‘Turning Out’: Young People, Being and Becoming

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2011

Katherine Davies

School of Social Sciences (Sociology)
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Word Count: 84, 736
Abstract

‘Turning Out’: Young People, Being and Becoming
Katherine Davies, University of Manchester, Doctor of Philosophy, December 2011

This thesis explores young people’s experiences of and orientations towards being and becoming. Using focus groups and interviews with participants aged between 11 and 15, the research investigates how young people form a sense of who they are and who they can become in terms of character, temperament, talents, intelligence, humour, appearance and so on. Particular attention is paid to the role of relationality, and especially siblingship, in these processes as well as to how young people themselves make sense of and theorise being and becoming. The research shines analytical and methodological ‘spotlights’ on key contexts, relationships and modes of thinking which highlight processes of being and becoming in new and interesting ways.

A spotlight on the context of secondary school indicates how ways of being and becoming can be created and constrained by the particularities of the environment of school. A spotlight on being and becoming in a group of friends indicates young people’s reflexivity about the moralities of being different to friends, despite the largely homophilous nature of these relationships, and reveals some of the ways in which young people’s friendships can affect who they are and who they see themselves as becoming in the future. A spotlight on young people’s sibling relationships fills a gap in existing knowledge about the role of lateral kin in shaping young people’s lives and indicates how siblings can be a source of social capital (for good or ill) in school. It is also argued that being one in a series of siblings can ‘fix’ aspects of being and becoming in several ways, including through the construction of relational identities in families and through normative ideas about how siblings ought to behave. Finally, the thesis shines a spotlight on young people’s understandings of modes of transmission and the nature of personhood, indicating how young people can think in nuanced and complex ways about how being and becoming works.

Taken together the spotlights of this thesis indicate how young people form a sense of who they are and who they can become whilst embedded in webs of relationships through time. The thesis demonstrates that, despite being relational and contextual, processes of being and becoming can feel as though they become ‘fixed’ as the potential for how one can ‘turn out’ is limited. It is argued that the lay concept of ‘turning out’ evokes the idea that, although always continuing through time, we will one day ‘turn out’ and be ‘finished’. As such, this thesis suggests that the concept of ‘turning out’ allows sociologists to think about being and becoming simultaneously. ‘Turning out’ also encourages an understanding of the social world that embraces ideas which can seem ‘contradictory’ in sociological terms - such as fixity and malleability, individuality and relationality or genetic and social inheritance. Finally, it is argued that ‘turning out’ denotes a broader understanding of personhood than those evoked in familiar sociological terms - such as the self, identity and habitus - and incorporates aspects of being and becoming that might otherwise appear somewhat beyond the social.
Declaration

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Jennifer Mason and Dr Wendy Bottero, for their insight, encouragement and the kindness and humour with which they guided me through. I am also grateful to Professor Fiona Devine for her supervision, guidance and advice during the early stages of the PhD.

I completed this PhD whilst working full time as a researcher in The Morgan Centre for the Study of Relationships and Personal Life at The University of Manchester. I am grateful to all my Morgan Centre colleagues for creating such an intellectually stimulating and supportive environment in which to work and study; I am very lucky to have been able to begin my academic career here. Completing this PhD part time has been incredibly challenging at times and it would not have been possible without the support of my colleagues, especially Jennifer Mason who helped me to find the time to work on the thesis when I needed it most and with whom I worked on the Living Resemblances project which inspired aspects of this thesis. I must also thank my Sociology colleagues, especially Gemma Edwards, David Evans, Lucy Gibson and Helene Snee, who tirelessly listened to my ideas and encouraged me to keep going.

My most personal thanks go to my husband Sean McLaughlin. It can’t be easy being a PhD widower but Sean always believed I would finish it without ever asking when that would be. I could not have done it without his love and support.

Finally, I must thank the young people who took the time to talk to me about their lives in such insightful, articulate and often very humorous ways.
Chapter 1: Introduction

How do young people get a sense of the sort of person they are - of whether they are outgoing, sporty, clever, funny, lazy, naughty, arty, popular, shy and so on? How do young people imagine their future selves and envisage the potential for who it is possible for them to become? How malleable do these features of personhood feel? Is there a sense that aspects of being and becoming feel fixed?

This thesis is an exploration of how young people conceptualise the process of being and becoming. Put another way it is about the process of what is often termed ‘turning out’. By this I do not mean the profession young people ‘turn out’ to occupy or the education-related decisions they ‘turn out’ to make; rather I refer to ‘turning out’ in more existential terms - ‘turning out’ as a particular sort of person who has certain talents, tendencies and characteristics. Of course this more fundamental understanding of ‘turning out’ as a person implicates young people’s career aspirations and educational decision making and these aspects are an important feature of being and becoming but they are not the primary focus of the research. When used in conversation the term ‘turning out’ tends to incorporate all of the above. So, for example, if one was to ask a parent the question, ‘How do you think your child is going to turn out?’, one is asking about the possibilities for the future of the child as a person and is not separating measurable ‘outcomes’ in terms of occupation or education from more existential processes concerning personhood more generally.  

1 There is a body of anthropological literature (outlined in chapter 9 of this thesis) dealing with issues of ‘personhood’. Throughout this thesis I use the term personhood in a more general sense, to denote the idea of being a person in the world and all this entails. Thus the concept of personhood as employed in this thesis incorporates genetic makeup, appearance, ways of being and personal traits or tendencies as well as more sociologically familiar aspects such as gender, social background and educational achievement.  

2 The focus of the question inevitably shifts according to the temporal context in which it is asked (in terms of the time in the lifecourse of the child as well as in terms of what has led up to the moment of asking) and in accordance with to whom it is posed (a teacher for example may orientate their interpretation of the concept in terms of educational outcomes). To some extent the methodological approach taken in this thesis addresses such variations, but the point here is that the concept itself
The concept of ‘turning out’ is one that came from the data as I noticed that both I and young people who participated in the research used it to describe processes of being and becoming in a way that incorporated the more general understandings of ‘turning out’ as a certain sort of person that is the focus of the thesis. Thus, the concept facilitated an expansion in the focus of the research which began as a more specific exploration of the impact of sibling relationships on young people’s experiences of being and becoming at school before expanding into a broader exploration of ‘turning out’ more generally.

‘Turning out’ is an ongoing process that arguably continues until death. However, the term implies that a person can be ‘finished’ and this understanding has important implications for how young people conceptualise processes of who they are and who they have the potential to become. Indeed, although we are constantly ‘becoming’, it can often feel as though aspects of who we are become fixed along the way, limiting the potential for who we might become. Processes of being and becoming could arguably be studied at any point in the life course, however this work focuses on young people of secondary school age (11 to 16) because this is a period often understood to be characterised by particularly heightened experiences of decision making, transition and change in the process of ‘becoming’ an adult self.

James and Prout (1997[1990]), as part of what is termed the ‘new paradigm for the sociology of childhood’, point out that childhood has largely been viewed within social science as a state of becoming, with children conceptualised as future adults. James and Prout (ibid), along with other proponents of this ‘new’ approach to childhood, argue that childhood needs to be understood as a state of ‘being’, with children viewed as social actors in their own right (see also Brannen and O’Brien, 1995; James et al, 1998). The concept of ‘turning out’, with its focus on both being in the present and becoming in the future, views young people as social actors whose past, present and imaginings of the future are entwined in who they are. Thus, ‘turning out’ is not synonymous with becoming an adult; indeed, the entwining of past, present and 

tends to denote combinations of these various facets of ‘turning out’ and does not in itself separate them.
future in ‘turning out’ may mean that young people can feel as though they have already ‘turned out’ in certain ways. These features of ‘turning out’ make it a useful sociological concept which denotes a form of lay theorisation. As such, the concept encourages social researchers to engage with the complexities and ambiguities of the social world as experienced by actors.

This thesis explores processes of being and becoming for young people by focusing on certain key areas. The work does not attempt to cover all the elements that go into being and becoming but aims to shine spotlights on particular contexts, relationships and ways of thinking which influence these processes. These areas are not given equal prominence in the thesis (for reasons outlined below) and they interact and inform one another in complex ways. The methodological metaphor of a spotlight illuminating certain aspects of processes of being and becoming is useful in that it implies that other elements - which remain un-illuminated, or on the periphery of the light, in this thesis - are not conceived of as analytically separate. They are still there and are still able to be understood in terms of their interactions with those contexts which are the focus of this thesis. As such this work shines a spotlight on experiences of the context of school, of being in a group of friends, of having a sibling (or siblings) and on young people’s own understandings of how processes of being and becoming work.

Being in school is central to young people’s lives. It is also a context in which young people are specifically asked to contemplate their future selves and to make decisions. Furthermore, school comprises very specific socialities based on reputations with peers and teachers within the (often oppositional) arenas of ‘official’ academic success and ‘un-official’ social success. Thus, it is an important context in which ‘turning out’ occurs and where the potential in this process becomes limited by reputation and the perceptions of others. The emphasis on educational decision making also makes school an arena of heightened reflexivity in terms of processes of being and becoming.

3 For example, parents are obliquely present throughout the thesis despite not having a spotlight directly upon them.
Linked to these school socialities is the significance of **being in a group of friends** for the ways being and becoming happen and are conceived of by young people. As will be explained in chapter 3, there are a number of detailed ethnographies exploring young people’s friendships and this work is not repeated here. Instead, this thesis offers a short and focused illumination of aspects of young people’s friendships that are particularly pertinent to being and becoming. Young people can be incredibly aware of and reflexive about the influence of friends on who they are and who they might become and as such ideas like ‘getting in with a bad crowd’ can permeate young people’s perceptions of their friendship choices. Furthermore, young people’s understandings of who they are as well as their identity and reputation with others are formed through being in a group of friends, where identities are often constructed in relation to others in the group and where ideas of closeness and being ‘known’ are highly valued.

Related to this idea of being one in a group, is the impact of **being a sibling** on processes of being and becoming. Being a sibling means being one in a series and this can create a tension between being an individual and being part of a sibship. Furthermore, stories told within families can construct young people’s identities in relation to those of their siblings. This means that siblings (particularly older siblings) often provide a benchmark against which ‘progress’ can be measured, so that young people often understand both who they are and who they are likely to become in relation to their sibling(s). As will be outlined in chapter 2, sibling relationships have been largely overlooked in sociology and little is known about the specific affects of being and having a sibling on processes of being and becoming. For this reason sibling relationships take a prominent position in the thesis and are explored at length.  

Finally, the thesis switches focus to look at **how young people themselves make sense of processes of being and becoming**. The ways in which young people understand modes of transmission and the nature of personhood and how they theorise the role

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4 Due to the nature of the sample achieved it has not been possible to say much about not having siblings in this research.
of inheritance, environment and genetics in shaping who a person can be, and how they understand what is fixed and malleable about a person in more abstract terms, are important and can implicate the way they judge the opportunities and potential for the future in their own lives. This section of the thesis uses sibling relationships as a methodological lens through which to explore the interplay of social and genetic inheritance in young people’s understandings of the process of being and becoming. This is because, culturally, siblings are often presumed to share both genetic heritage and social upbringing and as such are often heralded as a fitting test case for thinking through issues of ‘nature’ versus ‘nurture’.

The study used interviews and focus groups with young people to explore being and becoming under these different spotlights. The PhD began as a project linked to an ESRC funded study on the significance of family resemblances undertaken with Jennifer Mason and colleagues⁵ and although the objectives of the study broadened into the spotlights of interest discussed above, the role of understandings of kinship and modes of transmission which transcend the ‘social’ to incorporate genetics and ‘scientific’ aspects of ‘turning out’ have remained a key theme.

**Chapter 2** of this thesis outlines some prevalent ideas of being and becoming in existing sociological thought. The chapter explores work on youth transitions to adulthood, arguing that these approaches tend to focus only upon the ‘becoming’ aspects of ‘turning out’ and have little to say about ‘being’ in the present. The chapter then looks at Bourdieu’s approach to social transmission, arguing that although linking aspects of being and becoming, this work does not pay enough attention to how processes of transmission actually occur in families. Thirdly the chapter looks at relational approaches to the self - including symbolic interactionism and Goffman’s work on presentation of self - as well as the work of Rose (1998) and Taylor (1991), who argue that the self is conceived of in contemporary society as autonomous. It is suggested that, although relationally formed, the self can come to feel autonomous.

⁵ For more details see the project website: [www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/research/resemblances](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/research/resemblances)
The chapter then turns to consider existing work on sibling relationships, normative concepts of ‘the family’ as well as sociological and anthropological approaches to relatedness. It is argued that it is necessary to conceptualise young people as ‘turning out’ within webs of relationships across time and space. The chapter concludes with an overview of the main research questions which explore the impact of young people’s relationships upon their experiences of being and becoming as well as how young people make sense of and theorise processes of being and becoming.

**Chapter 3** outlines the way the research was undertaken. The chapter discusses some of the benefits of the ‘spotlight’ approach to studying being and becoming and explains why particular spotlights were chosen. The chapter also discusses the design of the research, including why young people were the unit of analysis, the approach taken to temporality in the study as well as the reasons behind the choice of the methods of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The chapter explores how data were generated, including a discussion of the resulting sample and a reflection upon issues of rapport and power in research with young people. The chapter then goes on to explain how the data were analysed - using both case study and thematic analytical approaches - before briefly discussing the approach taken to writing with qualitative data in this thesis.

**Chapter 4** introduces the data chapters of the thesis with a case study of two sisters – Anna and Francesca – and their very different narratives of being and becoming. The case study is used as a device to raise pertinent themes such as the creation of relational sibling identities, the interplay of relationships at school and home and the role of wider family politics and relationships in the ways young people can come to understand how they are ‘turning out’.

**Chapter 5** explores processes of being and becoming at school. The chapter argues that the context of school can ‘fix’ the potential for being and becoming in a number of ways, including through the temporality of the school system itself, through labelling of and by others as well as by understandings of the nature of the self as autonomous and existing within a person. The chapter concludes by pointing to the ways young
people seem to simultaneously hold contradictory ideas about being and becoming at school which incorporate both relational and autonomous understandings of the self.

**Chapter 6** focuses on being and becoming in a group of friends. The chapter considers how identities are formed relationally within groups of friends and reflects upon how issues of homophily are lived by young people. The chapter then explores the ways young people conceptualise the significance of their friendships to how they are ‘turning out’, arguing that young people can be particularly reflexive about these processes, engaging with normative ideas about ‘peer pressure’ and the ethics of being influenced by others. The chapter also explores ideas of closeness and of ‘knowing’ one’s friends, using Spencer and Pahl’s (2006) notion of friends as ‘biographical anchors’. Finally the chapter considers the consequences of having few friends for young people’s sense of self.

**Chapter 7** looks at the significance of being and having a sibling (or a number of siblings) for being and becoming. The chapter begins with an exploration of the consequences of sibling relationships for being and becoming at school, arguing that older siblings can be a source of social and cultural capital at school – assisting their younger brothers and sisters with managing the ‘informal’ aspects of school socialities as well as providing a foil by which younger siblings can imagine their own future educational trajectories. The chapter then shifts focus to look at the consequences of being one in a series of siblings more generally. In this section of the chapter I demonstrate how sibling identities are constructed relationally, within the politics and dynamics of families, as well as pointing to normative ideas about how siblings ought to behave according to gender and birth order.

**Chapter 8** shifts focus to look at how young people themselves understand being and becoming in terms of their more abstract theories about how traits are transmitted in families as well as how personhood is understood. The chapter considers the ways young people tended to draw upon different sources of ‘knowledge’ (including ‘scientific’ understandings and ‘evidence’ from their own experiences) in order to understand the role of genetics as well as parents and other ‘environmental’ factors in
influencing how they ‘turn out’. The chapter also explores the ways that understandings of inevitability and volitarism could co-exist in young people’s conceptualisations of personhood which included fixed, inner and seemingly ‘natural’ aspects whilst at the same time emphasising the importance of ‘trying’ and of agency.

The thesis concludes in chapter 9 by arguing that young people form a sense of who they are and who they can become whilst embedded in webs of relationships over time. The relational approach taken in this thesis has highlighted these connections as well as overlaps between the social circles and domains occupied by young people. The chapter also demonstrates that - despite the relational, contextual nature of being and becoming - young people can understand the process of ‘turning out’ as becoming fixed as the potential for how one might ‘turn out’ in the future becomes limited over time. The chapter then moves on to argue that the concept of ‘turning out’ is of sociological importance. First I argue that, as opposed to concepts such as transition which focus mainly on becoming in the future, ‘turning out’ captures ways of both being and becoming through time, incorporating young people’s past, present and future. Second, I suggest that, as a form of lay theorisation, the concept of ‘turning out’ allows for complex understandings of the social world that are not separated through a focus upon dualisms. Finally, I argue that the concept of ‘turning out’ is useful because it denotes a general way of being a person which incorporates aspects of personhood - such as humour or appearance - which can often be understood as being outside the social.
Chapter 2: Ideas of Being and Becoming in Existing Sociological Thought

2.1 Introduction

How have existing sociological approaches handled issues of being and becoming? Are the themes of this thesis synonymous with studies of youth transitions, social class reproduction or the self? How do existing approaches conceptualise relationality and what are the gaps that these works do not address?

This chapter explores how existing sociological theory and research has addressed issues of being and becoming. First, the chapter explores work on youth transitions to adulthood which it is argued offers interesting insights into concepts of change, time and structure/agency but tends to prioritise becoming and pays little attention to young people as being in the present. Second, the chapter looks at work on social class reproduction, particularly that of Bourdieu, and argues that although Bourdieu’s theory of the inculcation of habitus links ways of being in the present with future class outcomes, it provides a rather impoverished account of how these processes occur within families. Third, the chapter looks at theories of the self, drawing upon both relational and discursive approaches to argue that, although contextual and relational, the self may feel individual and fixed although this remains largely un-empiricised in existing sociological work. It is suggested that, although providing useful insights into particular aspects of being and becoming, none of these existing perspectives captures the essence of personhood that is of interest in this thesis and it is argued that all three approaches provide somewhat depleted understandings of relationality, tending to overemphasise the role of parent-child relationships whilst overlooking young people as embedded within a range of relationships more generally.

The latter part of the chapter explores relational approaches to being and becoming. First, existing work addressing sibling relationships is examined and, although attending predominantly to sibling relationships in the present, it is argued that this
attention to siblingship raises interesting questions about how siblingship affects processes of being and becoming. Second, normative and discursive accounts of what it means to be ‘a family’ are explored and work on family stories, narratives and memories outlined to suggest that both normative ideas and stories, narratives and memories might be mechanisms through which ideas about being and becoming are formed relationally. Finally, the chapter focuses on theories of relatedness and embeddedness, which it is argued help to conceptualise young people as being and becoming within webs of relationships over time. The chapter concludes by summarising the questions that remain unanswered in existing sociological thought and outlines the research questions which are the focus of enquiry in this thesis.

2.2 Being and becoming and work on youth transitions to adulthood

In many respects this exploration of the process of being and becoming contributes towards a well established field of work exploring youth transitions to adulthood. This body of work conceptualises the idea of ‘becoming’ in terms of various processes involved in the transition from childhood to adulthood, usually focusing on those with perceivable ‘outcomes’, such as educational decision making, the gaining of citizenship, occupational and class-based trajectories and the pursuit of independence - be it social, emotional, material or economic. Although my work defines ideas of becoming in rather broader terms (also addressing wider issues of being and becoming as a person in terms of character, temperament, skills, talent and so on as well as in terms of ‘outcomes’), the importance of temporality to these sociological accounts and the attention to the interplay of structure and agency is helpful.

Much of the work exploring youth transitions to adulthood has been framed in terms of late modern theories of social change. Theorists such as Giddens (1991, 1992), Beck (1992), Beck and Beck Gernsheim (1995), Putnam (2000) and Bauman (2000) have suggested that processes of ‘de-traditionalisation’ and ‘individualisation’ - whereby society is understood to be no longer de-lineated along the lines of traditional social structures such as class, gender and ethnicity and where traditional ties such as those
between extended family and place-based community are seen to have lessened in significance – have resulted in increased personal freedom and choice. Aspects of these theories are particularly pertinent for understanding young people’s lives. Beck (1992) for example discusses individualisation in terms of a shift from ‘normal’ biographies of pre-existing life-plans and roles, to ‘choice’ biographies, characterised by individual responsibility for and choice in transitions to adulthood. This shift also means a weakening of class identification so that cultural aspects, such as lifestyle or political orientation, can no longer be deduced from occupation or family background. For Beck, social change has brought about a new set of unequally distributed risks and uncertainties in late modernity which must be negotiated in day-to-day life, including increased fragmentation and un-predictability in what were once familiar and inevitable pathways to adulthood.

Similar issues of choice, reflexivity and flexibility are found in Giddens’s (1991) understanding of de-traditionalisation and the perceived importance placed upon individuals to create a coherent biography for themselves, resulting in more individualised lifestyles and increased reflexivity. This situation whereby individuals are increasingly compelled to reflect upon their life experiences in order to apply some semblance of coherence to their biographical narrative is termed the ‘reflexive project of the self’. As with Beck and his attention to pathways to adulthood, Giddens points to the temporal and biographical dimensions of this project of the self through his concept of ‘fateful moments’ defined as, ‘times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands at a crossroads in their existence or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences’ (1991: 113). Key to the concept of fateful moments is the idea that the individual in question is agentic and reflexive, able to assess the risks and consider the consequences of the various options available to him/her, although the role of luck, or ‘fortuna’ as Giddens puts it, is still recognised. For this reason Giddens sees fateful moments as empowering and he argues that the ensuing decisions ‘will reshape the reflexive project of identity’ (1991: 143).

Indeed, for Giddens, individualisation is primarily positive and characterised by freedom of choice whereas for Beck the shift to a choice biography entails the
obscuring and consequential perpetuation of existing inequalities. An important consequence of processes of de-traditionalisation and the accompanying move towards choice biographies and individual freedom for young people in both these works - and one that has been adopted by most sociologists working in the area of youth transitions - is that young people are rarely able to ‘follow in the footsteps’ of their parents who can no longer provide a ‘benchmark’ demarcating pathways to adulthood for their children. Furlong and Cartmel (2007) for example describe young people as placed ‘at the crossroads of the process of social reproduction’ (2007: 3) due to the absence of parentally provided ‘route maps’ (2007: 1) and Brannen and Nilsen (2002) maintain that the de-standardisation of the lifecourse has changed the meanings attached to time, with individuals in late modernity engaging in much less planning for the future, which itself feels more random and haphazard.

Giddens’s and Beck’s accounts of de-traditionalisation and individualisation have been heavily criticised for their lack of attention to the prevalence of inequalities (particularly in terms of gender and class) and empirical studies have pointed to the continuing significance of ‘traditional’ ties (particularly with family) and the continuing impact of structural inequalities on people’s lives (Jamieson, 1999). For example, Mason (2004) points to the importance of relationality for seemingly individual decisions and Skeggs (2004) argues that the project of the self is really just a white middle class project. The primary problem with Giddens’s and Beck’s emphasis on de-traditionalisation for understanding being and becoming in this thesis is the lack of attention to the importance of young people’s relationships. Giddens’s emphasis upon choice and reflexivity - and in particular his concept of ‘fateful moments’ - implies that people make sense of being and becoming as isolated individuals. Beck’s (1992) story of the loss of ‘normal’ biographies and Furlong and Cartmel’s (2007) focus on the absence of ‘route maps’ imply that only intergenerational ties with parents are of use in assisting young people in their transitions to adulthood.  

6 This implicit assumption is made explicit by Coleman (1988) in his argument that siblings actually dilute the social capital passed from parents to children. The absence of siblings in social theory will be discussed in more detail in chapters 2 and 7.
Henderson et al’s (2007) longitudinal study - ‘Inventing Adulthoods’ (see also Thomson et al, 2002; Thomson and Holland, 2002 and Thomson, 2009) – approached the study of youth transitions to adulthood rather differently; by following the lives of around one hundred young people between 1996 and 2006 using in-depth qualitative methods⁷. This work is also situated within the framework of social change and de-traditionalisation and, as with the aforementioned approaches, the authors observe an absence of ‘route maps’ and accept the implication that such maps are provided by parents. Indeed, the concept of ‘Inventing Adulthoods’ itself denotes the perception that, in the absence of ‘route maps’, young people must pioneer their own biographies (Henderson et al, 2007: 32). However, the study’s focus on narratives of the self means that transitions are treated more processually than perspectives centred upon mapping the ‘outcomes’ of transitions to adulthood in terms of occupation and educational outcomes (found in the work of Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Furthermore, Henderson et al’s work envisages young people’s lives as embedded within relationships and within interconnected fields such as home, work and leisure (see also Irwin, 1995 on the importance of not creating separate categories in youth research). The authors argue that young people’s sense of competence in various fields is central to their ability to ‘invent’ their future and crucially, this competence is underpinned by recognition from others (2007: 32). Thus the ‘invention’ of adulthood is understood to be always affected by young people’s relationships with others (particularly their parents).

Henderson et al (2007) are critical of Giddens’s concept of ‘fateful moments’ and argue it ignores the ways decisions are structurally, spatially and temporally located. Henderson et al prefer to speak instead of ‘critical moments’ which, unlike fateful moments, are often only recognised as critical in hindsight: ‘In a sense the present provides the resources from which these imaginings of the future are made possible. Young people not only imagine very different futures, but how they do so is shaped by their experiences and social locations’ (2007: 28). Thomson et al (2002) point to

⁷ For a further discussion of the use of longitudinal qualitative methods in researching youth transitions, and my own, rather different, approach to temporality in this study, see chapter 3.
relational aspects of critical moments in further detail, arguing that Giddens’s approach constructs young people as abstract, independent individuals when they must instead be ‘understood as already living through the consequences of the decisions, or lack of decisions, of others’ (ibid: 338). The role of parental decision making in particular, Thomson et al argue, must be worked into constructions of fateful moments, along with structural aspects such as the classed nature of life chances.

Despite working with ideas of de-traditionalisation and individualisation, Furlong and Cartmel (2007), Henderson et al (2007) and Thomson (2009) conceive of the effects of individualisation as matters of perception. Henderson et al comment that ‘we can also understand it [Giddens’s ideas of individualisation and the reflexive project of the self] as referring to the process through which the appearance of choice and control is created’ (2007: 19) [my emphasis]. Furlong and Cartmel (2007) describe late modernity itself as an ‘epistemological fallacy’ whereby, although social structures (such as class) continue to shape young people’s life chances, the focus on individual choice obscures this process:

> While structures of inequality remain deeply entrenched, in our view one of the most significant features of late modernity is the epistemological fallacy: the growing disjuncture between objective and subjective dimensions of life. People’s life chances remain highly structured at the same time as they increasingly seek solutions on an individual, rather than a collective basis.’ (2007: 5)

This idea of increasing individualisation as an epistemological fallacy is important. In section 2.4 I use Rose’s (1998) and Taylor’s (1991) discursive takes on the self to extend these ideas and argue that notions of autonomy and individuality have taken on an ethical dimension. In doing so my theoretical approach to issues of reflexivity and individualisation is similar to that adopted by Budgeon (2003) in her study of young women’s ‘choice’ of self where individualisation is discussed as a normative ideal and Rose’s (1998) ideas about the construction of the autonomous self through the rise of the psy sciences are used as a counter to ideas about individualisation and
reflexivity. A similar conceptualisation of individualisation has also been adopted by Gordon and Lahelma (2002) who argue that neo-liberalism in education systems has created an emphasis on individual choice and responsibility. This responsibility is experienced as a moral and ethical obligation (or pressure) to be ‘true’ to oneself:

The celebration of ‘choice’ within the ideology of marketisation transforms the growing possibilities to make decisions into coercion to make them at an early age. Young people are also expected to take personal responsibility for wrong decisions. In the everyday life of the school the importance of ‘choice’ is emphasised in a range of contexts, from choosing optional subjects to choosing how one behaves. (2002: 6)

In conceptualising individualisation as a growing perception – or discourse - rather than as part of the reality of social change, the above authors are all grappling with issues of structure and agency. Indeed, by framing work on youth transitions to adulthood in terms of theories of social change, de-traditionalisation and individualisation, these researchers were forced to give careful consideration to the interplay between obstacles created by pervading structural inequalities (for example those linked to class, gender and race) and increasing flexibility and diversity in the trajectories available to young people. For example, Henderson et al (2007) - along with a number of other youth researchers (see for example, Hall et al, 1999 and Valentine et al, 1998) - have explored the ways young people’s geographical localities shape their values and meanings, constraining and enabling their identities.

Thomson (2009) also attends to issues of structure and agency, describing material and social challenges faced by young people which include the management of extended dependency on parents and adaptation to the expansion of higher education as well as the challenge of balancing autonomy and dependency during the current, rather piecemeal, acquisition of adulthood. Thomson points out how, although these challenges existed for all young people in the Inventing Adulthoods study, ‘responses were situated, shaped by the dynamics of family lives, the intergenerational trajectory of family projects and the intersection of social class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality’ (ibid: 9). Thus, Thomson seeks to account for the interplay between structural barriers
and subjective experience and is critical of what she sees as an over-emphasis on agency in late modern theories of social change:

I question the opposition of tradition and innovation that is so central to late-modern debates about agency and social change, and the argument is made that longitudinal biographical methods can enable us to understand continuity and change as existing in a necessary and productive dynamic. (2009: 11)

In summary, these perspectives share a common focus upon transition and upon processes of ‘growing up’ through time. They also all envision this process as having undergone large-scale structural changes within the past generation so that young people can no longer look to their parents to provide a ‘route map’ to adulthood. In general, studies of youth transitions have paid little attention to relationality, tending to envisage young people as individuals progressing through time, and although the qualitative longitudinal approach adopted by the various configuration of authors involved in the Inventing Adulthoods study facilitated a more holistic, embedded conceptualisation of young people’s lives, this work still adopts the premise that ‘route maps’ are provided by parents and as such pays little attention to how other relationships (particularly with lateral kin such as siblings and cousins) impact upon young people’s transitions. Furthermore, even Henderson et al’s (2007) more biographical focus, which is not preoccupied with measurable ‘outcomes’, does not capture the aspects of personhood - of being a certain sort of person with particular temperaments, characteristics, ways of being and so on - that are central to this thesis.

The focus of the empirical projects discussed here has tended to be upon mapping how individual young people make transitions over time. Whether this focus is upon measurable ‘outcomes’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Irwin, 1995) or upon qualitative understandings of young people’s subjectivities (Henderson et al, 2007; Thomson et al, 2002; Thomson and Holland, 2002 and Thomson, 2009), these studies have tended to use longitudinal methods to observe how young people actually ‘turn out’. The attention to time in this thesis is slightly different (and more in line with the approach adopted by Brannen and Nilsen (2002) in their focus group study of young people’s
attitudes to time) in that the intellectual project here is as much about exploring young people’s orientations to the very notion of being and becoming as on the decisions they make and the futures they plan for themselves. As such, although ideas of transition through time, of structural and subjective constraints and of critical moments within narratives of becoming an adult are pertinent for the explorations of being in the present and of becoming in the future that are the focus of this thesis, these studies of youth transitions attend largely to ‘becoming’ and have little to say about ways of ‘being’ in the present and the links between the two.

It is helpful here to turn to understandings of time presented by authors working within what is termed the ‘new paradigm for childhood studies’ (Prout and James, 1997, first published 1990). James and Prout (1997) argue that sociological and popular accounts of childhood have tended to locate childhood in terms of ‘time passing’ and ‘time future’ (1997: 239) so that the importance of childhood, although often represented in the ‘past’, is understood in terms of the future. Culturally, for example, children are often portrayed as the ‘next generation’ and childhood experiences assessed in terms of their effect upon mental health in adulthood. Sociologists have also focused on childhood experience (such as schooling) in terms of social reproduction and future social position. James and Prout point out that the present is almost entirely absent from such accounts and they advocate a:

*theoretical* perspective which can grasp childhood as a continually experienced and created social phenomenon which has significance for its present, as well as the past and future... what is vital is to focus on children not only as protoadults, future-beings, but also on children as beings-in-the-present. (1997: 245) (original emphasis)

It is this idea of attending to young people’s past and present in the process of being and becoming, of looking at this through the eyes of young people who, whilst located in the present, have a past and are able to imagine a future, that is under explored in existing conceptualisations of youth transitions.
Despite a helpful focus on temporality and process, this exploration of sociological thinking on youth transitions to adulthood therefore leaves a host of unanswered questions: What is the role of relationships in the provision of ‘route maps’ to adulthood? Do lateral kin relationships (with siblings or cousins) help to orientate young people towards their futures? How do young people make sense of and orientate themselves towards their future? How do ideas about ways of being in the present impact upon young people’s imaginings of their future selves?

2.3 Being and becoming and theories of social class reproduction

As stated, studies of youth transitions have tended to focus largely upon issues of ‘becoming’ an adult self and have paid less attention to ways of ‘being’ in the present. The focus on educational and occupational ‘outcomes’ also means they have tended to pay less attention to ideas of personhood more generally. This is not to say that approaches to class outcomes are not relevant to understanding being and becoming in this thesis. Cultural understandings of social class, particularly the work of Bourdieu, rather than focusing upon economic, educational or occupational positions, locates the cause of these social class outcomes in terms of ways of being a person – as habituated, embodied and ultimately relational practices. As such this perspective provides an interesting way of linking ‘being’ and ‘becoming’.

Bourdieu’s concern is with the ways in which class inequality is reproduced through socialisation. This socialisation occurs through the inculcation of habitus, a concept which shows how regular practices re-occur over time and as such provides a conceptual ‘bridge’ between the extremes of structure and agency (Jenkins, 2002: 74) in its emphasis on how actors react ‘dispositionally to the opportunities and constraints offered by various situations’ (Swartz, 1997: 100). The habitus comprises a series of embodied, pre-reflexive dispositions which exist in the practice of actors and the concept incorporates ways of being such as deportment, dispositions, gait, gestures and general ways of talking and moving. As such habitus is a way of ‘being’ in the present:
[The habitus is] A system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990: 53)

Habitus is formed through early childhood socialisation where external structures are internalised as dispositions. Crucially for understandings of being and becoming, habitus includes the internalisation of chances for success or failure which are translated into aspirations/expectations for the future and ultimately into action (Swartz, 1997: 103). Thus, habitual ways of being in the present are inextricably linked to future outcomes and the perpetuation of social inequalities so that individuals in similar status groups/classes unconsciously internalise structural (dis)advantage in the form of durable dispositions and form similar ideas about their life chances. As Swartz (1997) states, habitus ‘represents a sort of deep-structuring cultural matrix that generates self-fulfilling prophecies according to different class opportunities’ (ibid: 104).

In order to understand how this way of being is operationalised to perpetuate privilege/disadvantage, and thus to inform the process of ‘becoming’, it is necessary to explore how the habitus links to field. Briefly, ‘field’ denotes the arena in which social action takes place. The term is used to denote a battle field or playing field, thus highlighting conflict and competition between individuals occupying different hierarchical positions within it (Weininger, 2005: 128). Habitus is an unconscious, habituated propensity to act and respond to the circumstances of the field in which the individual is brought up. Individuals develop a ‘sense of the game’ - of how things work in the field - which can advantage certain groups. Although the habitus is understood as durable in that it cannot be ‘shaken off’ or adapted at will (it changes only very slowly through time), conscious reflection is not ruled out by Bourdieu in situations where there is a lack of fit between habitus and field.
In addition to the inculcation of habitus, Bourdieu sees class inequalities as perpetuated by the transmission of ‘capital’, a form of advantage which makes the ‘games of society – not least, the economic game – something other than simple games of chance’ (1997[1986]: 46). Thus capital can produce advantage and inequality. As Bourdieu writes:

Capital is accumulated labour… which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. (Bourdieu, 1997[1986]: 46)

Bourdieu identifies three types of capital – cultural, social and economic. Economic capital is understood to be at the root of all other forms of capital, with social and cultural capital ‘converted’ to economic capital to ensure advantage. Conversion to economic capital takes work to achieve and there is always an element of risk involved (that the capital will lose its value). This risk is seen to be heightened by the obscuring of economic capital and the perception that social advantage is ‘natural’.8

Cultural capital is concerned with the reproduction of class inequality, particularly in schools where the culture of the dominant classes is legitimised and rewarded by the education system. It is transmitted largely in the home but appears to be possessed ‘naturally’, to exist within an individual. Indeed, Bourdieu describes the domestic transmission of cultural capital as ‘the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment’ (1997[1986]: 48) and Swartz (1997) stresses that cultural capital indicates how ways of being that may appear ‘natural’ - such as ‘verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials’ (ibid: 75) are actually ‘inherited from the family milieu’ (ibid: 76) - rather than as pre-existing talents residing within people.

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8 Social capital is discussed in relation to siblings in chapters 3 and 6.
Bourdieu identifies three forms of cultural capital including the ‘embodied state’ whereby cultural capital takes the form of ‘long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’ (1997[1986]: 47); an internalized, cultivated disposition acquired in early childhood (Swartz, 1997). The transmission of embodied cultural capital in early childhood is understood as providing a link between inherited privilege and the acquisition of advantage in the lifecourse:

Because it is... linked in numerous ways to the person in his biological singularity and is subject to a hereditary transmission which is always heavily disguised, or even invisible, it defies the old, deep-rooted distinction the Greek jurists made between inherited properties (ta patroa) and acquired properties (epikteta), i.e., those which an individual adds to his heritage. It thus manages to combine the prestige of innate property with the merits of acquisition.’ (Bourdieu, 1997[1986]: 49) (original emphasis)

A key strength of Bourdieu’s approach for understanding processes of being and becoming for young people is in the way his work addresses how structural inequalities are perpetuated through embodied, dispositional ways of being in the present rather than focusing only upon measurable ‘outcomes’ such as educational qualification or occupation. The work also highlights the importance of family relationships and socialisation in the formation of these ways of being, which in turn influence subsequent outcomes.

However, Bourdieu’s work leaves a number of unanswered questions. Firstly, despite the importance of early socialisation to the theory, Boudieu tends to ‘black box’ the family in his work, paying little attention to how habitus and cultural capital are inherited and the role of wider kin in this process. As with those theories of social change outlined in the previous section, it is implicitly assumed that habitus and capital are passed down in families - from parents to children - and there is no accounting for the role of siblings (or of children and young people in general) as active agents in this process (see Holland, 2008 for a critique of the lack of attention to children as active agents in the transmission of social capital). As Swartz (1997) points out, there is also an assumption that this socialisation is always successful; that those ideas and
expectations of the future which are part of the habitus are always realistic and in line with a person’s structural position. Furthermore, for Bourdieu, the habitus is pre-reflexive and is only observable in particular circumstances when a person’s habitus does not match the field and they find themselves to be a ‘fish out of water’. This means that people’s own theories, abstractions and understandings about how transmission works can be overlooked.

Many sociologists have utilised Bourdieu’s theory of social class reproduction in empirical studies. For example, work on middle class advantage in education has looked at the role of parents’ cultural (and social) capital in securing advantage for their child(ren) in terms of ensuring children attend the ‘right’ kind of school (Ball, 2003), parental involvement in school (Bagnall et al, 2003; Lareau, 2000; Reay, 1998), the securing of advantage through extra curricular activities (Vincent and Ball, 2007)) as well as through a more general sense of parental expectations and aspirations (Ball, 2003, Devine, 2004, Power et al, 2003).

Other studies have focused upon the effect of young people’s habitus and levels of capital on the decisions they make and the advantages they are able to secure for themselves. Furlong and Biggart (1999) for example measure the links between social class and educational aspirations, pointing to the significance of gender in the framing of classed aspirations and Sullivan (2001) assesses the impact of cultural capital transmitted in the home upon young people’s performance in GCSE examinations, arguing that, although significant, ‘cultural reproduction’ (2001: 893) cannot entirely explain educational attainment. Others have concentrated upon the influence of cultural and social capital on young people’s educational decision making (for an overview see Brooks, 2008). Ingram (2011) for example explores the fit between habitus and field for educationally successful working class boys who experience a ‘habitus tug’ (ibid: 292) in their movements between the opposing fields of their working class homes and middle class school. Sullivan (2007) explored young people’s perceptions of their own ability, finding that although young people’s attitudes to education did not vary by social class or gender, their perception of their own ability
was classed, with disadvantaged pupils tending to underestimate their own ability and middle-class pupils overestimating it.

Although I have criticised Bourdieu’s work for ‘black boxing’ the family, these Bourdiesuan inspired approaches have provided details of how particular aspects of social transmission actually work in families. The work of Bertaux and Thompson (1993, 1997) goes further by viewing social reproduction as deeply embedded in intergenerational relational processes and conceptualising families as units of ‘anthroponomic production’ (1997: 19):

> Individuals are embedded within family, occupational, and local contexts, and mobility is as much a matter of family praxis as individual agency, for it is families which produce and rear individuals with specific characteristics and social skills, endowing them with their original moral and psychic energy and with economic, cultural, and relational resources. (1997: 7)

Bertaux and Thompson (1997) advocate the use of life stories and whole family case studies to explore the embedded workings of social transmission in families so that the inner dynamics of families are taken into account in addition to wider structural variables. As such, the authors were able to look at complexities and ambivalences within families, such as why siblings might ‘turn out’ differently and why some people ‘turn out’ to be similar to previous generations whereas others consciously try and live life differently. Ultimately, this approach examines how social transmission works in families and produces a framework for class analysis that accounts for structure, relationality and agency.

Despite the attention to specific details of the inculcation of habitus and the transmission of capital outlined in Bourdieusian inspired approaches to transmission and the relational approach adopted by Bertaux and Thompson, questions still remain: How important are the particularities of family relationships themselves to the inculcation of habitus? For example, do siblings play a role in social transmission? How do young people make sense of how social transmission actually works? How do they
understand the role of biology, genetics and resemblance in this process? What is understood as fixed and malleable in social transmission? Where do ideas of personhood and ways of being fit into social transmission?

2.4 Being and becoming and theories of the self

In day-to-day life, we implicitly assume, and act on the basis, that individuals have a ‘sense of self’. We refer to people as selves; we recognize that most people, most of the time, deploy commonsense understandings of personal and social experience in order to manage the routine nature of their social worlds. We recognize that making sense of our lives is often difficult, sometimes confusing, and that we are recurrently ambivalent about the coherence of our sense of personal identity....There is very little that goes on in daily social life that is not, in some very basic sense, conditioned, structured or dependent upon such fabrications of the self. (Elliott, 2008: 8)

This quote describes what Elliott terms ‘the arts of the self’ (2008: 8) and indicates that sociological debates about the constitution of the self and the differences between ‘self’ and ‘identity’ aside - the idea that people have a ‘self’ is ubiquitous in contemporary society, pervading all aspects of everyday life. Following Taylor (1989), Elliott maintains that ‘the self cannot be adequately studied in isolation from the interpretations that individuals make about themselves, others and society’ (2008: 9). It is this ‘lay’ concept of the self, the fact that the idea of a ‘self’ matters to people and that in order to understand concepts of the self as sociologists we must acknowledge its use in daily life and the ways it is interpreted and used by people, that is of interest here. As Burkitt states, it is ‘how we come to identify ourselves among others as having specific characteristics, how we come to see some aspects of our personality as more important than others, and how this changes over time, both socially and individually’ (2008: 23) that is important to researchers. Jenkins (2004) similarly talks of the omnipresence of identification in society, arguing that it is through processes of identification that we are able to know ‘who’s who (and what’s what)’ (2004: 6).
We have seen that a focus on ‘outcomes’ in research on youth transitions has not attended to the aspects of being a person (in terms of character, temperament, talent and so on) that this thesis addresses. These issues are covered by the concept of habitus but, as stated, the role of relationships in the inculcation of habitus remains under explored. For these reasons I now turn to explore sociological theories of the self which, although not referring to personhood in the exact same way as is explored in this thesis, provide useful ways of thinking about the social, relational and discursive mechanisms behind the construction of the self in western societies.

Much of the sociological work exploring concepts of identity and selfhood focuses on the ways that the self is constructed relationally. Jenkins (2004) for example argues that identities are social by definition in that identification (of ourselves and others) always involves interactions and negotiations about meanings as well as comparisons with others. For this reason, ‘identity can only be understood as process, as ‘being’ or ‘becoming’. One’s identity ... is never a final or settled matter. Not even death freezes the picture’ (ibid: 5 original emphasis). Burkitt similarly sees the self as inherently social, although he states that it is easy for researchers to ‘overlook the role that others play in giving us the pieces with which to put together an image of our self’ (2008: 1). For Burkitt, selves can be understood as social for three main reasons. Firstly, and most importantly for this study, we are all understood to be born into a place, time and set of relationships that are not of our choosing. The place we are born into structurally, temporally and relationally ‘will put a sizeable imprint on the self we become’ (2008: 3). Burkitt argues that it is through our social relationships that we are able to reflect upon ourselves, by seeing ourselves as others see us. Secondly, the self is informed through social activities and practices and thirdly Burkitt points to the role of political influences on selfhood in terms of rights, duties and identities.

Burkitt’s concept of the social self is very much in line with traditional symbolic interactionist approaches to the self such as the work of Mead (1934). For Mead, selfhood is constituted through interactions with others. Language is seen as key to this process as it provides the symbols necessary for thinking and interacting as a self.
For Mead, the perceived reactions of others are key to the constitution of the self. As Elliott states:

To possess a ‘self’ ... necessarily implies an ability to take one’s actions, emotions and beliefs as a unified structure, viewed from the perspective of significant others, as others would view and interpret actions of the self. Seen from this angle, the self is a social product through and through, an outcome of social symbolic interaction – of emergent, ongoing creation, thinking, feeling, the building of attitude structures, the taking on of roles, all in a quest for coherence and orientation to the social world. (2008: 32)

This incorporation of the perceived interpretations of others into the self is important and pervades much empirical sociology. Take for example the theory put forward by Henderson et al (2007), discussed in section 2.2, that competence and recognition are key to understanding young people’s subjective approaches to their futures. Competence alone is seen as insufficient without the recognition of this competence by others. It is this fundamental premise – that recognition from significant others informs the self - which informs the focus upon relationality in this thesis. Mead also distinguishes between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ in his conceptualisation of the self. The ‘me’ is the socialised aspect of the self, made up of the internalised attitudes of others whereas the ‘I’ is the un-socialised self, made up of more spontaneous desires. As well as pointing to the importance of known, significant others in constituting the self, Mead also identifies a ‘generalised other’ which is referred to as a general, normative behaviour-regulating influence. It is through the idea of a ‘generalised other’ that wider social norms and expectations are internalised. As Holdsworth and Morgan state, ‘generalised others embody normalised practices; it is through these references that norms and reference groups are not treated as abstract entities but are associated with what people actually do and say.” (2007: 414)

Mead, although understanding the self as formed through an ongoing internalisation of the perceptions of others and through an ongoing relationship between the self and social norms through the relationship with the ‘generalised other’, focuses particularly upon socialisation in early childhood (as we saw with Bourdieu and habitus) and pays
less attention to such ongoing processes of identification as outlined by Jenkins (2004). This focus also means that the role of family relationships in processes of socialisation are reduced to those between parents and children. This means that the particularities of relationships with those others with whom individual selves are in dialogue are not accounted for, for example we learn very little about the role of relationships with siblings or friends in Mead’s account.

Another important way in which the self has come to be understood as relationally constructed is pioneered by Goffman (1959) who argues that there can be no ‘true’ self because the self is wholly situated and can only exist through performance. Using the metaphor of the social world as a theatre comprising both ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ areas, Goffman explores how presentation of self is managed and performed in different social settings. For Goffman, individuals are constantly managing the impression they give to others. In other words, identity is performed for an audience. In this sense, Goffman’s work can be seen to be largely within the symbolic interactionist tradition. However, as Elliott notes, a key difference is that for Goffman, the individual is involved in a ‘strategic manipulation of impressions in everyday life’ (Elliott, 2008: 38). That is, the individual is interpreted as being agentic and reflexive about the performances that constitute the self. He/she is a skilled performer and these performances are constantly monitored in terms of levels of competence.

The crucial point here is that although it might appear as though the self is pre-existing in terms of beliefs, activities, views etc., these subjectivities are actually applied retroactively to our identities through performances of our social roles. The social setting (and accompanying norms, conventions and assumptions) is crucial to the way the self is performed and this is epitomised in the distinction between ‘front stage’ performances (where certain aspects of identity considered inappropriate to the setting might be concealed or downplayed) and ‘back stage’ performances. Goffman’s theory of the self as constituted through performance provides a useful way of considering how certain social settings and relationships may constitute different ways of being and as a result, conceptualisations of becoming. It also provides a useful
analytical tool for thinking through the impact of the research setting on the production of narratives in interviews and focus groups.

The approaches outlined above suggest that the self can be understood to be constituted relationally. Although, it follows that there can be no fixed, inner ‘true’ self that exists prior to social interaction, it is argued in this thesis that it often feels as if this is precisely how the self works and, importantly, how it ought to work. This relates to the interpretations of individualisation and the reflexive project of the self outlined in section 2.2 which see these theories as a prevalent perception rather than as a state of being.

Taylor (1991) develops a conception of individualism as a perception, identifying an ethical or moral ideal within individualism of ‘being true to oneself’ (1991:15) which he terms the ‘culture of authenticity’ and has come to feel like the ideal way to live – how we ought to be. According to Taylor, the ethic of authenticity began in the late eighteenth century and is specific to modern culture. Influenced by ideas from Rousseau and Herder, Taylor explains the nature of the ethic of authenticity which has ‘entered very deep into modern consciousness’ (1991:28):

There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else’s. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me.

(1991: 28-9) (original emphasis)

So, for Taylor, the culture of authenticity is given ‘moral force’ (1991:29) by the idea that it is crucial to be in contact with oneself, to stay true to one’s own ‘inner nature’ (1991:28) and originality (which the individual must discover and articulate for themselves). This culture of authenticity and emphasis on the individual does not mean that the self is not also relational. Indeed, Taylor identifies something of a paradox between the expectation that we will construct our own individual, authentic self and the fundamental role of others, particularly parents, in doing so:
We are expected to develop our own opinions, outlook, stances to things, to a considerable degree through solitary reflection. But this is not how things work with important issues, such as the definition of our identity. We define this always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognise in us. And even when we outgrow some of the latter – our parents, for instance – and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live.

(1991:33)

Rose (1998) also argues that as opposed to indicating that the nature of the human self has shifted as a result of social change, the new ‘regime of the self’ formed through social changes points to a shift in how we know and understand the self as an example of social change. Rose argues that the way that the self is understood in contemporary western society is inextricably linked to the growth of the psy sciences and as such he offers an explanation for how the perception of individualisation (also identified by Taylor (1991), Furlong and Cartmel (2007), Henderson et al (2007), Gordon and Lahelma (2002) and Budgeon (2003) and outlined earlier in this chapter) has arisen. Rose sees the psy sciences as creating the idea, or ethic, of a ‘normal individual’ (1998:17) (who is autonomous, free to choose, striving for self-realisation and so on) as well as influencing the ‘technologies of subjectification’ (ibid: 47) which are the everyday practices and ‘rationalities’ that individuals apply to themselves in order to achieve the goals of selfhood such as fulfilment, happiness and sanity. In this sense, ‘Psychology constitutes its object in the process of knowing it’ (1989:49) and by tracing the rise and influence of psychological sciences, Rose shows how this itself is/was also a social process involving the rise of ‘experts’ and the role of knowledge in how we govern ourselves. This has resulted in the construction of the self as, ‘a naturally unique and discrete entity, the boundaries of the body enclosing, as if by definition, an inner life of the psyche, in which are inscribed the experiences of an individual biography’ (ibid: 22). Thus, the self comes to feel like a unified ‘personality’ or ‘identity’ to be discovered (1998: 39).

Rose identifies a ‘regime’ (1998:3) or ‘project’ (ibid: 157) of the self, which denotes the idea that the self should be worked upon. Thinking of the self in terms of a striving for autonomy and fulfilment (an ‘enterprising self’ (ibid: 151)) and a future state of
completion, indicates how and why it can feel as though ‘turning out’ will one day be finished despite Jenkins’s (2004) argument that this journey is never complete, even after death.

For Rose there is a moral, or ethical, element to the autonomous self, an obligation to be free which is borne out in practical attempts to improve oneself. This ethical awareness is seen as instilled into us through the language and techniques of psychology. Rose also points to the ways psychology works in institutions where people are more observable and regulated, making it easier for them to be known. Thus, sites pertinent to this study of being and becoming such as school and home can be seen as perpetuating the ethic of the autonomous self in the same ways as constituting the socialisation process. For example, institutions like schools are seen to regulate people to such an extent that aspects of the disciplinary regime are adopted by individuals who, as a result, become easier to be known.

This section of the chapter has pointed to perspectives highlighting the social, contextual and relational construction of the self as well as those attending to its discursive and normative nature. This section has also indicated that work exploring the self cannot fully explain processes of being and becoming. Firstly, there is a tendency in the literature for an overemphasis on early childhood development and, although writers such as Mead do acknowledge the ongoing dialogical relationship with others in the construction of the self there is little detail about how this works and its importance is underplayed. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) argue that the focus on early childhood socialisation in Mead’s work actually pays very little attention to children themselves and they maintain that ‘symbolic interactionism begins from the baseline of adult interactional competence’ (1998: 25). This means that, in common with many theories of youth transition, theories of socialisation treat children merely as future adults. Furthermore, the approaches outlined in this section of the chapter (including those of Rose (1998) and Taylor (1991) on the ethic of the authentic, autonomous self) are not empiricised so we do not know much about how the self is formed relationally and how discursive and moral ideas about the authentic self are lived with and the effect they have on individual lives.
By focusing on both relational and discursive approaches to the self in this chapter, it has been possible to understand the importance of relationships (the social) whilst also gaining an insight into ideas and understandings about the self as a fixed entity existing within an individual. In this way discursive ideas of the self can give an insight into how it feels to be a person. However, these approaches could all be criticised for presenting a rather disembodied view of the self. Goffman’s focus on agentic performance for example, can be seen to overlook emotional and embodied responses to social situations. Crossley (2006) identifies the importance of ‘reflexive embodiment’ – the idea that we relate to and act upon our bodies reflexively. This reflexivity means that, although the idea of mind, body dualism is rejected by Crossley (and most social scientists), there can be a ‘lived sense of separation’ (Crossley, 2006: 2) between mind and body as we objectify ourselves in order to reflect upon our bodies. The idea of reflexive embodiment highlights the importance of our bodies to our reflections upon who we are and who we might become. Furthermore, this form of embodiment is seen to be socially constructed in a similar way to theories of the relational self and Crossley draws upon the work of Mead (and others) to demonstrate this and to maintain that the meanings attached to our bodies are fluid and variable. These relational aspects of reflexive embodiment, particularly how the ways we make sense of and act upon our bodies might be informed by ideas about transmission and inheritance, could be an important aspect of the construction of the self that has been overlooked in the approaches outlined here.

Finally, it is important to state that the various understandings of self and identity outlined here are not synonymous with ideas of personhood explored in this thesis which are broader and include aspects of ways of being that extend beyond ideas of the social or socialised self such as sense of humour, temperament and talents as well as embodied aspects like appearance and physique.

For these reasons, the work outlined in this section of the chapter raises a number of questions: How is selfhood/identity constructed relationally (not just with parents in early childhood but in various contexts and with various relationships such as in school,
or with siblings)? How do young people conceptualise/theorise about the nature of the self? Do they buy into a perception of an authentic, autonomous, inner self? What feels fixed/malleable about the self and how does this relate to embodied ways of being such as genetic inheritance and physical resemblance?

### 2.5 A relational approach to being and becoming

Up to this point this chapter has highlighted a number of existing approaches to the sociological study of being and becoming which have been placed broadly within the categories of studies of youth transitions to adulthood, theories of social class reproduction and approaches to understanding the formation of the self. The chapter has also posed various questions about processes of being and becoming that remain unanswered. Central to my critiques of these approaches has been the identification of an overemphasis on parent-child relationships and lack of attention paid to lateral kin. As such this section begins with a discussion of work that does attend to sibling relationships, which it will be argued, provides useful ways of conceptualising sibling relationships as lived in the present but does not focus in detail on the effect of siblingship on the formulation of ideas about becoming in the future.

In sections 2.2 to 2.4 of this chapter, gaps were identified in existing approaches to being and becoming in terms of the need to attend to young people’s own theories of how being and becoming works and the role of relationality within this, which might incorporate ‘natural’, biological or embodied aspects often overlooked in sociological accounts as well as normative understandings about relationships and the ways in which ideas of being and becoming are formed relationally. As such, in this section of the chapter I turn to work in sociology and anthropology which, in various ways, calls for an understanding of individuals as embedded within webs of relationships and which emphasises the significance of relatedness in practice as well as in the imaginary. I focus on work exploring familial norms and negotiations, work which emphasises the centrality of narratives, stories and memories to identity and selfhood as well as work proposing that we think of relationships in terms of relatedness and embeddedness. I
argue that these perspectives provide a useful way of conceptualising young people as embedded within webs of relationships with others but that questions still remain regarding the impact of relationality upon becoming and imaginings of the future.

2.5.1 Sibling relationships in sociology

We have seen that sibling relationships have been neglected in most sociological approaches to being and becoming. Others have also pointed to the absence of siblings in various social science disciplines including sociology (Edwards et al, 2006; Mauthner, 2005a, 2005b; Edwards et al, 2005; Mitchell, 2000 and 2003; Weisner and Gallimore, 1977 and Sanders, 2004). Mitchell (2003) for example claims that sibling relationships have been overlooked in psychoanalysis due to the patriarchal foregrounding of vertical interaction and lines of ascent and descent between family members. Psychology has paid rather more attention to the significance of sibling relationships although this has tended to be largely from a ‘top down’, adult centred developmental perspective (see for example, Dunn (1985) or Sulloway (1996)). There is also a body of large-scale statistical studies analysing the effects of structural aspects of siblingship - such as size of sibship, birth order position, spacing and sex composition - on various ‘outcomes’ including educational achievement (see Carr Steelman et al, 2002; Hauser and Sin-Kwok Wong, 1989; Kuo and Hauser, 1997 and Sandefur and Wells, 1999). Although specific findings vary, the overriding results of such studies tend to follow Coleman’s (1988) claim that siblings dilute the social capital available from parents (see also Conley, 2004).

Although, as stated, there has been much less interest in sibling relationships within sociology, there have been a number of notable empirical studies - by Edwards et al (2006), Mauthner (2005a, 2005b) and Punch (2005, 2008) - which apply a social constructionist approach to conceptualising sibling relationships. In their analysis of sibling relationships in middle childhood, Edwards et al (2006) combine social constructionist and psychodynamic perspectives. The social constructionist aspect of their analysis has resulted in a conceptualisation of the meanings and realities of
being/having a sibling as multiple, negotiated and continuously shifting. The incorporation of a post structuralist attention to discourse also means that, although fluid and contextual, sibling relationships are still understood as influenced by underlying social structures: ‘Children and young people are both subject to predominant discourses and structures of, and creators of the lived social practices of, age, class, ethnicity, gender and so on’ (Edwards et al, 2006:10).

Edwards et al’s (2006, 2005b) work focuses upon sibling relationships as practices (Morgan, 1996) as does Punch’s (2008) exploration of the constructions of birth order within sibling groups, where it is argued that birth order roles ‘are not fixed hierarchies but can be subverted, contested, resisted and negotiated through children’s everyday experiences of family life’ (2008: 30). In an earlier paper Punch (2005) draws upon Goffman (1959) to illustrate how sibling relationships tend to be more ‘backstage’ than parent-child relationships, largely because they are seen to be less characterised by fixed, generational power differentials and thus require a less careful presentation of self. Mauthner (2005a, 2005b) also highlights the dynamics of shifting subjectivities within sister relationships.⁹

Also centred on practices, a number of studies have found siblings to be a particularly useful source of social capital for young people, a direct contradiction of Coleman’s (1988) ‘dilution’ model of the effect of sibship size upon social capital transference. Holland (2008) discusses how older siblings (and other relatives) already in school can provide valuable ‘insider information’ (2008: 12) about school as well as emotional support and a ‘bridge’ to the formation of new friendships. Hadfield et al (2006) also show how older siblings can provide a source of support for young people who are experiencing bullying at school, demonstrating how, although some siblings were found to relish the space away from a sibling that school provided, siblings would always step in to offer support against bullies, regardless of levels of closeness outside

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⁹ Other studies have also highlighted the contextual nature of siblingship through a focus on cultural differences in the ways sibling relationships are conceptualised and practiced (see for example Chamberlain (1999) on siblingship in the Caribbean and Song (1997a, 1997b) on sibling relationships amongst British Chinese children as well as Cicirelli (1995), Weisner and Gallimore (1977) and Joseph (1994)).
school (2006: 68). Similarly, Gillies and Lucey (2006) found that: ‘Even where sibling relationships were conflictual and strained brothers and sisters were broadly acknowledged to be an important source of knowledge and experience’ (Gillies and Lucey, 2006: 490).

The above approaches provide a useful way of conceptualising sibling relationships in terms of practices and the emphasis upon siblings as a source of capital suggests that siblings may be able to provide the sort of ‘route maps’ to adulthood that work on youth transitions tends to conceptualise as being provided by parents. However, the focus of these studies is very much upon sibling relationships as lived and negotiated in the present and they are not directed towards issues of being and becoming. Although still attending mainly to the significance of sibling relationships in the present, some work exploring the importance of similarities and differences between siblings offers clues as to how being one in a series of siblings might impact upon the development of the self and as such might affect ways of being.

In her ethnography of kinship in a Malay fishing community, Carsten (1997) shows how the concepts of identity, similarity and difference in sibling relationships are representative of reproduction, and as such kinship itself:

> Siblingship is both about resemblance and identity and about difference. Simultaneously individual and multiple, it is the process by which things start the same, multiple entities in one body, but become different and separate: bodies within bodies. (1997: 106)

Despite its specific Malaysian context, Carsten’s quote indicates the importance of similarity and difference to understandings of sibling relationships. Edwards et al (2006) point to the centrality of sameness and difference in the language of siblingship and the effect of this upon the way young people construct their own sense of self:

> Sameness and difference, then, are two of the key intersubjective notions that children and young people use when describing and reflecting upon their own sense of self, notions that are closely tied up with feelings about individuality and being part of a group, belonging, connection and separation, dependence and independence. (2006: 38)
Related to this prevalence of sameness and difference (and influenced by psychoanalytic theory, including the work of Mitchell (2003)), Edwards et al (2006) also point to a central contradiction within sibling relationships, that of being part of a series whilst also striving to be an individual, which they see as impacting upon the formation of the self, indicating why sibling relationships might be particularly significant for sociological understandings of the relational formation of the self.

Song’s work on mixed race siblings (2008, 2010) builds upon issues of sameness and difference by taking account of the interaction between cultural identity and identification between mixed race siblings. Song pays attention to the interaction of choice and constraint in the construction of ethnic identity and points to ways that siblings are constructed as ethnically different within family scripts of ethnicity due to identifying features such as friends, cultural taste and appearance. The importance of physical appearance (particularly differences in skin colour between siblings) to some families in this research highlights the significance of family resemblances - or differences - between siblings and introduces a sense of embodiment to understandings of the relational self.

This attention to similarities and differences in sibling relationships and the significance of the seriality of siblingship on the formation of the self offers clues as to how being a sibling might impact upon how young people form ideas about who they are and who they might become as a person. As such, these studies pose certain questions about the role of siblingship in shaping being and becoming that are of particular interest in this study: How does being and having a sibling, or a number of siblings, affect young people’s experiences of and orientations towards being and becoming? Can siblings be a source of social or cultural capital for young people? Can siblings provide ‘route maps’ to adulthood and if so how does this work? How are ideas about similarities and differences between siblings formed and what effect do they have on young people’s sense of self? How does being one in a series of siblings affect young people’s sense of who they are and who they can become in the future?
As we have seen, much of the existing sociological work exploring sibling relationships is situated within a wider shift towards understanding family relationships in terms of practices (Morgan, 1996). This focus has meant that less attention has been paid to how normative ideas about siblingship might implicate how young people come to think of themselves and their future potential relationally. As such, I now turn to focus on work exploring normative ideas and thinking about family relationships, what Smart identifies as the importance of the imaginary to personal life (2007: 49).

2.5.2 Norms and negotiations

In their study of step-families, Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003) engage with the intersection of morality and practices. They argue that despite Morgan’s (1996) focus on practices and the sociological move away from conceptualising ‘the family’ as a fixed, boundaried entity, the concept of ‘family’ is important because it means something to people:

> Whatever language academics may develop, and whatever conclusions one reaches about the state of ‘the family’ in contemporary Western societies, the idea of family is still very strong. It constitutes a key concept by which people understand their lives, and a very significant and powerful ideal at the levels of both personal lives and public debate. Whether people like or hate the idea of belonging to ‘a family’, it is difficult – if not impossible - for people to ignore family ideals and discourses in relation to their understandings of their own lives. (2003: 27) (original emphasis)

Ribbens McCarthy et al accept that family practices are contextual and negotiated and acknowledge that being ‘a family’ takes work and effort, but argue that ‘everyday ‘family’ discourse is concerned with constituting family as if it were indeed just a coherent and solid entity’ (2003: 29, original emphasis) and point to ways that people construct ‘family’ as if it were natural. Thus, in a similar way to work identifying discourses of individualism outlined in sections 2.2 and 2.4, Ribbens McCarthy et al point to the ways we often live our lives as if our families are naturally fixed and bounded.
Others have pointed to the moral ideas of how it is understood that families ought to behave, how ‘family’ ought to be done. Finch and Mason (1993) point to the moral dimensions of understandings of kin roles and responsibilities, viewing these moralities as negotiated within lived relationships whilst also constituting an individual’s reputation within the kin group: ‘The kin group as a whole, through the shared images which its members hold and transmit, has the power to confer or withhold a ‘good’ reputation’ (1993:161). Thus, the links between moral norms and one’s personal identity within one’s family resides within lived relationships and in accordance with one’s structural position in the family. Finch and Mason stress the ‘importance of looking at the ways in which social meanings are constructed for use rather than seeing them as ideas which exist inside people’s heads. Beliefs, in that sense, may or may not exist...What matters is to understand the meanings which his or her actions convey to other people’ (1993:174, original emphasis).

Others have conceptualised morality in similar ways. Smart et al (2001) for example argue that children also apply moral principles to their familial relationships and Brannen (1996) looks at discourses surrounding the nature of adolescence and how they relate to parenting practices. The idea that moral and normative understandings come out of lived relationships is an interesting one which is explored in this thesis by the shining of a spotlight on young people’s more abstracted, generalised theories of inheritance and transmission as well as on their lived relationships.

The importance of discursive and normative aspects of ‘family’ highlighted in the aforementioned studies is summed up by Gillis’s (1996) distinction between ‘families we live with’ and ‘families we live by’. According to Gillis:

We not only live with families but depend on them to do the symbolic work that was once assigned to religious and communal institutions: representing ourselves to ourselves as we would like to think we are... we all have two families, one that we live with and another we live by. We would like the two to be the same but they are not. (1996: xv, original emphasis)
Gillis claims that the families we live with are often much less reliable and more problematic than the imagined and idealised families we live by. Families we live by ‘are never allowed to let us down. Constituted through myth, ritual, and image, they must be forever nurturing and protective, and we will go to any lengths to ensure that they are so, even if it means mystifying the realities of family life’ (1996: xv). Gillis’s families we live by do not exist ‘out there’ as a fixed entity but are created within families through practices such as the displaying of photographs, story telling or the writing of Christmas newsletters. Thus, Gillis’s ‘families we live by’ fit in with Finch and Mason’s (1993) fluid, family produced structures as well as being in line with Ribbens McCarthy et al’s (2003) pronouncement that ‘the family’ as a concept matters. Indeed, Gillis argues that:

These imagined families and mythic homes are no less real than those found in the census return or the survey result. Indeed, it is through our imaginings - our images, myths and rituals – that family takes on meaning. The way we live by our families is just as important as the way we live with them. (1996: xv)

The work outlined in this section of the chapter has highlighted the significance of normative understandings of familial relationships whilst also indicating the ways these normative ideas can be produced through family practices (Morgan, 1996). It also raises questions regarding how normative understandings of family relationships might impact upon processes of being and becoming. For example, how do ideas about how people occupying particular structural positions in a family ought to behave affect young people’s sense of who they are and who they might become? Do young people have moral ideas about the role that certain family members ought to play in shaping who they are and who they can become? Are normative and moral ideas about family roles affected by young people’s structural position in the family or by their gender? How do these moralities link to the ethical dimensions of the autonomous self discussed in section 2.4?
2.5.3 Narratives, stories and memories as normative mechanisms

We are, it seems, *homo narrans*: humankind the narrators and story tellers. Society itself may be seen as a textured but seamless web of stories emerging everywhere through interaction: holding people together, pulling people apart, making societies work. (Plummer, 1995: 5, original emphasis)

The above quote by Plummer indicates the centrality of story telling to social life. For Plummer, the telling of stories produces the social world around us. In this section of the chapter I turn to examine the role of stories and memories as potential mechanisms for the production of normative ideas about the ‘families we live by’ (Gillis, 1996)) in addition to their role in the ways the self might be produced through kinship, for example, through family practices (Morgan, 1996) or displays (Finch, 2007).

We have seen that Plummer sees storying as central to social life. He also highlights the symbolic interactions inherent to storytelling, showing how stories are communally produced and interpreted. Both Lawler (2008) and Gubrium and Holstein (2000) point to the effect of stories on individuals with both arguing that identity is created through narrative. Using a similar (but not purposefully related) turn of phrase to Gillis (1996), Gubrium and Holstein describe this narratively constituted identity as ‘the self we live by’ (2000). The self, according to Gubrium and Holstein ‘is not only something we are, but an object we actively construct and live by’ (2000: 10, original emphasis) and the construction of this self is seen as occurring through everyday ‘narrative practice’ (2000: 104).

Here I suggest that the construction and telling of stories within families can be seen as a mechanism through which relationality comes to affect individuals and the way they act upon themselves. Thompson (1997, 1993) for example, discusses how, in narrating their life stories in interviews, research participants are drawing upon a range of family stories. In this sense family stories can also be understood as a form of social transmission (they are passed down in families along with a propensity towards certain
occupations and ways of approaching education) and are understood as an important part of the context through which individuals make decisions about their future:

Family stories are the gist of social description, the raw material for both history and social change; but we need to listen to them more attentively than that. They are also the symbolic coinage of exchange between the generations, of family transmission. They may haunt, or inspire, or be taken as commonplace. But the way in which they are told, the stories and images which are chosen and put together, and the matters on which silence is kept provide part of the mental map of family members...Family myths, models, and denials, transmitted within a family system provide for most people part of the context in which their crucial life choices must be made, propelling them into their own individual life paths. (Thompson, 1993: 36)

The co-construction and passing on of memories within families can be viewed in a similar way and, in her outline of the significance of storying for identity, Lawler (2008) points to the role of memory in this process. Carsten (2007a, 2007b) similarly points to the entangling of kinship and memory, arguing that memory plays a significant role in processes of being in the present and becoming in the future, talking of, ‘the myriad articulations – of temporality, memory, personal biography, family connection, and political processes – that are manifested in subjective dispositions to the past, and in the imagination of possible futures’ (2007a: 1). Important to understandings of both stories and memories are the ways they are produced collectively, and as such are subject to the politics and power dynamics of the interpersonal relationships within which they are created. Misztal (2003) terms these groups ‘mnemonic communities’ - ‘groups that socialize us to what should be remembered and what should be forgotten’ (ibid: 15) - where memories are understood as dynamic and negotiated within relationships (in a similar way to the co-construction of family roles and responsibilities outlined by Finch and Mason (1993)).

Thus, it seems that the creation of family stories and memories can have an important impact upon ideas about identity and relationality. Are stories and memories also a mechanism through which ideas about being and becoming are transmitted? What role do stories and memories play in the creation of young people’s ideas about who
they are and who they can become? Do these stories only apply in family contexts or can they ‘carry over’ into other contexts and affect how young people perceive themselves at school or youth club? How and why are these stories and memories created? Are they influenced by the personal politics and power dynamics of family life?

2.5.4 Relatedness and embeddedness

Over recent years sociologists and anthropologists have moved away from a narrow focus on ‘the family’ (in sociology) and kinship structures (in anthropology) to develop new concepts for exploring the connections between people more profoundly. This new language enables an exploration of how processes of being and becoming are embedded within webs of relationships with kin that span past, present and future and can include the ‘hauntings’ (Roseneil, 2009) of past generations or imaginary kin.

Bengston et al (2002) introduce the concept of ‘linked lives’ to describe the ways that chains of relationships are built up over generations. They argue that individual lives must not be approached in isolation from the webs of relationships, spanning previous generations, which inform them. Smart (2007) builds upon this work with her concept of ‘embeddedness’. Smart describes what she terms the ‘stickiness’ (2007: 45) of relationships which, whether offering ontological security or being experienced as stifling or overbearing, are embedded into our lives in a way which means they cannot end (even through lack of contact). For Smart, the concept of embeddedness indicates the importance of contextualising people relationally, not as unique individuals:

as a concept it seeks to reflect the tenacity of these bonds and links, sometimes even to the extent that family members and close kin or friends can feel as if they were part of one. This ‘being part of one’ can manifest itself in several ways, whether close physical resemblance, or in a shared aptitude, aesthetic taste or sense of values...Blood

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10 This offers a direct critique of the relational forms described by proponents of the individualisation thesis (Giddens, 1992; Beck, 1992 and Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995) which stress freedom, choice and the cessation of ‘given’ ties.
relationships in particular seem to be unique in possessing these haunting powers. (Smart, 2007: 45)

Carsten (2000), similarly, argues for the use of the term ‘relatedness’ rather than ‘kinship’ because it denotes a move away from a preoccupation with boundaried notions of the biological and the social (which had traditionally dominated anthropological understandings of ‘kinship’) and instead prioritises ‘indigenous idioms’ (2000: 4) of relatedness. In later work Carsten (2004) argues that ‘close kin ties are intrinsic to the social constitution of persons’ (2004: 83) and the concept of relatedness allows her to explore the emotional, creative and imaginative aspects of these connections between individuals as opposed to reverting to a model conceptualising western selves as bounded individuals who may independently engage in relationships or connections with others. Thus, relatedness is an intrinsic part of personhood and Carsten argues strongly that one cannot study personhood without accounting for how people are made (through procreation), thus introducing ideas about biological aspects of kinship into conceptualisations of people. This thinking is also reflected in the rise of the term ‘relationality’. Mason (2004) for example, speaks of relationality in her discussion of personal narratives of moving home to demonstrate the ways in which these seemingly individualistic narratives are deeply relational.

Concepts of embeddedness, relatedness and relationality can be seen to be premised upon two key ideas. First, that the study of family and kinship should be expanded to incorporate webs of connections across time and space; and second that these connections are integral to the formation of the self, identity and to personhood. It is these understandings that I have identified as largely absent from existing approaches to youth transitions, social class reproduction and the self and which are central to the approach I take in this thesis.

These perspectives highlight the importance of conceptualising young people’s lives as embedded within webs of relationships as opposed to young people being understood to ‘turn out’ as lone individuals who happen to have relationships with others. Roseneil
(2009) for example, uses the concept of ‘haunting’ to explore how individuals are ‘inhabited by the traces of the lives of others’ (2009: 411) and Kramer (2011), in her study of the role of genealogy in personal lives, shows how imaginative and creative engagements with the past (the ‘genealogical imaginary’) impacts upon the construction of self-identity. Mason (2008) also identifies four dimensions of what she terms ‘tangible affinities’ including ‘fixed affinities’ denoting what is understood as given in kinship (including and extending beyond the biological), ‘negotiated, creative affinities’, ‘ethereal affinities’ denoting the magical, unexplainable possibilities of kinship and ‘sensory affinities’ pointing to the importance of bodily connections and of touch, sound, smell and sight in the ways we relate to others; all elements of kinship largely missing from the approaches discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. Mason’s framework of tangible affinities and ideas about links to previous generations flesh out some of the ways that relatedness and relationality matter to people.

The significance of understanding the role of nature in these concepts of relatedness is highlighted by Strathern who argues that kinship is a fruitful topic of enquiry precisely because it is a key site where nature and culture intersect in Western society; kinship (like culture) is thought of as being born out of nature. Strathern (1992a) expands on the problematic nature of the nature-culture dichotomy using the idea of ‘merographic connections’ (1992a:72) to discuss the role of the natural and the cultural in constituting English kinship. Strathern conceptualises English kinship in terms of parts and wholes with kinship seen as part of society (kin names, such as brother and sister, for example belong to the domain of the social) but also part of biology (the names of gametes, for example, belong to the realm of science). These parts (which belong to different wholes) mingle in kinship (Franklin, 2003: 66-7). Thus, kinship is understood as inherently containing a mix of the natural and the social, as Franklin, in her analysis of ethnographic work on the new genetics describes:

what is helpful about Strathern’s attention to the merographic nature of (EuroAmerican) kinship thinking is precisely that it describes how what is ‘conceivable’ about amniocentesis testing, or genetic screening for breast cancer, or paternity testing, is already built into the conception of kinship as a hybrid of individual and society, of natural
The dilemma of ‘what to make of our genes’ derives from the assumption that they make us who we are to begin with. (2003:74) (original emphasis)

The idea that kinship is inherently made from nature, culture, the individual and society suggests a need to attend to the parts of the different wholes that form it. Similarly, it suggests that, if conceptualised as situated in kinship relationships, in order to understand processes of being and becoming one must attend to its different parts, including the biological or ‘natural’ aspects as well as the cultural and structural aspects of the process and the position of the individual within this.

The idea that we are embedded within webs of relationships over time and that these relationships can profoundly affect our sense of who we are is significant for how I conceptualise young people in this study, although these approaches have tended to emphasise the significance of personal histories and past generations whilst paying less attention to the role of relationality on future trajectories. The questions that these ways of thinking about relationships pose include: How does being and becoming work for young people who are embedded in webs of relationships over time? How do these webs of relationships impact upon young people’s sense of who they are and who they can become in the future? Do ideas about personal histories, hauntings and past generations play a role in young people’s imaginings of their future? How do young people make sense of the impact of relationality on being and becoming? How do they understand the role of the parts and wholes of kinship – of ‘nature’ or biology – in shaping who they are and who they can become? How do these parts and wholes fit in with ideas about what is fixed and malleable about being and becoming?

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored three broad sociological approaches that are, in different ways, related to ideas of being and becoming as well as the fourth area of relationality which was found to be lacking in the other approaches. It has been argued that each body of work raises unanswered questions and, although containing useful ideas, none
is entirely synonymous with the approach to being and becoming that is taken in this thesis.

Studies exploring youth transitions to adulthood, although containing work - such as the Inventing Adulthoods project - contributing holistic and embedded understandings of young people’s subjectivities, offer useful insights into ideas of ‘becoming’ and of ‘outcomes’ of transitions to adulthood but also neglect ideas of ‘being’ in the present. Bourdieu’s approach to social class reproduction links ideas of being in the present with becoming in the future but can be criticised for ‘black boxing’ the family and for failing to attend to how social reproduction actually occurs (although more recent empirical studies, and in particular the work of Bertaux and Thompson, does attend to these issues in some respects). By exploring work approaching the self as relationally constituted as well as work seeing the self as a moral, discursive construct, I argue that although relationally formed, the self can feel as though it exists entirely within an individual. However, the ways in which this apparent paradox occurs remain un-empiricised and we still know little about how perceptions of the self are lived.

Furthermore, there are unanswered questions common to all three of these approaches. These questions concern a lack of attention to individuals as embedded in webs of relationships outside of relationships between parents and young children. Similarly, an acknowledgment of the role of siblings and lateral kin is absent in all three approaches. Young people’s own conceptualisations and theories of how processes of being and becoming work were either overlooked or downplayed in the work covered in sections 2.2 to 2.4. Finally, none of the three existing approaches to being and becoming utilise a broad enough understanding of being a person (in terms of characteristics, temperament, humour, talent and embodied, genetic and ‘fixed’ aspects of personhood) to explain the ideas of being and becoming explored in this thesis.

Although not specifically exploring aspects of being and becoming, work on relationality offers a way of approaching this research which conceptualises young people as embedded in webs of connections across time and space and which
understands such connections as integral to personhood. Work on sibling relationships provides some useful insights into what it is like to be and have a sibling, but further work is necessary to understand how siblingship might implicate orientations towards becoming. Normative and imagined ideas about how families ought to behave and what family roles ought to entail have been identified as a way that relatedness can exist in the imaginary. Family stories and memories are mechanisms for both the production of normative ideas about family as well as for the production of personal identity. Furthermore, ideas of relatedness and embeddedness are a way of conceptualising young people as being and becoming in connection with others and understandings of ‘nature’ and biology are important aspects of these connections. In providing useful ways of conceptualising young people relationally, these areas of work raise questions concerning how relationality impacts upon personhood, and upon becoming in the future. Furthermore, questions must be asked about young people’s own understandings of how relationality works to shape being and becoming and the role of ‘nature’, biology, fixity and malleability within this.

This chapter has identified gaps in our understanding of being and becoming that this thesis explores. These gaps concern how being and becoming works relationally and in different contexts and particularly whether and how relationships with siblings have a role to play in who we are and who we might become. The thesis also explores young people’s understandings and theorisations of how being and becoming works and what is understood as fixed and malleable about who we are and who we have the potential to become. Understandings of relationality are fore grounded in this respect with particular attention paid to ‘natural’ and biological parts of being and becoming as well as normative and negotiated aspects of relatedness.

As such my research questions can be broadly summarised as follows:

How do relationships impact the ways young people experience processes of being and becoming?

- In particular, how does being and having a sibling - or a number of siblings - impact upon being and becoming for young people?
How does being and becoming work in different contexts and in terms of different relationships - for example with siblings, peers, friends or parents?

How do young people orientate themselves towards ideas of being and becoming?
How do they form theories about how being and becoming works?

What is understood to be fixed or malleable about being and becoming?
How far does being and becoming feel agentic? Is there ever a sense of inevitability about being and becoming?

In the following chapter I develop these ideas and explain how they were operationalised in the research.
Chapter 3: Research Design, Method and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In order to achieve the relational, contextual understandings of being and becoming that form the basis of my research questions, it was necessary to design a study which approached being and becoming relationally.

The study focuses upon particular ‘spotlights’ of interest which highlight processes of being and becoming in terms of certain contexts and relationships. I wanted to understand how young people make sense of who they are and who they have the potential to become with a particular focus upon their relationships with others (especially siblings) and their ideas about how being and becoming works - particularly their theories about how traits and characteristics are passed on and what they understand to be fixed or malleable about who they are and who they can be. These spotlights are focused upon areas that were thought to resonate with these relational aspects of being and becoming in various ways and include a focus upon the context of secondary school cultures, a focus on being and becoming in relation to friends, in terms of being and having a sibling or group of siblings as well as a focus upon young people’s theories of how being and becoming works in a more abstract sense. These spotlights form the basis of chapters 5 to 8 of the thesis. Of course an approach such as this cannot cover every relationship or context of possible relevance and other areas, such as young people’s relationships with their parents, are opaquely present in all the spotlights that are the focus of this thesis.

The study comprised 26 interviews with 41 young people aged between 11 and 15 in schools, youth clubs and homes in the North West of England. I also conducted 9 focus groups with 75 young people aged 11 to 15 in schools which addressed the question of how young people can theorise processes of being and becoming more explicitly. In this chapter I discuss how the research was undertaken, beginning with an explanation
of the design of the study - including a discussion of the spotlights that became the focus of the study, my reasons for approaching young people as the unit of analysis, my approach to grasping issues of temporality and a discussion of the main methods used in the study. I then outline how the research was done including the resulting sample, reflections on the research interactions and the ethical considerations of the project before going on to discuss the ways the data were analysed using both in-case and cross-case analytical techniques. In this section of the chapter I also reflect upon the different orders of narrative generated in the project and upon the role of normativity in shaping the narratives produced. Finally, I discuss the process of writing with the data and reflect upon how I presented the argument that unfolds in the forthcoming chapters.

3.2 Planning and designing the research

3.2.1 ‘Spotlights’ on being and becoming

I approached the study of being and becoming by focusing on certain areas that were thought to be particularly pertinent. These decisions were made in light of a review of existing research and from some of the early analysis of the data. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, I use the metaphor of shining a spotlight on certain areas of interest to denote that, rather than representing all the factors pertinent to being or becoming, or attempting to separate certain factors from others, those areas that are not included in the study are still present, even if they remain on the periphery of the light in this study. In this respect, the approach is similar to Mason’s (2011) ‘facet methodology’ approach to research design where she perceives the object of study as a gemstone:

The facets in a cut gemstone reflect, refract and intensify light, taking up the background, and creating flashes of depth and colour as well as patches of shadow. It is in the way the light is cast and plays in the facets that we come to perceive and appreciate the distinctive character of the gemstone. The facets are different shapes and sizes, and they catch and
cast the light differently, depending on the direction and strength of the illumination as well as which planes and depths are left in shadow. (Mason, 2011: forthcoming)

Mason’s metaphor is appropriate for thinking about spotlights as differently sized and shaped facets which can explicate the broader research topic by casting and catching the ‘light’ in different ways. Mason’s emphasis upon a ‘connective ontology’ (ibid) also resonates with my approach which assumes that the social world is not divided into separate areas such as ‘family’ or ‘education’ but rather that the spotlights of this study overlap and connect with each other in a multitude of ways. However, rather than being ‘methodological/substantive’ facets of enquiry in line with Mason’s approach, the spotlights of this thesis are mainly substantive areas of interest which exist within the broader methodology of the study as a whole. The different lenses they provide on the problem of ‘tuning out’ are discussed below.

A spotlight on being and becoming at school
I originally set out to focus entirely upon being and becoming at school; it seemed to be an obvious place to explore these processes as it is a place where most young people spend a great deal of time and the nature of progression through the school system requires young people to reflect upon their performance and make decisions about their future.11 Furthermore, there has been a multitude of ethnographic research of secondary school culture which indicates the complexities of the organisation of socialities at school. Researchers such as Mac an Ghaill (1994), Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002), Hey (1997) and Willis (1977) have pointed to the formation of various groups or cliques defined by differing levels of popularity with peers and different orientations towards educational achievement. Gordon, Holland and Lahelma suggest that ‘Everyday life at school is like a complex dance with formal and improvised steps in a ballroom consisting of classrooms, halls, stairways and corridors’ (2000: 2). Within this dance Gordon et al identify three intertwining layers that must be simultaneously negotiated: the ‘official school’ (comprising the correct steps of the dance, with prescribed rules, a written curriculum and formal relationships

11 See Appendix 8 for an overview of the secondary schooling system in England.
with teachers), the ‘informal school’ (comprising improvised steps to the dance where ‘students dismantle the mantle of authority’ (2000: 102) and which includes informal relationships) and the ‘physical school’ (comprising the ballroom itself which as well as providing the context for the dance also shapes students’ practices). Gordon et al (2000) point to the complexities inherent in performing this dance and suggest that ‘Ballrooms are arenas for various kinds of feelings; pleasures, desires, anxieties, joys, fears’ (2000: 6). Thus, the complexities and ambivalences of managing social relationships and presentation of self at school, coupled with the decision making and formal assessments of ability inherent in young people’s trajectory through compulsory education make secondary school a particularly interesting context in which to explore processes of being and becoming.

A spotlight on being and becoming in a group of friends
I did not originally set out specifically to explore young people’s friendships. Although I recognised that relationships with friends are likely to be an important part of young people’s lives I had originally intended to subsume these within the spotlight on ‘being and becoming at school’ (in the same way for example that Mac and Ghaill (1994) and Frosh et al’s (2002) ethnographies of school incorporate male friendships). However, during analysis of the data it became clear that young people’s understandings of their friendships were very different from their more homogenised understandings of their school peers and as such I decided to discuss them separately in the thesis. Cultural ideas about the dangers of the influence of ‘peer pressure’ for how young people ‘turn out’ (as discussed by Brooks, 2005) plus studies, such as those by Budgeon (2003) on young women’s sense of self and by Brooks (2005) on the influence of friends on educational decision making, indicate the particular significance of friendship for young people and the influence of these relationships on self identity (see also Proweller, 1998; Keihly, 2002; Hey, 1997). Furthermore, sociological understandings of the relationship between friends and the self more generally (Pahl, 2000; Smart et al, forthcoming), particularly in terms of the centrality of choice and voluntarism to concepts of friendship (Davies, 2011), suggest that young people’s relationships with their friends may be particularly important for understanding being and becoming.
A spotlight on being and becoming as a sibling

Sibling relationships have been a key focus of this study from the start. As the previous chapter indicates, the role of sibling relationships have been absent from most mainstream areas of sociological thinking pertinent to being an becoming due to the privileging of vertical, intergenerational ties. The previous chapter also pointed to existing sociological work on sibling relationships which, in touching upon the significance of similarity and difference and the serial nature of siblingship, suggests that sibling relationships may be particularly pertinent for shaping processes of being and becoming in young people’s lives. Furthermore, there appears to be something of a wider cultural fascination with the emotional effects of sibling relationships with a particular emphasis upon issues of rivalry and jealousy between siblings. This has been evident in media coverage of the Miliband brothers’ labour party leadership campaigns which included headlines such as ‘The guilt that binds Ed and David Miliband together’ (Covington, 2010), ‘A tale of brotherly love: when siblings fall out and try to make up’ (Bennett, 2010) and ‘Romulus and Remus, Prospero and Antonio, David and Ed’ (Higgins, 2010).

However, we still understand very little about how having a sibling can affect our sense of who we are and who we might become and as such the spotlight on sibling relationships is a particularly important contribution of this thesis.

A spotlight on young people’s theories and generalisations about being and becoming

Young people’s own theories and generalisations about how ‘turning out’ works in terms of how ways of being and potential for the future are seen to be transmitted/inherited and how personhood itself is conceptualised have always been a key aspect of this study. Indeed, I began this project whilst working with Jennifer Mason on a project about the social significance of family resemblances and my interest in lay understandings of kinship and inheritance arose from this work on resemblances as well as from anthropological explorations of the ways people engage with the kinship consequences of New Reproductive Technologies and the everyday

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12 For more details see project website www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/research/resemblances
expertise employed when making sense of these issues (see for example, Edwards, 2000; Franklin, 2003 and Franklin and Mckinnon’s (2001) collection). This concern with young people’s theories and understandings is reminiscent of Sayer’s (2011) argument that we are evaluative and sentient beings (ibid: 1) and that sociology needs to attend to this ‘lay normativity’ (ibid: 2). For Sayer, concepts ‘are not merely questionable academic ways of thinking, but have become fundamental to the organization and self-understanding of modern life’ (ibid: 4). Therefore, I felt it was of interest to attend to the ways young people theorise about being and becoming in more abstract ways.

3.2.2 Devising the methodology

I approached the project with individual young people (and their perspectives) as the unit of analysis. Given my interest in the impact of young people’s relationships upon how they make sense of ‘turning out’ and in light of my argument in the previous chapter that young people ought to be perceived as embedded in networks of relationships, I could also have taken a networked approach to the study by interviewing young people’s siblings, friends, parents and so on and treating the network as the unit of analysis. This approach was used to good effect by Heath, Fuller and Johnston (2009) in their study of young people’s educational decision making - although the method was not without its difficulties and the authors described the pursuit of others in the network as akin to ‘chasing shadows’. Punch (2007) similarly researched sibling groups, interviewing siblings together and separately in order to compare her observations of birth order roles as negotiated ‘live’ in the group interviews with those narrated ‘privately’.

Although there were some cases in the project where I interviewed a young person’s sibling or friends or talked with their parents,\textsuperscript{13} the primary focus was young people’s own perspectives of being and becoming. As such I wanted to explore the relational aspects of being and becoming through young people’s eyes; I was more interested in how young people made sense of the influence of others in shaping who they are and

\textsuperscript{13}The details of these opportunistic encounters are listed in Appendix 2.
who they might become than in attempting to map these influences and perspectives. Furthermore, by placing young people at the centre of the research my study treats them as competent and articulate social actors in line with the new paradigm for childhood studies outlined by Prout and James (1997).

This focus on young people’s perceptions also led to the adoption of what could be termed a ‘snapshot’ approach to temporality in the study. There has recently been an upsurge in the use of Longitudinal Qualitative (LQ) approaches to the study of young people’s lives (as utilised in the Inventing Adulthoods study described in the previous chapter (see Henderson et al, 2007)). Neale and Flowerdew (2003) argue that LQ research implies ‘a particular theoretical orientation, a way of knowing and understanding the social world’ (ibid: 189) and that the adoption of a longitudinal approach allows qualitative researchers to explore the interplay of time and texture (which they describe as the temporal and cultural domains of social life). McLeod (2003) also describes how, in her work, LQ methods enabled ‘prospective and retrospective understandings of identity – both the participants’ and the researchers’ – and ... [provided] an opportunity to compare and move across and between the two’ (ibid: 202) resulting in what she terms ‘a kind of reflexive self-positioning for both the participants and the researchers’ (ibid).

The approach I take to time in this project is somewhat different. Rather than engaging with the ways young people actually move through time, my focus is upon how they conceptualise themselves as moving through time; how they conceive of their past and imagine their future in the present. As such, my approach has more in common with Brannen and Nilsen’s (2002) focus upon ‘The ways in which people conceptualize and experience time’ (ibid: 517) and James’s (2005) focus on children’s subjective reflections upon issues of age and the lifecourse. Thus, in this study I explore how young people, in the moment of the research encounter, envisage the possibilities of their future and how they incorporate their past into these conceptualisations. Therefore, it was not necessary to return to the participants after one or two years to map how they were actually ‘turning out’ and to decipher whether or not they had been ‘correct’ in their predictions of the future – to do so would imply a focus upon
the ‘outcomes’ or becoming aspects of being and becoming. Indeed, this study embraces the subjectivity and partiality at the heart of people’s orientations to time - including ‘memories’ of the past which were analysed as subjective and communal entities (Misztal, 2003) - and I approach ideas of past and future in terms of hindsight and foresight (as narrated by a particular young person on a particular day). Thus, the thesis addresses being and becoming through the lens of the present with hindsight and foresight understood as part of young people’s state of being in the present.

I employed two main methods in the study: semi structured interviews and focus groups with young people. Semi structured interviews are usually conducted between a researcher and one or two participants (my interviews involved interviews with one, two and sometimes three young people) and are often thought of as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984: 102) in that they take an informal, conversational tone. Kvale describes the central aim of qualitative interviews as, ‘to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations’ (1996: 1) and this is largely what I aimed to achieve in my use of interviewing. I wanted to provide an opportunity for ‘young people to talk about their lives on their own terms’ (Heath et al, 2009: 79) and therefore I designed the interviews in such a way as to allow young people to tell their own story, and to bring up issues that were important to them (I reflect further on the nature of these interview interactions in section 3.3 below).

There were of course key areas that I wanted to broach in the interviews such as young people’s experiences of schooling, their sibling relationships as well as their ideas about the sort of person they saw themselves as being and becoming. As such I prepared an interview schedule which, although rarely followed in a linear fashion, contained themes that I tried to cover in all the interviews. The focus of the interviews was to explore young people’s relationships and experiences as well as the ways they made sense of themselves and the sort of person they are. For example I asked questions about what they were good at, whether they had any particular

14 See Appendix 5 for a copy of the interview schedule I used.
talents and we discussed how these traits are believed to have come about, as well as exploring the particularities of their relationships – what their siblings, parents and friends are like and how they perceived these relationships. Semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate method for exploring these particularities in that they allowed the space for a more personal narration of practices, relationships and opinions.

Focus groups are generally defined as a form of group interview or focused discussion facilitated by a researcher, where the interactions within the group are a fundamental part of the method (Kitzinger, 1994) and data can be analysed in terms of the group as the unit of analysis (Smithson, 2000). Although less suited to eliciting personal narratives about practices, memories and relationships than interviews, focus groups can be particularly good at accessing normative understandings (Bloor et al, 2001; Smithson, 2000) and their use in this study was intended primarily to explore the ways young people make sense of and theorise about how being and becoming occurs, particularly in terms of their understandings of inheritance and personhood. I posed questions which sought to elicit opinions and theories about the possibilities for ways of being at school, about how talents and skills come to be possessed, about what can be passed on in families and about how one’s siblings and position in the sibship might matter15. I hoped that the more abstract nature of my questions along with the group interactions would encourage young people to take a stance and to think through and hone their opinions in dialogue with others so that I could explore how theories of ‘turning out’ can come to be formed as well as their substance.

I decided to use a clip from the cartoon television series The Simpsons in the focus groups as a sort of vignette. A vignette is a short story or case detailing hypothetical character(s) in particular circumstances and research participants are asked to respond to their situation. Vignettes are often used in surveys and sometimes in qualitative research and are particularly useful for accessing normative ideas concerning moral

15 See Appendix 6 for a copy of the schedule of themes covered in the focus groups.
behaviour: how one ought to act in a particular situation (Finch, 1987; Finch and Mason, 1993).

There were 3 main reasons why I decided to use a vignette and to do so with a clip from The Simpsons. First, I thought the focus group might be a potentially risky situation for young people to talk about ways of being at school (especially if they were experiencing bullying or teasing at school) and I felt that discussing these issues in relation to well known fictional characters would be safer and would encourage a more abstracted mode of reflection. Related to this, I also thought young people would feel comfortable and knowledgeable talking about the characters from such a popular and ubiquitous television show and one which is accessible without being patronising in the way it appeals to all ages.

Second, the fictional Simpsons family themselves are highly relevant and appropriate for my research – the two main sibling characters (Bart and Lisa) provide a good example of siblings who are very different at school; Bart is popular, funny and low achieving whereas Lisa is ‘geeky’ but very clever. These differences are particularly evident in the clip I showed from an episode entitled ‘Bart gets an F’\textsuperscript{16} and I hoped that discussing the experiences of the characters would encourage young people to think about how ways of being can be transmitted amongst siblings.

Third, I thought the use of a popular television show would add a fun, enjoyable element to the sessions and thus aid rapport. Every young person in the study was familiar with the programme (most had seen the particular episode I showed before) and I thought the familiar theme song would conjure a feeling of pleasure I remember from my own youth of being allowed to watch some television at school.

As suggested in my reasons why The Simpsons cartoon is particularly relevant to this study; in addition to being an object of interest in their own right, sibling relationships were used as a methodological lens through which I explored young people’s theories.

\textsuperscript{16} See Appendix 7 for a brief synopsis of the clip.
and opinions about inheritance. Sibling relationships seem to offer a certain cultural fascination and the comparability of siblings means they are often heralded as a fitting test case for thinking through issues of ‘nature versus nurture’ and are commonly understood as being relationships imbued with particular emotions. Think, for example, of the media fascination with the perceived sibling rivalry at the heart of coverage of brothers’ Ed and David Miliband’s Labour Party Leadership campaigns mentioned earlier or of interest in whether Venus and Serena Williams’ talent for tennis came about through shared genetic heritage or through being ‘hot housed’ by their father (Smith-Johnson, 2009).

I thought that by asking young people to think through how siblings (such as Bart and Lisa Simpson) can share genetic heritage and upbringing but ‘turn out’ differently, I would be able to elicit their thoughts on inheritance, modes of transmission and how ‘turning out’ works and that all young people, even those with no siblings, would be able to engage in the discussions.

3.3 Generating data

3.3.1 The sample

I accessed young people to participate in the research through various schools and youth clubs. I had originally planned to recruit young people for interviews through the focus groups I held in schools. However, despite gaining access to two schools (which I call Highfields and St Stephens) to conduct focus groups, this only resulted in 9 interviews. This was mainly due to the fact that, although eager for me to take young people out of lessons to take part in focus groups, the teachers who acted as gatekeepers in both schools were unable or unwilling to provide much help in organising the interviews which ultimately I arranged myself by contacting focus group...
participants who had registered an interest in taking part in an interview directly. Due
to this mode of recruitment, interviewees who were recruited via focus groups at St
Stephens were interviewed at home during the school holidays whereas those
recruited through Highfields focus groups were interviewed at school. Conversely,
similar issues with teachers as gatekeepers meant that I recruited more young people
for the focus groups than I intended – I had asked for a maximum of 8 but was
regularly sent groups of 10 and this of course led to difficulties in maintaining order in
the group and problems ascertaining who was speaking in subsequent recordings.

I supplemented the interviews I organised through the focus groups by recruiting in
youth clubs (during a week long set of workshops held at a youth centre I call The
Freedom Centre during school holidays as well as on evenings at ‘Estate youth club’
and ‘Rural youth club’\(^\text{19}\)) and in another school I term Romsbridge secondary school
where, rather than begin with focus groups, I negotiated access to talk to a year 8
assembly where I distributed leaflets.

The resulting sample consisted of 9 focus groups with 75 young people (31 girls, 41
boys, in years’ 7, 9 and 10\(^\text{20}\)) and 26 interviews with 41 young people (17 boys and 24
girls). The following tables depict the makeup of the sample for both the focus groups
and interviews.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{19}\) See Appendix 1 for more details.

\(^{20}\) See Appendix 8 for an outline of the ages of young people in various year groups.

\(^{21}\) For a more detailed overview of each participant’s characteristics see Appendix 2 for interview
participants and Appendix 3 for focus group participants.
Table 1: Focus Group sample

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>White British/European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG 1</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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Table 2: Interview Sample

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<th>Romsbridge School</th>
<th>Freedom Centre</th>
<th>Estate Youth Club</th>
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Although, as evident in the tables above, the sample did contain some ethnic diversity (the focus groups contained 27 non-white participants whilst the interviews contained 9 non-white participants), this diversity has actually made it difficult to say much about cultural and ethnic differences in the process of being and becoming because the numbers in each group are so small. Similarly, it has been difficult to make definitive
comments about social class in the thesis because, although all participants in focus groups and interviews were asked to provide details of their parents’ occupations, many young people did not know these details or were only able to provide details such as ‘works in an office’ or ‘Dad works in a place where they make passports and stuff’ (Nina, focus group 5) which did not help me definitively to categorise their social class.

The sample also contains very few young people who do not have siblings (just 1 interview participant and 4 focus group participants) and this means that I have not been able to provide many insights into experiences of being an ‘only child’ in this thesis. However, there were some young people in the sample who had recently acquired a baby sibling and these participants were able to talk about their experiences of having spent most of their lives as an ‘only child’. Furthermore, I have not categorised young people in terms of their birth order position or in terms of the structure of their sibling group (for example, I have not attempted to systematically compare the experiences of youngest and eldest siblings or those with full and step siblings). This is because these categories are highly complex and fluid. As the details of the sibling structures of interview and focus group participants - detailed in appendix 2 and 3 respectively – suggest, many young people in the sample had a complex combination of full, step and half siblings of various ages and living in different households. As such there were many participants who were, for example, the ‘oldest’ child when at their dad’s house but the middle child when at their mum’s house or who were the youngest of three children but had never lived with any of their older siblings. There were also examples of young people who categorised their siblings according to the quality of their relationship, for example participants who classified just one of their numerous step siblings as a ‘full’ sibling because of their particularly close relationship. Of course, these complexities offer interesting insights into the nature of young people’s sibling relationships whilst also highlighting the importance of resisting any temptation to create simplistic typologies of family structures in this thesis.
3.3.2 Interview contexts and the development of rapport

The various contexts of the interview interactions inevitably affected the rapport developed and the narratives generated. The most obvious example of this is in The Freedom Centre where the only opportunity to talk to young people was during the short and chaotic lunch break making it impossible to conduct long, private interviews. In this context I took the opportunities I could to talk to young people and some of the resulting interviews were as short as 15 minutes long and were more akin to ‘vox pop’ style interview encounters, covering only the most essential themes (Mason and Davies, 2010). The Freedom Centre interviews were also supplemented with observations of young people interacting in the Centre which added a richness to the interviews and enabled an understanding of the particularities of the context for the managing of relationships (these particularities are explored in depth in relation to sibling relationships in chapter 7).

Although longer in duration (up to 30 minutes), the interviews conducted at ‘Rural youth club’ were similarly challenging in that there was no private room available in which to conduct the interviews and this meant participants frequently became distracted by others who were partaking in youth club activities. The interviews at ‘Estate youth club’ were held in a private office and as a result participants were generally much more focused on the conversation and the interactions tended to be longer lasting (between 20 and 45 minutes). However, these interviews were still often interrupted by the youth club’s activities and in all these interactions, hearing occasional noises from the young people outside the office, I was aware that I was keeping participants from enjoying their leisure time at the youth club. This was particularly apparent in the following example from an interview with Nick, Tom and Russell at Estate youth club:

Katherine: Yeah. Why do you think that sometimes people like looking like their brothers?
Tom: (short pause) Cos you get known for it
Katherine: Right.
Tom: Like, if your brother’s known.
(Door opens (no knock) youth worker enters room)
Youth worker: Sorry to interrupt. Just need to get the TV.
Katherine: OK
(youth worker leaves with television)
Russell: Can we go now?
Katherine: Can you just stay for ten more minutes?
Russell: Ten? Can you make it five?

In this quote the interview discussion is touching upon some particularly interesting issues about sibling identity and resemblance but the interruption signals to Russell that the television is about to be turned on in the room outside and he is suddenly eager to finish the interview as soon as possible – with ‘ten more minutes’ feeling like an inordinately long time. In situations like this a level of negotiation about how long a participant would stay was often present although I was careful to ensure that participants understood that they were under no obligation to stay. Indeed, in all three youth club situations a number of interviews were curtailed because a participant had received a text message, sighted their friend through the window or in another part of the room and decided that there was more fun to be had elsewhere.

The interviews held at school were generally more private but still subject to the temporal organisation of the school in that they were structured by the timings of the lessons and could not take longer than 50 minutes each. Furthermore, young people were sometimes keen not to miss a particular lesson, or conversely, were eager to keep the interview going so they did not have to return to a particular class. The power dynamics of interviews undertaken in the school context were also more pronounced and these issues are discussed below.

Finally, the interviews which took place at home were different again. Although often longer (up to 90 minutes) they were frequently peppered with familial interactions and on some occasions participants’ parents sat in on the entire interview, often interjecting throughout the conversation. Such interactions were sometimes difficult to negotiate as I was aware that young people may feel inhibited in disclosing aspects of their lives (particularly in terms of their persona at school) in front of a parent and I
was careful to remain sensitive to these issues and not to push young people to comment if they appeared reticent. Despite such difficulties, analysing these family interactions and performances was interesting and provided clues about the power dynamics and negotiations behind some of the themes that arose from the data (such as how and why family stories about young people’s ways of being are constructed). Similarly, interviews undertaken with two or three friends, although sometimes lacking the more ‘private’, ‘confessional’ atmosphere of a one-to-one interview were analysed in terms of the interactions between friends and the construction of the self in this context.

3.3.3 Power, rapport and ethical practice

Since the advent of the new paradigm for childhood studies (Prout and James, 1997, first published 1990) which conceptualises children as social actors whose voices should be incorporated in social research, there has been a great deal of discussion about power relationships in research with children (see Heath et al, 2009; James, 2007) with researchers such as Punch (2002a) highlighting the particularities of conducting research with children and many researchers adopting a range of participatory research methods designed to help counter some of these difficulties (which are perceived as inherent to adult-orientated methods) and to encourage children to become active participants in research on terms they are comfortable with. Christensen and James (2000) for example discuss their use of circular ‘pie chart’ diagrams designed to help children to articulate their views of time, Punch (2002b) discusses what she terms the ‘secret box’ technique and Bagnoli (2009) describes how she went ‘beyond the standard interview’ to incorporate the drawing of self portraits, time lines and relationship maps in her interviews with young people. However, this does not mean that in order to be successful, research with young people must always involve non-verbal or ‘creative’ elements. As Heath and Walker state:

Implicit within exhortations to use ‘youth-friendly’ methods is a view that more conventional research methods are unhelpfully adult-orientated, possibly requiring skills and levels of confidence that may be beyond many young people. However, the inherent
danger of this assumption is that the widespread conceptualisation of young people’s interests and competencies as existing in opposition to those of adults is – albeit inadvertently – reinforced, which rather undermines the emancipatory ethos of much participatory research. (2011: 251)

This is not to suggest that the methods used in the studies outlined above were not highly creative and successful, but Heath and Walker’s critique raises the importance of not inadvertently patronising young people with the use of special ‘non adult’ methods, particularly in a study like mine involving young people of different ages. Furthermore, James (2007) warns against the dangers of assuming that young people’s ‘voices’ can be ‘represented’ in participatory research in a straightforward way, for they are inevitably mediated by the adult researcher – if not in the course of the research interactions themselves then certainly in the ways the research is analysed and communicated.

In some ways the use of The Simpsons vignette can be understood as a method particularly designed to appeal to young participants and young people who participated in the focus groups certainly appeared to engage confidently with the clip, using their often extensive knowledge of the series to engage with the themes of the research. Ultimately though, the design of both the interview and focus groups, although not containing the sorts of methodologies that have come to be understood as ‘creative’ or ‘participatory’, were inherently empowering in that the interactions were structured around young people as ‘experts’ on their own lives and the way I introduced the aims of the study emphasised this expertise and my wish, as something of an ‘outsider’, to understand young people’s cultures of friendship, family and school. Thus, although I went into the interviews and focus groups with an awareness of the potential difficulties surrounding age and power differentials, I was pleasantly surprised by the ease with which I was able to interact with young people and their enthusiasm for engaging in the themes of the research.

Despite the success I experienced in engaging with young people, it is interesting to reflect upon the role of power in the research interactions. The research relationships
developed in the focus group interactions, for example, were particularly defined by age and power and I suggest that in some ways this was a necessity of the context in which these group interactions took place. The focus groups took place in school in place of regular lessons and as such the classroom atmosphere and pupil-teacher dynamic that participants were used to did feature in their interactions with me (for example, I was repeatedly referred to as ‘Miss’ – a term they used to address teachers). Furthermore, participants were often so enthusiastic and passionate about the discussions that I had, on occasion, to step in to control the interaction – asking young people to listen to others in the group and to not shout over one another. There were also some occasions where I had to discipline young people who were clearly mis-behaving and being disruptive and this obviously confirmed my position as an adult in a position of authority. This meant that I found myself adopting a persona that was at times rather different from my usual researcher habitus which tends to involve being friendly, smiley and as egalitarian as possible. Ultimately, I feel my presentation of self in the focus groups lay somewhere between that of a teacher and of a friendly professional and this identity shifted according to the atmosphere of the groups which themselves fluctuated throughout the hour long sessions. Despite this, the focus groups were generally characterised by animated debate and in most cases I was able to encourage even quite reticent young people to take part in discussions by making eye contact and asking at points whether they wanted to add anything.

The nature of the focus group discussions obviously varied according to the age of the participants, with those in year 7 displaying more open enthusiasm and those in years 9 and 10 engaging in more humorous refrains and drawing in a more confident

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22 The issue of one or two people dominating discussions has been acknowledged as a common problem with focus group methods elsewhere (Smithson, 2000).

23 I adapted the focus group schedule slightly in the second school (St Stephens) after feeling that a more structured approach to certain elements of the discussion would help in keeping the group focused and the participants engaged. These additions involved writing key words on a white board during discussions (a technique young people are used to engaging with in their school lessons). These insertions are marked on the focus group schedule reproduced in Appendix 6.

24 This is one of the reasons I decided to recruit year 8 pupils at the final school (Romsbridge).
manner upon different sources of knowledge about inheritance. However, in keeping with Heath and Walker’s (2011) point about not making assumptions about age-related competence, I did not change the focus group schedule to accommodate different age groups and The Simpsons clip was a resounding success in all groups, with young people in all year groups singing along to the theme tune music and talking excitedly about other episodes of the programme they had seen. Overall, the biggest challenges by far in conducting the focus groups were controlling the discussion when it looked like it was encroaching upon the personal details of other school pupils, trying to stop young people talking over each other without killing the discussion and reining in those groups (especially held at the end of the school day) that looked to be in danger of slipping into mayhem and silliness. I believe that the willingness of young people to engage with the discussions and the animated and enthusiastic ways in which they did so are testament to the cultural fascination with the issues raised – particularly around siblingship and inheritance.

Of course power was still prevalent in the individual interviews, especially those conducted at school and youth clubs where, although clearly not a teacher, I was something of an authority figure and had been seen to act as such by interviewees who had also taken part in focus groups. Feminist researchers have often discussed the importance of sharing aspects of their own lives when interviewing in an attempt to break down power defined boundaries between researcher and researched (Oakley, 1981 cited in Finch, 1984), although Finch (1984) points to the ethical ambiguities that such research relationships can produce. Although I had no wish to contrive an illusion that a one off interview interaction was in any way akin to an equal friendship, young people did sometimes ask me questions about myself and, in switching the focus of the questioning, these instances did alter the power dynamic of the interaction. This practice seemed highly gendered as it was young women who tended to ask me personal questions, and notably also to offer me advice, thus sometimes taking on the role of the more ‘mature’ and knowledgeable party in the interview. For example, in their interview at Estate youth club, Molly and Lois were both passionate about horse riding and greeted my admission that I had never ridden a horse with obvious sympathy. Similarly, Courtney and Emily’s probing questions about why I would want
to do a PhD forced me to think about how the endeavour might appear from their point of view and left me momentarily stumped:

Emily: So, have you got to write all this down?
Katherine: Yeah. ... type it all up and then I have to write... (overlapping)

Courtney: Do you live at the university? (overlapping)
Katherine: I did when I went to do my first degree, I lived, erm, like, in the student halls of residence, but now, like, I’m 29 now, so I live with my boyfriend and I just work at the university, so.

Courtney: How long’s your course?
Katherine: Well, my first, doing my degree was three years, and then I did a Masters, which was, like, another one, for a year, and then I got a job, and, like, worked for a few years and now I’m doing this PhD which takes, erm, like, ages, like, three, four years but it will probably take me longer than that. (overlapping)

Emily: Why do you want to do one of those?
Katherine: (Pause)... Well, I just think it would, like, what I thought is, like, erm, yeah, ... find out about young people’s opinions and, like, write it up, and I just think it would be, like, it’s, like... a good thing to do. (overlapping)

Emily: Do you get paid for this?
Katherine: Er... I don’t get paid for this, like, coming here in the evening, but I do work there [at the university] at the same time, so I get paid for doing my job, but I do this, like, extra, kind of. (overlapping)

Courtney: Is it like an apprenticeship? (overlapping)
Katherine: Kind of, yeah.

(year 11 and 10, Estate youth club)

Although rather humorous, this exchange reveals something about engaging with young people across an age and, in this case, class divide (both Emily and Courtney lived in a particularly deprived area and had no family members who had been to university). It points to the importance of listening to young people, which sometimes means allowing them to take the lead in directing the conversation. Courtney and Emily’s questions concerning my PhD were astute and I have often reflected upon this conversation in the course of writing this thesis. Thus, this exchange allowed Courtney and Emily to direct the focus of the research towards me and in doing so forced me to
reflect upon my own life in the same way that, as ‘interviewer’, I had done to them. Of course my response was far less articulate than those provided by the young people who participated in the research.

One final note on the power dynamics of the research interactions concerns my role as ‘somebody from the University’ which I now understand as being marked by status and class. This was not something I had particularly thought about until going to Alex’s home to interview him after he had signed up in a focus group at St Stephens School. Alex lived with his mother (who had emigrated from Vietnam) and brothers in a small terraced house in a particularly deprived area of Manchester. Having knocked on the door I heard something of a kerfuffle behind the door before it was opened and when I stepped into the house I was almost choked by the overpowering smell of air freshener that had obviously been sprayed on my arrival. Alex seemed relaxed and happy but his mother, who spoke hardly any English, was clearly a little nervous and kept bringing me tea and biscuits and checking I was ok in the house. Although I was as pleasant as possible to Alex’s mother and tried to speak to her briefly about the research, I left feeling that she had mistakenly gotten the impression that I was somehow ‘important’ and I feared she may have thought that I could in some way assist Alex in his own aspirations to attend university.

These exchanges are all part of the negotiated and contextual ‘living’ of ethics and power in research and reflecting upon them is an important part of the process of thinking about how my own position as a (then) 29 year old, white, middle class researcher from the university will have informed the interviews and focus groups and the data they generated. My final note on the rapport I gained in the research encounters, and particularly the interviews, concerns the experience of interviewing young people as opposed to adults. Having had a fair amount of experience interviewing adults I was struck by how focused my interviews with young people were in comparison. Unlike adults who would often divert from the questions asked in

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25 I was researcher on both the Real Life Methods and Realities ‘nodes’ of the National Centre for Research Methods. More details about these projects can be found on the Realities web page: [www.manchester.ac.uk/realities](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/realities)
various ways and who regularly had quite well rehearsed narratives to ‘tell’, the young people I interviewed in this study tended to listen carefully to the question I asked and then genuinely tried to answer them. This is not to say that my interviews with young people were not ‘conversational’ or spontaneous or that the tangents inherent to interviews with adults cannot be hugely rich sources of data, but rather that young people seemed to think more during their interviews. Of course, this is likely to be a reflection of age and power differentials between researcher and researched but in addition I suspect that young people are less used to being invited to speak at length about themselves and as such engaged with the process of being interviewed ‘afresh’ with less rehearsed narratives of their lives to fall back upon.

There are of course other ethical issues that arise in all research and which can be particularly acute in research with young people. There has been a great deal of debate for example about whether young people are able to give informed consent to participate in research, with many researchers presuming that one must seek parental permission to ensure that consent has been achieved (see Heath et al, 2009, for an overview of ethical issues in research with young people). Heath et al (2009) point to the potentially disempowering effect of seeking parental consent and suggest that achieving informed consent in research with children and young people (as with adults) is negotiable and contextual. This was certainly my experience in this study where it was not always possible or practical to seek parental permission for the research. All young people were given a leaflet to take home and were encouraged to discuss its contents with their parents before deciding whether to take part in an interview and there was a section for parents to sign on the accompanying ‘reply slip’. However, in the contexts of interviews conducted in schools and youth clubs young people had often lost their leaflet and forgotten their reply slip all together. Furthermore, having negotiated access with the adult in charge of the relevant institution I was keen to talk to young people themselves about consent and all the interviews began with a

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26. These issues include confidentiality and I have changed the names of all the project’s participants, including those of any third parties named in research interactions. All school, youth club and place names have also been changed.
discussion about what the research was about and its likely ‘outcomes’, with young people often asking questions and showing an interest in the endeavour.

Negotiating informed consent in the focus groups was slightly more contentious because I had not played a role in selecting participants and had not been present when certain students were invited by teachers to take part in a focus group instead of attending their usual lesson. I feared that being asked to participate by a teacher in a school setting may have created a feeling of obligation, or even that young people had simply been informed that they must participate. With this in mind I stressed the voluntary nature of participation and gave all young people the opportunity to opt out and return to their lesson, although no one did so.

3.4 Analysing the data

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Although this meant that I largely worked with textual data, I regularly returned to the audio recordings in order to gain a sense of how certain things were said and, particularly in focus groups and noisy youth club settings, to remind myself of the atmosphere of discussions. Once interviews are transcribed (however carefully this is done) it can be easy to forget the subtleties of tone of voice or the general atmosphere of a research setting and returning to the audio recordings on occasion reminded me exactly what the phrases ‘overlapping’ and ‘everyone talking at once’ (which I regularly used in the transcriptions) actually mean in practice. In fact, focus group discussions were so characterised by overlapping speech that in some groups it was impossible to ascertain who was speaking, including whether or not the speaker was male or female.

I analysed the data using both case studies and thematic, cross case analysis. Thomson suggests that in depth (and in her case longitudinal) case study analysis provides ‘a different kind of insight than we are used to in social science and social policy research’ (2009: 1) and argues that her use of case study analysis provides an understanding of how individual lives are ‘located in relationship to dynamic configurations of family,
community, class and generation’ (ibid: 154). Although Thomson does not claim an ability to generalise her insights to all young people she talks of trying to ‘capture [through engagement with the details of personal lives in case studies] something of ‘the universal singular’ which enables us to read the social from the personal and vice versa’ (ibid). Thus, case study analysis can enable an understanding of young people as embedded within wider social and relational systems and can enable the researcher to ‘capture something of the character and feel of contemporary youth that goes beyond and beneath what is possible when working on a larger canvas’ (Thomson, 2009: 3).

I began my data analysis with detailed in-case analyses which, in the first instance, involved the writing of analytical case notes for all the interviews and focus groups followed by the writing of detailed extended case studies of 5 interviews and 1 focus group. I selected cases to write about that I felt contained quite different themes and that featured participants who had engaged with the research in different ways. In writing the cases I was able to explore how young people’s relationships, experiences and opinions interacted in shaping how they narrated their experiences of being and becoming. One of these case studies (featuring a pair of sisters who were interviewed separately) forms the basis of chapter 4 of this thesis and the themes that it raises are picked up throughout the remaining data chapters. Throughout these chapters (which are organised thematically) I occasionally draw upon a more in depth discussion of a particular theme or process as it relates to a particular case in order to explore connections, relationships and causality.

In addition to case study analysis I analysed the data thematically using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). CAQDAS is based upon a grounded theory approach to analysis whereby codes are identified through analysis and as such are supposedly derived from the ‘ground up’. However, in reality, I derived my codes from a number of different sources and the analysis included codes that arose in my case study analysis (for example ‘family stories/memories’ which I recognised as important through careful in-depth analysis across the duration of whole interviews), codes that I had identified through an exploration of the literature (such as the code ‘narrations of the self’ which I gleaned from the different theories of the self
outlined in the previous chapter), codes that helped me to retrieve data relating to certain areas I had set out to explore in the thesis (for example ‘sibling relationships’ and ‘theories of inheritance’) and codes that arose during the course of the process of coding itself (for example, I had originally created a code for ‘experiences of school’ but adapted this to include separate codes for ‘school self’ (denoting attitudes to school and persona), ‘school institution’ (denoting talk about the institution of school itself) and ‘school subjects’ (which included talk about how young people felt they were performing at school). Mason points to three ways of reading qualitative data: literally, interpretively and reflexively (2002: 149). The codes derived in my analysis covered mainly literal themes (such as talk about siblings, parents or friends) as well as some more interpretative themes (such as ‘negative reactions to resemblance’). I did not formally code for reflexivity but reflections on the interview and focus group interactions themselves were a central theme in the individual case notes and written case studies.

By examining the various codes and the intersection of certain codes (for example ‘sibling relationships’ and ‘school self’) I was able to form a sense of the spread of data - how common it was in my data for young people to talk about issues in a certain way as well as whether there were any striking differences between narratives. Thematic analysis such as this can fragment and decontextualise young people’s accounts but by combining this analysis with my case study work I was able to maintain a sense of context and of the narrative as a whole throughout the analysis and during the writing of the thesis. Indeed, my case studies enabled me to understand some of the processes behind themes I had identified as commonly occurring across the data and I regularly returned to the case studies to explore why certain themes might be occurring. For example, I created an interpretive code called ‘family stories and memories’ to code talk that I felt involved the repeating of well rehearsed stories or memories. By exploring some of the cases where young people had been interviewed with family members present I was able to identify that these stories and memories can work within the politics of existing family dynamics. I was then able to use a particular case (by a boy called Mason) in writing about this process in the thesis (section 7.3.1).
As stated, the use of case studies allowed a more contextual analysis of young people’s narratives. My interest in the ways young people made sense of the process of ‘turning out’ in terms of their theories of inheritance and of personhood meant that I also attended to how they worked with various narratives in talking about being and becoming - including normative discourses, family stories as well as narratives created within the interview and focus group interactions. Gubrium and Holstein (2009) suggest that what they term ‘narrative reality’ (which incorporates the social context or ‘narrative environment’ in which narratives are produced) can be analysed from a number of starting points, including ‘linkage’ (ibid: 55) which denotes the way stories acquire meaning in social and research contexts and ‘activation’ (ibid: 42) which refers to how narratives are provoked in research interactions. In earlier work Gubrium and Holstein also refer to the idea of ‘narrative slippage’ which denotes the gaps between the sources of knowledge – the cultural categories - that form a narrative and the ways those narratives are applied in a particular setting (1998: 167)\(^\text{27}\).

In analysing the ways young people theorised inheritance and personhood I tried to attend to the ways these narrative accounts were formed. For example, I looked at how narratives were activated in focus groups through dialogue with others in the group and in relation to the clip from The Simpsons as compared to in interviews where narratives were activated through discussions of personal relationships and practices. I also explored how young people’s narratives, as told during the interviews and focus groups, might be linked to the wider social situation and other forms of knowledge (such as knowledge gleaned through formal schooling and from family members as well as through cultural discourse). Thus, in effect I was interested in exploring the ‘slippage’ between the various sources of knowledge young people drew upon and the ways they discussed these in the research settings. Such instances are particularly evident in focus group discussions where young people regularly slipped between the recounting of personal experience, scientific ‘knowledge’ and moral and normative understandings of the lives of celebrities and fictional characters in

\(^{27}\) See also Davies and Heaphy (2011)
collectively producing narratives of how ‘turning out’ works. These influences are discussed in depth in chapter 8.

3.5 Writing with data

Writing with my data was part of the analytic process which began with the writing of case notes and more detailed case studies and culminated in the writing of the thematic chapters of this thesis. Mason argues that qualitative researchers need to be concerned with accuracy and she urges researchers to ensure and to be able to demonstrate in their writing that ‘data generation and analysis have not only been appropriate to the research questions, but also thorough, careful, honest and accurate’ (2002: 188). Mason also talks of ‘presenting an argument that is fallibilistic (Seale, 1999) because it contains enough contextual and reflexive material for the audience to be able to judge how convincing it is’ (2002: 192). Smart (2010) on the other hand, although not disputing the researcher’s duty to be honest and accurate, likens the writing of sociological arguments using qualitative data to story writing and uses the metaphor of qualitative data as a lump of wet clay that must be shaped by the writer to draw attention to the multitude of stories that could be told as well as to the creativity at the heart of the formation of such stories. In presenting the data in this thesis I thus strove to achieve a balance between creating an argument, or story using the data, whilst also attending to the data’s nuances and contradictions and taking care to provide an honest and accurate representation of young people’s narratives.

In selecting the themes that form the ‘story’ of this thesis, I tried to remain engaged with how far the data that I selected to use in illustrative quotations were representative of the data set as a whole. In doing so I have found it useful at times to use numbers to indicate how many young people in the sample said similar things, although this was not always possible or sensible because the nature of qualitative research means that not all young people were asked the same questions in the same ways and not all of my interview encounters were with just one individual and thus contained different opinions and experiences. My aim in presenting this thesis is not to
provide a generalisable set of findings that can be applied to all young people; as Prout and James (1997) note, it is vital to be sensitive to the differences between young people who do not all experience their age in the same way or from the same social position (see also James, 2005). Rather, my interest is in exploring the processes of being and becoming as narrated by different young people as well as the ways young people can orientate themselves towards the idea of being and becoming more generally. Indeed, at times I have identified themes arising from the data that were not shared by most young people in the sample but which are none the less particularly illuminating and at points throughout the thesis I have drawn attention to young people whose narratives are different from the majority in revealing ways.

I have not been able to group the participants of this study into typologies based on categories such as social class or a particular set of experiences because the narratives were often complex and contradictory and young people were rarely clear about their class background. However, I have pointed to instances where particular narrative forms could be gendered or classed using information gleaned from other theory and research. The process of selecting quotations from young people’s narratives to use in developing my arguments is significant and I have selected different length quotations depending upon the particular arguments I am making (as Corden and Sainsbury (2006) describe in their study of researchers’ use of verbatim quotations). I have also tried to resist choosing quotes from only the most articulate young people in the sample and have included in the discussion the wider context of the quote so that the reader has a sense of the questions I asked to provoke the narratives they see before them.

Finally, the spotlights of this thesis are interrelated and are not separate entities in the lives of young people. However, despite the use of a case study in chapter 4 which has enabled me to demonstrate this interrelatedness, the organisation of the remaining data chapters according to different spotlights of interest does not necessarily make the links between spotlights clear. This is a problem that Henderson et al (2007) also noted in the presentation of their findings from the Inventing Adulthoods project (which they ultimately separated according to different themes and contexts as I have done in this thesis). In future work it would be interesting to experiment with new
ways of writing with data which do not necessitate such a demarcation. Dicks and Mason (2008) for example, point to the use of web hyperlinks in troubling the narrative reading of research texts, enabling a reader to jump between interrelated areas of interest in non linear ways.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the relational approach to understanding young people’s experiences of and orientations towards being and becoming that has been adopted in this research. It has been argued that the focus upon certain ‘spotlights’ of interest has facilitated a particular understanding of young people as being and becoming whilst embedded in certain contexts and relationships. The use of case study analysis (in conjunction with thematic analysis) has encouraged a sensitivity to the ways these spotlights can intersect in young people’s lives.

This chapter has discussed the different narrative emphases of the qualitative interviews and focus groups that were the main methods employed in the project and it has been argued that the use of interviews has enabled a detailed exploration of young people’s relationships and the use of focus groups an exploration of their theories of being and becoming in a more abstract sense. The interviews and focus groups facilitated the production of different narrative environments (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009) which have been analysed in terms of the ways they link to the wider social situations, relationships and forms of knowledge which young people in this study drew upon to construct their narratives.

The following chapters tell the stories of being and becoming that these methods generated, starting in the following chapter with a case study of two sisters’ experiences and orientations before moving on to look at each of the spotlights of the thesis in turn. Although all young people inevitably experience being and becoming differently, the data chapters of the thesis identify processes and themes which enable a broader insight into young people’s lives in a similar way to that outlined by
Thomson (2009), who argues that wider social processes can be read from specific personal details in detailed qualitative analysis.
Chapter 4: A Case Study of Being and Becoming Amongst Two Sisters

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the data section of the thesis with a case study of two sisters, Anna and Francesca. The chapter provides a particularly in-depth analysis of Anna and Francesca’s narratives of their relationship, school experiences and understandings of the nature of inheritance and personhood. By comparing both sisters’ accounts in considerable depth this chapter is different in tone and style from those that follow. It demonstrates the links between processes of being and becoming in the different contexts highlighted in the rest of the thesis, indicating particularly how processes of being and becoming are embedded within wider family dynamics. Themes raised in this chapter are picked up in relation to the entire dataset and to existing literature in chapters 5 to 8.

The case was chosen for two main reasons. First, this particular case study offers a slightly different angle on siblingship than represented in the dataset as a whole because, rather than focusing on sibling relationships as part of one individual’s narrative of ‘turning out’, in this case both sisters were interviewed and their narratives compared. This gives a rounder picture which, although different from the wider methodological strategy which was to focus upon sibling relationships from the perspective of individual young people as opposed to specifically sampling sibling groups, helps illuminate processes and possibilities that are relevant to the other interviews undertaken in the project. Second, both Anna and Francesca narrate their experiences of school and of their sibling relationship more emphatically than most of the young people I interviewed. Anna for example weaves a narrative of herself as incredibly popular and successful at school whereas Francesca talks openly about not fitting in well at school and about struggling to adapt to the culture of secondary school. Although there are echoes of these experiences in the narratives of other participants, Anna and Francesca’s polarised narratives are heightened. In many ways
Anna and Francesca’s stories are an enlightening way to introduce this thesis because they are so atypical.

The fact that Anna and Francesca’s descriptions of how they see themselves as ‘turning out’ are on extreme ends of the spectrum of experiences discussed in this project and the fact that their experiences are so different from each other has polarised their narratives, enabling them to talk explicitly about their understandings of being and becoming in a way that has helped in the identification of themes and ways of theorising these processes that I have gone on to explore in other accounts. Similarly, by looking at the accounts of the sisters together, I was able to piece together their different narratives, experiences and perspectives to gain a unique insight into how issues of resemblance and inheritance, siblingship and interpersonal politics of family life can work to inform young people’s orientations towards being and becoming. Furthermore, although issues around being and becoming are raised in a particularly explicit way with Anna and Francesca, they are echoed throughout the data and are therefore a useful way of raising some of the issues that I will go on to discuss with regards the whole sample at other points throughout this thesis.

Francesca was in year 8 at Romsbridge School at the time of the interview and had taken home a leaflet about the research when I talked to her year group at school. When phoning to arrange the interview, Francesca’s mother suggested that I might also like to interview her sister Anna, who was in year 10 at a different school, Crumpston High, at the time of the interview. Crumpston High is largely regarded as a ‘better’ school academically than Romsbridge and Anna faces a lengthy commute each morning. Francesca chose to attend Romsbridge along with the majority of her primary school friends (although as will be discussed, this strategy backfired somewhat). Anna and Francesca’s parents are divorced, they live with their mum (a nurse) in a small two-up, two-down terraced house. Their mum’s mum (nana) lives relatively locally and they see a lot of her. Their dad also lives locally with his partner and their two children (Anna and Francesca’s half siblings). Their mother is white British and their father is ‘half Italian, half Brazilian’. The girls were not entirely sure what their father does for a living but they think it is ‘something like a lawyer or solicitor’. Although it appears that
both parents have a middle class profession, Anna and Francesca’s house is small, shabbily furnished and in a working class area of town.

I interviewed Anna first and during both interviews I was very aware that the other sister might be within ear shot (particularly when they talked about how much they disliked each other). The sisters had been at their piano lesson earlier that evening which they attend together (as part of a larger group of children) and both girls were wearing their pyjamas during their interview (although Anna later got changed to answer the door). Francesca looked a lot younger than Anna in her pink fluffy dressing gown and slippers. Although I thought they looked similar (both have similar colouring), Anna’s hair is a mass of curls and Francesca’s is straight and this is seen by them as signifying a big difference in appearance. Anna and Francesca do not seem to get along well. Although they have familiar sibling squabbles (Anna recounted an argument earlier that evening about Francesca taking things from her room without permission), much of the animosity seems to stem from them seeing themselves as very different (almost oppositional) characters, with Anna as the ‘loud one’ and Francesca as the ‘quiet one’. This is a narrative which other members of the family support and which has consequences for how the girls see themselves at home and school. Both girls, but particularly Anna, found it difficult to say anything positive about the other in their interview.

4.2 Experiences of school

Anna and Francesca are having very different experiences of school. Francesca is not happy at her school and in some ways sees herself as a victim of circumstance and bad luck because after having based her decision to attend Romsbridge on the school destinations of the majority of her primary school friends, she found many subsequently changed their mind and attended a different school or were placed in a different class because, as Francesca puts it, ‘they’re so brainy’. Thus Francesca describes herself as ‘stuck’, finding herself at the wrong school and in the wrong class. Francesca also seems to be struggling with the pupil culture at school. She talks about
how some pupils are like ‘Heads of the School’ and recounts a recent incident that is indicative of her place within the socialities and hierarchies of school life:

Francesca: And, erm, and today [in the canteen] I was, like, somebody, right, somebody was stood in front and I was trying to reach over to get a cake and this person wouldn’t move, so I was, like. And then I was in the queue because I was at the front of the queue and I put my dinner down to go and get a cake and this person, they knew I wanted to get something, but I don’t think, I didn’t say anything and they didn’t say anything to me, but they were just standing there and looking away, and I was like. But they knew I had my hand right over their head, but they just wouldn’t move, so I had to go back down, I had to pay for that, sit down and then go, go. (overlapping) Katherine: Yeah, go back again? (overlapping) Francesca: Go again, yeah. Cos, I really wanted one. (overlapping)

Anna’s descriptions of school, and her own school persona could not be more far removed than those of Francesca. Indeed, Anna’s description of her own social position at her school suggests that she might be close to being in a group equivalent to the ‘Heads of School’ whom Francesca was struggling with. This can clearly be seen when contrasting their attempts to describe how the groups are divided up at their schools:

Francesca: But we do have some people at school, who, like, I don’t know, they’re just very, like. They’re not, I don’t mean, like they’re really popular, I mean, erm, like, oh I can’t explain it, can. Do you know what I mean?
Katherine: Yeah, I think so.
Francesca: They’re, they’re, kind of, like, you know...Head of the School.
***
Anna: Well in our year, it goes, like, there’s a, there’s a really big group that, like, we’re dead friendly with, but we don’t hang around, well we do sometimes, it just depends ... And then it goes, so it goes them, like everyone in the year knows them and then they know us. It’s like, me then them and, like er, like, no them then us, like our group, so. And then there’s like...
Katherine: (overlapping) Like, they’re the most well known and you’re the second most well known?
Anna: Yeah. So, cos we all, kind of, mix together anyway. So, we’re, like, dead good friends, erm, and we, just like, go out with each other, so everyone’s like, ‘Oh, yeah, yeah’, you know, like and, er, then there’s, like, really quiet people, but people don’t know quiet people really, and like. I think the most well known people are the loud people and the naughty people, really (laughs).²⁸

Here Anna is placing a great deal of importance on being ‘known’ at school and has a clear understanding of this hierarchy and her position within it, whereas it can be assumed that Francesca falls into a category similar to Anna’s ‘quiet people’ who are not ‘known’.

4.3 Conceptualising personhood

Perhaps unsurprisingly considering their different experiences of school, Anna and Francesca have contradictory understandings and ways of theorising the nature of personhood – of how fixed or malleable aspects of their ways of being are. Francesca for example speaks of the significance of presenting a successful self at school, stressing the importance of adaptation for surviving the difficult environment of school:

Francesca: ...I have to stick up for myself at school and I have to be a bit harder, because I can’t let the bullies come to me, like, get to me. I’ve got to, I’ve got, I just want them to know, I know they’ll never stop but I just, they do know that I will shout at them, cos I do... Cos I know high schools, not all, all, like, I know high schools are all bad²⁹, so I was thinking; maybe I have to let people know that I’m a bit more tougher. So I could just do a whole new fresh start and, like, let people know that I’m like, not, I don’t mean hard, but sort of. Yeah. ... I think I came to Romsbridge, erm, just really shy and not talking. So I think that was the wrong idea³⁰.

²⁸ Anna is saying that her group is the second most popular (or well known) group but that her group also mixes with (and is friends with) the most popular group.

²⁹ This sentence is rather confusing but Francesca is saying that all secondary schools are ‘bad’ to some extent.

³⁰ It seems likely that some of this thinking about the necessity of presenting a ‘harder’ more resilient self has come from the family and a (collective) comparison with Anna’s more successful school persona.
Francesca’s interview contains many discussions of her self as something that can (and must) be altered to aid survival at school. She believes that most people project a different version of themselves at school than the one they show at home and she has ‘evidence’ of this, having knowledge of how one of the pupils who is ‘popular’ at school and part of the culture of behaviour that Francesca struggles with behaves outside school:

Francesca: It’s, like, the, they’re just common, sometimes and you think that, that they’re not really brought up like this, it’s just when you come to school.
Katherine: Right. So you reckon that at home they’re probably nice?
Francesca: Yeah. Well I know because erm, erm, well I know somebody, erm, this, this girl who’s quite popular, erm, I always see her playing out cos my friend lives near her and she’s playing out with these three little boys and they’re playing at racing cars and stuff. But then she’s really popular at school and, like.

Thus, for Francesca, ways of being at school should be altered to aid survival and she believes that most people project a different version of themselves at school in order to do this. However, for Francesca the creation of a successful school persona is not an entirely free choice – the malleability of ways of being are hindered by the context of school once one becomes known for being a certain way and Francesca understands that now she has been at her school for some time, the opportunity to present herself in a different way and become a different person has lapsed and she would need a fresh start in a fresh school if she wanted an opportunity to change her persona at school.

Anna was actually in a very similar position to Francesca when she first started secondary school and as with Francesca’s bad luck at being at the wrong school in the wrong class, Anna traces her current ‘loud’, ‘fun’ school persona (‘I have fun all the time, so, like, I’m a fun person, so. I’m always happy...’) back to a similar stroke of luck that found her mixing with a different group of children:
Anna: I think it was because, I don’t know actually, I, cos, what happened was, because I was, like, in Year 7 I was in a completely, I had, like, loads of different sets of friends, cos I was like in Year 7, I had a group of friends and then I, kind of, fell out with her. But, and then what happened was, we were really naughty, so then I got chucked out of that form, put in a new one and met, like, Sadie and everyone. So, I think I, when I first went in, I was, like, dead, and then I started to show myself and everyone was, like, “Wow, yeah.” So, then, that’s how I got friends with them all, really. (my emphasis)

In contrast to Francesca, the narrative Anna tells here is one containing a true, fixed, inner self that was waiting for the right circumstances to be released (like a butterfly from its cocoon). Francesca, meanwhile sees the nature of personhood in the context of school as something which to a large extent must be moulded or adapted to suit the school environment. This self is not an entirely free choice for Francesca, it seems that once a version of the self has been presented at school, it is fixed to a certain extent, otherwise there would be little temptation in the idea of starting afresh at a new school. Francesca’s theory of how a school self is formed is however, rather different from her sister’s.

Anna’s narrative of a ‘true self’ lying dormant until the circumstances enable it to be ‘shown’ is also contradictory to some degree; she acknowledges that it is sometimes necessary for people to ‘put on’ a self and in the extract below it is clear that Anna is well versed in the necessary steps to achieving such a self. Although Anna describes the ‘putting on’ of a self as undesirable, it seems at odds with her conceptualisation of her own transformation into her ‘true self’:

Anna: It is. It’s like, it’s like, have you seen Mean Girls?
Katherine: Yes.
Anna: It’s [socialities at school] like that, it’s like that, it’s like, you don’t, you need to, like, you can’t. I don’t know, it’s weird, because if you make, if you, sometimes you have to put on a self that you’re not always are, just so you don’t get picked on, which is a shame really because then people can’t be themselves. Because in Year 7 I was dead, dead quiet and I didn’t speak or anything, er, and everyone knew me as the quiet girl because I didn’t want to, like, show who I was, cos I was dead embarrassed. And then when I moved out of that form and weren’t with those people anymore I showed myself and everyone was like,
"You were never like", and I was like, “Yeah. But this is how I am”, but, and so it was just like. It's good to be yourself and it's just, I don’t see why people need to, like, pick on people really.

Katherine: Yeah. So do you think now you’ve found a way to be your, kind of, true self? (overlapping)

Anna: Yeah. I love it. I love the fact that I moved. Cos if I didn’t, then I’d still just be plain old Anna, that’s just, like, not happy, really, so. (overlapping) (my emphasis)

In this extract Anna is rehearsing this narrative about how she showed her ‘true’ self and seems to be buying into discourses outlined in chapter 2 about how it is ‘good’ to ‘be yourself’ (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991). Anna seems keen to present herself in the interview (as opposed to Francesca) as someone who is popular and fun at school and whose ‘true’ personality allows her to enjoy this position in her peer group naturally, without having to try. However her experiences in year 7, her contradictory explanations of the nature of the self at school as both ‘true’ (for her) and ‘put on’ (for some less fortunate others) and her knowledge and expertise of the complexities of achieving the balance between being ‘known’ and ‘not picked on’ suggest that Anna is creating, in the interview interaction itself, a narrative of herself as someone who naturally possesses the qualities to make her popular at school. This narrative seems to be rehearsed within the family too and is expressed in contrast to Francesca’s persona.

4.4 Siblings, resemblance and the construction of relational identity

Francesca and Anna’s conceptualisations of how they are ‘turning out’ at school are compounded by the differences between them. There is something specific about the comparable nature of a lateral relationship, like that between siblings, here. Because their experiences are so readily comparable, the ways Francesca and Anna are perceived to be ‘turning out’ at school are constructed in opposition to one another. Anna for example uses Francesca’s different, seemingly less successful, school self to help reinforce her own presentation of herself as naturally outgoing and popular. Thus ideas about the nature of the self and personhood are linked with presentation of self at school and with relational constructions of being and becoming:
Anna: She’s a proper geek and everyone knows it. Like, my mum’s, my mum, like, cos she’s been bullied and everything at school, so she finds it quite hard whereas I’m, like, all right. But **she hasn’t got a back bone like I have**, cos I stick up for myself and she doesn’t, so she’s, she just stays in the corner, whereas I would say something, but she’s not, she’s not like that. [my emphasis]

When considering the possible reasons for this difference in experience, the story of luck and circumstance enabling the showing of her ‘true self’ is forgotten and Anna talks about absolute, fixed differences in their characters, even drawing upon the embodied metaphor of the possession (or not) of a ‘backbone’. In the quote below Anna is illustrating how these fundamental differences manifest within the family:

Anna: I don’t know. I think I was always more of the, I think it’s cos I’m just louder than her and she’s, like. And because, er, I think it’s the fact that I had friends, like, good, I’ve always been a dead outgoing person so every single weekend, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, I’m out, I’m never in the house and she’s never out. She’s always in with my mum and, like, my mum, her and my nana, are dead close. Whereas I’m not really into all that, so. I’m more of, like, ‘lets go out and party’. And she’s like, ‘lets stay in and read a book’, so.

Francesca’s perception of how she is ‘turning out’ at school is also informed by Anna’s school experiences (despite them attending different schools) which are used by Francesca (and others in the family) as a benchmark by which Francesca’s own experiences are compared. Francesca’s unhappiness at school is viewed *in relation* to Anna’s own initial difficulties in settling in and, in Francesca’s interpretation at least, she is not measuring up:

Francesca: My dad, erm, says, ‘You’re going to be in that school for, like, years, so you really should move’, erm, ‘if you, like, not settling in’, but erm, my mum on the other hand doesn’t really want me to move schools and says, I’ll, erm, cos my mum and dad don’t live together, don’t live together, she says that, ‘This is how it was with Anna in Year 7’ and, and, like, and ‘when she first came to a new school’, but the thing is, Anna, Anna settled in at, like, the end of Year 7 and I’ve still not, it’s just like.
The way that Anna and Francesca are seen as ‘turning out’ is relationally constructed but this is about more than the sisters comparing themselves to each other. They are part of a whole web of resemblance narratives within the family and their journeys in the process of ‘turning out’ are constructed against an array of narratives of familial similarities and differences. This seems to take place within the construction of family stories and memories as outlined in chapter 2. For example, Anna and Francesca both ‘just know’ whose temper they have, who they look like and so on and these stories-like memories - are created within the family and taken on board to become ‘fact’ (although this does not mean that this process has occurred unproblematically and without challenge or resistance). There is a politics to how these resemblances are ‘done’ and how they are taken on board to inform Anna and Francesca’s understandings of who they are and who they might become and there are inequalities in who has the power to create or challenge narratives of similarity and difference in the family. Francesca for example is said to take after her father (by both Anna and her mum) for largely negative reasons. The father is described by both sisters as a difficult character, and is unlikely to be viewed as having many positive characteristics by those who liken him to Francesca: Anna (who has fallen out with him and is currently banned from his house) and her mum (who is divorced from him) and Francesca seems to accept that these similarities exist (although she is not happy about them). In these cases the resemblance is ‘done’ to Francesca and used as a weapon against her:

[Having been asked what her mum is like]
Francesca: Mmm. I can’t explain that, because, erm, she [her mum] says I take after my dad.
Katherine: Does she? In what way do you think she thinks you take after your dad?
Francesca: Erm, slobbiness…. And, erm, when I get angry… Erm, cos my dad’s a bit angry. Erm, erm, but, I don’t, I don’t have any of my mum’s looks either, but I, kind of, a, we’re both, like, different…

...  
Katherine: So do you think that you take after your dad then?
Francesca: Yeah. Well, I don’t, I don’t know, cos I don’t like it when my mum says that.
Katherine: How come?
Francesca: I don’t really like my dad.

On the other hand, resemblances could also be used as a tool. Anna for example, created some of her own resemblance narratives in the interview and used resemblances as a way of distancing herself from Francesca which she does by likening Francesca to the father she does not much like, meanwhile emphasising the similarities between herself and her younger half sister:

Anna [having talked about not getting along with Francesca] Whereas my dad, he has a daughter and she’s exactly like me, and we’re like, best friends. But she’s 6, but she acts like a 21 year old. She’s so old for her age...So me and her, like, go around, like, proper, like. She’s, she’s a loud girl, she’s, she’s...

By likening herself to her half sister, Anna is bringing her half sister closer in terms of ways of being (particularly by pointing out characteristics that they share and Francesca lacks, such as loudness) and in age (saying she seems much older than she is). As a consequence of bringing her half sister closer in these ways she is distancing herself from Francesca.  

Linked to these resemblances practices is the creation of oppositional labels within the family which directly refer to how Anna and Francesca are ‘turning out’. These labels have directly impacted upon Anna and Francesca’s decisions about and orientations towards their future. Anna, for example, is considered (particularly by their nana/gramma (their mother’s mother)) as the ‘clever one’. Although Anna never described herself as more intelligent than her sister in her interview (perhaps this would contradict the narrative she created of being popular and fun loving), she did seem to feel the pressure to achieve that accompanied her nana’s label as ‘intelligent’:

Katherine: Yeah. Do you ever, like, worry about not doing well at school?

31 It is difficult to believe that Anna has an equal friendship with her 6 year old half sister but by telling the story in such a way she is able to use the unlikelihood of this closeness to distance herself further from Francesca.
Anna: Yeah... Like, I got a C in ICT the other day and I never fretted so much in my life. So I stayed after school and did, like, an hour revision, to help my, like, boost my level back up.

Katherine: Did you? So, what’s, is your fear just, kind of, erm, not doing very well or do you worry that you’ll come home and you’ll get told off or something, or? (overlapping)
Anna: Oh, I’m always getting told off, that doesn’t bother me. I’m just, it, like, if I don’t do well, the thing is, like, my nana, like I said, ‘Oh, yeah, I got a B the other day in Maths’, and she’s like, ‘Well, why didn’t you get an A?’, things like that, are just, like.

Katherine: High expectations. (laughs) (overlapping)
Anna: Yeah. That’s, she is, she has loads, and if I say anything, she’s like, ‘Yeah, well why didn’t you get?’ and I’m just like, ‘Oh, right, okay’, like. But my mum’s, like, ‘Oh, well done, well done’, so I’m, like, I don’t mind. But I just try, I try hardest and I feel like, to, like, I want to go home to, home to my nana and be like, ‘Yeah, I got really good things’, so she’s happy.

Francesca mentioned Anna’s superior intelligence a number of times in her interview as well as referring to her own lack of intelligence. Francesca seems to have accepted unquestioningly her position as less clever than her sister:

Katherine: ...so do you think you might go to university and stuff when you leave school or...
Francesca: I’m not very bright for university, so, erm, but...
Katherine: (overlapping) Is that, like, your opinion or have other people said that?
Francesca: My grandma. (laughs)
Katherine: Right. Do you believe her or do you...
Francesca: Erm, I don’t know, because I really want to graduate. It’ll be great to graduate something. But, I kind of do, cos I know I’m not perfect and, I know you’ve got to be quite brainy for university, I think, I don’t know, I would have thought you do, but erm...
Katherine: You don’t have to be super brainy for university.
Francesca: No, but, like, I know there’s no use going to university and being proper dumb and then, you know.

... 
Katherine: Yeah. And does your, erm, grandma say the same things to your sister?
Francesca: No. Is, Anna, erm, grandma knows that Anna’s quite brainy. Like, well, actually I’ve never heard her say that. (overlapping)
Francesca has really taken on board the idea of Anna’s superior intelligence and seems to accept it unquestioningly (despite her grandma having never said this out loud). In the extract below Francesca is trying to make sense of where this difference comes from:

Katherine: Erm, have you got any theories on whether, like, how you are at school can run in families, or not?
Francesca: Er, erm, well, I’ve got, I don’t, I don’t really know, to be honest, because my sister has got both of the families’, erm, intelligence, because my mum’s, erm, quite intelligent and my grandma is. But she’s [her grandma] not very good at spelling, so I think I take after her a bit. But, erm, my dad, is, he’s, he’s like, I think, a Lawyer, or like, some Solicitor, or something. And so, I think my sister, like, takes after him cos he’s quite brainy.

Thus it seems that Francesca’s understandings of how aspects of being and becoming are determined by the workings of inheritance has combined with family produced narratives of her differences from her sister to influence her own understandings of how she is likely to ‘turn out’ and as such has limited the possibilities for who she might become.

4.5 Conclusion

By interviewing both Anna and Francesca it has been possible to piece together an image of how their sense of who they are at school and at home (their talents, character traits and personal flaws) and who they might become in the future is constructed within the family. Thus, the chapter has indicated how relationships within Anna and Francesca’s family and the politics and power imbalances surrounding narratives of resemblance and inheritance impact upon how the sisters make sense of who they are and who they can become at school and home. Therefore, the case study highlights the ways being and becoming are embedded in relationships and as such the case study has indicated how ideas of being and becoming are constructed within the relational dynamics of home as well as school.
Anna and Francesca’s narratives also indicate the significance of sibling relationships (and the role of birth order) in this relational construction of being and becoming, so that Anna’s progress at school and personality traits are constructed as a benchmark by which Francesca’s progress is measured. The relational constructions of sibling identity as well as the different environments/contexts of home and school have worked to ‘fix’ the sisters’ ways of being so that, whether it is at school or at home, one can become ‘known’ to be a certain way and this reputation is difficult to shift. Furthermore, these relational contexts have impacted upon Anna and Francesca’s imaginings of who it is possible for them to become in the future and we saw this clearly with Francesca’s feeling that she is not intelligent enough to go to university. This case study also helps us to see how ideas about resemblance and inheritance within the family have shaped Anna’s and Francesca’s understandings of personhood and how they theorise its properties.

Finally, looking in detail at a case study like this enables us to understand how the interpersonal politics and power relationships within the family are impacting upon Anna and Francesca’s understandings of who they are at school and at home. For example, Anna seems to have more power to discredit Francesca than vice versa and she uses resemblances as a weapon in doing this. The grandma/nana also seems to play a crucial role in telling the sisters what they should be aiming for and achieving, something which both Anna and Francesca have taken on and are grappling with in different ways.

The analytical style of the thesis now shifts as I turn to explore some of these themes as they relate to the entire dataset. The next chapter looks specifically at the process of being and becoming at school.
Chapter 5: Being and Becoming at School

5.1 Introduction

How does being at school impact upon the ways young people think about who they are and who they might become in the future? How do the particularities of the context of secondary school constrain or enable these options? How do young people themselves reflect upon the influence of the school context?

In chapter 2 we saw that the education system is viewed as an important arena for ‘becoming’ in some social theory; with Bourdieu seeing it as a key field in which cultural capital provides advantage; theorists of youth transitions seeing it as a place where young people begin to contemplate their uncertain and un-routed pathways to adulthood; and proponents of discursive understandings of the self and individualisation seeing it as a site of governance (Rose, 1998; Gordon and Lahelma, 2002). Indeed, young people spend a great deal of their time at school and these years spent in education are particularly characterised by decisions, changes and transitions (see Appendix 8 for an outline of the British schooling system). The context of school is central to the lives of young people and is inextricably linked to conventional ideas about being and becoming because it is a place where young people are specifically asked to imagine the ‘future’ in terms of key educational decisions and career options. Similarly, the advent of secondary schooling is where some young people become disenchanted with both education and the idea of planning their future. Furthermore, as we saw in chapter 3, accounts of the often contradictory interplay between the official, informal and physical school (Gordon et al, 2000) indicate that negotiations of identity at school can be particularly complex and fraught. Thus, the specific context of school provides an environment where aspects of ‘being’ (of presentation of self and identity construction within the context of school) and of ‘becoming’ (of imagining who one might become within and beyond compulsory education) are heightened (and in some cases thwarted) and where the relationship between the two can be explored.
This chapter considers some of the particularities of the context of secondary school and explores how these influence the process of ‘turning out’. First, the chapter argues that the temporality of the school trajectory influences young people’s understandings of who they are and affects their imaginings of who they might become in terms of how their orientation to school will inevitably be affected by ‘critical moments’ in institutional life such as the choosing of GCSE options, SATs \(^{32}\) and other examinations. Second, as outlined in chapter 3, a number of studies have indicated how labelling, reputation and presentation of self at school are practiced (Mac an Ghaill (1994), Frosh et al (2002), Hey (1997), Gordon et al (2000) and Willis (1977)) as we saw in the previous chapter with Anna and Francesca’s polarised experiences of school life. This chapter examines the labelling of young people within the hierarchies of school socialities in terms of how such labels can limit opportunities for ways of being at school and in turn influence young people’s understandings of who it is possible for them to become. It is argued that these forms of relational groupings and identities/identifications are particular to the environment of secondary school which constrains opportunities for ways of being (as well as for presenting and narrating the self), with consequences for young people’s ideas about the potential for the future. The chapter concludes by arguing that young people can operate with understandings of the school self which appear contradictory in sociological terms because they incorporate understandings of the self as both relational and autonomous.

### 5.2 Temporality, critical moments and the biography of school life

Ideas about the temporal nature of young people’s lives and the significance of certain ‘critical moments’ in young people’s biographies have been well documented. Chapter 2, for example, outlined the concepts of fateful (Giddens, 1991) and critical (Henderson et al, 2007; Thomson et al, 2002) moments in understanding the ways young people conceptualise time in both hindsight and in imaginings of their future. Christensen and James (2001) also point to everyday temporalities of children’s

\(^{32}\) See Appendix 8 for definitions of these acronyms.
experiences of primary school and their relative lack of power to control their use of
time at school. There was a tendency amongst young people in my sample to
classicise the trajectory of ‘turning out’ at school in terms of ‘critical moments’,
with all focus group discussions and some interview conversations containing
examples of young people conceptualising moments in their educational past as
critical and, most importantly, imagining that at certain key points in their school
careers their attitude to school would shift or change. Life at school was commonly
understood as peppered with moments or key shifts in ethos (at the time of the study
these included entering year 9 with its accompanying SATs exams and options choices
or year 10 with the commencement of work towards GCSE examinations) which are
universal in that they affect everybody at school, although different ‘moments’ were
cited as being ‘critical’ by different people in keeping with Henderson et al (2007) and
Thomson et al’s (2002) concept of critical moments as relational and contextual (this is
discussed in relation to siblings in chapter 7). Most of those young people who talked
about such ‘moments’ as being ‘critical’ to the development and shaping of their
future school self saw them as precipitating an almost automatic or natural change in
their approach and attitude to school by virtue of the moment itself. Thus the
temporality of school life (its changing nature and inevitable progression towards GCSE
examinations and graduation) is often seen as inevitably implicating processes of being
and becoming.

In the following example from a focus group discussion amongst year 9 pupils at
Highfields school (FG3), young people, in remembering early childhood interests that
have not been pursued, are reflecting on how their attitudes have already evolved
through their biography as their school lives have progressed and become more
‘serious’. These moments are in keeping with Henderson et al’s (2007) focus on the
importance of hindsight for recognising moments as critical:

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33 See Christensen and James (2001) for an example of the importance of SATs tests to children and
teachers at primary school.
Reece: When I was younger I used to watch all the like archaeologist programmes and wildlife and that and now I just don’t.

**Everyone starts talking at once**

:³⁴ My mum always says ‘why aren’t you watching Blue Planet?’

:Blue Planet!

Katherine: So what do you think happens then, that you kind of grow out of these childhood dreams that you have? Why do you think that happens?

Lauren: ‘Cos you realise you’re not good at it.

(overlapping)

**Everyone starts talking at once.**

Reece: There’s loads more people around and things to learn and stuff so then you just...

Ryan: I think it starts when you go High School ‘cos you’re more mature and you know what’s going on; you get me?

Others: Yeah.

Maleehah: I think mostly in year 9 cos year 9’s when you do your options and then cos you’ve had like two years here and you’ve had like the thing and you’re like ‘I’m good at that and not good at that’ you get me? But Primary School you don’t really like.

Lauren: You mix, it’s more mixed ability innit.

Reece: Oh yeah, it’s not sets is it.

These reflections and memories of change from childhood are employed when thinking in a more abstract, general way about the effects of specific changes in school life in year 9. The young people in this example are currently in year 9 so are discussing changes which have recently happened to them, or are in the process of happening. They are also reflecting in a general way about how the temporality of school life can affect a person’s behaviour, self conception and ambition (both ‘being’ in the present and ‘becoming’ a person in the future) – in this case the advent of setting³⁵ at secondary school and of options in year 9 as well as shifts in ways of being and socialising due to a perceived increasing ‘maturity’ (which could be viewed as progression towards ‘turning out’). The idea of ‘being’ at school is thus temporally contextual and therefore inextricably linked to that of ‘becoming’; it automatically

³⁴ As stated in chapter 3, it was not always possible to ascertain who is speaking in focus group discussions so speakers are not always identified in quotations.

³⁵ ‘Setting’ refers to the grouping of pupils into separate classes according to ability
shifts and adapts in line with external changes which happen at key moments in school life.

The idea of imagining how external forces might impact upon one’s attitudes to school was important, with young people often talking about the future in this way. Thus, changing one’s attitude to school was regularly seen as a future state of being with young people often presuming that they would inevitably change and become more serious at some point in the future.\(^\text{36}\) Thus young people also employed foresight to imagine potential future critical moments and how they would be affected by them. Take the following example from an interview with Nick, Tom and Russell where the boys see their attitude to school as shifting at the halfway point in year 9 when their SATs exams begin:

Katherine: Do you think it’s possible to change how somebody’s going to turn out or?
Nick: Yeah.
Tom: Yeah.
Nick: Cos we’ve still got three more years left.

Katherine: When do you think you’ll change?
Nick: About Year, ’alfway through Year 9.
Katherine: What makes you think that? Is it a crucial time?

Nick: Er, I’ll start, be doing, like, the SATs, SATs test and things like that.
(all year 8, Estate youth club)

Alex also spoke of the inevitability of changes to his behaviour as he contemplated entering his final two years at school:

Katherine: Do you think it will be a bit more, kind of, harder in Year 10 and 11, than what you’ve had so far, do you think anything will change?

\(^{36}\) This was raised in 7 interviews. There was little agreement as to the point at which this change was expected to occur; the older the person the later in the school career the change was expected to happen.
Alex: Erm yeah, I think that I’ll have to, erm, stop going out more and just have to stay at home and try to revise and pick careful course work.
(year 10/11, St Stephens school)

There are of course other aspects of school life which have key moments and a temporal dimension (for example participants often described labelling as having begun at some point since leaving primary school). However, what is interesting about these particular examples is that they indicate that young people understand aspects of who they are at school (their attitude, behaviour, motivation, concentration and so on) as becoming inevitably affected by the temporality of the school system itself at some point in the future. Thus, regardless of whether such imagined changes do actually occur, the fact that such moments are understood as transitional, as naturally necessitating change, indicates how the trajectory and potential of being and becoming at school is imagined and understood.

I now move away from discussing the impact of the external structuring of school life on being and becoming to an exploration of the effect of lived school socialities on young people’s identities, identifications and general perceptions of who they are at school.

5.3 Being labelled in school: the social dynamics of secondary school culture

Supporting other research in the area outlined in chapter 3, I found that most young people classified one another into groupings and hierarchies within the dynamics of secondary school culture. Although some of these classifications involved cultural signifiers, such as taste in music and fashion, they were primarily based upon an inverse hierarchical scale of pro and anti school personas reminiscent of Willis’s (1977) ‘ear’oles’ and ‘lads’ as well as more recent ethnographic studies (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Frosh et al, 2002; Hey, 1997). In 12 of the interviews and 7 of the focus groups young people spoke of or alluded to definitive categories of student ‘types’ organised into (hierarchical) groupings depending largely upon whether one has a reputation for abiding by school rules, is generally conformist, well behaved and liked by the teachers.
(and is consequently less socially successful) or whether one is known for an attitude which is somewhat anti-school, usually resulting in increased popularity and social success. Although young people used different terminology to describe such groupings, there seemed to be little difference in these classifications between the various schools in the study (although it is likely that the behaviour within these categories, that is what constitutes ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ school behaviour, varies between institutions. We have already seen Anna’s descriptions of a hierarchy of ‘known-ness’ at her school and Francesca’s reference to the ‘Heads of school’. Aiden (year 8, Romsbridge school) also talked of ‘high’ and ‘low’ people (who are ‘always going to the lessons and, like, tucking their shirts in’), Courtney and Emily (years 11 and 10 respectively, Estate youth club) pointed to categories of ‘popular’, ‘normal’ and ‘swots’ and Mason (year 8, Romsbridge school) employed the term ‘safes’ and ‘not safes’, the concept of safety alluding to the risks (of social exclusion, teasing or bullying) associated with a pro-school persona.

Even those categorisations which young people tended to make based on more culturally based signifiers such as ‘chavs’ and ‘moshers’ were often linked to these familiar pro and anti school categorisations related to behaviour, attitude and degrees of rule following:

Gemma: a chav’s like one that has all the earrings and the makeup and like the attitude and stuff.
Katherine: What’s the attitude like?
...

37 No young people argued that these groupings did not exist. In those interviews and focus groups where young people did not identify hierarchical groupings the subject did not come up in conversation.

38 For example chapter 2 pointed to studies indicating the efforts that middle class parents can make ensure their child attends a ‘good’ school.

39 Of course, the label of ‘chav’ is widely acknowledged to be a derogatory term associated with working class culture (see Preston, 2007; Jones, 2011) but for young people in the study the concept of ‘chav’ was used rather differently, in relation to the rival category of ‘mosher’ and both labels (although obviously still classed) were largely used to describe oppositional clothing and music tastes and were both readily opted into by young people at Highfields school (the only school in the study where these labels were raised by young people).
Gemma: Cheeky. And like her (indicating to her friend Lindsay) she always goes, ‘I’m creasing on the floor’, which can be laughing.
(both year 9, Highfields school)

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Farhana: Chavs could be related to Scallies…it tends to be like the way they speak, it’s not very formal, very informal and slangish. Erm, also like I think the way they dress as well you know cos people tend to associate (laughs) erm, them with like Nike trainers or tracksuit bottoms or something like that...
(year 10, Highfields school)

As outlined in numerous other studies (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Frosh et al, 2002; Hey, 1997), the levels of social desirability of certain practices, behaviours, labels and classifications at school were found to be highly gendered. Despite national concerns about links between a masculine anti-school culture and male underperformance at secondary school, it was in expressions of femininity where I came across particularly gendered performances of an anti-school culture.40 My data indicated the prominence of a performance of femininity centred on a socially desirable presentation of self as lacking intelligence, concentration and seriousness regarding school work. This ideal was alluded to in 8 of the female interviews with these girls talking about being ‘loud’, ‘gobby’, ‘giddy’, ‘dumb’, ‘blonde’ or ‘dizzy’. Take the following extract from my interview with Lindsay and Gemma where the friends work together to present a narrative of Lindsay as loud, blonde and dumb in the interview:

Katherine: And what are you two like at school? How would you describe your kind of personalities?
Gemma: She’s loud.
Katherine: Are you?
Lindsay: Yeah, I’m loud. I don’t know, I kind of
Gemma: (laughs) She acts blonde sometimes.
Katherine: (laughs) She acts blonde? What does that mean?
Gemma: Dumb.

40 Of course this could be influenced by my self selecting sample, where, it is likely that, for boys recruited in the school context, opting into the study constituted a more pro-school presentation of self than for girls.
Katherine: Okay. (To Lindsay) Would you agree with that or?
Lindsay: Yeah.
Katherine: And would you say that you act dumb but you’re not actually dumb..?
Lindsay: (Giggling) No I am actually quite dumb!
(both year 9, Highfields school)

Although I did not have access to Lindsay’s school reports or test results in order to ‘verify’ her claim to be ‘dumb’, it felt very much like a performance. For example, I was surprised by her claim to ‘loudness’ as, although she was reasonably talkative, in terms of volume she was by far the quietest young person who took part in the study, her voice barely more than a whisper and difficult to make out in interview recordings. Thus it seems that Lindsay actively sought to present a self which was ‘loud’, ‘dumb’ and ‘blonde’. It is interesting that loudness was such a desirable - and largely feminine - trait and was linked to lack of intelligence and looks-based indicators such as ‘blondeness’, mapping onto long standing jokes and stereotypes about blondes. Loudness was also noted as a socially desirable feminine trait in Bagnoli’s study of ‘young lives and times’ (Bagnoli, 2009) and fits into particularly working class performances of femininity highlighted by Hey (1997). These links to working class femininities are important, but despite the problematic nature of those attempts to definitively group participants according to social class outlined in chapter 3, these behaviours were not confined to girls who appeared to be from working class backgrounds and were present in focus groups and interviews among girls who it was possible to deduce were from a variety of backgrounds. Rather than being an example of working class habitus, it seems that young women in this study were engaging in these gendered behaviours as performances, interacting with socially desirable feminine traits as opposed to enacting habituated embodied ways of being. This is evident in the ways Lindsay proclaimed to be ‘loud’ and ‘giddy’ despite actually being incredibly quiet.
5.3.1 Fixity and malleability within school based labelling

It is clear from this analysis that the aspects of ‘being’ a person – and the options for performing these ways of being - that are available to young people at school can be largely governed by labels and reputations which are applied according to an inverse hierarchical scale of both educational success and popularity amongst peers. I now turn to examine some of the consequences of this social order for young people’s understandings of ‘turning out’. Issues of fixity and malleability, and of choice and constraint, in the ways school labels and reputations affect the process of ‘turning out’ are important because aspects of this process often feel as though they become fixed, or ‘finished’, as options for change become reduced and elements of how one will ‘turn out’ feel as though they come into focus. This section of the chapter outlines various ways in which school socialities fix aspects of who young people can be, which in turn affects their options for who they can become.

Young people’s understandings of being and becoming at school and of the nature of selfhood within the context of school socialities can incorporate elements of fixity and constraint. Ways of being, presentation of self and the potential to change these aspects were conceived of as fixed in a number of ways: by being ‘known’ to be a certain way by pupils and teachers, by the perceived inevitable influence of home and upbringing as well as by other theories and knowledge held by young people about the nature of identity such as genetics, star signs and by the ethic of the ‘true’, authentic, autonomous self (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991).

‘Turning out’ as fixed by reputation

In Francesca’s account of the perceived necessity of starting again at a new school in order to present a different, more socially successful self we saw how being known at school for being a certain way limited her perceived scope for change. This idea that the school context can fix young people’s options for ways of being and becoming was
most commonly alluded to in focus group discussions about The Simpsons. In 7 of the 9 focus groups, during discussions of whether the characters of Bart and Lisa could change how they are at school, the conversation turned to a different episode of the programme where, whilst on a family holiday, Lisa makes a new group of friends and becomes ‘cool’, dressing and acting differently than she usually does. This episode was cited by young people in focus groups both in order to demonstrate the potential for change (Lisa did become cool therefore it must be possible) whilst also indicating a reduced potential for change within the context of school (Lisa could only change in this instance because she was not at school amongst people who knew her). One of the key reasons for this fixity is that once one is known by others at school for being a certain way it becomes problematic to change these perceptions. Thus it is reputation, as perceived by others, particularly peers, which fixes one’s options for changing one’s presentation of self as illustrated in the example below from focus group eight (year 7, St Stephens school):

Katherine: Do you think if Lisa decided that she wanted to be cool like Bart, she could change?
:No.
:Cos she tried once...
...
:... cos then people’ll start going, “This isn’t like you,” and then she’ll feel guilty.
:Because she’s like that, people would know her for being like that, so people would treat her the same.

This example was typical of the discussions of Lisa’s attempts to change and in other groups, as well as discussing the vignette of The Simpsons, participants also saw their peers’ perceptions of who they are as an insurmountable obstacle to change. As a girl in focus group six put it, ‘Like in our school you can’t just walk up to a different group of people that you don’t hang around with.’ Participants in focus group 6 felt that it might be possible to change one’s school persona in the way Lisa did but stressed that this would be difficult and would take time. Thus, the same constraints of being ‘known’ to be a certain way at school are still seen as hindering an attempt at change:
Katherine: Yeah. So is it possible to break free of these kind of school...?
Yeah. But it'd **take time**.

...  
Can't just make an action, you’ve gotta, you can't just make, just think ‘tomorrow, yeah, I’m not gonna be like this’...You’ve gotta like, **it comes within time**.  
(my emphasis)  
(year 10, St Stephens school)

Similar discussions of some of the ways that reputation is understood to be fixed arose in other focus groups. For example, in focus group 4 it is clear that teachers are seen as a key reason why it would be fruitless for the character Bart to try and become more rule abiding and well behaved at school:

Emma: But then the teachers probably still wouldn’t like him  
Haashim: He couldn’t, no, cos he’s got bad genes.  
Katherine: What do you think then, you think he couldn’t change?  
Haashim: No.  
Katherine: Why not?  
Haashim: Cos once you go down the road you can’t come back. (overlapping)  
Hayley: Well he’s not getting any encouragement to change so? (overlapping)  
Jake: The teachers’ opinion would be ‘once a mischief always a mischief’.  

...  
Haashim: First impression.  

...  
Jake: But, you know, opinions can change.  
Emma: And also like if he tried he probably wouldn’t get like any credit for it so he’d just like think, ‘Well what’s the point?’  
(year 9, Highfields school)

Here we see the prevailing idea that reputations with teachers are also fixed. Haashim refers to ‘first impressions’ suggesting that once made they cannot be altered (once one has gone ‘down the road’ of bad behaviour at school it cannot be reversed). The concept of time in this fixing of labels at school is also interesting here. The idea of ‘first impressions’ suggests that labels are applied very quickly but the discussion in the previous quotation along with this one indicate that a major constraint to changing
these perceptions is that it would take a prohibitively long time. The nature of teachers’ fixed bad opinions are also seen as inevitably affecting Bart himself who will ultimately give up any attempts to try and change himself as school when he receives little ‘credit’ for his efforts from teachers. Thus, the constraining influence of school socialities on young people’s options for changing the way they are labelled at school can be understood to implicate being and becoming, constraining who they can become and the possibilities for changing who they are. This pre-emption of the reaction of others is akin to Mead’s (1934) dialogical approach to the self discussed in chapter 2 and indicates that young people in the study were suitably reflexive about the relational construction of the school self to be able to incorporate these understandings into more abstract generalisations about how the school self is constituted.

Evidence of this constraining role of school was found in the way a number of young people seemed able to adopt a different presentation of self and a different reputation in out of school contexts, such as at clubs and in their local neighbourhood. Here it seems as though some young people in the study recognised a Goffman (1959) type presentation of self with school requiring a more ‘front stage’ performance and other environments facilitating a ‘back stage’ presentation of self. Nathan (who was interviewed in the holidays between his year 10 and 11 and attended St Stephens school) for example, described having a difficult time at school, having few friends in his year and having experienced teasing due to his high academic abilities. However, Nathan also attended Scouts which he greatly enjoyed. When asked what he liked about Scouts Nathan talked about having different friends there who attend different schools. It is the fact that they are separated from his school friendships, meaning that

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41 This was mentioned by 7 young people in both group and individual interviews. Some young people however, spoke about the idea of adapting one’s presentation of self very negatively – as being indicative of a lack of authenticity. This was more common in focus groups and group interviews where it is likely that participants were less willing to admit to relational, performative, or otherwise ‘in-authentic’ elements of the self in front of their peers although in these contexts it was also common for young people to describe both a relational and an autonomous self. Ideas of where an autonomous version of the self might arise are discussed in the following section of this chapter.
school socialities cannot carry over to his relationships at Scouts, which makes them so rewarding:

Nathan: It’s probably just the people you talk to and your friends, that’s what I enjoy most about it...
Katherine: ... What do you think are the advantages of having a hobby like Scouts ... where you have another group of friends who aren’t all at the same school?
Nathan: Well, erm, if you’ve fallen out with a friend at school then you’ve still got to make sure that there’s no awkwardness or anything...

In chapter 4 we saw how Francesca felt that people often present a different self at school and are likely to behave differently outside of this context. Francesca provided ‘evidence’ of this after having seen a ‘popular’ girl from her school playing a childish car game with her little brother in the street near her home. Jade also explained that being in the locality of home with different people could free people from the constraints of their school-based labels:

You know like how your mates act around here [in the locality around her home] and they could act differently in there, in school, and then not here. So then, but in, like if friends here, you don’t know like if you’re like a swot or a geek or popular.
(year 7/8, St Stephens school)

‘Turning out’ as fixed by ideas about the nature of the self
There is more to this fixing of the self at school than the perceptions of others. Indeed in the example from focus group 4 outlined in the previous section, Haashim refers to the idea that Bart has ‘bad genes’, suggesting that this is a deep rooted problem with the very makeup of his being which cannot be altered by sheer will, or presumably by going to a new place with new people. There is also a feeling that Lisa’s attempt to change ultimately failed because she was not being true to who she ‘really’ was – thus, any attempt to change will inevitably fail because of the impossibility of denying one’s ‘true’ inner self. We saw this ethic coming across clearly in Anna’s narrative of the releasing of her true, inner self in chapter 4. In the example below the participants in focus group 7 are discussing the same episode of The Simpsons where Lisa changes on
holiday and, like the example above, the perceptions of others are seen as an important factor in ‘fixing’ the self. However, the futility of attempting to adopt characteristics which are fundamentally at odds with ones ‘true’ self also comes through clearly:

Katherine: What about Lisa, what if she decided that she wanted to be a bit more like Bart?
Boy: She has.
Boy: She’s tried that as well.
Katherine: Yeah, there was an episode wasn’t there?
Boy: Where she got mates and that.

Girl: But it just wasn’t her.

... 
Katherine: Erm, they weren’t in school were they, they were somewhere else and they were like a new group of friends. D’you think she would have been able to do that in school?
Boy: No.
Girl: No, because she’s smart so she wouldn’t be able to like...
Girl: Because she’s not known to be a nerd.
(my emphasis)
(year 10, St Stephens school)

In the above example there is a sense that it is seen as futile to attempt to change the core of who you are at school. When Lisa did change it could not stick, not just because of her reputation with others but also because it ‘just wasn’t her’ and this alludes to an ethical or moral dimension to this understanding of the true self, that it is somehow wrong to attempt to go against who one ‘really’ is in this way which is reminiscent of the ethic of the autonomous or authentic self outlined by Rose (1998) and Taylor (1991) and discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. Other focus group discussions alluded to a similar presumption of the impossibility and moral undesirability of changing or going against elements of the self which are seen as inner, fixed and fundamental. For example there were a number of references to intelligence as something which cannot be denied; as a girl in focus group 6 commented about Lisa’s attempts to change; ‘Like she could act stupid but she is still clever.’ In making sense of where this ‘true’ self
comes from, young people in the study outlined a number of possible origins, including genetics as mentioned by Haashim above as well as other forms of inheritance from family such as ‘rubbing off’. For example, Paul in focus group 2 talks about how aspects of ways of being at school may originate in the home:

Paul: Cos it will run in the family, er, if they’re outgoing and see people all the time then you’ll just become outgoing and with people all the time.

Katherine: How do you pick that up do you think, er, were you born like that or?

Paul: You pick it up from when you’re, you’re little as you’re growing up and that in the environment and you pick it up.

(year 9, Highfields school)

Similar influences on ways of being at school were also mentioned in interviews, such as with Rhiana (year 7/8, Freedom Centre) who talked about traits ‘rubbing off’ on one another in families: ‘I think that the parents could be like the children because obviously their personality, if they’re like confident or not, could rub off on the children and then that would either make them a shy or confident person.’ In the example below, young people in focus group 8 look to star signs as a possible cause of a true inner self and as an explanation for the fixed nature of temperament, characteristics and general ways of being:

Katherine: What about things like being a shy person or being an outgoing person? How does that come about?

Girl1: It’s supposed to be to do with your birth date, you know like star signs?

Boy1: I’m a spirio [sic] so I’m quite neat and stuff.

... 

Girl2: I’m Aries, so like it, some of it, it says that you can be outgoing or cheeky. I’ve got a twin sister. She’s outgoing and I’m cheeky...

Girl3: I’m Taurus.

Katherine: Yeah, do you know what that means?

Girl3: It means you’re strong minded and like you can do stuff that other people can’t...

Boy2: I’m Aquarius which means like a bit smart and a bit like mad.

Katherine: I’m Leo and I think that means that I’m supposed to be a bit of a show off and like really kind of outgoing?
Girl: Leo’s like, Leo’s the lion so that could be you’re…

:...Brave...

Girl: ...like proud of who you are and...

(year 9, St Stephens school)

Thus it seems that, particularly when thinking in more abstract terms, the potential of who one can be and become can be understood by young people as being ‘fixed’ at school in two key ways. First it is seen as fixed by social relationships within school (by others who ‘know’ you). Following this logic it might be possible to change if removed from the school context (and we see this to a certain extent with young people’s experiences of labels and classifications at youth clubs, scouts and other out of school activities). Second, and somewhat contradictorily - for sociological understandings of the self, but not for young people in this study - it seems that the ‘true’ core of the ‘inner’ self is seen as less malleable. Not only is it futile to change one’s core self, it is also unethical to do so. Thus, ideas about the nature of the self at school can be seen as limiting possibilities for change in terms of how one will ‘turn out’ in the future. These conceptualisations of personhood are discussed at length in chapter 8.

In addition, it appears that these ways in which ‘being’ at school becomes fixed are largely out of the control of young people who have little agency to effect a change. I now turn to look at the roles of control and agency in the shaping of ‘being and becoming’ at school, focusing particularly on the complex and often paradoxical nature of choice and constraint in the process of ‘turning out’ at school.

5.3.2 Moral agency, choice and constraint

As stated, contradictory understandings of the roles of choice and constraint are implicated in the ways in which processes of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ are ‘fixed’ within the school context. On the one hand, the data reveal an almost conservative style moral emphasis on the role of individual responsibility for one’s own label(s) and reputation at school. On the other hand young people were generally unable to classify themselves within these hierarchies and labels, thus failing to see themselves as being so simply defined.
**Individual Responsibility and a sense of the game**

We have seen in Anna and Francesca’s case study that, in creating a narrative about her naturally popular and outgoing school self, Anna was often rather disparaging about Francesca’s less socially successful persona. Although many young people paid some lip service to the undesirability of the hierarchical system of school labels and classifications, a general acceptance of the current social system as ‘the way it is’ was a common theme in the data. Some, like Anna, seemed to place the responsibility for the successful negotiation of secondary school labels and classifications squarely on the shoulders of individual pupils. In the following extract, Mason looks to the behaviour of the ‘non-safes’ as the cause of their unfortunate position at his school rather than critiquing the system as a whole:

Mason ...Have you heard that, it’s ‘safe’?...And then it’s, like, ‘not safe’ and then it’s like the boys that are soft and stuff...Say things like, if you’re safe, no one will mess with you. But if you’re not safe, and you’re like, the not safe people, like, are the annoying ones who are a bit stupid and people don’t like them...

Katherine: So are the not safe ones, the ones who are like vulnerable to being bullied and stuff like that?

Mason: Yeah. But they, like, they put themselves in those, they, like, make themselves not be safe, the way that they act...

Katherine: ...to be kind of not safe, what sort of behaviour would you have to have?

Mason: Teacher’s pets, erm, like, people who are annoying to the, like people at the top of the tree. It’s like the food chain really.

(year 8, Romsbridge school)

It is as if Mason is saying that everyone knows and understands the ‘rules’ that must be adhered to in order to stay ‘safe’ at school (i.e. no overt demonstrations of pro-school behaviour)\(^2\). This is why the ‘not safes’ are ultimately understood as being ‘a bit stupid’ for failing to follow the rules. Mason’s use of the ‘food chain’ metaphor is

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\(^2\) It is also notable that he draws upon the gendered nature of this – being ‘soft’ is clearly ‘not safe’ for a boy and this has been observed by numerous studies exploring masculinity, sexuality and schooling (see for example Mac an Ghaill (1994), Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002)).
also illuminating here (it is also outlined in chapter 4 that Anna referred to the film ‘Mean Girls’ which features a scene where the school cafeteria is depicted as the Serengeti and the students as wild animals fighting for dominance and survival) because it evokes the idea that this is the natural order of things. This is reminiscent of Bourdieu’s (in Weininger, 2005) concept of field, outlined in chapter 2, where those whose habitus successfully fits a particular field are thought to ‘fit in’ through the successful acquisition of a ‘sense of the game’ gleaned through cultural capital, although for Bourdieu this occurs mostly at the level of pre-reflexivity. The idea of a ‘sense’ of the game was a strong one in the data with almost all the young people demonstrating an acute awareness of the hierarchical social order at their school and how to navigate it successfully. Take the following description from Aiden which indicates his implicit knowledge of how to ‘survive’ school and how to ‘read’ other people’s hierarchical positioning from their behaviour:

Aiden: Cos when you’re like walking into school, you can tell, cos some people like fling these sweets at you and you go, ‘Right, don’t hang around with him’, like that. And then some people take the mickey out of other guys and then some people are like that, they’re doing, getting all these books, that, and reading and you don’t hang around with him, sort of. Hang around with the middle people.
(year 8, Romsbridge school)

Thus, if young people have a ‘sense of the game’, meaning that they understand how the social order of secondary school culture works and how one ought to behave within it, then (following Mason’s point about the ‘non safes’ being ‘a bit stupid’) those young people who do not adhere to the ‘rules’ can be understood by their peers as making a personal choice not to do so, regardless of whether they are acting in a pre-

43 It is possible in this case that my introduction of a loaded term such as ‘bullying’ which has been treated so seriously in the media and in the secondary school curriculum encouraged Mason to feel that he had to justify the system and ensure that the ‘non-safes’ were not portrayed as innocent victims.

44 Ed and Francesca were the only young people who openly admitted to being ‘unpopular’ at school, although in both cases it appeared that they knew why they were not socially successful.

45 Of course, we know from Francesca’s narrative of being ‘stuck’ at school that this is not how it feels for many of those who are in the position of being a ‘non safe’.
reflexive way and cannot readily alter their behaviour. Indeed, this presumption that young people have a sense of the rules of the game implies that young people have options and that they are aware of the consequences of opting for certain presentations of self. Of course, not all options are open to all, but what is important here is that many young people narrated the brutal hierarchies of school socialities in terms reminiscent of conservative ideology with an emphasis on freedom of choice and individual responsibility for the consequences of these choices. This moral emphasis upon individual choice and responsibility was discussed most explicitly in focus groups where choices of behavioural practices, activities, friends and so on were cited as impacting upon one’s persona and way of being at school. In the following examples the practicalities of time limitations were cited as the main reason why it is difficult to be both clever and popular at school:

FG2 (during a discussion about the ‘The Simpsons’ character Bart being popular but low achieving and Lisa being clever but ‘geeky’ and whether it often works this way in ‘real life’):
Paul: I think it does kind of work that way. If you’re really clever you’re not really, you don’t pay much time to your friends and like your education is more.
(year 9, Highfields school)
***
FG 6:
Girl: If you’re always with your friends and then you’re just gonna be more bothered about them than your work.
(year 10, St Stephens school)

This suggests that young people may conceptualise ways of being at school in terms of making decisions about how to spend their time. These decisions are understood as having consequences for the ways young people balance their reputations in the unofficial game of school with their academic work (in the official game). Furthermore, because young people are all thought to understand these consequences, the responsibility for them is understood as lying firmly with the individual. This emphasis on individual responsibility also means that those who fall into the category of a ‘non-safe’ and experience bullying or teasing are thought to have only themselves to blame.
The morality of these normative judgements is similar to those described by Sayer (2005a, 2005b) with respects to class-based lay normativities and moralities. Following Sayer, in placing the responsibility for their position in the school hierarchy upon individuals, young people in this study could be seen to be engaging in ‘moral boundary drawing’ (Sayer, 2005a: 952) - distinguishing themselves from those less socially successful by ‘claiming for themselves certain virtues which others are held to lack’ (ibid: 953). Sayer points to these boundary drawing exercises being ‘particularly strong in groups that are anxious about their position in terms of both how they are regarded from above and the risk of falling into the group they despise and fear below them.’ (2005a: 953) This suggests that the context of school itself, particularly the uncertainties and anxieties inherent in achieving both social and academic success at school, encourages this practice of ‘moral boundary drawing’. Young people in the study often alluded to the idea that a school persona which is ‘successful’ with regards to both (or indeed either) games requires both knowledge and work to maintain. Emphasising these universally valued qualities in differentiating themselves from those in a less advantaged social position enabled young people to differentiate themselves from those less popular in a similar way to Sayer’s thesis of social differentiation along class lines (Sayer, 2005a, 2005b). This emphasis on the work involved in being socially successful is clearly evident in Clinton’s statement, ‘I’ve just worked my reputation up since year 7.’ Similarly, during a discussion in focus group 8, one girl suggests that the solution is to ‘Be smart and helpful in class and then totally different outside’, in focus group 2 Jessica claims that ‘some people who are clever can be [popular] and others can’t. It’s just the way they act at school’ and in his interview Cameron explains that although he is well-behaved at school he has avoided being labelled a ‘supergeek’ because he does not ‘like sit in there studying at dinnertime.’

Other studies, such as Willis’s (1977) and Hey’s (1997) school ethnographies have pointed to the classed nature of these two opposing ‘games’ of school life which must be played simultaneously, with the ‘official’ game (involving working hard, applying oneself to one’s school work, being liked by teachers and so on) being understood as favouring middle class young people who have the resources, or capital, to understand
how to ‘play’ and results in increased life chances and career options. Conversely, the ‘unofficial’ game (involving social rather than academic success and which includes being seen not to study too much or to be too overly pro-school in ones attitude) is seen as not conforming to middle class ideals about the value of education and deferred gratification.

In this study young people were found to be constantly negotiating between two sets of sanctioned behavioural practices whereby if they adhered too much to the ‘official’ game they risked being labelled a ‘non safe’ and perhaps suffer bullying or teasing at school. However, too much attention paid to the ‘unofficial’ game could result in poor academic performance and consequently reduced life chances. However, these social positions seemed less clearly defined along class lines (Anna and Francesca, for example are from the same social background and negotiated the two games in very different ways in their schools). Most young people appeared to strive for a balance between the two and were involved in a continuous process of social negotiation rather than ‘belonging’ to a specific boundaried group. This was reminiscent of Gordon et al’s (2000) metaphor of negotiating the opposing social orders at school as a complex dance. Furthermore, many young people narrated the social structures at their school in particular ways which involved the definitive categorisations of others and much less clear self-categorisations, indicating that, in this study, young people’s understandings of how they themselves are ‘turning out’ are not created by these hierarchical structures in a straightforward manner.

**Self classification: occupying the middle ground**

During the interviews with young people I was struck by how quickly they were able to describe the classifications at their school and how aware they were of the various groups, labels and hierarchies and the risks associated with them. Despite this obvious awareness of the intricacies of the social order in their schools, very few young people in the study were willing or able to definitively place themselves in a group within this

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46 This balance was explicitly discussed by 7 young people and in other interviews it was possible to deduce that young people were balancing their presentation of self in order to be both socially and academically successful. Of course this could be a consequence of the self selecting sample.
system, with the majority (21 of the young people interviewed) describing themselves as somewhere in the middle of the groupings and hierarchies at their school.\(^{47}\) Thus, it appears that the labels governing how young people can ‘be’ at school are largely applied by and to others, with many young people themselves - although very much aware of and constrained by these labels - not viewing themselves in this way. The following examples are typical of the responses I received when asking young people where they saw themselves fitting in:

Maria: there’s two complete... There’s the quiet people and the ones who just shout and everything.
...
Maria: I’m not quiet quiet but I’m not like one of the gobby people.
(year 10/11, St Stephens school)
***
Sofia: Er, I’m not quiet but I’m not like, I’m not naughty. Like I wouldn’t be one of the rebels, I just talk a bit.
(year 9, Highfields school)

In these examples we again see the equation of loudness with popularity by the two girls. Maria is starting to say that the two groups at her school are completely separate but then goes on to contradict this by describing herself in a way that straddles them. Maria provides a highly qualified description of herself (‘not quiet quiet’) that was typical of the other responses in the data. Similarly, Sofia struggles to define her behaviour and structural position at school, finding it easier to describe what she is not rather than affirmatively categorising herself.

\(^{47}\) Anna and Francesca were exceptions to this and in chapter 4 we saw that the relational construction of their oppositional identities within the family contributed to their ability to categorise themselves as definitively popular (Anna) or as someone who is socially struggling (Francesca). Another notable exception was also provided by Jade who proudly declared herself ‘a geek’ in her interview. Jade (who was interviewed in the summer between her year 7 and year 8) had had difficulties applying herself to her academic work at primary school due to her tumultuous living situation. After starting secondary school and moving in with her dad Jade was able to become the ‘geek’ that she could not be previously. Thus, as with Anna and Francesca, it appears as though it was Jade’s home and family circumstances which caused her to be unusually able and willing to place herself within a grouping at school.
Zerubavel (1991, 1996), in a set of theoretical arguments, suggests that we experience the world as if it were divided into discrete ‘chunks’ or ‘islands of meaning’ (1996: 421) and this idea helps us to understand why so many young people in the study found it difficult to place themselves within the discrete groupings they had created between their school peers. According to Zerubavel, we divide the world into ‘islands of meaning’ through the linked processes of ‘lumping’ (grouping similar things or people together into a ‘mental cluster’ (1996: 421)) and ‘splitting’ (‘perceiving ‘different’ clusters as separate from one another’ (1996: 421)). This process of lumping and splitting results in the downplaying of differences within ‘mental clusters’ along with an emphasis on differences between these clusters. As such, we develop a homogenous view of those items (or people) within clusters and are able to dismiss any perceived differences within the clusters as meaningless. Zerubavel sees this ability to create homogenous ‘mental clusters’ as a fundamental aspect of social life:

The ability to ignore the uniqueness of items and regard them as typical members of categories is a prerequisite for classifying any group of phenomena. Such ability to “typify” our experience is therefore one of the cornerstones of social reality. (Zerubavel, 1991: 17)

Thus, in mentally creating groups or cliques within school socialities, young people are homogenising those within them. This makes it understandable that many young people will struggle to place themselves within these groups beyond confirming the ways in which these groups are different from themselves, which in itself heightens the separateness of these groupings, emphasising inter-cluster differences. Zerabuval also argues that although they appear to be natural, the creation of ‘islands of meaning’ and the processes of lumping and splitting are social, taking place within what he terms ‘thought communities’ (1996: 426) rather than as separate individuals. Thus the social system of school can be seen to play a part in the creation of groups, explaining why there is often some agreement about how this lumping and splitting is done. Therefore aspects of ‘being’ which are fixed within school socialities can become so because of the homogenised ways in which young people come to be understood as belonging to particular categories at school and the corresponding downplaying of individual features and differences between them. Differences in the ways young
people classify those school friends with whom they are ‘close’ are explored in the next chapter.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the context and social relations of school ‘fixes’ aspects of being and becoming in a number of ways. Firstly, the temporality of the school system encourages young people to think of their ways of being at school as inevitably changing in response to future critical moments. Secondly, labelling within the socialities of the school context ‘fixes’ the potential for ways of being and becoming at school. This ‘fixing’ occurs through one’s reputation as applied by and to others as well as by understandings of the nature of the self as autonomous and existing within a person. We have also seen the moral impact of school labelling and the paradox between the prevailing idea of an individual’s responsibility to successfully play the game of presentation of self at school and young people’s inability to classify themselves within these hierarchies which was explained using Zerubavel’s (1991, 1996) concepts of ‘lumping’ and ‘splitting’.

As stated in chapter 2, existing studies of school socialities have tended to focus on presentation of self in relation to hierarchies and labels. This chapter has corroborated these findings in many respects but has also pointed to new ways of making sense of being and becoming at school in highlighting how young people understand their school self in ways that, according to social scientific theories of the self, appear paradoxical. For example, young people tended to see the self as relational and contextual and the data contained evidence of an awareness of a Meadian (1934) self formed in dialogue with others (including the idea of a generalised other, with young people feeling their options for ways of being at school were limited by the idea of how they ought to behave in the official and unofficial games of school). Young people also alluded to the idea of Goffman-esque (1959) ‘front stage’ presentations of self at school. However, at the same time young people also talked in terms of a fixed, true, inner self and spoke of, and seemed to also understand the self, in the ways outlined
by Rose (1998). This came across particularly in the focus group data where, in producing more general, abstract and moral narratives, young people often reached for psy scientific style language and discourse to make sense of the potential of the school self (what Rose would term the languages and techniques of the self) such as being ‘proud of who you are’ (FG8), ‘it just wasn’t her’ (FG7), ‘once you go down that road you can’t come back’ (FG4) and ‘this isn’t like you’ (FG8). Similarly, discussions of ‘critical’ moments within the temporality of school life allude to a ‘journey’ of the self, which Rose points to as characteristic of psy conceptualisations of the ethic of the self (how the self ought to be practised and understood).

Thus, one of the most important points that this chapter makes is that young people understand processes of being and becoming at school as both relational and individual. What is striking is that it is clearly possible to adopt an understanding of the self as unique and autonomous whilst also being highly reflexive about the ways it is relationally constructed. Young people seem to be aware of the contextual nature of the self whilst also being aware that there are limits to this. Furthermore, this chapter has indicated how, although ways of being at school are relational and contextual and the process of ‘becoming’ is ongoing and negotiable, it often does not feel like this for young people. For them it can feel as though aspects of how they are ‘turning out’ are becoming fixed, not only by the context of the school and the people they are known to there but also because of wider psychological discourses about the ethic of the autonomous free thinking self.

In the following chapter I continue the examination of relationalities that are undertaken primarily in the setting of school by looking specifically at the role of friendship groups for the process of ‘turning out’ as opposed to the more general account of peer group and wider school socialities that have been the focus of this chapter.
Chapter 6: Being and Becoming in a Group of Friends

6.1 Introduction

How does being in a group of friends affect young people’s sense of who they are and who they might become? How are identities formed within friendship groups and what are the ethics and morals of being similar or different to one’s friends? How do young people interpret the influence of friends upon how they are ‘turning out’ and how does this relate to understandings of the importance of individuality? What are the consequences of having few friends for young people’s sense of self?

In this chapter the spotlight shifts from a focus on the impact of school cultures to an exploration of friendship cultures. Although largely practiced within the context of school (as well as in other locales), young people’s friendships can impact upon ways of being and ideas about becoming differently to the more generalised descriptions of hierarchies and labelling and the creation of homogenised groupings discussed in the previous chapter.

As outlined in chapter 3, many authors have discussed the significance of friendship in young people’s lives, with adolescence often heralded as a time when friendship relationships are heightened as young people begin to seek relationships of significance outside the family. Pahl (2000) for example argues that adolescent friendships provide young people with an audience on whom they can practice different identities and there is a multitude of school ethnographies which explore the segregation of school friendships in terms of ability (Ball, 1981), the importance of girls’ friendships for the development of female identity (Proweller, 1998; Keihly, 2002; Hey, 1997) and performances of masculinity amongst boys’ friends (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Frosh et al, 2002). Brooks (2005) also explores the influence of friends upon young people’s decisions about Higher Education. Others writing about the nature of friendship more generally have argued that friendships are implicated in constructions of the self (Pahl, 2000; Smart et al, forthcoming) due in part to strong normative scripts
emphasising friendship as a highly desirable and ‘good’ relational form (Davies, 2011; Davies and Heaphy, 2011). Thus it seems that friendships are likely to have a significant role to play in young people’s understandings of who they are and who they can become.

Rather than repeating ethnographic explorations of the nature of young people’s friendships, this chapter examines the impact of being in a group of friends for ideas of being and becoming by focusing on specific aspects of friendship which are particularly pertinent for shaping young people’s ideas about who they are and who they might become. As such, the chapter begins by exploring how identities are constructed relationally within friendship groups. It is argued that there is an ethical or moral dimension to the desirability of being ‘different’ from friends and this ethic is discussed in relation to theories of homophily (Bottero, 2005; McPherson et al, 2001; Allan, 1996) and the authentic, autonomous self (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991). Young people’s subjective experiences of homophily are highlighted and it is suggested that friendship groups can feel diverse even if homophilous in terms of class, gender and ethnicity. Second, the chapter turns to look at young people’s own conceptualisations of the significance of friends to being and becoming, paying particular attention to the role of normative understandings of the influence of friendship for young people in shaping these perceptions. Third, the chapter explores the importance of knowing and being known by one’s friends and uses Spencer and Pahl’s (2006) description of old friends as ‘biographical anchors’ to argue that closeness through knowledge of a friend can impact upon processes of being and becoming. Finally the chapter examines the consequences of having few friends for young people’s sense of self and argues that narratives can be produced to protect young people from the negative impact, in terms of self image and ontological security, of being a person with few friends.

6.2 Relational identities and the ethic of being different

In the same way that, as outlined in the previous chapter, most young people could not definitively classify their own school persona; it was also common for young
people to describe their own friendship group as ‘mixed’ or diverse despite having described or alluded to a general school social classification system based upon distinctive and bounded friendship groups of similar young people. Returning to Zerabuval’s (1991, 1996) theory of lumping and splitting, this tendency to emphasise differences within one’s friendship group is in direct contrast to the homogenising effect of lumping, outlined with regards to school socialities in general in the previous chapter, and indicates that friendship groups are viewed from a different vantage point. Indeed, it was common for young people to speak positively about being different from their friends. 7 young people commented that their friendship group comprised people who were all ‘different’ in terms of intelligence, talents, behaviour, attitude to school, taste, style, personality and so on and most others alluded to both similarities and differences within their friendship group. What is interesting is how narratives of difference were constructed and the work they did in the creation of both friendship and identity.

Although both girls and boys in the sample described friends as ‘different’, it was only girls who talked at length about the various characteristics of their friends. Girls were also more likely to talk about their friends as a defined group. This is not to suggest that boys do not have groups of friends, and a minority of boys in the sample did talk about being part of a defined group of friends although discussions of the characteristics of the individuals within these groups tended to be based less on issues of personhood and more on practices or activities. The following example from Aiden is typical of this:

Katherine: Yeah. Erm, and so what are your friends like? Are they all quite similar to you, or, are you all different? (overlapping)
Aiden: Some are different, some, when I play football with Max some don’t cos they, like, they don’t like, like, football, they like just sitting around on the grass and stuff like that. (overlapping)

5 young people described their friends in a way that could be interpreted as mostly similar although it is not clear from the data why these particular participants narrated their friendships differently from others in the sample.
There are of course well rehearsed arguments which highlight the gendered nature of friendship and which suggest that women’s friendships tend to be defined by deeper emotional ties than those of men (Chambers, 2006) and that boys’ friendships tend to be characterised more through practices and activities than those of girls (Paechter, 2007). Although the narratives of friendship produced in this study appear to corroborate these distinctions it is not possible to deduce this merely from these few narratives of friendship. However, it does seem that boys in the sample were less inclined to talk about their friends in terms of their personal characteristics and traits than girls. This is in line with arguments made by Butera (2006) who, having experienced difficulties recruiting men to participate in her project about friendship, suggests that men, rather than having few friends, can perceive the research topic of friendship as deviating from hegemonic notions of masculinity (see also Smart et al, forthcoming). There were also no examples in the data of young people who spoke of being in mixed gender friendship groups.

In both academic and cultural terms, friendship has been viewed as an ideal relational form due to assumptions that it is more freely chosen than relationships with family (Giddens, 1992; Smart et al, forthcoming; Davies, 2011; Davies and Heaphy, 2011). Thus, by creating narratives of their friendship groups as containing a variety of ‘different’ individuals, these young people were able to indicate the chosen nature of these ties whilst also adhering to the ethic of the authentic, autonomous self (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991) by depicting themselves as ‘free-thinking’ individuals rather than somebody who has merely ‘followed’ their friends. These two ‘ethics’ surrounding friendship are evident in the following narrative from Sherise who is keen to explain that, although her friends do have similarities, this is not why they are friends:

A lot of my friends do play instruments and stuff, but if they don’t play an instrument they’re good at art … But it’s not like I pick people that are good at the same thing as me … it’s not like, ‘Yeah, I’m gonna be friends with people that are good at art cos I don’t like
people that are not...It’s just like, turns out like that. But not all of them are good at art and music, but a lot of them are.

(year 8/9, Freedom Centre)

Thus, in order to narrate her friendships as positive, socially desirable relationships it is important that Sherise stresses that she has not been instrumental in choosing friends that are similar to her and that the choices she has made about her friendships are voluntaristic in that they are not determined by similarities in intelligence or shared talents.

As well as adhering to an ethic of voluntarism and the unique, individual, self; differences within friendship groups were also narrated in terms of being beneficial (perhaps even crucial) to the make-up and potential of the group as a whole, working to establish the group as healthy, successful and fun. In the following example, Lois is explaining why having people who are ‘different’ within her group of friends is the ideal form for a group to take:

No, we’ve all got, like, different, like, personalities, because like if we all had the same personality kind of like it wouldn’t be very good. It’s like different when there’s different people in your group ‘cos they’re not all the same or like doing the same things, like some people will come up with ideas saying, ‘Oh let’s, let’s do this’ and other people saying, ‘Yeah, that’s a good idea, we’ll do that today.’ So...

(year 10, Estate youth club, interviewed with her friend Molly)

The idea that these young women can analyse their friendship groups as an entirety relates to the ways individual identities within the group are often relationally constructed. In this way labels, reputations and ways of being are mutually constituted within friendship groups. Labels within friendship groups were often oppositionally constructed in relation to each other so that, for example, one friend may be labelled the ‘quiet one’ in relation to the others within the group. We saw a similar pattern of relational identity construction in chapter 4 in the ways Anna and Francesca’s different school personas were constructed in relation to each other - Francesca is quiet because Anna is not and so on. To some extent it seems as though the same
phenomenon can occur within friendship groups. Take the following extract from my interview with Abigail, Poppy and Georgia:

Georgia: Geek. I’m the geek.
Katherine: What about you two?
Poppy: I’m not a geek.
Georgia: Yes you are
Abigail: Well I’m always, me and Poppy always giggle we always laugh.
...
Georgia: Jokers.
...
Abigail: Well, apart from Courtney, no one else is as giddy as us two.
...
Georgia: Piper’s just scary. She’s scary spice, slash ginger.
(all year 7, Rural youth club)

In this segment of dialogue, we see Georgia placing herself firmly within the category of ‘geek’ in relation to the other girls in the group. This example indicates some of the complex ways in which school labels and sense of self are relationally constructed within friendship groups. Piper is the ‘scary one’, Poppy and Abigail are the ‘giddy’ ‘jokers’ and Georgia is the ‘geek’. It is also telling that Georgia refers to the girl band The Spice Girls who were marketed as a group containing diverse women with different personality traits and characteristics (although they are perhaps not so different in other respects). This extract of conversation also points to the ways these labels are being constructed collectively within the politics and power relationships of the group. Indeed, Georgia seems to be a little on the periphery of the social group here – she is excluded from Poppy and Abigail’s (positive and gendered) narrative of being giggly and silly although she in part helps them to construct this narrative by describing them as ‘jokers’. Thus, we see how Georgia does not have the power to label Poppy as a geek and how Poppy and Abigail are jointly constructing a more positive narrative of themselves as a pair of similarly giddy girls which excludes Georgia to some extent. There was little evidence in the study to suggest that these
characteristics were applied according to class or ethnicity although of course a larger sample may have revealed examples of this.

In the case of Abigail, Poppy and Georgia these dynamics of labelling are being performed and reinforced during the interview interaction itself. Similar descriptions of oppositional labelling within friendship groups were found in individual interviews. For example, Jade makes sense of the school personas of her friends in relation to her own ‘swotty’ self:

Jade: No [we’re not all alike], like Lucy, she’s just like dead naughty all the time, but she’s quite brainy. But like everyone likes her and that so, like...And then Heidi, she’s smart but she’s not a swot at all, she just like, she does what she wants but she’s not like bad or anything. Then Jo, Jo’s just (laughs) dumb. Doesn’t do any work, and that’s Jo.
(year 7/8, St Stephens school)

Although Jade is focusing upon the differences between her friends, the friendship group appears to be rather socially similar in that they are all white and appear to be from a similar social class background. In Jade’s interview she focused a great deal on the localities where most students at her school live and she spoke particularly derogatively about students from a particularly deprived area, describing them as ‘hanging, most of them...Cos they like think they’re dead good, but they’re not.’ None of the girls in Jade’s close group of friends are from this area except for Jo, who Jade says ‘doesn’t act, she doesn’t act all big about it’. Thus it can be deduced that Jade, in making locality based class distinctions about students at her school, is suggesting that her friends are not part of this lower class contingency, even Jo who, despite living in the same deprived area, does not behave accordingly and is presumably therefore more similar to Jade, Lucy and Heidi.

The principle of homophily suggests that ‘birds of a feather flock together’ (McPherson et al, 2001), meaning that people tend to befriend socially similar others. As Bottero writes:
Whilst we all have very complex networks of relations to a range of different people, social characteristics (class, gender, race etc.) are systematically embedded in these social networks, and the people closest to us also tend to be socially similar to us, along many dimensions of difference and inequality. (2005: 166, original emphasis)

Allan (1996) suggests this tendency towards homogeneity within friendship groups is largely due to the scope of our social worlds, meaning that through the course of our lives we are likely to encounter people in socially similar positions to ourselves and our friendships reflect this. It would appear that the majority of friendship groups I encountered in my research were good examples of the homophily principle with members being the same age, usually living in the same area, attending the same school, often from similar economic, educational, ethnic and religious backgrounds and of the same gender. Of course the schools and youth clubs that young people attend are likely to influence this propensity towards homophily. Highfields school for example is relatively ethnically mixed and as such some of the young people I interviewed here seemed to have friends who included young people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. St Stephens on the other hand is predominantly white, but as a Catholic school it incorporates young people from outside its immediate geographical vicinity and as such young people attending this school were more likely to be friends with others from different localities (although, as we saw with Jade’s friends, this was not always the case). Although for the majority of young people in the sample their school friends were their closest friends, young people attending the Freedom Centre had the opportunity to mix with others from a range of class and ethnic backgrounds and from a variety of areas. The estate and rural youth clubs on the other hand were attended by young people from a very particular geographical area with the rural youth club situated in a very affluent white middle class area and

49 There were some young people in the sample who had less homophilous friendship groups. Alex for example is Vietnamese but attends a predominantly white school and as such has white friends. Clinton’s friends are all older than him and this is perhaps due to his presentation of self as aggressive and the fact that he is not particularly engaged with school and often does not attend. Nathan also described having few school friends his own age, although his main group of friends are people he knows through Scouts and are more socially similar to himself. The particularities of these individuals’ friendships are picked up at other points in the remainder of this chapter.
the estate youth club comprising young people who all live on what is an incredibly deprived, and almost completely white, area.

Despite these indications of homophily, the ways that friendship is lived by these young women at school does not feel homophilous. Subtle differences in personality, temperament, talents, intelligence and behaviour feel profound and important. Of course when people see their friends as different from themselves they are making this judgement from a limited subset. In other words this difference is relative to the network of relations in which young people are embedded, which as Bottero argues (2005), tend to comprise people who are socially similar. This brings us back to Zerabuval’s (1991, 1996) processes of lumping and splitting because it is an example of how we tend not to recognise subtle differences between those in other more socially distant friendship groups whom we have subsumed into ‘mental clusters’.

Work emphasising the importance of voluntarism to understandings of friendships also offers clues as to why young people might be motivated to emphasise difference in their friendships. For Giddens (1991, 1992), friendship is seen as typifying the ‘pure relationship’, capturing the voluntarism and democracy of this ideal relational form. Although critics have argued that this voluntarism is overemphasised (Jamieson, 1999) and we have seen that studies of homophily indicate that our friendships, rather than being freely chosen, are in fact socially structured; the idea that friendship is characterised by choice is a pervasive one in cultural understandings (as is clear in the common use of the adage ‘you can choose your friends but not your family’). This emphasis on choice is also commonly seen to be part of what makes friendship feel like an ideal, ‘good’ relationship (see Davies, 2011) and Weeks et al (2001) argue that the voluntaristic nature of relationships with friends can lend them a heightened sense of ethics or morals which they term ‘the friendship ethic’ (ibid: 51-2). Therefore, by emphasising difference within their friendship groups, young people can be seen to be enabling their school friendships to be understood as ‘good’, ‘ethical’ relationships based on individual choice. This emphasis on choice also means that young people can understand their own self in terms of the socially desirable traits of autonomy and authenticity (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991). Indeed, others have argued that young
people’s friends play a central role in the construction of identity (see for example Keihly, 2002 and Proweller, 1998 on female friendships). Furthermore, these relational constructions of identity are important to processes of being and becoming because, despite emphasising differences which could be seen as trivial, they appear to influence young women’s understandings of who they are in quite fundamental ways (such as whether they see themselves as quiet, funny, geeky, intelligent etc.) and can thus inform their imaginings of their future selves.

6.3 The influence of friends

I now turn to look at young people’s own understandings of the influence of friends on ‘turning out’. Brooks’s (2005) research on the impact of sixth formers’ friendships on their decisions about Higher Education indicates that, although young people were often reluctant to talk about these decisions extensively with their friends for fear of highlighting problematic differences in educational abilities and trajectories, young people used comparisons with their friends to think about their own future:

friends and the wider peer group provided the context in which young people came to construct a ‘hierarchy of students.’ Through social and academic comparisons with other young people, they came to work out their own place in this emerging hierarchy. (Brooks, 2005: 24)

In this study, young people often thought quite philosophically about how friends and peers can influence who they are at school in more fundamental ways concerning general attitude and orientation to learning rather than in terms of specific choices, and had clearly thought through the consequences of this influence on how they might ‘turn out’. For example, concepts of ‘peer pressure’ or ‘getting in with a bad crowd’ were often discussed in focus groups in relation to how they might affect a person’s attitude to school and consequently limit their educational success and future life chances. In the following example, participants in focus group 2 are discussing whether The Simpsons character Bart could improve his academic performance:
Ryan: I think it’s to do with the friends that surround you... I think it’s to do with friends and peer pressure.
Maleehah: I think the reason why he’s like that is he thinks that he’s bad at school so he thinks ‘why should I be bothered?’
Lauren: He’s pretty popular at school so he thinks ‘if I turn into like, proper clever and a bit of a geek then no-one will like me’.
Maleehah: I don’t think that’s true.
Ryan: Yeah but if he’s trying to learn his friends might try and distract him.
...
Ryan: Well like, if you’re trying to get on some friends could like try and distract ya by like trying to do things that could get you in trouble.
(year 9, Highfields school)

In this example, it is clear that the focus group participants understand that friends can be a ‘bad influence’ on somebody like Bart - who (at least in the clip shown in the focus group) is trying to get on with their school work - both in terms of actively distracting them from their studies as well as applying pressure to continue behaving in a socially successful, anti-school way.

Focus group discussions tended to involve more abstracted, generalised reflections on the possibilities and potential of the influence of friends. Such discussions often tapped into wider public discourses and concepts (such as peer pressure) or were focused around characters in The Simpsons as in the example shown here. There were also examples of young people who had actively thought about the impact of particular friends, groups of friends and friendship practices on their own behaviour and attitude at school. These narratives echoed those created in focus group discussions to some extent but focused on concrete, personal experiences rather than drawing on generalised concepts such as ‘peer pressure’. Cameron for example, has kept his distance from certain people at school because their behaviour is sometimes problematic and he is wary of their expectations and potential influence on him were he to become friendly with them:
Cameron: ...Erm, quite a lot of the people that I know from school they, they kind of expect you to do things that I don’t wanna do, like when they go out on Friday nights and get drunk on the street and stuff, and I don’t do that. So that’s the main reason why I don’t know many people at Highfield because most people that I do know are doing all that.
(year 9, Highfields school)

It appears that decisions such as this may have classed dimensions. In the case of Cameron (who appeared to occupy a lower middle class position and lived in a generally affluent part of Highfield’s large catchment area), he found that sticking close to his friends from primary school provided less of a clash of aspirations and ways of being than mingling with young people from different areas and thus links to ideas of homophily. It therefore appears that Cameron is actively choosing to befriend socially similar others amidst a diverse peer group.

Other young people in the study echoed the idea that positive relationships with friends could work in beneficial ways. For example, Alex talked about how his friends have influenced his confidence, enhanced his sociability and encouraged him to develop new interests:

Alex: I think I’ve grown quite louder, more talkative cos, erm, er, when I ... they [his old teachers] told me when I was in their primary that I was quite shy, didn’t speak as much ... but as I grow into High School I’ve developed and I’m more broad in personality.
Katherine...What do you think changed? Was it a gradual thing or...?
Alex: I think that, I think that erm, I’ve developed more friends and that got me more confidence and around them and around other people as well.
...
Alex: some friends got me into, erm, drawing and cartoons and into educational, while other friends, er, they er took me into town and told me how to wind down and er how to relax.
(year 9/10, St Stephens school)

It is perhaps significant here that Alex is from a working class, immigrant background but both he and his mother have aspirations for his own class progression through educational success. It is therefore possible that his social background has caused Alex
to reflect upon how his friends are affecting how he is ‘turning out’ in regards his and his mother’s ambitions for his future. Thus, it could be argued that Alex has gained what Putnam would term ‘bridging’ social capital (2000) from having friends from a different background.

As well as reflecting on the positive influences of friends, or making assessments about who might be a ‘bad influence’ on school behaviour (as Alex and Cameron both did), some young people specifically spoke of the possibilities of purposefully selecting friends because they aided the maintenance of an anti-school persona. Young people tended not to openly admit to this in their interviews but in Clinton’s descriptions of why he is not friends with boys in his own school year, it is clear that he has chosen friends who will assist with his self-proclaimed ‘hard’ and anti-school persona:

Clinton: I don’t hang around with anyone in my year. I hang around with all the year 11’s...I always hang around with older people, I never hang around with anyone my age apart from girls who I’m shagging.
Katherine: Why do you always hang around with older people...?
Clinton: It’s cos of the size of me. Everyone else my age are all little spuds and proper bad giddy and so I’m just, I chill with the older boys.
(year 9, Estate youth club)

Peer pressure is culturally understood as an undesirable and destructive influence on a person’s ability to succeed at school and to ‘be themselves’.50 Certainly in all focus groups the concept was drawn upon in this way. However, young people also alluded to ways that so called ‘peer pressure’ could be a ‘good influence’. Often this pressure was seen as a motivational factor and a source of healthy competition to do well at school, particularly in tests and exams.

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50 Although Brooks (2005) points to a number of studies which indicate that young people can be resilient to such pressure.
Finally, young people were very aware of the influence of those around them on their behaviour and when describing their school persona 11 young people spoke about it being contingent on who they were with at the time:

Chanelle: I’m good in school, but like, but sometimes when I’m around certain people I can be silly.
(year 8/9, Freedom Centre)
***
Aiden: It matters, it matters who I’m with. If I’m with, like, my friends then I’m quite chatty. If I’m with people who I’ve never met before, I’m really shy and quiet.
(year 8, Romsbridge school)
***
Farhana: I’d say I’m quite well behaved but if my friends are in my lessons I tend to be a bit chatty.
(year 10, Highfields school)

These examples indicate how, in addition to the bigger picture of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’, young people also understood how friends and peers could influence their attitude to school in small ways, as part of the temporal minutia of school life.

6.4 Closeness and friends as a ‘biographical anchor’

The group interviews (with two or three young people, who were often friends) provided an opportunity to analyse how friendship can be constructed and reinforced ‘live’ through performance in an interview. For example, banter and teasing was a particularly common feature of interviews with boys and was also present in many focus group discussions. Exchanges of banter such as this have been noted by other scholars as a common way that friendship is practised amongst boys at secondary school (for example in Frosh et al’s 2002 discussion of interviewing groups of boys). This banter was often about displacing other’s presentations of self in the interview. In
the example below, Nick has described himself as ‘hard’ and his friends Tom and Russell tease him about this, troubling this particular presentation of self:

Katherine: Hard, are you? (overlapping)
Tom: Is he heck.
Russell: No you’re not!
Tom: Idiot.
Nick: No, you’re not.
Katherine: (laughs) How do you get known for being hard at school?
Russell: He’s not.
Tom: He gets battered off everyone, so it doesn’t make him...
Nick: He can take beats off year 7’s...
Russell: No one. (laughs)
Tom: (laughs)
Nick: Take beats off year 7’s, that’s it.
Russell: 7 year olds.
(all year 8, Estate youth club)

This example indicates how presentation of self at school, rather than being an individual decision (which, as the previous chapter explained, was often how young people in the study described it), is collaboratively constructed and maintained within friendships. Thus, it is not simply a question of deciding to present an image of oneself as ‘hard’, as is clear in the example above, this presentation of self is constantly maintained, reinforced and undermined through relational practices within friendship groups.

Another common way in which friendships were relationally constructed in interviews was by making it clear that a friend is ‘known’. This was achieved through commenting on aspects of a friend’s life that span beyond the immediate context of the school, namely commenting on kin relationships, particularly claiming to ‘know’ the siblings of friends and claiming a shared history or biography such as knowledge of a friend and

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51 Being ‘hard’ means being tough, aggressive and not only proficient in fighting but also unafraid of physical confrontation.
how they have changed since infancy. These knowledge claims are reminiscent of Mason and Tipper’s (2008) observation that children can consider non-kin to be ‘like’ family if they have known them for a long time, particularly since birth. These forms of knowledge are evident in the following example where we see Gemma interjecting when Lyndsay is describing members of her family with comments about their characters and resemblances between them. In doing so, Gemma is drawing herself closer to both Lyndsay and her family (Gemma, being from a much smaller family expressed envy at Lyndsay’s larger kin group a number of times during the interview) and is ensuring this closeness comes across clearly in the interview:

Lyndsay: [about one of her sisters]...she’s just, I don’t know where she got her personality from. And she’s weird, you ask...
Gemma: She’s weird!
Lyndsay...And my brother and my cousin Craig, the way he walks, he walks like a penguin with their feet outwards.
Gemma: They’re both alike when they’re stood next to each other.
(both year 9, Highfields school)

These knowledge claims about the biographies of friends were also used as a way of confirming status as belonging to a particular group of friends. Sofia (who was in year 9 at Highfields school) for example, cited the fact that she had been friends with a particular girl since the start of secondary school as a reason why they are still friends, despite being very different and having frequent arguments. Similarly, in the example below - in an interview with Ed, Charles and Olivia at Rural Youth club - we see Olivia in particular using both her knowledge of Ed’s family and the longevity of her knowledge of him and his behaviour at school to cement the friendship (particularly as they now attend different schools)\(^\text{52}\):

\(^{52}\) This could be seen as an example of a mixed gender friendship group but it appeared that Olivia and Ed, despite being friends at youth club and having attended the same primary school, were not part of a definitive friendship group and both described their main friends as being of the same gender as themselves.
Katherine: So are you just friends here at the youth club...you have different friends at school?
Ed: Yep. Well, me and Olivia went to primary school together, so.
Olivia: Yeah. And we used to mess around a lot.
...
Katherine: So how is it ... having different friends here and different friends at school?...do you act different here than at school do you think?
Ed: no we probably act the same erm, disrespectful to the teachers...
Olivia: [He’s] disrespectful to everyone, even his mum.
(all year 7, Rural youth club)

As well as acting to confirm ‘closeness’ within a friendship, ideas of ‘knowing’ and ‘being known’ also implicate knowledge of oneself. Spencer and Pahl (2006:56) mention that old friends become what they term ‘biographical anchors’ in that through their knowledge of one another’s biography, friends can ‘anchor’ a person to their own past, helping them to feel a sense of belonging to the friendship and an understanding of themselves. Thus, performances and narratives of ‘knowing’ and ‘being known’ between friends can be seen as an important factor in the process of ‘turning out’, anchoring young people to their past ways of being and limiting options for change (as emphasised in the previous chapter). This idea comes across strongly in the following section of dialogue between Ed, Charles and Olivia (as above):

Olivia: I remember when I joined school in year 1... [looks to Ed for confirmation but he is distracted] Edward, you...
...
Olivia: In year, year 1, I went, erm, I was really quiet and then, and then when I got to year 5 I got a bit giddier and then when I got to year 6...
Ed: Year 6 you got a microphone!
Olivia (laughs)

In this extract, Olivia is clearly looking to Ed to help her in narrating the story of how and when she became loud. The fact that Ed knew her before, during and after the process whereby she ‘turned out’ to be loud confirms Olivia’s perception of herself in this respect.
6.5 Being and becoming with few friends

Due to strong cultural discourses about the importance of having close friends, particularly in adolescence, and the links that others have outlined between friendship and the self (Smart et al. forthcoming for example indicate how having few friends - or problematic relationships with friends - can be detrimental to ontological security), it is perhaps unsurprising that young people in the study tended to present their friendships in positive ways. Only two young people who were interviewed (Francesca and Nathan) clearly described themselves as having few friends at school and in both cases this seemed to have had a profound effect upon their ideas about themselves and their futures.

We saw in chapter 4 that, in contrast to her sister, Francesca had found herself in a position at school where she had few friends. Francesca’s narrative of being separated from her friends on starting secondary school was central to how she narrated the onset of her difficulties at school. For Francesca an accident of fate resulting in her having few friends was seen to have had a direct impact upon the sort of person she was at school.

Nathan was the only other young person in the study who it is possible to ascertain from his interview had few friends at school. After stating that he thought friends could influence people’s interests at school this is how Nathan described his friendship situation:

Katherine: ... So what are your friends like? Are they quite similar to you do you think?
Nathan: I had a few, a few friends who were in last year’s year 11 who I’d say were, yeah. They were really good friends, but I don’t have as many friends in my own year. I’ve got a few friends in the year below that I’m good friends with as well.

53 Indeed, elsewhere I have described the methodological challenges in generating narratives of dissatisfactory relationships with friends (Davies and Heaphy, 2011).
Nathan was interviewed in the summer holidays between his year 10 and year 11 but when asked about how he would keep in touch with those friends in the year above who had left school he replied that, ‘I don’t, I never really saw them much out of school, so I don’t see them as much now. But I still talk to them on the internet and email them and stuff.’ This indicates that perhaps these friendships did not comprise the strong group mentality and closeness described by others in the study and later in the interview it transpired that even when at school together, Nathan’s main form of contact with these friends had been through online forums and gaming sites.\(^{54}\)

Like Francesca, Nathan was also having some difficulties with being teased at school and, like Francesca, Nathan put some of this down to his poor friendships. We saw in chapter 4 that Francesca narrated her friendship situation as ‘bad luck’. This meant that Francesca did not have to look to herself for reasons for her lack of friendships in the ways described by participants in Smart et al’s (forthcoming) work, for whom a lack of friendships led to self doubt and ontological insecurity. Nathan engaged in similar ‘face saving’ work in his narrative of his school life. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Nathan was heavily involved in Scouts where he had more friends who attended different schools. When asked about this situation, Nathan replied by derogating his school and in doing so those pupils with whom he was not friends:

Katherine: Do you ever wish that more of your Scout friends were at your school or...?
Nathan: It’s probably more the other way round really. I wish I went to their schools, cos I wouldn’t say my school’s that good for things like, just general idiots, just messing about and giving the school a bad reputation.
...
Katherine: And so what do you think that some of your Scout friends’ schools are like?..
Nathan: Well I’m, well apparently our school is a very bad school, cos lots, whenever I tell someone that I go to St Stephens, they recognise it as being a very bad school. So, and my

\(^{54}\) Of course this is not to say that friendships conducted online are any less intimate than those carried out face to face (Wellman and Hogan, 2004) but they are certainly different from the friendship practices described by most other participants in the study.
friends, well obviously people often tell stories about things, fun things they've done at school and stuff, and it just sounds better than ours.

It is easy to see why St Stephens may have acquired a reputation for being ‘bad’ (and this is something that Jade, who attends the same school, also commented on). Although, as described in Appendix 1, its Ofsted rating was ‘Satisfactory’, St Stephens is in a particularly deprived area of a city and had notably poor buildings and facilities (a new school building was under construction at the time of the fieldwork). What is significant here is the work the reputation of the school does for Nathan; it enables him to separate himself from the others at the school, applying moral class-based judgements to the behaviour of other pupils as outlined by Sayer (2005a, 2005b) and described in the previous chapter. Furthermore, following principles of homophily, the school’s reputation offers an explanation as to why Nathan has not made many friends there (because other pupils are seen by Nathan as being different in attitude from him, the subtext being that they are from a less middle class background). Thus, Nathan is able to consider that if he had gone to a different (presumably more middle class) school he would have ‘turned out’ differently:

Katherine: Do you think that like going to a good school will have an impact on, you know, what you do later in life, or do you think that you would be pretty much the same whatever school you went to and it’d just be more fun if you were at a different one?
Nathan: Well teachers, teachers obviously influence you don’t they? So they might direct you into certain paths, so that would change. And if you’re at a school which is more fun and things, then you’ll be thinking about things differently, like your opinions will be different. So that would change things as well.

Thus, it seems that having few friends can influence young people’s ways of being at school and can be reflected upon as such. However, it also appears that it can be necessary to create a narrative to explain this situation in order to protect oneself from the damaging effect to one’s ontological security (Smart et al, forthcoming) of being a person with few friends.
6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how processes of being and becoming are formed in relation to friends in a number of key ways. First, narratives of being different from friends can be used to confirm an idealised ethic of friendship and thus implicate a desirable self. Second, young people’s sense of what they are like at school can be relationally constructed through practices of comparison and the emphasising of difference within friendship groups. Third, young people can think about the influence of their friends on their school self in generalised terms as well as specifically in terms of how their persona is contingent on others. Fourth, friendships are often actively created, nurtured and performed through narratives of ‘knowing’ and of shared biography (what Spencer and Pahl might term a ‘biographical anchor’) as well as through banter and teasing and finally, young people can be affected by having few friends at school but can employ explanatory narratives to protect themselves from the negative implications of this situation. These findings add to existing understandings of young people’s friendships by emphasising the importance of individual reflections on the ethics and meanings of friendship and the significance of conceptualising the friendship group in its entirety for how young people conceptualise who they are, particularly in the school context.

This chapter has also highlighted the complexities of homophily as lived by young people, showing how - although largely homophilous in terms of class, gender and ethnicity - young people’s friendship groups feel diverse and are not homogenised in the ways more distant peers are ‘lumped’ into clusters (Zerabuval, 1991, 1996). This feeling of difference is important because it allows young people to emphasise individual choice in their relationships with friends - in keeping with the ethic of the autonomous self (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991) and of friendship as voluntary (Weeks et al, 2001) - whilst also constructing an identity within the group in relation to others. Furthermore, young people were found to be highly reflexive about the potential influence of friends on being and becoming, particularly in terms of friends’ potential to enable or thwart educational success. In assessing the potential benefits of having particular sorts of people as friends, young people can be seen to be inadvertently
reflecting upon the perceived benefits or not of having a homophilous group of friends in terms of class background.

As stated, sociologists have traditionally paid attention to the importance of friendship in young people’s lives, particularly in terms of their schooling and sense of self/identity. Brooks (2005) argues that the literature on young people’s friendships presumes young people to be particularly peer orientated and she points to work (such as that by Duck, 1983, in Brooks, 2005: 51) emphasising the growing importance of friendship in adolescence as the influence of parents is seen to wane. I maintain that this emphasis on friendship has been at the expense of attention to other lateral relationships, particularly with siblings. A perceived lessening of the significance of parents in adolescence has led researchers to look outside the family for significant relationships without considering whether non-parental family members are of interest. As such the following chapter explores the influence of siblings on both education and on the development of young people’s sense of self and identity more generally.
Chapter 7: Being and Becoming as a Sibling

7.1 Introduction

How does being/having a sibling affect being and becoming? How does having a sibling impact upon experiences and expectations of being and becoming at school? How does being one in a series of siblings affect our sense of who we are and who we might be in the future?

This chapter looks at the significance of being and having a sibling - or a number of siblings – for the ways young people make sense of the process of ‘turning out’. In chapter 2 it was argued that existing sociological approaches to being and becoming have failed to acknowledge the role that lateral kin might play in this process, with work on youth transitions to adulthood, the transmission of social advantage and formations of self/identity emphasising the role of parent-child relationships to such a degree that authors appear blinded to the potential significance of siblings in these processes. Implicit in all these approaches is an assumption that - whether it be ‘route maps’ to adulthood, the transmission of capital or childhood socialisation - ways of being and opportunities/obstacles to who we can become are passed down in families. Furthermore, work that has explored sibling relationships has tended to focus on sibling relationships as family practices without attending to how siblings might affect young people’s sense of who they are and who they can become in the future. This chapter addresses this ‘blind spot’ in sociological thinking by providing a detailed exploration of the significance of being/having a sibling (including all configurations of sibling relationship such as with full, half and step siblings) for processes of being and becoming.

Firstly, the significance of sibling relationships are explored in terms of their impact upon the processes of being and becoming at school outlined in chapter 5. Sibling
relationships often traverse the arenas of home and school and even when siblings do not attend the same school at the same time, one’s sibling relationships can carry over into the context of school as we saw with Anna and Francesca’s relationship outlined in chapter 4. This section of the chapter explores how older siblings can be a source of social and cultural capital for younger siblings at school in that they can provide practical help with negotiating the official, informal and physical school (Gordon et al, 2000) as well as providing an accounting tool or foil by which younger siblings can imagine their future self. Thus, it is argued that capital can be passed intra-generationally, or horizontally, as well as inter-generationally, or vertically, in families. The complexities of this form of social capital for ways of being at school are explored in terms of the positive and negative effect of the ‘rubbing off’ of a sibling’s reputation at school.

Secondly, the chapter explores the implication of being part of a series of siblings for how young people experience and make sense of being and becoming more generally. In chapter 2 it was suggested that family stories and memories constitute mechanisms through which ideas about being and becoming are transmitted and this chapter considers how such family stories can work to ‘fix’ identity in relation to a sibling, exploring the effect of having a sibling who provides a ‘benchmark’ against which one’s own process of ‘turning out’ is measured. This section of the chapter also considers how normative ideas about birth order and gender roles within a sibship can work to fix aspects of relational behaviour and identity.

As stated in chapter 3, the sample contains very few young people with no siblings and as such it has not been possible to systematically explore experiences of being and becoming as an only child, although the issue of imagined sibling relationships are addressed towards the end of the chapter. The data has also not always been analysed according to the sibship characteristics of participants (such as whether they have full, half or step siblings; whether they are the youngest, middle or oldest and so on). This is because these types of sibling relationships are more complex and fluid than they first appear. For example, the data contained many examples of young people who were the youngest sibling at one parent’s home and a ‘middle child’ at another’s, or
young people who had lived most of their life as an ‘only child’ before the birth of their younger sibling. Furthermore, not all young people were aware of the correct kin terms to describe their sibling relationships. These structural aspects of siblingship were not overlooked entirely however and where practices were found to be particularly defined by birth order, or to be experienced differently by step or half siblings, they have been discussed as such throughout the chapter.

7.2 Being a sibling at school

This section of the chapter explores aspects of siblingship that are played out in the context of school. In chapter 5 we saw how the school environment provides particular challenges for negotiating the process of ‘turning out’ and here particular attention is paid to the role of sibling relationships in managing both official and unofficial school socialities and for orientating oneself to the temporality of school life. In direct opposition to Coleman (1988), who maintains that siblings dilute the social capital passed down from parents, it is argued that siblings can be an important source of both social and cultural capital in school.55

7.2.1 Exchanges of support at school

In chapter 3 I referred to a body of work emanating from the Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group identifying siblings as a source of social capital in school. This work indicates how siblings (particularly older siblings) can: provide information about school as well as provide emotional and social support (Holland, 2008), offer specific support in dealing with bullying (Hadfield et al, 2006) and generally generate social capital even where sibling relationships are conflictual (Gillies and Lucey, 2006). The present study also found siblings to provide practical help with managing day-to-

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55 Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital was outlined in chapter 2. There are a number of different definitions of social capital. According to Edwards et al, ‘Social capital can be broadly defined as the values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which both result in, and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships’ (2003: 2).
day aspects of school life, with older siblings able to provide help with official and non-official fields of secondary education. All participants saw this sort of practical help as exclusively something that was passed down from older to younger siblings, indicating that social capital cannot be so readily derived from relationships with younger siblings in the context of school. This capital was derived from full, half and step siblings and there were also examples of older cousins providing some help and advice. The data contain lots of short statements about forms of help provided and received with most young people talking about it more as a by-product of being or having an older sibling rather than showing signs of having actively reflected on how they might help or be helped. Alex (who was interviewed in the holidays between his year 9 and 10 at St Stephens School and has two younger brothers) was the only participant who saw how by helping his younger brother he also gained knowledge and an opportunity to learn something new: ‘Erm my younger brother could influence me as well cos, cos, erm, there once was a piece of work that I was seeing him do that I haven’t done before and that seemed interesting to me so I just tried to help him along or he gave me another piece of work to do and I would do that.’

25 young people in interviews spoke of receiving (from an older sibling) or giving (to a younger sibling) help with homework or advice about taste and cultural consumption such as clothes, music or makeup\(^56\). Thus, often participants with younger siblings were able to assist them in the management of ways of being at school, both in terms of the official game of academic success and the unofficial game of social success and popularity. This is particularly evident in Sofia’s account of how she used her greater experience and understanding of school culture to equip her younger sister with the tools necessary to present herself in a ‘safe’ and culturally appropriate way. Despite having described a rather tumultuous relationship with her younger sister (who was 10 at the time of the interview), the way Sofia explained her willingness to help in terms of simply not wanting her sister to be ‘weird’ gives the impression that her motives are

\(^56\) Assistance with clothes and makeup was only shared between sisters although taste in music was found in all gender sibling configurations.
rather obvious to her and are understood as a natural part of any relationship with a younger sibling:

Sofia: The other day she [her younger sister] was like, erm, cos she don’t wear makeup or anything but she was like, ‘Will you put this makeup on for me?’ and I was like, ‘Yeah’ and then she was like asking me to borrow my clothes and stuff.
Katherine: Oh right. Are you quite happy to encourage that or..?
Sofia: I don’t want her to be like, weird.
(year 9, Highfields School, 1 younger sister, 1 step sister, 1 step brother, 1 half sister and 1 half brother)

My findings to some degree also corroborate Hadfield et al’s (2006) argument that older siblings can be a source of support in cases of bullying and again this seemed to be the case for step, half and full sibling relationships when the siblings were living in the same locality. Cameron (who was in year 9 at Highfields School and has 2 older brothers) for example talked about an instance when his older brothers stepped in to offer him support when he was involved in a potentially physically threatening confrontation with older boys at school. Indeed 2 other young people recounted a particular incident where a sibling (again always older) had stepped in and supported them in a similar situation and others suggested that should a situation like this occur their sibling would step in. Interestingly, in focus group discussions older siblings (particularly brothers) were almost universally recognised as a source of support in cases of bullying at school. Thus, there was a great deal of slippage between normative ideals about sibling provision of help and young people’s recounted experience of lived examples of such help and this is discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. A minority of young people spoke of receiving no help from siblings and this was often discussed as a rueful example of how annoying a particular sibling was. Of course there are also strong cultural scripts about bickering between siblings and siblings as a source of irritation or rivalry, and the taken-for-granted nature with which most

57 These discourses were clearly visible during the 2010 Labour Party Leadership Campaign when journalists drew heavily upon ideas of sibling rivalry in their coverage of the battle between the brothers Ed and David Miliband (see Conington, 2010; Bennett, 2010; Higgins, 2010).
young people narrated these aspects of their sibling relationships suggests that they are viewed as a typical characteristic of siblingship.

As stated, most young people mentioned this help as a kind of ‘natural’ by-product of siblingship although in the following instance, Farhana discusses it as a more reflexive process, having actively thought about her own experiences at school and used these to inform the help she provides to her younger sister, constituting an ethic of care for younger siblings:

I think on my first day I got lost and even though I asked for instructions I still got lost...I gave my little sister a mini tour of the school before she came so.. Yeah so hopefully she didn’t get lost. She didn’t, thank God, unlike me. (laughs) So yeah, erm, I think you could also, you know, like tell them which teachers to be aware of and er things like that...And I think, erm, the workload, you can, erm, ask them [older sisters] for a lot of advice, erm, cos erm like erm, in some of my work I sometimes I don’t quite understand it when I’m at home I would remember at school and then when I come home I just forget and blank out. So yeah, I would ask my erm older sister. So yeah, my little sister does that with me so it’s good.

(year 10, Highfields School, Farhana has 3 sisters – 1 older and 2 younger)

It is interesting that Farhana was one of the only young people to describe having been so thoughtful about the care she provides to her younger siblings. This is in keeping with others’ observations about a general ethic of care amongst South Asian families (including siblings) coupled with strong age related roles and responsibilities (Ballard, 1982; Mand, 2006; Matthews, 2000).

The roles of responsibilities of older siblings were largely described as gendered and (as will be discussed later in this chapter) young people were very aware of the implications of gender in ascertaining how siblings in all birth order positions ought to behave. In practice gender roles associated with older siblings were not prescriptive although girls did speak more of providing emotional talk-based support, particularly with the managing of friendships, in ways reminiscent of studies of young female socialities such as Hey’s (1997) observations of gossip amongst female friends. This
support was also sometimes extended to the friends of a younger sibling or provided by the friends of an older sibling. Thus, at times the ethic of care demonstrated and the social capital provided by older siblings in the study was extended to incorporate networks of friends.

Although it was very common for young people to agree that older siblings ought to offer protection at school, most young people seemed ambivalent about sharing school with their siblings, often citing instances where it had caused particular irritation and annoyance, especially on those occasions when younger siblings came to them seeking support. This was evident in focus group discussions where most young people were horrified by the idea that they might ‘hang around’ with a younger sibling at school or walk to school with them:

FG1
Katherine: And do you like walk to school with your brothers and sisters or.?
Sadia: No!
:D:No!
(laughter)
Katherine: Why not do you think?
Matthew: Embarrassed.
Shelley: It’s embarrassing!
(laughter)
(year 10, Highfields school)

The annoyance and irritation with being ‘bothered’ by a sibling seemed to be something which was seen as closely tied to birth order. All young people who talked about such instances did so in relation to younger siblings. Aiden (year 8, Romsbridge School), for example described how his older brother regularly blanks him at school, failing even to say ‘hello’ if approached by Aiden. The following example from an interview with Poppy, Abigail and Georgia also indicates how the sort of support younger siblings talked about receiving from older siblings is often given rather begrudgingly. It also indicates the significance of siblings’ friendship networks:
Poppy: Last year all of her [her younger sibling] friends used to come up and go, ‘They’ve fallen out, can you make them be friends?’ or ‘Nadine’s crying again.’ It was dead annoying.

Abigail: ...my other proper brother, yeah, he was really annoying [when they were at the same school], he kept coming up to me and saying, ‘People are hurting me.’ I felt sorry for him but it was really annoying. He did it all, nearly every day.

(all year 7, rural youth club, Poppy has 1 younger sister, Abigail has 1 younger brother, 2 younger half siblings and 1 older step sister)

Most sibling relationships of support tended to lie dormant at school to be activated only when needed. Although, as stated, siblings largely spoke of avoiding each other at school, an older sibling was still generally seen as a trustworthy person who could be counted upon to step in with protection, support or advice when necessary and the view that this is a fundamental responsibility of being an older sibling was reasonably consensual in the sample amongst those occupying all birth order positions (including older siblings), even if they had never had to mobilise this support. Take Chanelle’s descriptions of how she relates to her older brother at school:

Chanelle: Because we’re both, in front of our friends, like say, if one of us said ‘Hiya’ or something, we’d just ignore each other... Or we’d just like, just say ‘Shut up’ or something... Whereas when we’re at home we actually do speak.

Katherine: If you were having a problem at school, would you have gone to your brother even though you weren’t that...

Chanelle: Yeah, I would have gone to my brother if I was having a problem in school and, like, I’d tell him about it, but then I’d see, like, because he’s older than me and he’s probably been through it before, then he’d know some advice to give me.

(year 8/9, Freedom Centre, Chanelle has 1 older brother)

Chanelle’s description of the differences between her relationship with her brother at home and school indicates that these sibling socialities are often specific to the context of school (with different ways of relating to a sibling at home and in other non-school contexts). I now turn to data explicating how siblings helped each other at The Freedom Centre. By examining the differences in the ways siblings interacted in this
context as opposed to at school, it is possible to highlight the particularity of the school context for the ways sibling relationships are lived and how they can transmit capital.

**siblings and social capital at the Freedom Centre**

In contrast to the predominantly ambivalent experiences of sharing school with a sibling, many children and young people attending the Freedom Centre stuck with their sibling, particularly in the first few days when the Freedom Centre was unfamiliar and they had not yet got to know other people there. Thus, siblings provided a distinct form of social capital in the context of the youth centre where social capital could also be derived from younger siblings. It seems therefore that the relationship between social capital and birth order roles is less fixed outside the parameters of school where (as demonstrated in chapter 5) young people are free from some of the challenges of presentation of self inherent to establishing a ‘successful’ identity in the contradictory arenas of official and unofficial games at secondary school.

siblings ‘stuck together’ at the Freedom Centre in a way that would not happen at school. Siblings tended to eat lunch together and opt for the same activities when offered a choice. Sometimes this sticking together was more about the elder child taking responsibility for ‘looking after’ their younger sibling but often the support was mutually beneficial in contrast to the transference of social capital at school which was almost universally seen as benefiting only younger siblings.

The idea that having a sibling with you at a place like the Freedom Centre can be a comfort for both older and younger siblings was reinforced during my interview with Joseph who was about to enter year 9 and had one younger brother, Anis, who was 5 years old and was also attending the Freedom Centre. Joseph had obvious feelings of responsibility for Anis but he also spoke of the benefits of attending the workshops with his brother. Here Joseph is talking about Anis’s company at the centre almost as a safety net which made it tolerable if he did not make friends straight away (which it seems might be the ideal scenario) because he had the guaranteed companionship of his brother. Thus neither of them had to be alone during the week:
Katherine: ...And what’s it like coming to these things together? Is it nice coming as a pair or...
Joseph: (Overlapping) Yeah it’s better as a pair.
Katherine: Why do you reckon that is?
Joseph: Because that way we always have friends.

... So is it easier to make friends when you come to these things together or...
Joseph: Erm, no, I mean, like, if you don’t make friends on the first day, I’ve got my brother as well.

Despite this mutually beneficial companionship, older siblings did provide lots of support to their younger siblings. Although this could be arduous, it was less sporadic than the help provided at school. Rather than lying dormant until needed, older siblings provided almost constant support in the unfamiliar context of the Freedom Centre and in the absence of known adults such as teachers or parents. Watching the young people arrive and register for their sessions, I was struck by how many of them looked after their younger sibling on arrival and afterwards. Although some of the smaller children arrived with a parent or carer, the majority of young children were brought along by an older sibling, a direct contrast to the testaments of horror and embarrassment at the idea of walking to school with a sibling outlined earlier. Many of the older siblings also looked after the packed lunches for both themselves and their younger sibling (this was sometimes a difficult task with children often losing their lunch or finding it laborious to keep with them all morning).

When in a busy, unfamiliar space such as the Freedom Centre, and in the absence of a parent, an older sibling can take responsibility for his/her younger brothers and sisters. For some brothers and sisters this sense of responsibility in ‘loco-parentis’ continued throughout the week. When, during different lunchtimes, I approached Estella (who, like Joseph, was about to enter year 9) and Joseph about taking part in a short interview, both commented that, despite the fact that the lunch break was supervised by members of staff, they could not leave their younger sibling (both were at the Freedom centre with their 5 year old younger siblings; Joseph’s brother Anis and Estella’s half sister Alesha). They also continued to take responsibility for their younger
sibling during the interview and both felt it necessary to step in to ensure their sibling engaged appropriately with the interaction as well as generally monitoring their behaviour:

Katherine: And what about you Alesha, have you been having a nice time?
Pause – Alesha starts dipping her fingers in various paint and glue pots left in the room.
Katherine: Don’t put your fingers in those. They’ll make you messy. Have you been having fun, Alesha, yeah?
(Pause)
Estella: (To Alesha) You have to speak!

In fact, keeping an eye on Alesha during my short interview with Estella (which I eventually had to cut short because of the need to keep Alesha entertained) was a constant battle. The idea of a parent needing to have eyes in the back of her/his head certainly applied to Estella (and, at least for the duration of the interview, me) and as well as answering my questions and engaging in the interview herself, Estella had to repeatedly advise Alesha about how to use the paints, warn her not to run out of the room and generally try to keep her in hand. This behaviour is also interesting because Estella’s feelings about Alesha were ambivalent to say the least, she described her as ‘loud’, ‘a bit boasty’ and visibly scowled when the lunchtime assistant told her she thought they look alike.

Joseph’s younger brother Anis, although also 5 years old, was very different from Alesha and he sat quietly at Joseph’s side for the majority of his interview (and when their cousin Britney later joined them). However, Joseph’s sense of responsibility for Anis’s conduct in the interview was similar to Estella’s. Not only could he not leave Anis in the lunch room while he did the interview but he too felt a need to step in and make sure Anis ‘did well’ in the interview and answered the questions ‘correctly’. After talking with Joseph about his favourite school subjects and what he is good at at school, I asked Anis what he enjoys at school. Here Joseph seemed to see himself as a sort of broker for his younger brother, passing on my questions to him and persevering until he, on Anis’s behalf, was able to provide me with an answer he deemed more
satisfactory. Like Estella, he also demonstrated how much patience is necessary to attend a place like the Freedom Centre with a younger sibling (and no parent):

Anis: Guitar’s the favourite and...
Joseph (overlapping): No. What do you like doing most?
Anis: Playing on the Nintendo Wii.
Katherine laughs
Joseph (sighs): At school!
Anis: At school? Playing at school.
Joseph: No, what work are you good at?
Anis: Maths and Reading.
Joseph (to Katherine): Reading.

This contrast between how siblings share non-school spaces and how they described sharing school is illuminating in that it helps to highlight the contextual, fluid nature of sibling relationships – how they can be mobilised in specific contexts into supportive, beneficial relationships whilst still feeling annoying or claustrophobic in other situations. It also highlights the particular nature of school (as outlined in chapter 5) for affecting how relationships impact upon ways of being. Here it is likely to be that the ways school is organised along strictly age-differentiated lines results in the provision of capital passing only from older to younger siblings (although we have seen that younger siblings can affect their older brothers and sisters at school through their potential to embarrass) and accentuates ambivalence and animosity between siblings despite the continued existence of an ethic of care. I now turn to look at some of the ways in which, rather than being a straightforwardly beneficial resource for successfully ‘being’ at school, the social capital provided by siblings can be complex and messy, capable of having positive or negative implications depending on the sibling his/herself.
7.2.2 Reputation and resemblance in school

In chapter 5 we saw how reputations are produced within the context of school socialities. Siblings who have attended the same school can also have a direct impact upon the formation of school reputation and persona. This is an example of how the social capital offered by older siblings can have negative as well as positive connotations. In terms of the unofficial ‘game’ of being socially successful and popular at school, having a sibling who is ‘known’ by others can have a direct impact upon one’s own standing within school hierarchies of popularity. This relates to ideas raised by Anna in chapter 4 and by others in chapter 5 about ‘knownness’ at school. Although only mentioned in relation to peers and social success in 5 interviews, the benefits and potential pitfalls of being ‘known’ due to a sibling’s reputation indicates how reputations can be understood as ‘rubbing off’ on other members of the family, both in terms of generally being recognised by others as a particular person’s sibling as well as being seen to somehow embody aspects of a sibling’s reputation. Take the following comment made by Tom about why he thinks people often feel positive about a physical resemblance with an older brother:

   Cos you get known for it...Like, if your brother’s known...Because, like, if your big brother’s, like, known, and then all like, everyone who hangs about with your brother like knows you because of your big brother.
   (year 8, Estate youth club (interviewed with friends Nick and Russell), Tom has 2 older brothers)

Molly and Lois expressed similar views about the benefits to one’s reputation and level of ‘knownness’ of sharing a physical resemblance with a sibling, this time based on Lois’s own experiences with her elder brother who is well known at school and in the local neighbourhood:

   Katherine: Why do you think it’s nice to, kind of, look like people? Have you got any theory?
Molly: Cos then people, people say, ‘Oh I saw you before’ and then they look at you, they can go, ‘Oh you’re so and so’s little sister’ so they know you then, like.

Lois: That’s what I mean, because, like, if they respect your brother they’re going to respect you if you look a bit like him aren’t you, as well?

(Both year 10, Estate youth club, Molly has 3 brothers (2 older, 1 younger) and Lois has 4 older sisters and 2 younger siblings)

Thus it seems that for Molly, Lois and Tom, a physical resemblance to a sibling is understood and experienced as something which also implicates reputation with peers. It is not merely that the resemblance makes them obviously recognisable as siblings - and thus increases the ‘knownness’ of the younger sibling - but also that something of the older sibling’s reputation rubs off on the younger one, and this ‘rubbing off’ is understood as particularly compelling where there is a physical resemblance. Thus perceptions of individuals as the sibling of another ‘known’ person can involve the entwining of physical appearance with qualities more commonly seen as contained within a person, such as those which command the respect of others, as alluded to by Lois. In these cases it seemed to be the physical resemblance which connected the siblings and implicated the sharing of other characteristics, thus constituting the transference of reputation (which can have both positive and negative effects depending on what the older sibling is like). The significance of physical resemblance between siblings was also acknowledged by Song in her work on mixed race siblings (2008, 2010) where physical appearance was found to be important in the creation of family scripts about similarities and differences between siblings. 58

Teachers were also heavily implicated in how school reputation was constructed in relation to those of siblings. 16 young people talked in interviews of being likened to a brother or sister (including half and step siblings) by teachers at school or having witnessed this happening to others and it was discussed as a common practise in all focus groups and regardless of whether siblings were full, half or step brothers or sisters. This likening was seen as affecting reputation in terms of the ‘official’ game at

58 It seems that ‘rubbing off’ can also occur amongst half and step siblings although there were no examples of this being embodied through physical resemblance between step siblings.
school - of impacting upon how teachers viewed young people’s behaviour, intelligence and attitude to school - as well as sometimes drawing the attention of peers to a sibling’s ‘official’ reputation and consequently impacting a little on ‘unofficial’ reputation with peers. Young people had varying perspectives on this, with most alluding to a feeling that it is somehow wrong or undesirable to be judged in relation to one’s siblings in such a way. For example, it was seen as particularly irritating when teachers confused the names of siblings or complained to them about the behaviour of a sibling. Others attested to concerns that teachers will think less of them if their sibling is not as intelligent or well behaved at school. As Craig (year 10, Estate youth club) commented, he is pleased he does not attend the same school as his older brothers and sisters because, ‘if I went their school, they’d all expect me to be like them. I’d have to, like, well, live down to their reputation ‘cos mine’s better than theirs.’ Others who had siblings who had a ‘good’ reputation with teachers at school saw comparisons and assumptions of similarity as beneficial to their reputation within the official school game. Sadia (year 10, Highfields School), for example describes how she likes it when teachers remember her older sisters because they are likely to say things like, ‘that they were wonderful and you’re really alike.’ As Molly (year 10, Estate youth club) summarises, ‘it depends if they’ve [one’s siblings] been naughty or good in school don’t it really’.

It seems that teachers are perceived as forming judgements on a child’s abilities and potential based on knowledge of their siblings, thus assuming that siblings will resemble one another at school and ‘turn out’ in the same way. As seen with regards peer judgements and the ‘unofficial’ game, such assumptions often seemed to be compounded or triggered by a physical resemblance (particularly the habit of mistakenly referring to a child by their sibling’s name).

\[59\] Indeed, the teachers I met when organising focus groups often spoke of confusing the names of siblings and generally felt guilty about this. One teacher put this down to being confronted with so many names and faces to remember on a daily basis.
locality, from police officers in particular. He described how; ‘if something like that [a crime] happens now, the police are at my door and it’s me that’ll get done for it...they shouldn’t even come to my house if I’ve not done anything wrong. They haven’t no proof so they shouldn’t even bother coming to my gaff.’ Thus, the implications of the rubbing off of a sibling’s reputation, particularly in institutional contexts and with powerful professional figures, such as teachers or police officers, can work either to the benefit or detriment of younger siblings. Such judgements were often found to be morally problematic by young people who often felt that they were unjustly assumed to be unintelligent or ‘naughty’ because of such presumptions of resemblance between siblings.

7.2.3 Siblings, critical moments and imagined educational futures

We have seen how having an older sibling can be both beneficial and detrimental in terms of influencing ways of being at school. I now turn to examine how older siblings can be a source of capital in understanding and negotiating processes of ‘becoming’ at school, arguing that they can comprise a sort of accounting tool for measuring and assessing how well one is ‘turning out’ and predicting how the process is likely to transpire. As stated in chapter 2, work addressing youth transitions to adulthood tends to follow Beck (1992) in identifying an absence of ‘route maps’ to adulthood. It is assumed that these route maps must be provided by parents. The significance of older siblings in orientating young people towards their future directly critiques this assertion.

Watching an older sibling progress through the education system can have an important impact upon the ways young people conceptualise their past and future experiences at school. As stated earlier in relation to the case of Anna and Francesca, younger siblings often make sense of their own school experiences in relation to those of older siblings. An important aspect of this is in the way young people imagine their futures. 8 of those with older siblings (or cousins who were ‘like’ siblings) referred to the experiences of an older sibling when discussing future plans and expectations with
most narrating this as a positive aspect of having an older sibling in that having observed a sibling face ‘critical moments’, make choices and progress through education enabled younger siblings to better imagine what experiences such as attending university might be like for them.\textsuperscript{60}

The sibling relationship (particularly when siblings have grown up in the same household) offers a proximity not usually present in other social relationships (such as with older peers) in that the longevity of the sibling relationship and the day to day nature of observations and conversations mean that knowledge of a sibling’s experience of, say, college is likely to ‘soak in’ over time so that even those young people in the sample who had not directly asked their older siblings for advice (though many had) still had a clear sense of what they thought things had been like for them. As such, it was common for young people to make choices about which sixth form college to attend based on the choices of their siblings and a number of young people talked about wanting to attend the same institution as their sibling. Of course these impressions are constructed relationally within the context of the family and the dynamics of this will be discussed later in this chapter.

Some young people explicitly reflected upon how observations of their older siblings’ behaviour had motivated them to change their own attitude to their school work, namely in that their longitudinal perspective of their sibling’s trajectory through education enabled a clearer vision of their own future selves. These young people were often able to piece together their knowledge of their sibling’s school career at various points, thus identifying causal factors as to their sibling’s perceived level of success or failure. Take the following comment by Aiden about his older sister and how his perceptions of her struggles with studying and the subsequent pay-off of her hard work have affected the way he approaches his own onerous school work:

\textsuperscript{60} These advantages were experienced by young people with full, step and half siblings although it seemed that living with a sibling could facilitate the gaining of this knowledge along with having the sort of relationship which enabled younger siblings to ask for and receive advice.
When she was trying to get into university, I know how hard it is cos she was getting annoyed and then the work paid off. So I’ll be like, ‘yeah, I’m doing a lot of work. I don’t like it, but it might pay off for me.

(year 8, Romsbridge School, as well as his older sister (who is 25 years old) Aiden has an older brother (15) and younger sister (11)).

I now turn to closely examine one particular case in order to explore the role of siblings as an accounting tool in the imagining of one’s future self in more detail and to contemplate the interplay between this form of capital and the ‘rubbing off’ of reputation at school.

Cameron and ‘The Simmonds’ Downfall at Year 9’

Cameron Simmonds was in year 10 at Highfields School at the time of his interview. His two older brothers had both attended the school before him. Cameron’s perspective of his future and the way he managed his behaviour at school was influenced by what happened to his older brothers, or rather the narratives of his older brothers’ school trajectories which were produced by the teachers who taught them and probably also within his family. Teachers regularly refer to ‘The Simmonds’ Downfall at Year 9’ when interacting with Cameron, because both his brothers are said to have been well behaved and academically achieving at school until they reached this point in their school trajectory. The teachers’ assumption was therefore that Cameron would follow the same trajectory as his brothers.

Rather than finding such judgements offensive, Cameron interpreted the narrative of ‘The Simmonds’ Downfall’ as an incentive to act differently and break the pattern stating, ‘I just wanted to prove ‘em wrong. I didn’t mind at all. I wasn’t offended cos it’s true. They both did the same thing.’ Thus, although (as outlined in chapter 5) many young people saw year 9 as some sort of crux point where they would ‘settle down’ and ‘apply themselves’ to their studies, for Cameron this ‘moment’ was of personal significance because of the resemblance assumptions linking his own trajectory to his brothers’ ‘downfall’ at this point. The way Cameron discussed his observations of the ‘outcome’ of his brothers’ school selves and the way he related this to his own
attempts to secure a different outcome for himself indicates his longitudinal vantage point as a younger sibling and the relational way he makes sense of his own school self:

Erm, my oldest brother was a lot like me; he did his work, he just proper got along with his work and then about year 9 he started mixing with the wrong crowd, like I haven’t done, and he started going off his work and just messing about... He missed, er, like the first two years of college because he was working and was a mess, he just didn’t know what to do, he was just... He messed up pretty much but then now he’s back on track, he’s got a part-time job and he’s at college and he’s gonna go to university soon. But my other brother, he’s got an apprenticeship. He got, he did pretty much exactly the same as him but before. He wasn’t as clever anyway. He’s generally clever, he just wasn’t as clever when it came to school so he did pretty much exactly what he done but he hasn’t decided to go to college. He’s still like an apprenticeship.

The chronology of the formation of this narrative is significant. Although Cameron tells the story in ‘chronological order’ starting with how his brothers behaved in their early secondary school years, explaining what happened at year 9 and concluding with the ‘outcome’ of the story (what they are doing now), it is likely that he has pieced the narrative together in hindsight, with his memories of what his brothers were like at school formed through narratives created by his teachers and parents. This is alluded to in the explanation below where Cameron uses his structural position as the youngest in the family, and particularly his distance from his brothers in age, to make sense of why he has been able to avoid succumbing to ‘The Simmonds’ Downfall at Year 9’. Although here Cameron is explaining that he is different from his brothers because he did not know much about their school selves, it is clear from the earlier example that in fact he is also different because he does know, but rather than first hand observed knowledge, his knowledge is of a narrative of failure which Cameron very much uses as a foil now:

I think it’s the middle one kinda copies the older one cos they’re pretty close ages, they’re kind of, they’re practically the same year, they go through the same stuff. But me, cos I didn’t really go to school with either of them, because one left when I was in year 7 and one left when I was in year 8 I didn’t really see either of them at school. I didn’t copy anything they did, I didn’t know what they got up to at school. I knew to an extent what
they got up to in school but other than that I didn’t know so I was totally different because I never got to see what they were like. And I didn’t wanna know what they were like.

Most younger siblings who spoke of imagining their future in relation to an older sibling did so in relation to wishing to replicate that sibling’s success. Some however, like Cameron, talked more in terms of learning from mistakes. Craig for example saw himself as more intelligent and better equipped to achieve academically than his older sisters. Witnessing his eldest sister leaving education to get a job that she disliked added to his desire to do well at school: ‘Because, er, my sister Caz, she’s like got a job but she doesn’t like it. She hates it. And er all my brothers and sisters apart from Lou, cos she’s in school, they’re like not as bright as me. They don’t want to do anything that much.’ Thus, it appears that through being the youngest, young people are sometimes able to use the hindsight acquired vicariously through piecing together the causes of older siblings’ educational outcomes, in order to gain foresight (an ability to predict their own future trajectory and alter their behaviour accordingly). This acquisition of both hindsight and foresight could be viewed as a form of cultural capital derived from one’s older siblings in that it helps young people to adapt to the field of education.

7.2.4 Conclusion: Being a sibling at school

This section of the chapter has corroborated those studies that, counter to Coleman’s (1988) claim that siblings dilute social capital, found that siblings can be a valuable source of support at school (Edwards et al, 2006; Edwards et al, 2005a; Gillies and Lucey, 2006; Hadfield et al, 2006) and has further indicated that counter to Beck’s (1992) claims, older siblings can provide a ‘route map’ to adulthood for their younger brothers and sisters. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that the capital provided by siblings is contingent upon birth order position due to the particularities of the school context and this is evidenced in the different ways of relating between siblings found in the non-school context of the Freedom Centre. Thus, the significance and experience of sibling relationships can vary according to the context in which they are practiced. This section of the chapter has also indicated that social capital can have
negative as well as positive connotations due to the role of physical resemblance and the transference of reputation between siblings and school which can be either beneficial or detrimental in ways reminiscent of those studies outlined by Holland (2008) and explored in chapter 2 which point to the dark side of social capital in certain contexts.

The ambivalent nature of lived sibling relationships at school can be explained using Bourdieu’s (1997) concept of social capital (as mentioned in chapter 2) which highlights the potential of the transference of social capital to cause jealousy and resentment in the emphasis on the work it takes to maintain such relationships of exchange. The fact that older siblings often do not experience any reciprocity for the social capital they provide to their younger siblings in school means that the ‘continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed’ (Bourdieu, 1997[1986]: 52) works only for younger siblings and not for older brothers or sisters who must act as what Bourdieu terms a ‘delegate’ (1997[1986]). As such the ‘unceasing effort of sociability’ to which Bourdieu refers (1997[1986]: 52) goes unrewarded for older siblings who do not gain from the effort they have invested. With this in mind it is possible to understand why, at school, older siblings particularly expressed feelings of annoyance, embarrassment and irritation at the presence of their younger sibling(s). Furthermore, Tonkiss’s (2004) focus on the complexities of trust in the transmission of social capital between family members which are described as ‘a complex (and changeable) mix of trust, duty, law, contract, norms and convention’ (2004: 19) is helpful in understanding the complexities of the relational mechanisms and emotions that are occurring in the exchanges of social capital amongst siblings described here.

Looking at the implications of siblingship for being and becoming at school has also highlighted the particular nature of siblingship and its implications for the process of ‘turning out’. This has been clear in the longitudinal vantage point through which knowledge of school trajectories is passed between siblings as well as in the matter-of-fact way that young people narrated the transference of care and support between
siblings. These particularities of siblingship are explored further in the following section of the chapter.

7.3 Having a sibling as being part of a series

Chapter 2 pointed to work which could be understood as linking the concept of siblingship to notions of the self (Carsten, 1997; Edwards et al, 2006; Mitchell, 2003; Song, 2008, 2010; Mauthner, 2005) and pointed to Edwards et al’s (2006: 5) observation (following Mitchell 2003) that sibling relationships are distinctive because of the requirement that siblings be part of a series whilst at the same time retaining uniqueness. In this section of the chapter I build upon these ideas about seriality to explore their implications for being and becoming as a sibling – in terms of relational identity construction, the emotional effect of having a sibling who provides a ‘benchmark’ for processes of being and becoming and the role of prescribed, normative roles within the sibship.

7.3.1 Relational construction of sibling identity within families

We have seen how siblings can have a direct influence upon young people’s reputation amongst their peers and that teachers are often perceived to regularly make judgements about young people’s characters and abilities in relation to what they know of their siblings; in this way teachers are seen as presuming a resemblance between siblings. Young people’s identities were also found to be relationally constructed within families, in relation (and often in opposition to) their siblings. This is because being a sibling means being part of a series within the family as well as being an individual. Parents and other family members of course make sense of young people in relation to reference points of what they know of young people of that age and family stories and memories can be constructed to reinforce these identities in the ways outlined in chapter 2.
Thus, young people’s conceptualisations of who they are and who they might become are often constructed in relation to their sibling(s). Indeed, it was common for participants to describe themselves in relation to their siblings, applying mutually exclusive, oppositional labels relating to character, temperament, talents, intelligence, etc. In fact all young people in the study who had siblings were able to easily ‘rattle off’ the similarities and differences between themselves and their siblings and required little or no time to mull over their response.\(^61\) This indicates the existence of a habitual family narrative concerning the relational identities of siblings (and one which was evident in relation to Anna and Francesca’s identities in chapter 4). This is reminiscent of Lawler’s (2008) claim, outlined in chapter 2, that the construction of narratives and the telling of stories create identity, Thompson’s descriptions of stories as ‘part of the mental map of family members’ (1993: 36) and of Blokland’s (2005) argument, that social identifications are produced through narrative constructions of past and present events. Furthermore, following Plummer’s (1995) emphasis on the communal production of stories and the ‘work’ they do, it could be deduced that family-produced stories work to construct young people’s sense of who they are, where they fit in and consequently who they might become. Take the following example from an interview with Nick where he constructs the identity of his two sisters in relation to each other (with his sister Sara constructed as the ‘good one’ because Rebecca was the ‘naughty one’):

Nick: Er, Sara outside, she’s, like, she was like the good one. Rebecca, she’s the really naughty one. Rebecca got excluded about, I think it’s 27 times.

Katherine: how come you think that in the same family, people can turn out so different?
Nick: (short pause) I think Sara started to, like, she was naughty for the first two years and then she started to realise things that she was doing. And Rebecca didn’t realise, really.

(year 8, Estate youth club, as well as 2 older sisters, Nick has an older brother who is in prison)

\(^61\) There were examples in the data of young people in the sample doing this ‘rattling off’ of similarities and differences in relation to half and step siblings although this was not always the case and seemed to depend upon the longevity of the relationship and how well young people felt they knew their half and step siblings.
In this example, as well as being able to confidently map out the relational personas of his siblings, Nick also explains these identities in terms of ‘realising’ or not how one’s behaviour at school might affect one’s future outcomes. This was also an important part of Anna and Francesca’s sibling relationship and in chapter 4 we saw how the sisters were oppositionally constructed in terms of physical appearance, loudness, intelligence, temperament and their experiences of school. Thus, in addition to reproducing narratives of relational identities based on family memories of his sister’s behaviour, he is building upon these narratives in the interview, adding causality to the story.

Referring to a naughty and good ‘one’ in terms of sibling behaviour at school was relatively common in the data and links to wider cultural depictions of siblings as opposites in terms of their orientation to school (the characters of Bart and Lisa Simpson are a good example of this phenomenon). Sadia, for example, discussed her 4 older sisters in a similar way – relaying relational identities as well as theorising these differences, this time in terms of birth order:

Sadia: [discussing her eldest sister] She’s really argumentative. She wouldn’t like give in. Erm, she likes going out and just being by herself most of the time.

... 

Katherine: What about your other sister?
Sadia: Erm, she compromises us both. She does like, she mainly does all the work at home. She helps me out as well with my dad and everything else. She’s like the good one.

...

Katherine: So if she’s the good one, what one are you would you say?
Sadia: Erm, I think I’m the naughty one...

(year 10, Highfields School, as well as 4 older sisters, Sadia also has 2 older brothers)

In this example, the way Sadia described one sister as ‘compromising’ the other less helpful and well behaved sisters is illuminating in that it suggests that when taken together, the characteristics of the three sisters form a well balanced whole. This is reminiscent of identity construction within a group of friends outlined in chapter 6,
although arguably more powerful due to reinforcement through family stories and memories.

Similar relational identity constructions were made in accordance to appearance. These constructions were not limited to full siblings but were less common amongst step siblings. In the following example Georgia cites physical attractiveness as a way of differentiating herself from her half sister and explaining their differing levels of social success at school:

Georgia: Erm, my brother’s, like, sort of the good looking boy out of everybody else sort of thing, except he looks like my dad...Actually, he looks like me. My sister, er, she’s quite short and, erm, she’s like pretty big, so she’s a bit different to me cos of that sort of thing...so she’s obviously a bit different to me at school.
(year 7, Rural youth club, Georgia has 1 older half brother and 1 older half sister)

In this example, the complexities of family resemblances (in terms of physical appearance as well as character, intelligence and talents) and theories of who takes after who and how and why things get passed on in families were clearly woven into Georgia’s narrative of the relational construction of her siblings’ school selves, thus providing these categorisations with an explanatory history or story.

Resemblance stories and explanations such as those narrated by Georgia (above) are well established family narratives which young people in this project were easily able to draw upon in interviews. Take the following examples:

Charles: Cos I’m, well, my brother takes after me dad ‘cos they look well similar. And my brother’s starting to sound like my dad.
(year 7, Rural youth club, 1 older sister, 1 older brother)
***
Lois (overlapping): Yeah and everyone says I look like him in the face, I’ve got his nose, I’ve got his eyes, and I’ve got his lips (laughs).
(year 10, Estate youth club, 4 older brothers, 2 younger siblings)
In these examples the impression is one of re-telling stories of resemblance. Charles’s description of resemblances in his family are relayed as fact, as if they are a taken for granted part of his kinship knowledge. Lois meanwhile is explicit about where her ideas about resemblances come from, stating that ‘everyone says’ she resembles her brother.

In chapter 5 we saw how there can exist an ethic of the unique, autonomous and authentic self at school, with young people speaking about their school selves in terms of discourses of individuality and autonomy. Similar discourses were present in the way young people discussed their sibling relationships. Siblingship provides something of a paradox here in that the seriality of siblingship and the subsequent relational construction of identity amongst siblings means that likenesses, resemblances and differences are often heightened and people can be faced with a paradox between discourses of individuality and those of resemblance and relationality. The unproblematic way young people held seemingly paradoxical ideas about the nature of ‘turning out’ is reminiscent of the seemingly contradictory understandings of the self outlined in chapter 5. This paradox, although not discussed explicitly by young people, was occasionally hinted at in discussions of resemblances between them and their siblings. Take the following examples:

Courtney: Everyone’s personalities are different, and people have different interests and everything so things what they’re not interested in they just thingy...
(year 11, Estate youth club, 5 siblings)
***

Britney: Like, I don’t wanna be exactly the same. If God wanted us to be exactly the same we’d all look like each other.
(year 7/8, Freedom Centre, 1 older sister)
***

Joseph: Not, he’s [his younger brother] not gonna look like me though...Cos it’s erm, proven because we’re gonna eat different things and our faces are gonna grow in different ways because of the stuff we eat...
(year 8/9, Freedom Centre, 1 younger brother)
In these examples, the resistance to ideas of inevitable similarities with siblings are apparent although there are differences in whether this is understood to be because people are born as unique individuals (as Courtney alludes to), or are unique due to some kind of moral or religious ‘grand plan’ (as Britney comments) or develop their uniqueness through the choices they make in life (as with Joseph’s emphasis on diet).

_Siblings as a benchmark for ‘turning out’_

Often inherent to the relational construction of sibling identity in families is the use of siblings (particularly older siblings) as a benchmark against which other siblings’ progression in the process of ‘turning out’ is measured (in ways similar to the description of older siblings as ‘accounting tools’ at school in the previous section of this chapter). We saw this in chapter 4 with Francesca’s misgivings about her inability to ‘settle in’ at secondary school compounded by the fact that Anna had ‘settled’ by the time she was her age. This measurement can be undertaken by young people themselves as well as others, particularly parents. The emotional effect of ‘living up’ to an older sibling’s benchmark is a common trope used in fictional literature, film and television to denote siblingship (such as Jane Austin’s ‘Sense and Sensibility’ or Louisa May Alcott’s ‘Little Women’).

In interviews for this study, 5 young people talked of an awareness that having a high achieving, academically successful sibling could lead to them feeling under increased pressure to achieve themselves and result in a competitive edge to their sibling relationships. This pressure was cited as coming from parents as well as from young people themselves. Take the following examples where Ethan and Britney are both talking about feeling under pressure due to the academic success of their older siblings:

Ethan: yeah, both my brothers have been head boy, and they’ve got like the best marks in the year...so I’m pretty, like, got loads of pressure on me.

Adam: (starts singing the Queen/Bowie song ‘Under Pressure’) Under pressure, la la la...

(Ethan is in year 8 and was interviewed at Rural youth club. He has 2 older brothers)
Britney: Like I get it a lot cos he’s [her cousin Joseph] really smart and I’m not. I’m like more of the chatty person. He’s the one that concentrates and gets down, buckles down. And like my mum and Uncle Nigel and everyone’s like, ‘Why can’t you be more like Joseph?’ and it drives me insane. That really does get on my nerves cos I’ve had it said to me so much I’m like, ‘Well I’m trying. Don’t you, don’t you listen to what I’m saying?’ I’m good at art. He’s not. We’re different.
(year 7/8, Freedom Centre, 1 older sister)

It is notable that although Ethan talks about feeling ‘under pressure’, a joke is made of this and perhaps the normative nature of the statement revealed through Adam’s song. Britney’s frustration at the comparisons her family makes between her and her cousin comes across clearly. Interestingly she seeks to provide an alternative discourse, countering Joseph’s academically successful self with her own claims to be ‘the chatty one’ and ‘good at art’.

Similar discussions occurred in focus groups, with those participants who had not experienced this pressure to achieve themselves clearly empathising with the emotions of those who had. This can be seen in the following example from focus group 3 where Sofia demonstrates her empathy by finding the phrase Tom is searching for:

Tom: I think, I’m never gonna be as clever as me sister but I don’t want my mum and dad to like, you know, think I should like erm...what’s the word?
Sofia: You’re not good enough?
Tom: Yeah think I’m not good enough and like try and make me as good as her when I know I can’t so it’s annoying really. It scares me when I see all the work she’s doing I think I’ve got to do that one day. It’s annoying.
(year 9, Highfields School, Sofia has 1 younger sister, 2 step siblings and 2 older half siblings. Tom has 1 older sister)

This ability to empathise is likely to be due, in part, to the tropes of the emotional effect and pressure of ‘living up’ to a sibling which is a familiar story whether one has siblings or not due to it’s depiction in fiction film and media (for example in coverage
of the Miliband brothers’ labour party leadership campaigns or Venus and Serena Williams’ tennis careers and of course the bible story of brothers Cain and Able).

We saw earlier how having an older sibling can help young people to conceptualise their own school trajectory, providing a measure for their performance. In the following discussion taken from focus group 6, young people discuss the links between emotions and birth order in sibling relationships, indicating the effect of constructing a sense of one’s own academic success in relation to a sibling:

Katherine: Yeah. So what about being the youngest? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being the youngest do you think?
: (inaudible) pressure to be like your older brother or sister.
Katherine: Right. So this pressure ... is that worse if you’ve got an older brother or sister?
: Probably cos it’s like you should be more like them.
: Yeah but not always cos the oldest is always compared to the parents.
Katherine: Do you think?
: Yeah, because there’s no-one else.
...
: Yeah, but the younger child can be compared with the older one. So it’s a lot like closer.
...
: Sometimes the younger children are compared to the adults thought aren’t they?
: To the parents.
(year 10, St Stephens School)

This quote conveys the idea that there are patterns (even rules) concerning who is compared to who in families and that these patterns relate to family structures (birth order and generational positionings). Furthermore, there seems to be a feeling that any sort of comparing has emotional consequences and is negative or ‘wrong’ in some way. The phrase ‘it’s like you should be more like them’ is telling in that it is evocative of ideas of the autonomous self and the futility of trying to be something you are not that were discussed in relation to school persona in chapter 5.
Other interviewees mentioned pressure as a common side effect of a sibling relationship but seemed resilient to the emotional effect, giving the impression in their responses that it is not such a big deal for them (of course this could be an act of bravado put on for the interview). Adam for example, added to Ethan’s point (displayed above) about being under pressure by telling a story about his own older sisters. The impression is very much that, although some pressure does exist in their relationship, it is treated in a rather light-hearted way within the family. This comes across both in Adam’s humorous telling of the story and in his description of his parent’s reaction:

Adam: Oooh! I’ve got a good one to relate to that. [to feeling under pressure]... My sisters never got a DT [a detention] in their whole five years and in the first year I got nine!
(laughs)
Katherine: Oh no!
Adam: Oh yes!
Katherine: What did your parents say about that when you got home then?
Adam: Nothing, they just asked me, like... ‘Why?’ Cos my mum and dad have split up and my stepdad was just like asking me why and stuff, why I’ve been getting ‘em. Just said ‘Cos I weren’t doing my homework and that.’
Katherine: Do you think your parents were more cross because your sisters never did that, never got a DT?
Adam: No, like when she told people, my mum told people, she just like started laughing, but then when I first told her, I think she was like a bit annoyed at me.
(year 8, Rural youth club, 2 older sisters)

Similarly, Cameron admitted that his parents are probably hoping that he will go to university because his brothers did not but did not seem particularly perturbed or troubled by this:

They’ve had three sons so I’m guessing they wanted at least one of them to go to university and that’s one of the reasons why I want to go, other than the fact that I want to go anyway. I want to do that just so they can see me do it, you know what I mean?
(year 9, Highfields School, 2 older brothers)
The way Cameron emphasises his own choices and desires in the above quote is in keeping with ideas of the desirability of the idea of an autonomous and authentic self (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991) which has arisen at points throughout this thesis.

Interview interactions, particularly in group interviews, tended to produce less emotional talk than in focus group discussions where participants relayed emotional effect in relation to fictional characters from The Simpsons cartoon. In some cases interviewees seemed reluctant to engage with discussions about their emotions at all. Clinton’s descriptions of his ‘feelings’ about his brother’s higher level of academic achievement are a clear example of this:

  Katherine: So how come you think your brother who like went all the way at school and was in the top sets for everything...How come you think he was like that?
  Clinton: Cos he was a little bum hole.
  Katherine: What was different about him?
  Clinton: He was just strange.
  Katherine: ...does it ever make you feel like under pressure to do well at school because you had a brother who did really well?
  Clinton: No.
  (year 9, Estate youth club, 2 older brothers, 3 younger sisters)

In focus groups however, young people discussed the feelings of Bart Simpson at length and revealed a lot of opinions about the emotional effect of having a high achieving sibling (see chapter 3 for a full discussion of the methodological advantages of using popular culture vignettes for accessing talk about emotions). In all focus groups Bart was said to feel ‘sad’, ‘unloved’, even ‘adopted’ by the differences between him and Lisa and by the covering of his drawing on the family fridge by Lisa’s A grade report card. Young people were clearly able to empathise with him, possibly drawing out emotional issues that some may have found difficult to narrate in a group context. Take the following example from focus group 7:

  Katherine:...how do you think Bart feels when Homer covers up his drawings with Lisa’s report card?
: Like sad.
Boy: A bit under-rated?
Girl: He don’t care about him and no-one does?
Boy1: Why? It’s only a fridge!
Katherine: So you don’t think it’s that big a deal?
Boy1: No.
Boy2: So if you got A stars?
Boy1: Yeah.
Boy2: And your younger brother what you haven’t got got nothing?
Boy1: Yeah. Mmm.
Boy2: How d’you think he feels?
Boy1: It’s his fault he’s not got anything innit?
Boy2: How about vice versa? How would you feel?
Boy1: I’m not bothered.
Boy2: You wouldn’t bother?
Boy1: No.
Boy2: So if you thought to check the picture there…and then your dad came in and stuck your little brother’s thing on it like his picture was better, you’d be devo.
Boy1: No!
(year 10, St Stephens School)

In this example young people are clearly imagining how they would feel in Bart’s situation. Furthermore, the narrative of empathy with Bart is being produced collectively within the group with Boy1 professing not to empathise and Boy2 clearly being unable to understand how he could fail to feel for Bart and trying to persuade him to put himself in Bart’s position. This is indicative of the power of the vignette and focus group methods to illuminate the relational processes whereby normative ideas are created and consolidated.

The politics of sibling identity construction: The case of Mason and his half brother
Although in most cases I only interviewed the individual participant and did not seek narratives from other members of their family, it is clear in those cases where I was
able to access narratives from other family members that there is a politics to how this relational identity construction works, with older generations possessing more power to label siblings in this way. The construction of memories and stories within the power dynamics of families is reminiscent of Misztal’s (2003) descriptions of memory construction within a ‘mnemonic community’ such as a family. These politics and power dynamics are particularly observable in Mason’s interview where his mum, who sat in on most of the interview, interjected during a discussion about similarities and differences between Mason and his half brother. Mason’s mum and dad are divorced (Mason lives with his mum but sees his dad regularly). Mason has a half brother, Zack, whom his dad had in another relationship. Zack is 1 year older than Mason and attends the same school (Romsbridge). What is interesting about this example is that it demonstrates how a narrative about the differences between Mason and his half brother is collectively constructed, and points to why this might be happening:

Mum: And they’re completely opposite. You both went to the same school and the teachers can’t believe you’re brothers.

... Mason: [We’re] really, like, different and. They [school teachers] expect me to be like my brother. Like, good at Art and not that good at Maths and English. But it’s the opposite for me; I’m not that good at Art, but I’m good at Maths and English.

... Mum: He is. But he thinks he’s not better than Zack.

Mason: I’m not, I’m not that good though.

Mum: No, but you’ve done very good.

... Mum: That’s, sorry, that’s the only feedback I got when I went to his parent’s evening in March, no one could believe that he...they can’t believe that Zack is his brother. That’s all we got.

Katherine: (To Mason): What do you think of that?

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For example with Anna and Francesca where I interviewed both sisters and with Aiden, Ryan and Mason whose mothers were present during their interviews.
Mum: And the mannerisms. And I didn't understand at first, and I said, cos he’s [Mason’s half brother] lovely with me, but I’m very strict, well not strict, but I don’t have children talking back. So he, when he comes, when he’s been here he’s lovely with me, but outside that door, he’s completely...

In this example we see how, although there is a multitude of voices contributing to the narrative of Mason and his half brother as very different, it is his mum whose voice dominates. It is clear that Mason’s mum has strong motivations for wanting to construct the two brothers as different. Firstly, she is eager to boost Mason’s confidence and ensure he sees himself as equally intelligent and academically successful. Secondly, she is divorced from Mason’s father and by constructing his son as badly behaved she is also able to criticise her ex partner’s parenting skills and, through the construction of Mason as so different, praise her own. As such, a narrative is produced constructing the brothers as opposites and creating relational memories about what the boys were like at school. It is interesting how Mason’s mum adds further weight to her claims by drawing upon what teachers have told her as a kind of ‘expert’ corroboration of the points she makes. This example indicates how relational sibling identities are constructed within familial relationships. Furthermore, it illuminates the less powerful role of young people themselves in creating these narratives.

7.3.2 Normativity and the prescription of sibling roles

Another way in which being part of a series of siblings implicates processes of being and becoming for young people is in the way one’s identity as a sibling is constructed in dialogue with normative ideas about what a big brother, or little sister, for example, ought to be like. Young people in the sample alluded to strong normative scripts about how sibling relationships ought to be practiced, particularly with regard to the roles and responsibilities of older and younger siblings and the gendered nature of brothering and sistering. Thus, being a sibling is accompanied by prescribed birth order and gender roles which can form part of the family which young people live by (Gillis, 1996) and as such influences ways of being and conceptualisations of becoming as a
sibling. Punch points to the negotiated, fluid and contextual nature of birth order positions amongst siblings in childhood (2005) and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, I found some evidence in support of this conjecture in the context of The Freedom Centre. However, my data suggest a more complex picture with normative scripts of prescribed birth order positions also working to ‘fix’ ideas about birth order at the same time as young people’s embedded relational practices suggested some fluidity. For example, it was common for young people to view the position of an older sibling as characterised by increased responsibility, with the position of the youngest sibling often viewed as the most advantageous birth order position. These positions were also understood to be gendered, with brothers generally considered to be ‘protectors’ of their sisters. These gendered roles were enhanced by birth order (for example an older brother and younger sister was often cited as the ideal sibship pattern for providing heightened care and protection where it was considered most needed).

However, young people did not necessarily act in accordance with these normative birth order positions and these ‘fixed’ positions therefore did not impact directly upon ‘turning out’. This is because there was slippage between narratives of lived sibling relationships and normative ideals of how these relationships ought to be practiced. As discussed in chapter 2, in their study of familial obligation Finch and Mason (1993) found that generalised ideas (in response to a vignette) about moral obligation towards kin often did not map directly onto descriptions of actual practices (generated in qualitative interviews). This was because people’s normative sense of obligation was combined in their lived relationships in negotiation with the context of that particular relationship (for example, the perceived quality of a particular tie). Thus, Finch and Mason claim that family obligations are negotiated in relation to particular lived

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63 Methodological differences between this and Punch’s study may have encouraged more discursive narratives of birth order positions in my study, where participants were also older. For example, I recruited participants individually (as opposed to in sibling groups) and conducted my interviews in different contexts (Punch interviewed young people with their siblings and separately in the home and was thus able to incorporate more ethnographic observations of home-based family interactions).

64 The pros and cons of various birth order positions were debated in this way in all focus groups with the majority in each group arguing that being the youngest child in a sibship is the most advantageous position to occupy.
relationships rather than fully prescribed by wider normative scripts. In this project, young people spoke in different ways about the particulars of their individual sibling relationships and the practices these involved in a way that suggests that their normative imaginings of ideal sibling roles are practiced in relation to the negotiated, lived realities of their relationships with their siblings. In the following example from focus group 7 we see how moral ideals and normative scripts about gender roles are created ‘live’ during such interactions through the sharing of embedded experiences of sibling relationships:

Boy: Like I want a son about three years older than the girl cos then the boy can stick up for the girl if anything happens.
Katherine: Okay. So do you think, do you not think it can work the other way around then?
Boy: Girls sticking up for lads?
Girl: Not as much.
Boy: It’d be better to have a sister that’s like one year younger than you so you can keep an eye on her in school and that.
...
Girl: Yeah. But then you’ll have all your time on them won’t you?
...
Boy: So? You stick up for your relatives.
Girl: But my brother never sticks up for me.
Katherine: Doesn’t he?
Girl: No. He’d just love me to get battered, he hates me.
...
Boy: So if someone were gonna come round to your house he’d do nowt. Even if it were a boy?
Girl: No, he would batter a boy.
Boy: Right then.
(year 10, St Stephens School)

This quote is indicative of the interplay between normative gendered roles and the realities of sibling relationships. Indeed, the data are full of contradictions between how young people talk about how older or younger, male or female siblings ought to behave towards each other and descriptions of how their own lived sibling
relationships work. However, this does not mean that normative ideals and lived relationships comprise ‘made up’ versus ‘real’ accounts of sibling roles. In fact they are mutually implicated and, along with the particulars of the research interaction itself, make up what Gubrium and Holstein (2009) term the ‘narrative environment’. Indeed, young people often employed examples from their lived experiences with their siblings in order to help them to construct a narrative about the generalised moral implications of a particular birth order position. We saw this in the extract from focus group 7 (above) where the girl provides a contradictory reckoning of her older brother’s role towards her in that she says he would not defend her yet when confronted with a further moral scenario concerning a threat from a boy she concedes that her brother would provide protection. At the same time normative understandings were also drawn upon to help make sense of these lived relationships.

Imagined and real sibling positions: the case of Lyndsay and Gemma
This ‘slippage’ (Gubrium and Holstein 1998) between young people’s narratives of how a sibling occupying a particular structural position in the sibship ought to behave and their narratives of how they relate to their own siblings is particularly clear in the discrepancies between how young people imagine it would be to occupy a position and how young people in these positions describe their sibling relationships. These ways in which normativity, morality, lived relationalities and imagination interweave were particularly apparent in Lindsay and Gemma’s interview interactions. Both girls were in year 9 at Highfields School. The two ‘best friends’ (who had requested to be interviewed together) had very different views of sibling relationships. Lindsay is one of 6 and lives with her family in a three bedroom house where she shares a room with her 3 sisters. Lindsay described sharing space with her siblings as incredibly difficult and has actively tried to find ways to gain more personal space including a plan to move in with Gemma and another to move into the garden shed. Gemma on the other hand has lived most of her life as an only child, with her baby sister less than a year old at the time of the interview. In the following quotation the two friends are discussing why Gemma longs for an older sibling:
Lindsay: like when we were younger and I still had like a little brother in my room and she [Gemma] used to come round to mine and like it got dead hectic and stuff, so I don’t think she would want any other brothers or sisters.

Gemma: Well I do! I want an older brother or sister but too late now.

Katherine: Why do you think you would want an older brother or sister?

Gemma: Like to look up to and stuff.

... 

Lindsay: My older brother’s a wuss! He doesn’t do anything! Like and my big sister she’s in a different school. And then my little brother, it’s not as though he’s gonna do anything.

The power of normative scripts in the shaping of imagined, idealised sibling configurations, particularly for children with no siblings, is clear in the way Gemma wishes for older siblings despite Lyndsay’s first hand experiences of the downsides of being from a large family. The reasons Gemma gave for wanting older siblings are highly reminiscent of the generalised moral norms of how older siblings are meant to behave (offering protection and being somebody to ‘look up to’). Interestingly Lyndsay immediately counteracted these normative ideals with descriptions of the reality of her own sibling relationships, highlighting a gap between normative expectations and lived realities of birth order and siblingship in general.

Thus, despite having first hand experience of the lived realities of Lindsay’s sibling relationships (‘You never stop arguing with your sister, every time I’m there you’re always screaming at each other.’) and Lindsay’s increasingly persuasive descriptions of the difficulties of life with siblings, Gemma stuck with her idealised normative imaginings:

Lindsay: Like there’s too, if there’s like too many brothers and sisters like it’ll get dead annoying because after a while you’ll end up having loads of arguments that you’re not speaking and stuff like that. And then you just don’t like ‘em. And then it causes trouble with the parents who’s always arguing as well.

... 

Gemma: They can look out for you, they can help you.
The regularity with which the *help* and *protection* thought to be offered by older siblings was cited in the data suggests that it may be easier for Gemma, in her position as an almost ‘only child’, to draw upon normative cultural discourses than upon what she knows to be Lyndsay’s more complex ‘reality’. Also Gemma is painting a picture of a different, ideal, family scenario which it seems is not necessarily at odds with her observations of her friend’s family.

Although the vast majority of the sample described their sibling relationships as prescribed by birth order (i.e. with help passing exclusively from older to younger siblings as described earlier in this chapter), there was some evidence of the fluidity of birth order positionings described by Punch (2005), with a minority of participants describing their birth order relationships as less fixed. Courtney for example, described how on occasion her *younger* brothers look after her at school and Craig indicated that for him and his siblings, age is not fixed by years but is dependent upon the individuals involved, indicating that depending on one’s definition of age, birth order positions can be reversed:

> Cos I reckon, er, I’m mature enough, I reckon, like, I’m really old in the head, me. Like, like, er, thingy, erm, my sister, I don’t reckon she’s as old as me in the head.

(year 10, Estate youth club. Craig has 3 older sisters and 1 older brother, their precise ages are unknown)

Thus, birth order and gender are very much present in narratives of the siblings we live by (Gillis, 1996) even when they are less prescribed in our relationships with the siblings we live with (Gillis, 1996) and in our day-to-day sibling practices (Morgan, 1996). This is not to say that the siblings we live by do not matter; the data presented in this chapter suggest a negotiation between normative ideals and lived relationships. This is reminiscent of the ‘activation’ of the ‘narrative environments’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009) of friendship described by Davies and Heaphy (2011) where normative ideas about the ‘goods’ of friendship were found to interact with more negative experiences of friendship in the different forms of narratives produced within different research settings. Indeed, in this thesis normative ideas about sibling roles were
narrated in more abstract ways in focus group discussions (as discussed in chapters 3 and 8). Thus, imaginings of the siblings they live by are likely to affect young people’s interpretations of their role as a sibling. In short, young people are ‘turning out’ as a person who is embedded in a particular family structure and their normative, abstract understandings of the meanings of that structural position are part of the experience of living it.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has indicated that sibling relationships are an important part of the ways young people form ideas about who they are and who they have the potential to become in the future. These relationships include those with full, step and half siblings although it has not always been possible to make statements about whether and how these forms of sibling relationship affected aspects of being and becoming in different ways. It is argued that social scientists need to attend to the significance of lateral kin more carefully, not least because there are particularities about lateral kin (such as heightened comparability) which makes them important to understandings of identity, youth trajectories and decision making and the transmission of social advantage.

Older siblings were found to be a source of social capital at school, although this capital could work both positively and negatively. Furthermore, older siblings were found to provide an ‘accounting tool’ for younger siblings to help them in imagining and assessing their own progression through the life course. For the young people in this study having an older sibling provided help with imagining their educational futures but this ‘accounting tool’ or ‘benchmark’ could also be useful at other stages in the life course. Indeed, this chapter has indicated that the proximity of the sibling relationship (especially if sharing a home) creates a longitudinal vantage point enabling an interaction between hindsight and foresight in approaching the process of ‘turning out’.
Furthermore, this chapter has explored the implications of ‘turning’ out for being one in a series of siblings. The serial nature of siblingship was found to ‘fix’ aspects of being and becoming in several ways. First, it was found that identity is often created and negotiated in families in relation to one’s sibling(s). This ‘fixing’ of sibling identity is done through the telling of family stories and memories and it takes place within the power dynamics of the family meaning there is a politics to how this works. It was also found that the seriality of siblingship can have an emotional effect on young people who may feel they are not ‘measuring up’ to their siblings. This can be a negative effect of the role of older siblings as an accounting tool. Second, this chapter has indicated how ideas about how a young person ought to behave according to their structural position within the family creates a normative idea of the siblings we live by, if not actually lived this way in practice.
8.1 Introduction

How do young people make sense of the process of ‘turning out’? How do they talk about processes of being and becoming when asked to think in abstract ways? How do young people understand the inheritance and transmission of traits and characteristics? What sorts of theories do they develop about the workings of inheritance and the nature of personhood?

This chapter shifts the analytical lens to focus specifically upon young people’s own understandings of being and becoming. Young people’s opinions, theories and suppositions have been discussed at various points in previous chapters (for example Anna and Francesca’s opposing views on the nature of the self were discussed in chapter 4, ideas about the ‘fixing’ of ways of being at school were explored in chapter 5, reflections on the influence of friends and siblings on the process of ‘turning out’ featured in chapters 6 and 7 and the previous chapter outlined young people’s theories of how siblingship ought to work). In this chapter young people’s theories of how the process of ‘turning out’ itself works take centre stage.

This chapter therefore reflects upon how young people themselves theorise about the process of ‘turning out’ and as such focuses on young people’s understandings of modes of transmission - including their reflections and generalisations about the role of parents and parenting and genetic inheritance in the passing on of ways of being (in terms of traits, talents, characteristics etc.) along with their understandings of the nature of personhood -including the idea of a fixed, ‘natural’, inner self and the moral dimensions of agency. This chapter uses data derived from asking young people to reflect upon and debate these issues and as such tends to be in the form of more abstracted narratives than in the previous chapters. Young people did however also
draw upon their own lived experiences along with scientific ‘truths’ and knowledge of the lives of others (including celebrities and fictional characters) when thinking through issues of modes of transmission and theories of personhood and this chapter reflects upon the role of different modes of knowledge that are used in the generalisations young people make.

Why is it pertinent to look at the ways young people themselves theorise ‘turning out’? Although much sociological work in the fields of relationality and family life has argued strongly that morality, normativity and theoretical ‘rules’ about how ‘family’ works derive from lived experience (see for example, Finch and Mason, 1993; Ribbens Mcarthy et al, 2003) and Morgan (1996) has extended this thinking in his argument that the very notion of ‘family’ resides in practices; processes of abstracting, generalising and theorising are still part of the way people live. Indeed, people form theories and opinions about the world around them from various sources and these theories are part of their lives. This was clear in the ways Anna and Francesca’s understandings of the nature of the self were wrapped up in their relational sibling identity. Put simply, lay theories matter. As outlined in chapter 3, other approaches have also pointed to this, for example Sayer (2011) demonstrates the importance of ‘lay normativity’ for making sense of the social world. Furthermore, anthropologists examining the kinship consequences of New Reproductive Technologies have pursued this through explorations of lay understandings of how these technologies might work in practice (Edwards, 2000; Franklin, 2003; Franklin and Mckinnon, 2001). Edwards (2000: 204) talks of these lay understandings in terms of people having ‘an expertise in kinship’ which is reminiscent of Mason’s (2008) identification of a ‘fascination’ with kinship and it is this approach to conceptualising the role of lay opinions in making sense of the social world that has influenced this aspect of the thesis. Therefore, following Carsten’s call for a focus upon ‘indigenous idioms’ (2000:4) of kinship, this chapter explores the ways young people theorise ‘turning out’, paying attention to their - often seemingly contradictory - understandings of the world around them and in doing so the chapter argues that the ways young people understand the possibilities and limitations of modes of transmission and personhood can also work to ‘fix’ aspects of the process of ‘turning out’.
As stated in chapter 3, some of the data used in this chapter were generated by using siblingship as a methodological tool to elicit opinions about inheritance and transmission. By asking young people how it might be that siblings (for example Bart and Lisa Simpson) often ‘turn out’ so differently, I was able to encourage them to think through the role of different modes of transmission and of different conceptualisations of the self in the process of ‘turning out’ (see chapter 3 for a full discussion of this methodological approach). Siblings are culturally heralded as a fitting test case for thinking through issues of ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ and are often assumed to share both genetic and social heritage. This enabled their use as an elicitation device to encourage talk about the interplay between social and biological aspects of kinship and personhood.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the ways different modes of transmission and different orders of knowledge are tangled together in young people’s understandings of inheritance in families, for example how normative tropes and understandings combine with scientific ‘facts’ and lived experience in the ways young people theorise ‘turning out’. The chapter then goes on to explore how the environment in which young people are raised and the way they are parented in particular is perceived to influence ways of being and the potential for becoming. For example, young people perceived sibling differences to be partially caused by birth-order specific parenting practices as well as by the experiencing of different ‘environments’. The role of watching and learning from parents and the ethical dimensions of parents’ own aspirations for their children are also discussed as aspects of being and becoming understood as fundamental by young people. The chapter then moves on to consider the ways young people in the study understood the nature of the self, particularly in terms of the idea of being a ‘natural’ which is linked to notions of a fixed inner self. It is argued that at the same time as harbouring ideas about a fixed inner self, young people were also committed to ideas of agency and particularly an ethic of ‘trying

65 This can be seen particularly in relation to twinship where, in line with scientific twin studies, people are fascinated by ideas about ‘long lost’ twins leading parallel lives (Stewart, 2000) or identical twins ‘feeling’ each others’ pain (Edwards, 2000).
one’s best’. This apparent paradox is explored through an examination of young people’s understandings of the concept of potential as equating to effort and possibility as opposed to being limited and finite.

8.2 Young people’s knowledge and hypotheses about inheritance and modes of transmission

Young people tended to understand the inheritance of ways of being pertinent to the process of ‘turning out’ - such as talents, tendencies and skills – as comprising a complex tangling of modes of transmission such as learning from parents, wider ‘environmental’ influences, genetic inheritance and a sense of a unique, non-reducible core self which remains uninfluenced by social relationships. In describing these tangled modes of transmission young people drew upon various different sources of knowledge including scientific ‘knowledge’ and discourse, examples from the lives of celebrities, religious doctrine and their own biographical experience. Thus, all these forms of knowledge contributed to the ‘narrative environment’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009) in which young people talked about modes of transmission in focus groups.

The complex interplay of modes of transmission was common to all focus group discussions. Although each group contained a minority of young people who seemed to object to the idea that ways of being are reducible to genetic inheritance, most common was a theory of inheritance that incorporated numerous modes of transmission which were debated at length within the groups. These complexities were cited both in terms of different modes of transmission combining together in the formation of a particular trait, tendency or talent as well as in terms of different traits and talents being transmitted in different ways. The following extract from focus group 7 is a typical example of how these debates and discussions transpired in focus groups and in this case young people are discussing how traits are passed on in families. It is necessary to quote at length in order to illustrate how such discussions tended to unfold:
...Katherine: Where do you think it comes from, being a ‘natural’?…How do you think it might work in families?
(Numerous people in the group talking at once)
Girl: I don’t know but…
Boy (overlapping) Genetics.
...
: Genes.
Boy1: No.
Katherine: Why do you disagree?
Boy1: Cos it’s like some mums can be different.
: (overlapping) No, it’s just the upbringing.
Boy1: Like … David Beckham he likes football or Rooney or somebody, they didn’t get it from their mum or dad did they?
Boy: No but it gets passed down generations.
Boy: They’ve got a natural talent.
Boy: How does it?
Boy: You’re telling me…
Boy1: We’d all be the same then cos we all came from the same two people didn’t we?
Girl: (overlapping) Yeah, Adam and Eve.
Girl: (overlapping – shouting to be heard) You work on it.
Girl: It could just be upbringing…Like if you live in the house and like someone goes, say, does Art and then, ‘cos my mum does Art and that’s why I do it’…
Boy (overlapping)...play football since the day you were born you’d be good at it aren’t you?...Like if I had a son and I sent him boxing when he was young he’d be good when he gets older cos he’s done it for so long.
Boy: Natural.
(my emphasis)
(year 10, St Stephens School)

Here young people seem to be having a complex debate about ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ but they are not framing their discussions in this way. Rather they are thinking about combinations of modes of transmission and seem to be honing their opinions about these collectively. Participants are using a complex tangle of normative scripts, tropes, hypothetical vignettes, religious doctrine (this was a focus group of participants from the Catholic school, St Stephens) examples from the lives of celebrities as well as their
own experiences in forming their opinions of how traits get passed on in families. We see a number of ideas being floated in the group including ideas about the significance of watching and learning from parents over a prolonged period and genetic pre-dispositions passed on in families. Furthermore, the disagreements as to whether talent is ‘natural’ or ‘worked at’ hint at the ethical dimensions to the role of agency in lay-theories of inheritance (discussed below in sections 8.3 and 8.4).

These complexities in young people’s understandings of inheritance are reminiscent of the seemingly contradictory understandings of the self outlined in chapter 5. In her explorations of such contradictions (discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis), Edwards (2000) argues that people draw upon diverse sources of knowledge and understandings about kinship depending upon the circumstances of their use. It is only in analysis that these different sources of knowledge and different understandings come to be seen as contradictory. In focus group discussions such as this, participants are encouraged to draw upon a vast array of knowledge as well as to take a position on the subject at hand and this results in debates about seemingly oppositional views of inheritance. Following Edwards (2000), all these views can be seen to be part of how we make sense of kinship in our lives and do not have to be contradictory.

As well as group discussions and debates which tended to produce generalisations about the workings of inheritance, young people applied their understandings of inheritance to their own biography, as an explanation for how they have ‘turned out’. When thinking about the workings of inheritance in their own lives young people’s accounts also tended to include family produced stories about, and relational constructions of, their identity (akin to those discussed in relation to siblings in the previous chapter) alongside tropes and discourses about inheritance. Take the following example from an interview with Cameron (who was in year 9 at Highfields School) where he is describing how he thinks his talent for weightlifting came to be. Cameron’s father and two older brothers also practice weightlifting but Cameron has reached a higher level in the sport and regularly competes at a national level:
Erm, I don’t know, I was never naturally strong at first. My dad always said that I got through it because I had high energy levels. Like my older brother he had like really strong legs. Like when we kind of tested it, he had like really strong legs. And then my other brother had a really strong upper body and then I just had, I don’t know, I just had high energy levels so he said. But then I turned out to be the best so I kind of question that. Cos like for my age I’m a lot bigger than both of them. Like one of them is nearly nineteen and he’s like pretty much the same size as me and the other one’s a bit bigger but he trains quite a lot now. And, erm, yeah I don’t know if I inherited it or not but I’ve been training at it pretty much, pretty much five times a week since I was about 9.

(my emphasis)

In this example, Cameron’s analysis of his talent contains a combination of ‘natural’, embodied factors such as being ‘big’ for his age, analyses of other seemingly ‘natural’ characteristics such as his ‘high energy levels’ which appear to be constructed in part by his dad in relation to his siblings and as compensation for his lack of ‘natural’ strength, as well as Cameron’s own dedication, training and practice. The role of Cameron’s father and his older brothers in the construction of Cameron’s conceptualisation of his talent is key here, with Cameron’s dad – having introduced all three of his sons to weightlifting – creating a narrative about the boys and their various ‘natural’ strengths and aptitudes in a similar way to the family stories about siblings’ relational identity outlined in the previous chapter. Crucially, this narrative was confirmed by ‘tests’, indicating the interaction between seemingly objective ‘scientific’ discourse and relational narratives constructed within the social dynamics of families. Interestingly Cameron is now starting to question this judgement having weighed up the ‘evidence’ himself. Thus his views about transmission and inheritance and about the role of ‘nature’ in his own talents are relationally constructed and are liable to shift alongside shifts in the relationships which formed them.

Combinations of modes of transmission were narrated by other young people in similar ways. Sherise, for example, in her discussion of the inevitability of her artistic and musical talents, employed the idea of transmission through ‘DNA’ as well as watching and learning from others:
Because even if, like, from DNA and stuff I wouldn’t have got it I suppose I would have picked it up from my mum and like seeing people, but I think it’s quite fun as well so I would have, I would have wanted to do it more as well.

(year 8/9, Freedom Centre)

Here Sherise has also introduced the idea that regardless of this transmission from her mother she is sure she would have wanted to take up these activities. Thus, within her conceptualisation of her talents as being inherited from her mother in various ways she makes room for an idea of her own autonomous self. This creates a sense of inevitability coupled with voluntarism – even if it was not in her ‘DNA’ she would have picked it up from watching her mother and even if she had not had the opportunity to pick it up this way she would have wanted to do it anyway. Thus Sherise’s understandings of inheritance incorporated a complex range of modes of transmission and produced a narrative of inevitability where voluntarism can still be present.

Scientific discourse and genetics

As mentioned, young people regularly drew upon scientific discourses, particularly ideas about genetic inheritance, in their theory building about how transmission works in families. It was clear in all focus group discussions that young people had picked up on various scientific ‘facts’ or ‘truths’66 about how genetic inheritance works and what can and cannot be inherited genetically. Although there was little agreement about what these ‘facts’ were, the incorporation of scientific ‘knowledge’ into young people’s thinking was typical. Take the following example from focus group 5 where young people are discussing what can be ‘in the genes’:

: Your cells
...
: Your height.
...
: Height.
: Your legs.

66 Of course these young people have probably studied genetics in their school science classes too.
Hair colour.

... 

Eye colour.

... 

Your cells.

Skin.

... 

Illnesses and diseases.

Katherine: ... And what about any of these things that we’ve got on the board, some of the subjects [refers to participant’s ‘best’ and ‘favourite’ school subjects, written on a white board]?

Boy: Talents.

Boy: Sport.

Boy: Knowledge.

Katherine: So say, you said sport talent can be in the genes? So do you think that some people are born more sporty than others?

Boy: Yeah.

Boy: How do you be born well sporty?

Girl: It can be like doing lots of sports.

Running.

Boy: No cos your parents can be like dead active and fit and then when you’re born some of that can be passed on can’t it? Like health.

Through the genes.

Boy: Healthy babies.

(year 7, St Stephens School)

This discussion gives some indication of how young people’s knowledge of genetic inheritance seems to be based upon various tropes and discourses which are not necessarily understood beyond their use as a short-hand to denote a more general idea of ‘naturalness’ or inevitability. This is particularly apparent in the un-elaborated comments, ‘in your cells’ or ‘healthy babies’. Furthermore, this example indicates that when pushed to think about the implications of genetics (for being ‘born more sporty than others’) participants started to question the simplicity of the concept of being ‘in the genes’ but ultimately returned to the use of the concept as a catch-all trope when
the questions about multiple modes of transmission posed by the boy towards the end of the example become too complex. Thus, the concept of ‘genes’, rather than used in its ‘true’ biological sense, can be used as a way of side-stepping the complexities of inheritance.

Young people also combined their ‘scientific’ knowledge with their opinions and experiences of other modes of transmission in the ways they made sense of inheritance. Take the following example:

Mason: We were doing something about brains today [at school] and how, like, we’re opposite and how each brain works...we had to do a mind map. For, like, our brain and what, what we listen to, and like, what we taste and everything like that...
Katherine: Oh right. So do you reckon sometimes people’s brains just can be totally, just work totally differently or...?
Mason: No. It depends. I think everyone’s brain is the same but it depends how you’re like brought up, how you like, how you feel towards stuff when you get a bit older.
(year 8, Romsbridge School)

In this quote, Mason has drawn upon his own memories and interpretations of scientific knowledge imparted to him through his formal education but he does not simply absorb this knowledge. Rather he uses this to form his own opinion which also incorporates other aspects of inheritance and transmission which he views as important (how you are ‘brought up’ and how you ‘feel towards stuff’), thus incorporating ideas of environment and family as well as of an autonomous self into his re-interpretation of scientific discourse.

As some of the examples outlined above have hinted, the quality and dynamics of familial relationships were also implicated in young people’s conceptualisations of what is inherited ‘naturally’ or ‘through the genes’ (for example in Cameron’s dad’s interpretations of his talent for weightlifting). There is a politics to the ways family relationships are incorporated into wider views on how inheritance works which is similar to that described in the previous chapter concerning the relational construction of sibling identity in families.
In his interview, Ryan provided an example of this. Ryan (who was in year 8 at Romsbridge School) described seeing a ‘natural’ connection between himself, his mother, his grandfather and his baby sister (all family members with whom he seemed to share a close and positive relationship). This connection was described as being a shared ‘energy’, or energetic nature and Ryan identified it in the way his grandfather enjoys keeping fit, how his mum walks ‘really fast’ and how his baby sister had already started to show signs of crawling. This shared energy is cited by Ryan as an example of the inevitability of resemblances existing between these family members – they all show different signs of ‘energy’ and therefore it is seen as inevitable that this has come about through their shared genetic makeup. However, it is striking how tenuous and coincidental these links seem to be. The shared ‘energy’ has manifested in such different ways in Ryan’s grandfather, mother and baby sister that it is difficult to be convinced by Ryan’s interpretation of this energetic inheritance as being transmitted, as he put it, ‘through the genes and whatever you call it’. Thus, it seems that Ryan’s belief in this genetically shared ‘energy’ lies in his interpretation of the meanings of the characteristics he has seen in his family members. Both the seeing and interpretation of these characteristics as ‘genetic’ are of course informed by his relationships with his grandfather, mother and sister. This identification of some sort of shared trait or connection that is dependent upon the quality of the relationship and the motives of those involved can be intangible in nature, constituting some sort of non-reducible ‘connection’ which is difficult to pin down and articulate. For example, Estella in trying to describe similarities between herself and her favourite aunt, can only say, ‘I think we’ve got a connection sort of thing.’

The idea that ‘seeing’ a connection and interpreting it as such is tied to relationality is reminiscent of Mason’s ‘fixed’ affinities outlined in chapter 2 and has also been noted in empirical studies of family resemblance which have explored the interplay between relationality and perceptions of resemblance (see Howell and Marre (2006), Bestard and Marre (2009), Nordqvist (2010), Mason and Davies (2010), Davies (2011b)). Furthermore, anthropological accounts of lay-understandings of genetic science and the incorporation of these into kinship practices indicate that ‘knowledge’ is
interpreted within social relationships. Edwards (2000) explores this interaction in particular depth and describes the process of *selection* through which one particular participant ‘sees’ particular traits, characteristics and resemblances in her children as ‘Plucked out from myriad possibilities’ (ibid: 214). Thus, the interpretation of various forms of knowledge which form young people’s understandings of the role of inheritance in shaping who they are and who they are likely to become is embedded within young people’s biographies and relationships. We saw this embeddedness in chapter 4 in the way Anna used ‘observations’ of resemblances between her and her younger step sister in order to distance herself from Francesca.

Conversely, the ways young people interpret the relationships in which they are embedded can also be informed by other ‘knowledges’ gleaned from scientific discourse, the lives of celebrities, normative understandings and so on. I now turn to look at these complexities further, in part through the example of young people’s understandings of why siblings might ‘turn out’ differently. Young people talked extensively about the role of parents and of the wider ‘environment’ in shaping processes of being and becoming for siblings in different ways. In both these examples it is clear that lived relationalities and generalised ideas about how these processes work mutually inform one another in the formation of these understandings.

### 8.2.1 The parenting environment

As stated in chapter 2, sociological approaches have long since recognised the significance of parents in shaping how young people ‘turn out’, in terms of socialisation and the transmission of capital, and this also applies to studies of ‘family’ more generally. Furthermore, policy makers have often placed responsibility on parents for how their children ‘turn out’, blaming them for criminality, ‘delinquency’ and anti-social behaviour amongst young people. For Edwards (2000), the consideration of the ways that parents’ values, characteristics, traits etc. can manifest in their offspring is ubiquitous and is central to the kinship thinking she terms ‘Born and Bred thinking’ (2000: 213). The pondering of such questions is part of what Mason (2008) terms the
‘everyday fascination of kinship’. In common with these approaches, the focus of this thesis remains on how young people themselves conceptualise the role of parents in shaping who they are and who they might become. Young people in the study inevitably looked to parents (including step-parents) as a central influence in the process of being and becoming and we have seen in the previous section of this chapter that young people often spoke of the importance of parents and upbringing in their theories of how traits, talents and ways of being are transmitted. By focusing on young people’s perspectives of how parenting practices influence processes of being and becoming, this study has been able to explore the moral implications of this influence. For example, in the ways young people balanced the aspirations, motives and desires of their parents with ideas about the ethic of individual autonomy and authenticity.

**Differential parenting practices**

Young people in focus groups were asked to think about why siblings who share genetic heritage and are brought up by the same parents, in the same family, so often ‘turn out’ to be different from one another. The examples of cartoon characters Bart and Lisa Simpson were referred to in the framing of this discussion but young people often brought up examples from their own lives. All young people accepted that the phenomenon of siblings ‘turning out’ differently was a common one, and parenting was cited in all focus groups as a key cause of sibling differences. Thus, as outlined in chapter 2, although existing sociological accounts often assume that siblings are similar (presumably due to their shared parentage and upbringing), young people carefully scrutinised parenting practices looking for evidence of variable treatment and looked to norms about parenting siblings in order to build generalisations about why siblings are often parented differently and thus become different.  

The clearest examples of this were found in young people’s discussions of how sibling birth order positions are understood to create differences between siblings in terms of

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67 It is likely that, as discussed in chapter 3, such practices of making generalisations are an artefact of focus group methods which necessitate the formation and defence of opinions.
their personality traits. These differences were understood as primarily caused by differential parenting. Take the following example from focus group 4 where young people are thinking through how and why birth order impacts upon ‘personality’:

Joanna: Usually younger siblings do worse [at school].
Haashim: Wiser, are wiser.
...
Joanna: No, it’s just like been proved in tests because parents like wrap their first child in bubble, like bubble wrap and do like everything for them and that and then the second child is...
Haashim: (overlapping) That’s all true, that’s all true.
...
Emma: Well in my family it’s like, erm, well my parents were kind of like experimenting in how to bring my sister up and then so she got away with more stuff. And then they learnt to trust her more so she does better like on her own. But with me they’ve kind of like wrapped me in bubble wrap rather than the first person, their first child. (laughs)
...
Zoe: Cos I’m the youngest and I’m the rebel.
(year 9, Highfields School)

This discussion includes different modes of thinking/theorising about siblingship: the making of claims about differences in parenting styles for different birth order positions and the referral to so called ‘tests’ which ‘prove’ the theories put forward about the salience of birth order position. There is also a challenge from Emma who utilises the same frames discussed earlier in the group (the concept of being ‘wrapped in bubble wrap’) to narrate her own experience, troubling the theory being produced collectively that it is older siblings whom parents overprotect. Although participants in this focus group could not identify a universal rule linking temperament and parenting styles to particular birth order positions, it is clear that participants understood parents to be fallible; regularly making mistakes and learning from these. These mistakes work to fix aspects of the process of ‘turning out’ in their children.

This idea of siblings being parented differently according to birth order position by parents who were learning and experimenting with parenting was a common one in
focus group discussions with these different parenting styles understood by most as profoundly affecting ways of being and becoming. In the following example from focus group 1, Shelley used the general premise of birth order-specific parenting styles to think about the complexities of her own experiences of being parented alongside her siblings in a similar way to Emma in the example above. Here Shelley highlights the idea that parents are learning and adapting their practices and she suggests that her mother parented her differently from her older brother after learning from the mistakes she made with him:

I think it’s like, you know like my mum? Like I’ve got an older brother and he’s left school but she weren’t so much on his case about being good, so when he left, and she thought that, you know, ‘cos he’s not done anything with his life, he’s just at home and that, she wants me to be an example for my little sister. So she’s more on my case than what she was with him, so, we were quite, one child to leave school and she knows that he, she wants the other child to become like...

(Focus Group 1, year 10, Highfields School)

Watching and learning from parents

As well as identifying parental ‘mistakes’ and fallibility as impacting upon ‘turning out’, young people were also reflexive about what they had picked up from their parents. The idea that inheritance in families occurs from watching (and learning from) parents was a common one that was raised in all focus groups and many interviews. Nick and Russell for example felt that their love of football had been passed on from their father and grandfather respectively, by both playing football and watching football on television together from a young age. Ethan and Aiden in separate interviews talked about inheriting a certain ‘sportiness’ from their parents in a similar way. Similarly, Naomi saw her interest in running as inherited from her granddad through spending a lot of time with him in early childhood and Sherise and Poppy - in separate interviews -

68 Although, as stated in the previous chapter, young people also spoke of watching and learning from their siblings, these instances were not discussed explicitly in terms of inheritance. This is probably because cultural discourses about inheritance tend to echo those in academia by highlighting vertical transmission.
talked of their talent for art as learnt from their parents. In the following example, Sofia is describing how she sees her talent for art as being transmitted in a similar way:

Oh I don’t know actually because when I was younger she [her mother] used to like take us to art galleries and stuff cos when I was growing up she was still at, she was at university [studying art] ... And so, I don’t know, she’s just been doing art...I don’t think I was born with it because I don’t think you can be born with any like subjects. I think it’s cos like when I was growing up my mum was doing her degree and stuff, so I don’t know, cos I was no good at art when I was little... [Now] I’m all right but my mum’s an artist so it like rubbed off on me...I think it’s cos like my mum’s always doing arty stuff and she’s got all art stuff in the house and she gives me ideas on what to do.

(year 9, Highfields School)

Here Sofia is reflecting upon how her mum’s abilities at art have ‘rubbed off’ on her. Rather than reverting to the use of ‘scientific’ language as a short hand for the complexities of inheritance, she is thinking of specific ways in which this transmission might have occurred, rejecting the notion of genetic inheritance altogether. It is significant here that Sofia cites her lack of talent during early childhood as evidence that it must have ‘rubbed off’ on her from her mum. ‘Rubbing off’ is a common phrase used to denote a form of transmission that takes place through being with somebody over a prolonged period. Other participants alluded to similar modes of transmission although they did not always use the same terminology (Paul in focus group 2 for example talked about ‘pick[ing] it up’ from his parents). In the case of Sofia, this ‘rubbing off’ is described in some detail and includes being taken to art galleries and growing up in a house where she was regularly exposed to art. Thus, rubbing off can be seen as a lived example of how propensities towards ‘turning out’, including through the transference of cultural capital, is transmitted and conceptualised.

As well as this idea of things ‘rubbing off’ through prolonged exposure, encouragement was identified as key to the way that talents and traits are transmitted through watching and learning from a parent, thus identifying the significance of the quality of relationships with parents. In many of the aforementioned examples of transmission through watching and learning, it was encouragement – the help given and enthusiasm
shown for sharing an activity – which was seen as key to the successful ‘rubbing off’ of a talent or trait. Encouragement was also cited as one of the key things that Homer and Marge Simpson could provide for their son Bart to help him to improve at school in response to the clip from The Simpsons. Some young people talked explicitly about being encouraged by parents or other relatives\textsuperscript{69}. Chanelle (who was interviewed at the Freedom Centre before she commenced year 9) for example discussed her enjoyment of dancing, a talent she felt she had inherited from her auntie due to their close relationship. As Chanelle put it, ‘I just think that my, like, auntie encouraged me to, like, dance.’ Encouragement was also openly discussed as important in focus group 4:

Katherine: So a few people have mentioned parents as being, erm, a bit of an influence. How do you think that your parents influence whether you’re good at a subject or not?
Boy1: Encourage you.
Boy2: Whether they encourage you and they, like, help you with your homework and stuff.
(year 9, Highfields School)

Encouragement is thus a way that the quality of a relationship is understood as affecting inheritance and shaping the process of ‘turning out’. Young people were very attuned to the motives and desires of parents (in terms of their experiences with their own parents as well as in a more general sense of how parents can behave). It was understood that young people might want to follow in their parents’ footsteps in terms of jobs, educational choices, hobbies and talents and that parents are likely to want this (as a girl in focus group 7 put it; ‘to make it like proud and that’). At the same time it was universally seen as unethical for a parent to ‘push’ their child into being like them, reflecting the ethical significance of the authentic self, outlined in chapter 2 (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991), with young people perceiving parents to have a moral obligation to ensure they do not obstruct their children’s ‘natural’ progression towards autonomy. This is reflected in the following comment from Farhana (in her individual

\textsuperscript{69}These relatives included uncles, aunts and grandparents but, as stated previously, lateral kin were not drawn upon in the specific context of inheritance (although the capital gained from siblings, discussed in chapter 7, certainly seems akin to ‘rubbing off’).\textsuperscript{70}
interview) about whether she could pursue a career as a doctor or a dentist to please her dad despite her own preference for studying arts and humanities-based subjects\textsuperscript{70}:

I think it would depend on the individual. I think I could do it [pursue a career in medicine or dentistry] but I think I would, you know, I’d just regret it really. I’d just be like ‘I don’t really like this’ you know, I’d hate it and I’d just be bored all the time...

(year 10, Highfields School)

The idea of ‘pushy parents’ is a familiar one and young people commonly referred to this ‘pushing’ along with feelings of ‘pressure’ as a negative outcome of the problematic desires of parents. It was commonly understood that parents are likely to want their children to pursue a similar career path to themselves and young people identified a tension here between parents’ good intentions for wanting their children to ‘follow in their footsteps’ and the downsides of following a path that is not chosen. This tension was reflected in most focus group discussions through talk of following a parent being a ‘good’ thing for the young person only if the parent’s job seems interesting and desirable. Furthermore, as one participant in focus group 7 suggested, when he/she stated, ‘Yeah but only cos they want the best for you’; ‘pushing’ can be morally acceptable if done for the right reasons. These generalised ideas about the aspirations of parents and possible conflicts with young people’s own aspirations for how they want to ‘turn out’ are illustrated in the following example from focus group 8:

Girl: (overlapping) Because like what your parents are like, if you wanna be summat like a builder they’re like more on the sporty side, they’d want you to be like a footballer or summat like that but you want to be a builder. So it, it could be like, erm, it could be like different to what your parents actually think you should do.

...

Girl: your mum might want you like to persuade you into a different career so you might try that.

...

\textsuperscript{70} Farhana’s dad’s aspirations for her are in line with the findings of other studies (see Modood and Acland, 1998) which suggest that South Asian parents often favour high status, stable professions in medicine, dentistry and law for their children.
Boy: Miss, could it just be ‘cos in football, I kick with the same foot as my dad and, er, and I play the same position as him. He really wants it for me.
(year 7, St Stephens School)

In this example participants seem to be assuming that parents would commonly want their children to ‘turn out’ like them in terms of pursuing the same career or even in terms of taking pleasure in and nurturing a resemblance such as favouring the same foot in football.

As well as an understanding that having a child ‘follow in their footsteps’ is something many parents yearn for, young people also recognised that parents can often desire that their children do not ‘turn out’ like them because they are not happy with their position in life or have regrets about their past educational choices and do not want their children to make the same mistakes. This sentiment links to the familiar idea that parents want their children to achieve more success than themselves and indicates that young people are aware of these desires in their parents and are likely to take them into account when making decisions about their own future as the following two quotes indicate:

Georgia [on why she thinks she’ll go to university]: My dad didn’t go and he really, really, really regrets it.
(year 7, Rural youth club)

Craig [on who he takes after] Er, probably my dad, but, like, I have gone like, he used to try and change it so I don’t follow him like thingy, cos like, he’s got a job and he doesn’t like that much and er, he doesn’t want me to end up with a job like that, he wants me to do qualifications and stuff and get, like, the job what I want.
(year 10, Estate youth club)

What is striking about both these examples is the level of awareness that the two young people have of how their parents feel about their own trajectory and the way things have ‘turned out’ for them. It is clear that these young people are making links between their parents’ feelings about how they themselves have ‘turned out’ and their
aspirations for their children. Put another way it is seen as inevitable that parents use their own biography as a basis for forming aspirations for their children. This is only seen as problematic when these aspirations become ‘pushing’ and young people are not able to ‘turn out’ in a way that remains ‘true’ to their own authentic selves.

Thus we have seen that parents are viewed by young people as fundamental to processes of ‘turning out’ in several key ways. First, parental fallibility and the mistakes they make whilst learning how to be parents are understood as primarily outside the control of young people who are born into a particular position in a series of siblings and are parented accordingly. Second, parents are understood as influencing processes of being and becoming through aspects of their own ways of being, skills and interests ‘rubbing off’ on their children. This ‘rubbing off’ again seems to be largely un-agentic but the importance placed on encouragement in facilitating this process indicates the role of the quality of the relationship for young people’s understandings of ‘rubbing off’. Finally, parents’ own biographies are seen as affecting that of their children in the transposing of feelings about this into aspirations for them.71 I now turn to look at how young people conceptualised these parenting practices as embedded (spatially, economically and temporally) within a wider environment.

The familial environment
As with the previous discussion about parents; sociological perspectives of socialisation, youth transitions, social class reproduction and educational decision making have always attended to the significance of the role of the wider ‘environment’ (be it culture, place, class, policy, economics and so forth) on individual life paths and trajectories. Young people in this study conceptualised the significance of ‘the environment’ in remarkably sociological ways. First, the general family environment was cited in a number of focus groups and interviews as a reason why siblings might

71 The sample of young people in this study was not large enough to ascertain whether there were any differences between those parented by two natural parents, lone parents, step parents and so on although these issues were clearly important and individual accounts of changes in family structure indicated that they can matter profoundly (and are reflected upon as such). Examples of this are raised in terms of family ‘eras’ in the following section of the chapter.
‘turn out’ differently, having experienced different environments at different times. Second, the ‘environment’ was also conceptualised as somewhat outside of the family and was commonly understood as affecting (usually hindering) parental attempts to control how their children ‘turn out’.

Despite the many configurations of sibling relationships, young people often felt that siblings would ‘turn out’ similarly due to a presumed shared upbringing. In focus group 1 for example, Farhana makes the comment; ‘We [her and her sisters] all seem to be like in the same bubble’, with the metaphor of a shared ‘bubble’ conjuring images of shared upbringing akin to ideas of habitus. Britney (in an interview at the Freedom Centre) articulated a similar view when she discussed how members of a family have ‘similar surroundings.’ Indeed, the word ‘environment’ was specifically used in 4 focus groups to denote ideas of cultural transmission, indicating how young people think with such sociologically significant concepts, although as outlined below this notion was more often used to explain differences between siblings rather than commonalities.

Of course siblings often do ‘turn out’ differently (Conley 2004) and even when siblings have grown up in the same household and have attended the same school, they experience their family, school and wider society differently. In this way their ‘environment’ can never be identical. The significance of birth order positions in the way school and family life are thought to be experienced has been identified in the previous chapter and earlier in this chapter we have seen how young people perceive siblings to be parented differently according to their birth order positions. Young people talked of other ways in which siblings experience their family environment differently. Olivia (year 7, rural youth club) for example cited the difference in the quality of her relationship with 2 of her 3 younger brothers as a reason for her similarity with one and difference from another: ‘I dunno [why one is similar and one is different], because I’ve had more influence on Christian cos maybe I liked him more, because he [her other brother] was stroppy and…’
Family relationships and practices are also constantly shifting and can go through periods of rapid change or upheaval. Thus, siblings can also experience different configurations or ‘eras’ of the family unit according to their age, so younger siblings who are still at home when their parents divorce or encounter a change in financial circumstances for example, are brought up in a very different environment from older siblings who may have left home by this stage. Young people were very aware of the impact of such different family ‘environments’ and were reflexive about the effect of this on themselves, perhaps more so than sociologists at times. For example, in the quote below Sofia is reflecting upon why her younger sister is very sporty whilst she has no interest in sport. In doing so she reflects specifically on the significance of the difference in ages between herself and her sister when their step father joined the family:

I don’t know [why her sister likes sport and she does not], I think because when my mum met my stepdad she [her sister] was only 3 and he was really into sport and stuff and when we were younger we used to like go out and play football and stuff, but I never liked it but she really liked it and stuff. So I think that’s why, but because my mum’s not sporty at all. I’m just like my mum.
(year 9, Highfields School)

Thus, Sofia’s step dad is understood as having had a greater influence on her sister because of her relatively young age when he joined the family. Young people also pointed to other factors which were understood as leading to siblings having different experiences and thus ‘turning out’ differently. Take the following discussion from focus group 9 where individual experiences (bullying and the hypothetical example of experiencing a car crash) are cited as examples of how siblings are likely to have different life experiences whilst growing up which will change them as people, setting them apart from their brothers and sisters:

(In response to a question asking why/how siblings might turn out to be good at different things):

Katherine: Yeah? Like you might have different experiences? What sort of things?
Thus it is clear from these discussions that young people understand the process of ‘turning out’ as, in part, influenced by luck or chance so that events and circumstances outside their control are understood as profoundly affecting how young people ‘turn out’.

This way of conceptualising the influence of the environments in which they live on ‘turning out’ as being based on chance means that wider political and cultural societal shifts could be understood as important. For example, the recent rise in university tuition fees will have affected some siblings differently depending on their age at the time the policy is implemented.72

Young people also conceptualised the wider environment as impacting more generally upon how things are passed on in families and upon the influence of parents particularly. As a child says about inheritance in focus group 9, ‘I’m more, I’m more as in both [genetic and environmental factors] because it could be passed down but then is takes an environment to carry it on doesn’t it?’ Thus it is seen that direct inheritance from parents cannot take root and impact upon the self without wider environmental factors (including immediate family circumstances as well as wider influences such as location and economic factors) also working to assist this continuation. This recognition that one’s environment beyond the immediate family is a crucial aspect of the development of the school self is clearly indicated in the following example from focus group 8:

72 Interestingly there was no talk of economic circumstances per se in the data beyond some oblique references to economic disadvantage in discussions of the difficulties of being raised on a ‘council estate’. This is likely a product of the questions I asked and my lack of prompting about economic circumstances which did not seem so important until I began to analyse the data.
(Participant mentions the idea of being brought up on a council estate)
Katherine:…Do other people agree with that, that sometimes people’s environment…?
: (overlapping) Sometimes the mum and dad try and tell ‘em that it’s bad to do that and make people stay inside ‘cos...
Girl: In council, erm, on like, erm, like younger people, they rely on er bigger sisters and brothers cos like they always copy them and like watching some kind of television are quite bad.
...
Girl: They might like copy it.
Girl: I was like on a council estate with loads of weird people and there’s loads of drug dealers and everything so my mum told me to stay away from them.
...
: You could be on a council estate, but you could be like bright and, cos it doesn’t...
(year 7, St Stephens School)

In this example, focus group participants are indicating that parenting is not everything in inheritance because the wider environment can limit a parent’s capacity to shape their child in the ‘right’ way. In addition it is clear that these young people are thinking quite sociologically about equality and social class in terms of providing barriers to parents’ ability to raise their children in the way they want to.

Young people also thought about cultural ways in which siblings might experience society differently. Gender was raised in all focus groups, particularly in relation to why Bart and Lisa Simpson are so different from one another. As well as commenting on how gender may affect Bart and Lisa’s relationships, particularly with their parents, young people were highly tuned into discourses surrounding boys’ underachievement in education, which, when raised in focus groups was usually dismissed as a ‘stereotype’. However, this stereotype was still understood as affecting young people’s ways of being (especially at school). This perspective is summed up by Sadia in the following quote from focus group 1:

He [Bart Simpson] probably did it [messed about instead of studying] because of the stereotypes and because of the different genders of them but I don’t really think it does matter like, I don’t think it’s true at all.
This idea that people experience society differently according to their gender is a familiar one. It is also reminiscent of Song’s (2008, 2010) work on mixed race siblings discussed in chapter 2 where differences in physical characteristics led to siblings experiencing racisms in society differently.

This section has outlined how young people’s understandings of how inheritance works can affect their conceptualisations of the process of ‘turning out’, particularly in terms of how aspects of this process ‘fix’ the possibilities for what they might become. I now turn to focus particularly on how young people made sense of the nature of personhood itself.

8.3 The nature of personhood

Young people’s understandings of how particular traits and tendencies are formed and how (if at all) these aspects of a person can be changed have significant consequences for being and becoming because they implicate ideas about aspects of a person that are already determined. This section of the chapter explores young people’s ideas about fixity and malleability within personhood, beginning with the idea that siblings often ‘turn out’ differently because it is ‘natural’ for them to be unique, before moving on to explore young people’s ideas about being ‘a natural’. I then detail the seemingly paradoxical finding that young people also place the ethic of ‘trying’ at the heart of understandings of personhood. The paradox between ideas of a ‘natural’, fixed inner self and the ethic of trying and the moral belief in agency are explored in terms of understandings of ‘potential’ which, rather than being understood as a finite entity, was universally equated with trying and effort.
8.3.1 The fixed, inner, ‘natural’ self

The ‘natural-ness’ of being unique

There were a number of references in the data to the idea that it is ‘natural’ for siblings to be different. Take the following example in which Courtney talks about how and why her siblings are so different from each other:

Katherine: So, how come you think that, like, you can have a family of people and some of them will turn out, like, to do well at school and some of them won’t and some of them will be, like, naughtier than others?
Courtney: (overlapping) Cos everyone’s different aren’t they?
Katherine: …is everybody just born different do you reckon or, how do you reckon it kind of works?
Courtney: (overlapping) Everyone’s personalities are different, and people have different interests and everything, so things what they’re not interested in they just thingy…
(year 11, interviewed at Estate youth club with her friend Emily)

Courtney’s answer to my question asking whether people can be ‘born different’ suggests that this is simply the way it is and implies that it is almost unnecessary to speculate about how such differences occur, because they are simply a ‘natural’ phenomenon.

Becoming different from a sibling and being uniquely individual was seen by some as a ‘natural’ aspect of the process of becoming an adult. In the following example from focus group 3, young people are talking about copying - or being generally influenced by - a sibling (particularly older siblings) in a way reminiscent of Mead’s dialogical self (1934) and Burkitt’s ‘social selves’ (2008) outlined in chapter 2, but it is interesting that siblings are thought to naturally outgrow this behaviour as they ‘find themselves’ and become their own unique, autonomous person:

Emma: Sometimes like, cos like when you’re growing up and stuff like when you’re like if you’ve got an older brother or sister then, erm, they influence like yourself and stuff.
Hayley: (overlapping) You see stuff and then you follow them, yeah.
Haashim (overlapping): My brother’s into Scarface and now I’m getting drawn into it.
... Hayley: But then like when you get to a certain age, yeah, then you can like then go off on your own like and you find yourself and then...
Jake: You do it subconsciously.
Haashim: Yeah!
Jake: You subconsciously copy people.
Haashim: Jake you’re right!
(year 9, Highfields School)

In this example, being like a sibling is associated with a ‘natural’ stage of development which occurs early in the process of ‘turning out’ before the person is understood to be ‘finished’. It is interesting that Jake uses the concept of the subconscious to make sense of how this childhood copying occurs, a concept heavily associated with the culture of the psy sciences outlined by Rose (1998) as described in chapter 2 and one which, in this case, works to absolve the sibling from judgement for ‘copying’ - which otherwise could have negative connotations in terms of the onus of maintaining an authentic, autonomous self.

Rather than shared genetic heritage and upbringing working to make siblings similar, some young people saw these processes as contributing to difference. These discussions were closely linked with the ideas of an authentic self and the ethic of an autonomous self (Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991) outlined in chapter 2 in that these young people understood siblings as unique. As the use of discourses about the authentic self suggest, there is also a morality to this uniqueness. For example, in the following focus group 9 discussion, young people are imagining a world where people have the same genetic makeup and it is clear that the participants find the idea of a lack of ‘natural’ uniqueness and individuality abhorrent, particularly the idea of being the same as one’s parents:

[If people's genes were exactly the same]
: there’s no point trying sommat new.
...

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You’d be copying your own parents cos they, if you have their genes then you’ll be like the same as them.

Yeah but just cos you inherited it doesn’t mean you have to like use it. You could just do something else instead.

(year 9, St Stephens School)

Despite the ‘naturalness’ of being unique and the strong desire demonstrated by young people in this example not to resemble others, the idea that one does not have to ‘use’ what one has genetically inherited introduces an element of individual choice, even in a situation like this where genetic heritage is understood as completely shared. Thus, issues of fixity and malleability and the role of agency in understandings of personhood are understood in complex ways and are not conceptualised in simple binary terms (despite the language available to discuss these ideas largely being split in this way). I now explore these complexities further through young people’s understandings of what it means to be ‘a natural’.

On being ‘a natural’

All young people were familiar with the concept of being ‘a natural’, particularly in the context of academic abilities and other talents, and in all groups young people cited school subjects - such as physical education and art - as those particularly associated with some sort of ‘natural’ ability, although other subjects - such as mathematics and science - were occasionally also mentioned. Various definitions of being ‘a natural’ were provided with some disagreement over whether it was something which could be achieved through effort/practice and could be learnt or acquired in some way. The most common definition however (cited in all focus groups) was that being ‘a natural’ meant being able to excel at a particular activity without practicing or receiving any training. This ability to do something immediately is what makes it seem ‘natural’. The following discussion from focus group 7 provides a typical example:

Boy: That’s [being a natural] just when you’re purely skilled at

Natural trouble causers

Katherine: Yeah. What does it mean?

Girl: When you’re good at something.
Girl: That it comes to you natural, like you can do it straight off.
Katherine: Right. Okay. And is there anything you can do to make yourself a natural at something?
Josh: No.
Girl: No, it just comes to you.
Boy: It’s like nature, it’s always there and it’s there.
(year 10, St Stephens School)

This idea that the term ‘natural’ implies something that is in you and is a fundamental part of who you are, as opposed to clearly coming from somewhere or someone, came across strongly in all focus group discussions. In 5 groups (including following the discussion in focus group 7 cited above) such ‘natural’ talents were narrated as ‘gifts’, either explicitly or using different terminology, such as Lauren in focus group 3 who said, ‘I think you’re just born with a few good things that you’re given good at.’ (my emphasis). Similarly, a girl in focus group 8 depicted a sort of hidden gift that exists within you regardless of whether it is utilised; ‘You might just have something you don’t know about and you’ve not tried it yet.’ (my emphasis). This concept of a ‘gift’ denotes ideas of luck or chance as playing a role in the process of ‘turning out’ because there does not seem to be any particular logic or reason why some young people have a ‘gift’ and others do not, although how the gift is utilised is understood as requiring agency. In the following example from focus group 9, young people are explicitly discussing being born with a gift in a way typical of the focus group discussions and are drawing upon their own experiences to assess whether this gift is something non-reducible which simply exists or whether it is something ‘passed down’ from parents, akin to some of the other modes of transmission discussed in the previous section of this chapter:

: You do something new and you’re good at it, then they’ll just say like, ‘You’re a natural.’
...
: It’s like starting a new sport or something ... and you’re already good at it.
...
: Like born with a gift to do it.
Yeah, and I think like you’re born, you may be born with that gift because of, it’s probably passed down through parents ... because like I’m not being big-headed or anything, but I know I’m good at sport ... and my dad has always been good at sport and everything.
(year 9, St Stephens School)

Within this premise of ‘a gift’ being something that simply exists within a person was an idea that, although one may not be born with a gift for a particular school subject, one can be born with a gift that enables one to excel at certain school subjects. Thus, being a ‘natural’ at a school subject was understood as being in possession of an inner ‘gift’ which is particularly helpful for achieving in that subject. The example of having an inner gift of ‘confidence’ was most commonly cited in relation to this (cited in 4 focus groups). Take the following examples from focus groups 1 and 3:

FG 1
Katherine: Yeah and you said Drama might be something you’re born good at?
Lindsay: Yeah....Well, erm, some people are like more shy and stuff so...
Hadara: Yeah, like I think you’re born with confidence.
(year 10, Highfields School)
***
FG3
Katherine: Are there some subjects that you’re more of a natural at?
...
Annabel: Drama. I get buzzes out of drama.
Katherine: Drama ok. Is that something that you’re born with or...?
: I think that people are born with things.
: Yeah, it’s born with the confidence.
(year 9, Highfields School)

As well as being commonly perceived as some sort of personal ‘gift’ which simply exists within the individual, the focus groups contained discussions echoing those about modes of inheritance outlined earlier where being a ‘natural’ was seen as something which could be inherited (most commonly from parents) both genetically and through watching/learning. Indeed, learning something from a young age was seen by some as fundamental to becoming ‘a natural’, so that if one leaves it too late to take up a
particular hobby one will never be ‘a natural’ at it. Thus, it seems that certain possibilities for how one might ‘turn out’ in the future become closed as time passes. Take the following example from focus group 8 where participants kept returning to the adage ‘practice makes perfect’:

(On whether it is possible to be ‘a natural’ if you are not ‘born with a gift’ or have it ‘in your blood’)
: You have to learn it.
Katherine: Can you do anything about that or...
: Well yeah.
: If you learn at a young age then you probably could.
Girl: Practice makes perfect.
...
Girl: You’d have to pick it up like when you were young.
Jade: practice makes perfect.
(year 7, St Stephens School)

Other focus group participants drew upon hypothetical examples or their own experience in order to assess why it is crucial to start practising at a young age in order to ensure one ‘turns out’ to possess that particular talent or ability. In focus group 7 one girl is thinking through the various ways one can be born good at sports and athletics. She concludes that it is related to ‘like the way you’ve grown up...Like you start going to all the clubs when you were dead young then like developed like your speed and all that...so you’re better.’ Similar opinions were expressed by Ahmed in focus group 1 with regards being ‘a natural’ footballer, where it is seen as important to have played from a young age, before starting secondary school, in order to be a talented player on the school team:

Ahmed: Like cos if like say someone’s like never played football until year 7 they’re most likely not to be good but it depends (sighs), I don’t know really...Erm, cos I started like when I was young and just like build it up at school.
(year 10, Highfields School)
So it is clear that young people have a sense that the early years are crucial in terms of developing talents akin to being ‘a natural’. Normative ideas about the significance of learning in early years coupled with young people’s own observations and experiences combine in young people’s construction of self, of their own talents and following that, their likely trajectories. The following example from my interview with Ed, Olivia and Charles provides a detailed example of the privileging of early development in young people’s understandings of what is a ‘natural’. The example also indicates the role of family stories and memories as outlined in chapter 2 explored in the previous chapter in relation to sibling identity, in constructing a trait as ‘natural’.

**Ed and his love of tractors**

Ed was interviewed at Rural Youth Club with his friends Olivia and Charles. He is in year 7 at a local school. Ed is widely understood as having a particular interest in tractors and when he arrived at the youth club the club leader greeted him in front of the whole group as ‘tractor Ed’ and made tractor noises as he sat down. Indeed, when Ed said during his interview that he has ‘a hobby of driving tractors’ Olivia and Charles audibly groaned having obviously heard the story of Ed’s tractor obsession many times before. In fact, it was difficult to get Ed to talk about any other aspects of his hobbies or interests outside tractors, with every question resulting in another wild and wonderful tractor tale:

> Ed: I’ve got a hobby of driving tractors.
> Katherine: Apart from driving tractors, have you got anything else?
> Ed: And racing combine harvesters on the other side of the fence, and then my mate jumped on the other side of this fence and cut his hand, and got his hand cut off by the combine harvester…

When asked where his love of tractors comes from Ed responds with a story that Olivia and Charles have heard ‘a million times’ about seeing a tractor on television at the moment of his birth. Obviously this is a story which has been told to him by his parents and which (whether ‘true’ or not) has been constructed within the family to account for his particular obsession with tractors. The moment of his birth is a particularly
crucial moment in the story in that it gives Ed’s love for tractors a permanence, a significance and a status akin to ‘natural’, whilst also introducing an element of ethereality. It also ties tractors to Ed personally so that, although later in the interview it transpires that his dad drives tractors, tractors are part of Ed’s self and are a result of the serendipitous moments of his birth as opposed to passed on or inherited:

Katherine: Where do you think your love of tractors and combine harvesters came from? Is there anybody else in your family who’s like that?
Ed: No.
Olivia: here it comes. I know the story, he’s told me a million times.
Olivia and Charles cover their ears.
Katherine: (laughing)...Go on then Ed.
Ed: It’s probably when I opened my eyes, it’s probably the first thing I saw. My mum and dad said that when I, when I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was the telly and on the telly I saw a digger.

Ed’s love of tractors is therefore ‘natural’ and a fundamental part of who he is because of the way the story of how this ‘gift’ came to him has been constructed and because of the significance of the moment in the life course that it came to him (birth). In the following quote Ed describes becoming emotional at the very sight of tractors, offering an insight into how profound the effect of the construction of his self as inextricably linked to tractors has been:

Ed: On one of those, like, 60 minute makeover things I’m watching, I’m just looking at this digger. It’s there and I’m just looking at this digger working and then it shows these people and I’ll start crying. I don’t know why.

Ed does not cry on seeing tractors because he simply loves them but because his love of tractors is a fundamental part of who he is and this provides an example of the effect on the self that coming to see oneself as ‘a natural’ at a particular subject or hobby can have.

73 Although of course Ed’s environment enabled him to have access to tractors in the first place.
8.3.2 The ethic of trying and the moralities of agency

The aforementioned discussion of being ‘a natural’ indicated that young people see aspects of personhood as coming about through serendipity and chance. Conversely young people also stressed the significance of effort and trying in their accounts of being and becoming a person. Sayer (2005a, 2005b), as outlined in chapter 5, points to the morality of narrating one’s class position in terms of effort and tenacity as opposed to privilege or luck and I argue that the way young people emphasised agency and trying in their accounts of personhood reflects a similar morality and one that is regularly reinforced for young people at school. Aspects of this theme were touched upon in the previous section on being ‘a natural’ in reference to the role of practising and the adage, ‘practice makes perfect’ which was also repeated in focus group 9 in reference to the idea that you can become a natural through sheer will and practice. As one participant in this group said, ‘You could push yourself... and then with all the effort you could just become good at it. Practice makes perfect.’

The ethic of trying is closely linked to the ethic, outlined at points throughout this thesis, of the autonomous, authentic self in that making a choice and following one’s own path are understood as necessary pre-cursors to trying hard. This link is clear in the following example from focus group 3 where Sasha comments that skills and talents come about initially through enjoyment: ‘I would say how you enjoy it. Cos if you don’t enjoy it, I don’t think people try as hard.’

This ethic of trying touched upon in the above example is a fundamental aspect of the official rules of the school game and young people have it drilled in to them (by teachers, parents and other family members as well as through examples from popular culture such as books, television programmes and so on) that it is highly desirable to try one’s best, and that trying pays off in terms of achievement. Thus, although as stated in the previous section, many young people thought that being ‘a natural’ meant not having to try or to learn, participants generally seemed reluctant to advocate that ‘naturals’ should not try at all. As a boy in focus group 6 put it, ‘Even if you’re born good at it it doesn’t mean that you still don’t have to try’ and there was a
strong feeling that even if one is not ‘a natural’, through trying and persevering one could still improve as the following example from focus group 8 indicates:

: Yeah [you can still improve], you take lessons.
Boy1: You just keep on.
Boy2: You just keep on.
Boy1: Yeah you gotta keep having lessons.
Girl1: If it’s what you wanna do.
Girl2: Start practising it.
(year 7, St Stephens)

In order to further pursue the role of agency in the acquisition and development of talents and skills and the role of trying within this I now look at discussions around the concept of potential from focus groups 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Potential and the agentic self
All participants in the St Stephen’s focus groups were familiar with the concept of potential as something which teachers often referred to in the following ways:

FG8
Katherine: What sorts of things do they [teachers] say?
Girl: Like you’ve got a lot of potential in a subject.
Boy: Or you’ve got no potential at all.
Boy: In like your primary school say they get an idea that you’ve got a high potential to be good at a subject.
Girl: Aim to get your potential.
...
Jade: And then you’ll do well ’cos you’ve got your potential.
(year 7)
***
FG9
: Erm, [teachers say] that you should like exceed your potential or something like that.

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74 The discussion topic of potential was only introduced into the focus groups held at St Stephen’s school because it arose as a topic of interest after the focus groups at Highfields had taken place.
(year 9)
***
FG6
Boy: You’ve got potential to get A’s in GCSE, blah, blah.
(year 10)
***
FG7
Katherine:...how do people talk about it?
Josh: A LOT! ‘You have potential to be a wonderful lad.’
Girl: ‘To go far in your work’ and then...
Josh: (overlapping) You have potential to go in prison.

Interestingly young people seemed less certain about what potential actually meant. Most referred to a vague idea of potential as something one must try to ‘live up to’ (FG7) whilst also commonly refuting the idea that it is a finite entity that exists within a person. Thus, in all focus groups potential was linked to the idea of trying, but this ethic of trying one’s best is at odds with another prevalent idea, that people have different degrees of potential within them (in the same way as being ‘a natural’ is a ‘gift’ which one either does or does not possess). This paradox led to a great deal of debate about whether potential is universal and about the role of agency within this.

In the following example from focus group 9 young people are discussing how potential is judged, who gets to decide how much potential an individual has and whether everybody has equal potential:

Katherine: Okay. Who decides then what your potential is do you think?
: Yourself.
: No. Well that’s only your self assessment innit?
: When the teacher assesses you.
: really the levels you get in SATs...kind of potential for us like if you...in year 7, that’s kind of like what your potential is, for the GCSE...
Katherine: ...do some people have more potential than others?
: Yeah.
: I think so.
: Yeah.
: Maybe if somebody’s like disabled and another person’s not.
: I think you know among yourself as well who’s got more potential like than, than yourself.
Katherine: When you say ‘among yourself’, do you know that like just you or ...
: No, as a, as a group, like if we, we know here who’s more capable or not than others.
(year 9, St Stephens School)

In this example, issues of power come across strongly and it appears that potential is judged by teachers, standardised tests and by other pupils; any idea that a person can judge his/her own potential is soon dismissed. The group therefore seems to be veering towards an opinion that people have different levels of potential, although it is only disabled children who are seen as possibly having less potential.

This was the only group where participants felt that all young people did not have equal amounts of potential. In other groups the link between potential and trying was so great that it could not be understood as unequally distributed. In the following example from focus group 7 young people link potential to future trajectories, describing it as ‘like you’re going somewhere in life’ and ‘like you’re going far in what you’re doing.’ The following example from this discussion indicates how trying is fundamental to potential and therefore to one’s future trajectory in life:

Girl: Yeah. But everyone’s got it but some people are just lazy.
Girl: They all have but some of ‘em are not bothered and...
(year 10, St Stephens School)

Later in the discussion the same group agree that potential can be changed through sheer will and determination. As one girl says, one’s potential can be changed by ‘like putting time into it and you can work hard and…’

A similar discussion about levels of agency within potential took place in focus group 5. Here ideas about transmission from parents are evoked in a discussion about whether people are born with different amounts of potential and are met with some opposition from those who see potential as completely subject to individual agency:
Katherine: So who thinks that some people are born with more potential?
Boy: I do...Cos if your parents are willing to do something, you’re either born with it, they teach you how to do it.
Girl: I, I don’t agree...Potential is something that you can achieve yourself, not that, it’s not something that your parents leave.
...
Sasha: Everyone has different smarts and different talents.
...
Boy: Oh that’s from primary that.
...
Sasha: Because people get interested in different things, not just one thing.
(year 7, St Stephens School)

Here Sasha’s comment about the unique nature of ‘smarts and talents’ is also revealing because as well as being reminiscent of ideas raised in the section on being ‘a natural’ (that talents and skills exist within the individual independent of external factors) and thus at odds with ideas about everybody having equal potential, another boy raises the point that ‘that’s from primary that’ indicating that there is an institutional discourse about the uniqueness of skills and talents employed at primary school which is reminiscent of the role of ‘experts’ in the proliferation of psychological understandings of the self outlined by Rose (1998) and explained in chapter 2 of this thesis.

8.4 Conclusion
This chapter has indicated some of the ways in which young people make sense of how being and becoming works. The chapter has highlighted the ways young people theorise inheritance as a complex tangling of modes of transmission which incorporate ideas about the role of the ‘environment’, including parents and parenting practices, alongside those concerning genetic inheritance and the pervading idea of a ‘unique’, non-reducible self. The chapter has also demonstrated the nuances involved with young people’s understandings of the nature of personhood as both ‘fixed’ (in terms of a ‘natural’ inner self) and malleable (in terms of a focus upon ‘trying’). It is argued that
these ideas about the fixity of aspects of personhood may work to close or open particular doors in their effect upon young people’s understandings of their own potential to be, for example, a talented artist or sports person. These theories and generalisations about inheritance and personhood were found to contain strong moral and normative elements - such as an onus upon young people to ‘try’ in order to achieve their ‘potential’ and upon parents to avoid overly ‘pushing’ their child.

We have seen that young people can be highly reflexive, sophisticated and ‘sociological’ in their thinking about the complexities of how who they are is influenced by the familial environment in which they are brought up, the accident of their birth order and the fallibility of their parents as well as about the role of ‘nature’ and of agency in the formation of their particular talents. Young people drew upon divergent modes of knowledge which incorporated scientific ‘truths’, knowledge of the lives of others (including celebrities and fictional characters), moral and normative opinions as well as observations, memories and narratives from their own relationships. Young people’s theories of being and becoming arose from an interesting relational assemblage which, in addition to incorporating the orders of knowledge mentioned above, was produced in the focus group interactions themselves where the methodological context encouraged young people to form an opinion and to defend it in a group debate. The data presented in this chapter were not about any one person offering one opinion but instead demonstrate how opinions come into being relationally (in relation to the group as a whole). This is reminiscent of Gubrium and Holstein’s (2009) concept of ‘narrative environments’ because the narratives represented here are a product of young people’s individual relationships and experiences, wider normative and cultural ideas as well as the methodological context in which the narratives were ‘activated’.

Ultimately this chapter has pointed towards the importance of lay understandings of the social world. Young people in this study have demonstrated complex and nuanced understandings of being and becoming which allow for the holding of seemingly contradictory ideas. Understandings of inevitability and voluntarism, for example, co-existed in young people’s accounts and personhood was conceptualised as fixed, inner
and ‘naturally’ unique whilst also incorporating ideas of agency and ‘trying’. Thus, young people conceptualise processes of being and becoming in a way that, although seeming contradictory in sociological terms, make sense to them and their lives. This is reminiscent of work focusing upon the ways people understand kinship as working in their lives such as Mason’s (2008) identification of a lay fascination with kinship, Edwards’s idea of a lay ‘expertise in kinship’ (2000: 204) and Carsten’s call for a focus on ‘indigenous idioms’ (2000: 4) of kinship. The lay concept of ‘turning out’ seems to capture some of the nuances and complexities that are part of young people’s understandings of being and becoming and in the final chapter of this thesis I turn to reflect upon the potential of ‘turning out’ as a sociological concept.

The following chapter further explores the role of more abstract normative understandings of how the process of ‘turning out’ itself works in shaping young people’s perceptions of who they are and who they have the potential to become.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The aims of this research were to explore young people’s experiences of and orientations towards ideas of being and becoming. I aimed to pay particular attention to the role of relationality in this process, especially that of sibling relationships, as well as how young people themselves make sense of and theorise processes of being and becoming, explicitly in terms of their ideas about what is fixed and what is malleable about who they are and who they have the potential to become. Rather than producing generalisable findings about how ‘turning out’ is experienced by all young people, or by particular groups of young people, this thesis has illuminated certain understandings, ways of thinking and processes which, although inevitably experienced differently by different young people, can be extended beyond the narratives of those sampled in this project through the identification of wider sociological and explanatory elements in the data.

I begin this chapter by reflecting upon the issues of relationality and fixity/malleability that were highlighted in this research. First I look at the role of relationality in shaping young people’s experiences of and understandings of being and becoming, arguing that young people can form a sense of who they are and who they might become in the future whilst embedded in webs of relationships with others. I also argue that the contextual and relational approach taken in this research has highlighted the overlapping nature of the social circles in which young people are embedded. Second I look at young people’s understandings of processes of being and becoming which I describe using the lay term ‘turning out’. In this section of the chapter I argue that, despite the relational and contextual nature of being and becoming through time, for young people aspects of these processes can feel as though they become fixed along the way.
In the second half of the chapter I discuss ‘turning out’ as a sociological concept and argue that, as a concept which was derived from the data, ‘turning out’ suggests a form of lay theorisation which forces sociologists to think differently about young people’s lives. ‘Turning out’ is not something that is always or automatically achieved in and through adulthood and I will argue that, unlike the existing concept of ‘transition’ with its focus on becoming, ‘turning out’ captures ways of being through time - evoking the idea that the process of ‘turning out’ could one day be ‘finished’ whilst at the same time always proceeding through time. It will also be argued that the concept of ‘turning out’ allows for the marriage of what, for sociologists, can seem like contradictory understandings of the social world in that it denotes a form of lay theorising which is not characterised by dualisms such as ‘individual versus relational’ or ‘social versus biological’. Furthermore, in lay terms the concept denotes a general sense of both being and becoming as a particular sort of person which is not quite explained by concepts of habitus, the self or identity. Although incorporating educational outcomes, occupation, social class, economic capital and so on, the concept of ‘turning out’ also denotes more general ideas of ‘turning out’ as a particular ‘type’ of person in terms of temperament, humour, looks, talents, orientations, tastes, character and so on which helps to broaden the ways sociologists can understand young people’s lives.

9.2 A relational approach to being and becoming

The relational approach adopted in this research has facilitated an understanding of young people as being and becoming within webs of relationships and in a range of contexts. We have seen for example how labelling in school, feelings of similarity and difference within friendship groups and the use of siblings as a foil for one’s own progression through life can work to inform young people’s sense of who they are as well as who they have been in the past and who they can become in the future. These relationships can be imbued with interpersonal politics and power dynamics which can affect the transmission of ideas about being and becoming through the communication of stories and memories. We have also seen that young people often have strong ideas about how aspects of being and becoming can be transmitted
through their relationships with others, particularly parents and siblings, as well as about the moral and normative aspects of the role of others in shaping being and becoming.

Existing approaches to being and becoming can be criticised for failing to account adequately for relationality. Theories of youth transitions to adulthood, for example, were criticised for assuming that only parents can provide young people with a ‘route map’ to adulthood. Similarly it was argued that in Bourdieu’s (1990) theory of habitus and Mead’s (1934) approach to socialisation is an implicit assumption that ways of being are transmitted predominantly from parents to children in early childhood. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s (1990, 1997[1986]) approach to social transmission was criticised for ‘black boxing’ the family and for paying little attention to how habitus and capital are actually transmitted through socialisation. By conceptualising young people as embedded within webs of relationships through time, this thesis has provided a different lens on processes of being and becoming. For example, by taking a relational approach it has been possible to explore the lived ambivalences and politics at the heart of the relational way that being and becoming is lived by young people. This research has also enabled an incorporation of the role of sibling relationships in the process of ‘turning out’ - made possible through the widening of the lens from the narrow focus on parent-child relationships inherent to the above approaches - and in doing so has clearly indicated that siblings can be a valuable source of capital as well as a provider of ‘route maps’ to adulthood.

Although all young people will have different ideas and experiences of how their relationships affect who they are and who they have the potential to become in the future, this thesis has pointed to some of the processes whereby young people can negotiate being and becoming as a person who is embedded in webs of relationships over time. These processes are generalisable in ways reminiscent of Thomson’s claim, highlighted in chapter 3 of this thesis, that an in depth analysis of personal lives can enable researchers to read more general social processes from individual lives in what she terms the ‘universal singular’ (2009: 3). For example, in chapter 4 of this thesis, the case study of sisters Anna and Francesca highlighted issues and processes such as the
presence of links between relational dynamics in home and school; the embedded, relational nature of identity construction and the ways that the sisters’ more abstract theories and understandings of the nature of personhood and transmission are informed by their lived relationships at school and home. Thus, the case study has highlighted broader themes and processes which are applicable beyond the specific lives of Anna and Francesca and can be helpful ways of making sense of young people’s lives more generally.

Just as the case study in chapter 4 highlighted the interconnected nature of aspects of being and becoming, despite its arrangement into chapters denoting different ‘spotlights’ this thesis has indicated overlaps between these spotlights. For example, we have seen that sibling relationships carry over into the arena of school, that one can benefit from the siblings of one’s friends and that young people’s understandings of how ‘turning out’ works can implicate orientations towards school. Simmel (1922[1955]) observed that in the modern world individuals are members of a number of intersecting social circles in which they occupy distinctive social positions. Thus, individuals are seen as occupying the intersection between multiple social circles and as they move between these social circles their personalities and identities can shift. Mische and White (1998) have used the similar concept of ‘netdoms’ (network domains) to explore the processes whereby identity and self switch between overlapping networks of relationships and they point to tensions and difficulties within this process.

Thus, in order to pay attention to the ways in which personhood and ways of being are formed through social relationships it is important that the domains, or circles, in which this relational self is negotiated are not separated from each other. Not only do young people negotiate processes of being and becoming in multiple contexts and in relation to multiple sets of relationships and groupings, but negotiations of being and becoming in the contexts of school, home and youth clubs and in relation to relationships within these contexts - with siblings, friends, parents, grandparents, cousins, uncles, aunts, peers, teachers and more - are mutually informative so that, for example, relationalities at home carry over into those at school and vice versa. This has
been particularly notable in terms of sibling relationships where, not only do siblings often physically occupy the same spaces of home, school and youth club, but the process of the ‘rubbing off’ of a sibling’s reputation in these contexts can mean these relationships are also carried between contexts in the imaginary. This thesis has highlighted the complexities of these overlaps and we have seen that, at the same time as being carried over between contexts, sibling relationships can be practiced differently in different contexts. Thus, the use of spotlights in this thesis has entailed an approach that is relational and contextual in terms of paying attention to the ways that relationships inform the process of being and becoming but also in terms of attending to different domains pertinent to the negotiation of being and becoming and how they relate to each other.

The concept of ‘turning out’, which has emerged from the data, provides a way of thinking which does not automatically separate the domains of home, school, youth club and so on and the relationalities they involve. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, to ask about how somebody is ‘turning out’ tends to denote a more general sense of ‘turning out’ as a person in a number of contexts and as such does not automatically apply parameters to its interpretation. In the following section I explore young people’s ideas and understandings about fixity, malleability and ‘turning out’. The concept of ‘turning out’ is also helpful in this context because it denotes a process that is both ongoing through time, whilst also implying that it can one day become ‘finished’.

9.3 The ‘fixing’ of ‘turning out’

When taken together, the various spotlights of this thesis point to an understanding of being and becoming as a process which, although ongoing, can feel as though aspects of it become fixed along the way as the potential for how one might ‘turn out’ becomes gradually more limited. It helps here to conceptualise the process of ‘turning out’ using the metaphor of painting a picture. The picture may never be finished but the more details that are added over time the more one can guess what the ‘finished’ picture is likely to look like and the less potential there is for it to become something
different. At some point enough of the picture is completed so that one is able to imaginatively fill in the blanks and ‘see’ what the finished product will be. There is a multitude of ways in which being and relating in the world might ‘fix’ aspects of who we are and who we have the potential to become and these are likely to be experienced differently by different young people depending upon other social factors affecting their lives. However, the general idea that ‘turning out’ can feel as though it becomes fixed is likely to have resonance beyond the particularities of the young people in this sample. The relational, contextual approach of this research has revealed five key ways in which aspects of this process of ‘fixing’ can occur.

First, the thesis has revealed how the labels that are applied to and by others can limit opportunities for the presentation of self. This labelling was explored in relation to school (but was also present in labelling of and by family members and friends, particularly in relation to others in the friendship or family group). Although not limited to the school context, it has been argued that the particular challenges of managing a presentation of self in the oppositional fields of both the official and non official school can result in particularly rigid hierarchical groupings and labels. Although young people in the sample were rarely willing or able to place themselves definitively within this hierarchy, it was clear that the practices of lumping and splitting (Zerubavel, 1991, 1996) in the labelling of others meant that young people often felt that once ‘lumped’ into a certain group or ‘known’ to be a certain way it became difficult for them to change the way they presented themselves. This feeling of the limitations of potential for change was reflected in the commonly accepted practice of presenting different versions of self in school and in other contexts. In summary, practices of labelling in certain contexts can necessitate particular presentations of self, thus limiting the potential to be or become different in some way.

Second, the thesis has indicated how identity is produced in relation to others. This form of fixing is similar to that outlined above and often involves the creation of labels. However rather than involving processes of lumping and splitting, this relational identity construction takes place from a much closer vantage point, within existing relationships. For example, the thesis has indicated that young people’s ideas about the sort of person they are and can be is often formed in relation to friends and
siblings. In the context of both these relational forms (which are not mutually exclusive) young people’s identities seemed to be constructed in terms of where they fit into the group as a whole. This was particularly apparent in relation to siblingship where young people were constructed in terms of being one of a series of siblings. This means that young people’s sense of being an individual with certain characteristics, tendencies and talents can be contingent upon the particularities of their group membership. Furthermore, these relational identities can be collectively constructed, particularly in families, through the collective production of stories and memories. There can be a politics to how this is done with young people often having less power than adults to manage or negotiate their relational identity.

The third way that possibilities for ‘turning out’ were found to be limited is through the temporality of young people’s lives. There was a sense of inevitably about certain aspects of progression through the life course which was particularly profound in terms of the ways young people imagined their educational trajectories, with many imagining that the temporal nature of the education system itself would automatically bring about a change. This was also present in more general remarks about growing up and maturing, for example in focus group reflections on the likelihood of ‘growing out’ of certain tastes and interests. Regardless of whether these imagined changes came to fruition in the lives of the young people who took part in the study, it is significant that they tended to see temporality as dictating certain behavioural and attitudinal changes. Interestingly, relationships with older siblings were found to be pivotal in this process, with older siblings often providing a route map through the education system - and for ‘growing up’ more generally - which, when compounded with prevalent assumptions about relatedness and resemblance between siblings, was found to have a particularly personal effect on young people’s orientations towards their future.

Fourth, this thesis has indicated that young people’s own ideas and theories about modes of transmission and personhood can implicate how they see the possibilities for ‘turning out’. For example, it has been demonstrated that the possession of a talent can be understood as a ‘gift’ existing within a person, and as such it would follow that it is not possible to acquire such a talent through sheer will. Similarly, particular ways of being were understood as affected by the environment in which young people are
raised and again this suggests a certain inevitability to the ways influences beyond the control of the individual can affect how they ‘turn out’. However, at the same time ideas about agency, potential and the ethic of trying in order to acquire a talent were also emphasised, suggesting a less fixed idea of the future with possibilities for an agentic shaping of how one will ‘turn out’.

Finally, and closely related to the ways young people’s understandings of modes of transmission can fix or open up possibilities for ‘turning out’, a strong theme of the thesis was that young people’s moralities and ethical opinions also affected the process. For example, there was a moral dimension to following one’s own path at school, of being different from one’s friends, of adhering to normative ‘rules’ about how siblings in particular structural positions in the family ought to behave towards one another and there was also an ethical dimension to the importance placed on trying and agency in shaping talents and trajectories. Interestingly, this research indicates that none of these moralities are wholeheartedly adopted by young people - and some of these moral positions were found to divert greatly from the realities of how young people spoke of living their lives. However, these moralities were still lived with and as such are likely to factor in to young people’s understandings about who they are and who they might become.

9.4 ‘Turning out’ as a sociological concept

As we have seen in the previous discussions of the relational aspects of being and becoming and the ways these aspects can be experienced and understood as ‘fixed’, the lay concept of ‘turning out’ is useful because it does not automatically imply the separation of certain domains of social life or emphasise only future states of being. In this respect it is the understandings encouraged by the concept of ‘turning out’ itself that offer insights beyond those gleaned from the specific data generated in this study. In this final section of the chapter I consider the concept of ‘turning out’ in more detail, arguing that it can further the way we think sociologically about being and becoming, and about young people’s lives more generally, in a number of ways.
9.4.1 ‘Turning out’ denotes both being and becoming through time

‘Turning out’ encourages an understanding of time which does not separate past, present and future. The concept suggests an ongoing process and we are arguably always ‘turning out’ until death. At the same time it suggests that we may already have ‘turned out’ in some respects. For example, one might feel able to surmise that one has ‘turned out’ to be good at sports, bad at biology or ‘shy’ at some point during their school career but there will be numerous other aspects of ‘turning out’ that are still unknown at this point or are only on their way to being ‘fixed’. Thus the concept of ‘turning out’ suggests a tangling of past, present and future in people’s lives which, although corresponding to the ways young people seem to live with ideas of temporality, is often not reflected in existing sociological concepts.

Existing work addressing youth transitions to adulthood have tended to focus upon issues of becoming, with the use of longitudinal methods and the accompanying propensity to track young people through time, neglecting young people’s experiences of being in the present. The inherent tangling of past, present and future in the concept of ‘turning out’ forces researchers to think of youth as a period of both being and becoming and as such is a useful tool in answering James and Prout’s call for a ‘theoretical perspective which can grasp childhood as a continually experienced and created social phenomenon which has significance for its present, as well as the past and future’ (1997: 245, original emphasis). Furthermore, although used in this thesis to explore young people’s lives, the continuous nature of ‘turning out’ means it does not invite a preoccupation with early childhood socialisation in the same ways as Bourdieu’s concept of habitus or Mead’s concept of the dialogical self. This means that the lens of the research is less likely to unduly focus on parent-child interactions in the home and can embrace the broad spectrum of overlapping relationships and contexts that have been found to be so significant in this research.

The focus on young people in this thesis has favoured a prospective lens on how they might ‘turn out’ in the future, although of course the significance of the past has come across strongly in young people’s narratives of what has ‘fixed’ or limited the potential for who they might become. However, the continual nature of ‘turning out’ means that
it would also be possible to explore issues of ‘turning out’ in later life where, although also incorporating ideas of the future, the past is likely to take centre stage.

The idea of ‘turning out’ has the potential to contribute to and extend sociological theories of the nature of time and how it is experienced. Theories emphasising the social nature of time trouble the seemingly natural linear progression of time in a similar way to the tangling of past, present and future in the concept of ‘turning out’. Mead ([1932] 1980) for example, views clock or calendar time as a social convention that can never exist independently of an individual’s perspective. For Mead, the past can only be evoked in the present and in order to conceive of a present there must be an idea of a future (a ‘becoming’). Thus past and future are always implicated in the present. Schutz (1971) extends this premise in his idea of ‘reflective turning’ (ibid: 172) which he uses to suggest that we can never truly be in the present, the act of reflection meaning we can only know the ‘present’ once it has past. Thus the idea put forward in this thesis that we are always both ‘turning’ and ‘turned’ contributes to social understandings of time which trouble the idea that the ‘present’ can ever be separated from the past and the future.

As Adam (1990, 2004) outlines, debates about the nature of time have tended to polarise around the dualism of time as either natural or social. However, for Adam (1990, 2004) this dichotomy obscures the idea that time is both fundamentally natural in the sense that we are part of the natural world and social in the sense that ideas of ‘natural’ time are socially produced. Indeed, this thesis has demonstrated the ways in which moments of the life course which seem ‘fixed’ or ‘natural’ are experienced and conceptualised according to our social relationships with others, particularly siblings. Adam (1995) also shows how focusing just on clock time can limit our appreciation of the temporal dynamics of particular situations (e.g. classrooms) and I suggest that this thesis enables the extension of this argument to incorporate the temporal dynamics of relationships through the life course. Ideas about the ways the temporality of the life course is experienced are also explored by Hockey and James (2003) who, following Leach (1966), consider how we can experience growing older when the gradual passing of time cannot be perceived through the senses. Hockey and James use
anthropological accounts of rites of passage to suggest that such moments may enable us to experience time passing through acts of repetition, change and transformation. The idea of the ‘fixing’ of ‘turning out’ contributes to these debates about the ways the temporal nature of the life course can be perceived by suggesting that the perception of time passing can also arise out of our relationships with others and our views of the world.

9.4.2 ‘Turning out’ can account for seemingly ‘contradictory’ understandings of the social world

One of the key aims of this research, and one that sets it apart from other research on youth transitions - which has tended to focus on mapping ‘outcomes’ over time - was to explore young people’s orientations to the very notion of being and becoming. This was done by attending to young people’s opinions and reflections on their own lives as well as by inviting them to theorise about how being and becoming work more abstractly. The concept of ‘turning out’ suggests a form of lay theorisation because it is an everyday concept which inherently incorporates the complexities, ambivalences and contradictions that have been evident throughout this thesis.

The ways that the process of ‘turning out’ can feel at once relational and constrained entails understandings that, in sociological terms, appear rather contradictory in that young people can allude to ideas of ‘fixedness’, fatalism and lack of agency whilst at the same time conceiving of who they are and who they are likely to become as deeply relational and contextual. For example, we have seen in chapter 5 how participants recognised relational and contextual aspects of the school self whilst also buying into ideas about an autonomous, authentic, ‘true’ self. Chapter 7 pointed to an apparent paradox between the significance of individuality and young people’s reflections on their identity as one in a series of siblings. These contradictions were explored further in chapter 8 through a focus on how young people can theorise, conceptualise and narrate the process of ‘turning out’ in ways which highlight both agency (for example the importance placed on ‘trying’) and the pervading idea that aspects of the self are fixed and exist within a person, or are created through upbringing in a way which is outside of an individual’s control.
The unproblematic ways in which young people simultaneously held onto seemingly contradictory ideas about being and becoming suggests that such ideas are in fact not so contradictory, but instead are part and parcel of personal life. It suggests that these ideas are only ‘contradictory’ in sociological terms because our concepts – such as the ‘relational self’, ‘social identity’, ‘individualisation’, ‘socialisation’ or ‘social transmission’ – invite us to think in terms of dualisms such as ‘the individual versus the social/relational’, ‘the biological versus the social’, ‘nature versus nurture’ or ‘the fixed versus the fluid/malleable’. The concept of ‘turning out’ inherently incorporates the social and biological, the fixed and the malleable, the relational and the individual and so on because, as this thesis has indicated, these elements are not necessarily separated in the ways people think in the ‘real world’.

This attention to how people live with concepts and ideas in their everyday lives is reminiscent of the anthropological consideration of lay theories of kinship and particularly Edwards’s notion of ‘an expertise in kinship’ (2000: 204) which she also sees as comprising combinations of understandings:

>[it is common for people to adopt] a cultural understanding of inheritance which relies on an interplay between the given and the mutable; between genes and background; between nature and nurture, which allows both to be evoked at the same time, by the same person, but to address different questions... (Edwards, 2000: 215-6)

Thus, for Edwards, part of people’s everyday expertise in kinship is to simultaneously hold seemingly contradictory opinions about inheritance which are constructed in response to different questions. My point with regards ‘turning out’ is that the concept can aid sociological thinking because it does not close down opportunities to embrace complex combinations of understandings.

**9.4.3 ‘Turning out’ denotes a sense of personhood which extends ideas of ‘the social’**

This thesis has approached personhood through the lay idea of what it means to be a person in the world and all this entails. Anthropological understandings of personhood have emphasised the social construction of the category of the person by pointing to variations in its meanings in particular cultural settings. In his seminal essay on the
Mauss ([1938]1985) argues that, although consciousness of self (an awareness of body and spirit) is universal, the concept of the person is socially produced. Mauss’s essay traces the evolution of the category of the person and ideas of the self through various historical configurations in different societies, demonstrating how current ideas of the person as possessing civic identity/conscience arose and arguing that the idea of the individual is both recent and unique to Western thought. La Fontaine (1985) extends Mauss’s argument by suggesting that the key to understanding how the idea of the person varies between cultures is in ‘the recognition that concepts of the person are embedded in a social context’ (ibid: 138), particularly in terms of the degree of institutionalisation present in a particular society.

The continuous nature of institutionalised offices/social roles and the appointment of individuals to them according to their personal qualities in the West is seen as denoting a separation between the role of an individual and the idea of the person. La Fontaine (ibid) evidences this claim with examples from non-Western societies where personhood is assigned according to social role and where all individuals are not necessarily persons.

This depiction of the individual as person in Western societies is reminiscent of theories outlined in chapter 2 (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Henderson et al, 2007; Thomson, 2009; Rose, 1998; Taylor, 1991) which view the western ideal of the free individual as a fallacy which works to obscure inequality. This link is clear in the work of Hockey and James (1993) where the idea that personhood is socially constituted according to cultural ideas about what it means to be human are explored in terms of the relationship between the socio-cultural construction of dependency through the denial of personhood in the life course. What is important here is the anthropological focus on the social production of personhood which this thesis has explored in terms of how personhood is conceptualised in relation to different social contexts and relationships. In this respect the idea of personhood explored in this thesis has commonalities with Strathern’s (1988) notion of the ‘dividual’ - as opposed to the ‘individual’ - depicting the embedded, relational, always interdependent nature of personhood in the Melanesian context. In contrast to their persuasive use of non-Western ethnographic data, these theories (with the exception of Hockey and James
(1993) who provide a fascinating British historical perspective) tend to rely upon rather impoverished and taken-for-granted assumptions about Western culture which is often employed as little more than a foil to in-depth ethnographic data generated in non-Western contexts. This thesis contributes a detailed empirical investigation of how personhood is perceived and lived with by young people in a Western context.

I have argued that existing approaches to being and becoming which are explored through concepts of the self/identity, transition or habitus do not fully account for the general ways of being a person (such as temperament, character, humour, talents, dispositions, physical appearance and so on) which this thesis set out to explore. Indeed, this thesis has indicated that these ways of being are both important and mutually implicated (so for example, young people’s ideas about their talents could be tied up with ideas about whether they are ‘outgoing’). This tangling of different aspects of personhood incorporate elements that are familiar to us as sociologists such as talents, skills, even bodily dispositions (which are of course key to habitus) alongside those which may seem somewhat out of the realm of sociological research such as physical appearance, which may be viewed as ‘belonging’ to biology or aspects of ‘personality’ which may be viewed as ‘belonging’ to psychology. Of course this is not to say that sociologists have ignored these issues – Crossley, for example, has argued that ‘fat is a sociological issue’ (2004: 222) and Scott (2007) has endeavoured to explore shyness sociologically – but in general, our sociological concepts often blinker us to these areas.

As with ideas about ‘contradictory’ understandings of the world, people do not separate the sociological from the biological or the psychological in the ways they make sense of their social worlds. This is reflected in the concept of ‘turning out’ which, I argue, can incorporate all of the above. Indeed, this thesis has shown how aspects of personhood that could be interpreted as purely psychological or biological (and as such, largely individual) are in fact deeply social and relational. This comes across clearly in young people’s discussions of family resemblance where aspects of physical appearance - such as having curly hair - or aspects of ‘personality’ - such as being ‘outgoing’ - are deeply entwined with kinship, relationality and more familiar
sociological concepts such as labelling and identity. Clearly people do not see these concepts as entities to be thought about separately, so as sociologists we must strive to incorporate them into our understandings of ‘the social’.

To conclude, I have argued that existing conceptions are not wholly adequate and that the concept of ‘turning out’ forces us, as sociologists, to see things differently. As a lay concept it draws our attention to the ideas and concepts which people already live with and this is why it has such sociological potential. This thesis has indicated some of the ways in which people can hold astute, complex and nuanced understandings of the social world; understandings which incorporate a simultaneous engagement with past, present and future, multiple understandings which span beyond simple dualisms and holistic conceptualisations of personhood which include a range of ways of being. As sociologists we need to employ concepts, such as ‘turning out’, which can enable us to engage with these complexities without flattening the social world by forcing it to fit within our pre-existing conceptual boundaries.
Appendix 1: Fieldwork Contexts

Highfields School

Highfields school is a very large comprehensive secondary school (with a sixth form) and is a specialist performing arts and technology college situated in an affluent suburb of a large northern city. Despite the affluence of the immediate area, the school’s catchment area incorporates some less affluent areas and the school has an above average number of young people entitled to free school meals. The school is also very ethnically mixed with almost a quarter of pupils speaking English as a second language. The school buildings are new and impressive and the school has traditionally been a popular choice for local parents, having enjoyed a good reputation and with its pupils achieving above average exam results. However, prior to my fieldwork, the school had received an ‘unsatisfactory’ result in its Ofsted Inspection\textsuperscript{75} meaning that it was classified as ‘failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education’, due largely to its leadership and management. This result caused considerable shock in the local community and press.

St Stephens School

St Stephens is a smaller than average Roman Catholic secondary school which has specialist status as a sports college. The school is situated in a very deprived area on the outskirts of a northern city and as a result it has three times the national average of pupils entitled to free school meals. Most of the pupils are white although there are an increasing number of pupils who speak English as a second language. Due to its status as a Roman Catholic school, the school gives priority in its admissions to children who have attended local Roman Catholic primary schools but catholic children from wider areas are regularly admitted. Prayer is an important part of every school day although there are a minority of pupils who are not catholic. At the time of the fieldwork a new school building was under construction and the current building was incredibly shabby and poorly equipped. The school had achieved a ‘satisfactory’ result in its latest Ofsted inspection where it was taken into account that the school faces

\textsuperscript{75} Ofsted stands for ‘Office for Standards in Education’ and is an independent schools’ inspection body which reports directly to central government
extra challenges due to the economic disadvantage experienced by many of its pupils (for example, despite improvements, the school still experienced less than average attendance).

**Romsbridge School**

Romsbridge School is a slightly larger than average comprehensive secondary school which has been designated as a specialist school in the arts. The school is in a medium size town on the outskirts of a large northern city and its pupils are predominantly white. The school’s catchment area incorporates both middle and working class areas but none that would be categorised as particularly deprived and the proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is slightly below the national average. The school was graded as ‘good’ in the Ofsted inspection conducted closest to the time of the fieldwork and it is popular with local parents. The school is situated close to a grammar school, which is fee paying, and Romsbridge pupils regularly discussed the ‘posh school across the road’. The school buildings contain some very old, grand buildings in addition to newer, more modern wings.

**Freedom Centre**

The Freedom Centre is a specialist arts centre located in a northern city. The centre is located in a deprived area of the city which has a large Caribbean population. The Freedom Centre runs regular evening classes for young people and adults and specialises in Caribbean culture and arts including African dance, steel pan drumming lessons and carnival rehearsals. For these reasons many young people of Caribbean heritage attend the centre but it also attracts a range of young people from different ethnic and economic backgrounds and from all over the region. The session observed during the fieldwork was part of a series of week-long workshops held during the school summer holidays. This particular workshop was focused around carnival activities, including costume design and performance, and was specifically for under 16’s (older children were able to attend other parallel sessions on street dance and drumming). The carnival workshop was attended by some young people who regularly attended classes at the Freedom Centre alongside young people who had never attended the centre before.
**Estate Youth Club**

Estate youth club is held weekly in a purpose built youth centre that is equipped with computers, a kitchen area and a separate ‘girls only’ room which neither male youth workers or young people are allowed to enter without permission (the room is decorated with cushions and fairy lights and was established following observations from youth workers that the club was becoming a very male dominated space). The youth club serves young people aged between 12 and 19 and is well attended by young people across this age range. The youth club is popular and vibrant (when I arrived there were a number of young people waiting for the club to open). As part of a wider regeneration programme in the area, the club was well funded at the time of the fieldwork and ran regular workshops in dance, music and computing. The youth club is situated in the heart of a large ‘overspill’ housing estate in the outskirts of a large northern city. The estate is predominantly white and is amongst the most deprived areas in the country with high unemployment rates and very high levels of long term illness.

**Rural Youth Club**

This youth club is geographically close to Estate youth club and although it is run by the same youth team it could not be more different; being situated in an incredibly affluent, picturesque, rural village. The area served by the youth club is predominantly white and middle class with high levels of employment. The youth club covers the same age range as that on the nearby estate (12-19) but is attended only by people at the younger end of this age range – the oldest being 13. Due to the affluence of the area this youth club has no funding and as a consequence tends to be less structured around activities than that of the Estate youth club and is held weekly in the village hall as opposed to in a purpose built space. A youth worker explained to me that, in contrast to the young people who attend the Estate youth club, the lives of those young people attending Rural youth club tend to be particularly structured by regular after school lessons in music, arts, languages and so forth and as a consequence they looked to the youth club as a rare opportunity to just ‘hang out’.
## Appendix 2: Interview Participants

Participants recruited through Highfields school
(all recruited through focus groups except Gemma who was invited by friend Lyndsay)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interview situation</th>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Living/family situation</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Parents’ occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>Interviewed at school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Lives with mum, dad and siblings</td>
<td>2 brothers (18, 17)</td>
<td>Dad: Local government manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mum: Carer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farhana</td>
<td>Interviewed at school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Lives with mum, dad and siblings</td>
<td>3 sisters (20, 11, 16 months)</td>
<td>Dad: Owns restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mum: Doesn’t work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Interviewed at school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mixed ethnicity (British and Caribbean)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Lives with mum, stepdad and sister</td>
<td>1 sister (10), 1 step sister (16), 1 step brother (14), 1 half sister (24), 1 half brother (22)</td>
<td>Mum: Freelance artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dad: Pipe fitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay</td>
<td>Interviewed at school with friend Gemma</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Lives with mum, dad and siblings</td>
<td>2 brothers (16, 12), 3 sisters (15, 8, 5)</td>
<td>Dad: Works for council (maintenance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mum: Trainee teaching assistant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Participants recruited through Highfields school
(all recruited through focus groups except Gemma who was invited by friend Lyndsay)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interview situation</th>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Religion (self defined)</th>
<th>Living/family situation</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Parents’ occupation (as defined by participant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gemma</td>
<td>Interviewed at school with friend Lyndsay</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum, dad and sister</td>
<td>1 sister ('baby')</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadia</td>
<td>Interviewed at school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Lives dad and siblings (mum has died)</td>
<td>2 brothers (22, 26), 4 sisters (16, 19, 24, 27)</td>
<td>Dad: works at airport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Interview situation</td>
<td>School year</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Living/family situation</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Parents’ occupation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Interviewed at home</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>Defined as ‘Oriental’ (Vietnamese)</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Lives with mum and siblings</td>
<td>2 younger brothers (8, 13)</td>
<td>Dad: Chef Mum: Doesn’t work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jade</td>
<td>Interviewed at home</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Doesn’t know if she has one</td>
<td>Lives with dad, step mum and siblings</td>
<td>3 younger brothers (11, 8, 3), 1 younger sister (9)</td>
<td>Dad and stepmum own and run a shop Mum’s occupation unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Interviewed at home</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Lives with mum and dad (older siblings moved out)</td>
<td>4 older brothers (31, 38, others age unknown), 1 sister (27)</td>
<td>Mum and dad both retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Interviewed at home</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>‘Brought up Catholic but don’t believe in it’</td>
<td>Lives with mum and dad (older sister moved out)</td>
<td>One sister (23)</td>
<td>Mum: Caterer Dad: Welder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants recruited through Romsbridge school
(all recruited through presentation to year group except Anna who was recruited through her sister Francesca)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interview situation</th>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Religion (self defined)</th>
<th>Living/family situation</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Parents’ occupation (as defined by participant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aiden</td>
<td>Interviewed at home. Mum and dad present throughout</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with parents and brother and younger sister</td>
<td>1 sister (25), 1 younger sister (11), 1 brother (15)</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Interviewed at home. Sister of Francesca. Attends different school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Italian and British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and sister</td>
<td>1 sister (Francesca, 13)</td>
<td>Dad: Possibly lawyer Mum: Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francesca</td>
<td>Interviewed at home. Sister of Anna</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Italian and British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and sister</td>
<td>1 sister (Anna, 15)</td>
<td>Dad: Possibly lawyer Mum: Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>Interviewed at home. Mum present throughout</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum</td>
<td>1 half brother (older)</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Interviewed at home. Mum present throughout</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Lives with mum, mum’s partner and half sister</td>
<td>1 baby half sister</td>
<td>Mum: Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Interview situation</td>
<td>School year</td>
<td>Ethnicity (self defined)</td>
<td>Religion (self defined)</td>
<td>Living/family situation</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Parents’ occupation (as defined by participant)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Chanelle</td>
<td>8/9 (interviewed in school holidays)</td>
<td>‘Black’</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3 sisters (10, 8, 6)</td>
<td>Mum: Doesn’t work Dad: Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanelle</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Clarissa</td>
<td>8/9 (interviewed in school holidays)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1 brother (16)</td>
<td>Dad: Carpet fitter Mum: Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estella</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club</td>
<td>8/9 (interviewed in school holidays)</td>
<td>Mixed ethnicity: Black Caribbean and White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2 younger half sisters</td>
<td>Mum: receptionist Dad: Truck driver Stepdad: Decorator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britney</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with cousin Joseph. Joseph’s brother Anis present throughout</td>
<td>7/8 (interviewed in school holidays)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Lives with nana</td>
<td>1 older sister</td>
<td>Mum: Disabled and cannot work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club</td>
<td>8/9 (interviewed in school holidays)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and siblings</td>
<td>2 younger brothers</td>
<td>Mum: Homemaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants recruited through Freedom Centre  
(all recruited during a week of summer workshops)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interview situation</th>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Religion (self defined)</th>
<th>Living/family situation</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Parents’ occupation (as defined by participant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sherise</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Rhianna</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>Mixed ethnicity Black Caribbean and White British</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2 sisters (18, 22), 1 brother (22)</td>
<td>Mum: Nurse, Dad: Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhianna</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Sherise</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and dad</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Dad: Unknown, Mum: Works for local authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Interview situation</td>
<td>School year</td>
<td>Ethnicity (self defined)</td>
<td>Religion (self defined)</td>
<td>Living/family situation</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Parents’ occupation (as defined by participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Craig</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum, stepdad and some of his siblings (1 brother in prison)</td>
<td>2 older brothers, 3 younger sisters</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Clinton</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and some of his siblings</td>
<td>3 older sisters, 1 older brother</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Emily</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and</td>
<td>5 siblings (some older, some younger)</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Molly</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with nana and cousins</td>
<td>Unknown – some of her cousins are ‘like’ siblings</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Lois</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with dad</td>
<td>2 older brothers, 1 younger brother</td>
<td>Dad: Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lois</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friend Nick</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and siblings</td>
<td>4 older brothers, 1 baby sister, 1 baby brother</td>
<td>Dad: Incapacity benefit Mum: Cleaner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with Tom and Russell</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1 older brother, 2 sisters</td>
<td>Dad: Driver Mum: Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with Nick and Russell</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and dad</td>
<td>2 older brothers</td>
<td>Mum: Cleaner Dad: ‘Grass cutter and litter picker’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Interview situation</td>
<td>School year</td>
<td>Ethnicity (self defined)</td>
<td>Religion (self defined)</td>
<td>Living/family situation</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Parents’ occupation (as defined by participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friends <strong>Nick</strong> and <strong>Tom</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and siblings</td>
<td>1 younger sister, 1 younger brother</td>
<td>Dad: In prison Mum: ‘Everything’ (odd jobs?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Interview situation</td>
<td>School year</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Living/family situation</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Parents’ occupation (as defined by participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friends Poppy and Georgia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum, step dad and younger brother and half siblings</td>
<td>1 brother (8), 1 half brother (5), 1 half sister (1), 1 older step sister</td>
<td>Mum: Dental nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friends Abigail and Georgia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum dad and sister</td>
<td>1 sister (9)</td>
<td>Mum: Chiropodist Dad: Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with friends Abigail and Poppy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum</td>
<td>1 older half brother, 1 older half sister</td>
<td>Dad: Graphic designer Mum: Learning support teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with Ethan and Ben</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum, step dad and 1 sister</td>
<td>2 sisters (20, 19)</td>
<td>Mum: Nurse Stepdad: ‘DIY’ Dad: Hospital chef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with Adam and Ben</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum, dad and 1 brother</td>
<td>2 brothers (16, 24)</td>
<td>Dad: Police officer Mum: Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with Adam and Ethan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum and dad</td>
<td>1 sister (24), 1 brother (20)</td>
<td>Dad: Photographer Mum: Childminder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Interview situation</td>
<td>School year</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Living/family situation</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Parents’ occupation (as defined by participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with Charles and Olivia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum, dad and sister</td>
<td>1 younger sister</td>
<td>Dad: Owns a business Mum: Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with Ed and Olivia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum, dad and sister</td>
<td>1 older sister 1 older brother</td>
<td>Dad: Electrician Mum: Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Interviewed at youth club with Ed and Charles</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lives with mum, dad and brothers</td>
<td>3 younger brothers</td>
<td>Dad: ‘Chief’ in local government Mum: Possibly surveyor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Focus Group Participants

**Focus Group 1** Highfields Year 10 (age 14-15) (no details available from teacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including 'step', 'half')</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelley (F)</td>
<td>Black British</td>
<td>1 brother (18), 1 sister (10)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (9)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (13, 7)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 brother (17)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard (M)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1 brother (10), 1 sister (8)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farhana (F)</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>3 sisters (20, 11, 16 months)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadia (F)</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>2 brothers (22, 26), 4 sisters (16, 19, 24, 27)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 sisters (21, 17, 3)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus Group 2** Highfields Year 9 (age 13-14) (no details available from teacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including 'step', 'half')</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed (M)</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>2 brothers (7, 17), 2 sisters (12, 15)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasmin (F)</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>2 brothers (17, 8)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 sisters ('both 20')</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (5)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed (M)</td>
<td>Mixed race (S. Asian and White)</td>
<td>3 brothers (17, 22, 24)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (16, 12), 3 sisters (15, 8, 5)</td>
<td>Yes (with friend Gemma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadara (F)</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>1 brother (3), 1 sister (15)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

76 Although participants were asked to note full, step and half siblings this was not done in all cases and some young people wrote 'siblings' to denote a combination of sibling relational forms.
### Focus Group 3
Highfields Year 9 (age 13-14) (no details available from teacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including 'step', 'half')</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sofia (F)</td>
<td>Mixed race (British and Caribbean)</td>
<td>1 sister (10), 1 step sister (16), 1 step brother (14), 1 half sister (24), 1 half brother (22)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece (M)</td>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>2 brothers (12, 20), 1 sister (4)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan (M)</td>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>9 brothers, sisters and step siblings (no more details). (0,0,2,7,14,21,22,25,25)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (15)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 sisters (24, 19, 15), 2 brothers (18 and age unknown)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maleehah (F)</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>2 sisters (26, 28), 2 brothers (20, 24)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubina (F)</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>2 brothers, 2 sisters (all in their 20's)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (18, 17)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Focus Group 4
Highfields Year 9 (age 13-14) (no details available from teacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including ‘step’, ‘half’)</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jake (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 brother (14), 1 sister (16)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zac (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (9), 1 brother (17)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majid (M)</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>1 brother (16), 1 sister (12)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haashim (M)</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>3 brothers (17, 9, 5), 1 sister (21)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayley (F)</td>
<td>White British (Irish)</td>
<td>1 sister (10), 1 step brother (14)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (17)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 sisters (12, 8, 4), 1 brother (4)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe (F)</td>
<td>British and Italian</td>
<td>2 sisters (19, 18)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Focus Group 5
St Stephens Year 7 (age 11-12) (described by teacher as ‘varying ability but no very low ability pupils’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including ‘step’, ‘half’)</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jon (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (14)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina (F)</td>
<td>Mixed: Black African and White British</td>
<td>1 sister (15), twin brothers (12), 1 younger brother (3)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasha (F)</td>
<td>‘Mix race’ - details unknown</td>
<td>1 brother (6)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shazad (M)</td>
<td>‘Mixed’ Pakistani</td>
<td>2 sisters (13, 8)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaun (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 sisters (5, 3), 2 brothers (16, 1)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 sisters (1, 3)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mollie (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 sisters (8 months, 2), 1 brother (10)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>8 brothers (5-22), 1 sister (14)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (17, 15)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Focus Group 6** St Stephens Year 10 (age 14-15) (described by teacher as ‘very bright’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including ‘step’, ‘half’)</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sienna (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 sisters (14, 10)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (11), 1 brother (2)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (17, 12)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel (M)</td>
<td>Mixed race: White British and Black African</td>
<td>2 brothers (11, 19), one sister (23)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zephaniah (M)</td>
<td>Black British</td>
<td>3 brothers (14-29), 1 sister (28)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (23)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shazia (F)</td>
<td>‘Asian’</td>
<td>2 brothers (21, 10)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 brother (13)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa (F)</td>
<td>White Italian</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin (F)</td>
<td>‘Mixed’</td>
<td>1 full brother (16), 3 step brothers (15-20), 1 step sister (4)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus Group 7** St Stephens Year 10 (age 14-15) (described by teacher as ‘lower band’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including ‘step’, ‘half’)</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luke (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (17, 15 months)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (31, 38), 1 sister (27)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (18)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keira (F)</td>
<td>Mixed: White Ukrainian and White British</td>
<td>1 sister (11), 1 brother (3)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (8), 1 brother (21)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (22), 3 brothers (19-27)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus Group 8** St Stephens Year 7 (11-12) (described by teacher as ‘varying ability but no very low ability pupils’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including ‘step’, ‘half’)</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jade (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 brothers (3-11), 1 sister (9)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 full sisters (20-34), 1 step sister (16), 1 step brother (12)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 brother (17), 2 cousins (classed as siblings, gender unknown) (13-18)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ata (M)</td>
<td>‘Black British’</td>
<td>1 brother (10)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles (M)</td>
<td>‘Mixed British’</td>
<td>2 sisters (12, 14), 1 brother (3)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 sisters (16, 18)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Focus Group 9** St Stephens Year 9 (age 13-14) (described by teachers as ‘generally more able pupils’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity (self defined)</th>
<th>Siblings (including ‘step’, ‘half’)</th>
<th>Individual interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basil (M)</td>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>1 brother (15)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 brother (6), 1 sister (11)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 brother (twin) (13), 1 sister (9)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimee (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (7, 2), 1 sister (6)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 sister (17)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max (M)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (16, 21), 1 sister (18)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex (M)</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>2 brothers (13, 8)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 brothers (10, 19), 1 sister (11)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara (F)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 brother (17)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Copy of Project Leaflet

The pictures here depict both pages of the leaflet which were printed double-sided and folded into thirds. The wording on the front page was adapted to fit the different recruitment contexts.
An invitation to take part

What do people in your 8th thinking year 8 think?

Would your brothers, sisters, or friends like to take part?

This project is also linked to the National Centre for Research Methods. The PhD project is also working on research methods and how they might be used to gain insights into people's everyday lives.

Further information

Family and friendships.

In what young people think about school life, academic success is often prioritised. This PhD project will be interested in understanding how young people's thinking and experiences of school might be influenced by their friends and family. Friends and family are important in young people's everyday life, and their views might be as important.

Publications

For a list of publications, please visit the Manchester Social Science website.

The research findings will form part of my PhD thesis. They may also be published in a number of forms, in print and electronically, and in other media.

Ethical practice

If you have any questions or if you would like to get in touch, please feel free to get in touch. If you have any questions, please feel free to get in touch. If you have any questions or if you would like to get in touch, please feel free to get in touch.
Appendix 5: Interview schedule

About school:

Do you like school? What do you like/dislike about it?
What subjects do you like/dislike? Why?
What do you think is your best subject? Worse subject? What makes you think you are particularly bad/good at these subjects (do people comment on this? Who? Why do you think that is?)
How do you think it came about that you are good at this? Can it run in families?
So you say you are good at x, interested in y. Has this always been the case right through school? When did you start to become interested in/good at this sort of thing, how did that come about?
Is there anything that you’re not so good at but that you wish you were? Talents, hobbies and school subjects etc?

What about non-academic things? Are you part of any other activities in school – clubs or sports teams? Hobbies and interests outside school? Talents? How did this come about? Why do you think you are particularly interested in/good at this?
If not in any school teams – do you ever wish you were? Did you try out? Why not?

What sort of person would you say you are at school? Are you naughty, well behaved, hard working, popular?
What do your teachers and your friends and family think you are like at school (prompt for siblings)? Why do you think they would all have such different (or similar) impressions of what you are like in school?
How are you different when you’re not at school?
Have you always been like that or has it changed?

Friends

Who do you hang around with at school?
Are they in your year? How long have you been friends? What are they like (hard working, funny, naughty etc.)? What sorts of things do you have in common?

What are your friends like at school? Good at/not so good at? What about teams, clubs? How come you think you are similar/different in this respect? How do you think it came about?

Do you have groups at school? Where do you fit in?
Do you have other groups of friends? Outside school? What are the differences between friends you have in school and out of school/between different groups?

Friends and family:
We’ve talked a lot about you and the sorts of things that you are good at and not so good at at school and what you like and don’t like etc. Now I thought we could talk about some of your family and the ways that they are similar and different to you.
Make sure to discuss all siblings (cousins), parents and friends.

siblings (go onto cousins if only child or if not getting very far with sibs – prompt for cousins if there is time)
Let’s start with brothers and sisters... Names, ages
So x, what is she/he like? Is she/he at (or did she/he go to) this school too? What sorts of things was/is she good at at school. What about teams, clubs and hobbies? What is he/she like at school? Well behaved? Naughty? Popular?

Do/did you ever hang around together when you are at school? Where do you usually hang around? Where does your brother or sister usually hang around? How do you think that came about? What about at home? Are you different with each other at home or do you still stay away from each other/hang around together? Do you share any of the same friends?
Was/is she/he taught by any of the same teachers who have taught you? Which ones? What was that like?
So your sister/brother is into x and is like this whereas you said you are like x etc. Do you think you are quite similar/different? How do you think it came about that you ended up being so different/similar in this respect?

Are you alike/very different in other ways? Prompt for personality, mannerisms, looks – eyes, hair, nose, colouring, laugh etc. Do other people ever comment on these differences/similarities? Who? What do you say to that? What do you think your parents think about these differences and similarities between you and your brothers and sisters? What about teachers who you said had taught you both or friends you both know?

Pros and cons of being youngest, eldest, middle.
Pros and cons of having female/male sibs

How did your sister/brother do (or how do you think your sister/brother will do) in their exams? Pressure?

Do you look alike? How do you feel about that?
Are brothers and sisters usually similar at school? Why? How?
How are these similarities and differences we’ve been talking about different between your brothers and sisters and your friends? What about parents? Do you have different sorts of thing in common with your family and your friends? Is it harder to spot these differences and similarities with parents/siblings/friends? Why?

Parents/guardians
What does your mum/dad do? What do you think she was like when she was at school (well behaved, naughty, sporty)? What do you think she was good at and not so good at? How do you think she did in her school exams? Have your parents ever talked to you about this? Talk about similarities/differences between participant, their siblings and parents. What about looks, do you or your brother/sister look like your mum/dad? Has this got anything to do with having other things in common?
Do you talk to your parents much about how you are getting on at school? What sorts of things do they say?

Parents evenings. What happens when it’s parents evening? Do you go along too or just parents? Do both parents go? Do they go and see your brother/sister’s teachers on the same evening? What happens when they get home? How do you usually discuss the outcomes of parents evening? Do your brother’s and sister’s parents’ evenings go the same way?

What about other things like winning awards, test results? Have you or your brothers and sisters ever won something at school? How did your family handle it? Did you all celebrate etc.? What happens when you have reports or test results to bring home from school? Who looks at it first? Who talks about it? What happened last time etc? How do these things work in your family?

**Careers**

Have you got any ideas about what you might do when you have finished your GCSEs? How did you come to that decision? Have you talked this through with teachers, family, friends? Who? What did they say? How is it different talking about this sort of thing with teachers, friends and family members?

NB: Ensure I talk about type of course/job etc as well as specific subject choices where relevant and place. What made them choose a certain college say?

What about careers advice in school? What’s it like, is it useful? Look through Connexions forms together and any other careers documentation they have had.

So, how do you think you’ll do in your GCSEs in the end? Why do you say that? Do you worry about how you will do in these exams?

What sort of thing do you imagine that you might do in the future – when you’ve finished with school and training courses etc? Talk about work experience placements if they’ve done this.
Is it hard to think about things like this? Why do you think that is? Do people often talk to you about things like what you might do in the future? Who? In what circumstances?

How do these sorts of discussions about what to do next vary between talking with friends, siblings, parents, teachers?

Do teachers ever comment on these similarities/differences between you and your friends?

What about other people in your year? What are other people planning to do next? Are most people doing similar things to you and your friends? Who is doing similar/different things? What sorts of different decisions are people making? What do you think makes some people choose to go and do A-levels and others to learn a trade, go to different colleges etc?

Do you think that people’s friends and family have an impact on these sorts of decisions? In what way? What about teachers? What sort of impact do you think they have?

Is there anyone else (other family members, friends) who are important and who we haven’t drawn on the map...

NB: Throughout interview prompt for theories of the inevitability of similarities/differences, ideas about emulating friends/family and issues around space and place – sharing space, deciding to go to a different place etc. Also explore whether things only pass down – can you inherit from siblings as well as parents? Do things go across as well as up? Can older siblings learn/inherit from younger siblings?
Appendix 6: Focus Group Schedule

**Introductions**

Introduce myself.

Introduce project:

Project about similarities and differences between people in the same family and also between friends.

I am interested in whether you think things can run in families – looks, personalities and things at school such as being arty, sporty or clever.

Because you’re contributing towards a research project I am tape recording this session. You can say what you like as long as it isn’t offensive. What you say is in confidence, I will change your names and won’t report back to teachers what individuals have said. I’m doing research in other schools as well. Results will help social scientists understand more about what young people think. I’m also doing some interviews with people one at a time and you can also take part in this part of the project if you want to. I’ll tell you more about this at the end. You don’t have to take part – can return to lesson if prefer.

We’ll start by discussing what you enjoy and what you’re good at at school, then I’ve got a short clip from The Simpsons for us to discuss.

Any questions?

Group introductions (favourite TV programme)

**What you enjoy and what you’re good at**

- What are your favourite subjects at school? Write on board

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77 Use of white board introduced in focus groups 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.
- What are your best subjects (mine was probably English and my worse was definitely maths). Write on board.
- How can you tell when you’re good at something?
- What about outside school? Any talents or hobbies or maybe something that you wish you were good at (me and singing). Write on board.
- Use subjects and talents that have been mentioned to discuss how you get good at them? Are you born good at them or can you learn? Does thins work the same way for all subjects (prompt for what is fixed, what is malleable)
- Can subjects run in families? How does this work?
- Ideas for future careers? Can careers run in families?
- Do people from the same family often turn out like each other? In what ways? How does this happen (prompt for nature/nurture)
- What about if you’re different? Parental pressure? Why would parents want their children to be like them? Can you make yourself more like someone? (friends)

Potential (topic introduced in focus groups 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)
Write word ‘potential’ on board
- Do you know what it means?
- How do you know what ‘your best’ is?
- Can what ‘your best’ is be inherited in the ways we’ve just been talking about?
- Can ‘potential’ or ‘your best’ be changed?
- Are there some subjects that you can be a ‘natural’ at? For example, some people think that being good at art is something that you either have or don’t have whereas others think you can learn and practice and become good. What do you think? (prompt- nature/nurture)

The Simpsons: Sibling differences and stereotypes
Show 5 minute clip from the Simpsons (‘Bart Gets an F’ Season 2). Bart is doing badly at school – Lisa gets an A in a test and Homer puts it on the fridge - covering up Bart’s drawing because Lisa has filled the fridge with her ‘A’s.

- How do you think Bart felt when Homer covered up his drawing?
- How should Homer and Marge have handled the situation? What should they do about Bart’s poor performance at school in general?
- What about Bart? What should he do? Can he change if he wants to?
- What about Lisa? Is any of this her fault?
- Do you think situations like this can arise quite often?

Bart and Lisa are very different at school – Lisa is very motivated and gets high grades, Bart is cheeky and popular but doesn’t get high grades and usually doesn’t try too hard.

- Do you think it’s quite common for brothers and sisters to be different like this at school?
- Do you think people tend to be good at the same things as their brothers and sisters?

In The Simpsons Bart’s character is funny and popular but not so good at school whereas Lisa’s character is the opposite. (Pin pictures of Bart and Lisa on flip chart and brainstorm – what is Bart like? What is Lisa like?)

- Is it possible to be funny and popular and work hard at school and get good grades or do these things not usually go together?
- How do you get to be known as funny, popular, clever etc. When does this start and can it be changed? Prompt about pigeon holing. If your brother or sister is popular at school is it more likely that you’ll be like this?
- Gender. What difference does it make that Bart’s a boy and Lisa’s a girl? Prompt for discourses on girls outperforming boys – are they aware of it? Do they think it’s true and why? Does being a girl or boy make a difference to how you act at school, how well you do or what subjects you choose?

**Siblings and friends at home and school**
- Pros and cons of having a sibling at school (write on flip chart)
- Pros and cons of being the youngest, eldest, middle?
- Do brothers and sisters ever have the same friends at school?
- Do you get on better with brothers and sisters at home or school? Is it different?
  Would you ever walk to school together? Hang out at same place? What are the
  boundaries and how does this relate to the pros and cons (especially of birth order)
  that we discussed before?

**Individual interviews**
Next I’ll be doing some individual interviews with people to talk more about your own
subject choices and also about your friends and family. Explain interviews (themes,
location, timings) and hand out leaflets to those interested. No obligation – can
change your mind. Please take 5 minutes to fill in the form.
Appendix 7: Synopsis: ‘Bart Gets an F’, The Simpsons, Season 2 Episode 1

The clip I showed was from the episode ‘Bart Gets an F’ from season 2 (first aired in the US in 1990). In the clip Bart is supposed to complete a school book report on Treasure Island but when he gives his presentation to the class it is clear that he has not read the book and he gets an F grade. He is told by his teacher that he will ‘flunk’ the whole ‘grade’ (school year) if he does not improve. His teacher gives him one last chance to redeem himself in an upcoming test and he sets off home determined to study. However, he becomes almost immediately distracted and he goes to the arcade and is later deterred from working by his father, Homer, who encourages him to watch television instead. Bart is clearly feeling bad about himself and his lack of focus when his sister Lisa comes home from school with her own A grade test result. Bart’s parents - Homer and Marge - stick Lisa’s report card on the family fridge, which is already covered in her A grade report cards meaning that the latest card is placed over the only contribution from Bart – a very poor sketch of a cat.
Appendix 8: Overview of Schooling System in England

The School Trajectory

Free state education is provided for children between the ages of 3 and 18. 3 year old children are educated at nursery schools. Compulsory education begins at primary school, which young people attend between the ages of 4 and 11, and continues through secondary school, which is attended between the ages of 11 and 16. It is then possible for young people to elect to continue in further education between the ages of 16 and 18 at a college or sixth form.

The school system is divided by year group. The table overleaf describes the ages and schools attended by young people in various years.
At the time the fieldwork for this project was conducted (2007-8), secondary school pupils in years 7, 8 and 9 studied a compulsory portfolio of subjects which included mathematics, English, technology, physical education, art, languages and so on. In year 9 pupils were able to select which subjects they would study for their end of compulsory education examinations (GCSEs) although certain core subjects - such as mathematics and English - remained compulsory. Years 10 and 11 were characterised by studying for these examinations which were sat at the end of year 11 (although certain subjects adopted a modular system whereby small parts of the examinations could be taken at earlier points in year 10). In addition to GCSE examinations young people, at the time of the fieldwork, also underwent a series of standardised tests (SATs) at key points during their school career (at the end of years 2, 6 and 9) where their progress was compared to others of the same age and used primarily to assess the standard of the school they attended.
Key terms

**SATs** are ‘Standardised Assessment Tests’ which are taken at the end of years 2, 6 and 9. SATs tests indicate a child’s progress compared to others their age and are also used to assess the progress of the school.

**GCSEs** are ‘General Certificates of Secondary Education’ awarded in a specified subject. Young people usually take a wide range of GCSEs and at the time of the fieldwork they were usually taken at the end of year 11 with some occasionally taken earlier in year 10 (although in recent years there has been a move towards young people sitting certain GCSEs even earlier). Pass grades range from A* to G with A* to C considered the most desirable and useful grades in terms of progression into further education or employment.

**‘A’ Levels** are ‘Advanced level’ qualifications that are usually undertaken in 3-4 subjects at sixth forms or Further Education colleges between the ages of 16-18. **AS levels** equate to half an A-level qualification and are usually completed in one academic year. A-levels are the most academic post-16 route but there were a range of other more vocational qualifications available to young people at the time of the fieldwork including **BTECs, City and Guilds** qualifications and **NVQs**.

**Ofsted** is the ‘Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills’ and conducts inspections of schools, assessing the standard of education delivered. Ofsted inspectors categorise schools as ‘outstanding’, ‘good’, ‘satisfactory’ or ‘unsatisfactory’. An ‘unsatisfactory’ grading results in a school being placed in ‘special measures’ involving close monitoring and sometimes a change in management. Ofsted results are publicly available and can be an important factor for parents when selecting schools for their children.

**Connexions** was, at the time of the fieldwork, a government guidance and support service for young people aged 13 to 19 (up to 25 for those with learning
difficulties/disabilities). Connexions advisors deliver careers advice to young people in schools and colleges as well as supporting young people who are classed as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).
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