EXPLORING THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF WORKING CLASS MASCULINITIES AS BARRIERS TO MEN AND EDUCATION IN IRELAND

KEN SMITH

Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the Med in Adult and Community Education

Department of Adult and Community Education

National University of Ireland Maynooth

June 2012

Supervisor: Brian Sheridan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

The concepts of social class and masculinities have influenced a multitude of studies across a number of academic fields on a global basis. This research explores some of these studies within an Irish context, and follows the evolution of social class in Ireland and the construction of Irish working class masculinity. In doing so, the relationships between notions of acceptable masculine behaviour within perceived class settings are examined and an attempt is made to unpack the influences and barriers to education that socially constructed ideas of class and masculinity impose on working class men.

Literature relating to social class development, masculinity, and education, is reviewed and an attempt is made to go beyond socially accepted markers of class and masculinity and into the real lived experiences of working class men. This research is a qualitative study conducted through a series of one to one interviews with open ended questions that led to a resource of rich narrative. Finally this narrative is unpacked and discussed in the context of current and relevant literature, a process that highlights the damaging and isolating effects of socially constructed expectations, and highlights the need for continued examination of the construction of social class and masculinities in Ireland.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

During the analysis of the recent referendum voting patterns, the national media in Ireland focussed on the divide between middle class and working class areas. However, throughout this discussion there was no regard to any critical appraisal of these terms. The apparent implication was that middle class voters consider the long term financial stability of Ireland when voting, whereas working class voters vote according to immediate concerns and anger. Additionally mass unemployment for men and a changing gender balance in employment has lead to role changes for many Irish families. This thesis intends to examine two important themes that are at heart of the social fabric of modern Irish society. First, is social class and how we as a nation perceive and define its existence. Second, is working class masculinities and how working class men perceive their role and value within the community.

In Ireland social class and socio-economic groupings are defined (as we shall see in chapter two) by the CSO in terms of educational attainment, skill set, and profession. Having access to high quality education and training, and experiencing a positive relationship with same, can have a profound impact on an individual's social standing. Class identities and issues of masculinity are by no means recent developments and there have long been debates and questions regarding the benefits and advantages of being a middle class male as opposed to a working class male.

A considerable part of this research is concerned with the Irish male's experience of social class and seeks to move beyond the mere labelling or categorising of people and toward a more defined exploration of the terminology involved in this discussion. I will examine our understanding of the real implications facing men living in a social class, which for the purpose of this research is chiefly confined to those considered working class. In addition I will also explore how these men define themselves in terms of what working class is, the attributes required to be considered as such and the values associated with being labelled a working class man.

My interests in these issues are both personal and professional. Having come from what would be considered a working class family (my father was a taxi driver) I progressed into third level education and have held a number of professional roles. According to the CSO I am categorised as professional and thus perceived as middle class, which leaves me in a kind of no man's land between the socially defining factors of my early family life and the social and professional expectations and experiences of my adult life. As such I am deeply interested in the means and rationales that working class men employ to construct their understanding of their social class, and also how these constructs shape the working class man's view and value of education in relation to other social classes and society as a whole.

I am currently a project worker in a drug rehabilitation centre. My work involves a holistic approach to the social, educational, and health development of individual participants. I am continually exposed to the perceptions that the male clients have regarding their understanding of the values that define them as men in their community, values that are constructed around their communities ideas of the importance of family and what for a man

constitutes real work. In addition my work looks at their relationships with education and the values that they place on different types of education and learning. This directly relates to the second theme of this research which is an exploration of masculinities and the working class male's perception or personal understanding of what a male is and what it means to be a man.

My approach to this research as a whole is qualitative, and as part of this research I have undertaken a number of interviews with Irish males from Dublin. These interviews were conducted on a one to one basis through a number of structured questions and were enhanced by further questioning and exploration prompted by the material divulged from the participants' responses. Throughout each interview a process unfolded that allowed the personal expression of what these men felt were the social implications of being a working class male in Ireland. These men were forthcoming in expressing how these social implications impact on their perceptions of themselves as men, and how in turn this defined their value as working class men in their community.

This research as a whole is concerned with the exploration of the social construction of working class masculinities and how these shape the working class man's relationship with education. It seeks to go beyond what this researcher sees as the narrow vision of national parameters set by the CSO for defining social class, by pushing aside the assumption that there is an accepted understanding of what social class is. The hypothesis which underpins this thesis is that ideals of masculinity and identity amongst working class men, can and do act as barriers to engagement in certain types of education. Therefore, the second theme of this research seeks to explore this view by examining the working class males understanding of masculinities and what it means to be a male in Ireland. I will examine the responsibilities

and behaviours that these men see as socially expected of a working class male, and also any restrictions that arise for these men as a result of this. The recurring themes which emerge from this examination are the value of work and education in the community, what constitutes real work, and what is considered valuable knowledge. These are all intertwined with personal experiences of relationships, marriage, and the importance of being a provider.

This research is important for adult and community education as it unpacks the real lived experiences of working class men by facilitating the expression of feelings, experiences, and how each participant perceives their existence, identity, and worth in the community. The research and the question of whether ideals of masculinity and social class identity amongst working class men can and do act as barriers to engagement in certain types of education is important as it contributes to the understanding of the continuing barriers that socially constructed perceptions of social class and masculinity create for working class men regarding an engagement with education.

Structure and Outline of Thesis

Following this introduction, chapter two consists of five sections in which I review literature relating to social class development and categorisation, personal identity regarding social class, development and understanding of masculinities, and the material relating to social class and relationships with education. In this chapter I will trace the main trends and highlight the gaps in our understanding of social class and masculinity concerning Ireland.

Chapter three is the methodology section and is also divided into five sections. This chapter contains both my ontological (how I see the world) view and my epistemological (what I

believe constitutes knowledge) approach, which explains the methods I have employed in this research. The research interviews are discussed along with a section on ethical considerations. This chapter is an integral section of both the thesis and research process as it defines my approach as a researcher, thus giving the reader an insight into me, both as a researcher, and as part of the research process.

Chapter Four contains an introduction into the background of each participant and a discussion of the findings and analysis from the interviews. I will attempt to make sense of these findings in the context of the theorists and the key ideas that I have focused on in the literature review in chapter two.

Chapter five concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review begins with an examination of literature concerning social class and men in Ireland. Additionally, the bulk of masculinity studies have explored men in terms of fatherhood, work, social and domestic power, and their relationship with religion, neglecting the relevance and importance of diverse masculinities between the social classes. I will therefore review the topic of masculinity in Ireland focusing on literature pertaining to the exploration of masculinity and the concept of multiple layers of masculinities. I will conclude by looking at the relationships that working class men have with education, reviewing literature relating to the barriers experienced in Ireland, drawing comparisons from elsewhere in the world. This literature review will therefore take a thematic approach encompassing different written material from various academic disciplines around the globe.

Contemporary Social class in Ireland: Inception and Development

The development of social class in Ireland was far removed from that experienced throughout Europe. Nineteenth century Ireland was governed by a foreign power, with no native aristocracy or ruling class. Elsewhere nations were transformed through the unification of principalities and the power of various kingdoms and personalities, as is effectively illustrated in the formation of The Kingdom of Italy 1861 which was the culmination of an almost half century struggle for independence driven by the aristocrats and upper-middle class and born out of the sharing of territories after the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte. Germany experienced a similar process and these nations developed from the desires of the native aristocratic and wealthy middle-classes who could and did envisage the importance of

strong national identity and the advantages (both economically and politically for themselves) of nations guided by their influence and control, a factor that was significantly absent in Ireland.

Social Class in Dublin

Throughout Ireland as a result of the land war of the 1870s and the subsequent demise of the landlord class, the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of new middle-class farmers, as increased access to land and property led to increased wealth. In Dublin (the British Empire's second city) similar issues of social class regarding property and wealth were at the forefront of everyday life at the dawn of the twentieth century. A brief overview of Dublin shows that it was no stranger to social class divisions with one third of its population living in abject poverty in the cities tenements, which Kearns (1996) sees as 'hellish', whilst the wealthier classes had in the vast majority of cases left for the cities suburbs. It is in these suburbs that the social divisions recognisable in Dublin today began to emerge from the ground up. Here areas were divided by profession as the National Archives suggests with doctors and dentists living in Rathmines and Kingstown, and railway workers living in Kilmainham.

This socio-economic landscape transformed throughout the twentieth century and blended to some degree as Ireland emerged into the twenty first century. Whelan (1999) makes the point that O'Connell has done the hard work for us regarding class structure and social mobility from 1961 to 1991 by outlining such factors as a decline in the self-employed, increased middle class professional numbers, increased unemployment, and the rise of female numbers in the labour market. As Ireland moved closer to the millennium and beyond, social mobility, personal attainment, and access to various social circles were influenced by the rise of

economic prosperity and increased access to credit and education, while those who did not or where not in a position to benefited have moved increasingly to the margins of Irish society. At this point it seems natural to ask, what is social class? How does the state decide the categories of social class in Ireland, and do the Irish people agree with or for that matter fit willingly into these categories?

Social Classification versus Social and Personal Identity

The CSO in Ireland combines socio economic groupings, which has an alphabetic grading system determined by skill set, with social class which has a numerical grading system defined by occupation type. Thus skilled manual workers are classed with the reference E4 and non-manual workers are referenced D3. Whelan, C. T. and Breen (1992) concur with Goldthorpe and include property, hierarchy, and agriculture in this debate. These are obvious and practical methods of grading and assessing class divisions but the impression is given that social class is fundamentally defined by the workplace and ownership, a highly universal approach that affords little attention to social class identity and the experience of being a working class man and being described as such.

This research in part is an enquiry into the important attributes that make up the working class persona (if there is such a thing), specifically concentrating on urban Dublin males, and an examination of each participant's perception of his relationship, experience, and identity as a male in his community. In reviewing the literature on social class I have looked at the writings of Hout (1989), O'Connell (1999) and Whelan, C.T. (1999) who explore class mobility, occupational mobility, and the economic division of social class. However, their work does not include the effects of social class labels on the individual or indeed the positive

and negative attributes that individuals attach to their class of origin. In the literature that's available on social class, its categories and divisions are taken as already understood with little attention paid to the individuals relationship with his social class or the value and identity that an Irish male attaches to this.

One piece of work that shows evidence of how some individuals express and conceptualise their relationships with, and understanding of social class identity is Patrick O'Dea's '*A Class of Our Own'* (1994), which is a collection of interviews with a group of prominent and active members of Irish society. Each interview explores the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes that have socially constructed the interviewee's relationship with class in Ireland. It is an ethnographic approach that allows the interviewee's to share their experiences of growing up in Ireland and making their mark on society. It contains evidence of each interviewee's ideas of class boundaries and knowing your place in society, and to some extent it highlights the negative and damaging effects that these issues have on the so called working class's relationship with education. It highlights the difficulty we have in defining class and raises questions about how we construct class by not only exploring perceptions of wealth but by shedding light on how the interviewees value themselves in terms of others. Some of the interviewee's views are clear and forthright but in other cases they can be contradictory.

Finbarr Flood for example talks about not being aware of class as a child living in Oxmanstown Road in Dublin's North inner city, but then describes the people living on the North Circular Rd in the following way:

> The North Circular Road was not only dangerous from a traffic point of view, but there was a different type of – what would you call it? – a different bracket of people that lived on the North Circular Road.

<div align="right">(O'Dea, 1994, p.40)</div>

By 'a different bracket' he seems to be implying that the people living on the North Circular Rd were better than him, as he says:

> I was probably conscious too, that if you moved onto the North Circular Road, people were more superior'.

<div align="right">(O'Dea, 1994, p. 50)</div>

Finbarr confirms that he did not understand what 'superior' meant but it still had the effect of implying a difference, something that can be seen to have been socially constructed for him. He also describes the poverty he witnessed while visiting the Liberties in Dublin's South inner city and he differentiates himself from the poor people which he describes by saying:

> A poor person to me would have been someone with ragged clothes, no shoes and just not well looked after.

<div align="right">(O'Dea 1994 p.50)</div>

In relation to my research question these views are important as firstly, Finbarr states that he did not experience class difference as a young child and in subsequent sections of the interview expresses the feeling that he does not feel part of any particular class. There seems to be a lack of any in-depth analysis by O'Dea here and he does not question Finbarr on this point nor indeed is Finbarr questioned on how he defines class. Interestingly he has firmly placed himself and his family in better circumstances than the poor of the Liberties but does not refer to them as a different class. Secondly, he does, however, allude to a difference when he implies that the residences of the North Circular Road were 'a different bracket of people' and 'superior' to himself (O'Dea, 1994). These insights open up a number of questions

regarding perceptions of how social class is constructed. There is clear recognition of seeing one's self as different in terms of belongings, property, and how you appeared on a daily basis and yet these things alone do not define a class. The idea of being of a different bracket is not fully explored by O'Dea and this leaves the reader to ponder and question what Finbarr Flood sees as the essential essence that defined those who were of a different bracket. There also seems to be a recognition or acceptance that the poor had their place in society and that that was just how things where.

> It was never said that they could do better, or should do better. It was sympathy, and how lucky we were.
>
> (O'Dea, 1994, p. 50)

The reader is also left wondering that if he was pushed to give an answer, what social class would Finbarr Flood place himself in.

Joe Duffy unlike Finbarr was expected to work and contribute to the family to the detriment of his education. Growing up in Dublin's Ballyfermot housing estate Joe talks not so much about class but more about the differences of possessions and behaviour, for example the people who had televisions or public displays of affection for children. Joe's perception of himself is as a working class man, but he does not see any advantages or disadvantages to this. Yet it is clear that he recognises certain attitudes towards further education which in his family was not valued as much as a paying job. Joe paints an almost idyllic, if not a naive, picture of his upbringing but it is clear that his families' attitude towards a financial contribution to the home ran contrary to his own ambitions and beliefs, and must surely have caused some level of domestic strife. The family beliefs regarding education show that it was a problem for as Joe says 'success for me would have been a job' (O'Dea, 1994, p.60). Joe

unlike his brothers completed his Leaving Certificate and then worked for a few years but experienced negative feelings from his father when he expressed a desire to go to college.

> My father was worried, not about the cost of going to college, but the absence of my income in the house. Obviously the job was more important than third level education.
>
> (O'Dea, 1994, p60)

Each interviewee discusses their working lives, attitudes to class, barriers, and other people's attitudes towards them. Although it could be argued by those who view themselves as from Dublin and working class that both of these men in light of their subsequent achievements (certainly in the case of Joe Duffy and the social capital that he possess) are not representative of the average working class Dublin male, they offer useful insights into what they perceive are the values that made up their social backgrounds, showing subtle but important differences that both define their relationships with class and also their relationships with education and the type of importance it has had in their lives. These men's views, while subjective are valuable firsthand accounts, rich in lived experiences that lend voice to the subject of class that is always there but conveniently unexplored.

How individuals perceive and structure their social class in reference to other social classes is dealt with to some degree in the work of Bourdieu and his concept of habitus. Bourdieu was concerned with understanding the relationship between agency, (the ability or power that an individual possesses regarding the making of free and independent decisions and choices) and structure, which contains the persuasive characteristics such as gender and social class that determine, prevent, or limit an individual in their decision making process. Therefore if we consider the individual as existing within a 'social space' (Bourdieu,1989, p.16) that is

different in its 'disposition' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.170) to other social spaces then habitus is determined by the thoughts, perceptions and behaviours that are generated and experienced in an individual's social space.

So it could be argued that an individual's disposition can be reflected in the social context of their upbringing. If the difference of social class can be defined and governed by habitus then this would mean that change and social mobility are in essence quite difficult as we would be defined by our upbringing and permanent change could not occur. However, as (Reay, 2004, p.440) shows habitus is located in the 'past and the present' and can be changed according to interaction with the wider world. I raise the issue of habitus here to highlight the integral importance of how an individual values their association with their social class which I see as being socially constructed rather that a product of habitus and I will deal with this in greater depth in chapter four.

Masculinity, Construction and Diversity

Irish masculinity has historically been defined in terms of being Catholic and a breadwinner. Men, either married or single, worked, while married women looked after the home and the children. Harry Ferguson in (Pease and Pringle, 2001) echoes this view as he sees the development of masculinities in Ireland shaped by the governance of the Catholic Church with its issues of morality, sex as procreation, and fatherhood. These masculine identities have fallen into crisis and indeed masculinities have changed since the latter half of the twentieth century which saw the lifting of the marriage bar for public sector workers in 1973, allowing married women to continue to work or return to work, the introduction of divorce in Ireland, and the blending of roles in the family structure with an increasing number of men

taking an active role in domestic duties. Emigration also figures in Fergusons work as he sees our identity as Irish working men over shadowed by the effects of emigration.

As with the issue of social class the similar problem of defining masculinity arises, and when considered in an Irish context very little definitive research or literature exists. There is considerably more literature available outside of Ireland and one such work is Victor Jeleniewski Seidler's '*Man Enough'* (1997). Seidler is concerned with diverse masculinities and endeavours to unpack the multilayers of masculinity within the middle class white male setting, focusing on emotions, power, the body, language, and what seem to be socially constructed myths of manhood. Seidler's arguments are clear and well laid out, and these myths of manhood tackle the ideas that 'men learn to be 'strong' as we do not have needs' (Seidler, 1997, p.50), and that if men are 'strong' they can stand on their own. Seidler also talks about the dangers of the myth of the 'macho man' (Seidler. 1997), and the damage that is done to relationships when we try to live up to this image. However he consistently refers to the middle class white male (in whose camp he firmly places himself) and mostly defines these men in terms of emotions, and shame of showing emotions while referring to working class men in terms of work identity, and power.

Seidler is encouraging men to more fully embrace a feminist form of masculinity and his work goes some way to debating the makeup of class identity and the difference of masculinities within each class, but it lacks the authenticity of interviews and other contemporary voices which might be achieved through the addition of ethnographic narratives.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The above literature is part of a growing debate that began in the early twentieth century and saw a move away from the notion of patriarchal masculinity and towards the study of plural masculinities. Before discussing plural masculinities it is necessary to define the notion of a patriarchal masculinity and the concept of a hegemonic masculinity whose elements include complicit, subordinate and marginalised masculinities. This concept was first formulated by Connell in the 1980's and was revisited and reviewed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) in their article *'Hegemonic Masculinity, Rethinking the Concept'*. Here the authors look at the original formulation for hegemonic masculinity, and explore suggestions regarding what should be discarded from the original concept and what should be kept. The basic tenant of the original formula for hegemonic masculinity, which consists of a power spectrum with the ideal or perfect expression of manhood at the top and every other man positioned and judged accordingly, is expressed as follows:

> It embodied the current most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.

(Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832)

For McDowell (2003) this notion of a hegemonic masculinity and the values of a dominant masculinity find expression in employment, being a breadwinner, and heterosexual, and McDowell (2003) in her work, *'Redundant Masculinities'* calls our attention to what she sees as a growing crisis for working class masculinity. This study explores how a changing economy, changing employment structures, and negative media attitudes towards young working class men in England have complicated their transition into adulthood. This literature engages with two groups of young working class men in England on the cusp of

leaving school and taking the next step into adulthood. Here we gain a useful and important insight into the values and attitudes that these young men attribute to being a man. These values and attitudes are socially constructed and are expressed in a desire for paid work and the securing of a family nucleus similar to their parents, with them acting as the husband, breadwinner, and father.

When discussing issues of class and masculinity McDowell explores the idea of a 'protest masculinity' (McDowell 2003), with its traits of risk and uncertainty being associated with working class youth and set in contrast and conflict to a middle class hegemonic masculinity, which is associated with privilege and choice. Like the other literature reviewed in this chapter power relationships between man take centre stage as McDowell also approaches masculinity and masculinities from the structured spectrum laid out by Connell with all other forms of masculinity compared and contrasted to a hegemonic masculinity.

> This gender politics is based on relations between men based on hegemony, subordination and complicity. Hegemonic masculinity (that which is most respected, desired or dominant within a society) captures power relations between men.

(McDowell, 2003, p .11)

These concepts explore the idea that there is a definitive, powerful way of being a man and that all those who cannot achieve this adopt lesser positions in relation to it, which implies different types or levels of masculinity, something that Aboim (2010) defines as 'plural masculinities'.

Plural Masculinities

This idea of plural masculinities can be defined in terms of identity and diversity, and the multiple ways men both perceive and are perceived in different social and cultural settings. Therefore men are viewed not just in terms of being a man, as they are also husbands, fathers, brothers, employed, or unemployed, and of different ethnic origins to name but a few. As Aboim states:

> Most men also seemed to occupy different positions in different spheres of social life, which led them to enact and exert their 'male power' very unevenly, according to the circumstances and demands of the moment.
>
> (2010, p2)

Aboim brings our attention to the current debate on plural masculinities and 'the need for a deeper understanding of contemporary masculinity as plural masculinities' (Aboim, 2010, p2) which she along with Morgan (1992) see as central to the study of masculinity and necessary for the critique of dominant masculinities. Morgan (1992) recognises along with Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Aboim (2010) the scope for diverse masculinities and the multiple layers of difference that construct an individual's masculinity. They see the gender and masculinity landscape as a place of change and Connell and Messerschmidt explore the possibility of new more universally acceptable forms of being a man that might level the gender playing field.

When looking at complicit masculinities and the idea of a patriarchal dividend Aboim (2010) examines how other men who are not at the top of the hegemonic masculinity spectrum benefit from the social and institutional dominance of those who are, a relationship that sees those who are complicit capitalising socially in a trickledown effect from the social and cultural dominance of the hegemonic masculine members of society.

These authors demonstrate powerful insights into ideas about how masculinities are layered and structured with significant field research done by Connell in Australia, but how does this relate to and affect the working class male in his everyday life? Would he readily view himself in such terms, or hold a positive view of hegemonic masculinity, or would he see these issues as relevant to the construction of power in his social interactions with other men and indeed reasons for the limitations in his life?

Working class masculinities and male participation in adult education

There are a number of written works available concerning men and either their absence from education or the barriers that exist to dissuade them from participation. In this section I am going to review and critique these works and highlight the gap that exists in our understanding.

McGivney (1999, 2004) talks of attitudes to work and the socialisation of the male role model as breadwinner, and also sees gender specific subjects and negative early schooling experiences as areas of concern. McGivney questions the ethos of educational and training institutions and male attitudes to education, and adds voice to why we should be concerned. Her research addresses unemployment, health, and isolation, and contrasts this with the sense of belonging and purpose that employment brings to men. It also looks at the role that education might play in combating isolation for the unemployed. These are highly important issues, and McGivney is highlighting the problems for men and participation in education, but as none of these men seem to have a voice here this literature comes across as mostly quantitative as the human element is largely absent.

Owens (2000) addresses similar issues and focuses on the numerical state of affairs regarding Irish males accessing education and possible barriers to male participation in education. Through the facilitation of discussion groups and one to one interviews with participating males in various community education projects the research explores why men are absent, what participating men feel about this, and their own participation, and what experimental projects are doing to combat these issues? Topics addressed are gender, gender role changes, social exclusion, isolation, and self image, and the issue of masculinity and male identity. The issues laid out here are clear and informative and compliment the work of McGivney, Nesbit, and also Corridan whose work *Moving from the Margins* (2002) highlights the barriers to male participation in adult literacy courses. The views offered in Owens work are convincing as they are both supportive and reflective. The whole research report is about people and by people with the research method designed to be driven by the participants. There is very much a human feel to this report with the researcher highlighting the negative impact that past educational experiences and social attitudes to male participation in education are having on Irish males. This report reflects on approaches and new models and assesses their impact on not only male participation but the quality of the experience. It is an ethnographic and qualitative approach, which targets social beliefs and the negative impacts of social constructs and highlights them as barriers to males participating in education.

Another author who goes a step further is Nesbit (2005) in a collection of contributions relating to social class and education. Here Nesbit highlights the significance of avoiding the debate on class and education, and this collection of writers from various parts of the globe engage in dialogue about capitalist driven education systems and how they are predicating the continuing divide between those who have and those who have not. The notion of capitalist driven education systems is worthwhile and necessary to discuss as this is particularly

relevant to modern Ireland. The concepts of lifelong learning and knowledge based societies where actively embraced by the last Irish government, further education institutions across Ireland, and those who represent Irish business interests. This in itself creates an education system that is influenced regarding the programmes it offers by the employment trends and Irish business's response to global demands. Thus what is available to an adult learner is dictated by the current trends of domestic and global capitalist economics. What business wants regarding worker skills, the education system will supply. The choice on the knowledge menu in further education institutions is designed to meet workforce and labour demands. In turn a monetary value is attached to the obtaining of this knowledge making access for those who cannot afford it, if not impossible than very difficult indeed.

Nesbit's collection of work examines how class affects every aspect of our educational and social lives, and how educational institutions socially construct our relationship and beliefs about the usefulness and importance of education in our individual lives, by placing value on specific types of knowledge and structuring our lives through grading systems and the importance of qualifications.

By highlighting the importance of the class debate these contributors are opening up new channels of critical awareness that challenge the capitalist based education system. As Nesbit says:

> [A]dopting a class perspective on adult education does two things: it draws clear links between educational institutions, the world of work, and the economic system that underpins them; and it highlights how educational institutions function to maintain and inculcate societal ideology and values.

(2005, p.84)

This literature and its arguments are clear and accompanied by reference to a wealth of authorities on the subject. It gives voice to the relationships of class, gender and education from various parts of the globe and shows similar trends in different capitalist educational systems regardless of their location. Critically speaking while it demonstrates the common link with capitalism, education systems, and class issues in various parts of the globe, Nesbit's collection is ineffective in giving voice to the man on the street, and as such lacks a qualitative input that could add real lived experience to the work.

Whilst the literature regarding men, class, and barriers to education deals with the social constructs of working class aspirations, it does not address or explore in any real depth how the working class male is affected by and negotiates the sense of not belonging in an environment that is not theirs, or how this in turn effects their social integration, involvement, academic performance, and educational experience. Reay (2001) and Reay., Miriam. E. David., Ball., S.(2005) go some way to opening up this debate by exploring how and by whom (as she sees it) the English education system is constructed. She then examines the negative effects this construction has on working class students, highlighting how these continue to act as barriers for those who enter further and third level education. Reay puts forward the view that the education system is constructed by the middle classes to bolster their position in society and this in turn has created the college and university as a middle class domain where the working class students who attend feel they are out of place and likely to be discovered as failures.

> It is not surprising then that education for the working classes has traditionally been about failure; about 'being found out'.

> (Reay, 2001, p.334)

Reay interprets data from interviews with a number of people who voice their feelings and opinions and reasons regarding their choice of college. These range from feeling out of place in certain college settings to choosing a college with a poor reputation through feelings of inadequacy or lack of self belief. Reay is making the point that working class students discover and develop abilities only to become lost as a result of their working class identities in the third level system. The blame for this she places firmly at the feet of the middle classes.

> At the beginning of the twenty-first century we still do not have a valued place within education for the working classes and for that we, the middle classes, must all collectively be held responsible.

(Reay, 2001, p.344)

Conclusion

The debate in Ireland remains firmly focused on embarrassment regarding literacy issues, negative childhood experiences in school, and the struggle with the decline of the traditional masculine identity as factors contributing to the working class males' alienation from education. This is vividly demonstrated in the BETI report (2008) which utilizes the work of Owens (2000), and issues raised by the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) relating to disadvantage people in the community. The class debate in Ireland continues to focus on economics and ownership with individuals occupying allotted spaces on a statistical spectrum. This literature review has sought to explore both national and international discourse on class, masculinity, and education, highlighting the ground breaking research already done, the lack of an abundance of literature on these issues in Ireland, and the need for further research into working class male identities, working class masculinities, and their influence on the working class males' relationship with education. It is a good starting point for an exploration of these themes and the socially constructed barriers that they develop, barriers that possibly remain throughout the educational journey of the working class male.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

My passion for education has existed from a young age and has been a constant, motivating factor in my everyday life. However, I did not grow up in a domestic environment that encouraged or nurtured these feelings. My background can be categorising as working class as my father was a taxi driver and my mother was a house wife who held various part time jobs, and I conformed to what was expected of me by entering the labour market after completing my Leaving Certificate.

Having a job was ok, but I always had a problem with being taken from school when the opportunity of work arose as I believed I could achieve so much more. Making money was a family priority and I was constantly reminded that both my grandfather and father had left school at fourteen to go to work. I was different however, and in rebelling against their expectations for me, I began a journey of discovery that has been tainted with isolation, insecurity, and the feeling of having done something wrong.

My journey through education has thus far been inherently imbued with self doubt about my right to succeed at a higher level. I forever tussle with the rationality of my thinking. On the one hand and in light of my achievements, to have these thoughts seems irrational, but on the other hand it has not been impossible for me to shake off the social expectations of my upbringing. By choosing to return to education I was inadvertently isolated from family and friends. My father became withdrawn as he felt I had let him down and friends continually

questioned why I was in college and not out working. This separation from family and friends has never really been reconciled even though I am now in paid employment. In choosing to do something that was alien to my social circle I feel that family and friends had a difficulty understanding me which created an atmosphere of discomfort due to them seeing me as different.

These experiences and thoughts have shaped how I view and question the social world, which I see as being a mix of human interactions and socially constructed expectations, attitudes, and values. They are the chief motivating factors for me conducting this research and although I have not let my feelings of isolation and wrong doing (for I cannot escape the feeling that I let people down in pursuance of my own dreams) stop me, they still act as barriers to my progress and play havoc with myself belief. My personal experiences of these barriers which are intertwined in the social expectations and connotations that accompany labels such as working class and male have contributed greatly to how I view the social world.

This research is an attempt to explore the experiences and views of others, to unpack labels such as working class and male, and to allow the participants to voice their experiences, understandings, and relationships with these labels and the social world that surrounds them. I believe I am guided in this by a social constructivist approach with the view that all knowledge is valid and based on how we interpret and process our experiences. I acknowledge that I am a part of this research process and that my experiences and world view have played an integral part in the inception, approach, and design of this project. With this

in mind I will now discuss my methodology and my methods of research, and I will also focus on the process, challenges, and ethical considerations that I encountered along the way.

Ontological Perspective

The nature of the social reality that I wish to investigate is that individual men hold ideas, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards masculinity and social class, which creates barriers to education, and that these beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes are meaningful elements of the social world. This research enquires into how individual men have developed their beliefs and perceptions, and unpacks the influence that socially constructed expectations may have had on their view of what it means to be working class and male.

In an attempt to investigate the very meaning of the terms working class and male on an individual level, this research stays true to my view that it is inherently difficult to fundamentally define the social labels that societies construct, labels that we as individuals have to negotiate, position ourselves in, or measure ourselves against every day. Thus my ontological perspective is grounded in the belief that there is not one truth but many, and that these many truths which shape each individuals beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes are meaningful elements of the social world that can be learned, shared, and experienced through an outpouring of discourse based on personal lived experiences.

Epistemological Perspective

This research is grounded in my believe that ideas, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes, which I see as meaningful elements of the social world are knowable, and that evidence for them can be generated through the sharing of lived experiences. What I want to research and how I will

interpret the data is very much guided by the belief that we as humans are guided by our past, our culture, and our experiences of these, and that all knowledge is valid and based on what meanings we place on the events that we take part in or witness. This view of knowledge as socially constructed can be found in the work of Berger and Luckmann who state:

> And in so far as all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the process by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality.
>
> (1966, p.15)

Thus I see value in the expression of these things and recognise that, how I conduct my research, what I ask, and my interpretations are greatly influenced by my own background. I am part of the research process and I bring my own meaning, expression, and experience to this process. Therefore it is fair to say that my approach to this research and the set of principles that underlie how I view the social world are embedded in the social constructivist paradigm.

As an individual and a researcher I am persistent in my endeavour to find meaning and understanding of the world around me and the social spheres that I engage in. As individuals we each experience and interpret events in our own way, and this creates multiple views and an intricacy of meanings for our understanding of aspects of our social world. Thus as individuals, our interactions with other people and experiences from social involvement prompts us to endeavour to construct meanings and to attempt to make sense of these social interactions. The social constructivist paradigm fundamentally defines my approach to this research as a whole, as it compliments my intention to go beyond the generalisation of labels

such as working class and male, toward the more complicated and varied lived experiences of the research participants. Creswell gives us a clear insight into the meaning of the term social constructivism.

> The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives.
>
> (2007, p.20-21)

Method and Process

As I have stated earlier my set of beliefs about the social world, the complexity of human experience and the validity of knowledge are heavily influenced by the ideas of the social constructivist approach which seeks to explore the values and meanings that individuals attribute to their social world. The methods to generating such knowledge in my view must go beyond the testing and proving of rules and past the mere analysis of statistics. I believe in an approach that provides a space for, and, allows the expression and analysis of lived experiences. This I feel can be achieved through a qualitative method of research which Creswell says:

> [B]egins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.
>
> (2007, p.37)

Qualitative research inquiry takes place in 'the natural setting' (Creswell, 2003, p.181) and involves a degree of participatory human interaction and the sharing of experience and knowledge, and requires that the participant is comfortable and actively involved. I feel that these characteristics are present in my approach and have been achieved to some degree

through the medium of one to one interviews, that where conducted with the aid of open ended questions in the homes and work places of the participants.

This interview process came together through the completion of a number of steps, involving the careful selection and design of questions that required each participant to examine their understanding of the terms social class and male. In turn it was hoped (and proved to be the case) that this open ended approach would provide the participants with the space to examine and express an understanding of their individual experiences and relationships with these terms. Secondly as the nature of this enquiry involves a lived experience of working class and being male, a number of willing participants were selected with these criteria in mind. As it transpired it was possible for me to engage with four men from Dublin who I have been acquainted with for a number of years and who know each other. As my research method was qualitative, in the form of interviews that allowed the voicing of personal lived experiences, I was concerned that it would be very much ethnographic. As such I felt it was important for me and the participants to have long standing relationships and a sense of knowing that would bring trust and allow for the sharing and expression of thoughts and feelings. Thirdly an insight into the purpose of this research and a consent form where discussed with each participant in an attempt to enlighten them to both the research purpose and their role in the research and to give them the chance to opt out or proceed as they deemed fit. Fourthly, preselected times and places to conduct each interview where agreed with the participants. A time frame of one hour was agreed with one of the participants at his request and the remainder of the participants were happy to allow their interviews to unfold organically with the confidence that we would all be aware when the interviews had reached a natural conclusion.

The questions asked required the participants to think about how their experience had shaped their understanding of the topics, and different concepts were explored as the interviews sometimes developed into conversations. What grew from the process was a series of interviews with many similarities but with distinct differences in flow and direction.

Observations and Challenges

Being relatively new to the interview process I was presented with new and contrasting challenges that I had not previously envisaged. Being well acquainted with most of the participants there was limited awkwardness or reluctance to share and divulge that may be present with first time meetings. Even so I had to contend with the habits and behaviours of some of the interviewees, which have developed over the years due to the history of our personal or professional relationships.

Interview one took place in Mark's home. This transpired to be the longest interview which is reflected in the fact that I have known Mark for over sixteen years. At the outset I got the impression that I was being positioned and directed. Mark placed himself in a comfortable chair facing a television. I was directed to sit to the side and slightly in front of Mark with the television behind me and over my head. A football match had been showing when I arrived and this remained on during the interview albeit with the sound turned own.

Mark also smoked cigarettes throughout the interview and drank coffee. Although he actively engaged in the process and gave thoughtful and considerate responses to the questions, my initial impressions where and still are that there was reluctance on his behalf to fully immerse

himself in the interview. It seemed to me that the television, seating positions, cigarettes, and coffee where representations of things continuing on as normal, while the interview played to some degree like a child in the corner with the appropriate amount of attention given when needed. However the questions did raise Mark's interest and challenged him on a number of levels, enough to create a desire in Mark to engage despite the distractions.

The second and third interviews took place in the college where both Tom and Alan are employed. Again I can say that I have known these men on a social and professional level for a number of years. I can also say that with Tom there was a degree of reluctance regarding the duration of the interview, and despite the provision of details regarding this research and my reassurances, Tom was unsure about being a part of the process. However, there was no control positioning or distracting props during this interview and I received Tom's undivided attention.

Alan's interview ran very smoothly and he was interested and engaging on all counts. Keith's interview was the shortest and probably the most difficult for me as I knew Keith the least, and although he co-operated and provided truthful and honest information I sensed awkwardness from both of us. I was least satisfied with this interview but recognise that my interview techniques had improved by this stage, a fact that attributed to an acceptable level of comfort and security for both the participant and me.

My learning has developed a good deal during this process and I am now aware that there was much more going on during the interviews aside from nerves. Each interview was to

some degree a power struggle that was seasoned with a desire for self expression and the need to protect one's self. This was something that was highly evident with Mark, who because of our acquaintance had an opinion of what my social class was, which he felt was different from his, and as a result positioned himself accordingly during the interview.

On reflection, where I to conduct this research again in the future, I would enlarge the interview process by conducting interviews with each participant both at home and at work, and if at all possible at social events. I believe that extended exposure to this process in different settings would provide worthwhile narratives and generate valuable knowledge more naturally.

Ethical Considerations

When I think of the word ethics and the noble considerations that many researchers have imbued upon this concept in a general sense and indeed throughout their own bodies of work I am continually drawn to a feeling of overwhelming responsibility. This is a responsibility towards the concept, and the integrity of my area of interest, the doing justice so to speak to the subject, my fellow academics, research participants, and external observers. After all I have a responsibility to open up topics of interest to debate, and add where possible to this debate. This must be done with a reflective mind towards research practices that allows for a stress testing of these practices with ethics in mind, and appropriate action taken to address and correct any abuse of my ethical standards which are constantly under review and challenged with every new situation. The core fundamentals of my ethical standards are chiefly concerned with honesty, openness, fairness, understanding, and respect for the integrity of the research, its participants, and its external audience.

Informed Consent

The participants of this research are a mixture of personal acquaintances and former work colleagues who have travelled on their own unique journey with their own experience and attitudes towards social standing and education. I was aware that these men were keen to participate through a need to help me as a result of our relationship. It would have been easy to just accept their kindness but I felt it was ethically necessary to sit with each participant and explain the purpose and nature of this research. I wanted to be sure that these men understood their participation fully and that they were taking part for the right reasons. Once this was done each participant read and agreed to the details on the consent form. In the spirit of fairness it was agreed that the participant's real names would not be used. Finally each participant was informed that their interview material and my analysis of the interview would be available for them to review and change up to the time of printing and submission.

Trust and Privacy

The main areas of concern for all involved related to the issues of trust and privacy. Being acquainted with the participants I was aware of their concerns regarding the handling of material and whether anything would be divulged or shared. Each participant knew that the others were taking part in the research and I made a point of reassuring everyone of my adherence to privacy and non-reference to interviews or sharing of information amongst the participants. An agreement of non-discussion was also made amongst the participants. I can guarantee that I won't discuss the material pertaining to individual participants with other participants, but I am also aware that I cannot fully guarantee that participants will not discuss their interviews with each other. Prior to interview, concerns regarding honesty and faithfulness towards the material generated were addressed. This led to a reassurance that

aided the research process by contributing to an atmosphere of trust and respect during each interview.

Power

There are always issues of power regarding the relationship between the researcher and the research participants. These can range from a lack of understanding on the participants behalf, to feelings of obligation to divulge information, and even the location and setting of the interviews. Having clarified the purpose, nature, and method of the research with each participant I feel confident that they were fully informed and freely agreeing to take part in the interviews. However, I am also aware that some of the participants may have wanted to make the interview situation as comfortable as possible but I am confident that they did not in any way feel obliged or pressured to share any personal information with me that they did not want to.

Conclusion

Approaching a research project is challenging, frustrating, and immensely satisfying. I found the internal questioning of my social world view and how I value knowledge challenge in itself. The logistics involved in engaging people in research and accounting for all the ethical requirements can and were taxing and frustrating, but highly necessary, leading to an immensely satisfying experience were I feel I created a vehicle for both informed and consented outpourings of real lived experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

In order to explore these issues relating to the research question I felt it was necessary to engage a number of men with whom I was already acquainted, in one to one interviews. As each interview progressed, individual experiences relating to social class, masculinity, and education were explored, and topics concerning family life, friendship, social standing, aspirations, and male responsibility began to emerge, and it is here that I will discuss the findings that materialised as a result of not only the questions that were asked in each interview, but the unique relationships that I as researcher had with each participant, and the genuine willingness on behalf of each participant to engage in an honest and reflective manor.

In doing this research my intention was to go beyond the generalised social accepted labels of working class and manhood in order to explore the real lived experiences of these topics and how they affect a working class males' relationship with education. As a result I became immersed in both historical and contemporary literature relating to social class, masculinity, and education. Therefore, my analysis of these research findings will be conducted in conjunction with both the experience of the actual field research and what transpired during each interview, and the literature review in chapter two. Firstly I will introduce the research participants, and offer an insight into the background of each participant. For the purpose of anonymity participants real identities have not been used.

Introduction and background to participants

Mark

Mark is forty nine, single, and grew up in a council housing estate in what he considers a working class area of Dublin. Reading has always been a hobby and he was influence by his mother who had a keen interest in writing poetry. Upon completing the Leaving Certificate Mark attended college for a period of time before taking on a number of unskilled jobs and getting engaged. However, this engagement did not last as he felt the responsibility of marriage was not for him, something he feels marked him out as being odd in his community in terms of what a man should do in his life.

> I would have been seen as odd. My background, because I didn't have kids by the time I was twenty, I wasn't married, and I'm not separated now.

Due to high unemployment Mark left Ireland in the 1980's and worked his way around Europe. By the early 1990's Mark had returned to Ireland but struggled to find employment. However, he still retained an interest in education and decided to avail of a government scheme known as the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme or VTOS. Upon completing this course Mark applied to, and secured a place in NUI Maynooth as a mature student. This was a defining step towards Mark developing a 'self belief' in his abilities, and the feeling that he was 'smart enough to do it'. Something he felt was hampered by peer pressure during his early twenties.

Marks' feelings, ideas, and experiences of social class are very much constructed by his upbringing and for him there is a pride in being working class which he wears as 'a badge of honour'. Mark demonstrates a prejudice towards those, who he perceives as having money or access to money, and he also refers to those who live in 'purchased houses' in a derogatory

way as he feels that they are middle class, are afforded easier lives, and did not have to struggle for success as much as himself. He has turned this perception of struggling into a thing of value, as he feels he has managed to succeed in terms of education despite the challenges of his social back ground, and thus sees the successes of middle class people in a lesser light. This could be seen here to be demonstrating prejudice which instead of coming down the social class spectrum is going the other way. Unlike Finbarr Flood, Mark does not see those with more wealth or more options as 'superior' (O'Dea 1994) but instead views them in negative terms and treats them with what he calls 'reverse snobbery'.

In terms of there being a difference in how a middle class person views the world as opposed to a working class person who has achieved success economically and property wise, Mark says:

> I would differentiate myself from them and have done in college. I've said ah yeah but your middle class. I've done that, I know I have.

Mark viewed the remark 'ah yeah but your middle class' as 'a putdown' in terms of 'what would you know'. This as I've pointed out above, he interestingly sees as 'reverse snobbery'. However, education and life experiences have changed some of his attitudes towards social class and how he values certain other types of work and this has enlightened and informed his relationship with education. When Mark attended college in Maynooth he initially felt that he was 'getting away with it' and that 'you were not doing real work' which he defines as 'physical work, working in a kitchen, on a site or in a factory'. Mark's ideas of academic work are now different and he sees it as 'different' and 'mentally tiring rather than physically'.

Tom

Tom is thirty three and a married father and he grew up in what he describes as a middle class home in North County Dublin. Tom defines himself in terms of being a husband, a father, a provider, educated, and as he says 'male 101' in Irish society, this being a man who enjoys golf and a few pints at the weekends. Tom views himself as middle class and from a middle class background even though when describing his childhood experience with education he says:

> I grew up in a house where it was valued or certainly I was told I should value it because my parents have very little education

The fact that his parents had 'very little education' would suggest according to the CSO grading system that they were non-professional and therefore perceived in Irish society to be working class. However, despite this Tom still sees himself as having come from a middle class background. He describes a positive attitude toward education in his childhood home with a room set aside for studying and an atmosphere that created a belief that he would always go to college, a belief that he feels was shared by his friends and acquaintances.

> I never thought that I wouldn't go to college apart from when I wanted to be a song writer. I was always told that if I wanted to be a song writer I would have to go to college and study music.

Some interesting points arise here. Was this a middle class upbringing as Tom believes or did Tom grow up in a working class environment that simply valued education? Does a positive experience and relationship with education necessarily have to mean a move from one class to another? Could Tom not remain working class and also value education? Tom believes that education is indeed an important tool for access to the middle class, something that can been seen as an 'escape' Reay (2005) which subscribes to the negative view of being working class and will be dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.

Tom did not achieve sufficient points in his Leaving Certificate to attend university so he applied for an IT course in the RTC in Tallaght. Upon completing the IT course and driven by what he would have seen as a 'long term goal' Tom attended university, and is now a vice principle of a VEC college. Tom differentiates himself from the working class in that he believes they are defined by what he sees as being 'short term planners', who do not see the importance of investing their time now for gains in the long term. Tom sees himself as a long term planner who was encouraged by his parents, which is one of the attributes he believes defines his upbringing as middle class. The following views are Tom's and quite clearly demonstrate a negative attitude towards the work class, and the attitudes and values that Tom believes the working class have.

> I think there is a certain short-sightedness about some working class people. There is a work ethic issue, I think, I think with certain working class people. They tend not to be, not so much forward thinkers. They tend to be short term planners and not to be long term planners and they tend not to see that if they invest their time wisely in a particular project, usually education for some amount of years and then maybe in five or ten years time they could project themselves into a nicer position.

Alan

Alan is forty four, a father, and a step father. Alan grew up in a social housing estate in North County Dublin and is the only member of his family to have attended third level education. Having left school at fifteen he worked various jobs and experienced bouts of unemployment before engaging with the VTOS programme, which lead to a place in NUI Maynooth as a mature student. Alan was keen to maintain a relationship with education, which he felt was valued in his childhood home but not understood by his parents.

> Education was valued but not understood. They didn't know, like you know, making sure we went to school, making sure we had the books, it wasn't easy to get a day off school but they didn't know how to give the supports at home in terms of, like you know giving help with homework because they didn't have the educational level, or the, the cultural knowledge that I feel would exist in a middle class home with things

like grinds or other educational supports that are employed in middle class households.

Alan now teaches childcare in a VEC college, and views himself as a different type of man from the boys he grew up with and different from his male colleagues because of the subject matter he teaches**.**

> I probably fit more into the emotion kind of category of a male, the stereo typical male, but I probably, I wouldn't say other males' would view me as very masculine, probably based on my profession, wouldn't help that cause either.

Socially, regardless of his educational and professional attainment and contrary to the perspective that Tom (who also teaches in the VEC) holds, Alan sees himself as working class and specifically lower working class, and it is a perspective that will be explored in more detail in the social class section of this chapter. Just like the other participants Alan feels he understands the term social class and its implications, and in relation to the other participants he expresses both similar and conflicting views and experiences of social class and masculinity, specifically the type of man he sees himself as. He would see the working class experience of and relationship with education as running contrary to the experiences of those he believes to be middle class.

> It's just an unawareness I think of the importance of education and how it has consequences for all aspects of a person's life or can have consequences for their health, their income, for their children. I think that would be a big distinguishing factor for me between the different classes.

Keith

Keith is fifty six, single, a father, and a grandfather. It is worth noting here that although I have known Keith for a number of years he is the one participant that I am least acquainted

with, a factor that contributed to awkwardness in our interactions and impacted on how, and ultimately what information was shared.

Keith grew up in Dublin and would see himself as working class. Keith feels that people are proud of their working class backgrounds and hold different moral values to those who would deem themselves middle class.

> In the present economic climate working class is just so full of morals now in comparison to middle class because of what's happened through the banking and what have you, and everything, the property, the whole lot, where it's the working class that have really stood up and been shown to have a lot of integrity.

Upon completing the Leaving Certificate level Keith became a clerk with The Irish Life Insurance Company in Dublin, a job that paid '£14 a week'. Continuing education was not a consideration or an option because Keith believes that working yourself up to a secure position through time and hard work was 'the done thing then'. Keith also points out that becoming a father quite young gave him the responsibility of providing for his family. This led him to taking on a new role for more money, working on the buses, and leaving Irish Life behind.

> I got a job on the busses for £28 so it doubled your wages so when it comes down to stuff like that you just jump. You don't think about further education, you just think of the day, the time.

This job became redundant and up to recently Keith has been working various non skilled, labour intensive jobs. On the subject of education he feels that as a young man he received a very good education and moral grounding from the older men that he worked with, and Keith believes that through advice and encouragement he was 'shaped', into the man he is now,

something that is of value and importance to him. In relation to the type of men there are in the world Keith talks about 'macho man' and the 'effeminate guy' and he feels he fits into 'middle of that', and is 'neither macho nor effeminate'.

Keith's comments and the ones expressed by Alan are not unique to Irish masculinity. The idea of there been different levels of, or multiple masculinities have been extensively discussed outside of Ireland in the works of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) who revisit the earlier concept of hegemonic masculinities, and Aboim (2010) who explores the ideas and validity of the existence of plural masculinities. There is recognition here by each participant of an awareness of different types of masculinities which draws comparisons with Aboim's work. There is also a placing of one's self which is revealed in comments like 'macho man' (Keith) and 'Alpha male' (Mark), but it being defining or oppressive in terms of how these men place themselves, value themselves, and interact with other men as Connell and Messerschmidt imply in the original formula for hegemonic masculinities does not readily translate from these interviews but sits more with Aboim's view that the masculinity arena is a place of change. I will return to this in the masculinity section of this chapter.

Social Class

The subject of social class and its impact on the fabric of everyday life for individuals in Ireland is usually examined in terms of economics, education and personal wealth. As I have stated in chapter two, social class and socio-economic groups are categorised by the CSO in terms of educational attainment, skill set, and occupation type and a review of the studies by Whelan, C. T. and Breen (1992) show that they approach the topic of social class categorisation through an exploration of issues including ownership of property, farming, and

social hierarchy. A furthermore Whelan, C.T. (1999) explored social class in terms of social mobility as defined by mobility in the work place. While these are worthwhile studies of social class in Ireland what they do, as I have said earlier is focus on social class in terms of educational attainment, economic wealth and the ability or inability to move socially and professionally in terms of employment. They do not address the experience of social class for the individual. Experiences that I see constructed by values, attitudes, and expectations that are fundamental to shaping an individual's relationship with education, are relative to the value an individual places on certain types of employment, and deeply affect how an individual interacts with family and the wider community.

Therefore, literature on the subject of social class pertaining to Ireland, once these fundamental categories of education, employment, and wealth have been established seem to assume that there is a universal understanding of how social class exists for and is negotiated by the people of Ireland. There is a significant lack of work specifically relating to how people perceive and value their social class. The work that Owens (2000) and Corridan (2002) have undertaken, deals with their participant's experiences of masculine identity, and childhood education, and shows the negative effects of masculine identity defined in terms of employment as opposed to education, and peer pressure regarding how men should behave in public. However, these works despite researching working class participants do not define social class or try to gain an understanding from the participants of what social class is and how it might play a significant role in their socially lived experiences. Thus, literature from an Irish context relating to the development of an individual's understanding and relationship with social class is thin on the ground.

This understanding and individual relationship with social class as I have experienced with the participants in this research is a complex process that seems to be absorbed and tussled with continually. It has also in the case of some of this research's participants led to a shift in positioning regarding their identity within what they see as their own class from time to time. This shift as we shall see concerns the negotiation and restructuring of relationships with family, friends, and other social institutions, through an assertion and ordering of the value of education in their personal attitudes, and an insistence on the recognition of how they define their masculinity. It is a shift that is also importantly directed by a willingness to achieve more in life regarding property, and employment, but with the continued need to remain accepted within their community and social class.

What is Social Class?

Each interview began with an enquiry into the participants understanding of the term social class. All saw social class as being divided into working class, middle class, upper class, with in some cases subdivisions in between. They each categorised class around issues of family, income, property, occupation and where you were born or grew up, which ties in with the work of Whelan, C. T. and Breen (1992), but then Mark began using words like 'limits' and 'aspirations'. Tom spoke of 'short term planners', Alan of 'attitudes' and Keith was concerned with a 'lack of ambition'. They were in fact referring to their perceptions of the working class, and Mark who sees himself as working class had a view of the working class as being 'defined by limitations' and 'expectations'. He feels that working class people have a limited view of both what is expected of them and what they can achieve in life.

> Working class generally, its' defined by its limitations, by the expectations that working class people have of themselves and their kids, how far they can go in the world, what they can achieve.

43

However, Mark's thoughts of his working class experience are to some degree expressed in negative terms and these views are echoed by Keith who sees a 'lack of ambition' as the main defining factor of the 'so called working class', along with the belief that certain things in life like further education are not for them.

.

Tom and Alan took a slightly different perspective and to some degree shared the view that what is valued, goals in life, and attitudes towards education defined the working class and set them apart from the middle class. Both saw education as having a higher place of importance for the middle class and there seems to be an agreement that a lack of vision or long term planning and a drive towards short term goals or gains are defining factors of the working class. Interestingly Mark, Alan and Keith, who all view themselves as working class expressed the view that middle class people share a world view of entitlement, a belief that they can achieve things and do not question their right too, for example go to college, a view that is backed up by Tom who sees himself as 'very much middle class' and expresses the view 'I never thought I wouldn't go to college'.

Social Mobility

On the topic of social class and control, Mark has the view that social class is not controlled by any particular class but he does feel that it suits some parts of society, that 'it suits that that's the attitude of people and that it's accepted without being talked about'.

Alan talks of social class being controlled in terms of social mobility. He does not believe social class is controlled by any institution but that social mobility in Ireland is quite difficult and that 'education is the key'. Alan feels that 'cultural differences' create 'invisible barriers'

that have a negative impact on the relationship between working class people and the education system.

> They are the barriers, the invisible barriers. There may be financial supports, there may be learning supports and kind of all sorts of supports within the educational system but they don't transfer necessarily to the home.

One of the points being made here is that education is the major contributing factor to achieving social mobility, but what the education and schooling system tries to do is either not understood or is not afforded the same importance in the family home. This places the failure to completely engage with education at the feet of working class people, and not the schooling system. A system which it could be said is middle class in outlook and geared towards social values that do not hold the same importance within the working class home. I have explored literature regarding social class and education through the writings of Nesbit (2005), and Reay (2001) in chapter two and I will deal with this more fully in the education section of this chapter.

Another point being made here is that people are caught in the vacuum of their social class which creates subconscious barriers that are not tangible and outwardly obvious in peoples' daily lives. These barriers are also raised by Mark and Keith who believe that you can move financially, but that a move from one class to another is not possible because of barriers in the form of attitudes, values, and goals. Mark believes that regardless of financial success a working class man will retain his working class values and will have 'an attitude' about the world.

These men are not expressing an innate difference between working class and middle class because I believe that social class is something you are born into, structured by, and learn from. Therefore what I see being expressed is that the fundamental difference between working class and middle class is an individuals' state of mind, which becomes a collective state of mind within a social class, something that has been absorbed through their lived experience.

Keith concurs as he sees social mobility as not possible because of 'social' and 'educational' barriers coming from both sides. He feels that working class people continue to identify with their social class and that the middle class will still look upon them as working class regardless of their wealth or occupation.

> I still see them as working class because I know people who've done that and still, although they are accepted by their work colleagues because of their whatever, they are still regarded as working class and vice versa, they still regard other people as middle class, so that's a boundary right away.

This state of mind can be located in the work of Bourdieu who sees habitus (which I have explored in chapter two) as having a particular relevance in terms of the reproduction of social class. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is that an individual is more likely to value what they have rather than focus on reaching a goal they perceive as either economically or culturally beyond their reach. Therefore based on Bourdieu's notion of habitus it could be conjectured that individuals are controlled by internal frames of reference that make some things achievable and others unthinkable. This would mean that individuals are subconsciously controlled by outlooks forced upon them by their habitus, which is in turn informed by class.

> [T]he social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds. Social divisions become principles of division, organizing the image of the social world. Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a 'sense of one's place' which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded.
>
> (Bourdieu 1984, p. 471)

This 'sense of one's place' although voiced and recognised by some of the participants did not succeed in permanently imposing limits on them and I would say that habitus did not succeed in all cases in preventing them from changing how they valued and perceived certain structures like work and education. However, those who valued the importance of being working class still insisted on maintaining this relationship.

The participants demonstrate that they are aware of the choices and alternatives that exist outside of their community and through their actions both Mark and Alan have demonstrated a willingness and capability to avail of these options while at the same time not changing their view of themselves as working class, which leads me to believe that the state of mind as discussed earlier regarding the perceived differences between the social classes is constructed on a much deeper level within the social experience and is not as a result of habitus because habitus is subject to and affected by change and interaction with the wider world.

> Habituses are permeable and responsive to what is going on around them. Current circumstances are not just there to be acted upon, but are internalized and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socializations:
>
> (Reay, 2004, p. 434)

Tom feels social mobility is possible depending on the actions we take and whether we set short or long term goals for ourselves. This runs contrary to the opinions Tom voiced earlier regarding the working class being 'short term planners' however there is the implication

throughout Tom's interview that he feels an engagement with education would change in his view the working class inclination towards short term planning. Tom expresses the view that a working class man could achieve 'middle classness' but that doesn't mean that he becomes middle class.

> If you were born into a working class family and you were a working class man, and if you decided you wanted to go back to education and you wanted to get a job, for example you get a typical middle class, quote unquote a typically middle class job like a teacher were you will earn enough money to get by but you will never be a wealthy man, then you could enter the realm of middle classness if there's such a word but it doesn't necessarily mean that you the person are middle class. May be we're still, may be whatever class we're born into that's what we're defined as but certainly we can live the life of a typical middle class male.

This idea of achieving 'middle classness' and also remaining 'defined' by the class we were born into highlights again the argument as laid out above that there is a state of mind that runs deeper than habitus and does not alter, regardless of the change in social and personal circumstances. The self positioning of each participant regarding social class raised some interesting thoughts during the interviews relating to mobility, a state of mind, and whether or not a person can move between social classes. I put it to Mark and Alan that in light of their educational achievements and occupational successes they would be viewed as middle class. They accepted this point but would not accept that they were anything but working class and Alan who is a successful teacher with a high level of education, insisted that not only was he working class but lower working class. This view point of not changing social class is also expressed by Finbarr Flood, who says,

> I don't perceive that since childhood, I have moved social class at all. I mean I don't have a mental feeling that I have move from one class to another.

(O'Dea, 1994, p.50)

Tom, however, felt that he had come from a middle class home in a middle class suburb of Dublin, despite the fact that both his parents had 'very little education'. Does this mean that Tom came from a middle class background or did he grow up in a working class home where education was valued? I feel that this raises questions around immediate day to day family circumstances and their affects and influences on aspirations, values, and attitudes towards education, work, and what is socially valued and expected of members of the family home.

If you grow up believing you are working class or middle class then what seems to be the case here is that this will not change, something I believe is socially constructed. This implies the need for a review of how we define social class and the values associated with each class. Mark and Alan are redefining what it means to be a working class man which includes values that would traditionally have been termed middle class. They want to hold onto what they see as the positive attributes associated with being working class and they also want to be respected and valued for their educational and employment attainments. These men want to be working class, educated, and able to benefit from the advantages that professional employment brings.

The other implication that arises from Tom's views regarding 'middleclassness' is that it asks questions of what middle class really is. If Mark and Alan can live their lives as working class men, ignoring the CSO classifications, are we getting to the stage where in the case of this researches participants that the differences between the classes is just a state of mind?

The study of social mobility in Ireland has people categorised in terms of their 'sources of income' and 'their chances of economic advancement' (Whelan, C.T. 1999, p.136) and most of these aspects are reflected in the comments of the participants with Keith even referring to a 'lack of chances', but the views expressed by these participants add complexity and depth to the debate on social class mobility, a profundity in understanding and experience that Whelan does not address in his analysis of the different working sectors in Ireland. They are not just numbers or statistics to be placed into predefined sections or subsections according to their place of residence, education level, occupation, and professional status. They have perceptions of what is to be valued in life and they define themselves by these values. Some values fit with the social constructions of their upbringing while some don't, and they negotiate these changes within their communities on a daily basis. The point here is that their social lived experience is infinitely more complicated and imbued with a richness that has not been addressed by the literature in Ireland to date.

Conclusion

These findings bring to light the sheer complexity of each participant's relationship with social class, relationships that seem to be individually subjective and tied to personal circumstances, goals achieved, disappointments and a sense of belonging whether there is pride in belonging or not. Where a person places themselves class wise and indeed their positioning or self posturing within that class is wholly grounded in their social lived experience.

For the participants, what you achieve in life does not change the class you belong to or your attitudes to life. Each interview demonstrates that for the participants the ideas of how

working class is perceived conjures up negative images and stereo types. However, the participants do not believe that social class is controlled by any one sector of society but that barriers exist between the classes, barriers that are not defined by money but by a state of mind. What has arisen from this section of the research is the willingness on behalf of some of the participants who view themselves as working class and to achieve educational and professional success without changing their class. Escape is not the goal here as a redefinition of what it means to be working class and what can be valued is taking place. In laying the responsibilities for the success or failure of social mobility at the feet of individuals there is a firm agreement that attitudes, expectations, and aspirations play a defining role in the outcome of an individual's life and the social class they place themselves in, and the findings here show that in the case of this researches participants class difference is wearing thin.

In terms of how the CSO grades and categorises people there would seem to be a disparaging void between this and how the participants view themselves. There is no correlation between the lived experiences of the participants and how they are categorised on paper. Social labels effect everyone be it negatively or positively and I would feel that in grading and classing people this way we are creating a power structure that does not need to exist, and it is doing more damage than good to our society. If working class people as the participants demonstrate don't psychologically move social class then we are socially constructing barriers and prejudice by creating and using a classing system that quite clearly doesn't begin to demonstrate or give full meaning to the lived experience of social life. Class has real effects on individual's lives and by couching social class in terms of economic, academic, and occupational success we seem to be neglecting the very essence of the working class, which, is the lived experiences of the people themselves. This research and findings

regarding social class inspire more questions than answers; questions, that I feel have not been adequately addressed in the literature pertaining to social class in Ireland to date.

Masculinity

What is a man? What does it mean to be a male and how do these things shape and define our relationships with the social world? This research has explored the ideas surrounding the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the notion of a dominant way of being a man, a realm that is occupied by the few, with the remainder demonstrating 'complicit masculinity' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and positioning themselves on a scale relative to this. I have also looked at the development of the concepts surrounding plural masculinities whose existence Aboim feels emanates from the power structure within the hegemonic spectrum.

> From this perspective, masculinities are necessarily plural because, more than symbolic, they are related to different positions within a power structure, that is, a gender order that segregates men in accordance with how far removed they are from the hegemonic norm: white, heterosexual, professionally successful.
>
> (Aboim.2010, p.3)

Here we have identification by Connell and Messerschmidt and Aboim of a 'power structure' (Aboim 2010) and that within that 'power structure' there is a plurality of masculinities. I don't believe that this power structure is formed in an orderly hegemonic way as described in chapter two, as men adopt different behaviours and roles depending on the social setting. As I will demonstrate below each participant has an awareness of themselves as a man. This individual awareness is firmly grounded within a socially structured hegemonic masculinity spectrum and expressed in ways, like 'old fashioned' (Alan), when it comes to conveying the attributes that a man should have. However upon further reflection the recurring themes of the individual, values, and what is important in life, begin to emerge and a self positioning

takes place that sees the 'hegemonic norm: white, heterosexual, professionally successful' (Aboim 2010) being continually challenged. How each participant expresses their understanding of masculinity, and how they position their own masculinity in relation to other men clearly demonstrates both the cultural and social impact of the notion of a hegemonic male, and confirms to some degree the complicity explored by Connell and Messerschmidt. However in my view it more readily resonates with what Aboim says,

> Conversely, most men do not explicitly defy the codes of masculinity. Yet, it is a misnomer to see complicit men as merely passive subjects, sandwiched between those who are most powerful and those who directly challenge hegemonic masculinity (e.g. gay men or pro-feminist activists). They are simply 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman 1988), and in many ways making masculinity evolve into plurality.
>
> (2010 p.3)

The 'dominant cultural symbols of manhood' (Aboim.2010, p3) are expressed by each participant as they consider what a male is and what makes a male. Mark talks about a 'breadwinner' and 'taking responsibility for the family'. Tom's understanding of a male is as 'the leader of a family' and 'being a father', sentiments that are shared by Keith who sees a male as 'the one people always rely on' and by Alan who expresses his view of a male as 'a provider, protector, somebody the family relies on'.

When considering the idea of different males, the work of Connell and Messerschmidt comes into play as each participant attempts to position themselves on a masculine scale with Mark setting himself apart from the 'Alpha male' and Keith placing himself firmly 'in the middle' between the 'macho man' and the 'effeminate guy'. Tom refers to the difference between masculine guys and men 'with feminine tendencies' when asked to consider whether there

are different types of males. He uses examples of 'the rugby star' and 'the dad in the park with his daughter feeding the ducks on a Sunday morning' to describe the masculine male, and in considering feminine tendencies he refers to 'a certain willingness to talk about, maybe women's fashion'. He also talks about having 'heterosexual tendencies' and that the 'feminine side of a man' is something that 'stands out' as something he is not.

Aspects of what Tom says fit with the 'idea of a homogeneous dominant masculinity' (Aboim.2010, p.3). Tom was 'born into an Irish Catholic setting' and lived with the spectre of 'self loathing' and 'a certain superstition about how you live your life'. Tom does not view himself at the top of the hegemonic masculinity scale, describing himself as 'male 101 in Irish society' and sees 'nothing wrong with being gay'. However, he displays traditional values of what it means to be a male and sees economic strife as the only reason why a man should swap domestic roles with a woman.

Alan also explores his view of different types of males and before defining how he sees himself he talks about the 'classic' view of the Irish male as, 'sporty, physically strong, emotionally aloof, popular with women, aggressive'. However Alan personally sees people in 'terms of individual' and views the concepts of masculinity and femininity as 'just categories' and 'for the most part social constructs', that people might attempt to live up to out of some form of insecurity or search for identity. Alan is not convinced by the 'traditional view of the Irish male' which he sees as 'not necessarily true', because for him masculinity 'takes many shapes and many forms and its down to the individual really'. Alan sees men as more protective and selective when it comes to expressing emotions and sees the differences between men and women relating to 'emotional availability' or 'emotional vulnerability' and

yet when it comes to considering himself as a male he feels he fits more 'into the emotional kind of category of a male'. Alan also feels he is 'quite masculine traditionally' but is not 'sporty' or 'physically strong'. This is interesting as Alan expresses an understanding of his masculinity both in traditional terms and in emotional terms. There seems to be an acceptance or at least recognition here that a man can be both of these things at the same time and that masculinity contains a number of layers. This fits with the work Aboim has done regarding plural masculinities and both Alan and Tom seem to be justifying their constructs of masculinities and where they fit with the 'idea of a homogeneous dominant masculinity' (Aboim, 2010, p.3).

Alan also talks about compensating for a lack of sporting prowess as a child by playing sports 'for the sake of fitting in' but he wishes he 'had been more secure' when he was younger, something that is not a problem now. This fits with Aboim's view that 'it is a misnomer to see complicit men as merely passive subjects' (Aboim, 2010, p.3) as Alan is aware of what he sees as 'the traditional view of the Irish male' is something he believes he is not, and he has positioned himself accordingly. Alan sees himself as masculine in terms of being a father, partner, and provider and he seems to have taken what he values from the idea of the traditional male and blended it with how he wishes to exist socially. I do not see Alan as passive and though he may not be amongst 'those who directly challenge hegemonic masculinity (e.g. gay men or pro-feminist activists)' (Aboim, 2010, p.3) he is to some extent challenging it indirectly.

These issues relate significantly to the research question which in part is in an exploration into how working class masculinities are constructed. Alan has a view of the hegemonic

male which he sees as the 'classic' male. This view is somewhat negative and Alan would not relate to all of its attributes. Instead Alan has positioned himself as a male who holds what he sees as the positive attributes of the classic male (being a father and provider) along with the attributes that he would associate with women (showing emotions). This has led to a positioning for Alan that has attracted negative attention from members of his community and created barriers regarding acceptance and recognition from work colleagues and friends, barriers that may dissuade other working class men from expressing and defining similar masculine values.

Mark and Keith share similar sentiments regarding different types of males and Keith clearly expresses his understanding of being a male and the type of male he is in the form of a masculinity spectrum with the 'macho man' who is 'all bluff and gruff' on one end, the effeminate guy' who 'is girlish in attitude', and 'soft natured' but 'not gay' on the other end, with himself 'in the middle of that', occupying a number of masculine attributes. Keith also talks of the physical aspects of those into sport as compared to a man who is into 'culture' or 'reading' and he sees the masculinity of the male who likes to read as 'different but no less' than the 'macho man'. As with Alan, Keith demonstrates a dislike for what he calls the 'macho man' and he believes that he is 'steady' which closely resembles Tom's 'male 101' in Irish society.

When Mark talks about what he calls the 'alpha male' he sees somebody who 'stands up' and 'takes control of groups'. He does not associate with this type of male as Mark feels he is quite simply just not that person. Instead he views himself as 'more introvert' and 'quiet for a bloke'. Like Alan, Mark would have been less secure and influenced by 'peer pressure' but

now he is more interested in how he thinks and feels and 'not what others think'. This fits with the social construction of masculinities as it demonstrates the pressure to conform to what boys should do in the community. This changing as a male is something that Alan, Mark, and Keith felt comes about with maturity and they all seem to deliberately position themselves, finding value in the type of male they have become, as compared to males in their social sphere and against social markers defining what makes a male.

Conclusion

I began this section by exploring not only what each participant's understanding of a male is, but also the type of male they felt they are or have become. In doing so I gained interesting and important insights into how the notion of being a male is socially constructed in terms of how each participant positioned themselves against social and cultural definitions of what a male is. These definitions included words like provider, father, breadwinner, being responsible, macho man, sporting prowess, and femininity. In using these terms the participants demonstrated a level of complicity, and recognition of the notion of a hegemonic masculinity. In relation to Aboim's theory of plural masculinities and the complicit male not being passive I would agree as I feel that this research highlights the number ways of being a man and that regardless of how each participant positions themselves they are not demonstrating a passive acceptance of a hegemonic masculinity structure, on the contrary, they are finding value in who they are, and are challenging aspects of hegemonic masculinity on a daily basis.

Education

The one important theme that emerges in each interview is the value of education and the tumultuous relationship that working class men have with it. Each participant talks about their experience and relationship with education and in the case of the participants who viewed themselves as working class, there is clear evidence of peer pressure and negativity towards education which is intrinsically linked to what they see as the social values and attitudes of the working class regarding what men should spend their time and energy doing.

Some of the participants highlighted the issues surrounding education within the social setting of their adolescence, exploring the positive and negative influences within the family home. The participants also talked about how those who choose to continue education were received by other members of the community and how this in turn shaped their future relationships with education. I refer to future relationships with education here because as this research's findings will show, some of the participants still experienced barriers upon returning to education as adults, barriers concerning self confidence and the need to maintain a working class identity. This section will therefore examine the types of barriers that exist for these men regarding engaging with education and will focus on the tangible (family, peer pressure, and employment) and the intangible (thoughts, perceptions, and values) barriers.

Family and Peer Pressure

Mark made the decision to attend college on completion of his leaving certificate and he is vividly clear regarding the obstacles and barriers that he experienced from family, friends and other community members. There was a negativity he believes, that arose around commitment to financial contributions to the family home and the suggestion that Mark

should have got a job instead of being 'a drain on the family'. Mark's mother supported his decision to continue his education but his siblings felt that they were carrying him. Mark thinks that this negativity may have resulted from jealousy from his brother's about them having to work while he went to college, but it was always 'presented' in financial terms.

> I was the first from my family to go and even then it was a big deal, even then it was talked about in this house and it was said about, you should be contributing because it was the year my dad died that I went to college and it was said.

Mark also talks about the general attitude of friends and other people in his community and what he sees as a working class lack of aspirations. He does point out that although he experienced these things, they did not stop him, however, he did have to negotiate this negativity on a daily basis and it did have an effect on his initial experience and indeed later experience of college.

> Middle class people believe they can achieve certain things, believe, and its, it's like as if they have a right to go to college or, you know, it's their right. They don't even question it. Working class people do and when somebody goes to college it changes the attitude of your friends to you. I don't know what it's motivated by, whether it's actually looking down on you or whether its jealousy, but it changes the attitude of your friends and they comment on it.

Mark believes he suffered from this 'peer pressure' which as he puts it 'got to me more, even in my twenties'. He also makes the point that he experienced this same negativity upon returning to college as an adult but that the experience of college gave him 'a lot of self belief'. This experience of peer pressure was also highlighted by Alan who differentiates himself from his class mates who he feels did not understand him. Alan also talks about people making negative comments regarding his involvement with education. This for Alan ties in with what a man should do, and he feels that the attitude within his social sphere was that education was for women not men.

There not seen as masculine enough, education. I know it was an issue I considered when I was going back to education. It would seem more acceptable for women to do it, from my social group to go back or return to education.

He also sees a rejection of certain types of education on behalf of working class men on the basis of them not being masculine enough or tangible in the form of 'an apprenticeship'.

I would imagine there's more acceptable types, yeah, you know the more traditional types, something that's tangible, something that's like an apprenticeship or working in something that is very kind of masculine even if its computers or accountancy. Something that people can understand, can relate to being an occupation. Whereas in my case it was an arts degree and when I explained what an arts degree is they would say what's the point? You know. Why are you studying history or sociology? What's the point?

These negative interactions within Mark's and Alan's social spheres echo the sentiments of the male participants in Owens study *Men on the Move* (2000). Here we have an outpouring of negative, formative educational experiences that are constructed in the context of what it means to be a boy and then a man in a working class setting. These experiences carried on into the participant's adult lives contributing to identity issues and problems with self confidence, something which Mark makes reference to above. They find root in the socially expected and peer driven attitudes and values attributed to being a man, attitudes and values that place an importance on manual 'waged work' (McDowell 2003) and negativity towards education.

With loss of ownership of the self, affirmation is increasingly externally sourced until identity comes to mean being the same as those around you, following the scripts around you. Thus, in a cultural arena wherein education has low currency value, participation may be perceived as threatening to an already fragile identity.

(Owens, 2000, p27)

Employment versus Education

This identity crisis is highlighted by McDowell (2003) in her study of employment, masculinities, and working class youths. Here McDowell looks at the values that construct working class masculine identities and shows how the traditional notions of how employment is structured, the changing economy and society's perception of young working class men have all played a part in undermining the hegemonic masculine identity. An identity that is intrinsically linked to employment as McDowell says:

> As theorists of the social construction of masculinity have argued, it is waged work that is of crucial significance to the construction of a masculine identity.
>
> (2003, p.58)

I would agree with McDowell as being employed is a means of achieving a level of empowerment so to speak, that allows a man to develop and to hold onto an identity, (be it a butcher, or a truck driver) that positions him in the world and ultimately provides the opportunity to achieve other social markers such as moving from the childhood home and buying his own. Alan experienced conflict in this regard as the importance of a man 'making a living' and what a man works at was so strong in his social sphere that he experienced barriers in the form of comments and attitudes not only while he was in college but also as a result of his chosen career as a child care teacher. He feels that he was viewed as 'eccentric' but 'tolerated' and 'the fact I'm working now sits easier with people'.

It is here that education becomes an issue as it clashes with these identities and challenges the masculine working class attitudes of getting through school and getting a job as described by all the participants. Ultimately education runs contrary to the value system that Mark comes from where 'real work' for a man is important, and is defined as 'labouring, working on sites or in kitchens' as opposed to 'reading or writing'. This 'real work' is a form of masculine

identity that is caught in a cultural lag where changes to gender dynamics in employment, and 'the nature of work and the social characteristics of workers' (McDowell, 2003, p.27) resulting from economic drivers and technological development have out manoeuvred working class masculine definitions of work. This is expressed clearly by McGivney when she says:

> Many working class men are experiencing a cruel dilemma: the kind of employment they want is in short supply but their sense of identity is so bound up with traditional labour that they find it difficult to engage in different jobs or alternative activities.
> (1999, p.67)

Identifying with traditional labour as opposed to education is borne out by Keith who would not have seen continued education when leaving school. The 'done thing' was to get a job, to 'get out in the world', and make money, he sees finishing school and getting a job as a 'thought process' as a job 'was the holy grail in those days'. In confirming the theory of employment being a 'key element in the establishment of an acceptable version of adult manhood' (McDowell.2003, p58), Keith continues by seeing it as a socialising process where 'you were one of the lads, you were working' and that this achievement meant that you 'were seen as adult as well'. On the topic of those who turned their back on work and decided to go to college Keith talks in terms of not being 'one of the lads', and being seen as 'odd or different'. He does not think a college person would have been isolated but it is difficult to see how this could be avoided for as he says himself,

> You wouldn't have been part of the social scene because you where in college, you weren't at work with the lads, like you didn't work in the same factory and that's the way it was.

Class, School, and College

Each participant sees these issues as barriers to education, which existed for them and still exists for the working class today. Barriers that find root as Keith believes in our childhood where there is 'no expectations' and that the 'expectation is to get you through school and out into work'. Keith sees the schooling system as having to bear some responsibility for creating barriers to education as he feels that:

> Teachers just want to get them through the schooling system, and if they go on to third level education it's a bonus, it's not a God given.

McGivney (1999, 2004), and Owens (2000), both pass judgment and highlight the culpability of the schooling system in the creation of barriers to education, but Reay (2001) see's a shift away from this situation as she believes 'our consumer culture' has created a new relationship between the working class and educational institutions.

> Now we have a situation in which the working classes are rapidly moving from a position of marginalization to an ironic situation, given our consumer culture, in which capitalist privatized education is consuming the working classes rather than the other way round.
>
> (Reay, 2001, p.335)

Reay feels that education not only in England but elsewhere in the World is structured by and for the benefit of the middle class and that any success or educational achievement by a working class person is not a recognition of working class success but is in fact a devaluation of the working class and a move toward being middle class as she says:

> In England, in the minority of cases when the equation of working class plus education equals academic success, education is not about the valorization of working classness but its erasure; education as escape.
>
> (2001, P.334)

This view is supported by Nesbit (2005) who argues that educational institutions are upholding 'societal ideology'. Tom supports this view as he believes that 'education is one of the strong tools that lifts people up into a middle class environment', however, despite reaching these social markers (educational success, employment, property) both Mark and Alan still see themselves as working class. Both men engaged with education not only to improve their employment prospect but also for the love of learning, and have not nor do not want to 'escape' (Reay et al 2005) to the middle class. So is it the case that once you are educated you become middle class or can you be educated and remain working class? Is there something wrong with achieving educational success and maintaining a working class identity? This debate and the mere asking of these questions highlight the kind of barriers that exist to education for the working class, with these viewpoints and questions demonstrating vividly the conflict between perceptions of working class identity, which each participant has voiced in negative terms and the belief that educational institutions are middle class domains that control, manipulate, and maintain the class divide for the betterment of the middle classes.

This view of education as a middle class domain is expressed by all the participants with Keith believing that the middle class see going to college as a 'God given' and 'an extension of school' while for the working class there is 'a lack of being led to believe that further education is available to them'. Mark expresses similar feelings, using words like ' right' and 'believe' for expressing a middle class relationship with education and 'foreign' and 'not for them' when expressing the working class relationship with education. Tom, who sees himself as middle class would seem to confirm these views, as not going to college was never an issues for him. He always felt that college was the next step in life.

That next step was taken by Mark and Alan as mature students and even though it did not prevent them from going, their time at college was fraught with negative feelings and perceptions that remained as barriers to a fulfilling, embracing, and inclusive experience of third level education, negative feelings that did not exist for Tom, who had an 'expectation' of being there.

Mark carried his socially constructed ideas about the value of work as opposed to education into college with him and he talks about waiting on them 'to catch me' and that 'they would cop on that I was a chancer'. This reference to 'chancer' comes from Mark's belief that he was 'getting away with it' and that 'they were paying me to read'. He says that he felt 'this isn't for me and I'm getting away with it'. These feelings relate to Mark's understanding of work and what 'real work' is, and he says that at the time he didn't feel that college work was real work, which to him could be defined as physical work.

Although these things did not stop Mark attending college they still shaped his experience of college because as a working class man he carried the attitudes, values, and expectations of his social background, and what a working class man should be doing with him into a third level domain, a domain that he felt was the expected right of the middle class and somewhere he was getting away with being in, an experience that was all so shared by Alan. This can be seen as a barrier to a fulfilling educational experience that might be expected of by a middle class man. It is also a barrier that is the culmination of being both working class and male with socially constructed attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of what can be achieved, and what a working class man should be occupied with, and where this occupation should take place.

While Mark seems to have isolated himself from any negativity in his community by staying with 'the college crowd' Alan was not isolated from this negativity while he was in college and he was subject to 'disparaging remarks' in the form of 'should be getting a job' and 'wasting time'.

> A lot of people would have struggled to understand why a grown man would be going to school and not getting paid, because it's a cultural thing, a value thing. In their eyes I should have been working.

These expressions and experiences mirror the work done by and McGivney (2004) who when examining the barriers education says:

> For many men, engaging in learning is not what 'real' men do, and some feel they will lose face and standing with their peers if they depart from the established norms of male behaviour. One of the most established norms for men is to engage in paid employment.
>
> (2004, p.65)

Reay (2001) and Reay et al (2005) also highlights how some working class people in England negotiate these barriers when engaging in higher education and the following statement goes to the heart of this debate.

> Working class students are trying to negotiate a difficult balance between investing in a new improved identity and holding on to a cohesive self that retains an anchor in what had gone before.
>
> (Reay et al, 2005, p.93)

These comments are significant in highlighting the barriers to education that have arisen for some of the participants of this research and they importantly demonstrated the intricate bond between masculinity, social expectations, and employment, a bond that shapes and defines what is acceptable behaviour for working class men regarding life choices and employment. What has emerged for Mark and Alan is similar to what Reay describes, a feeling of being

66

caught in the middle between wanting to embrace education and define themselves as such and also needing to hold onto and maintain ties with their social class identity. It is a socially constructed barrier that has shaped and affected both Mark and Keith's relationship during and beyond their involvement with education.

Conclusion

The fact that a negotiation and the finding of a balance have to take place is a significant contributor to the recycling of barriers to education for working class men. This has and does take place for some of the participants on a daily basis and sometimes a balance is never struck. If a working class man cannot engage with education without relinquishing parts of his social identity, if the option of education must at all times result in personal and social turmoil for self identity, or indeed disengagement from the working class mans social setting, then there will always be those who occupy a kind of other social identity, whose existence and visibility are a reminder to other working class men of the social negativity and personal identity issues that accompany working class men during and even after their further or higher educational journey.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the barriers both tangible and intangible that exist for working class men regarding an engagement with education. In doing so I felt it necessary and worthwhile to inquire into each participants understanding and experience of social class and the significance it held for them. I also inquired into their understanding of masculinity, what they believed it to be, where they positioned themselves regarding these beliefs and how this had affected their lives to date.

The intrinsic correlation of social class and masculinity is evident throughout this study, not only in the field research but also in the sizable amount of literature dedicated to the field. However, I have endeavoured to separate these issues as much as possible in an effort to tease out the fundamental understandings that each participant has regarding each topic.

What has emerged regarding social class is that these men see the differences between the classes as being bound up in perceptions, values, and beliefs. They did not see tangible objects such as money, cars and homes as the real difference. There was a negative view of the working class regarding how they viewed the World and what could be achieved and a general consensus by the participants that the real difference between the classes was a state of mind. This state of mind can be defined as the underlying barrier that for the participants ultimately curtails social mobility and as I have demonstrated in chapters two and four goes beyond what Bourdieu describes as Habitus. It is very much socially constructed and finds its grounding in the values, beliefs and perceptions of the participants' social background and is

expressed in the need to remain a part of that background despite personal changes in values and exposure to outside influences.

Regarding the issues of masculinity all of the participants had similar but slightly varying opinions of hegemonic masculinity, something they felt they did not resemble. There was a general negative attitude towards the 'alpha male' (Mark) or the 'macho man' (Keith) but each participant still associated elements of their masculinity with the hegemonic male. Aboim's argument regarding the existence of plural masculinities is quite evident here and each participant seems to have positioned themselves on a spectrum between the hegemonic male and the effeminate male, picking and selecting the elements of masculinity that appeal to them. However, I do not feel that they are 'complicit' (Aboim) as they are essentially indirectly challenging hegemonic masculinity and individually changing the values of what it means to be working class and male.

When combined, the main barriers that arise for the participants regarding education are bound up in the attitudes and beliefs of their social background and what is socially expected of a male. Being a father, earning an income, and providing for the family were values expressed by all the participants regardless of what social class they felt they were in. However, the type of work a man did and how he arrived at achieving that employment were viewed differently by some of the participants. Tom and Alan felt that education was the key and that planning for the future through education was an important factor in social mobility. This forward or long term planning was something all the participants felt was lacking in the working class but this issue when tied to education was also affected by the schooling institution, that can be seen to have a middle class outlook, which can to some degree be an

alienating factor for working class homes. Peer pressure, doing what a man should do, the notion of isolation within the community, and the feeling of not belonging in educational institutions were also integral factors that contributed to barriers to education and this research also highlighted barriers that existed during and after an engagement with education and on into working life. These barriers concerned the idea of not belonging in college and the experience of negativity from friends and colleagues regarding the type of employment undertaken, which runs contrary to what some people believe a man should do.

What has emerged from this research process is the very evident need to encourage men to talk and confidently become involved in expressing who they are. There is also the need to further define the notion of social class and to highlight the barriers created by placing people in categories relating to money, property, and education. These categories do not reflect the real lived experiences of these participants. They aid a negative attitude towards the working class and they disregard the pride that working class men have in their upbringing. This negativity and categorisation suggests that working class is a place to escape from, something that can be done through education which in itself creates difference as it gives the impression that if you engage with education than you are leaving your social class and community behind. However, what this research has shown is that there are working class men who want to be educated, successfully employed, who define their masculinity in varying and equally legitimate ways, and who seek to be respected as educated, working class men in their communities.

REFFERENCES

Aboim, S.(2010). Plural Masculinities: The Remaking of the Self in Private Life: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

AONTAS, in cooperation with the Further Education Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science (2008). BTEI: Increasing Men's Participation in Adult Learning. Retrieved February 07, 2012 from
http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/btei_mens_participation.pdf

Bourdieu, P. (1984) Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: MA. Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1989) Social Space and Symbolic Power. Sociological Theory, Vol. 7, No.1. (Spring, 1989), pp. 14-25: Published by American Sociological Association.
Retrieved May 25, 2012 from Stable URL:http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0735-2751%28198921%297%3A1%3C14%3ASSASP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T

Breen, and Whelan, C. T. (1992). Modelling Trends in Social Fluidity: The Core Model and a Measured Variable Approach: ERSI Project on Income Distribution, Poverty, and Usage of State Services: Working Paper Number 40. Retrieved December 12, 2011 from
http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20071120135552/WP040.pdf

Breen, and Whelan, (1996). Social Mobility and Class in Ireland: Gill & McMillan.

Connell, R.W. (1995). Masculinities: Polity Press.

Connell, R.W. and Messerschmidt, James W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept: Gender & Society 2005 19: 829. Retrieved January 25, 2012 from
http://gas.sagepub.com/content/19/6/829.

Corridan, M. (2002). Moving From The Margins: A Study of Male Participation in Adult Literacy Education: Dublin Adult Learning Centre.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches: Sage Publications.

Ferguson, H. (2001). Men and Masculinities in Late Modern Ireland, in Pease, B. and Pringle, K. (eds). A Man's World?: Changing Men's Practices in a Globalized World: Zed Books Limited.

Hout, M. (1989). Following in Fathers' Footsteps: London Harvard University Press.

Kearns, K. (1996). Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History: Gill & McMillan Ltd.

Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education (2002). Government of Ireland: Published by the Stationary Office. Retrieved November 15, 2011 from http://odtl.dcu.ie/mirror/irlgov/educ/adult-ed-wpaper.pdf

McDowell, L. (2003). Redundant Masculinities: Employment Change and White Working Class Youth: Blackwell publishing.

McGivney, V. (1999). Excluded Men: Men who are missing from education and training: NIACE

McGivney, V. (2004). Men Earn Women Learn: Bridging the Gender Divide in Education and Training: NIACE

Morgan, D. (1992). Discovering Men: Routledge.

Nesbit, T. (2005). Class Concerns, Adult Education and Social Class, Vol. 106 of New directions for adult and continuing education: Jossey- Bass.

O'Connell, P. (1999). Sick Man or Tigress? The Labour Market in the Republic of Ireland, in R. Breen, A.F. Heath and C.T. Whelan (eds.), Ireland North and South: Perspectives from social science: Proceedings of the British Academy, 98, Oxford. Oxford University Press

O'Dea, P. (1994). A Class of Our Own: Conversations About Class in Ireland: New Island Books.

Owens, T. (2000). Men On The Move: A Study of Barriers to Male Participation in Education Initiatives. Retrieved October 19, 2011 from http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/men_move.pdf

Reay, D. (2001). Finding or losing yourself? Working-class relationships to education. J. Education Policy, 2001, Vol.16,No.4, pp 333-346. Retrieved December 15, 2011 from http://web.ebscohost.com.jproxy.nuim.ie/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=75ee7a04-6623-4a8d-ab5e-b351b19524b6%40sessionmgr14&vid=2&hid=12

Reay, Diane (2004). "It's all becoming a habitus': beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4) pp.431-444. Retrieved May 25, 2012 from http://www.jstor.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/stable/pdfplus/4128669.pdf

Reay, D., Miriam, E. David., Ball, S., (2005). Degrees of Choice: Social class, race and gender in high education: Trentham Books.

Seidler, J. Victor. (1997). Man Enough: Embodying Masculinities: Sage Publications.

The National Archives (2012). What was Dublin like in the early 20th century? Retrieved January 15, 2012 from http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/main.html

Whelan, C.T. (1995). Class Transformation and Social Mobility in Ireland in Clancy, P. Drudy, S. Lynch, K. and O'Dowd, L (eds.). Irish Society, Sociological Perspectives: Institute of Public Administration.

Whelan, C.T. (1999). Social Mobility in Ireland in the 1990s: Evidence from the 1994 Living in Ireland Survey, The Economic and Social Review, Vol. 30, No 2, April 1999, pp. 133-158. Retrieved December 03, 2011 from http://www.esr.ie/vol30_2/2_Whelan.pdf

Whelan C.T., Hannan, D. F. (1999). Class Inequalities in Educational Attainment among the Adult Population in the Republic of Ireland: The Economic and Social Review, Vol. 30, No 3, July 1999, pp. 285-307. Retrieved December 03, 2011 from http://www.esr.ie/vol30_3/5_Whelan.pdf

Participant Consent Form

The Social Constructions of Working Class Masculinities as Barriers to Men and Education in Ireland.

Researcher: Ken Smith

Contact: Ph 0876945703. Email ken.1972@hotmail.com

Supervisor: Brian Sheridan

Contact: Email. Brian.sheridan@nuim.ie

Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the links between social constructions; the development of working class masculinities and the working class male's relationship with education. The field research method will take the form of one to one interviews. Each participant will be invited to participate in open, honest conversations, sharing their views and experiences.

Confidentiality of Data

All of the data generated from this research will be kept in a secure place at all times. Data generated from this research will be available to the research participants at their discretion (i.e. tapes or transcripts/notes can be accessed at any time) and to my supervisor. When published the research will be available on request from the NUI Maynooth Library. Please

note that research participants may withdraw from the study at any time or they may withdraw their data up until the time the work is published.

Interviews and focus groups in no way constitute any kind of counselling and participants my contact_____ should they experience any kind of distress/anxiety as a result of the process of this study.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Signed: _____   Date: _____
(By participant)

Print name: _____

Signed by researcher

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Print Name: _____

.

Interview Questions

Social Class

1. What is your opinion of the term social class?

2. What do you feel are the different social classes?

3. Is social class controlled by anyone?

4. What social class do you feel you belong to if any?

5. Why do you feel this?

6. Do you think it is possible to move from one social class to another?

Masculinity

1. What in your opinion is a male?

2. What makes a male?

3. Are there different types of males?

4. How would you define these different types of males?

5. What type of male do you feel you are?

6. Do we become different males at certain points in our lives?

7. When do you feel you began to form your opinion of the type of male you are?

8. Was there a time or place when you decided on the type of male you wanted to be (become)?

9. Has being or striving to become this type of male had a positive/negative impact on your life?

10. How so?