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BREAKING THROUGH
How do Adult Learners negotiate Class prior to, during and after Higher
Education

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While the following thesis has been written by one author, I believe it is imbued with the essence of many contributors.

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“Never Give Up!”

ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to explore the experiences of adult learners and how they have negotiated class prior to, during and after higher education. Class is a difficult subject to talk about, however, it is important that it is examined particularly in relation to the education system as much of the literature outlines that there is a direct correlation between class background and educational inequality. While the study involves eight participants and is relatively small so cannot be applied universally to working class experience, nonetheless the findings and analyses demonstrate common themes which highlight the need for further exploration of this topic. Issues such as low expectations in relation to inequality emerged from the findings rather than economic factors which are typically attributed to such phenomenon. Other issues emerged such as the sense of having to alter one's way of being in terms of accent and behaviour in order to be accepted by middle class values and norms. These findings demonstrate the need for a fresh examination of social class inequality and highlight the importance of the issue particularly now in the face of momentous shifts in society.

Chapter One

The Context

“Be realistic” the well intentioned career guidance counsellor told me. It was fifth year and I was invited to consider what career I might pursue upon leaving post primary education. I, in my innocence had wrongly assumed that there were a myriad of options open to me, that the ‘world was my oyster’, to borrow a well worn cliché, however, the reality I was presented with was in opposition to my rose tinted view of the world. I had mistakenly imagined that a third level education was a possibility for me. I had in fairness heard people extol the virtues of third level education, albeit through the media, and being a good student who received excellent feedback and sufficiently high grades, I assumed I too could be one of those people. It was perhaps this moment that brought my entire set of life experiences into focus and presented them to me in such a way as to put me in my place and inform me of the particular parameters within which I was welcome to operate”. (Excerpt from 1.3 Background to the Research, *My experience*)

1.1 Formal statement of the Research Question

The research question for this study is the following;

In what way do adult learners negotiate class prior to, during and after higher education?

1.2 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of people who did not progress to higher education until they were mature students as a result of their social class background. It aims to explore how their social class position was negotiated prior to, during and after the completion of a university education. It seeks to uncover the reasons why they waited until later in life to return to formal education and to explore their understanding of those reasons. I am from what I would call a 'working class' background and also returned to complete a formal education as a mature student having not had the opportunity to do so when I left school with a leaving certificate in 1990. Having returned to study for a sociology degree at Maynooth University in 2010, I was introduced to the academic discourse which surrounds issues of social class and it was at this point that I began to contextualize many of my own life experiences.

Having been introduced to the theories suggested by writers such as Karl Marx (1844, 1848, 1859), Antonio Gramsci (1972), Pierre Bourdieu (1982, 1986), bell hooks (1994), Paulo Freire (1996), I became captivated by the debate surrounding class issues. I find that the concept of what it is to be working class is either represented as having disappeared entirely or is represented through a lens which suggests that it is lacking in some way. Apple (1999) argues that 'reactionary postmodernity has had success in proclaiming the disappearance of ideologies and the emergence of a new history without social classes, therefore without antagonistic interests, without class struggle

[...]' (1999, p.212). Mike Savage (2003) addresses this and refers to the debate around social class as 'two entrenched camps of critics and defenders of class who have little to say to each other' (2003, p. 536). Savage argues for a re-working of the class debate which includes recognition of social and cultural change but nonetheless acknowledges the relationship between class, identities and inequalities (Savage 2003, p. 536). Authors such as Skeggs (1997), Walkerdine et al (2001) and Lawler (2005) have presented literature which explores such concerns. I believe the apparatus of the education system is directly linked to the needs and wants of the state which is largely organized and run by the dominant classes and ultimately serves middle-class interests (Reay, 2006). Therefore literature surrounding this phenomenon put forward by authors such as Althusser (1984) Lynch and O'Neill (1994, 1999), Reay, (2006), O'Connell, Mc'Coy, Clancy (2006,2007), ESRI (2014) is also addressed.

I believe in order to assist me in producing knowledge relative to the research question 'how adult learners negotiate class prior to, during and after higher education', it is imperative to explore the ways in which social class is represented both from a cultural and economic position. It is without doubt that issues of social class matter if we are to comprehensively understand the reproduction of inequality in society. According to Sayer (2005) 'not only because of differences in material wealth and economic security, but also because it affects our access to things [...] and hence our changes of living a fulfilling life' (2005, p. 1). This will underpin the findings and analysis of the research.

1.3 Background to the Research

Why Do I care?

Social Class, what it is, how we define it, and why we define it should be considered, I believe, even more important in an age where the visible markers of class are no longer as evident as they once were (Savage, 2003). The reasons are manifold not least because social class inequality impacts on the lives of people inter-generationally (hooks, 1994). My own parents lived in Tenement Houses in Dublin when they were children and from there, while small strides have been made in terms of the improvement of their and consequently my situation, economic struggle remains a factor in the lives of my family. This struggle impacts on the decisions we make on fundamental levels. The foods that we buy, the houses that we live in, whether or not we can afford to adequately heat our homes, attend a doctor or a dentist these decisions affect our health and the health of our children, as pointed out by O'Neill a lack of money, work and good health 'confines' people, (1994, p.79). I am also still firmly rooted within my working class circle and experience firsthand the pain of my friends and family as they try to make ends meet and provide the best for their families against a backdrop of marginalization, lack of resources and the difficulties they encounter when they find themselves in difficulty and in need of state support. But I am also there for the celebrations and the witty conversations, the support that we provide each other with, the warmth and care that we extend to each other, the familiarity and understanding that we share runs so deep that I would not trade it for any other way of

being. Nonetheless, the difficulties associated with working class lives have not dissipated despite the modern conversation which claims that we live individualized lives. I am very much aware however, that such experiences of Inequality are not simply located within social class issues. I recognize this and think it is an important and valuable point in relation to the overall topic at hand. Inequality is present in many guises, in particular at the point of intersectionality between class, race and gender (Hill Collins, 2006). Each of these issues is as relevant as the other and I agree with Darder and Torres (2004) who point out that equal weight should be given to each in an effort to understand the ideologies, institutions and social order through which they are underpinned (cited in Kincheloe and Maclaren, 2011, p.321). Nonetheless given the scope of this study I will focus solely on the topic of social class and how class is negotiated prior to, during and after higher education.

What Is Class Anyway?

As my grandmother used to say 'if I had a ha'penny for every time somebody asked me that question I'd be a millionaire'. Since I began this project I have been on quite a journey, I have defended class, rejected class, and gave up on the existence of class only to keep returning to a defense of class and how important I believe it to be. One thing that has emerged from this process is that class is a messy and often embarrassing subject (Sayer, 2005). I have unwittingly offended people while speaking of class and have learned to tread carefully when discussing the topic. That is not to say I have

diluted my opinion any, however, I recognize that sometimes people do not want to acknowledge that class may have had or is having an impact on their lives. This I believe speaks to the power of the issue however and also re-enforces my belief in just how important a topic it is. But what is class anyway? I suppose it is pertinent at this point that I offer an explanation of my own understanding of class. Firstly, I wish to acknowledge that within my understanding of it lays a tension, a tension that is provoked by my experiential understanding of what it is to be working class and by the literature I have encountered in relation to the topic. Therefore, my understanding is embedded within my life experience as I identify as a working class individual and also as a result of my time spent at university studying social sciences.

While studying for an undergraduate sociology degree I often felt that the analysis of working class lives that was offered by academics was somewhat sterile and devoid of any real understanding as to the complexities of working class experiences. As Lynch (1999) points out oftentimes those academics who do study social class issues are academics who are typically not working class. Nonetheless, my own understanding of class has been informed by that knowledge and combined with my experiential knowledge I have come to understand class in two ways. Firstly, as a division within society whereby some members have experiences which afford them greater opportunities in terms of life chances in relation to housing, health, education and employment. Secondly, I understand a lived experience of class to be underpinned by the struggle for those same opportunities.

My Experience

“Be realistic” the well intentioned career guidance counselor told me. It was fifth year and I was invited to consider what career I might pursue upon leaving post primary education. I, in my innocence had wrongly assumed that there were a myriad of options open to me, that the ‘world was my oyster’, to borrow a well worn cliché, however, the reality I was presented with was in opposition to my rose tinted view of the world. I had mistakenly imagined that a third level education was a possibility for me. I had in fairness heard people extol the virtues of third level education, albeit through the media, and being a good student who received excellent feedback and sufficiently high grades, I assumed I too could be one of those people. It was perhaps this moment that brought my entire set of life experiences into focus and presented them to me in such a way as to put me in my place and inform me of the particular parameters within which I was welcome to operate. And so, not knowing any better and having no knowledge of how the university system operated or how to apply without the endorsement of school teachers, I aimed for a good leaving cert which hopefully would secure me a job as a sales assistant. The job market was not good at the time Ireland had just come out of a severe recession and was not yet back on its feet so I knew competition was high. While classmates spoke of getting jobs in local shops I had bigger dreams, I dreamt of working in Dublin city centre in one of the department stores or a fashion store. This makes perfect sense to me now as I realize I had wanted more for myself but with a university

education no longer on the cards, I planned to move up the ladder in the circles where I was permitted to do so. On the advice of my Dad, I omitted some details from my address when sending off job applications, only supplying the name of the road on which we lived and I managed to get a job in a Department Store in Henry Street. While it was certainly more glamorous and more exciting than working in a local shop, it was challenging in ways I had never imagined. I worked in the stationery department which was on the ground floor and directly next to the cosmetic counter. Working in the department store with girls who were mostly from middle class backgrounds introduced me to something about myself that I had never realized before. I was different, I had very different experiences. I became hyper aware of my accent and hyper aware of my lack of knowledge around high culture. I had never travelled, had never at that point listened to classical music and my family did not 'have dinner' at restaurants. I struggled with that sense of lack and internalized it. This was my first experience of the 'us' and 'them' or the 'have' and 'have nots' discourse that I had often heard amongst my family members but had never understood. On reflection, the exposure to this other world and my recognition of my place outside of it, operated as somewhat of a rite of passage amongst my own social group as I was now fully initiated in the ways of the world and could therefore offer legitimate observations about our social position in society that were valid and acknowledged.

However, as I moved from the Department Store in Henry Street to fashion shops in Grafton Street and finally a secretarial job in an organization which dealt with education

and learning, I began to assimilate and while I always felt different when positioned next to the shop owner or the teachers and psychologists that I worked alongside, I also began to feel a little alienated from friends and family. Seduced by the dominant culture of middle classness I began to bring home some of the unspoken codes and traits that I felt were more acceptable. In the case of my parents this made me look a success as it appeared I was 'bettering' myself and moving in circles which could possibly lead to 'better things'. I was in effect however existing in a 'liminal' space, or 'limbo' as my grandmother would have called it. I did not quite fit in the middle class world I inhabited during the day and no longer was I a good fit for the friends whom I had left behind.

Those involved in the Research – the stories of others

During the course of this research I interviewed eight people. Five out of the eight people are known to me and offered to take part in the project. One participant I met on a field trip, she was hosting a workshop that I attended and I subsequently contacted her to ask if she would be interested in taking part. Two of the eight I met after they had responded to a flyer that I had distributed through the university where I work. All of the participants returned to education as mature students and four out of the eight attribute the gap in their formal education to their social class background. Six of the interviews took place at my place of work, one interview was conducted in the home of the participant and one was conducted through email at the request of the participant who did not feel comfortable being recorded but was very keen to participate.

The thesis is arranged into five chapters and a brief outline of what can be expected from each chapter is presented below:

1.4 The Structure of this Thesis

This section outlines the structure of the thesis which contains five chapters which will answer the research question, 'how adult learners negotiate class before, during and after Higher education'. Chapter one includes a discussion which frames why I am interested in the topic of social class and also explains how I have come to my understanding of social class. In addition I have included a piece which outlines my own experience as I believe this will assist the reader in understanding the position from which I am writing.

Chapter Two: Literature and Theoretical Review

Drawing on the work of Karl Marx (1848), Paulo Freire (1996), Antonio Gramsci (1972) and Pierre Bordieu (1984), this chapter will offer a comprehensive discussion on the theory surrounding class and will also discuss the literature which links education and social class position.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this section I will outline my ontological and epistemological position. I will explain both the methodology and the methods used for this study and the reasons pertaining

to why I have chosen these instruments. I will also present a detailed approach to how and why I will honor my ethical position within the research.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

In this chapter I will introduce the data that was gathered during the interview process. The voices of the participants will be interwoven throughout a discussion that refers back to the literature in order to support the analysis of the findings.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter will draw on the findings and analysis in order to present conclusion and recommendations which will be informed by my understanding of what is uncovered throughout the research process.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research project and a structured outline of what will be contained in each chapter including background to the research which encompasses a section on why I care about this research, my understanding of what class is my own personal experience, those involved in the research and an outline of the research questions.

Chapter Two

Theoretical and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In order to assist me in answering the research question, how is class negotiated prior to, during and after higher education, this chapter is divided into sections which contain firstly, a theoretical review focusing on the work of Marx (1844, 1848, 1859), Gramsci (1972), Bordieu (1984, 1986) and Freire (1996), in relation to the structure of class, this review will also explore the theory in relation to education. Moving on then the literature review will discuss contemporary theory surrounding class and educational inequality. This section will be divided with the use of sub-headings into two parts which will examine on the one hand the connection between education and inequality and on the other the cultural and economic aspects of class. To begin, the only way in which I can approach this review of theory and literature is to reveal my position from the outset. Otherwise I believe the contents of this article will appear as do many others, to be written from the outside looking in, whereas I am very much looking at this discussion from the inside out. Ultimately, I am making the argument that understanding structural inequality is best served through a class lens and it must be understood in all its dimensions, I do not believe it is sufficient to view class either as an economic relational position or entirely cultural, in fact I agree with Savage (2014) who argues for a re-working of class. There are two distinct ways of examining class in the social sciences, one uses economic theory to propose an exploration of class issues and

the other uses an exploration of cultural phenomena as the lens. Both positions are discussed below and I believe that neither of them adequately present a picture of the experience of working class lives, one particularly less so than the other. What is lacking in both the economic understanding and the cultural understanding of class is a representation of what I believe is strength, resilience and determination that exist within working class culture.

Rather, being working class is either represented as having disappeared entirely or is represented through a lens which suggests that it is lacking in some way. The re-working of class suggested by Savage (2003) argues for a reconsideration of the class debate which includes recognition of social and cultural change but nonetheless acknowledges the relationship between class, identities and inequalities (Savage. 2003, p.536). I believe in order to assist me in producing knowledge relative to the research question 'how do adult learners negotiate class prior to, during and after higher education', it is imperative to explore the ways in which social class is represented both from a cultural and economic position. This will underpin the findings and analysis of the research. As I previously stated, while class is the lens through which I am viewing the experiences of the participants, education plays a major role in the reproduction of inequality and therefore literature surrounding this phenomenon is also addressed.

2.2 Grand Theory - The Structure of Society

Any discussion surrounding class must I believe make as its starting point a reference to the work of Karl Marx. Marx's writings are not neglectful of references to historical events regarding existing divisions in society associated with the division of labor. On the contrary, Marx's analysis of historical materialism (1845/1994) outlines the trajectory along which such divisions have existed. Using examples of macro-economic theory which reports a division between nations through to micro-economic examples which outline the division of labor between town and country, tribe and family, feudalism and serfdom (1845/1994, p. 108-111). In fact much of Marx's theory is based on the notion of division and demonstrates a belief in a dual system of those who have and those who have not. The theory of alienation purported by Marx provides the basis for much of what we now understand as the division between the classes. In Marx's estimation the relationship between private property and production is directly relatable to the relationship between labor and exploitation as man in his efforts at work becomes a commodity;

“[...] the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, the most miserable commodity; that the misery of the worker is inversely proportional to the power and volume of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands and thus the revival of monopoly in a more frightful form; and finally that the distinction between capitalist and landowner, between agricultural laborer and industrial worker, disappears and

the whole society must divide into the classes of *proprietors* and property less workers” (Marx. 1844/1994, p. 58)

The opening lines of the '*Communist Manifesto*' claims that the history of all societies is 'the history of class struggles' (Marx. 1848/1994, p. 158). The Manifesto goes on to further assert that 'the modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of old ones' (Marx. 1848/1994, p. 159). Marx's argument contends that due to the relentless pursuit of capital acquisition by those who own the means of production every interaction in society can be accounted for by means of its economic value or a 'cash payment' as Marx specifically calls it (1848/1994, p. 164). The expansion of the proletariat 'the modern working class [...] who live only so long as they find work' (1848/1994, p. 164) is in direct relation to the expansion of the bourgeoisie class. While Marx acknowledges that there exist differences within this class of laborers he believes that the oppression they experience at the hands of the bourgeoisie will unite them in a cause which will eventually lead to the overthrowing of their oppressors. This happens according to Marx as a result of the development of trade unions which can operate more effectively due to the increase in modern communication (Marx, 1848/1994, p. 166). While Marx recognizes that within the proletariat class there are differences which threaten the cohesiveness of that class as a result of 'the competition between the workers themselves', (1848/1994, p. 166), he nonetheless contends that despite these

differences the working class become stronger and mightier in their opposition to the ruling class. However, while much of Marx's theory provides a gateway into the understanding of social class divisions it does not adequately address the entire set of phenomena at work which stunt the progression of the collective class identity and movement which Marx envisioned.

Modern theorists such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have attempted to explain this through the theory of individualization which suggests that due to the advances of transnational interactions, social class is no longer a relevant tool for examining inequality. The argument put forth by these authors is not that social class is dead but rather that using a class model alone to understand inequalities is insufficient as class identity can no longer be defined within a particular set of parameters (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). They furthermore contend that members of class groups have become individualized by the acquisition of a set of rights which have been afforded citizens which cannot be solely located in the welfare state. Moreover claiming that 'individualization is not to be confused with individualism' explaining that while individualism is a choice or a preference made by the individual, individualization on the other hand is what they call a 'macro-sociological phenomenon' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p.681) which they are suggesting might result in a fundamental change in the attitudes of individuals.

However, Marx (1859/1994) would argue that all societies are ruled by an economic base which informs the superstructure which contains the institutions of socialization

such as religious and educational institutions. It is within the institutions that the dominant ideologies are reproduced (Marx1859/1994, p. 211). While viewing the world through an economic lens might be a somewhat useful method for interpreting inequality amongst groups of people in society, it is not sufficient. I do not believe the theory suggested by Marx (1844, 1848, 1859, /1994) goes far enough in unpacking the relationship between class position and the structure of society. Other theorists argue this point and offer theories which attempt to explain the differences in society as being more complex. For instance, Gramsci (1972), in opposition to Marx (1948), claims that capitalism runs much deeper than simple economic relationships, but rather is cultural and is created through 'hegemony'. That is, the cultural appropriation by the masses of the dominant culture (1972) which in this case is the middle classes and upper classes. Bordieu also acknowledges that the 'social world is accumulated history' (Bordieu 1986/2008 p. 280) and that capital is the force that underpins the social world, however, he argues that simply acquiring capital does not equalize all agents or groups of agents. This view according to Bordieu is an 'imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity' (1986/2008, p. 280) On the other hand, he makes the case that capital takes time to acquire and therefore because of its potential to produce profit it 'has a tendency to persist in its being' (Bordieu, 1986/2008, p. 280), he goes on to claim that the theory surrounding the distribution of capital in its economic form does not adequately explain the structure of the social world and states 'It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of

the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory' (Bourdieu, 1986/2008, p. 280).

Bourdieu claims that using economic theory and thereby reducing all interaction to what he calls mercantile exchange or 'cash payment' as mentioned above in relation to Marx 1848/1994, p. 164) has resulted in all other forms of exchange being considered as '*disinterested*' meaning non-economic, thus resulting in the immaterial forms of exchange being transformed into other forms of capital such as social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986/2008, p. 281). For Bourdieu, the practices involved in the pursuit of profit cannot exist without the artifacts necessary to support that endeavor, claiming that 'the world of bourgeois man, with his double-entry accounting, cannot be invented without producing the pure, perfect universe of the artist and the intellectual and the gratuitous activities of art-for-art's sake and pure theory' (Bourdieu 1986/2008, p. 281). Bourdieu therefore outlines forms of capital which he argues are not mutually exclusive and are presented in three variables.

"[...] as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility" (Bourdieu 1986/2008, p. 281)

These forms of capital imply a set of interacting relationships which would see one form of capital as interlinked with another. For instance, it is possible to exchange economic capital for cultural, cultural capital for social and social capital for cultural capital. This theory goes further I believe than the theory offered by Marx (1848/1994) in assisting with understanding the distribution of capital throughout society, and is far more effective in its application to social class systems.

2.3 Grand Theory – The Structure of Society and Education

With regards to the issue of class and education however, Marx poses a question in relation to the 'equal education of the people' (1848/1994, p. 329). He poses the question as to the meaning of this statement, does it imply that 'education be *equal* for all classes? Or is it demanded that the upper classes also shall be compulsorily reduced to the modicum of education [...] that alone is compatible with the economic conditions not only of the wage laborers but of the peasants as well?' (Marx, 1848/1994, p. 329). I understand this to mean that Marx is suggesting the notion of an education of the people is located within an education of the labor force from which the ruling class will draw its resources. As is previously mentioned, in order that capitalism reproduces itself it must have access to a labor force. Althusser (1984) suggests that what labor power is available must be suitable for reproduction, it is not enough to simply have access to a labor force but that force must be trained in the ways of the capitalist system. This training according to Althusser happens within the 'capitalist education system, and by other instances and institutions' (1984, p. 5) not only do children learn to

write and become competent at maths they learn what Althusser refers to as 'know how' (1984, p. 5). Students learn how to perform the position that they are destined for, learning either how to obey instruction or how to give instruction, but either way they are learning their role in the system of reproduction, thus ensuring the continuation of the cycle and serving the interests of the powerful elite.

Similarly, Bordieu (1986/2002) suggests that educational inequality has very much to do with the cultural relationship between academic success and profit. He rejects quite clearly the notion of an education which produces results based on meritocratic principles. He clearly argues that given the structure of the education system educational success and academic achievement '[...] depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family' (Bordieu 1986/2002, p. 282) In addition, he argues that the reward from educational participation in this regard is dependent upon the inherited social capital which further cements its importance. The acquisition of cultural capital according to Bordieu is, he claims, cultivated over time, can be acquired and transferred without conscious action and 'always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value (Bordieu 1986/2002, p. 282).

The critical educator Freire is unfalteringly critical of the traditional system of education and in 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' presents a model of education which he claims has the potential to transform not only the lives of those who engage with it, but also the

society in which it propagates. He describes the conventional structure of education as one of 'banking' (Freire, 1996, p. 53), claiming that educators deposit information into students who are empty receptacles who need to be filled with knowledge. This analysis places the educators in a position of power and the students in a subordinate role. Claiming that education exists within a hierarchical structure, Freire also manages to highlight the political components that underpin that structure. Use of language such as 'oppressed' to describe students and ascribing the term 'oppressors' to those who hold the knowledge, he goes to great lengths to expound how this power relationship dominates the education system and the need for its transformation. Ultimately Freire argues that;

“The banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (1996, p. 54).

Maintaining that as it stands, the system will continue to recreate itself as the oppressed become the oppressors, as those who are oppressed look upwards to the lives the oppressors live and strive to reach those heights. Thus, the oppressor maintains their position of power within the matrix in that the condition of the oppressor is dependent on the existence of the oppressed and thus their interests are focused on changing the way the oppressed think not in changing what they think about (Freire, 1996). The over arching argument suggested by Freire is that 'the banking

concept of education serves the interests of oppression 'It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power', (1996, p. 58). In order to overcome such oppression and to enlighten individuals to their plight, Freire has suggested a teaching method known as 'problem posing'. Claiming that history is not to be regarded as unchangeable and fixed but rather it is dynamic and fluid, Freire argues it can be changed at any moment given the actions of the people who live it. Recognition of this fact can be aided, according to Freire, through the 'problem posing' method whereby the student teacher relationship functions best as a dialogical process (1996, p. 61). The teacher presents the relevant problem and between teacher and student a dialogue ensues which educates all participants. The teacher is taught by the students and vice versa in this process, therefore Freire maintains, no one in particular claims ownership of the knowledge. For Freire, this system of 'problem posing' necessitates a collaborative approach between students and teachers with a focus on socially and culturally relevant material, Freire argues that people must recognize that the system put in place by the oppressor will "maintain them" (1996, p. 73) but that they will never overcome that system if they do not engage in a praxis which will see them rise above it. Praxis requires reflection and action, according to Freire (1996, p. 73), which is a cognitive development and not one which can be derived through the transfer of information. Henceforth, a dialogical process is a prerequisite for the depth of realization that is required for the oppressed to fully acknowledge the right they possess to be their own master. Moreover, Freire posits that oftentimes both 'educators and politicians speak and are not understood

because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address', (1996, p. 77) resulting in a situation whereby their rhetoric becomes both 'alienated and alienating' (1996, p. 77). This argument ultimately claims that there is a need for both politics and education to 'understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed', (1996, p. 77).

2.4 Understanding Class – A Review of the Literature

Much of the contemporary literature surrounding inequality and stratification gives as its basis the reproduction of inequality through class divisions. As I mentioned in the previous section, class division was conceptualized by Karl Marx (1848/1994) as being based on the relationship of each individual in society to their relationship to the mode of production. Marx believed that there were simply two opposing classes, the bourgeoisie or upper class and the proletariat or working class. The working class people were forced to sell their labor (take employment) from the upper classes who then exploited that work by paying them a wage which was not representative of the profits derived from their work (1848/1994). This analysis of class stratification according to economic means goes some way to explaining class inequality and is in fact one of the most central 'popular and academic means of classification' (Skeggs, 1997, p.77). However, Apple (1999) argues in relation to Marx's theory (1848/1994) that 'these predicted revolutions did not occur or at least did not occur how and where they were supposed to' (1999, p. 138). Apple goes on to argue that 'among the major explanations for these non events are those that see that capitalism is not only an

economic system but a cultural system as well' (1999, p. 138). It is without doubt that issues of social class matter if we are to comprehensively understand the reproduction of inequality in society. Ignoring issues of social class inequality and claiming that they are no longer useful in explaining inequality (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) is I believe to sweep such inequality under the carpet and pretend it no longer exists. This approach of course fits nicely with the ever encroaching neoliberal discourse which would see society and state separate once and for all, placing the responsibilities for inequality in the hands of those who suffer the greatest (Giroux, 2014). Rather I believe it is imperative in these times perhaps more than ever that social class is given the respect it deserves in an effort to anchor something to the increasing inequalities which are pervading modern society (Savage, 2013).

Class identity is I would argue perhaps stronger than ever now in the face of a broken economy being treated with austerity. In contrast to the argument made by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) authors such as Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody (2001) critique such an account of class from a cultural perspective and claim it is 'hyper rational', adding 'there appears to be no difficulty about the act of transformation no deep sense of loss about the end of tradition' (2001, p.24). While Crompton claims it is the 'explanatory shift to the individual (and 'rejection' of class, as an 'outdated' concept) that has 'played its part in shifting the analysis of social inequality to the individual level' (2010, p. 20) suggesting that 'What used to be the working class is now dispersed into the service industry, [...] jobs for life having disappeared' (Crompton 2001, p. 22).

Walkerdine et al, argue further and refer to the work of (Holton & Turner 1989, Pahl 1989) claiming that the challenges of understanding and 'articulating' the monumental changes that have taken place in the last two decades is so great a task for 'theorists and political pundits' (2001, p. 23), that it is easier to give up on the 'idea that class as a concept has any useful place in the work of sociology and politics' while they claim 'there is no denying that class is etched deeply into our culture and our psyches' (2001, p.23) As Savage (2003) points out the very nature of social relations were, when understood through the economic model 'organized around a powerful series of oppositions, between working class and middle class, city and suburbs, wage and salary, low and high-brow [...]. Class was a visible marker of social differentiation' (2003, p. 536). However, as times changed and the process of de-industrialization began the obvious markers of class became less apparent. Social class did not look exactly as it had looked in its earliest conception, but that is not to say it had disappeared entirely. Savage (2003) suggests that something filled the empty space that remained, and that something was the norms, values and standards of the middle classes whom Savage refers to as having carved out a way of being for themselves which became the 'particular universal class' (2003, p.536) typically represented by white middle class males. This compounds the inequalities that are to be found within the resurgence of social class and consequently the culture and ideals of the middle classes have become the accepted norm to which everyone else must subscribe. It is in these spaces that social class is played out. Savage (2003) argues not wholly unlike Beck (2007) and mentions the fact that what was once a socially recognized class conflict dissolves into

identities which are rather concerned with living up to middle class norms and values, thus resulting in a situation whereby those who manage to do so are seen as acceptable and those who do not are quite simply not acceptable (Savage, 2003). Such theories of social class provide a useful framework for understanding class differences regardless of the fact that class does not explain everything,

The Reproduction of Inequality through Education

Much of the literature surrounding class and education points to education as the site of reproduction of dominant values and subsequently inequality. In the Irish case recent evidence shows that while there has been an increase in the uptake of university courses by working class students, (O'Connell, McCoy and Clancy, 2006) they remain under-represented. The ESRI report of August 2014 states that 'Young people from working-class backgrounds were less likely than their middle-class peers to go on to higher education [...]' (ESRI. 2014 p.13). This translates to an over representation of middle class norms and values permeating the higher education system which has a direct bearing on the continuous reproduction of university as an alienating place for those from working class backgrounds (Reay, 2006). Bell hooks argues that '[...] no education is politically neutral' (1994, p.37), a statement which is clearly an echo of what Freire purported when he stated that 'Oppression-overwhelming control-is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic' (1996, p. 59). Apple echoes this sentiment but adds the notion of negotiation claiming that 'education is a site of

struggle and compromise' (1999, p.203). While there are other social and cultural divides which give rise to discrimination such as race and gender, social class 'remains one of the most powerful factors in the shaping of our lives and dealing our life chances' (Walkerdine et al. 2001, p. 23). Kiely, Leane and Meade argue that 'it is widely recognized that gender and class oppressions are reinforced by the formal education sector' (1999, p.31), they state that there are 'marked disparities in the class backgrounds of those who leave second level education early and those who complete it' (1999, p.31). Quinn claims that 'lack of educational qualifications clearly impact on employment opportunities [...]' (1999, p.182), and Crompton argues that 'In short the association between class and employment is firmly established' (2007, p.10). While Clancy (2007) refers to the analysis of Bowles and Gintis regarding the educational system which he says begins with an assessment of the labor force requirement of capitalism, 'education functions as an agency to supply appropriately educated labor power to the economy' (2007, p.104). For Apple '[...] education is intimately connected to multiple relations of domination and subordination [...]' (1999 p. 197). While the literature is compelling as to how inequality is reproduced through hegemony, the education system and the relationship of the individual to the modes of production, there is little discussion centered on how the dominant class manages to legitimize their position effectively ensuring the status quo is maintained. Lynch and O'Neill (1994) claim that there has been a lack of understanding with regard to social class and education, and they state that '[...] sociologists have tended to ignore the poverty-related barriers to equality in education, and have focused on cultural issues

which have not been a central preoccupation of working class people themselves (1994, p. 308). Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact, as Sayer argues, that 'Class is an embarrassing and unsettling subject' (2005, p.1). Nonetheless, it appears that 'Those who receive much formal education are considerably advantaged over those who receive little, and those who receive their education in elite institutions are privileged over those who do not' (Bourdieu, 1986/2002, p.282).

In addition to this discussion there is the question as to whether or not working class people having successfully navigated the education system must leave their background behind. Bourdieu (1984) outlines a theory which proposes that we cultivate a 'habitus' which means that based on our unique experiences during socialization and development, we become enmeshed with the cultural relevance and meaning of our worlds and thus find it difficult to relate to that which is not of us. Put simply, it is difficult to understand or fully relate to the experiences of others when we are coming from a place where our own specific understanding is connected to our social disposition, 'The habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions [...]' (1984, p.170). Lynch and O'Neill claim 'working class people who succeed in the education system have to abandon certain features of their background class habitus' (1994, p. 318). Therefore, arguing that 'once they succeed within higher education in particular, their class identity changes' (Lynch and O'Neill. 1994, p. 319). However, Sayer posits an argument which suggests that the habitus can be modified and 'produce new

dispositions, and skills, enabling people to react in new ways' (2005, p. 25). Sayer further adds that to the extent a persons habitus is modified they 'may find they become comfortable in contexts where they may not have previously been comfortable' (2005, p. 25). hook also points out that in order to be seen as acceptable and not obviously from a different class background '[...] students from working class backgrounds could assimilate into the mainstream, change speech patterns, points of reference, drop any habit that might reveal them to be from a non-materially privileged background' (hook. 1994, p. 181). hook also refers to the fact that being expected to surrender all indexes to class backgrounds and experiences creates 'psychic turmoil' (1994, p. 182) which inevitably for some leads to a cessation of studies. Moreover, hook (1994) argues that it is middle class conservatism that creates a culture of silence and dominates classrooms as those spaces are predominantly controlled by people from middle-class backgrounds.

The legitimization of class inequality

The work of social class analysts such as Skeggs (1997) and Lawler (2005) respectively, goes some way to providing a cultural analysis which mirrors the argument of Reay (2006), who suggests that culture is of huge importance in the creation of working class lives, 'cultural analysis are needed to complement and augment traditional economic understandings' (Reay. 2006, p. 295). Skeggs (1997) asserts through her qualitative research with working class women the tension that exists for the women in rejecting their working class identity by acknowledging its very existence through the act of

treating it disparagingly. On the one hand, there are the usual references made by the interviewees to the economic state of class such as 'To me if you are working class it basically means that you are poor. That you have nothing. You know, nothing' (Sam 1992 in Skeggs 1997, p. 75). On the other hand there are the references to taste and to having the knowledge about what values one should be subscribing to illustrated by the many references made by different women to either wearing a particular style of clothing or decorating their houses in a particular fashion (1997, p. 91). Ultimately, as Skeggs portrays it, these working class women are seeking approval and acceptance from the middle classes. Lawler suggests that in the act of rejecting working class identities, middle-class norms are re-enforced and reproduced 'Class, in this context, is conceptualized as a dynamic process which is the site of political struggle, rather than as a set of static and empty positions waiting to be filled by indicators such as employment and housing' (2005, p. 430). Lawler states when referring to the representation of working class identities that it is not simply a case of middle class people being reproachful of working class people but it goes deeper than that. It is she claims, more fundamentally that 'they also work to produce *middle-classed* identities that rely on *not* being the repellent and disgusting 'other' (Lawler, 2005, p.431). The implications of such othering have a far reaching effect in terms of how the working classes are perceived. A position supported by Reay who claims that the 'lack of positive images of the working class contribute to them being educationally disqualified and inadequately supported academically' (2006, p. 295). Lawler's article illustrates that the working class body is a site for admonition and is often held up to scrutiny and vilified in a way that

would never happen to their middle class counterparts, '[...]their appearance, their bearing and adornment – are central in representations of white working class people'(2005, p. 432). This 'othering' that is placed upon working class people demonstrates the power that the particular universal class (Savage, 2003) has in positioning itself as the dominant culture. There is also what can be called an accommodation and resistance that exists between these two groups. While Lawler depicts a sentiment of disgust leveled at the working classes, similarly Skeggs' (1997) points out that while the women readily admit trying to shake off their working class attributes they are not fully willing to accept middle-classness and display an attitude or mockery towards the very group that holds the values and norms that they aspire to.

2.5 Conclusion

The theory and literature reviewed in this section demonstrate the complexities which surround the issues of social class in terms of defining what it is, how it is reproduced through the education system and how that inequality is legitimized by cultural factors. I believe the breadth of literature covered in this chapter will greatly assist me in exploring how class is negotiated by adult learners prior to, during and after higher education. Chapter three will explore the methodology and methods that have been used in order to complete this research.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In order to answer the research question ‘how do adults negotiate class prior to, during and after higher education’, I have chosen a particular approach to the study which is outlined in this chapter. Before I begin to illustrate what that approach is, I will outline both my ontological and epistemological position. I will then explain the methods that I have chosen to use and the reasons for choosing those methods. To this end I have broken the section into sub-headings which are numbered accordingly. I shall begin by explaining my ontology and epistemology under the heading ‘What I know and how I have come to know it’. The methodology is nestled under the heading ‘The toolbox’ and the methods that I used during the research are nestled under the heading ‘The tools’. For clarity, the section is further broken down into headings which explain ‘The sample’, ‘Gathering data’ and ‘Figuring it all out’ which relates to the coding of the interviews, ‘Limitations to the Study’ will illustrate where I felt there were limitations to the research. I will then outline my ethical statement in this chapter which combines the requirements of the university in relation to gathering data and the protection of participants, with my desire to ensure that I extend a deep respect to the participants and as such is nestled under the sub-heading ‘Taking care, demonstrating respect’.

3.2 What I know and how I have come to know it

In order to explore the question of how class is negotiated before during and after higher education I must first outline what my own ontological and epistemological position. Ontology is 'a philosophical belief system about the nature of social reality— what can be known and how' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010, p. 4). Henceforth, the methodology for this research is informed by my own ontological position. I believe that there is a persistent, pervasive inequality embedded in Irish society which continues to reproduce itself through the values that have come to be understood as normative throughout institutions, a discussion of which is fully explored in the theoretical and literature review Chapter Three. My reasons for holding these beliefs are personal and stem from a lived experience from which I have learned valuable lessons pertaining to power and inequality, how it operates and 'whom' it is foisted upon. For me, there are two elements to this understanding. The first has to do with social constructivism and the second with critical theory. Firstly, I believe lived experience is key in how we make sense of our world and how we interact within it, therefore, it is impossible for me to detach from a worldview which has been created, embedded and woven through every aspect of my existence and nor do I wish to. In *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*, 2003, Letherby indicates using an approach which she refers to as 'Auto/Biography', an approach Letherby states which begins by making sense of the self '[...] one's own history, developing and biography – and in locating oneself in social structures, to understand those structures and extrapolate

from this to try to understand and respect others' experiences, feelings and social locations' (Letherby. 2003, p.4). I believe this to be a true assessment of how we come to know ourselves, our world and our place in it. Ultimately, in making this claim I am asserting what is known as an epistemological position which contends that knowledge is created through experience 'Epistemology is defined not only as 'theories of knowledge' but also as 'theories of knowledge production' (Letherby. 2003, p. 5). Secondly, while I am making the claim that knowledge is created through experience, I need to assert at this point that I firmly believe that 'what' knowledge is created is filtered through the experience of structural inequality and more specifically class, race and gender. It is for these reasons as outlined above that I feel compelled to work within a combination of research paradigms, or practices, blending a little from each one to create a methodology that fits the purpose of this research.

3.3 The Toolbox

For this particular research I have chosen to use qualitative methods in the form of semi-structured one-to-one interviews and also a focus group. I wish to mention before I delve into this section that I am cognizant of the fact that within all research resides a power. The power of the researcher to decide what constitutes knowledge and what knowledge is represented.

The research which seeks to uncover how class is negotiated prior to, during and after higher education shall be underpinned by feminist research practice which Letherby states 'highlights the fact that the researchers' choice of methods, of research topic and

of study group population are always political acts' (2003, p. 4). In addition, given that the subject matter which I am exploring is very familiar to me it is impossible to stand outside of the research as an objective observer. As Letherby points out, within feminism the term 'feminist methodology' can be used to '[...] describe an ideal approach to doing research – one which is respectful of respondents and acknowledges the subjective involvement of the researcher' (2003, p. 4). Furthermore, she claims that '[...] all research is ideological because no one can separate themselves from the world – from their values and opinions, from books they read, from the people they have spoken to and so on' (2003, p. 6). For this particular research, it makes sense to use qualitative research methods whilst drawing from two research paradigms that of feminist research as outlined and critical research. To this end, the theoretical review presented in Chapter 3 draws on the work of such critical theorists as Marx (18, Gramsci (1972), Bordieu (1984,1986) and Freire (2006) as I believe the theory offered by these individuals substantially contributes to the discussion of class and educational inequality. As Kincheloe and Maclaran point out there are many varying understandings of what critical theory actually implies (2011, p.304), however, I am operating under the definition that they have applied to a criticalist as being;

'[...] a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted: that facts can never be isolated from the domain of

values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption;[...]' (2011, p.304).

As I have previously stated, I believe there is a persistent pervasive inequality embedded in Irish society, it is I believe power relations and social relations under the auspices of capitalism which drives this inequality. This is my knowledge, a knowledge that has developed over time and through experience and I have a duty to divulge that from the outset, entering into the investigation as Kincheloe and Maclaran state, with my 'assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage [...]' that I am bringing 'to the research site' (2011, p. 306). In addition to a critical feminist approach to the research I find that the constructivist paradigm is quite useful. A constructivist approach is not unlike feminist methods or critical theorist methods as it too is nestled within the notion that individuals make sense of their world by creating meaning in order that they might engage with what they are experiencing. 'The goal of research then', according to Creswell 'is to rely as much as possible on the participant's views of the situation being studied' (1994, p. 3). Nonetheless, I must reiterate that I believe conducting this research as I am from the perspective of critical theory, the construction of knowledge through experience and relationship with others exists under the auspices of structural inequality and class, race and gendered frameworks (Kincheloe and Maclaren 2001, p. 308). As stated by

Kincheloe and Maclaren researchers operating as critical theorists in the 21st century understand that there are multiple dimensions of power including sexual, racial and gendered 'axes of domination', (2011, p.308). It is within this overarching framework that I position my research.

3.4 The Tools

One-to-one Interviews

In using the methods that I have chosen for this study, I draw on the assertion made by Hesse-Biber and Leavey who claim that a holistic approach to research is one which draws connections between methodology, ontology, epistemology and method creating what they term a 'research nexus' (2010, p.7). What I understand this to mean is that the methods used in research must compliment the underlying philosophies of the researcher. Given that I fully agree with this viewpoint I believe qualitative methods tie in with both my ontological and epistemological position as previously outlined. It is for these reasons that I believe qualitative research in the form of interviews best suits this research project. Qualitative research practices begin with the collection of specific data which is subsequently analysed in order to further understand the subject matter (Hesse-Biber and Leavey. 2010, p. 8). I also agree with Schutt who maintains that intensive interviewing 'shares with other qualitative research methods a commitment to learning about people in depth and on their own terms, and in the context of their situation' (2008, p.338).

Interview Questions

The interviews were semi-structured and I did construct a list of questions. I gave the questions to the participants prior to the interviews and told them that the questions would act as a guide but that they were free to add anything from their experience that they deemed relevant in relation to the discussion. The questions are listed below;

- When did you become aware of social class?
- Did you identify as being of any class background before that time?
- What were your thoughts (if any) on higher/university education?
- Did you experience any difficulty during your time at university in terms of your home relationships with friends family and so on?
- Now that you have come through a third level education do you feel that your social class position has changed or that you have had to change in any way?

Focus Group

I decided to use a focus group as I believed it would add a powerful dynamic to the research process and also because I believed a conversation amongst participants might provide dialogical insight which would unveil common themes. 'Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from post hoc analyses of separate statements from each interviewee' (1997, p.11). While I had only two

members of a focus group I found this to be the case, the discussion between the participants and I produced data that was reflexive and informed by the input of each participant.

3.5 The sample

The sample chosen for the research was purposive for the most part. Purposive sampling takes place when the researcher decides who the individuals to be included in the study are (Schutt, 2008). This decision is based on criteria assigned by the researcher. I deliberately chose to speak to people who I felt may have shared similar backgrounds to my own and who had attended university either at diploma or degree level. The reason for this was simply that I felt people who had attended the academy would have an interesting reflective view on education and the part it played in their lives for better or worse, and therefore were best positioned to help explore the question of how class is negotiated before during and after higher education. The study involves eight people. Five of the participants were known to me and offered to participate when they heard what the research was about. This distilled any sense of obligation that may have existed had I asked them to participate in which case they may have felt they could not say no. One was a community activist whom I had met once as part of a group and contacted by email.

Two were located through a flyer which was distributed to the students undertaking a part-time arts degree at the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth. What I was attempting to achieve with the flyer was a control of what David Morgan

terms 'background variables' (1997, p.8) the most common of which are according to Morgan, '[...]are sex, race, age, and social class' for my study I was attempting to filter social class. However, in hindsight I realized that the wording that I used for the flyer was too broad and failed to specifically target one group. Nonetheless I received one response from a graduate who had recently completed a degree and after exchanging emails about the topic and the suitability of his experience to the topic, his attendance at the focus group was confirmed. On the evening of the focus group another graduate came along who had not previously confirmed his attendance. Again his reasons for attending the group highlighted to me the need for specificity in the wording of the invitation. He revealed that he was attending on behalf of his mother in response to the title of the flyer; 'Was University always on your Radar'? His mother had returned to education much later in life having not had the opportunity to do so due to a number of factors. One of which was that formal secondary education was not a requirement in 1927 when she completed her primary education. However, the interview went ahead and as it turned out much of the conversation was very relevant to the research question and therefore some of the conversation I have deemed valid for analysis.

3.6 GatheringData

The type of interview techniques that I have chosen for this research are 'one-on-one' semi-structured interviews incorporating what Laslett and Rapoport (1981, p.45) termed 'Interactive Research'. The methods attempted to foster a 'collaborative approach' to the research which engages both the interviewer and respondent in a joint enterprise (Oakley, 1981, p. 45). This is also in-keeping with my holistic approach to methodology which is underpinned by my ontological and epistemological position. Furthermore, engaging in a collaborative style of interviewing I found that the interviewees were more relaxed and better able to answer the questions asked of them. While at times I felt perhaps I offered too much of myself during the interview, reflecting afterwards I felt that the discussion in many cases may not have unfolded so richly had I been less involved. As Oakley argues 'the pretence of neutrality on the interviewers part is counterproductive: participation demands alignment' (1981, p.5). Where I had started out with ten confirmed interviews due to other commitments two people did not have the time to sit and talk with me. They expressed great disappointment as they were keen to be part of the process. This meant that I had eight interviews including the two members of the focus group. Seven of the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. However, one participant asked if she could have the interview questions emailed to her so that she might respond in her own time as she felt more comfortable with that method. This is known as computer assisted self-interviewing (Lavrakas, 2008) and while it might be argued that this method does not reveal the entire scope of what is possible with face to face interviewing, I felt that the

answers I received to the questions were quite in-depth and elaborate. In order to ensure that the research has no negative impact on the participants I took a number of steps. Firstly, each participant was assured that the interview would be private and confidential and that no other person would listen to the recording or view the transcript of the conversation. Schutt (2008) recommends that any information that is provided which might indicate the location of the participant or an event which can be linked specifically to their situation, should be altered to guarantee confidentiality (2008, p. 350). Therefore, I stated that I would not mention names during the interview nor would the actual names of individuals be used. Rather, an alias would be created for each participant. Obviously additional considerations regarding confidentiality come into play with a focus group, as Morgan points out, 'one unique ethical issue in focus groups is the fact that what participants tell the researcher is inherently shared with other group participants as well' (1997, p.3). In order to address this I simply pointed out that there was three of us involved in the conversation and we should do everything we could to ensure that confidentiality was respected.

3.7 Figuring it all out

In order to represent the findings, I have used a coding system which generates themes from the data (Clandinin, 2007). These themes will then be outlined in Chapter 4 Findings and analysis which is called 'The stories of others'. While I have outlined a brief version of my own story and have included it within the introduction to the thesis, I have also included in the themes pieces of conversation that I contributed to where

relevant. I found as I spoke with people many issues resonated with me and I had legitimate comments to make regarding some topics. To this end, I believe these pieces contribute to the findings and so I have decided they must have a place within the overall project.

3.8 Limitations to the Study

The limitations to this study are I believe due to the small number of people I managed to interview. I had hoped for a larger sample and had thought that the flyer used to recruit participants would have produced greater interest. The fact that one person preferred to communicate with me through email may also have limited the study as a face to face interaction will always allow for greater discussion such is the nature of conversation. Additionally, on the one hand I questioned whether my own experience created a limitation to the research as I was very close to the topic at hand and have considered whether my bias affected the questions I constructed. On the other hand however, and after much reflection I believe my deep knowledge of the topic was perhaps an asset to the study. Moreover, I believe that the fact that my social background is similar to that of the participants there was an understanding of shared experiences present throughout the interviews.

3.9 Taking Care demonstrating Respect

Satisfying University requirements

The ethical considerations for undertaking research are often understood as satisfying the requirements of the University and normally deal with technical issues such as confidentiality, consent forms, recordings, transcribed documents and so on. However, in the course of this project I have come to understand ethical considerations as running much deeper. In fact, I now understand that they are as much a part of the philosophical underpinnings of how I undertake this research as are the beliefs I have about how knowledge is created and whose knowledge is valued. In terms of satisfying the ethical requirements of the university, I prepared two consent forms, one standard consent form for individual interviews which has also been given to the participant who responded through email and a consent form for the focus group. I have also guaranteed that audio recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and guaranteed confidentiality in that no names or identifiable factors will be included in the final thesis. In addition participants have been told that I will send the transcription to them before the data is used and that they are welcome to withdraw from the process at any time or remove anything from the transcript that they are not happy with. These issues I believe to be the technicalities associated with ethical considerations and they are vitally important in that they provide some sense of control over the data to the participants. However, as Josselson (2007, p. 538) argues, 'ethics in narrative research, [...] is not a matter of abstractly correct behaviour but of

responsibility in human relationship'. This is the crux of ethical consideration for me; it is this responsibility to participants that must be at the forefront of all of my research activities.

My philosophical approach to ethics

Ultimately, my position as a researcher who has purposively chosen participants and also the research methods places me in what Josselson (2007) calls an 'ethical conundrum' (p.538) in that I find myself playing two roles. That of researcher who has a professional responsibility to satisfy criteria as laid out by the university and also my position which sees me involved in an intimate relationship with participants given that we are sharing stories and life experiences, a process which I have initiated. The ethical implications therefore are ongoing and cannot be catered for within a consent form. Rather ethical consideration is a reflexive practice which must be taken into account at all stages of the research. There is a duty on my part to maintain the trust relationship that was developed while the interview took place. It is the rapport that is created by the researcher which determines the level of trust given and therefore the richness of the detail relayed during the interview process (2007). This links back to the necessity of a collaborative approach as outlined by Oakley (1981) and discussed in the methodology section. The relationship between researcher and participant develops as a result of a sharing of life stories, however this must be balanced claims Josselson (2007, p. 540) citing Holloway and Jefferson 'against the need not to unduly direct the participant's attention to a particular phenomenon that the researcher wishes to study'

(2000, p. 540). I find this argument hugely compelling as I have encountered that dilemma as I mentioned earlier when I had to ask myself how much I should reveal during the course of the interview. It is in this context that I believe the 'ethical conundrum' comes to life in that I questioned whether or not it was unethical of me to elicit information from participants and yet hold back to some extent from sharing my own experiences. I managed this by stating at the beginning of interviews that I would share my own story however, so as not to lead the conversation, I would try to say as little as possible. Participants appeared to appreciate this and were happy to talk about their own experiences. Nonetheless if I was asked a direct question relating to how I felt about a subject I answered truthfully and honestly 'as a matter of good methodology, the researcher has to be transparent about his/her interests in order to make a research alliance with the participant' (Josselson, 2007, p.540). While this does alleviate the imbalance in power that exists between researcher and participant somewhat I do feel that what happens after the interview is just as important.

Participants were told that I would transcribe the interview and return it to them before I completed an analysis of findings. However, upon reflection of what I believe constitutes ethical consideration I have also decided to send a copy of the findings to the participants for their comment. The reason for this is that I have recognized while they may approve the transcript of the interview, they may not have considered that their words will be printed as part of the final product. As we 'are ethically bound to consider how publication of the material might affect the person's reputation in the

community were their identity to be revealed' (Josellson, 2007, p. 554) and in order to respect the relationship of trust that was developed in order to produce the findings, I think it is of great significance that participants are offered an opportunity to see how they will be represented. In the case that a participant should convey that they are uncomfortable or unhappy with any content I will at once remove it and guarantee them that I will destroy either the piece or the entire transcript. Once the thesis has been printed I will offer those who participated an opportunity to read the research in its entirety. As a matter of courteousness, I will also send a thank you card to each person in respect of the time and valuable information that they shared.

In taking the above steps and in endeavoring to be respectful and mindful of the power dynamics that exist in a participant researcher relationship, I believe I am satisfying ethical requirements not only from the perspective of the university but in terms of my own beliefs about the holistic approach that is necessary in undertaking a research project.

3.1.1 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology that was undertaken for this research project. It includes what I have termed the toolbox whereby I stated my ontology, epistemology and research paradigm. The Tools then outline the methods that I used broken down into an explanation of each method qualitative data and focus group and the reasons I chose those methods. Further on, I have outlined who the participants are, how the data was gathered and how it would be analyzed and I have also outlined

what I believe are the limitations to the study. This chapter also contains an extensive statement regarding my ethical considerations. Chapter 4 which follows will present the findings and analyses of the data that was gathered.

Chapter 4

Research Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will draw the entire project together and present the research findings and analyses in accordance with the themes that emerged from the data. While researching the question 'how adult learners negotiate class prior to, during and after higher education', Particular themes emerged which are relevant to both the theoretical and literature reviews. Henceforth, for the purposes of clarity the themes will be presented and analyzed under individual headings. In order to frame the findings and analysis I believe it is useful to reiterate the questions that I used as a guide in the semi-structured interviews, they are outlined below;

- When did you become aware of social class?
- Did you identify as being of any class background before that time?
- What were your thoughts if any on higher (university) education? Did you ever consider attending a higher education institute? If not why not?
- Did you experience any difficulty during your time at university in terms of your home relationships with friends family etc?
- Now that you have come through a third level education do you feel that your social class position has changed or that you have had to change in any way?

As was mentioned in Chapter three, there were eight participants included in this study, I must therefore reiterate as I mentioned in the section on limitations to the study, that this is quite a small sample and therefore the findings cannot be applied universally. Rather, the discussion will tie together what was found in this particular study and what has been reviewed through theory and literature.

4.2 Findings

While many themes emerged from this research initially, having spent some time analyzing the data I became aware of the following as common themes which were strong in their similarities. They are presented here under headings. The quotes from participants are woven through the text; however, in such cases where there is a long quote used I have indented and italicized the text for the purposes of clarity and ease of reading.

4.2.1 Awareness of Class

In response to the question when did you first become aware of social class the research revealed what I find to be quite an interesting factor. All but one of the participants expressed having no understanding of social class until they were much older adults. For instance, Michael who claims he deliberately does not identify with any class states;

“My understanding of class is informed through my education, otherwise I would never have thought about it, I wasn’t brought up thinking about it”,

and Louise stated;

“I wasn’t aware of social class as such when I was younger I definitely wasn’t [...] it wasn’t until I went to do that college course that I understood class”.

This view was echoed by George who reports;

“I never had a clue about social class. I didn’t understand social class, there were those who were rich and had loads and there were ourselves who had nothing [...] However when I went to Uni (university) I really became aware of what I now know to be social class and social inequality, when I started to become educated it really made sense to me. I understand the whole process now of social class”.

This was certainly my own experience also, as is discussed in Chapter One; I did not fully begin to contextualize my experience until I attended university later in life.

4.2.2 Expectations

The emergent theme that I found to be the most revealing was on the topic of ‘expectations’. This discussion arose in response to the question which asked if participants had ever considered a university education. Every participant involved in the process spoke about the expectations that existed for them in relation to their education, both from the perspective of their families and their teachers. The references made to this were for the most part in terms of a lack of expectation that they should progress to higher education but rather that achieving a leaving certificate and securing employment was sufficient. For one participant however who attended

school in what would be considered a middle class area in Dublin, she reported that there was an expectation that she would progress to higher education and her teachers actively encouraged her;

“I would have liked to go to college and I was encouraged by my teachers you know they used to say to me, ‘channel the energy you have’” (Adrienne).

While her personal life took her in a different direction, one which led her to council accommodation in an estate which she describes as being ‘classes apart’ from the one she grew up in, she describes the expectations that she experienced upon her move there as an ‘invisible ceiling’, stating;

“it’s almost like the invisible ceiling you don’t see the invisible expectations from one class is just you know to finish school, and you know, so they would say, Oh God finish school, and that was nearly a higher achievement than somebody else or others who had maybe left at Junior Cert or Inter-cert level”.

In contrast to the experience reported by Adrienne, other participants such as George reported that university had never even crossed his mind, stating that;

“I never even thought of my leaving cert never mind a university. It was impossibility for the likes of us”.

This view was echoed by other participants such as Colette and Nicholas. Colette also used a similar phrase as the one used by George, in relation to a university education she states;

"[...] so the difference in the view of education to some families where you have people who, they know that's where they'll end up, where there's people... who I would have never known I could have went there 'cos that wasn't a possibility to us".

Nicholas spoke directly about the fact that, "there was lower than there should have been, expectations". He expressed that he now believes that the option should have been presented to him, that he should have been informed about the possibilities of attending university,

"It should have been said do you know, do you realize there's you know... people go to college and there's possibilities and what would you think of that?"

A further interesting element within this theme is that Louise who states that she comes from a working class area, recognized during her secondary school years that there were little expectations from the teachers in relation to the work of the students, she asked her parents if she could move school to an area where the parents of the children were what she described as professionals and there she experienced something very different,

"the level of expectation of those parents and of the teachers in that school were much higher, having been very bright and top of the class in my other school, I was a very average in this new school, but I understood then, not that I understood social class but I understood that there was different expectations of people [...]".

4.2.3 Class, family and employment

As is suggested by Freire (1996) the current education system places educators in a position of power and the students in a subordinate role. Therefore, for students from working class backgrounds their relationship to the system of education directly affects whether or not they feel they are in a position to move on to higher education. For many of the participants, employment was the most crucial motivator upon leaving secondary school. Certainly in my own experience, employment was also the goal encouraged by teachers, discussions about progression to higher education did not happen. Training was often mentioned and many of the participants referred to this. Louise recalls how much knowledge her father has in relation to political matters and refers to him as being;

“much more knowledgeable [...] he has the knowledge, college knowledge well that’s all I have, but of course my knowledge is going to be given more value with a piece of paper at the end of it”

she goes on to discuss how the knowledge which her father possesses is not given the same respect or status in society because it is not endorsed by education, she then refers to her father’s class background as the reason for his lack of formal education, stating;

“like everybody’s mammy and daddy you know from a working class area, my mam left school at 14 to become a seamstress and my dad left school at 14 to go to tech and become a panel beater, so that was the norm”.

I agreed with Louise at this point and also shared that my own mother had left school aged 12 to go to work in a sewing factory, my father also left school at that age and began various jobs involving manual labour and factory work. This was also referred to by the other participants for instance Nicholas talks about his father being a labourer and interestingly discusses how his father was a countryman and where in Dublin the job of a labourer is considered working class that was not so much the case in the country. He did provide a quote however that he said his father used often when speaking with Nicholas 'get outta the dirt and don't be doing all that kind of laboring'. Nicholas also speaks about his father and mother as being good readers and writers although he says they only had primary school education. Unlike, the experience reported by Nicholas whereby he states that class is less defined in the country, Elaine's story reports how despite the fact that her family are from a rural background her mother told her she was working class and the term 'working class hero' was used a lot around her house. Her mother explained to her that certain jobs were associated with being working class and she states;

"I find it interesting now thinking back that all the jobs she mentioned were male dominated occupations such as builder (as my dad was) plumber, Bord na Mona worker, men who do work with their hands basically".

She also mentions that while she really wanted to go to university, the fact that her own mother had left school at 14 impacted this as her mother could not support her in choosing a course, the application procedure and so on. In contrast to Elaine specifically

mentioning the jobs that were undertaken by men, Niall reported that his mother left school after her primary education and worked as a shorthand typist for a number of years before she got married, in relation to higher education he comments;

“It just wasn’t on the Richter scale in her community in those days for people to even consider, people wouldn’t have even understood what third level was”.

George and Collette both referred to trades being important to their families. George states when talking about leaving school ‘I excelled because I got a trade before I finished my exams and that was our top floor, an apprenticeship’. While Colette says in relation to the impossibility of attaining a higher education,

“It didn’t mean that education wasn’t a value but the trades were more of a value because if you had a trade you would never go hungry and if you had hands to work in the trade they were more valuable than books put together”.

4.2.4 Feeling Different accommodation and resistance

This theme feeling different accommodation and resistance was generated as a result of a combination of three of the interview questions; When did you become aware of social class, did you identify as being of any class background before that time, and now that you have come through a third level education do you feel that your social class position has changed or that you have had to change in any way. Many of the participants spoke about their experiences with higher education which revealed a common thread in that everyone spoke at some stage about the experience of feeling different from either the lecturers at university or the other students. Louise states;

“I couldn’t identify with a lot of people in the classroom [...] that’s a huge reason why people drop out, they get into university and yet nothing around them makes sense to them, [...] the notion of university is so theoretical and they’re removed from everyday life and have come for a background, or if they are experiencing working class lives or whatever they’re experiencing them through a different lens, not a lived lens, a more theoretical lens or whatever”.

This viewpoint is echoed by Elaine who says that she found the cultural aspects of college difficult and this caused her to leave initially,

“I did not understand the language the lecturers used, I did not related to anyone else on the course and hence did not make friends, and anyone I did know certainly did not clean hotel rooms to keep themselves in college. Therefore, connecting with people was hard”.

Adrienne also speaks about this issue and is quite adamant that in order for working class people to be able to identify with instructors or lecturers it would be advantageous if those who were in that position had 'come up the ranks' as she puts it. She states;

"I remember being flat broke, a single parent stressed over work, kids all the trimmings with that and then going to a class and somebody who has been born with a silver spoon in their mouth and hasn't got a clue what I'm dealin' with [...] So I think having somebody who'd say look I was there I know where you're coming from and you know you can do this [...] I think when people are in a situation where they can't see the wood for the trees, can't see a way out and somebody who comes in and hasn't lived it ye think, feic off, ye haven't lived a day in my shoes".

Collette's experience is a little different in that she spoke about how she became aware that there were differences between her and others when she volunteered for an agency. "I became a volunteer which was unusual for me to have stepped out of the class", she goes to talk about the people she encountered there and how that made her feel,

"there used to be a lot of Trinity students and people like that and I remember going in [...] and then me accent is a Dublin accent a working class accent and you'd be kind of afraid to use your voice 'cos [...] even though those people were really nice to me, I kind of had that bit of a thing that I came from, ye know class, as different a bit different".

This experience is similar to my own in the sense that I only really recognized that I was different from others when I went to work somewhere that was outside of my local area.

For those participants who readily identify as working class they did not feel their class position had changed any upon completion of higher education, however, they do mention in various ways what Louise termed “filing the edges off” and what George refers to as the necessity to “sand off some of the rough edges”. Louise specifically refers to her accent and says;

“I speak differently in my own home that I do when I’m at work, but you do have to learn that early on, like I was working and if I was on the phone and that I was very conscious of my accent, so I obviously toned that down a bit, I think of course you don’t leave your working class identity behind, but you learn to not express as much of it I think”.

George and Adrienne both refer to being specifically aware of being treated differently since they have attained a university education. In George’s case he speaks about the fact that himself and his wife both notice this being the case;

“Now I am a professional too because I’m a teacher they treat me different. I can feel it and see it. Even my wife says it.”

Nonetheless George refers to behaving differently when he feels the need to.

“I can move within any social class and be true to myself, yet I have to play roles to be fully accepted by those who perceive to be a class above me, middle class and so on, it’s very hard to be true to yourself because you have to play by the rules and it’s difficult for me”.

Louise also refers to 'moving between two different classes' and states 'you have your particular personas in those classes'. Adrienne's story centers around a time in her life where she needed to move from the home she was living in, she recounts how having rang the council time and time again in order to be moved from an unsatisfactory situation, it was not until she mentioned her college education that action was taken on her behalf;

"I kept writing and ringing the council you know and saying get me out of here and they weren't really paying any attention. One day I got speaking to somebody face to face and he said you shouldn't be there in the first place, I don't know whether it was because I was educated or able to put my case forward or whatever [...] he transferred me to a new estate where most of the houses were predominantly private and he said you're suitable for there, so he deemed me suitable to live with people who had bought their house because of whatever way he had perceived me to be".

Colette discusses her time as a member on a prominent board she tells a story of attending a meeting and the experience she had in recognizing all of the differences in how food was presented and what food was presented. Nonetheless she states;

"there was all them kind of little experiences where inside that class thing, they go for dinner with each other they meet in galleries and it was really interesting, I was still able to hold my own in it, they didn't ask me did I go to university or didn't I go to university ye know".

4.2.5 Conclusion

The findings outlined above under thematic headings unveil some very interesting factors surrounding how adult learners negotiate class prior to during and after higher education. These findings will be analysed below in relation to the theory and literature that was reviewed in Chapter two.

4.3 Analyses

I believe the findings in relation to being aware of social class somewhat refute the claims made by (Marx in 1848/1994, p. 166) who argued that despite the differences that exist between them the working class would become stronger and mightier in order to overthrow their oppressors. Rather I believe this finding demonstrates that there is little or no discussion about being working class taking place within working class lives. Certainly not in the lives of the people who participated in this project. It is not talked about on a daily basis and as the opinions from the participants demonstrate it is usually through education that an understanding of social class arises, highlighting perhaps one of the reasons why the revolt anticipated by Marx did not happen. If social class is not discussed it is unlikely that any form of reaction to such oppression will come about. It is perhaps more useful to apply the theory of hegemony as posited by Gramsci (1972) in order to understand such phenomenon. So appropriated is the dominant culture by the masses that the current structure of society has become normalized to such an extent that differences in life chances are accepted without question. Furthermore, it may be that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have a point when they claim that the macro-sociological

phenomenon of individualization is the reason that social class is no longer a valuable tool for examining inequality (2002, p. 681). This is not to suggest that social class should not be examined, rather I am suggesting that the phenomenon of individualization would not be at all possible without a perpetuating hegemony which sees as natural the inequality that exists in society. I argue that such hegemony is allowed to persist because it serves very well the elite of society particularly in the face of much neo-liberal discourse which as Giroux (2014) argues, places the responsibility for inequality in the hands of those who suffer the greatest.

While Lynch and O'Neill (1994) claim that there has been a lack of understanding with regard to social class and education, and state that '[...] sociologists have tended to ignore the poverty-related barriers to equality in education, and have focused on cultural issues which have not been a central preoccupation of working class people themselves (1994, p. 308). This was not borne out by this particular study. A lack of money was mentioned a couple of times by certain participants in relation to why they did not attend university, however, it was not a strong enough theme to counteract the findings which suggest that expectations play a huge role in the reasons as to why participants did not progress to higher education. These findings are I believe very revealing of something that runs, as Gramsci and Freire (1972, 1996) argue much deeper than economic relationships. The over arching argument suggested by Freire is that 'the banking concept of education serves the interests of oppression 'It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their

creative power', (1996, p. 58). I believe the findings highlight a number of issues in relation to the theory surrounding class and education. Firstly, Marx (1848) posed the question as to the purpose of education and who it is designed for. This question is addressed by Althusser (1984) who claims that education serves the capitalist class, training people in such a way that they are prepared for the role that their class designates them fit for, 'students learn to perform the position that they are destined for' (1984, p. 5). The fact that the participants spoke about higher education either not being a possibility for them or that they were not presented with all of the options indicates an element of exclusion that operates within the education system. Clancy (2007) addresses this with his reference to the work of Bowles and Gintis, he claims that education begins with an assessment of the labor force requirement of capitalism, 'education functions as an agency to supply appropriately educated labor power to the economy' (2007, p.104). The theory posited by Freire is that the banking concept of education serves the interests of oppression 'It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power', (1996, p. 58).

In addition I believe while hegemony underpins the reproduction of this form of distribution throughout the education system, it is also useful to use Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital in an attempt to understand what might be happening in these instances. If we consider that inequality is not simply to be associated with economic values but has much more to do in fact with social and cultural capital it is possible to

posit this as a theory as to why some people gain immediate access to higher education while some do not. Capital according to Bourdieu (1986) has a habit of reproducing itself. Cultural capital is acquired and cultivated over time and is then transferred without the necessity of conscious action thus reproducing itself in such places as the education system. This is evident within the findings of this research whereby having acquired no cultural capital that is of value to the education system, the participants experienced a combination of factors in relation to progression to higher education. These being, on the one hand, low expectations in terms of academic achievement, lack of awareness about what options were available, and on the other hand, a sense of impossibility around attending a higher education institute. As Bourdieu claims academic achievement and educational success 'depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family' (1986/2002, p. 282) this is borne out by the findings of this study. In light of this discussion the finding by the ESRI (2014) which states, 'Young people from working-class backgrounds were less likely than their middle-class peers to go on to higher education [...] (2014, p. 13) is not surprising. While I do not believe that this is the only factor responsible for such a phenomenon, I do believe that expectations play a role as to why individuals from working class backgrounds attend higher education or not.

While Savage (2003) would argue that class when understood through the economic model was organized through oppositions such as middle and working class, city and suburbs, which became less apparent due to industrialization, these findings would suggest that as Bourdieu (1986) offered, the visible marks that are left by cultural and

social capital or the lack thereof have remained evident. The emphasis on employment stems directly from both the level of engagement with the education system and the concurrent expectations that are then transferred to children. This finding is supported by Quinn who claims 'lack of educational qualifications clearly impact on employment opportunities [...]' (1999, p.182), and also by Crompton (2007) who contends that 'In short the association between class and employment is firmly established' (2007, p.10). As is claimed by Walkerdine et al. 2001 social class 'remains one of the most powerful factors in the shaping of our lives and dealing our life chances' (Walkerdine et al. 2001, p. 23). Moreover, when the participants spoke about the types of jobs their parents had pursued upon leaving school, a very obvious gender element emerged. For instance where Elaine talks about her mother outlining the jobs associated with being working class, she specifically refers to jobs that she says involve men working with their hands. There were other references which imply a gender dimension such as those offered by Louise whose father became a panel beater and whose mother became a seamstress, a finding that was similar to my own experience. Kiely, Leane and Meade argue that 'it is widely recognized that gender and class oppressions are reinforced by the formal education sector' (1999, p. 31). I believe the findings of this study which as I have already mentioned encompasses a small group nonetheless reflects that quite clearly.

One of the reasons I consider class oppression is reproduced through the vehicle of the education system is the overarching sense of difference that working class people feel in such environments. I contend very strongly that this is due to the over representation

of middle class norms and values which permeate the higher education system. The perpetuation of a particular set of norms and values has a direct bearing on the continuous reproduction of university as an alienating place for those from working class backgrounds (Reay, 2006). This is further embedded by the fact as Freire (1996) points out that both 'educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address', (1996, p. 77) resulting in a situation whereby their rhetoric becomes both 'alienated and alienating' (1996, p. 77). This research revealed something quite interesting about how people negotiate those differences. As is revealed in the findings, participants spoke about managing their expressions of class rather than leaving behind their class altogether. hook (1994) points out that in order to be seen as acceptable and not obviously from a different class background '[...] students from working class backgrounds could assimilate into the mainstream, change speech patterns, points of reference, drop any habit that might reveal them to be from a non-materially privileged background' (hook. 1994, p. 181). This is supported by Lynch and O'Neill who state 'working class people who succeed in the education system have to abandon certain features of their background class habitus' (1994, p. 318). However, it does not correlate with their assertion that 'once they succeed within higher education in particular, their class identity changes' (Lynch and O'Neill. 1994, p. 319). Rather, the findings suggest that for these participants in particular, learning to operate within both classes is something that they have done. This challenges the notion of habitus proposed by Bordieu (1984) and suggests that the habitus is more fluid than fixed. As

Sayer (2005) argues the habitus can be modified and 'produce new dispositions, and skills, enabling people to react in new ways' (2005, p. 25). Furthermore Sayer adds that within the modification a person may 'find they become comfortable in contexts where they may or may not have previously been comfortable' (2005, p. 25). However, as was revealed by one participant who admitted having the ability to move between classes it was not always an easy task, hook refers to the fact that being expected to surrender all indexes to class backgrounds and experiences creates 'psychic turmoil' (1994, p. 182). This finding is synonymous with the findings reported by Skeggs (1997) who outlines an accommodation and a resistance present within the lives of the people she studied. While middle class norms and values are accepted at some level, working class people are not willing to entirely surrender their sense of identity in order to be accepted by those same middle class structures. The reasons for this might be attributed to what Lawler (2005) and Savage (2003) refer to as 'othering', Lawler claims that the representations of working class identities serve a greater purpose than simply creating a sense of distaste towards working class people, rather she argues that negative representation 'also work to produce *middle-classed* identities that rely on *not* being the repellent and disgusting 'other' (Lawler, 2005, p.431). This 'othering' that is placed upon working class people demonstrates the power that the particular universal class (Savage, 2003) has in positioning itself as the dominant culture and has far reaching implications as argued by Reay (2006), 'lack of positive images of the working class contribute to them being educationally disqualified and inadequately supported academically' (2006, p. 295). I fully agree with Freire (1996) who ultimately claims that

there is a need for both politics and education to 'understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed', (1996, p. 77). The experiences relayed in this study demonstrate that participants are aware of feeling a sense of difference when they attend higher education and they also express being aware of the fact that people drop out of university for those reasons.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

In addition to the analyses that was drawn from the findings, theory and literature, I would like to add a further comment on the inequality experienced by working class people in relation to education. I maintain that a new approach to class analyses is necessary at this point. As the research uncovered it was not purely economic factors which impinged upon the progression to higher education for the participants involved. It was rather a combination of factors. There were two issues in particular that stood out for me during the findings and analyses of this project. Firstly, the critical lack of working class people in universities either as students or as academic staff continues to make university spaces a difficult place to be for those who cannot identify with the culture, values and norms that are present in those spaces. Unfortunately, this perpetuates the notion of having to alter ones way of being to suit the status quo. As was revealed in the findings and analysis in chapter 4 people do change the way they speak and behave in order to fit in. As long as this accommodation continues the norms and values which create the sense of alienation in the first place will persist. Secondly, the silent expectations that exist for people from working class backgrounds are not sufficient and in no way reflected the ability of the participants from this study. As each participant has completed a higher education either at diploma or degree level, it can be assumed that they might have progressed to higher education at an earlier time in their lives had the opportunity been presented to them.

I believe what is lacking from the literature surrounding class is a positive portrayal of the strength and resilience of people who manage to overcome barriers despite them being stacked against them. What is presented are discussions about how difficult it is to overcome structural inequality, valid and necessary as these discussions are, my personal view is that such discussions creates limitations in and of themselves. They imply that there is no option but to surrender to those barriers which are portrayed as fixed, a self-fulfilling prophecy one might argue. If this is the general consensus and research continues to view class in such a way, these notions will saturate the educational spaces and inadvertently support the existing hegemony. I believe the research demonstrated something else entirely. All of the people that participated had had to overcome adversity and structural inequality to arrive at where they are now. For some, including myself, the barriers appeared as hurdles in a race do, intermittent and plenty. Nonetheless overcoming those barriers was possible for me and the other participants in this study. I do not believe I possess any greater skill than any of the people from my background and yet I have managed as have the other participants to break through. As long as class is viewed in a limiting way there will be no opportunity for a new hegemony to develop and the same old arguments will be continuously rehashed. What is most definitely needed is a positive approach to working class culture and conditions combined with support systems that are not placed upon people but rather lift them up from underneath. Beginning with conversations from very early on in the education of a child, all possibilities and all avenues should be open, full disclosure on how to access all arenas of life is a necessity. This leads to choice and

opportunity rather than a situation arising where the potential of a person is limited because they were not aware of all the options. I fully believe a re-working of the parameters of what constitutes class is needed and it must encompass all the facets of working class lived experience. In order to do this I believe as a critical theorist that Freire's (1996) model of a dialogical approach to education would be helpful. Through this approach people can begin to 'name' their situation and therefore 'own' it, and in so doing change can be brought about. As was revealed in the findings and analyses it was only through higher education that the participants including myself fully began to understand social class and the impact it had had on our lives.

It might also be useful in an effort to re-examine class that what it means to be middle class is explored. This might be done by asking the same question as was asked in this study 'how do adult learners negotiate class prior to, during and after higher education'. Such an exploration would offer an opportunity to uncover what it is like to be middle class and to have higher expectations around education and life chances. Uncovering these facets of privilege and how they work might provide a framework for how such privilege can be applied to all people and not just a particular group. And on this point I would like to draw the research to an end using a quote from one of the participants;

"There is a sense of not being aware. You only are where you are because of where you are, and some people are not aware of that. You're very lucky to be born there, some people are ahead of the game from the day that they're born, or even prior to that" (Louise, 2015).

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