# Racialised Transitions: The Pathways from Education to the Labour Market for Black Caribbean Young People

By

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## Abstract

This research explores post-16 transitions of a group of Black Caribbean young people, to gain insight into the factors which influence their transitions, the decisions made and executed and the outcomes produced. Biographically, significant details articulated by the individuals about their transition journey are conveyed to elucidate the particular circumstances of this group and to illustrate the dynamic nature of the dilemmas encountered and the responses enacted.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 24 respondents ranging in age from 16 to 25, of mixed gender, and reflecting a spectrum of post-16 destinations. The recollections shared by respondents are examined, interpreted and presented using the framework of narrative analysis. This approach emphasises the creation of a discursive space which allows individuals to retell stories of transitions which are meaningful to the narrator. Selected biographical portraits are presented to illuminate the contours that shape experiences of transition.

The attainment profile of respondents is heterogeneous and ranges from those with low levels of attainment to those with very high achievements. This disrupts the over-simplified discussions about 'ethnic minority underachievement' and reveals that attainment is more diverse than is commonly represented. Many respondents have high educational aspirations and are anxious to improve their qualifications (even low achievers). Respondents recognise that credentials are the currency for contemporary labour markets, and have ambitions for greater social mobility than their parents' generation; they are discerning about racial stereotyping and the damaging effects this can have on life chances.

The research highlights that young people are ill-prepared for making crucial decisions about their post-16 options. Many parents/carers are unaware of the importance of careers information. There is unanimity in the view that careers education is wholly inadequate. Many young people fall through the net and receive no guidance. Young people need to be better prepared for their post-16 transitions; this preparation should include an entitlement to quality careers education prior to leaving school.

# Acknowledgements

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# Chapter 1

## Exploring the intersection of race, identity and transition: an introduction

### 1.1    Overview of thesis

At the heart of this thesis is the portrayal of experiences of transitions elicited from 24 Black[1] Caribbean young people.  The respondents are aged between 16 and 25.  There are 12 males and 12 females, each at a different stage of the journey en route to young adulthood and coveted independence. Geographically, they are dispersed across inner and outer London boroughs. Class differentials appear particularly in housing tenure, family resources, educational and occupational attainment, social and cultural capital and future aspirations.   Collectively they share narratives replete with tales of their diasporic connections and the skilful use of memories of belonging and not belonging to shape visions of the future and its possibilities.

The texture of these young people's stories can be condensed into words borrowed from one respondent: "there's nothing wrong with my life".  The individual who shared this has had a number of 'fiddly jobs', has a few low grade GCSEs, and has experienced detours which have led down blind alleys. All the cases in this study have, to different degrees, experienced what Fergusson (2004) has defined as 'normalized dislocations'; in other words,

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[1] The term 'black' is often used to refer to all visible minorities, e.g. those of Caribbean, Asian or Pakistani descent.  This is now wholly unacceptable, as evidenced by the more sophisticated categorisation of social groups used in the 2001 Census.  My use of the term 'black' recognises its historical/political origins in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.  It is used here to refer to first generation migrants from the former British-dominated Caribbean colonies and their children, the majority of whom are now British-born.  A discussion of this is given in Hall (2000:149).

most young people experience different degrees of turbulence and ruptures in their progression to adulthood rather than orderly, sequential steps. What, however, is striking is that the young people in this cohort remain positive about the vicissitudes they face. They do not project themselves as passive victims of impersonal social forces which render their agency ineffectual. To some extent, the focus on researching and theorising the problematic aspects of youth transitions (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005) has diverted attention from the creative and dynamic ways young people respond and adapt to risks and uncertainties endemic in what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009) term the era of 'globalized modernity'. Young people's optimism in the face of problematic circumstances has been noted by a number of youth researchers (Roberts 1997, Jones 2009); it has not, however, been the subject of much scrutiny. This study brings into focus and gives insight into the active ways my research respondents manage their complex, contradictory and constrained circumstances as they craft progressive steps towards their imagined futures. As this is a theme highlighted through the narrative accounts presented, one of the contributions of this study is that it counterbalances the emphasis prevalent in youth transition studies, on the generalised effects of structural changes. The study offers a nuanced multidimensional picture of features that shape transitions to young adulthood.

Black Caribbean young people are the central characters in this research for two reasons. In the discourses that have shaped the youth agenda

(specifically in the UK), issues of 'race'[2] and ethnicity[3] have received marginal attention. There is an absence of analysis and reflection of the ways in which young peoples' experiences of transitions might be affected by racialised[4] categories. A number of research studies and youth researchers (Chisholm et al 1997, Rudd 1999, Catan 2004) have signalled that the couplet race/ethnicity has a strong influence on transition outcomes. Furlong (2007) and Webster (2009) view these categories as subordinate to the influence of social class. Either way, how race differentiates experience of transition has not attracted the same level of empirical or theoretical examination that class and gender have.

Interrogating the impact of social divisions and structural inequality on young people's life chances is a prominent theme in youth transitions research. (Bynner et al 1997; Jones 2002). However, how race/ethnicity – as a pervasive form of social division – affects transition experiences of black youth requires greater articulation and needs to be extricated from beneath the blanket of class where it is often submerged. A new perspective is also required to extend thinking (and possibly practice) beyond the meta-narratives of cultural deficit, dysfunctional family background, crime and social disorder which pervade discourses about black youth (usually referring to males); Webster (2009) is a case in point. This thesis makes the case for the re-

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[2] Whilst the biological basis to 'races' is thoroughly discredited scientifically, it remains a potent marker of social divisions and has enduring veracity in the common mind. According to Mason (cited in Knowles, 2005:18) there are no races but there is race, the social construct used to classify groups and ascribe them to a status in a hierarchy in which power is collectively exercised to the detriment of lower-status groups. The term appears with quotation marks to signify the contested nature of the concept. For the purpose of brevity, it will only appear in quotation marks on this occasion.

[3] There is a close interrelationship between race and ethnicity. Gunaratnam (2003), for example, uses them interchangeably. The use of the term ethnicity is embedded in discourses of cultural and religious differences, commonly perceived to be 'natural' and immutable.

[4] This term infers the existence of social and political processes which construct social divisions based on race. It can be used to imply experiences of contemporary racism but refers also to the myriad ways race is stitched into the social fabric of everyday life

evaluation of how we work with race and ethnicity and the differences arising from these in the domain of youth transitions. This thesis makes a contribution to discourses on race/ethnicity within youth transitions research by creating a space to explore both the milieu of actual experience and the social relations in which it is embedded. It does this by arguing for a shift to a frame of reference where the milieu of actual experience and the social relations in which it is embedded are given more prominence in mainstream youth research.

It is an opportune moment to look at what young black people express about their transitions. How, for example, they make sense of the 'choices' supposedly available, and whether they perceive race/ethnicity as relevant to the way their post-16 journeys have unfurled. To examine these issues in light of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2009: 28) assertion that youth and generational research should widen its field of vision to understand better "the lived reality of the global generation". This includes developing an understanding of the constructive engagements of minority youth who engineer possibilities and opportunities inside the exclusionary borders of the immigrant society where they are now settled. To illustrate their point, they comment on the work of a Turkish social scientist, resident in Germany, who writes about the experience of Turkish immigrant women. The writer challenges the "lachrymose tone of German immigration debates that lament about the poor immigrant woman … Otyamaz writes: the young women from immigrant families do not sit around doing nothing and remaining victims until someone's generosity helps them out of their situation. They are fighting for their place in society … creating their own plans. They're not fallen between stools, but they

are sitting on every stool" (ibid: 32). Similar observations are found in this research. The narrative extracts presented richly convey the complex and subtle ways these young people make sense of, and make out coherent plans from, uncertain and risky circumstances.

In a tentative way, this study seeks to counter the accusation that many transition studies are based on 'abstracted empiricism', where macro-analyses convey young people's lives as over-determined by structural impediments and discontinuity (Rudd and Evans 1998). It does this by highlighting micro-biographical insights which reveal how adept young people are at piecing together life plans which, at least to them, appear coherent.

The research sets out to explore the question, '*How is race important to the experience of transition from education to the labour market for Black Caribbean young people*'? There is extensive literature documenting the poorer outcomes achieved by Black Caribbean young people, compared to Whites and other ethnic groups (other than Bangladeshis and Pakistanis). Whether from education, training or the labour market, the statistical and qualitative evidence is not in dispute. Differential access to economic, cultural and social capital, of course, perpetuates social advantage/disadvantage. A different focus on the lives of young people is being offered: a focus which emphasises their perceptions of their transition histories and how these intersect with their racialised identities. The aim is to create a 'discursive space' where alternative expressions of the experience of transition can be

explored which are contrary to the discourse of uncertainty, insecurity and fragmentation, which concentrates on transitions as a social problem. These 'loosely structured conversations' provided a discursive space which allowed respondents to ruminate on a wide range of experiences including, among others, the impact of race on fluid identities.

The study uses a narrative inquiry paradigm for organising, analysing, interpreting and presenting the biographical extracts.  A central concern of narrative inquiry is the exercise of human agency.  Stories are regarded as lay sociological accounts which give insight into social action, often revealing links between its psychological, cultural and social contexts.  The close examination of narrative accounts as the basis for learning about particular life situations, of the specific group in the study, represents a departure from the usual methodological approaches we find in youth transition studies.  Specifically, the hallmark of narrative research is to understand how individuals interpret events and tell the story of their experiences.  There are, of course, a few studies which adopt a more explicit narrative approach (Lawry 2002; Henderson et al 2007; Devadason 2006).  I did not locate any UK studies which examined the transitions of black youth in which their narrative accounts were privileged.  In this regard this study makes a methodological contribution.

## 1.2    Theoretical orientations

> Recognition that individual lives are a significant part of the broader racial order in which they are cast has not produced the anticipated attention to the interface between lives and social processes (Knowles 1999: 110).

The research question, '*How is race important to the experience of transition from education to the labour market for Black Caribbean young people',* will examine why race should have a more prominent place in the debates about the changing nature of young people's transitions. It is asserted that the influence of race in the context of youth transitions, whilst acknowledged as an important structural imperative (Rudd 1997; Evans 1998; Catan 2004; Furlong 2007) shaping youth trajectories, access to opportunities and opportunities is under-theorised and at an empirical level insufficiently examined in youth transitions research.

The research question was shaped by the observation, made by Troyna (1994), that many research outputs offered up 'globalised' and 'commatized' interpretations and analyses. Within such analyses 'differences' are silenced under all-embracing terms such as "holistic youth transitions" (Catan 2004), where variations in the experiences of divergent groups of young people are not isolated but are treated homogeneously; commonly, when differences are alluded to, they are treated in a commatized fashion. By this, Troyna means that quite different and complex social phenomena are forced to be bedfellows because their perfunctory inclusion is preferable to their exclusion. An example of this common practice is highlighted in the following extract:

> 'Individualisation' became a much contested concept in debates about the factors driving and shaping youth transitions, which took the form of a rather polarised debate on the relative importance, on the one hand, of structural factors such as class, socio-economic background, family structure, gender and race, which lie largely beyond the control of the individual, and on the other agency, or factors relating to individual motivation (Catan 2004: 4).

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In fact critiques of 'colour-blind' scholarship have been leveled at social research over time (Brah 1988; Troyna 1994; Eade 1996) and research approach and practices have undoubtedly evolved extending inquiries to develop more nuanced insights into the social conditions of minority groups and communities. Bulmer and Solomos (2004) have commented that the emergence of black scholars across a range of disciplines, but especially the social sciences, has resulted in challenges to how minority groups are positioned within social research. Most importantly, methodological issues pertaining to the problematic of researching ethnic (minority) groups have been the subject of recent academic debates (Blair 2004).

It is widely acknowledged (Gunaratnam 2003); Knowles 1999) that the concept of race/ethnicity is slippery, messy and opaque as argued by Knowles; "the embeddedness of race makes it difficult to work with analytically. Race is always in play – this ubiquity renders it inaccessible to analysis and commentary (Knowles 1999: 115). Notwithstanding its lack of scientific validity, race remains an ineradicable social marker used to classify and stratify social groups, reproducing social hierarchies which serve to reinforce unequal access to material and symbolic resources, such as status and power. Race forms a significant part of our identity as we are reminded by Winant (2000), who aptly reminds us that, "We are after all so thoroughly racialized that to be without a racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity. To be raceless is akin to being genderless" (p.183-184). However, it cannot be presumed to be the most salient. Its constituent role in the lived reality of individual lives should be examined through biographical investigation (Knowles 1999).

This study focuses on biographical accounts of the research respondents to construct explanations of how race is articulated as relevant to the identities of my research subjects. The analysis pulls to the surface the social processes threaded into the young people's narratives to further build our understanding of the racial landscapes inhabited by the respondents. It endeavors to make visible the salience of race as a social reality through exploring the identities created/adapted, resisted/defended. A central contribution of the thesis is to offer insights into the racial dynamics of youth transitions through biographical lens. This exploratory work on the racialised context of individual lives seeks to address the marginalization of black youth in youth transitions research. For example, the transitions literature makes ubiquitous references to the problems of living in a risk society and young people's vulnerability to risks; but the particular risks which pervade the lives of black youth have not been subjected to much analysis. Therefore, the focus of my analysis is to provide textured accounts of the risks produced and reproduced during the transition phase. The study thereby contributes to the extensive body of knowledge in youth research that examines social divisions, specifically social inequalities arising from race, class and gender.

The deleterious effects of class and gender inequalities on transition patterns and outcomes have been subjected to microscopic critiques (Willis 1977; Griffin 1985, 1993; McDowell 2003; Goodwin and O'Connor 2005), to cite a few important exemplars. Analysis and critique of the racialised patterns of transitions have been more sporadic (Wright 1986; Drew 1995; Unwin 2006). The simultaneous effects arising from the axis of race, gender and class are

even rarer, in the context of the UK. However, within the last decade the intricacies of these social divisions on young people's career decision-making have been explored by Ball et al (2000), Archer and Hutchins (2000) and Archer and Yamashita (2003).

The research design takes into account the paucity of contributions reflecting on the synchronous influences of race, class and gender on post-16 trajectories and young people's identity constructions. Hence, whilst issues relating to race are foreground, the opportunity to comment on observations of the entanglements of class and gender in young people's experience of transition are alluded to, but not developed in depth. A comparator study to draw attention to is McDowell's (2003) work on the disappearance of labour market opportunities for white working class young men and the modes of heterosexual masculinities which spun out of the work culture of traditional craft/manufacturing employment sectors. McDowell examines gendered identities and employment aspirations commenting on the importance of situating these in relation to race, class, gender, cultural and economic forces which molded the habitat of her research subjects.

Class analysis, of course, has a long and distinguished heritage in youth studies (Furlong et al 2009). It continues to be the subject of contentious debates over the extent to which the concept of social class has much contemporary value in explaining widening inequalities. Shildick (2009) has argued that whilst class analysis has been in retreat (at least in populist

discourses) the ravages of unequal distribution of income and wealth has been on the ascendant.

In debates about the explanatory power of the concept of social class for accounting for racialised social divisions (Back and Solomos 2000; Hill Collins and Solomos 2010), there is a bifurcation in analytic approaches. Where race and class are debated in mainstream youth research (Furlong 2007; Webster 2009) they are premised on the class/race paradigm consistent with the work of Robert Miles (1993, cited in Hill Collins and Solomos 2010). Miles argued that class as opposed to racial processes was the substantive phenomenon of investigation for understanding social inequalities. Miles's framework relegated race to the sphere of "ideology which masked real social relations based on class (ibid.: 154)". Webster's analysis of young people, class and ethnicity (2009: 48) is consistent with this notion, where it is argued that race/ethnicity are "nested forms of stratification" in which class is placed as the most portent explanatory variable. It is claimed, for example, that: "many of the disadvantages faced by minority groups are more strongly linked to class than race or ethnicity". This position has been criticized by Hall (1996) and Gilroy (1997) for its economic reductionism. By submerging issues of racialised social divisions beneath economic processes, it is possible to smooth over the unequal distribution of economic resources between ethnically different working class groups in attempts to appeal to abstract notions of a unified working class. Hall and Gilroy's work is considered to have affected a profound shift (Virdee 2010) in class analysis destabilizing the idea that racism and racialised social processes were subordinate to social class. This

"genuine paradigm shift" established that race is a relatively autonomous social phenomena requiring the excavation of additional explanations to understand the interactions of economic relations, politics, ideology and culture, in sum the reproduction of the racialisation of class (Virdee 2010). Omi and Winant (in Virdee 2010: 153) also challenged the analytical practice where race, "disappeared into the 'reality' of class" and suggested that a class approach to race and racism hardly begins to scratch the surface of the sources and contours of racial dynamics.

The influence of this conceptual gear change is evident across a wide spectrum of studies. For example, Rothon (2006) questions the extent to which ethnic differentials in GCSE attainments can be fully explained by reference to social class backgrounds. She finds that whilst social class heritage is a consistent and strong predictable influence on attainments, there are still gaps in attainment which remain unexplained after controlling for social class. Archer and Yamashita (2003) have argued that identities are classed, raced and gendered and that these interact in complex ways to influence young people's post-16 decisions. In seeking to explain the phenomenon of the higher than expected (given parental socio-economic status) presence of certain ethnic groups in higher education, Moodod (2004) has operationalised Bourdieu's concept of capital. He finds that different forms of capital, such as social capital can be leveraged by certain ethnic groups to support, for example, educational aspirations and plans which confounds and mitigates some of the effects of economic disadvantage. These studies illustrated a conceptual shift towards focusing on race, class and gender as more than

abstract social categories by treating them as integrally related and embedded in everyday practices and constitutive of identities.  This study draws on these intellectual threads in an endeavour to better understand the links between race, class, gender identities and differences of social locations.  Importantly, to articulate how young people have utilised various resources, including economic and symbolic resources, to cultivate their post-16 identities and orientations orientations.

The discussion thus far has alluded to the important areas this research is concerned to tackle.   These are condensed into the following research objectives:

- to explore the prevailing perspectives of how youth  engages with issues of race/ethnicity and the ways these intermesh with class and gender identities;

- to highlight some of the complex distinctions which frame racialised subject positions: to understand, for example, how transitions have become individualised for black youth;

- using the method of narrative inquiry, to present young people's interpretations and evaluations about  their life situations;

- by working with multiple scenarios, to offer some sociological insights into public issues: for example, the reproduction of inequalities in the transition phase.

## 1.3  Structure of the thesis

The main purpose of chapter two is to explore how black youths are positioned within mainstream youth research. My perspective has been framed by the observation that race and youth have not shared a podium where conceptions of the relationship between the two have been the subject of much debate.  My standpoint has been influenced by the work of Knowles (2005). Knowles makes the claim that race needs to be repositioned in mainstream social analysis as it too frequently sits at the margins.  She argues:

> Despite its centrality in the calibration of the world in which we live, social analysis is rarely approached from the prism of race.  This book (*Race and Social Analysis*) is an attempt to nudge it into the mainstream: to insist that race is central, not peripheral, to the way things work (p.10).

The chapter discusses the characteristics of deracialised enquiry.  The case is made that deracialised enquiry unwittingly distorts characteristics which are common to young people's transitions and those which are different because these are conflated under hegemonic conceptions of whiteness as the commonsense norm.   This reproduces unexamined notions that young people's experiences are similar regardless of racially demarcated divisions which exist in society.   Commentary is arranged around a 'tour' of a selection of important contributions to youth transitions research.  Comments are based on the underlying theme: what, if any, contributions are made to analysing how race/ethnicity is implicated in the transition experience of young black people.

Chapter three examines some of the methodological challenges of including race/ethnicity in social research. Also detailed in this chapter are the methodological procedures used to conduct the study. Over the past decade there has been a growing tendency to use biographical methods in social science research. This trend can also be detected in youth research (Thomson et al 2004; Devadason 2006), where it has been recognised that quantitative methods should be balanced with the use of qualitative designs to produce more individualised analyses of youth transitions (Evans 1998) in which the particularities of young people's lives are brought into greater focus. The study makes use of the traditional interview format to collect the individual stories and then pays close attention to how narrative enquiry methods move from the interview transcript to interpreted representations from the world of the narrators. The details of how this has been achieved are examined in this chapter, which highlights the challenges of devising a procedure for the identification of narrative themes and their interpretations.

An important question guides the use of narrative enquiry and that is: how can the use of narrative enquiry enlarge upon or shift the social and theoretical conversations around the phenomena of my study (Clandinin & Connelly 2000)? This is of paramount importance and leads to two further questions: what is it that I want to learn from the study of these young people's lives, and what kind of knowledge do I hope to produce?

What stands out about narrative enquiry is the focus on using stories to gain an appreciation of how general social phenomena are embodied in specific life

stories (Chase 1995). The general social phenomena in question are black youth and their experiences of post-16 transitions. The purpose is to understand what is relevant to them in this life phase (based on what they choose to talk about), the cultural discourses they draw on in telling their experiences, and what we can understand from this about the constraints under which they act and the decisions and choices which they make as active agents in complex situations.

The rationale which underpins post-16 transitions is foreground in chapter four which presents a range of factual data to locate the structural contexts of the lives being studied. These factual data are complemented by narrative extracts from a selection of young people. Their experiences will give insights into the way particular actions are interpreted and the meanings portrayed about particular circumstances. There is a desire to capture a sense of biography but also to emphasise social processes that are connected to wider sociological debates: for example, by probing what the narratives may reveal about the existence, operation and effects of professional practices in school which have influenced a young person's decision. The intention is to engage in discussions about the specific circumstances which might make transitions different for racialised subjects.

Chapter five will "tell you something about the social worlds" (Willis 2004: 206) inhabited by three young people by offering more detailed representations of concrete events and social actions that have meaning for these respondents as they engage in formulating current and future plans. Three cases are

chosen to convey different facets of young people's lives, and focus in particular on what the narratives reveal about:

- respondents' experience of social differences: this could be based on race or class or both;

- the invoking of racialised subjectivities in the context of experiences of transitions;

- the manner in which transitions can be conceived as racialised.

The chapter examines two questions:

- What narratives are constructed about the experience of transition?

- How do young people evaluate and make sense of their situations and actions?

Each individual story served up a breadth of ideas for interpretation. Selection has been difficult and not all the young people's contributions have been used. Appendix 5.1 is a selection of biographical summaries providing further insights into other dimensions of the lives of the respondents.

In exploring these themes, the concern is to isolate pertinent features of the personal circumstances of this particular group of young people, in order to understand the transition process experienced by a typical group of Black Caribbean young people, and to explore what these stories convey about inequalities in transition processes. Finally the discussion seeks to unearth what is distinct about Black Caribbean young people's experience of transition.

The ways in which race is imbricated in the experience of transition is the subject of critical analysis in chapter six. Different facets of the lives of the respondents were represented and the discussion in this chapter pulls together threads connected to how young people embrace and contest racialised identities and the multiple ways this interweaves into their transition decisions.

Central to the discussion of contemporary youth transitions is the individualised nature of young people's lives. Drawing on Brah's (2000) concept of the 'four modalities of difference', which conceptualises differences around four dimensions – experience, social relations, subjectivity and identity This final chapter examines how theories about youth transitions can allow difference to be interwoven into analyses to create nuanced engagement with the social issues of race.

# Chapter 2

## The marginal presence of black youth within the school-to-work transition literature

### 2.1    Introduction

The purpose of this study is to contribute to our understanding of how Black Caribbean young people experience the process of post-school transition through an examination of the stories created by research respondents.  The intention is to explore what these young people communicate about their experiences, the strategies adopted to negotiate transition pathways, what they regard as important to their career plans, how they position themselves as racialised subjects and the implications this has for their exercise of agency.

The central argument developed in this chapter is that the social and political issues emanating from race/ethnicity have marginal presence within the discourses of youth transitions (Wright 2010).  One could be forgiven for thinking that the structural intricacies of racialised social practices stopped at the school gates at 16 and ceased to exert any influence in shaping the transition histories of Black Caribbean young people.  There are two questions guiding the selection of literature to be critically reviewed.  Firstly, how have issues of race/ethnicity been approached, studied and theorised within the field of youth transitions research?  Secondly, what can we learn from existing empirical contributions about how race/ethnicity is implicated in transition processes and outcomes?

**Why the focus on race/ethnicity in youth transitions?**

Locating studies of youth transitions which include the dimensions of race/ethnicity in their theoretical/empirical perspectives was difficult because of the paucity of investigations of this topic. Extensive references were found relating to black youth in the fields of education, health, cultural studies and criminology. However, on the specific topic of youth transitions and how these might be differentiated by ethnic status, there was limited empirical evidence. However, Griffin (1993) gives an historical overview of the theoretical focus of youth research and makes mention of the plight of black youth who featured prominently in the cultural debates which sprang from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the mid 1980s. Jones (2002) also found that polarisations based on class, gender and ethnicity underscored young people's routes to adulthood. But the particularities of the position of black youth are not delineated within these contributions. It was also observed that many contemporary youth studies texts, which address themes pertinent to modern youth transitions (e.g. Bennett 2003; Bagnall 2005; France 2007; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Kehily 2007), contained brief or no reference to the transition experiences of black youth.

I was interested in discovering how themes prevalent in youth transitions research, such as individualisation and the proliferation and acceleration of social risks associated with this process, were conceptualised for those of minority racialised status. Even Barn's (2001) comprehensive literature review, *Black youths on the margins*, which brought together evidence of the disadvantages experienced by black youths, contained no specific references

to their post-school transitions. This tells us that there is an absence within the youth transitions literature of critical engagement with how the concepts and issues being debated apply to ethnically diverse young people. However, the importance of theorising and empirically investigating racialised differences in youth research is becoming more prominent (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2005; Wright 2005; Schoon and Silbereisen 2009; Furlong 2009).   For example, Mac an Ghaill and Haywood's (2004) study focused on the meaning of transitions to adulthood for working class Bangledeshi and white young people aged 16-18. The study found differences on dimensions such as intergenerational relations, educational experiences and parental involvement in post-16 decision-making.  Two qualities differentiating the two ethnic groups are worth comment.

Firstly, the Bangledeshi sample experienced much higher levels of poverty with unemployment rates of up to 40% compared to a rate of 18% for white working class families.  Bangledeshi females were twice as likely to be in further education as Bangledeshi males, white males and females; a higher proportion of Bangledeshi males than white males were also in further education.   The researchers account for this by citing the differences in educational values between these two ethnically distinct working class groups. They noted, "there was considerable commitment by Bangledeshi young people and their families towards education"...Among white working class parents, the picture was more varied, with the majority of students reporting that, 'while their parents would like them to do well, it was really up to them.' (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2005: 115).  Studies of this nature probe the

material reality of groups included within abstract terms such as 'working class' revealing on closer examination the significant differences in cultural practices, educational profiles and spatial locations. Furthermore, they draw out features which are distinct as well as common between different ethnic groups.

A prominent strand in investigating the research question '*how race is important to the experience of transition*' is to locate the question within the parameters of current youth transitions research. This point is addressed in relation to three themes.

The first theme is concerned with the development of my theoretical framework and reviews a range of critical scholarship which has been influential in the construction of my research paradigm, which is committed to challenging discursive practices which homogenise, pathologise and regard diasporic communities, however unintentionally, as worthy of study when they are defined as social problems (Griffin 1993, Gilroy 1997). A number of researchers have been trenchantly critical of the normalised "absence and pathologised presence" (Phoenix 1998; Cohen 1997) of non-Western subjects in the academy.

The second theme elaborates that race/ethnicity are important social categories for analysis, and illustrates that, whilst there are ubiquitous references to their importance, their treatment is peripheral within mainstream youth transitions research. This is explored through critical engagement with some of the dominant theoretical debates about young people's transition from

compulsory education into the labour market hierarchy and more generally the development of adult identities. These discussions are guided by a number of concerns about the place of race/ethnicity within mainstream transition studies. How, for example, do transition studies engage with the material circumstances of black youth in contemporary British society? How are the areas of critical concern within transition literature articulated in ways that provide insights into how the specificity of race/ethnicity might shape the exercise of post-16 'choices' for young people of minority ethnic backgrounds? Studies by Goodwin and O'Connor (2002), Walkerdine (2001), Mirza (1992) and Griffin (1985) illustrate the importance of research which examines the particularising impact of gender on the experience of school-to-work transitions. These studies engender theoretical and empirical understanding of how real lives are affected by social constructs such as gender.

Archer (2002), for example, examined the gendered identity constructs of Muslim pupils' post-16 educational choices. She identified how views of young Muslim women differed markedly from Muslim males with regard to influences on post-16 decisions, and that the stereotypical constructions of Muslim girls' being oppressed by cultural values and practices were vehemently rejected. Archer's analysis invariably reveals a more complex interrelationship between gender and race which contrasts sharply with the simplistic homogenised characterisations of Muslim females suffering from stultified educational aspirations because of parental pressures to conform to traditional domestic roles. Respondents challenged these popular assumptions by affirming their freedom to negotiate, with their parents, their post-16 options.

There is an extensive body of literature which seeks to confront empirically the notion - central to Beck's thesis – that social-structural constraints which arise from gender and class inequalities have weakened.  It is argued that the weakening clasp of structural/institutional arrangements has freed young people to become architects of their individual biographies (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Te Rieli 2004; Webster 2004; MacDonald and Marsh 2005).  However, there is strong counter-evidence to this view where, for example, it has been empirically corroborated (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 2007; OECD 2005) that youth transitions are structurally bounded by social position, access to social and cultural capital and the operation and effects of macro-imperatives such as labour market arrangements and state policy (Green & Evans 2005; Müller and Gangl 2003).  As race and ethnicity have had a peripheral status in youth transitions research, compared with class and gender, there has been less attention given to analysing the life circumstances of minority young people. This practice has been sustained over time by the tendency to speak of young people as though they belonged to a unified formation.  The contribution of this study is it brings together a discussion of race, identity and class drawn from the subjective accounts of my respondents.

The third theme addresses the engagement of qualitative research with issues of race/ethnicity in transition processes.  Of interest is investigating how notions of difference and diversity are integrated into analytical frameworks to produce insights into the intermeshing of race/ethnicity and class specifically. Assessing these contributions is an important strand in understanding how

race/ethnicity reverberates through young people's experience of young adulthood. These studies adopt an interpretive paradigm yielding recognition of the textured meanings young people bring to bear on their experience of transition. This counterbalances the claim made by Cohen (1997: 179) that youth research is overly dominated by empiricist analytical frameworks which concentrate on tracking school leavers' transition routes, measuring their aspirations against qualifications, quantifying their consumption patterns and making crude correlations to gender, race and class. The selection reviewed illuminates attempts by some researchers to locate race/ethnicity within the dominant discourses in youth transition studies. These contributions provided a foundation for this study by illustrating the importance of examining specific subjectivities, in specific locations, at specific times, for what they unearth about social interactions within social structures.

## 2.2    Representations of the 'other'

In this section it is argued that the different discourses which shape youth transitions research and theorising do not adequately engage with the perplexing experiences of black youth, offering instead sanitised and limited accounts of the material operation and the structuring effects of race/ethnicity in youth transitions.

Black youth need excavating from colour-blind scholarship in the field of youth transitions research, which necessitates adopting a framework of critical social research. Critical social research, Troyna argues (1994: 325), requires a focus on finding out 'what's going on' and asking 'how come'. This perspective is

fundamental to the literature discussed here: literature which has provided inspiration and the backdrop to questioning some of the assumptions of the existing writings discussing modern youth transitions. These writings are critical of what we find in the academy, and contribute to dislodging the homogenised category of 'youth' behind which lurk presumptions which ignore how race/ethnicity materially affects and in turn shapes the 'imagined communities' young people inhabit. The conclusion to this emphasises the positional importance of engaging with issues of racialisation in contemporary social analysis, and debates relating to 'the youth question' cannot be divorced from this. I concur with Stuart Hall, who suggests:

> If there is to be a serious attempt to understand present day Britain with its mix of races and colours, its hysteria and despair, then writing about it has to be complex. It can't apologise, or idealise. It can't sentimentalise. (Hall 2002: 15)

C. Wright Mills (1959: 6) in *The Sociological Imagination* calls for sociologists to recognise that the sociological enterprise must articulate an understanding of the relationship between biography and history, how public issues relate to personal milieu, and the relationship between structure and agency. He reminds us that "no social study that does not come back to the problem of biography, of history and their intersections within society has completed its intellectual journey". The quest to establish an anchor point, therefore, began with the realisation that there was in fact inadequate critical engagement in the youth transition literature with the biography or history of black youth. The central concepts in youth transitions research are not theorised in ways which recognise the historical and contemporary relevance of racial difference, diversity and differentiation. How might one understand, for example, a term like 'hyphenated Britishness' (Modood 2007)? What this means in the concrete

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context to some of my research respondents is revealing, for one is sensitised to the central role of racialised identities in influencing transition decisions and how the young strive for a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Mohanty's (1988) work has been important for raising the notion that critical scholarship is involved in deconstructing and reconstructing simultaneously. She sets in motion a theme which is an undercurrent to the discourses reflected on throughout this chapter. That theme can be articulated thus: the subject of intellectual enquiry and focus within youth transitions research appears to have escaped the postmodernist attacks experienced by many other disciplines (Brah 1988; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Fish 2002; Phoenix 2001). These writers have argued that a shift has to occur to create a paradigmatic space where issues of race, ethnicity and difference can be seriously debated, as indicated by Hall earlier. It is argued that no such space has been engineered within the borders of youth transitions research. Consequently, mainstream debates are not informed by an engagement with material situations and subjectivities of the social group I am investigating. Whilst Western feminist scholarship was the audience of Mohanty's (1997) incisive critique, I think it is instructive for this current disciplinary discussion. Mohanty argues:

> The challenge of race resides in a fundamental reconceptualisation of our categories of analysis so that differences can be historically specified and understood as part of larger political processes and systems. The central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging differences; rather the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged. (Mohanty 1997: 558)

Critiques of the academy, of Western intellectual traditions of constructing the 'Other' [i.e. racialised subjects of enquiry], have been under sustained attack for some time; see Steinberg's (2007) critique of the race relations paradigm invented by Parks (one of the architects of the Chicago School of Sociology), which has influenced the liberal tradition of race relations in the UK (Virdee 2010). It is worth commenting that these writers are in the disciplines of education and psychology.  This challenging of disciplinary frames of reference has been given impetus by the emergence of black scholars in different disciplinary fields (Mama 1995; Gilroy 1987; Back & Solomos 2000; Ladson-Billings & Gillborn 2004; Bulmer & Solomos 2004), keen to destabilise theorising dominated by 'ethnocentric universalism' (Mohanty 1988) and replace it with more analytically nuanced strategies which are able to take account of the colonised subjects' adaptations to their socio-historical trajectory.

The disciplines of anthropology (Eade 1996; Benson 1996; Werbner 1996), psychology (Mama 1995; Garrod 1999; Phoenix 2001; Ayman-Knolley & Taira 2000), education (Eggleston 1986; Blair 2004; Ladson-Billings & Gillborn 2004; Mirza 1998), and sociology, particularly the branch of cultural studies (Gilroy 1987; Cohen 1997; Rizvi 2005; Alexander 1996), have had their theoretical frameworks within which analysis proceeds strenuously contested.  The field of anthropology is used as one example to highlight how texts have been deconstructed to reveal their assumptions about how we know the 'Other'.

In *Essentializing the other: a critical response*, Werbner (1996: 68) argues that the 'crisis of representation' in western discourses has called into question the quotidian, simplistic tendency to pathologise the 'Other' which fails to contextualise matters of community, identity, culture, ethnicity or race, and argues against simplistic culturalist approaches to the study of ethnic groups. Others go further to argue that anthropology played its role in shoring up ideological representations of the intellectually, culturally and morally inferior native (Benson 1996; Fish 2002).

I suggest that certain orthodoxies within youth research, for example privileging class and gender at the expense of race, need to be contested to advance the status and accuracy of knowledge. An epistemological framework premised upon a commitment to regard the couplet of ethnicity and race as crucial to social analysis – to knowledge making – must take into account, as Eade (1996) argues, the fact that engaging with the 'messy manifestations' (Hall 1992) of these social categories, which are so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, necessitates talk of power, resistance, conflict and change (Ladson-Billings 1998).

I would argue that, in the youth transition literature, examples which unpack these quadruplets are rare. One example can be found in an article by Rizvi (2005). Rizvi puts a contemporary interpretation on Willis's classic ethnography of working class (white) social reproduction practices. His interpretation draws out the "social dynamics of race relations in Hammertown". Of particular importance is Rizvi's argument that making sense

of what he calls the "cultural typography of race" means recognising that "global postmodernism" creates unstable, hybrid and fluid ethnic relations. This unhinges notions of stable, culturally homogenous identity groups (the "lads'" view of "Jamaicans" and "Pakis") or "relatively stable and enduring subjects possessing a certain insularity and essentialist character" (p88). Interethnic relations are a constant source of opposition and challenge which bring to the fore the diversity of subject positions. Therefore, theoretical and conceptual formulations which make little attempt to consider the plurality of subject positions when debating issues pertaining to the status of youth in contemporary Britain are perpetuating disciplinary myopia. The reality of the emergence of "new ethnicities" has altered the way all people in one location, not just those constructed as 'diasporic communities', have to consider questions of difference (Rizvi 2005: 89).

Youth researchers cannot remain isolated from addressing the questions of difference and diversity and the social relations they inscribe. For example, the practice of making references to generalised notions of 'working class youth' obscures radical differences in the practice of school exclusions which can have lasting detrimental effects on the excludee's education and future employment prospects. In a study on how black students survive school exclusions, Wright et al (2005) reveals that Black Caribbean males are between 4 and 15 times more likely to be victims of school exclusion than white males. Moreover, in discussing individual experiences of exclusion, the report highlighted that those excluded commonly believed school practices were racially motivated, as one respondent relayed:

> It's a stereotype. I mean they will see us, they will see a group of black youths with fists up, they think we're up to trouble straightaway. But sometimes it's not even like that, not up to trouble at all. But because of the colour of your skin, because we've got hoods on and stuff, I mean they just stereotype you basically (Wright et al, 2005).

Racialised practices do construct very different social conditions for ethnic groups. This signifies the importance of addressing, or at least being cognisant of, ethnic differences in our social analysis.

Two further examples of the absence from mainstream youth transitions research of the dynamics of race/ethnicity are cited. Bennett's (2003) work covers a wide range of themes pertinent to contemporary youth research: for example, epistemological issues concerned with researching youth cultures, post-structuralist critiques of youth lifestyles, life course theory, individualisation thesis, youth consumption, citizenship and other key transition markers. In a discussion about some of the 'central problems and priorities' for the sociology of youth we find this statement:

> Young people's positions vis-à-vis the justice systems are basically similar. A minority enter careers in which they are variously treated and punished, while others come to regard the law, police and courts as their (effective or ineffective) protectors. Again, which group each individual joins depends primarily on his or her class background and trajectory. (ibid: 21)

The author's statement reflects naivety about the well established criminological literature which documents (see succinct overview given by Ratcliffe 2004) the discriminatory and oppressive treatment meted out to black youth by the criminal justice system. This is ironic as the relationship between black youth and the criminal justice system is widely researched and talked about in academic writings, government policy reports and the popular media. Their depiction as a group with a constitutional propensity toward criminal

conduct has legitimated their disproportionate apprehension by the police (Gilroy 1987; Brah 1988(a); Modood 1997; Back & Keith 1999; Ratcliffe 2004; Alexander & Knowles 2005), borne out by their over-representation in crime statistics.

This particular example is symptomatic of accusations levelled at deracialised discourses where, as argued by Troyna (1999: 326), it is common to find that the literature "discursively evades issues of ethnicity and racism in the way they define, describe, conceptualise and theorise". However, neither do we want the tokenistic inclusion of references to the politics of ethnicity and race, as suggested by Phoenix (1998: 865):

> a nod in the direction of the panoply of gender, ethnicity and race (which) has now become a sine qua non of being a good sociologist…The concern that all sociologists should make at least a passing reference to "women, and ethnic minorities" has become a form of political correctness. (Ibid: 865)

Discursive practices undermine theoretical formulations because they do not lead to more significant understanding of the capacity of racialised groups to assert counter-strategies to discursive practices which seek to reduce their existence to that of victims of objective socio-structural forces. Such formulations are limited because they take no account of the adroit ways in which racialised groups exercise active "historical agency" (Harris 1996) which serves as an antidote to the impact of structural oppression.

What is required is nuanced analyses which foreground the role of human agency in resisting and opposing structural discriminatory forces, at an ideological level and at the level of the "socially located subject" (Catan 2004),

a point well argued by Eade (1996: 58):

> Listening to the voices of ethnic minority groups entails both a model of society that fully acknowledges the ability of minority groups to resist modes of oppression, exclusion and deprivation through the mobilisation of internal cultural resources.

My contribution is to offer a more fine-grained analysis which takes account of differences of race/ethnicity and social class to produce heterogeneous interpretations and calibrated insights into the social milieu of Black Caribbean young people. This will go some way to advancing understanding of those "ethnic related patternings of transitions to adulthood which are not well understood" (Irwin 1995: 21).

It has been contended that the complex dynamics of race/ethnicity have been given marginal treatment in the area of youth transitions. It has also been claimed that deracialised scholarship is commonplace and consequently there is less appreciation of the ways in which transitions are differentiated by race/ethnicity. This can partly be accounted for by the methodological difficulties of conceptualising and operationalising these concepts, a matter which is addressed in the chapter to follow. However, it must also be conceded that there needs to be a strengthening of the disciplinary commitment to engage with the problematics of race/ethnicity in social enquiry in this particular arena.

## 2.3 The theoretical terrain: key issues in youth transitions research

The selective review presented in this section is concerned to illuminate how issues of race/ethnicity feature in mainstream transitions research. The backdrop against which contributions will be reviewed is based on three

propositions. The first relates to Eade's notion (1996) that debating issues of race/ethnicity necessitates examining the interactions of power, resistance, conflict and change. The second is that the experiences of minorities are rendered invisible because discourses 'globalise' experiences and perspectives based on normative assumptions about white youth. Finally, Back (1997: 39) stated that academic youth research has relatively little to say about the lives of young black people in Britain. There are some notable exceptions (Mirza 1992; Tizard and Phoenix 1993) but their theoretical concerns have not filtered into youth transitions research.

## Dominant discourses

The youth transition literature is extensive. Its theoretical and empirical focus has changed and evolved and new areas of social enquiry have emerged. The first few years of the millennium witnessed an explosion of criticism about the focus of youth transitions research. It appeared that transition studies were moribund and mired in sterile debates about the extent to which young people's transitions had changed from their presupposed linear, stable and predictable path from school to the labour market. There were a number of voices calling for a 'rethink of the youth question' (Cohen 1997; Wyn & Dwyer 2000). Others were concerned to defend the established lines of inquiry but lamented the schism between transitions research and youth cultural studies research (Shildick & MacDonald 2001). Yet others believed that theory had raced ahead of empirical investigations, producing many new concepts (individualisation, post-adolescence, social biography) which were not understood in the context of 'lived experiences' (Roberts 1995; Bynner,

Chisholm & Furlong 1997). A common theme running through these contributions was the belief that youth research needed reinvigorating to discover "new models and definitions of transition for the current generation of young people in Western society" (Wyn & Dwyer 1999: 5).

Over a decade later the criticisms have not abated. Youth transition studies are still being criticised for making limited theoretical advances (Miles 2000, Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Fergusson 2004; Roche et al 2005). Researchers such as Miles (2000), Shildick and MacDonald (2007) and Stokes and Wyn (2007) question the relevance of the term 'transition' in youth studies as it is perceived as being anchored to methodological approaches which concentrate on quantifying and tracking school leavers' career destinations within narrow age bands e.g. 16-19. Useful as this data might be, it can be argued that it is now fairly widely accepted that young people can and do experience multiple transitions simultaneously. This demands the use of more diverse methods to capture evidence of the interdependent, multi-dimensional nature of transitions (Jones 2002; Bynner 2002). With such a framework, Shildick and MacDonald (2007: 590) would "re-affirm the value of a broad and long view of youth transitions situated in a panorama of socio-economic change".

The usefulness of the concept has been questioned for other reasons too. There is widespread consensus (Rudd 1997; Catan 2004) that the 'big four' (gender, social class, race and locality) reliably feature as important influences in young people's life chances, but as Rudd (1997: 266) acknowledges, "not enough has been done to deconstruct the individualised aspects of youth transition" (1997, p.266). This is particularly true in relation to race, as social

class and gender have been the subject of much critique and deconstruction (Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Du Bois-Reymond & Stauber 2005; Dwyer & Wyn 2001; Te Riele 2004).

Much effort has been made to counterbalance the contributions of macro-analyses, which cannot adequately account for individual agency in the process of negotiating the life course, with analyses which highlight the perspective of young people (Rudd & Evans 1998; Helve & Holm 2005; Devadason 2006).  Miles (2000: 11) has attacked the tendency in youth research to position young people as "troubled victims of economic and social restructuring without recourse to the active ways in which young people negotiate circumstances in the course of everyday life".  Stokes and Wyn (2007) emphatically claim that 'transition' has limited value for understanding young people's engagement with learning and work identities.

There has been considerable revision of how the term is used.  Latterly it has become distanced from the previous, more exclusive, association with capturing evidence of unidirectional trends from dependency to independent adult identity symbolised by full-time economic engagement.  However, I shall be arguing that regardless of theoretical commitment – whether that be a concern for understanding how structure and agency are interwoven, or the importance of using a biographical lens to obtain evidence of how transitions are individualised – research about the transition experiences of black youth and how race is implicated in that process has been inadequately explored. Race/ethnicity are contingent categories.  Including them in social analysis raises a range of problems for researchers, owing to the contested,

contentious and slippery nature of these concepts.  The dilemmas of working with race/ethnicity are the subject of chapter three.


## 2.4    Contemporary youth transitions: quantitative contributions

Quantitative approaches to analysing post-school transitions have been dominant in youth transitions research.  There is rich data analysing young people's career decisions, patterns of educational choice and labour market integration.  These data now routinely isolate the effects of gender and social class on occupational outcomes and transition patterns to delineate the social locations of young people several years after leaving school.  This literature utilises national and cross-national data sets to examine the effects of social change, such as the collapse in demand for youth labour, on young people's career opportunities, and the consequences of government and institutional policy responses. Lindlay (1996) investigates the integration of 16- to 19-year-olds into the British labour market, the government's response to mass youth unemployment, and policy failures, especially those associated with the vocational training system.  Furlong and Cartmel (1997, 2007) cover similar features but address more extensively contemporary transition issues such as the 'risk society' thesis and how this translates into a wider range of new risks that young people negotiate.  Many of these risks are masked by the rhetoric of individual choice which obscures the continuing hegemony of social class. This creates the impression that individual self-management, reflexivity and motivation are all that are required to benefit from an ever-burgeoning menu of post-16 opportunities (Bynner 2002).  Dolton & Makepeace (1999) give detailed statistical portraits of transition outcomes, documenting the

increasingly complex patterns based on frequent status changes and vacillations between temporary jobs, education and training, corroborating earlier observations made by Furlong and Cartmel. It's now worth making some brief comments about the contributions of cross-national research.

The principle contribution that cross-national research makes is to demonstrate similarities and differences in education, vocational training systems and patterns of youth employment/unemployment, and the effects of different institutional policies and practices (Shavit and Müller 2001; Müller and Gangl 2003; OECD 2005; Bagnall 2005; Walther 2006), comparing nation states. Analysis and commentary relate to youth concerns within Western economies, although Helve (2005) and Jeffrey and Mcdowell (2004) focus on the 'global geographies of youth' and present data about the particular issues of youth transitions within Eastern Europe and parts of Africa. These contributions are diverse, and illustrate certain global trends such as the prolongation of educational careers, deterioration of early entry to employment across Western Europe and the consistent correlation between educational credentials and occupational destinations. Cross-national and national research reports consistently that educational credentials are a major determinant of lifetime opportunities.

A selective overview of some of the important quantitative research into youth transitions gives insight into a broad spectrum of themes that researchers have considered essential to understanding some of the major changes which have occurred over the past three decades in the UK.

Ashton et al (1990) work on the transformation of the youth labour market in the 1980s has been regarded as a landmark study in occupational segregation, gender stratification and the impact on young people's labour market histories. Contrary to the discourse about 'delayed', 'misleading' or 'yo-yo' transitions (EGRIS 2001) which appeared in the lexicon of transition literature a decade later, Ashton 's data (drawn from interviews with 1786 18- to 24-year-olds) suggest less stability in young people's labour market behaviour than later studies indicate. They conclude, for example:

> The picture, even during a recession, is one of considerable fluidity within the labour market. However, unlike the 1960s, and the 1970s, when the movement was between jobs, in the early part of the 1980s there was less movement between jobs but more movement into and out of unemployment and Government schemes. (Ashton 1990: 141)

This point is supported by Goodwin and O'Connor (2002, 2007) who examined career decisions based on data from the 1960s. Ashton's work captured at an early stage some of the quantifiable effects deindustrialisation was starting to have on the labour market behaviour of young people. Bynner (1996) also charted the impact of industrial restructuring on 9,000 26-year-olds born in 1970. This longitudinal study revealed both continuity and change. In terms of continuity they observed that life chances remain highly related to human and social capital, which in turn is fundamentally linked to parental education and occupational status. They report a picture of the "30:30:40 society": those they regard as occupationally successful; three tenths who are occupationally disadvantaged, with mediocre educational credentials, and careers characterised by insecurity, low pay and long hours; and the two fifths who are occupationally and socially marginalised. They conclude that the evidence in

support of Beck's (1992) and Giddens' (1991) thesis about the loosening grip of social class on the occupational structures was equivocal. Key changes noted were the benefits gained by those who extended their educational credentials. New opportunities were emerging but this was coupled with the rise of credentialisation. They also noted the greater polarisation between the 1958 and 1970 cohorts. The polarisation of inequality has been noted by later studies (Bynner 2002; Jones 2002).

Bynner (1996) captured evidence of trends in young people's employment histories, education and qualifications, training scheme attendance and earnings. Variables were disaggregated by gender and class mobility but not ethnic status. Dolton and Makepeace (1999) concentrated on mapping the complexity of transition routes of two cohorts from the National Child Development Study (1981 and 1993) in order to establish key changes in transition histories for young people aged 16-23. They noted that, in spite of improved qualifications, the 1993 cohort experienced more frequent periods of unemployment. In terms of the growing complexity of transition routes, their study identified five (unemployment, vocational training, full-time work, full-time education and other). Later studies (Furlong & Cartmel 2007) documented even more variations and volatility in transition pathways.

**Macro transitions research and ethnically diverse samples**

It is significant that none of the quantitative studies cited explores the dynamics of race/ethnicity within its analysis. However, numerous researchers have alluded to the structural importance of these categories and their effects

on life outcomes. It is interesting that even with empirical work based on substantial datasets – the British Cohort Study 1970, comprising 10,000 persons – research summaries seldom mention whether their samples are differentiated by ethnic group variations, or whether the sample is composed entirely of the ethnic majority. Bynner's (2002) study of young people's journeys to independence is a case in point. This is an impressive study. The authors claim it provides details hitherto unavailable about young people's transition histories. It has extensive coverage of the changing economic environment and its impact on youth lifestyles, jobs, earnings, family formation and all the main factors which influence the move from dependency to independence. But minority young people are hidden or absent from the analyses presented, despite Bynner's claim in an earlier work (Bynner & Chisholm 1997) that life experiences are differentiated by race and gender, and should be addressed by researchers. The authors did acknowledge that a likely source of bias in this study was the under-representation of males and minority young people (Bynner 2002: 77). With studies of this nature, it is not possible to determine whether or how their findings apply to young people of minority status, although one could argue that in a generalised way they do because they map national trends based on large datasets.

The four studies commented on below fall within the 'youth paradigm', and seek to establish how data on transition outcomes are differentiated by race/ethnicity. They have been selected specifically because they make use of quantitative evidence to portray national trends in transition outcomes disaggregated by ethnic group.

Rice (2000) investigates education and the influences on post-16 choices, focusing particularly on gender and ethnic differences. Three main post-16 options are mentioned (full-time education, direct labour market entry and youth training). The author notes significant differences between ethnic groups:

- White males and females are less likely than other ethnic groups to progress into full-time further education.

- Educational attainment is highly correlated with progression into full-time education for all ethnic groups. However, regardless of levels of educational attainment, white males are more likely to choose direct entry to employment when local labour market conditions are favourable. Conversely, Afro-Caribbean males are more likely to 'choose' to stay in full-time education (primarily vocational), even with much lower levels of attainment. Research by Modood (1997) and Berthoud (1999) reveals that this is not necessarily a case of exercising active 'preference' as Rice claims, but is influenced by perceived and real barriers to labour market entry that minority youth are exposed to.

- Afro-Caribbean boys with similar or better GCSE attainment at 16 show a higher 'preference' for Government training schemes.

The language of 'taste and preference' in which Rice's article is couched is problematic, because the way statistical evidence is interpreted disguises significant race and gender disparities in the way training schemes, for

example, operate (Beck, Fuller and Unwin 2006, reviewed below). Rice (2001: 30) argues for example:

> Many employers use youth training as a screening device [to screen out black youth trainees], and higher quality trainees are offered a recognised apprenticeship or permanent employment.

This screening-out process is neither gender- nor race-neutral, a point which Rice does not acknowledge. For example, Beck, Fuller and Unwin (2006) revealed significant ethnic differences in the distribution of apprenticeship places. Young people of minority status are far less likely to secure apprenticeship places than their white counterparts. Importantly, such disparities remain when 'employment-enhancing characteristics' are factored into statistical models (Berthoud 1999).

The problem of understanding the interactions of race/ethnicity in transition processes is exacerbated by the practice of treating data as if there were no differences worth reporting. Dolton's (2001) ESRC report on youth transitions in the north-east of England considers ethnicity by obtaining information on the ethnic origin of the sample; minority ethnic respondents was estimated to comprise 3% of the sample. The findings give good descriptive accounts of changing opportunity structures and the risks and certainties associated with career decisions in a geographical area which has experienced radical structural decline. However, the report articulates its findings as though the experiences of all young people were the same irrespective of ethnic differences. We know that ethnic differences reproduce material advantage/disadvantages; therefore, some acknowledgement of those differences would produce less unitary analyses.

Connections between ethnicity, attainment at 16 and immediate post-16 destinations were the subject of Bradley and Taylor's (2004) study. Their study focused on variations in destination choices by ethnicity. What was important about this study was its examination of correlations between a wide range of variables and their effects according to different ethnic group. Examples of variables examined included family background (e.g. parental education, occupational status, housing tenure), exam performance, school quality (i.e. pupil-teacher ratio) and destinations; all variables are examined by ethnic groups Three important features were highlighted. There was substantial improvement in the exam performance of all non-white ethnic groups between 1992 and 1998, relative to white pupils. Black and Pakistani/Bangledeshi pupils' poor exam performance is largely (not fully) explained by socio-economic disadvantage; this is linked to the concentration of their parents in low-skilled occupations which they suggest is related to labour market discrimination. Additionally, the fact that greater numbers of non-white young people pursue further education, relative to white youngsters, is "consistent with the view" (Bradley & Taylor 2004: 343) that improved qualifications would in the longer term lead to improved employment and earnings opportunities. To build further on studies such as these, my study intends to explore the reasons for destination choices at an individual level to determine the factors which young people regard as influencing their destination choices.

Beck, Fuller and Unwin (2006) investigated the features which shaped young people's occupational horizons and were particularly interested in the role performed by information, advice and guidance in influencing perceptions about different occupational routes. 27% of their sample was of minority ethnic origin. They reported a number of disparities within the sample they surveyed and commented that there is still insufficient knowledge about ethnic segregation in the labour market. This is the case with minority ethnic young people between the ages of 16 and 25. However, there are some specialised contributions, for example Drew (1995), Modood (1997) and Owen (2000), which provide such data for this age category; otherwise data on labour market segregation tend to cluster information in the age range 16-64. The authors note the ethnic exclusivity of apprenticeships, a finding also reported by Modood, but also highlight some new factors. For example, white respondents were found to be far more aware of apprenticeship as a career route than non-whites, although black respondents were more interested in "working in a full-time job with structured training, and studying at a further education college". Yet black young people are far less likely to obtain access to 'employed status' apprenticeship provision and more likely to be found in provision which has a poor history of qualification and employment outcomes. This report reinforces evidence that black youngsters are less likely to receive structured support and advice which would enable them to access vocational routes which have better long-term career prospects.

The most comprehensive evidence mapping the post-school destinations of minority youth aged 16-19 is presented by Drew (1995). The study is based

on data from the Youth Cohort Study representing 28,000 white and non-white young people. It compares patterns of attainment, presence in post-compulsory education, participation in youth training, trends in labour market integration, and earnings. The study comments on the Government's (then) commitment to implement equal opportunities in training schemes to counterbalance the growing evidence of discrimination in the labour market against non-whites. However, significant disparities in access to employment have been consistently reported. The study captures the trend amongst minority ethnic young people who exhibit a strong desire to improve their qualifications (even those with low attainments at 16), viewing these as building blocks from one stage to the next.

Owen (2000) note the over-representation of minority youth in higher education compared to their presence in the population. Poor attainment at 16 is not the disaster it is often portrayed as, but can be regarded by certain groups of minority youth as a platform for making a fresh start in a new learning environment on a journey to improve longer-term employment prospects. Other reports (Modood 1997, Heath & Cheung 2006) have commented on the fact that some minority groups, in particular Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani young people, take on average longer to equalise their qualifications (through repeats of GCSEs for instance) than their white counterparts, but derive less benefit, due to "penalty effects" operating in the labour market; they conclude that qualifications only partly offset socio-economic disadvantage. Berthoud (1999), using 11 years of data

from the Labour Force Survey, found three persistent aspects of inequality reflected in ethnic differences in the labour market:

- Whites and Indians, with a fairly consistent and relatively low risk of unemployment;

- Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, with a consistently high risk of unemployment;

- Caribbeans and Africans, with a high average risk of unemployment but very strong variation within the group depending on individual characteristics.

Simpson (2006) conclude from their analysis of census data for 1991 and 2001 that employment gaps between whites and non-whites have narrowed, partly due to improvement in human capital among minority groups. However, significant differentials remain which are not fully explained by individual/group characteristics, cultural differences or geographical locations, or social class for that matter.

It has been shown that studies which integrate ethnic samples into their analyses are able to provide specific details about social positions of minority youths relative to their white counterparts. With particular reference to education, post-16 choices and labour market outcomes, empirical contributions are able to describe the macro picture of ethnic disparities and some of the factors which shape these. This evidence describes discriminatory outcomes from different institutional settings. The strength of quantitative research lies in its capacity to capture and present the more

global, national trends. However, we need to turn to qualitative data to have a better grasp of how post-16 decisions are constructed by individuals.

## 2.5    Contemporary youth transitions: qualitative contributions

Since the mid 1990s, youth transitions research has expanded its focus in response to criticisms that young people's lives were changing significantly and these changes could not be explained through mass survey methods. A number of theoretical outputs under titles such as *Youth research in the 1990s: time for (another) rethink* (Griffin 1997), *New directions in youth research* (Wyn & Dwyer 1999) and *Rethinking youth transitions* (Fergusson 2004) indicated the wind of change blowing through youth transition studies and demanding a broadening of youth research agendas. Change was being called for on a number of fronts. The traditional focus on the age group 16-19 was regarded as outmoded as there was growing awareness that due to socio-structural changes young people's life transitions were extending over much longer age ranges. Bynner, Chisholm and Furlong (1997) argued for research to be set within a 'life course perspective' which would be more receptive to capturing multiple dimensions of transitions, such as school, family and housing. This perspective would also be sensitive to investigating what they referred to as the "structural imperatives emanating from gender, class, ethnicity and locality" (ibid: 10). It was also asserted that youth research needed to adopt more critical and reflexive approaches (Rudd 1997) to examine the human side of youth transitions, including diversity and difference, which also enabled young people to 'speak for themselves'.

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The past decade has seen the emergence of a wider spectrum of contributions which utilise diverse qualitative strategies to capture the 'lived experience' of young people. The change to research agendas which is sought is well captured as follows:

> It is one thing for academics to write about relatively abstract conceptions of career trajectory, transition behaviour and individualisation and quite another to draw out empirical evidence relating to these concepts from the experiences and comments of young people themselves. Youth researchers need to consider how to faithfully and accurately discover, articulate and map out young people's attitudes and beliefs relating to their education, training and career opportunities, and particularly the part these young adults play themselves in creating these opportunities (Rudd and Evans 1998: 41)

There are a number of observations to make in regard to how this literature relates to the lives of minority youths. Firstly, Skelton (2002) questions the degree to which youth transition studies have advanced. She argues that the discipline still fails to incorporate research into the life experiences of marginalised young people; citing, for example, research with young people who are lesbian/gay, those who have disabilities and those raised in institutional care. In focusing my research question on how race is implicated in transition processes, it is anticipated that the answers to emerge to this question will extend our understanding of how transitions are negotiated at an individual level.

It can be argued that one actually has to look beyond the disciplinary framework of traditional 'youth transitions research' to discover works which engage with marginal groups such as those mentioned by Skelton or indeed with minority status young people. Griffin (1997) reviewed four new books on

youth research and heralded the:

> detailed discussion of social relations around ethnicity, race and class from the perspective of Australian society, as well as the more usual and dominant focus on Britain and the US. (Griffin 1997: 3)

The text referred to is *Rethinking Youth* (Wyn & White 1997), in which we find the discussion of ethnicity dispensed with in two pages, and from which you would gain only the vaguest idea about the nature of the social relations referred to. The observation relates to the treatment of race/ethnicity in youth transition studies. It is common to find references to race/ethnicity without any further recognition of the complex ways these social phenomena are interwoven into the fabric of the lives of young people. To understand how minority youth have negotiated and are negotiating the changing socio-economic contexts which shape their lives, one has to search for contributions which focus specifically on the lives of minority young adults. Having said this, there are a few examples of qualitative work which include minority youth in their samples; a selection of these are discussed below.

The 'structure/agency' dualism is a theoretical edifice in which researchers generally elect to prefer one over the other, or adopt a middle ground as captured by Robert's term (1997) 'structured individuation', which recognises that agency is bounded by structural imperatives such as class, race and gender. Rudd and Evans (1998) were concerned to discover how these concepts find expression in the experience of young people, by examining how young people perceive themselves as exercising 'choice' and control in the post-school options. They were particularly interested in identifying examples of 'individualisation', mirrored through the idea that "the school to work phase

is based on individual choice/activity and structural influences" (p.39). The individualisation thesis posits a vision of society in which "the individual must learn to conceive of himself/herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography" (ibid: 40). They discovered that young people "imagined futures" (Ball, Maguire & Macrae 2000) circumscribed by the locality and the opportunities available therein. The young people from an inner London borough were acutely aware that their ethnic identities would also be a brake on their imagined futures but demonstrated pragmatic rationality in taking steps which they hoped would engineer better future outcomes.

Human geography researchers Bowlby (2005) examined the interaction of 'racialised gendering', labour market processes and local specificities. This report, unusually, theoretically articulates that the racialisation of ethnic differences is played out through competing and conflicting social relations underpinning neighbourhood and place. An important observation is that young people do not have much faith in 'equal opportunity policies' to equalise the playing field littered with young people in search of employment.

Understanding young people's social networks by undertaking research with young people *within* their communities was a central theme in Smith's (2005) work with African Caribbean and Pakistani young adults in Birmingham and Bradford. Smith asked an important question which my own research subsequently identified as significant in understanding the transitions of young people of minority status: Reflecting on learning from the pilot focus groups,

Smith reports that concepts such as 'community' and 'transition' were found to be too abstract. However, paying close attention to how language is used by respondents can reveal meanings embedded in the language used. In my research, I didn't use terms such as 'community', but the narratives of respondents reveal a great deal about how they are *within* their communities. The finding that minority status young people believe community to be interwoven with their identities came as no surprise. Smith comments that his respondents reported that "their community" provided opportunities to develop a kind of "lived citizenship of mutual respect and obligations", a space where others are "looking out for me – in short, positive vibes" (ibid: 6). Social identities are forged through community networks. Smith also finds, as I did, a positive view which regards education as a key to a more promising future, despite the many accounts of negative experiences in the school system.

Louise Archer's work (2002) challenges the academic/policy thinking which reasons that Muslim women are absent from participation in post-compulsory education as a consequence of repressive cultural norms exerted through patriarchal dominance within Asian communities. This is research about Muslim pupils' intended post-16 choices. Her work acknowledges that there is much work to do to achieve a better understanding of the interaction between race and 'choice', and that 'choice' is not a passive response to structural contexts but can be a site of resistance too. She argues:

> Choice is bound up with identities embedded in tacit/common sense notions of 'what is appropriate for people like us/me' that can be specifically racialised, gendered and classed (Archer 2002: 360).

This makes clear that dominant discourses portray 'choice' as if it is unfettered by social relations of class, gender and race/ethnicity, obscuring the constraints which they reproduce.  Archer also illustrates how, in the context of the lives of Muslim young adults, choice is inextricably interwoven with shifting and fluid power relations enacted through structures of inequality which are "durably and multiply produced" (ibid: 363).

Tension between structure and agency in the narrative accounts of 24 young adults who are described as "complexly raced, classed and gendered" is an important theme in Ball, Maguire and Macrae's (2000) contribution to the post-16 transition literature.  The book is important for many reasons, not least for the authors' strenuous efforts to create contextualised, nuanced representations of the life circumstances of the research respondents. Avis et al's (2001) review of the publication raised an interesting dilemma which is created through narrative work.  They comment that the strength of the book is at the same time its weakness; in privileging the individual stories, summarised as case studies, it gives credence to the notion that individualisation and contingency are the primary drivers in the lives of the respondents – which is not warranted – and that structural relations are subordinated.  This is a vexed philosophical conundrum to which there appears to be no satisfactory resolution.

It is important to see neither structure nor agency as representing binary modalities. This dichotomy must be "replaced with an outlook that regards these elements as reciprocally constitutive moments of unified social process"

(Emibayer & Mische 1998: 968). It is also argued my Emibayer & Mische that actors are faced with a multiplicity of empirical circumstances (diverse forms of structures) to which they respond more or less inventively through subjective constructions of choices and social repertoires to shape the circumstances of their existence. They further describe that actions are not abstracted from their concrete situations, but rather ends and means develop "coterminously within contexts that are ever changing and thus subject to re-evaluation and reconstruction on the part of the reflective intelligence".

I argued earlier that as a result of the marginal presence of black youth in youth transitions research, our understanding of their material conditions and subjective evaluations are obscured because of unitary perspectives premised on models of white working class youths. Several studies have emerged in recent years which have analysed differences based on race/ethnicity, class and gender. Several of these are discussed because they have provided analytical reference points for my own study. A common feature of these studies is that they integrate informants' subjective perspectives with macro analysis and succeed in illuminating both the operation of socio-structural constraints and also how respondents "kick against the oppressive structures they inhabit" (Weis 2005: 115).

The importance of ethnic identity to young people is one of the themes explored by Cassidy et al (2006) in their study with 134 young people from multi-ethnic communities in Scotland. Evidence of how ethnic identity informs their lifestyles covered issues relating to education and occupation,

home/family and social networks. Young people of minority ethnic status report their positive embrace of hybrid/hyphenated identities, i.e. being a Muslim and at the same time being a Scottish-Pakistani. It was also reported that young people articulate high levels of "private collective self-esteem" (strong positive self evaluations), but that Pakistani Muslims reported lower levels of "public collective self-esteem" (due to negative public evaluations) and linked this to negative perceptions linked to 9/11. Overall, strong ethnic identifications were reported by many of the young people as a countervailing measure against negative public stereotypes of their ethnic group. Several young people reported that discrimination and stereotyping only made them more confident and determined to succeed, values also highlighted in Wright et al (2010) and Rhamie (2007). Wright and Rhamie explored the factors contributing to the high aspirational agendas pursued by many Black Caribbean young people, branded by various institutions as failures, and highlighted the range of success strategies adopted. These studies, for instance, the study featured the significant role played by family and "community expectations" (Cassidy et al 2006) in shaping the particular career-decisions of minority status young people.

Rhamie (2007) studied the influence of home, school and community nexus on the educational achievement of 78 African Caribbean young people, and identified some of the complex interactions between these social systems. The achievement profile, of the sample, was varied and was arranged into five classifications – high achievers 37%, retakers 12%, perseverers 18%, careerists 14% and underachievers 18%. Interestingly, the underachievers are

characterised by poor GSCE attainments, however, 71% went into employment immediately on leaving compulsory education. The purpose of Rhamie's study was to shift the focus away from the four decades of pervasive refrain of black underachievement and onto discussions of the factors enabling success for a significant proportion of African Caribbean young people. As with Cassidy et al (2006), the study reports on the high engagement of young people in community based social networks, including religious affiliation and high parental expectations and involvement in educational practices. These contributed to developing resilience which enabled many Black pupils to successfully navigate their overwhelmingly negative school experiences. Rhamie argued that social resources (of which social capital is one element) makes an important contribution to the well-being of black youth.

The concept of social capital has being widely used by youth researchers to explain the role that material and non-material resources play in young people's development of their capabilities to function in increasingly individualised social environments. Social capital is the product of relationships, formed through various group settings, and gives rise to the availability of various forms of resources; for example, kinship influences, community role models, network of social contacts which can, for example, lead to employment opportunities, the generation of information which can enrich, inform and empower (Ginwright 2007). Bassani (2009) notes the strong theoretical and empirical links between social capital and well-being, corroborated by a number of studies. Reynolds (2004, 2007) has undertaken extensive work within the Caribbean community examining how ethnicity has

been utilised as social capital. She finds that community bonds are valued as social resources which community members variously draw upon for instrumental and emotional support. She found evidence of strong 'bonding' social capital within Caribbean communities which facilitated protection from exclusion and discrimination.

A central contention of Yosso (2005) who critiques the, "very narrow range of assets and characteristics" captured by the traditional usage of economic, social and cultural capital is that 'communities of colour' have an array of "community cultural wealth" which are utilised to build, sustain, survive and resist "macro and micro forms of oppression" (p.81). Yosso presents an alternative definition of cultural capital, for example, characterising it as "the sense of group consciousness and collective" identity that serves as a resource aimed at the advancement of an entire group (p.82). With this definition, it is possible to locate the historical mobilisation of the Black supplementary school movement which sought to challenge the racist educational practices found within schools by providing culturally affirmative learning spaces to raise the standards of education Black children were exposed to.

In asking the question 'whose culture has capital?' Yosso seeks to trouble the taken for granted notion that only the white middle classes are adept (Archer and Francis 2007) at reproducing, claiming and monopolising Bourdieu's various forms of capitals for class advantage. Yosso challenges the idea that only middle class cultural values and practices have legitimacy by positing:

> Cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu espouses white, middle class standards and therefore all other forms and expressions of culture are judged in comparison to this norm (Yosso 2005: 76).

In this vein Black communities are also conceived as creators of cultural reproductions. Cultural constructions can be regarded as multi-dimensional diasporic identities, ensconced in locales agitating for inclusiveness, resisting marginality and reframing discourses which characterise failure as the only mantra by which Black communities are represented. Hence, Wright et al's (2010) focus on how 33 black young people, who experienced permanent school exclusion, move 'beyond school failure' is situated within the intellectual current of theorists who work with an expanded view of social and cultural capital.

Recognising that it is just as important to understand the intricacies of inequality which results in differential achievement gaps on completion of compulsory education, Wright et al utilise Yosso's framework which advocates six forms of cultural capital as an appropriate lens for surveying the construction of cultural capital within 'communities of colour'. The framework is applied to the accounts shared by respondents to interpret their actions in a more theoretically grounded manner. Furthermore, using these more expansive categories of cultural capital helps to illustrate the forms of knowledge, skills and abilities fostered in community settings and how these are utilised to resist oppressive labelling and, to effect strategies which seek to transform the constraints of disadvantage into 'cultures of possibilities'.

The six forms of cultural capital are empirically distinct but are not mutually exclusive; they overlap and are entangled in given interactional contexts. As Wright et al convey, whilst these concepts have been developed and applied in the US context, they have some appeal for interpreting the social experiences of Black Caribbean young people's negotiation of institutional relationships. Briefly stated the models of cultural capital which provide strategic support to 'communities of colour' are:

*Aspirational capital* - reflects parental and wider community role models instilling achievement values, even in the absence of material evidence to support such values; perceiving possibilities beyond immediate circumstances. Aspirational capital is nurtured by holding on to the possibility that children can break the links with their parent's occupational status through academic attainment.

*Linguistic capital* - intellectual and social skills attained through communicating in multi languages and perceived to be valuable because they underpin social maturity and cross-cultural awareness, for instance.

*Familial capital* - nurtured through 'extended family' and wider kinship relationships; consisting of cultural knowledge percolated through a 'sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition' (Yosso 2005: 78); it informs educational and occupational consciousness.

*Social capital* - networks and community resources used to navigate institutional structures symbolised in community associations such mutual societies and the ubiquitous 'partner' (informal financial savings arrangements instituted by the first generation Black Caribbean migrants who were denied

access to financial institutions). My mother and father saved for the deposit on their house through this mechanism.

*Navigational capital* - refers to the skills required to actively self-manage identities regarded as subordinate in hegemonic institutions such as universities and schools. It draws on the concept of 'academic invulnerability' or the ability to do well despite expectations to the contrary, the presence of stress events, stereotype threats which can heighten the risk of failure for minorities. Widdance-Twine (2000) sums up this often intangible threat when she asks, how comes one sees a 'black enclave' when a group of African-American students sit together in the caferteria and but only see a group of white students (paraphrased).

Resistant capital – knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behaviours that challenge inequality and discrimination.

The framework has been applied to the empirical data in Chapter 4. It has been used as an interpretive device to explore the kinds of choices made, the influences which have moulded respondents' choices, identity constructions and their associated behaviours.

## 2.6    Conclusion

A number of important contributions have been reviewed that have influenced the formulation of the study. Drawing on critiques which have challenged the representation of subordinate groups in main-stream social research, I developed a framework for the study built on questioning the prevalence of treating race/ethnicity as peripheral in discourses on youth transitions. Having

reviewed the presence of black youth in quantitative and qualitative studies, I acknowledged the important areas these studies have addressed, especially those related to mapping the patterns of inequalities. However, it has been argued that the particularities relating to the experience of transition from compulsory education are not well understood and are deserving of further attention. To contribute to this, I have outlined the critical cultural capital framework which will be used to interpret how differences based on race and class in particular (with some gender differences highlighted) have engendered particular ramifications.

Using a qualitative approach to foreground young people's articulations of their experiences, the proposed study will examine the experiences of black youth who are at different phases of their transitions to young adulthood. The next chapter explains the design of the study and its methodological approach.

# Chapter 3

## Including race and ethnicity in youth transitions research: methodological challenges

> My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people (Tierney 2000: 540).

> It is an inspiration to behold the experience of others in your arms, while recognising that what we touch is always moving, unpredictable, irreducible and mystically opaque (Back and Solomos 2000: 204).

### 3.1    Introduction: Colouring our representations

The central theme of the preceding chapter positioned race/ethnicity as pivotal social categories which frame the opportunities available to young people negotiating post-school destinations. Concomitant to this theme is the assertion that the corpus of mainstream research, examining from diverse angles the changing dilemmas affecting young people's development to adult status, deals peripherally with race/ethnicity (see Kehily 2007; Bagnall 2005; Webster et al 2004; Catan 2004). It is important to avoid the notion that, because other social groups, e.g. gay and lesbian young people and young people with disabilities, are also marginalised from contemporary debates about youth transition (Skelton 2002), such discursive practices are unproblematic.

Furlong and Cartmel (2007), and many others (Bynner et al 2002; Jones 2002, 2009; Shildick and MacDonald 2007; Bradley and Devadason 2008) have contributed important empirical evidence highlighting the continued salience of social class, gender and more recently geographical location (see Iannelli and Smyth 2008) in shaping prominent trends in young people's transition to adult

status. Notwithstanding this acknowledgement, our knowledge of how race/ethnicity intersects with varied social processes to produce distinct racialised experiences is underdeveloped. This arises because the circumstances of white (especially working class) youth are the implicit norm under which the particularities of minority youth are submerged. Bashi (1998: 343) reminds us that "racial categories matter because racial hierarchies matter". They matter for the simple reason that social divisions based on race/ethnicity are inherent in societal arrangements (Mason 2000). The study therefore explores what race/ethnicity means in the lives of Black Caribbean[5] young people as part of the broader context of their transitions to adult status.

It will contribute in two important ways to our current knowledge about black youth and their experience of transition: a) it foregrounds the interactions of race/ethnicity in young people's transition decisions by adopting a biographical narrative approach; b) it makes more explicit the ways in which race/ethnicity is implicated in transition outcomes. This contribution is developed by using the framework of narrative research. The rationale for the use of a narrative framework will be explained later in the chapter when I elaborate my associated methodological approach. For now, I restate the context which gave rise to the research question, as this shaped my methodological decisions for resolving my "research puzzle" (Mason 2002).

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[5] The term most commonly used in the literature of ethnic and racial studies is 'African Caribbean'. I use the term 'Black Caribbean' throughout as no respondent adopted the former phrase to identify their ethnic background. Black Caribbean, Black British or mixed-race were the terms used by the respondents.

What is the research puzzle?  It is to understand the ways in which the couplet 'race/ ethnicity' differentiates young adults' experience of transition to adult status;  linked to this, to examine these differences through the subjective accounts of the research respondents in order to understand how vicissitudes are negotiated within the constraints of social positioning.  From examining the range of theoretical and empirical research probing new developments in youth transitions, it is evident that the impact of race/ethnicity is only irregularly included in sociological discourses within youth transitions (see Griffin 1993; Rudd & Evans 1998; Smith 2005). A contemporary example can be drawn from the recent work of Bradley and Devadason (2008).  They present evidence derived from a quantitative and qualitative study of young people's patterns of transition into the labour market within a defined geographical area. The sample is differentiated by gender, ethnicity, class and socio-economic spatial zones.  Interestingly, the authors explicitly tease out the influences of three of their categories on pathways into the labour market; ethnicity is omitted from the discussion.  Subsuming ethnicity under the other categories leads to a totalising representation which creates the impression – indeed argued by the authors – that young people of *all* backgrounds will eventually settle down into "a steady career path" (2008: 120).  Such sweeping generalisations must be interrogated not least because the evidence to support the claims has not been elucidated.  Hence, Rudd's claim (1997: 269) is still relevant, namely that youth transitions research needs to offer new theoretical frameworks which "deconstruct the individualised aspects" of youth transitions, generally in the age frame 16-25.  This time frame has been

described by Jones (2009: 84) as the central dynamic in youth and the period in which the "essential nature of youth emerges".

An important thread linking examinations of race/ethnicity and the need to develop a better understanding of the individualised dimensions of transitions, is the concept of agency. The theoretical tension between the structure and agency problematic has been referred to as the "definitive sociological dualism" (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005). Notwithstanding this apparently irresolvable dualism, since the 1990s there have been notable theoretical advances in the foci of youth transition studies (Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Shildick and MacDonald 2007). Emphasis has increasingly concentrated on the significance of socio-biographical perspectives which examine how young people construct biographical possibilities in response to risks, uncertainties and the vulnerabilities inherent in modern day 'risk' societies. It was important therefore to have a methodological approach which would yield insight into the "routine problematic and interactional meanings in individual lives" (Denzin & Lincoln 2003: 5).

In the preceding chapter I have argued that what we know about the lives of black youth has been informed significantly by studies adopting a quantitative research paradigm. Whilst findings based on the generalisations from quantitative instruments are instructive in highlighting macro trends, they efface the intending individual (Chase 1996: 29). In studies of the details of social aggregates, lives are often positioned as "puppets dancing in the formation of social structures" (Knowles 2003: 23). It can be argued that the

structural manifestations of race/ethnicity are quite well understood but that the effects emanating from these categories are not understood in terms of their impacts at an individual level. Certainly Emirbayer & Mische (1998: 262/3) argue that there is theoretical vagueness about the "interpenetration of agency and forms of structure" which has created "a flat and impoverished" conception of how agency shapes social action. Whilst not promising to produce any greater clarity on this point, my study will use the interpretative practices of narrative enquiry to bring into sharp relief the more "mundane reasoning that articulates a sense of agency" (Gubrium & Holstein 1995: 556) in ways not divorced from its structural moorings.

Empirically, there have been shifts in youth studies research agendas which have symbolised an engagement with new methodological approaches emphasising young people's own perspectives. There has been a methodological revival designed to gain insight into notions of 'self-negotiated biographies' and the degree to which young people "write their own scripts" (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005), and to unpick the interlocking of various processes at the micro level. Holdsworth and Morgan have argued that agency is at the heart of transitions. The intellectual current of postmodernism has generated an upsurge in critical questioning of the conceptualisation of agency (Gubrium & Holstein 1995: 557) and reinvigorated the quest for new ways of studying human lives (Denzin & Lincoln 2003). This has encouraged a critical reflexivity in the academy, evidenced, for example, by questions about how research subjects are represented. How researchers "word the

world" accentuates responsibility for how the experiences of our research subjects are represented.

Postmodernist thinking has created this intellectual space whereby the "authority of experience" (hooks 1994[6]) can be recognised as a legitimate pursuit of sociological inquiry. hooks is particularly concerned with interrogating essentialist constructions of 'difference and otherness', which are, for example, blind to the variances of black identity and social locations, consequently inscribing a one-dimensionality to the 'collective black experience'. hooks contends that these discursive practices arise out of "inadequate concrete knowledge and contact with the non-white 'other'" (ibid: 423). This research questions how it is possible to read across or to extrapolate from the experiences of white (working class) youths to tacitly claim sameness of experience for black youths. Instead of reading across we need methods which enable us to read into the experiences, meanings and practices – the everyday lives of the particular social group who are the focus of the study.

## 3.2    Researching race: a 'doubled-research practice'[7]

It has been argued that one's ontological and epistemological perspective is embedded within the choice of research topic (Mason 2002: 17). By exploring a question such as 'how might race/ethnicity be implicated in the experience of transition', I have an epistemological interest in generating knowledge

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[6] bell hooks – always written in lower case.

[7] Term used by Gunaratnam (2003) to refer to research practice which questions, 'troubles' and interrogates assumptions made throughout the research process; e.g. reflecting on how subordinate groups may inadvertently be 'harmed' through our research, based on how such groups are represented in our writings.

produced through interactions between racialised subjects[8] in a given research setting and relationship. This means regarding research subjects as 'lay sociologists', active knowers who create meaningful interpretations of their social reality. I am also interested in yielding knowledge about the "socio-structural relations" found in daily practices and concrete conditions (Bertaux 1981). An interpretive paradigm offers an appropriate theoretical orientation to study lives at close quarters. The decision to use an interpretive perspective was influenced by a number of qualitative studies which relied on individual stories to formulate knowledge about particular social phenomena. Two American studies were particularly informative. Hunter (2006) explored African-American young men's reflections on "father-loss and survival" in their transition to "manhood". The young men's interpretations conveyed the complex interconnections of their identities and biographies. For the reader this opened a window into understanding the various ways African-American young men relate to the loss of paternal relationships. Rich and Grey (2005) used the stories of young men involved in urban violence to develop an understanding of the risk factors associated with patterns of recurrent trauma. He states that the study was undertaken to "generate hypotheses about recurrent violent injury based on narratives of black male victims of violence ... We explored the stories victims told about their injuries in an attempt to understand how the young men made sense of their trauma" (Rich and Grey 2005: 816). I found these texts a compelling read. They were emotionally engaging and did not suffer from the "passive-voiced author and passive subject" (Richardson 2003: 501) so commonplace in much social science

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[8] As a black researcher, my racialised status is not erased from the relationship.

writing. These writings were exemplars of interpretive approaches and demonstrated the complex layers of social life imbued in the stories offered by the research subjects.

My epistemological position is aligned to the belief that understanding the meanings that our research subjects convey is an ongoing accomplishment, utilising interpretative strategies sedimented within language and culture. Geertz (cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 193) refers to the process of cultivating an "ethnographic understanding" in which the "most local of local detail" is dialectically related to the "most global of global structure". Thus the epistemological stance of interpretivism centres on understanding and its representations:

> Interpretivists aim to reconstruct the self-understandings of actors engaged in particular actions...where the researcher grasps the situation in which human action acquired meaning in order to say one has an understanding of the particular meaning. (Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 193)

Interpretive approaches privilege the 'voice' of respondents as opposed to the 'objective' constructions of the researcher. Emphasis is given to the cultural interpretations and representations of the individual life. I have argued in earlier chapters that there is limited understanding of the complex daily realities of the lives of black youth, the identities they perform, how they link history into their personal biographies and how they mediate the choices available to them in their contingent, historically and politically located contexts. Youth research, like other academic subjects, has been affected by the discourses of postmodernism and post-structuralism. These discourses have evoked sensitivities to the complex perspectives of class, race, gender

and ethnic group affiliations (Creswell 1998: 79).  Yet how to study racialised communities, groups or individuals is a vexed and contentious terrain epitomised by the "treacherous bind" of working with and against racial categories (Gunaratnam 2003).  The "tricky business" of working with racial and ethnic categories has been exacerbated by the paucity of discussions in the methodological literature discussing the dilemmas of researching race/ethnicity (Bulmer and Solomos 2004).

The "tricky business" refers to the tension between treating race as an essential characteristic marked by phenotypical differences between social groups, in other words treating race as if it were a 'real' biological fact,  and the necessity in empirical research to work with racial classifications whereby the continued use of such categories reinforces racial differences.  Hall (cited in Gunaratnam 2003: 31) asserts that concepts such as race, ethnicity and multiculturalism have passed their analytic sell-by date but remain in common-sense use because there is nothing better with which to replace them.  In the meantime, there is "nothing to do but to continue to think with them but not in the paradigm in which they were originally generated" (ibid: 31).

Working with racial categories is discomforting because race as a biological entity is discredited.  However, our social institutions, the political and cultural landscape and social relationships construct race as socially significant (Mason 2000: 8).  We therefore cannot ignore the social manifestations engendered by racial and ethnic categorisations.  Appreciating that race is not an ontologically secure concept with a fundamental essence (naturalised),

fixed and immutable through historical time, is crucial to understanding its contingent nature (Widdance-Twine 2000; Gunaratnam 2003; Nayak 2006). Definitions and usage of racial and ethnic terminology and the social practices they inscribe alter over time, vary across geographical locations and have multiple meanings (Widdance-Twine 2000; Ellison 2005; Maylor 2009; Denton and Deane 2010). The crucial question, therefore, is how we can work pragmatically with race at a methodological level; how to bring "race into research" without "essentialising bodies, experiences, practices, thoughts of individuals and groups" (Gunaratnam 2003: 32). What practical strategies can be adopted to work with the paradox of race/ethnicity?

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argued the need for "epistemological reflexivity" when working in this complex terrain. Epistemological reflexivity is characterised by the conscious exercise of a critical outlook which recognises that our access to the experiences we wish to write about is partial, open to multiple interpretations, are temporary and shifting; and that the researcher's subjectivity impacts all dimensions of the research process, including how we represent our respondents. Two examples will suffice for illustration. Archer (2001) studied identity constructions of British Muslim young people and revealed how her own ethnicity (white researcher), gender and class exposed the relativity of race which was not experienced in any simple or unitary way by her respondents. Crozier (2003) highlighted the issue of power differences in her research with parents. She recognised the necessity of addressing their concerns regarding the value of the research to them as black parents. She contends that this was vital to building a mutually beneficial research

relationship. The practice of epistemological reflexivity is, I believe, threaded into the way my research study evolved, and is evident, for example, in negotiating access to respondents.

## 3.3     The paradigm of narrative inquiry

The purpose of my proposed qualitative study was to produce insights into the concrete practices of Black Caribbean young people making transitions to young adulthood; importantly, to complement studies which covered macro transitions patterns (see Dolton and Makepeace 1997; Bynner 2002).   I believed that my choice of research topic was not unconnected to my own biography.  For instance, some 25 years after leaving school I still had vivid recollections of my post-16 transition.  It was tinged with bewilderment and disappointment because, back then, I was treated as an 'underachiever', although that was not the label used then.  As such I was curious to find out how things had changed.

I therefore sought alignment with a research paradigm which did not expect behaviour which claimed to be 'objective', rationally detached, scientifically neutral and emotionally desensitised: behaviour often claimed to characterise research within the positivist tradition (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).  Instead, I was attracted by the perspective articulated by McCracken (1988), that the researcher is not a mere instrument in an impersonal exercise marshalling social facts existing 'out there'. The qualitative researcher is one who "fulfils qualitative research objectives using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination and intellect, in ways which are various and

unpredictable" (p.26).  This is now received wisdom.  Both Archer (2001) and Crozier (2003) share their ideas of how their biographies are stitched into their research practice.

The discovery of a narrative inquiry approach to research was serendipitous. It occurred some way into my research. I had already carried out the 24 in-depth interviews I'd planned to do before this discovery; which was a strength and a weakness in the research.  A particular weakness was that I had to deploy narrative methods at the data analysis stage as the source materials had already been collected.  Narrative methods, in general, require comprehensive attention to language and to non-lexical elements such as intonation and pace.  Having 24 transcripts to work through systematically, devoting close attention to what and how things are said, led to the realisation that I had undertaken too many interviews.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of undertaking several readings of each transcript, the strength of the framework of narrative inquiry was that it furnished insights into strategies for working with the data to address the main research question: '*How is race important to the experience of transition from education to the labour market for Black Caribbean young people?*' The framework enabled me to explore a number of dimensions important to this question, namely:

- the use of first person accounts to convey the diversity of young people's experience of transition and to understand what sense young people themselves made of the experiences they related: essentially, obtaining

accounts of experiences, studying the content of what was shared to understand the construction of meaning arising from the experience

- the exploration of the relationship between the young people's sense of agency and the actuality of socio-structural constraints

- the exploration of young people's perceptions of 'difference', and whether and how this affected their decisions and the identities they performed.

Interviews were the technique deployed for accessing the personal details which the research relied upon.

There are different approaches and meanings to narrative inquiry, which is used interchangeably with the broader term 'narrative research'. Briefly stated, it is described as a "rich framework for investigating the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories" (Webster and Mertova 2007: 3). Its methods are used in disparate disciplines: in education (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, psychology (Josselson, Lieblich and McAdams 2003), medical sociology (Mishler, cited in Atkinson 1997), clinical psychology (Shay 1994), organisational psychology (Czarniawska 2004), sociology (Berger and Quinney 2005; Andrews et al 2006) and, less frequently, youth research (Devadason 2006); although a recent contribution is provided by Jeffrey (2008) who presents some compelling narratives of the global dimensions of young people's lives.

Whilst there are great differences in theoretical perspectives, there are some broad areas of consensus. Firstly, the representation of social action in the

form of storytelling is an existential reality as old as life itself. Barthes' depiction of narrative being an organising principle of human action is often cited for its time honoured quality:

> Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversations. Moreover, under this infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind…and therefore nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative…it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes, cited in Riessman, 2008, p.4)

Secondly, narrative inquiry is rooted in an ontological view of experience emanating from Dewey's conceptualisation of experience.

> Because every experience is constituted by interaction between "subject" and "object", between a self and its world, it is not itself either merely physical or merely mental, no matter how much one factor or the other predominates … Experiences are the product of discrimination, and hence, can be understood only as we take into account the total normal experiences in which both inner and outer factors are so incorporated that each has lost its special character. (cited in Clandinin and Connelly 2007: 38)

Narrative inquiry examines how representations of experience are constructed, both what is told and how it is told, and the researcher's place in this construction. We see from Dewey's quotation that he regards experience as an ontological feature of humanity. On the basis of this conceptualisation, knowing is the product of the transaction between subject and object which itself draws on an experiential past and continues into an experiential future. It is this thread of continuity underlying experience which connects the historical experience of racism, for example, and the contemporary manner in which this may shape narratives of transition. This ontological notion of the continuity of experience is a third theme in narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly: 2007: 39).

A further common strand within narrative inquiry is the view that telling about experience involves selective emphasis. Human agency and imagination determine what aspects of past events are plotted into a coherent format to "claim identity and construct lives" (Riessman 1993); the researcher too can only capture and represent selective (Clandinin and Connelly: 2007) features of an individual's or group's experience.

A final premise on which narrative inquiry rests is the notion that narratives illuminate broader social processes. Narrative inquiry not only regards experience as an important source of knowledge and understanding but, because narratives are created from the 'cultural scripts' available within a given social milieu, they reflect at an individual, group and community level meaningful interpretations of the social world. It has been argued that the popularity of narrative research can be attributed to its capacity to effectively challenge the dualism between individual and society. Narrative inquiry has the theoretical latitude to address the interweaving of material social conditions, discourses and practices with subjectively experienced desires and choices (Andrews 2006: 1). In listening to narratives one is concerned not only with understanding experience but also in drawing interpretations about their wider social significance.

## 3.4    Evolution of the study: Design and data collection

<u>Design of the study</u>

The literature on qualitative research suggested to me that the research could be less rigorous and less credible where a single qualitative method – i.e. in-

depth interviews - is used to generate data. Consequently, my initial research plan was over-ambitious: a mixed methods approach involving structured questionnaires to 300 young people and interviews with 100 young people and about 20 professionals. Time and financial resources were constraints and the design had to be curtailed. For example, my capacity to meet with respondents to engage in a 'respondent validation' exercise (Malterud 2001) was undermined because of the time required to track and set up face-to-face meetings with all respondents. I felt it would be too impersonal, distanced and exploitative merely to send the transcripts in the post asking for respondents' comments. Equally, I recognise that this could have improved rigour to some degree.

Fortuitously, a meeting with a colleague who had recently published a book based on the results of her doctoral research caused me to think more critically about the number of interviews that would be appropriate for my study. Her research was based on the in-depth study of seven cases (McKenley, 2005). Her advice was to 'keep it real'; to read Grant McCracken's The 'Long Interview' (1988), and to study fewer cases and study them more deeply. Subsequent forays into the methodological literature found support for this advice (Patton 2002; Ritchie & Lewis 2003). For example, Patton (2002: 227) advises that there is a trade-off between depth and breadth in qualitative research. The decision hinges upon whether the desire is to obtain data about a narrow range of experiences, in which case a greater number of respondents may be required. Alternatively, where a greater depth of understanding (e.g. a detailed investigation into a life story) is required then fewer cases would

suffice. The decision I made was to focus on a segment of experience connected with leaving school and constructing career pathways. I also wanted to interview respondents of both genders and across different age ranges, so breadth was very important.

<u>Reliance on qualitative interviews</u>

The research came to rely on the use of a single method, that of open-ended in-depth interviews. This was the core method used for the study. There was great concern as to whether the use of a single method would generate the quality of data required to produce meaningful sociological insights. It was necessary to understand what young adults had to tell about their experiences of transition from school. At a second level, it was necessary to be able to say something about any collective features emerging across cases, as well as elicit their broader sociological implications: for example, by exploring how the concept of 'choice biographies' materialises (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998) in the context of racialised identities.

Critiques about over-reliance on interview data in qualitative social research, especially where this is the only data source, raised a number of methodological concerns. These are most clearly articulated by Hammersley (2003), Silverman (2004) and Atkinson and Delamont (2006). Their concerns are not recent; in most standard qualitative research textbooks one finds reference to the putative unreliability and 'unscientific' nature of qualitative interview data. These arguments are varied and complex. However, counterarguments claiming that sound, credible and robust data are produced

by interviews are just as tenable and forceful (Holstein and Gubrium 1997; Guest et al 2006). There are two issues that I will comment on as they are pertinent to my research design and I endeavoured to address them in carrying out the research.

Due to personal and financial constraints, it was not feasible to conduct research which included observations of respondents' actions. This is one solution to the methodological dilemma of over-reliance on respondents' perspectives which Hammersley (2003) and Silverman (2004) criticise. They assert that there is no unproblematic correspondence between what people say they do and what they do. The interview guide (Appendix 3.1(a)) was constructed to elicit evidence about respondents' experience and behaviour (what they actually did at specific time points) as well as opinions, feelings and values (as suggested by Patton 2002: 351). Having considered the injunction that qualitative researchers are to exercise methodological caution in using interview data as a way to 'get closer to actors' perspectives', I concluded that, after all, there was not an outright rejection of the methodological relevance of this data source. Instead, painstaking attention should be paid to how the data were garnered, and how accounts were constructed (by the respondent and the researcher). As long as judicious circumspection is paramount, and 'cavalier interpretations' are avoided, qualitative interviews are valid data sources. Hammersley states,

> The fact that they (interview accounts) are artful productions, that are often shaped by concerns of self-presentation, or persuasion, does not mean that they cannot be accurate representations." (Hammersley 2003: 123)

The researcher has to adhere to and make explicit a transparent process of analytic induction which creates confidence in the interpretations offered. The interview guide attended to some of these concerns by enabling the same areas to be explored across the 24 respondents. It allowed consistent coverage of certain predetermined themes, though the exact questions were not specified in advance, thus leaving scope to probe in certain directions within the interview context.

The design also had to address the thorny issue of 'how many interviews are enough?' In the initial stages, the research proposal naively tendered the idea of 100 interviews, based on the assumption that more equated to better quality/more valid data. Thankfully, a more measured approach was devised, influenced by the work of Bertaux (1981) and Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006). Bertaux, for example, conducted interviews with 30 artisan bakers but later reflected that after 15 interviews he had gathered no new data, just additional data reinforcing issues raised by earlier respondents. Guest et al drew similar conclusions from their research exercise to determine that point at which 'theoretical saturation' of their research codes had been achieved. They discovered that 92% of their codes were theoretically saturated at 12 interviews; the remaining 48 interviews did not yield new themes.

The research design settled on 24 interviews based on the sampling criteria discussed below. However, with hindsight, while the interviews produced a lot of data, I would still conclude that reliance on one data source has its limits. For example, if the design had included focus group activities this could have

enabled themes emerging from the interviews to be explored in a different context which would have produced alternative interpretations.

<u>Sampling characteristics</u>

A purposive, heterogeneous (Ritchie & Lewis 2003) sample of young people was recruited, based on criteria important to the study.  As spelt out by Mason (2002), the sample categories must enable one to generate enough data with the right focus to answer the research question.  With this in mind the following criteria were devised prior to any fieldwork:

- young adults in the age range 16-25 - to enable some comparative explorations of how transition experiences evolved over this age range

- a balanced mix of both genders for comparisons of the ways in which transition processes might be differentiated by gender

- young people with a family background where at least one parent/grandparent was born in one of Britain's former colonial territories formerly known as the "West Indies" but now known as "Caribbean".  The actual respondent could be either British-born or born in one of the Caribbean islands.  Potential respondents were asked to state how they identified themselves, e.g. Black British or Black Caribbean

- a range of transition pathways.  It was important to gather data about different types of experiences in relation to a range of post-school options and decisions. The sample categories sought to include young people who had experienced further education (in whatever guise); young people in employment, whether preceded by a period of post-compulsory education or not; and young people who were unemployed

- a geographical spread, but with a London focus.

As it transpired, the geographical spread was not as diverse as I had anticipated. Only three of the respondents were from boroughs other than those in South London. This happened because I had to rely on various contacts, the majority of whom operated out of South London, to gain access to young people. However, the characteristics of the boroughs are quite different. Details of the respondents and their geographical locations feature in tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 in chapter four. A pen portrait of several respondents is provided in Appendix 5.1.

The sampling criteria did not include social class. This was a potential weakness at the design stage. Fortunately, there was some randomness in the way young people were recruited for the study (e.g. poster on Black History Month website). This led to the appearance in the sample of young people from varied class backgrounds (a more detailed breakdown of class background is given in chapter four, which explains the research findings).

## 3.5 Data collection: Role of the researcher, access and ethical considerations

It is not uncommon in the research literature to find a separation between access and ethics, with ethics tucked away in the penultimate chapter. Blaxter et al (1996) and Bryman (2001) make an important point which resonates with my field experience. They emphasise that issues of ethics are intertwined throughout the research process and that the researcher should reflect upon

the sort of ethical issues which arise at different stages of the research. Ethical issues did have a bearing at the data collection, analysis, interpretation, and write-up stages. Reflections on ethical considerations are threaded into the discussion of these areas. Heath et al (2009: 23) stress the importance of a "situated approach to research ethics", one of four approaches to ethics presented by Bryman (2001). The approach emphasises the researcher's responsibility for acting appropriately and contingent to the dilemma faced in situ. This responsibility must, however, be exercised within the framework of four core principles based on a) avoiding harm to respondents; b) securing informed consent; c) avoiding invasions of privacy and d) avoiding deception (Bryman 2001: 479). With the exception of 'invading privacy' these principles raised dilemmas which were addressed in situ, as will be illustrated in the discussion which follows.

Locating respondents

Initially reluctant to use personal contacts because of anxieties about biasing the research, I began the quest for respondents through an advertisement on the Internet (Black History Month website); this invited interested parties to contact me to discuss the research. The advertisement consisted of a PDF document providing essential information about the purpose of the research, details about the sample categories, etc. Several weeks later this did produce six enquiries which eventually produced three respondents. The initial contact was made by a parent and after discussing the research they agreed to put me in touch with their son/daughter. I contacted these individuals to ascertain whether they would be interested in taking part in the research. Thus

telephone contact was instigated with these young people to secure their informed consent.

Several other avenues were used to secure the total of 24 respondents. I liaised with youth leaders in various boroughs whom I had worked with in a professional capacity and asked them if there were young people whom they could recommend that I speak with. Three youth leaders agreed to work with me to recruit prospective respondents. I recruited 10 respondents through these contacts. Respondents who agreed to be interviewed were then asked if they knew of other young people who I could approach to discuss the research. Prospective participants were screened by way of my initial conversation with them about the research. A number of young people were not taken forward where requirements in terms of age or transition pathways had already been covered. In total I spoke to 35 young people from which the final 24 were selected.

Twenty four face-to-face interviews were conducted between April 2006 and December 2006. Each interview lasted between 75 minutes and 2 hours. Each interview was tape recorded. Agreement for tape-recording the interview was discussed with the respondent once they had agreed to be involved and a date/time/place had been agreed for the interview. Interviews took place in multiple locations (e.g. three youth centres, an adventure playground where one respondent did voluntary work, the respondent's home, and in two instances my home. I phased the interviews in stages to enable the full, verbatim transcription of each interview. I transcribed 15 of the 24 interviews

personally, and enlisted the support of a typist to help with some of the transcriptions. Although I developed a transcription protocol to help with consistency, the fact that a third party was involved with the tape recordings did raise the issue of preserving the confidentiality of respondents' information. This was discussed with the transcriber and assurances were given. Ultimately I partially resolved this issue by completing the majority of the transcriptions myself.

## Personal disclosure, trust-building and using incentives

These conversations alerted me to the first of many ethical issues: what was I to reveal about myself? What was the research really designed to achieve? How would it benefit any of the intended respondents? As one parent bluntly asked, "How would this benefit black people, who are always being researched, yet nothing changes?" Comments of this nature were made time and time again as I made attempts to negotiate access. I was acutely aware of Oliver's critical observation (cited in Archer 2001: 110) that much research in fact has little direct benefit to the 'real' lives of respondents. I reflected earnestly on how I could explain how the research was relevant and to whom. It was hard not to conclude that the research was for my personal benefit. However, I knew that if I were totally 'upfront' about this motive I would be bereft of respondents. Bryman (2001: 478) observes, "Virtually all research involves elements that are at least ethically questionable." I developed a narrative which did seem to assuage the scepticism initially displayed. I went along the lines that the research is important because we usually hear

negative views about black youth and that my research would also convey constructive features of their lives.

This rationale began to open up a conduit for more detailed dialogue about the research and my personal values in selecting the topic. It established in a general way that I was there to serve the 'black community' in some way, and that we were "on the same side", as one youth worker remarked. It dispelled a pejorative assumption, in some cases unspoken, that I inhabited a social space completely different to those of the young people I wished to research. My credibility hinged on reassuring my potential respondents that I was sensitive to and not divorced from the oppressive features which are tightly bound with racialised identities. Crozier (2003) raised similar issues which were bound up with trust and evidenced by respondents' questioning the purpose of her research and the difference it would make. She resolved these questions as and when they arose, where she found, for example, that personal disclosure narrowed the distance between her and the respondents. She points out,

> As a researcher in the context described...the most important reason is about being willing to share experiences and identify with the respondents as much as possible in order to diminish the barriers and equalize the relationship. (Crozier 2003: 86)

In recruiting a number of respondents, I worked with three youth leaders who advised that I needed to spend some time "hanging out" so that the young people would "get used to my face". This I was assured would help to build bridges so that I was not regarded as a total outsider. I acted on this advice, and over several weeks spent time at the various youth clubs in the evenings, 'helping out' in ad hoc ways; I recruited a number of respondents this way.

These strategies also helped narrow perceived social distance between the respondents and myself, a factor which was commented upon by gatekeepers and a few respondents. Two respondents, for example, commented that I "talk proper" (unlike them). Ever conscious that my voice may be a barrier, I worked hard to simplify my use of language, and where it was appropriate even used a few Jamaican colloquial terms. Managing my image was a constant source of anxiety, as I wanted my respondents to believe they could communicate with me and feel comfortable revealing important details about their lives, and that I would understand and not judge their lives negatively; assuring confidentiality in the use of the information was the simple part of this negotiated relationship. My experience resonates with the claim made by Phoenix (cited in Egharevba 2001: 228) who remarked that very little has been written about the difficulties of negotiating with those whom we want to include in the study. This was the most challenging aspect of the process of gaining access. I had underestimated the time it would require to build relationships to gain informed participation.

Establishing rapport

Gatekeepers assisted me to gain access to potential respondents. The issue of financial incentive was raised as a way of minimising the exploitative nature of the research relationship. I explained that my research was unfunded (this helped my credibility and generated empathy!!). Nevertheless, offering a financial incentive was seen as an important gesture, a mark of respect for the young person's time. I offered a token £20.00. Heath et al (2009) explore the

role of incentives in youth research and suggest that there is no consensus about its ethical status. However, in this particular situation it was appropriate to do so. Many of the respondents refused to take the money when it was offered (at the end of the interview; the sum was advertised in the leaflet I gave out about the research). Some expressed their satisfaction with the opportunity to talk about their experiences, and their desire that "something good comes out of the research".

This point about the value of the research to respondents surfaced several times. Reassurances were expected and given that the presentation of the findings would not reinforce the stigmatising of black youth. The experience heightened my sense of responsibility and accountability for ensuring no harm would ensue as a consequence of my research. However, as Bryman (2001: 480) notes, it is difficult to determine whether harm is likely, though this fact should not deter one from taking all necessary steps to protect the self-esteem of respondents. Of paramount concern for the respondents, gatekeepers and myself was how to represent the young people's accounts honestly without "parading them for judgement in front of an audience" (Crozier 2003: 82).

This concern exemplifies the epistemological reflexivity implied in 'doubled-research practice'. This relates to questions about how researchers ensure their representations do not reproduce social inequalities by "reinscribing into prevailing representations" (Gunaratnam 2003: 40). This theme is commented on by Widdance-Twine (2000) who acknowledges the authority/power

researchers hold over how racialised communities are represented. She writes,

> The issue of representation seems to be a particularly agonising and complicated one for those researching communities vulnerable to racial and ethnic inequalities. A dilemma that often emerges is how one "realistically" represents racially subordinated communities without conforming to idealized racial tropes. (Widdance-Twine 2000: 23)

I was sensitised to this tension at the outset of the data gathering process because it was implicitly alluded to by a parent of one of the early respondents. Whilst not recognising it at the time, I was drawn to 'analysis of narratives' as a method for working with transcripts precisely because it offered the opportunity for respondents to display their own versions of events, actions and characters, and their subjective evaluations of their meanings. This approach varied from the orientations of conventional qualitative research studies (such as those discussed in chapter two) which concentrate on extracting several themes supported by interview excerpts (Chase 1996: 45). I come back to this point at the end of section 3.6 where the interpretive strategies are discussed.

## 3.6    Data analysis and interpretation

This section discusses the analytic procedures used to work with the 24 recorded interviews. The section covers the analytic process adopted to build intimacy with the data and elucidates how interpretations were constructed.

It is important to restate the premise relating to the kind of knowledge claims which this research intends to make. Interview data are regarded as the co-constructed productions of multiple meanings derived through the 'interview-as-local-accomplishment' (Silverman 1993: 105). No claims are made that

such data reflect external realities or objective truths; they are, instead, authentic representations of the identities and social acts articulated in the interview. In this context the subject behind the respondent "constructively adds to, takes away from and transforms the facts and details. The respondent does not 'spoil' what he or she is, in effect, subjectively creating" (Holstein and Gubrium 1997: 117). It is accepted wisdom that research instruments are not applied in any pure manner; different methods borrow from each other (Crotty 2003). This research is no different.

The approach to analysing and interpreting the data drew on three different ways of analysing and presenting qualitative data. Elements were borrowed from Strauss's (1987) grounded theory approach, specifically the coding and labelling of the data with concepts to describe the data, and the production of 'theoretical memos' whilst coding to capture immediate insights and points of relevance. From Ochberg (2003: 114-124) I adapted a number of questions to interact with the voice recordings (see Appendix 3.1(b) 'Listening and understanding narrative accounts'). A new reading/understanding of the respondents' accounts was developed using this approach. This detailed work forced me to think about the distinct and complex meanings embedded in the respondents' accounts. I adopted a third approach for working with narrative extracts which was proposed by Gee (1991). This approach devotes close attention to the linguistic arrangements of the whole narrative (not just selected excerpts which appear relevant) and discusses how to better appreciate the linguistic content of the narrative by examining minutely the ideas expressed in each sentence and reflecting intensely on what the narrator is communicating.

Combining these approaches assisted with the analysis and presentation of the data, to fulfil the requirement to convey:

- factual biographical information provided by respondents – e.g. educational attainment and other socio-demographic data (tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4)

- respondents' accounts of events, actions, and meanings which define and direct actions:  in other words, learning from the micro-analysis of the stories

- the construction of the 'hybrid' story based on authorial power, politics and values (Riessman 1993) to engage in larger conversations, thus extending the boundaries of knowledge.


Analytic procedures: working with transcripts

In preparing the transcripts a standard transcription protocol was adhered to. The protocol was developed by synthesising guidance from two sources, McLellan et al (2003) and Wengraf (2001), who emphasised the importance of creating textual data by adhering to consistent principles.  The transcription procedure included the practice of preserving 'naturalness' by keeping the forms of words and coding pauses and other non-lexical elements like laughter and intonation. The transcriptions were subjected to three 're-representations' (Mishler 1991) of speech as text.  The first eight interviews were transcribed simply by listening and attempting diligently to transform speech into verbatim text.  This was prior to discovering Wengraf's more detailed procedure for indexing text into 'units of meaning' (Wengraf 2001: 215).  The earlier transcripts were re-worked by re-listening and rearranging the layout of the textual representation; subsequent interviews were transcribed using the same

layout.  The third re-representation of the transcripts occurred much later in the research process when the decision was made to use 'analysis of narratives' (Polkinghorne 1995).  With this method one uses several stories (as opposed to a life story) to "locate themes and conceptual manifestations" in order to discover similarities and differences across several stories.  Gee's (1991) procedure of arranging text into stanzas based on 'idea units' and then naming the stanzas was used both as an interpretive strategy and as a way of presenting individual story elements.  This will be elaborated in the section on 'analysing narratives'.

Analysing Transcripts – pre-narrative

The experience of close and repeated listening to the voice recordings and reading the transcriptions leads to familiarisation with the patterns and features of the data.  This groundwork prepared the way for the next stage of working with transcripts: the use of qualitative software (MaxQda) to code speech elements within each transcript by assigning different labels to parts of speech and to reduce the data and isolate excerpts which could be retrieved for closer scrutiny.  A total of 64 categories were assigned to over 1,000 excerpts. Recognising the unwieldy nature of this data-mass, I adopted a further strategy of refining the categories by sifting, discarding, merging, and creating new, more theoretically meaningful categories.  This resulted in the production of 16 'master categories' labelled with names such as: 'career decisions', 'family involvement', 'crime fears', 'risks' and 'strategies'. "Theoretical memos" (Strauss 1987) were created which captured observations and reflections related to individual cases.  A one-page summary was also created for each

respondent to record initial interpretations of themes that appeared important within each case.

The coding exercise was advantageous because it a) enabled me to identify different levels of data simultaneously, e.g. demographic information, beliefs and values, important events, decisions, and networks; b) helped pinpoint similar discourses across different transcripts as well as discourses which were more individualised: for example, Appendix 4.1 'Influence of kinship' is a summary of accounts of the influence of parent(s) and/or significant others such as grandparents on pre- and post-16 decisions; whilst influences vary across cases, the pattern depicts the involvement of a significant other at crucial transition points; c) made possible the isolation of categories which appeared to have greater weight (based on the number of speech segments coded to the particular category).

This detailed work of disaggregating and condensing the data was an important instrument for generating familiarity with and understanding of the data. However, by the end of this process I felt I had lost sight of the unique cases and was left with decontextualised labels. There were two further problems at this juncture. Attributing the same label to different speech segments was helpful for the rudimentary purpose of clustering discourse which contains similar referents. However, what this obscured was the contextual specificity of the different discourses. For example, the category labelled 'crime fears' contained actual experiences of violence; experiences of being in close proximity to violence, e.g., witnessing an act of violence; various

general apprehensions about gangs; and fear of crime. Each scenario represented very different meanings and implications for each respondent. Therefore, apparently similar expressions were being conflated superficially. The realisation of this problem was magnified by Mishler's (1991) assertion that it is 'naïve realism' to believe that language and meaning are synonymous.

Related to the above was the issue of how to take the analysis forward, given the multiple realities which had been collapsed into 16 categories. It was concluded that having the categories was a good starting point but that I needed a better method for working with the totality of the individual story enmeshed in each script. The turn to narrative was a logical progression. The why and how of this approach is the subject of the next section.

Analysis of narratives

My research interest was not confined to developing a close reading of the features represented in specific narratives. I was interested in how to build a platform which linked the themes within individual stories to create an 'ensemble of stories' out of which socio-structural interpretations could be generated.

The decision to use the framework of 'analysis of narratives' was made because of the emphasis in narrative methods on the close listening to respondents' stories. Narrative is distinguished from other forms of discourse because events are selected, organised in a temporal order, connected by

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sequence and evaluated as meaningful by the person telling the story. "Meaning is created by noting that 'something' is part of a whole and that 'something' is a cause of 'something' else" (Polkinghorne cited in Richardson 1990: 118). The experiences recounted are the important components for analysis as they are the window into how the social world is interpreted by the respondent.

Having worked closely with the transcripts I learnt how they revealed a relationship between biography, history and constituent social relations. Respondents drew connections between the "big story" of post-war immigration to the UK and the "small stories" (Phoenix 2008) of their current lives and their experiences since leaving school. Ochberg's (2003: 115-121) work on narrative interpretation provided a way to move from the codes developed to working with the holistic content of respondents' interview data. He proposed that certain questions (which I adapted) are used to understand the identity constructions embedded in the stories. The questions are described in Appendix 3.1(b). The questions I devised were based on what I was listening out for, when I re-listened to the accounts. I used the questions by listening to a track of speech and then recording my observations against these questions; the process was repeated for all transcripts. This produced new readings of the same data.

The advantage of working with the data in these different ways is that it created the opportunity to take the findings in a number of directions, as numerous inferences could be drawn from these varied readings of the text.

The disadvantage is, given the availability of multiple interpretive opportunities, how to represent the work to preserve some semblance of the 'narrated life' as one moves along the continuum of what is obvious to the reader to arrive at representations which are not apparent to any reader (Ochberg 2003: 115).

A systematic way to do this was achieved by adapting Gee's (1991) linguistic approach to narrative. Mishler (1995) defined how to isolate narrative from non-narrative text by identifying a "connected succession of happenings" (1995: 90) which give speech order and coherence and which imply causality. Gee (1991: 28) points out that interpretation is based on understanding how the speaker achieves cohesion. "Cohesion is the way lines and stanzas are linked together"; these convey the meaning the speaker wishes to project. Gee's technique involves a step-by-step method for organising lines of text into stanza format so that themes "rooted in the world of the narrator" (1991: 38) can be identified and the narrative meaning interpreted. A stanza is created from several 'idea units'; an idea unit introduces a new piece of information which is linked to the topic. For example, (respondent 19):

> *I didn't know; I didn't know*
> *What I wanted to do*
> *I read many brochures*
> *From different colleges*
> *But I still didn't know*
> *What I wanted to get into.*
>
> *But at Kingsdale*
> *I loved computers*
> *So I tried to find a course*
> *That was nearby.*

A stanza comprises several idea units which when arranged this way encourage reflection on how sequence and consequence are linked together coherently by the narrator. Furthermore, when whole transcripts are

formulated into stanzas, you work from the level of the stanza upwards, initially by determining the point of view of each stanza, in its own right. In the example given I labelled the stanza "I didn't know how to decide". This process is repeated until all stanzas are interpreted, giving a holistic view of the meanings which are conveyed across the range of stanzas making up the transcript. In this way a new transcript was created for each respondent.

The analytic processes described enabled interpretations to be made of micro and larger social processes. Consequently, the multiple incursions into the data, listening, reading, re-listening and re-reading, generated the constructed accounts from which the selections presented in chapters four and five were made. The accounts are open to varied interpretations but the interconnections between biography and history are a constant theme across the narratives. Chapters four and five will display the myriad politicised and apolitical influences of race/ethnicity in shaping respondents' accounts of their experiences.

## 3.7    Criteria for quality in narrative research

Narrative research, like all other theoretical and interpretive orientations to the study of human interaction, is embroiled in the contested debates about methods, procedures and criteria for judging standards of rigour. The "paradigm warfare" (Riessman 2008: 185) over criteria, standards and values in social research has been aired by many researchers emphasising different strands in these long-running debates (see Mischler 1990b; Lincoln 1995; Poland 1995; Smith and Deemer 2003). A comprehensive summary of the

intricacies of these debates has been offered by Smith and Deemer (2003). My characterisation is oversimplified but the central concerns seem to revolve around three fundamental ideas. First is the proposition that there is no God's-eye view position from which one can discover the 'world out there' by adopting neutral inquiry procedures with which to generate 'findings' uncontaminated by the politics, ethics and subject position of the researcher. Smith and Deemer opine that we cannot "bracket" ourselves in some way or another, predominantly through submission to method such that it would be possible to seize upon some external referent (reality as it really is)" (2003: 439). Secondly, if we accept this position, which I do, then a crucial question becomes: what standards do we use as referents in evaluating the myriad judgements we are called upon to make throughout the research process? As Smith and Deemer argue, a relativist position in relation to knowledge production does not mean that 'anything goes' in terms of judging research quality. Thirdly, there is now little dissent that the researcher's biography is intimately enmeshed with all stages of the research process (Lincoln 1995; Malterud 2001; Archer 2001; Gerwitz and Cribb 2006). The position is that the researcher works outwards from their biography to determine research questions and select theoretical perspectives which influence analysis, findings and their presentation. The question has become what issues of moral and practical relevance should be couched within accounts of critical reflexivity (Smith and Deemer 2003; Gerwitz and Cribb 2006).

As a field within qualitative inquiries, narrative research is itself founded on different perspectives on the issue of standards and criteria for assessing

research contributions. Whilst a number of different criteria have been proposed, there is overlap, and sometimes different terms are used to mean very similar things. For example, some texts, including Lincoln (1995) and Blair (2004), advocate the importance of researchers explicating their 'positionality' by being open and honest about how their social and cultural perspectives influence the way they do research and especially how they treat and 'speak for' research subjects. In other texts` this is described as being upfront about one's "situated perspectives" (Riessman 2008). Importantly, there is some consensus about some of the elements of the criteria for discriminating between acceptable and unacceptable productions. Critical/ethical reflexivity is regarded as central (Malterud 2001; Gerwitz and Cripps 2006). This is described by Malterud as exposing the strategies adopted to achieve a "broad and critical reading" of one's research endeavour. Gerwitz and Cripps (2006) prefer the term "ethical reflexivity", which refers to practices in which researchers are ready to share accounts of the ways in which their personal involvement in social and fieldwork relations shapes their data collection, analysis and writing (2006: 1471).

Another concept regarded as valuable, especially in relation to research concerned with understanding the meanings arising from "human intentional states", is that of trustworthiness. Mishler (1990b) explains that the trustworthiness of our interpretations arises when the "community of researchers" understand the processes/methods applied in the study and when they have some confidence in adapting similar "concepts, methods and

inferences" for their own field of inquiry.  Trustworthiness emerges through discourses and actions and is exemplified in praxis (Mishler 1990b: 420).

The last criterion I wish to highlight (this is by no means exhaustive) is that of verisimilitude.  In narrative research it is not possible, nor important, to establish accurate 'truths' of a narrative recollection of experience, because narrative accounts cannot be relied upon as objective portrayals of past events (Riessman 2008: 189).  The elements of verisimilitude that are important, according to Webster and Mertova (2007), are: that the narrative resonates with the researcher's own experience; in other words it is coherent in the context of shared cultural meanings  that the narrative appears plausible, and, finally, when one looks at different cases there are some similarities (issues repeat themselves).  Below I discuss some examples of how issues of positionality, critical/ethical reflexivity, trustworthiness and verisimilitude are informed by research practice.

With regard to positionality, I discovered that I made a naive assumption that being of a similar ethnic background to my research participants would afford a degree of 'privileged access'.  I had wrongly presumed that there would be some correspondence between my research interests and those of the people whom I had to interest in being researched.  Whilst my ethnic identification did afford a degree of privileged access, I had to overcome a great deal of scepticism and distrust.  Relationships had to be developed prior to getting anywhere near data collection opportunities.  Gatekeepers and respondents perceived a social distance which had to be bridged before any interview

conversations could take place. Like Dunbar et al (2003) I too broke the 'methodological rule' that detachment is necessary for extracting uncontaminated data. I did share aspects of my biography, especially in those early critical conversations when attempting to convince potential respondents of the value of the research. Respondents not only want to know what you are doing and why, they also want to know who you are (Dunbar et al 2003); this resonated with my field experience. I found it necessary to demonstrate that I was sensitive to the social context of racialised experiences and that there was some historical and cultural commonality between respondents and myself. For example, the topic of the absence of black history from the school curriculum came up on a number of occasions and I was asked for my opinion. These exchanges were not part of the data but a necessary precursor to animating the 'subject behind the respondent' to create meaningful reciprocated exchanges in the interview.

Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) identify five elements to ethical reflexivity. I wish to comment on just one which was pertinent at the stage of data reduction and analysis. This area of ethical reflexivity relates to recognising and responding to tensions between various values embedded in the research process. With hindsight I wished I had conducted fewer interviews and spent more time with each respondent. Having performed 24 interviews I felt it was paramount to accord respect and value to each respondent and to deal with their contributions diligently. However, I had too much data, and judgements about how to make the best use of as much of the data as possible were fraught with difficulties. I resolved the dilemma, in a compromised manner: by conducting

several readings of the materials, and using the series of questions presented in Appendix 3.1(b) to reflect conscientiously upon the life of each person revealed in their voice recording so that I would have real familiarity with each case. Ultimately, I was able to draw from each case to build four typologies which aimed to capture and present fragments of the life of each respondent. The morality of discarding any one case felt tantamount to dishonesty and betrayal; I was committed to finding a way of ensuring my presentations honoured the respondents. I believed this was achieved by presenting data in a range of formats, e.g. typologies, case studies, pen portraits.

Mishler (1990b) and Riessman (2008) have been strong advocates of trustworthiness as a criterion for judging interpretive discourses such as narrative. Two dimensions to trustworthiness are discussed. One relates to access to the materials of the study from which interpretations were produced. This would include details about participants and their cultural contexts and explanations of movement from analysis to findings. From my study, access is available to the voice recordings, the different versions of transcripts (with and without codes), the condensing of codes into broader theoretical codes, the use of the narrative questions to produce further interpretations of the respondents' accounts, and, finally, the production of new transcripts, with a different linguistic arrangement to the earlier versions, which produced new readings of the accounts. From this range of materials the typologies were developed to capture similarities and differences in transition patterns across the 24 cases. A further feature of trustworthiness is coherence. Here one aims to show that the narrative 'hangs together' and that these interpretations

are consistent with what is revealed in the account. Narrative extracts have been presented throughout chapters four and five which show that the accounts are genuine and that my interpretations are plausible in the light of what I set out to investigate.

Verisimilitude is the final criterion I wish to comment on. One aspect of verisimilitude relates to identifying similarities in experiences conveyed by respondents (Webster and Mertova 2007: 99). Verisimilitude embodies the idea that authenticity of accounts is strengthened when experiences repeat themselves across different accounts. Across the 24 cases, there were issues which were repeated within different stories. For example, self-blame for academic failures, uncertainty over career direction, the importance of qualifications, and the influence of ethnic identity and parental involvement, to cite a few. However, there were also cases which did not share certain common features prevalent in many accounts. For example, three respondents made no reference in their interviews to the place of racialised identity. When asked about this they dismissed the "race thing" as irrelevant, as playing no part in their choices and aspirations. For them, race/racism was just "out there in society" but didn't affect them personally. These 'deviant' cases highlighted that race/ethnicity is not the most salient feature of identity and that whilst lurking in the background it is not regarded as paramount in structuring experiences.

Chapters four and five are presentations of the results and their interpretations based on the applications of the processes which have been detailed in this chapter.

# Chapter 4

## Young People's Lives in Focus:  Transition Trajectories

### 4.1    Introduction

In earlier chapters I have outlined the theoretical foundations for the empirical findings which emerge from this study.  I have framed theoretical perspectives based on the work of theorists critical of practices which ignore ethnic differences and the material consequences which ensue.  This study wishes to emphasise that race is the primary social category under consideration.  This is not to downplay the important point made by feminist scholars and scholars working in the broadly defined 'critical race theory' paradigm, that "race, class and gender matter because they structure interactions, opportunities, consciousness, ideology and varied forms of resistance (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 83)".  I concentrate on how race structures the experience of my respondents whilst also endeavouring to convey how individual actors respond to stratifications based on race, class and gender and respondents' attempts to reshape their effects.  I work with the structure/agency notion offered by Emibayer and Mische (1998) in which they speak of the "double-constitution of agency and structure" meaning that temporal-relational contexts support particular agentic orientations, which in turn constitute different structuring relationships of actors towards their environment (1998: 1004).

The respondents' understanding of their temporal-relational contexts can be observed through their narrative accounts of various interpersonal relationships.  The research does not primarily analyse class and gender.

However, it is impossible to ignore these elements as they are always in the drama of identity(ies) creations and mould social interactions; noted by Archer and Francis as manifesting in the "simultaneity of oppression and resistance within social structures" (2007: 37). Therefore, they are acknowledged as central principles in the shaping of respondents social locations. This acknowledgement is evidenced in drawing attention to class and gender patterns within the data, where this appears warranted.

The research interviews produced a wealth of data illuminating the nuances and complexities of the experience of transition retold by those participating in the research. I explained earlier, in chapter three, that I used the research setting to elicit stories which are the self-representations of respondents, and was therefore committed to displaying the storyteller's subjective viewpoint which permeates the narrative. However, I was not only interested in the individual stories for their interest value but also committed to understanding and articulating the relationships between the subjective stories offered by the narrators about their transition histories and the more objective social processes which shaped these experiences. The narrative genre is regarded as providing rich accounts of the social world the narrator shares with others (Chase 1995; Bochner 2001). Narratives also embody actual social practices, and, because of their social character, reflect prevailing social, cultural, ideological and historical conditions (Chase 2003). Narratives can also have a transformative influence on social and political practice. For example, Chase (2003: 80) has argued that gay and lesbian 'coming out stories' have produced

new understandings of sexual orientations; these understandings have affected wider cultural meanings and political and legal frameworks.

Narratives fuel the sense of temporal unity of the self in which the "reconstructed present and reinterpreted past" are perceived as a continuum, extending towards a projected future (ibid: 126). What is intriguing about analysing the narratives provided by the respondents is the ways in which young people represent their identities, their sense of being decision-makers, and their intention of reclaiming some measure of agency by portraying their belief in being in charge of the directions their lives take. Also revealing are their attributions of coherent purpose and meanings to events which at a more abstract level are easily interpreted as producing unstable, fragile and fractured prospects. The key point is that such interpretations are contested by the lives narrated. The stories do not surrender to victimised, marginalised identities, but reflect young people's desire to present themselves as embodying power, making meaningful decisions and displaying capacities for reflection. This is embodied in the idea expressed by many of the young people that transition is an unpredictable journey of discovery where mistakes are made; different avenues are explored where one reflexively learns to adjust to how things come off.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first section presents a range of factual details about each respondent, including information about family background, educational attainments and the primary movements of respondents since leaving school. This data portrays the different class

locations of the respondents. The second section presents a selection of narrative accounts, chosen to provide a richer description of the young people's experiences of transition which gives context and meaning to the rationale underpinning their decision-making behaviour. The chapter describes the different pathways young people pursue post-16; how they make sense of the decisions made; the construction of their identities; and the ways in which race is implicated in the experiences conveyed.

Part one, 'The shaping of transition contexts', features pertinent details across the 24 cases describing the social and cultural contexts structuring post-school transitions. Emphasised in these discussions are the resources young people have at their disposal as they make the crucial move from compulsory education into a world dominated by 'choices' and 'options' and explore what they have in their rucksack to facilitate their navigation as they head down the winding road towards adulthood. The term 'resources' and 'resource endowments' are couched within the Bourdieun framework of 'capitals'; namely, economic, social, cultural and symbolic. However, a broader meaning is intended here, drawing on the conceptualisation of cultural capital conveyed by Yosso (2005). This model is pertinent because it recognises that the cultural practices of minority communities instil values, behaviours and 'ways of knowing' that enable minority young people to survive and sometimes thrive in the wider, racially demarcated social order; implied in the term 'resources' is also Côté's (2002) notion of 'identity capital'. Identity capital comprises social and psychological skills and strategies which help young people manoeuvre within institutional settings as they enter different transitional phases. I view

this concept as overlapping with Yosso's (2005) idea of navigational capital. It refers to individual capabilities to manage multiple social contradictions. It is contingent on tangible resources, (e.g. parental income) and intangible resources such as agentic dispositions, personal ambition, will power etc.

A discussion of their resource base precedes the more detailed, but selective, presentations of their narrative accounts. These display the respondents' resources and how these are used in sculpting imagined futures.

Part two, 'Making use of resource endowments' comprises a more intense focus on selected narrative accounts. Resource endowments encapsulate features which shape respondents' transition pathway. It includes, for instance, qualifications, individual and family values, parental investments (both tangible and non-tangible), all of which influence individual orientations and infuse their decisions, actions and future plans. These have been grouped into four simple typologies in order to bring out similarities and variations among the cases. The typologies are a analytic tool for capturing and displaying features of the 24 cases; broadly based on social class, social identities and cultural, social capital features. The young people have been grouped into these typologies to illuminate some of the more critical dimensions which shape transition decisions, actions and outcomes. Here the young people speak about their social world in their own terms. Efforts are made to bring out the reasoning behind certain actions and the consequent decisions. I aim to illuminate the respondents' exercise of agency. I support the perspective offered by Elder (1995), who suggests that individuals operate within socio-structural

constraints which frame life chances.   Nevertheless, individuals always exercise some agency in how they operate within these constraints.

As the young people in this research commence their transition journeys, they do so, as would be expected, with widely differing educational, economic, cultural and social capital.  To capture these differences, factual and narrative details have been assembled into four typologies reflecting the resource endowments of respondents.

The four typologies are:

Resource Miners

In this category I discuss young people of working-class backgrounds who are achieving well with limited material family resources, making good use of other resources, e.g. social networks, to shape their transition histories.   Their transition decisions are influenced by their school achievements, supportive proximal relationships and the positive and negative use of cultural scripts[9], personal ambition and drive.

Resource Straitened

Young people in this category are characterised by their working-class family status.  With the exception of respondent 6 they are starting out with very limited assets of any description.  Money is a financial stressor within their families and their lives.  They are less skilled at sourcing and using social

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[9] Stories and the identities they contain are always socially embedded and are related to cultural discourses available to individuals (see Andrews, 2006, ch.1).

networks and experience significant information poverty. Resource straitened young people share a weak commitment to any particular occupational destination; and they have made multiple changes within a short time span.

## Resource Innovators

Resource innovators display a capacity to transcend difficult predicaments through the exercise of personal ingenuity, maintaining an adaptive posture and an outlook infused with foresight; they also show perseverance and determination to establish routines which match their drive for independence. For example, they all 'earn their own money', and are not too reliant on parents for financial support. However, with the exception of respondents 14 and 15, they live at home, so in this regard they are still reliant on parental resources.

## Resource Enriched

Here we have a combination of young people from middle-class as well as working-class backgrounds. What distinguishes them from the others is that they are either from families who have been able to support them well financially, or in full-time employment, or sometimes both. They all live in owner-occupied dwellings; two of the young people (respondents 20 and 22) own their own mortgaged property.

It is anticipated that these categories will convey various important features which are relevant to thinking about the complexity of transitions. Transitions are not only predicated on class location. Class is important, but it is too abstract to capture the variations in young people's career aspirations, for example. Class location does not adequately explain the instances of young

people who have no interest in reproducing or inheriting the class locations of their immigrant parents or grandparents (e.g. respondent 7 and respondent 17).  For these young people, and others in the sample, there is an undercurrent which shapes their identity and rational decision-making about transition directions: "doing better than our parents and ancestors" so that their struggles (against racism in British society) remain worthwhile.  In this sense we cannot deploy a class analysis in the way used by Willis (1977) to understand occupational outlook; not in all instances do "working class kids get working class jobs".  Further explanatory purchase can be gained by viewing the social identities performed by this group as borne out of strong social and familial capital; they are all located in family environments which are well endowed materially and symbolically.

## 4.2    Part one: The shaping of transition contexts

This section presents factual data on the spatial, kinship and educational contexts which have shaped the lives of the research respondents.

### 4.2.1   Spatial context

The young people participating in this study were drawn from seven London boroughs.  There are 354 local authorities in England and these are ranked according to levels of relative deprivation documented in the *English Indices of Deprivation 2007*.  Table 4.1 gives the ranking for the seven boroughs, where 1 is the most deprived and 354 the least deprived.  The indices measure relative deprivation by using 37 indicators which cover seven dimensions of deprivation: income and employment, health and disability, education, skills

and training, barriers to housing and services, living environment and crime. The table also contains details drawn from a selection of the 'quality of life' indicators[10]. Five of the boroughs fall in the top 10% most deprived areas in England; the others, Hambledon and Aletown, are in the top 30%. Young people in this research are drawn from areas exhibiting high levels of risks associated with living in inner urban areas, such as high levels of crime and unemployment, above average levels of school exclusions and increased likelihood of attending schools with poor examination results (Bradley & Taylor 2004). However, whilst this data portrays a macro picture of borough level deprivation, one still has to drill down to the more micro level to understand different spatial effects, for example, differences in school quality. For example, young people in the 'resource enriched' typology generally live in more suburban areas, which have better schools compared with young people in the other typologies who are more likely to live in inner urban and deprived areas.

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[10] Government Office for London Indices of Deprivation, 2007

Table 4.1: Selected socio-economic indices

This table gives the rankings of the seven geographical areas where the young people live, based on the Indices of Deprivation 2007[11]. This table also gives details of a selection of indicators used in the deprivation index.

| | Hambledon | Coxford | Aletorwn | Eastpark | Southwick | Southpark | Northpark | National Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rank[12] | 125 | 19 | 39 | 6 | 26 | 3 | 27 | % |
| 1. The % of residents who think that people being attacked because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion is a very big or fairly big problem in their local area | 46.1 | 49.12 | 41.73 | 7.97 | 45.41 | 27.81 | 50.52 | 22 |
| 2. % of working age population who are in employment | 72.2 | 60.2 | 68.8 | 58.6 | 64.3 | 54.4 | 66.9 | 77 |
| 3. % of job seeker's allowance claimants who have been unemployed for more than a year | 13.8 | 18.6 | 19.9 | 17 | 26.4 | 24.2 | 21.6 | 14 |
| 4. % of children who live in families who are income deprived | 24.5 | 39.9 | 34.1 | 44.9 | 41.2 | 58.7 | 32.8 | 19.5 |
| 5. Teenage conception rates: number of conceptions to under-18s in a calendar year per 1000 of females aged 15-17 | 55.1 | 84 | 70.2 | 48.6 | 71.8 | 43.2 | 47.3 | 45 |
| 6. % of young people (aged 16-24) in full-time education or work | 83.7 | 74.6 | 64.3 | 76.2 | 72.9 | 75.2 | 79.4 | 80 |
| 7. % of 15-year-old pupils in local authority schools achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C | 55 | 53 | 49.4 | 51 | 48.8 | 50.8 | 49.1 | 56 |

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[11] Audit Commission; www.areaprofile.audit-comission.gov.uk. Accessed 30/11/2009
[12] There are 354 local authorities in England ranked from 1, most deprived, to 354, least deprived

### 4.2.2 Educational context

The attainment profile of the young people in this study reveals a wide range of achievement. GCSE achievements range from zero (one respondent) to seven or more (50% of the cohort). The cohort is split equally between low-(fewer than 5 GCSEs) and high-attaining young people. The results are presented in table 4.2:

Table 4.2*:* Educational attainment aged 16 and post-16 qualifications pursued and achieved.

| | Gender & Age | GSCE-Age 16 | 16-18 | 19- 21 | 21- 25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | F-16 | 5 A-C 3 D-E | BTEC Art and Design, 1st year | Plans to attend university after completing 2year course | X |
| 2 | F-16 | 2 A-C 8 D-E | BTEC Health and Social care, 1st year | X | X |
| 3 | M-16 | 5 D-E | Level 1 Football Coaching Certificate | Seeking employment No interest in further studies | X |
| 4 | M-17 | NO GSCE | College to retake 3 GSCEs | Possibly study for a skilled trade | X |
| 5 | M-17 | 5 D-E | BTEC in Sports: withdrew in first 6 months. | No interest in further studying; seeking employment | X |
| 6 | F-17 | 4 A-C 5 D-E | Retaking 3 GSCEs | No plans for university; family cannot afford it. Plans on doing NVQ 3 in Childcare | X |
| 7 | F-18 | 8 A-C 1-D | 2 years A levels | Aspires to do Business degree like her 3 elder sisters | X |
| 8 | F-18 | 8 D-E | NVQ Hairdressing | Apprenticeship in Administration | No aspiration for further studies beyond completing apprenticeship |
| 9 | M-18 | 10 A-C | 3 A Levels + GNVQ IT | Has applied to do BA degree | |
| 10 | M-19 | 7 A-C + GNVQ IT | 3 A Levels: withdrew after 6 months | 2 year apprenticeship in Administration | X |
| 11 | M-19 | 4 A-C 1-D | Work-based training/dropped out | Youth training 2 days per week | |
| 12 | F-20 | 10 A-C | 3 A Levels | Medical degree | Medical degree will take 6 years |
| 13 | M-20 | 11 A-C | 3 A Levels | HND Graphic Design studies converted to BA degree | Aspires to complete degree |

| | Gender & Age | GSCE- Age 16 | 16-18 | 19- 21 | 21- 25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | M-20 | 12 A-C | 3 A Levels | Access to Medicine degree | Medical degree will take 7 years |
| 15 | F-21 | 4 A-C | GNVQ Business Studies: withdrew within the first year | BTEC Health and Social Care: completed 2 year course | BA Youth and Community Studies degree 1st year |
| 16 | M-21 | 3 A-C 2 D-E | GNVQ IT but withdrew after 6 months Working part time | Restarted GNVQ in IT Lost interest and dropped out after 6 months | No plans for further studies |
| 17 | F-22 | 8 A-C | GNVQ Business studies | NVQ Hairdressing NVQ Accounts | Self-employed, running small business |
| 18 | M-22 | 10 A-C | Advanced GNVQ IT BTEC National Diploma IT | BA Electronics and Communication degree | Completed degree, commenced internship with BT |
| 19 | F-23 | NO GSCEs | Unemployed (chronic ill health) | Volunteer work | |
| 20 | M-23 | 8 A-C | No post-16 educational pursuits. In full-time employment since leaving school | X | X |
| 21 | F-24 | 6 A-C | GSCE retakes GNVQ Business Studies | HND 2 Years | BA Early Childhood Studies |
| 22 | F-24 | 9 A-C | 3 A Levels; withdrew within year 1. Worked for a while. Re-enrolled in GNVQ Computing: withdrew in 6 months | Started BS in Computing Science as part-time degree | At time of interview continues to do degree part-time and works full-time |
| 23 | M-24 | 4 D-E | Building construction training | Working part-time whilst pursuing specialist carpentry training | Working part-time, under-employed |
| 24 | M-25 | 2 A-C | Unskilled work; does voluntary community work; GSCE retakes but withdrew | Football Coaching Certificate | Believes he needs to do further qualification if he is to 'get somewhere' but does not know what |

An immediate observation to note is that, contrary to popular stereotypes of 'black under-achievement' and the ubiquitous discourse of disadvantage, levels of attainment in the cohort are fairly diverse. This unsettles the pervasive discourse often rooted in national statistics which portrays ethnic

group under-achievement as though it affected all members of the groups labelled as failing. John (2006) puts this point forcefully:

> The relative attainment of different ethnic groups has long dominated discussions, but these discussions are plagued by oversimplification. The notion of 'under-achievement' is widely quoted but rarely subjected to proper scrutiny. Many writers have drawn attention to the fact that the notion of under-achievement has itself become a stereotype as if every member of that group is destined to failure ... If minority ethnic students continue to be presented as one dimensional, as an undifferentiated mass, pathologically defined, as if the lack of attainment with which the group has come to be identified is somehow congenitally determined, we will continually fail to recognise that the pattern of attainment by minority ethnic students is considerably more complex than is widely recognised. (p.58)

A further observation is that the vast majority (22/24) of the young people continued in some form of further education, sometimes for significant periods. The options pursued are somewhat more complex than we are usually given to understand. The picture often conveyed is the over-representation of Black/African Caribbean young people in vocational courses. Undeniably, even in this small cohort, the majority of young people did pursue vocational courses, but they often used these as a bridge into more academic subjects and in some instances as entry to university; also, one third of the young people pursued A levels. Interestingly, one in six males pursued A levels whereas only one in twelve females did this. Furthermore, university entrance was less likely to come via the conventional A level route. Just under half (10/24) either intended to attend university or were already attending; under a quarter (5/24) did so via A levels. Overall males performed less well than their female counterparts.

Finally, the class profile of the cohort and its relationship to the achievement profile warrants comment. Table 4.3, 'Respondents' family structure', presents details of the socio-economic background of the respondents' parents. Well

over half live in single-parent households and public rented housing. Using the occupational status of mothers (data on fathers are missing), the majority (18/24) have an occupational status which is either 'lower supervisory', 'routine' or 'long-term unemployed'. One quarter have parents in higher status occupations. Only five of the respondents were from homes with a more middle-class profile – owner-occupied properties and managerial/professional status occupations. Only four respondents were from families where a parent had a university degree; the four cases in question (9, 10, 13 and 20) performed well in GCSEs. The cohort has a predominantly working-class profile. All those who gained fewer than 5 GCSEs (12/24) had working-class backgrounds. A quarter (from working-class backgrounds) did achieve more than five GCSEs and progressed to strengthen their qualifications quite significantly between the ages of 16 and 19. In summary, it is emphasised that the data presented on educational attainments reveal two important factors: firstly, the diverse patterns of attainment across the 24 cases; secondly, that the majority of young people pursue and gain further credentials irrespective of their class background.

Table 4.3    Respondents' Family Structure

| Respondents' Family Structure | Self-defined ethnicity | Parents marital status | Parents housing tenure | Occupational status father[13] | Occupational status mother | Respondent living arrangement |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Intermediate [14] | Routine | Parental Home |
| 2 | Black British | Divorced | Public Rented Housing | Semi-Routine [15] | Lower supervisory | Parental Home |
| 3 | Black British | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Semi-Routine | Routine | Parental Home |
| 4 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | X | Lower supervisory | Parental Home |
| 5 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | X | Routine | Parental Home |
| 6 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Deceased | Long-term unemployed | Parental Home |
| 7 | Mixed ethnicity | Divorced | Owner Occupied | Technical (skilled) | Lower Managerial | Parental Home |
| 8 | Mixed Race | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | X | Long-term unemployed | Parental Home |
| 9 | Black Caribbean | Married | Owner Occupied | Higher managerial and professional | Lower Supervisory | Parental Home |
| 10 | Mixed | Married (reconstituted family) | Owner Occupied | Technical (skilled) | Professional | Parental Home |
| 11 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Semi-Routine | Technical (skilled) | Parental Home |
| 12 | Mixed | Married | X | Technical (skilled) | Semi-routine | Student accommodation |
| 13 | Black Caribbean | Married | Owner Occupied | Higher managerial and professional | Lower managerial | Student accommodation |
| 14 | Black Caribbean | Married | Owner Occupied | Technical (skilled) | Lower Supervisory | Student accommodation |
| 15 | Black British | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Semi-Routine | Long-term unemployed | Independent accommodation |
| 16 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Routine | Long-term unemployed | Parental Home |
| 17 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Owner Occupied | Lower Professional | Lower Professional | Independent accommodation |
| 18 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Technical (skilled) | Lower Supervisory | Parental Home |
| 19 | Black Caribbean | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Lower Supervisory | Routine | Parental Home |

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[13] National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC)

[14] Eight categories are reduced into three: higher occupations, intermediate occupations and lower occupations

[15] There are eight main categories: higher managerial and professional occupations, lower managerial and professional occupations, intermediate occupations (clerical, sales, service), small employers and own account workers, lower supervisory and technical occupations, semi-routine occupations, routine occupations and never worked and long-term unemployed

| 20 | Black British | Married (reconstituted family) | Owner Occupied | Professional | Lower Managerial | Owner Occupied |
|----|---------------|-------------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| 21 | Black Caribbean | Divorced | Owner Occupied | Own Account (self-employed) | Lower Managerial | Owner Occupied |
| 22 | Black British | Married | Owner Occupied | Lower Managerial | Intermediate | Owner Occupied |
| 23 | Black Caribbean | Married | Public Rented Housing | Semi-Routine | Routine | Parental Home |
| 24 | Black British | Single Parent | Public Rented Housing | Own Account (self-employed) | Lower Supervisory | Parental Home |

## 4.2.3 Family structure and influences of kinship

Table 4.3, 'Respondents' family structure', reflects the socio-economic status of respondents' families by giving an overview of parental occupational background. This is a proxy for levels of economic, cultural and social capital concentrated in respondents' familial environments. Bourdieu (1997) used the distinctions between various forms of capital as a "theoretical hypothesis" to explain disparities in scholastic achievements and the intergenerational reproduction of family assets. Economic, cultural and social capital are terms widely used in public policy (Bassani 2009), youth and educational research (Modood 2004; Helve and Bynner 2007) to explain how differential access to and use of family resources shapes life opportunities and structures social mobility. Modood (2004), for example, explored the interweaving of cultural and social capital, ethnicity, educational qualifications and social mobility within second generation immigrant families. He viewed the notion of capital as synonymous with social class, and suggested:

> If social class is a matter of categories of people accumulating similar volumes and types of resources, and investing them in promoting their own and their children's life chances, the metaphor of capital is helpful. (ibid: 87)

A limited view of capital concentration within the families from which respondents are drawn can be adduced from the occupational categories portrayed in table 4.3. There are young people positioned along a continuum from the professional and managerial class to the other end of the spectrum, relatively deprived families subsisting on social welfare. However, only a superficial perspective of familial resources could be formulated without delving further to discover the texture and range of resources available to and utilised by the respondents as they make decisions about their pathways. Here the notion of resource is being conceptualised quite liberally and has several dimensions. Firstly, it is used in the classical sense, referring to social class imbalances. Secondly, it refers to the use of narratives as a resource; as Thomson (2009, p16) suggests, "Narrative styles both reflect the resources on which individuals draw and operate as a resource in their own right." Immanent within narrative performances are a range of cultural resources used to construct identities which are shaped and reshaped over time. The cultural resources which shape these identities for some young people are powerful motivations engendering aspirations which are not wholly constrained by class location. For example, Appendix 4.1: 'Influences of Kinship' gives insight into the racialised learner identities used to shape young people's self concepts, their reasons for acting as they do and their expectations of the future. The appendix represents examples of young peoples' use of family and social networks and how these have influenced their decisions. These extracts make references to people, values, cultural beliefs and motives which they regarded as instrumental in giving meaning to their post-16 decisions.

The third dimension to the meaning of resource is that conveyed by Thomson (2009: 18) in the term 'intangible resource', conceived as young peoples' strategies for developing the "reflexive project of the self" (Giddens 1991). Thomson is both wary of and optimistic about the explanatory potential of this concept, suggesting that it can be central to understanding new forms of privilege and exclusion. Most importantly, I concur with and wish to use the idea offered by Thomson that this term can be detached from its moorings to middle-class cultural representations. I wish to make the claim that the young people engaged in this research reflexively use a range of cultural resources to develop ethnic identities and that these are used as a source of capital to support pivotal decisions in the making of imagined futures.

The summaries illustrate a number of important features about the factors which have influenced the transition experiences of the respondents. Across the cases there is a positive regard for education, which translates into high levels of expectation that education will continue beyond the age of 16. This is the case for young people who are from families with relatively strong and weak economic resources. Only a minority of young people in this study are disengaged or uninterested in further learning. There is little ambivalence about the importance of acquiring further qualifications. The majority of young people report how active and in some instances strident their parents are about their pursuit of further education. Strong, pro-educational values were influenced by parents and siblings; this was especially the case where siblings had progressed into higher education. Cultural support for education is received from a much wider kinship network of aunts, uncles and

grandmothers.  Only a minority of young people considered employment a viable post-16 option.  In such cases employment with structured training was the preferred option.

The proportion of young people whose families were willing (even where material resources were constrained) to provide financial support to enable the pursuit of better educational credentials was significant.  Not only did most young people reside with a parent, but parents also provided direct financial support to aid improvement in qualifications.  For example, a number of young people travelled significant distances in order to attend 'better' colleges than those available in their immediate boroughs.  A number of young people, from more disadvantaged backgrounds, believed university was out of the question because of the perceived financial burden.  Fears were expressed about accommodation costs (not just about tuition fees) and other living costs.  The financial cost of university life appeared to be completely beyond their visions of what's possible. The risks were perceived as likely to outweigh the costs. Equally, young people reported that parents were willing to make the financial sacrifice where university was a realistic prospect.

Where a university education or other form of higher level vocational training was desired or pursued, there appeared to be three principal motives:  a recognition that as young black people they would expect discrimination in the labour market – often fuelled by stories of discrimination experienced by siblings and other family members – combined with a belief that employment prospects would be much worse for those without qualifications;  the cultural

pressures and expectations that the younger generation should 'have a better life', and that parents had worked hard to make this a reality, so that it was important to 'do better' than one's parents; and, finally, a personal commitment to contest the pervasive stereotypes of 'black under-achievement'. All of the young people were very aware of overt and covert racism which is part of everyday life in British society. Indeed, many described experiences of confronting racist practices at school and told stories of how such experiences helped shape their aspirations.

### 4.2.4 Transition outcomes

Table 4.4: Profile of transition outcomes

| Transition Pathways | Women | Men | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. One or more changes of direction within 12 months of leaving school (i.e. switched course or job) | 6 | 9 | 12 |
| 2. Completed less than one year of further education | 2 | 7 | 9 |
| 3. Completed more than one year of further education (i.e. no switching) | 6 | 4 | 10 |
| 4. Studied full-time | 10 | 6 | 16 |
| 5. Returned to full-time study after break | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| 6. Full-time employment combined with part-time study | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| 7. Full-time employment | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 8. Engaged in part-time employment (with/without study) | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| 9. Higher education (either current or completed) | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| 10. Gained further qualifications since leaving school | 9 | 8 | 17 |
| 11. Not in education, training or employment | 1 | 1 | 2 |

For most respondents, continuing education was an important feature of their transitions, especially between the ages of 16 and 22. Between the ages of 16 and 18 most of the respondents had sampled various options, whether A levels, BTEC or GCSE retakes. Many were unclear and ill-informed about the best route for them to take at the age of 16. Many started courses (mainly vocational) because friends were doing the same course or because a particular teacher had recommended it. Others ended up in courses by default because other preferences were no longer available to them. A significant proportion changed courses, started new courses or changed track on a number of occasions because courses turned out to be "not what was expected". One third of the sample (all male) was keen to find work, and one expressed no interest in any further study. This group wished, ideally, to pursue some form of part-time work, through the route of apprenticeships, for example. At the time of the interview, a few young people (especially those in the older age range) had experienced multiple changes of direction. Following multiple detours, several cases (e.g. 15, 17, 20, 21 & 22) eventually settled into a steady pattern of either employment combined with study or full-time study combined with part-time employment.

Specific gender effects can be observed in table 4.4. At 16, males in the sample did either very well or very poorly. This then structured the decisions/options which were viable. More males than females were likely to be 'pushed' rather than 'pulled' into their post-16 options (i.e. starting courses which had places on them, rather than active choosing). Females were more willing to undertake retakes and applied themselves over a longer time frame

to improve their qualifications. Despite disjunctions such as courses not working out for various reasons, females were less likely to be deterred from further studies than males. We can conclude that males, who did poorly at 16, were much less likely to do any further studies and continued the pattern of disadvantage closely associated with poor skills; females were more likely to break this link.

Only one third of the respondents could be described as experiencing linear, straightforward, unproblematic transitions where they moved from school to college/6th form to higher education or employment. Most were uncertain about the choices available (there was intense lack of knowledge about career possibilities), how to differentiate between what might be good or poor decisions, and essentially how to discern which course of action was best suited to their particular circumstances. However, what is clear is that there is no lack of interest in learning but a dislocation from the sources of information which can help to produce clearer career decisions. There was much reliance on the grapevine, parents, siblings and friends, many of whom were not well placed to give informed advice.

### 4.3    Part two: Making use of resource endowments

Building on part one, where a range of factual characteristics of the respondents was discussed, further dimensions of the particular circumstances of the young people are illustrated by presenting some narrative accounts of their experience. All the cases are organised into four typologies based on my interpretations of common factors. The typologies are intended to capture

features of how the respondents deploy particular resources to produce particular transition outcomes. Whilst the young people may act with different degrees of agency, and believe they are in control, structural constraints are prevalent in shaping their biographies.

### 4.3.1 Resource Miners

| Respondent | Key Transition Information |
|---|---|
| Jerome<br>Age 22 | • Lives with mother (no siblings) on large council estate; father lives in the Caribbean, and they have regular communication, e.g. he visits his father every year. Immigrated to the UK when he was 11.<br><br>• Achieved 10 GCSEs A-C (3 A\*) and felt he could have done even better had he applied himself more.<br><br>• Loved working with computers whilst at school so followed this interest at college by completing a BTEC National in IT.<br><br>• Completed BA in Communications and electronic engineering<br><br>• At time of interview was three months into his job at BT as an engineer. He stressed a number of times in the interview "I want to be successful". |
| Janet<br>Age 16 | • Lives with mother and younger sibling on large council estate. 5 GCSEs A-C, enjoyed school, had various responsibilities; attends college 'out of the area'.<br><br>• Completing 2 year BTEC National in art and design – art has been her favourite subject; has part-time job.<br><br>• Unsure about university as she is worried about strain on her and mother. |
| Lorraine<br>Age 20 | • Lives in student accommodation; has five siblings and is first in family to go to university.<br><br>• 10 GCSEs A-C; had nothing but positive experiences at school; attended 6th form and gained 3 A levels: 2Bs and 1C. Has completed first two years of Access to Medicine course and will transfer to conventional medical degree in year 3. Was interested in sciences from an early age.<br><br>• Defines herself as "headstrong and independent".<br><br>• Has continued to work part-time for the first two years of university. |

The three young people grouped into this category are similar in a number of ways. They are from working-class families and have acquired (or are acquiring) transition capital in the form of educational credentials. They have quite firm career goals which are not based on whimsical fantasising. Their particular career interest has been used as a gateway into a more prolonged

educational track. Similarities are also found in the way they have sought out and used careers information (not provided by careers specialists). They spoke positively about this, but the emphasis was on them finding the right people to talk with (e.g. teachers and adult family friends), though where official information sources were available they also used these. Janet, for example, used her aunt, who had completed a degree as a mature student, as a source of advice. The advice to study at a college in a 'better area' (which was acted upon) came from this source. Lorraine had good rapport with a science teacher and found his advice invaluable. Jerome relied on his mother's research; she had thoroughly "checked out" what the different institutions were offering.

These young people are similar in their reporting of school as a positive experience. They took school life seriously and wanted to achieve well. This meant rejecting associations with those displaying anti-school behaviour, and being 'good students'. Whilst they had no choice about the areas in which they grew up – all three grew up on inner London council estates – they were active in the ways they cultivated their aspirations. For example, Lorraine decided to study in the 6th form, believing this would provide a more structured learning environment for achieving good A level grades. Their high aspirations can be viewed as an intangible resource which has been used to create strong learner identities. When asked to talk about how education was viewed in their families, they spoke with great enthusiasm about expectations of educational achievement which their parents regarded as fundamental to improving their life chances.

In the extract that follows Jerome recounts:

*Friends.  I didn't have that much*
*At the time, there were too many conflicts with black students*
*Some violence happened in my school*
*I had under five friends*
*My mother, she told me not to hang out with the wrong crowd*
*The wrong company could have led me in the wrong direction*
*I could have found my way into criminal activities.*

*And she's educated my mum*
*She was clear*
*She didn't want me to experience*
*what a lot of people around here experience*
*you know, unemployment*
*getting into trouble with the police*
*all that sort of stuff.*

*So she helped me a lot with my school work*
*she's really smart in maths*
*and helped me out a lot here.*

*I know I wanted to do further studies*
*but I didn't know what or how to go about it*
*she helped me out here too*
*got loads of college brochures…*

From these extracts we can see that Jerome constructs an image of wanting to be different to "a lot of people around here" and other black students.  He wants to "become successful" and they don't, so he distances himself.  This distancing tactic helped him to focus on what he regarded as important: pro-school, pro-learning, the belief in the value of education as a vehicle of social mobility.

His mother is the heroine of this story.  She is central to his life project of becoming successful (buying a house and getting off the estate).  Jerome emigrated from Jamaica to join his mother and the reason for this displacement was to enable him to obtain better things in life.  By the time he was ready to start university his mother had already saved up for his accommodation costs.  This extensive forward planning symbolises the

commitment to a project of betterment as a holy grail. One of the facets of this is the ability to extract value, to make much of scarce resources, an endeavour not to let material constraints become wholly constraining.

The cost of a university education is clearly a concern for Janet. In this extract she reflects on the strategies she might need to resort to, such as taking a year out to save before going to university. Elsewhere in her narrative she mentions that "being from round here" (meaning Coxford) young people are not expected to do or want much from life, but this isn't the case with her.

*I haven't quite decided I want to go to university*
*because I think about the loan and everything*
*I want to personally be able to pay for it (university) myself.*
*I don't want to be in debt*
*so I don't know if I would have a year out*
*then go to university and do what I have to do*
*but I'm not really there yet; not really sure*
*I'm not sure where I want to go*
*When I get to my third year*
*then I'm going to have to think about it.*

*The art itself motivates me*
*cos there's other things that I don't enjoy as much*
*I do sculpture and painting. Personally I prefer painting*
*I like drawing more than using my hands*
*There are certain parts I don't enjoy*
*But I like to remember that it's all important*
*no matter what I do it is always going to lead up to a mark*
*and it's all going to lead up to something*
*I put 100% into everything I do*
*because education is important to me.*

*Just knowing that everything you do means something*
*So it's like knowing that if I pass*
*All I think about is if I pass this and I do pass this, I could have my own money*
*I can be my own artist*
*I can be whatever I want to be.*

*If I just start slacking*
*Oh, I can do it tomorrow, and then tomorrow comes I'll do it the next day*
*You never get nowhere*
*Then you keep on going and you can get far, I think personally.*

*They (mum and aunt) want so much more for me*
*Which I want for myself as well*
*I know it don't just come on a plate, you have to work for everything*
*I see how hard she (mum) works for everything*
*I've seen that she works for it and it just doesn't come easy.*

*My mum always tells me, like*
*"You're a black person*
*so don't expect nothing to be*

*handed to you on a plate.”*

*My auntie J studied for her degree*
*and worked as well*
*so if that's what you need to do*
*then that's it.*

Here she articulates many things, not least her perception of the value of education as a 'way out', a way to move on and upwards. She uses her aunt's achievement as a model for herself, and equates her black identity with having to work hard, but regards this as mundane; it's just what needs to be done. This is another way of seeing how intangible resources (such as kinship networks) are used to fuel ambition.

Our third case, Lorraine, also regards education highly, but for other reasons. The motor behind her ambition is what she has absorbed about her father's struggle as a first generation migrant to the UK and the maelstrom of disappointed expectations which characterised his experience.

Lorraine talks about medicine as being her "calling" since she was eight years old; her interest in this area has never waned. She didn't get the highest A level grades (2Bs and 1C) for medical school. Hence she did two years on an "Access to Medicine" preparatory course before transferring to a conventional medical degree. At the time of her interview, she was working part-time, and felt a great deal of anxiety about how she would manage financially when it came to the clinical trials – being on call meant irregular hours. Her family are financially compromised and were not in a position to offer her much tangible support.

In this extract she shares how her father's experience is propelling her ambitions.

*My dad has also been a really strong person for me as well*
*He's had a lot of struggles*
*He told me about his struggles*
*He had when he first came to this country from Barbados.*

*He came to this country when he was 14*
*He shared with me the hard times that he had*
*And he always said that life should be better for you*
*"I'm working this hard so that you can have more opportunities.*
*Please don't waste it".*

*Seeing my dad come home from work every day tired*
*This really pushed me*
*But obviously as you get older*
*As teenagers you have conflicts with your parents.*

*Their views on certain things are different*
*So there were a lot of arguments over whether I should*
*Be allowed to go here, do this etc.*
*He is still a strong part of my life.*

*When I go home*
*I'm always glad to see him*
*He did push me*
*He used to say, before you go out to play*
*Read a book for half an hour.*

*I was able to understand his work ethic*
*I am not afraid to fail*
*These are two elements which he fulfilled in me*
*He would say, to be where you want to be in life, dare to dream*
*My parents always said your dreams are up to you.*

In other sections of her narrative Lorraine remembers not "having very much as children", but regards with passion the values instilled, especially those of hard work and self-sacrifice and discipline.  These values are the bedrock from which she draws personal inspiration and are an important intangible resource. She could have remained living with her parents – she attends a London university – but preferred living in student digs as a way of building her independence; the family home was also overcrowded.  She has held a part-time job since commencing her degree but feels anxiety about how she will be able to maintain part-time work once her study advances.

In summary, this trio exhibited specific characteristics which contributed to their capabilities to mitigate the effects of economic inequality. Firstly, they were buffeted by strong familial capital which circulated, for example, through messages about the pervasive existence of prejudice and discrimination in wider society. Connected to this were messages about the importance of overriding such realities to 'become something'. Two young people in this trio were of mix-race heritage and shared experiences of coping with racism within their own families. Secondly, familial support was the bedrock which helped to nurture aspirational and social capital; for example, seeking out information and advice from wider kin and teachers to formulate clear decisions; but also being acutely aware and affected by the pressures and risks faced by working class students aiming for higher education. However, their motivation to succeed was sustained by familial expectations and personal ambition.

### 4.3.2  Resource Straitened

Seven young people (over a quarter of the sample) have been grouped into this typology. Their circumstances display particular patterns in the way things 'come off' for them in their transition journey. Interestingly, their ages range from 16 up to the eldest in the sample, who is 25. Three cases are selected for further discussion. They were selected to cover the age spectrum and in order to show how the risks they are exposed to as a result of their weak resource base at the outset of their transition journey can contribute to cementing ongoing disadvantages. However, whilst the young people's situations are described as disadvantaged, this is only a convenient label, a way of viewing their situations through a socio-structural lens, as they do not

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particularly identify their situations as deprived. This is an aspect of the role of the social researcher, who elucidates dimensions of social relations which are not obvious to any one individual. However, as Bertaux succinctly comments, "The objects sociology examines do talk, they even think" (Bertaux, 1981, p.38), and have an expansive knowledge about the social world. This is an important point and is raised to acknowledge that the young people do not perceive of or talk about their lives as being risky, deprived or hemmed in by financial and other social disadvantages. They simply do not see their situations through such a lens. Their perceptions and evaluations focus on the practical ways they respond to their life situations.

| Respondent | Key Transition Information |
|---|---|
| Delroy<br><br>Age 16 | • Lives with mother and 2 younger siblings on council estate; achieved 4 D grade GSCEs; started GVNQ coaching but withdrew when he discovered there were "no practicals and too much bookwork"; does a few hours football coaching with local youth club; has ambition to get into professional football. |
| Richard<br><br>Age 17 | • Lives with mother and 2 siblings on council estate where the buildings are high-rise; achieved no passes at GCSE, blames himself for not working hard enough<br><br>• At time of interview was attending college some 12 miles away, taking GNVQ in sports, could not account for choice of subject; is looking for part-time job but feels there is nothing in the area; has 6-month-old daughter. |
| Oliver<br><br>Age 17 | • Lives with mother (is an only child) on council estate where the buildings are low-rise; achieved no passes at GCSE; mother gave him no option but to attend college to 'get some subjects' and he's now retaking English and Maths.<br><br>• Lost a year because he was ill and had to drop out of his retakes; attends college some distance from home to avoid distractions of peers. |
| Nancy<br><br>Age 17 | • Lives with grandmother in housing association flat; took 9 GCSEs and achieved 4 A-C and 5 D-E.<br><br>• At the time of the interview she was attending college full-time doing GCSE retakes; works part-time with local youth club. |
| Justin<br><br>Age 19 | • Lives with mother in housing association flat; would really like to move out to gain more independence but is unable to as he has no money; gained 4 GCSEs A-C and 1D.<br><br>• Attended 6th form for one year but pulled out after a physical assault; has subsequently done various short youth training courses; does part-time catering work. |
| Michael<br><br>Age 24 | • Currently lives with his parents but is under pressure to move out as space is overcrowded. Has four brothers, one is attending university (his twin).<br><br>• Left school with 5 GCSEs D-E, states he wasn't very academic and he did better than he thought he would.<br><br>• Completed two-year City & Guilds in carpentry but still couldn't find work because he didn't have any real work experience. From time to time gets jobs but has also had periods of up to six months unemployed. He wishes he had done an apprenticeship as he could have gained valuable work experience, but at the time, didn't know about apprenticeships. |
| Marie<br><br>Age 23 | • Lives with grandmother; achieved no GCSE passes.<br><br>• Has not worked since leaving school due to long-term illness. |
| Wayne<br><br>Age 25 | • Lives with mother and younger brother on large estate (mainly high-rise); achieved 2 GCSEs A-C, entered school 6th form on mother's advice and did GNVQ in manufacturing, left after a few months; started bricklaying but that too was abandoned after a short while.<br><br>• Has had several bouts of unemployment usually lasting about 6 months; currently working for Tesco's supermarket part-time.<br><br>• Did football coaching certificate with Fulham football club and works with several schools in his local community doing football coaching.<br><br>• Is chair of his local youth club management committee and works at the youth club 'every evening' as he loves giving something back. |

If asked the question, is life good for the young people in this typology, one would have to answer with a distinct 'no'. This would be the blunt conclusion that any outside observer would reach. However, what is striking about the way the young people see their situation is their sense that things will get better as they try different things; there's no sense of being resigned to their situation.

From the summary information above it's possible to see that these young people are not well endowed in terms of either tangible or intangible resources. They do not, for example, have any particular passions which drive their expectations, unlike some of the other young people in this study. Their transition journey did not start out with them achieving creditable GCSE results. They recognise this as limiting their future options, often blaming themselves for any failure experienced, and relating how they would have made different decisions had they started out with better GCSE results. There is some desire to improve on their educational capital. They are very ill-equipped for their transition journey in terms of information that could help them exercise career options. They report that careers advice was either non-existent or useless. For example, Oliver is not interested in academic subjects. In fact he is not sure what he is interested in, neither does he have the social contacts which may help him in an informed way to explore his options. He has therefore made the most obvious decision, following his mother's advice, to go to college to do a few GCSE retakes; he remains uncertain whether this is the right thing to do but is "giving it a go".

Information poverty is the prominent feature for young people in this category. This exacerbates existing disadvantages and contributes to entrenching difficult life trajectories. The extract below from Michael's narrative illustrates frustration and his sense of having made decisions which were misguided.

*When I left school, my dad said I'd best get a trade*
*And I wanted to do music as I was enjoying it at the time*
*So then I decided to try and do both.*

*I done carpentry at college*
*But I didn't like it very much*
*In fact we were doing a lot more paperwork than practicals*
*Then when I went outside and go for jobs and stuff*
*And when I actually got a job, it was*
*Like the things I was learning (at college)*
*They said that it was wrong*
*They said you have to do it in a different way*
*And that got me confused*
*Cos I mean, I spent two years doing it one way*
*And when I go to do it on the job they say it's not right.*

*Trying to find a job has been difficult*
*Like most of the jobs I've gone for*
*they want like five years experience*
*or six or ten years experience*
*In carpentry.*

*I was applying for anything that's with carpentry*
*And even labouring*
*But when I have the money I'm gonna go for the plumbing*
*It's been hard having regular work.*

*Another thing was I started doing maths*
*Yeah, evening classes*
*And they were saying*
*there's so many ways of getting into education or getting a job*
*but no one ever tells you that.*

*So there's loads of things people don't tell you*
*but they just expect you to know it*
*I've found out things through friends really*
*securing work and that.*

*Like thinking back to school*
*They just said go to college*
*They didn't talk about training courses or anything like that*
*They didn't talk about apprenticeships or other things that*
*it might be better to get into*
*they just said, well, "go to college"*
*and so I thought, I might as well go to college.*

Michael concedes that the last five years have been difficult for him. He keeps trying his best but he ends up in cul-de-sacs, and has to reverse and reflect on what the next best course of action should be. Michael doesn't represent

himself as failing. On the contrary, he views himself as sincerely searching for his 'niche' in the labour market, and is willing to try different avenues until he discovers this. He regards his transition as problematic because he "never got the right kind of advice". As a consequence he has taken some wrong turns in the road. He offers a positive evaluation of his experiences (as do many of the other young people). He casts himself as reflecting on where he's going wrong and what he might do to put things right, and even though things have not turned out as he hoped, he's learnt from the experience and has grown and matured. One way of managing and coping with trying circumstances is to construct a positive heroic image of how the challenges are dealt with. This scenario is such an example. Michael has a personal sense of responsibility for sorting out his situation. His vulnerability arises from a weak resource base.

Richard provides another example of how young people can experience dislocations from their family, education and the labour market at an early stage in their transition when they have poor transition capital. Richard exhibits an intertwined series of vulnerabilities which have created instability, fragmentation and social isolation; tangible and intangible resources are severely lacking in his circumstances. His situation is further compromised by the legal status of his mother - currently undergoing the process of gaining resident status; they have few entitlements which could prevent them falling below the poverty margin. The family have been in the UK for ten years (Richard joined his mother six years ago); their social network is rudimentary. For example the family have no relatives in the UK, no one whose knowledge

or experience they can draw from to explore and make sense of the different post-16 options. These factors have impacted on Richard's school experience, which he describes very negatively. His experience since leaving school has been equally desultory, which he recollects in this extract.

*At first I was interested in learning*
*Like at first, cos I was like the second smartest in that class*
*And then after year 10, I was going down slowly*
*No in year nine I started going down.*

*And then I wasn't working and stuff like that*
*So they put me in a lower class*
*When I went to year ten*
*So in year ten I was in a lower group*
*And I started hanging out with them.*

*It was a mixed class, about sixty per cent were black*
*Basically they didn't care*
*Like when the teacher was in class like*
*They would just still be talking*
*Throwing stuff around the class like*
*Acting childish like, playing around in class.*

*I was basically like them,*
*So basically I didn't care either*
*Cos, if you are in a room with everyone else that's willing to work*
*You're gonna be looking around and thinking everyone is doing their work*
*You're gonna be sitting down and doing your work as well*
*No I just…didn't …I didn't care at the time*
*I was more concerned with what was going on*
*So I wasn't surprised by the results.*

*I never spoke to anyone about what I was going to do at 16*
*I was just going to go to college.*
*That was what others were doing*
*I knew I had to go to college,*
*cos I want to learn bricklaying.*

*Cos around here, everyone's doing nothing*
*I walk on the streets and I see big people*
*Like they're 25/26 and they're still jamming the streets like little kids*
*But I just didn't want to be like them*
*Because I'm smarter now, I'm more grown up*
*And I know that I wanna be able to work.*

Since leaving school he has been adrift, unattached and unfocussed. He lacks concrete support from either family or official sources. In his narrative one senses the steady downward spiral from "being interested in learning" to becoming uninterested and disaffected. College is a refuge from unemployment and a refuge from "jamming the streets". He has ended up

there doing a GNVQ in sports because that "had places on it".  A year later he is unemployed and undecided about what to do next.

Richard's narrative conveys a picture of someone who is quite passive, getting carried along by circumstances; "basically they (teachers) didn't care", "no one cared", so how was he supposed to care, he just behaved in conformity with the other alienated learners.  Contrast his outcomes with those achieved by Janet.  There are close parallels in their socioeconomic circumstances (the parents of both have experienced periods of economic inactivity).  However, Janet makes liberal use of cultural stories to help drive her ambition, and shapes her identity as someone from disadvantaged circumstances who is intent on "becoming someone".  No such cultural drivers are embedded in Richard's narrative account of his transition.  He does not, for example, possess the level of racial consciousness displayed by Janet (typology 'resource miners'), She uses cultural stories to her advantage to contest the low expectations often associated with the structural disadvantage, poverty and exclusion correlated with ethnic status. She resists the stereotypes heaped upon young people who 'grow up on sink council estates'.  Richard on the other hand becomes thoroughly acculturated to such social expectations.

The young people in this typology 'know their limits' in the sense that they believe their future horizons are very limited because they don't have 'what it takes'; neither economic, cultural nor social capital.  They find it very difficult to construct imageries of what is possible, given their limited options. There is little room for manoeuvre within their structural locations underpinned by

material deprivation. However, the female in this group continued to assert a determination to improve her qualifications which she managed to achieve when I conversed with her some 18 months after the initial interview. These respondents are connected by the fact that they exhibited weak evidence of the existence of any of the forms of capitals discussed. Hence, whilst parents/carers hoped that they would do okay at school, this was not backed up by family resources, such as space to do homework or involvement in the young person's post-16 decisions.

### 4.3.3 Resource Innovators

| Respondent | Key Transition Data |
|---|---|
| Juliet<br>Age 18 | • Lives with aunt on an East London council estate which she describes as 'close-knit' where everyone knows everyone. Left school with 8 GCSEs D-E, followed by two-year hairdressing NVQ; has done hairdressing since age 14 and "loves it".<br><br>• Worked in salons whilst doing the NVQ followed by period of full-time work in salons. Became disillusioned with salon working. Continues to do hairdressing work as this is the way she "earns her money."<br><br>• Commenced two-year apprenticeship programme with local authority and is hoping to secure full-time employment in administration. |
| Lewis<br>Age 19 | • Lives with mother and stepfather but wishes to secure independent accommodation because he still shares a room with his younger brother.<br><br>• Achieved 8 GCSEs A-C; started 6th form but withdrew after a few months; did nothing for up to a year as he recovered from a serious physical assault.<br><br>• Attended short employment training programme and secured retail job when it ended. Worked in a local office doing general administration work for 6 months before joining the local council's apprenticeship programme. Is still unclear about what he wants to do, but for now is enjoying doing the apprenticeship. |
| Dwight<br>Age 20 | • Lives in student accommodation and has lived with grandparents since falling out with parents at age 11.<br><br>• Has worked part-time since age 14 and continues to do part-time work whilst at university.<br><br>• Achieved 12 GCSEs A-C, followed by 3 A levels, then enrolled in the 'Access to medicine' degree course. Completed this in one year then transferred to conventional medical programme. |

| Respondent | Key Transition Data |
|---|---|
| Mario<br><br>Age 21 | • Lives with mother in council rented accommodation, has one older brother who is unemployed.<br><br>• Left school with 5 GCSEs – 3 A-C; did 6-month stint at local college doing GNVQ in IT but dropped out as he worked long hours. The following academic year he again enrolled for an IT qualification but the same pattern repeated itself.<br><br>• Now works full-time as postman. Would like to do some further study as he doesn't want to be a postman forever but at least he can help his mum financially and save.<br><br>• Took three months off work to recover from a physical assault. |
| Debbie<br><br>Age 22 | • Has lived with her aunt since arriving in the country from Jamaica at age 11. Has no contact with her biological parents. Has three-year-old daughter.<br><br>• Worked hard at school and achieved 8 GCSEs A-C. Has not yet secured permanent resident status and this has been a huge constraint. However, she thinks it is important to remain upbeat and keep herself educated so that she has different options.<br><br>• Has completed qualifications in accountancy and hairdressing as she hopes one day to run her own small business. Works full-time as hairdresser – which she describes as well paid. |
| Rebecca<br><br>Age 21 | • Within the previous 6 months Rachel secured permanent accommodation through a housing association, having experienced homelessness and hostel living for the previous three years. She left home at 17 and going back home was "never an option".<br><br>• Left school at 16 with 4 GCSEs A-C. Advised to go to 6th form, and did, to do GNVQ in business studies. Was never interested in this and left before taking any exams.<br><br>• Worked in a succession of part-time jobs but wanted better for herself.<br><br>• Started volunteering in a youth club and enrolled to do GNVQ in Health and Social Care. Was pleased when she "completed a qualification at last".<br><br>• Has worked part-time as 'detached youth worker' for two years.<br><br>• Recently enrolled to do BA in Youth and Community Studies; feels on track at last. |

This group of young people display degrees of sophistication and hardiness in the way they manage their post-school decisions. They have all been exposed to numerous risks – e.g. physical assaults which led to hospitalisation, homelessness, detention under immigration law and disruptive family relationships; their paths have been littered with many obstacles. They have negotiated their way, quite successfully, through a labyrinth of post-16 'choices' and 'options'. One major difference between these respondents is

that not all have done well academically. Their post-16 credentials range from poor to very good. They have all pursued goals which they believed were sensible and which reflected the social constraints with which they are confronted. Three cases are selected for further analysis.

Many of the young people studied have experienced chequered and unpredictable transitions. The unpredictability of their circumstances is often viewed reflexively; this is typical of the six young people labelled 'resource innovators' because they have recovered from dramatic events through their ability to adapt. This attitude is expressed by Dwight speaking about his feelings of having to leave home at 11 due to the violence to which he became increasingly exposed:

> *It seemed like the only option to me*
> *I didn't feel like the situation was in any way sustainable*
> *I had to pick up and go*
> *and I suppose*
> *that's how I'll be for the rest of my life.*
> *You just have to do what you have to do to progress.*

The young people in this typology are quintessential pragmatists. Their decisions are tentative and subject to revision but they are conveyed with great optimism and matter-of-factness. These young people have been labelled 'resource innovators' as they have displayed ingenuity in locating employment and balancing it with studying to advance the credentials they regard as important to a 'fall-back position'.

The extract from Lewis's narrative reflects his uncertainty about the direction to take when he left school. This is in response to being asked why he settled on an apprenticeship in administration. At the time of his interview, Lewis had

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been on the apprenticeship programme for six months.  Prior to this he had participated in a number of short courses and had held two jobs for several months each.  He also spent time recuperating from a serious physical assault by a gang of local youths.

*Cos when I left school*
*I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do*
*So I thought I would take this option*
*I'm enjoying it*
*So I might as well carry on with it*
*Get a qualification out of it*
*See where it goes*
*Not really sure…*

*I did well in my GCSEs*
*I was so happy*
*Jus to make my mum proud as well*
*But I also felt proud of myself.*

*Yeah, I went to sixth form for a few months*
*But I think I was going through that stage where*
*I didn't really want to do nothing*
*I was staying at home, being lazy*
*So I went through a year through that stage.*

*I was on Job Seeker's Allowance*
*But I think every child goes through that*
*I don't know*
*We left school and that was it.*

*I suppose there should be more help and support*
*When I was that age…*
*And to get them to know what they wanted to do when they leave school*
*Cos I didn't have a clue really.*

*Even though we had five years of schooling*
*At the end of it, I still didn't know what I wanted to do*
*Basically, they were just talking about the variety of colleges*
*that there is out there*
*and the courses that you can do.*

*But that was just it really so*
*You go to college or you can work*
*That's what they were saying really.*

Lewis has tried a range of different possibilities in attempts to map out a path for himself.  He is unsure where any given path will lead and hopes pragmatically that somehow things will fall into place.  One detects a sense of bemused bewilderment when Lewis states, "we left school and that was it".  Young people have many 'options' from which to 'choose', but many are bereft

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of options and choice because they are inadequately resourced to make sense of what is supposedly available.

Mario's case parallels Lewis'; the crucial difference between them is that the latter had good educational attainments at 16. This has resulted in Lewis, for example, pursuing a more skilled vocational route whilst Mario does unskilled work. Otherwise they share other features in common, including being on the receiving end of gang violence which disrupted their lifestyles for a while. They have both made attempts to further their education but for different reasons withdrew part-way through their course. They are both now in permanent employment. Mario has been consistently employed since leaving school. At first he tried to balance part-time study and part-time work but he was unable to meet the demands of both; earning a living became more important than gaining an education. His identity as a worker is now firmly entrenched and any thoughts of further education have retreated into the background. He drifted into further education along with friends, but the reality of having to take more responsibility for his financial upkeep meant that further education was a precarious route; his family was unable to support him financially after the age of 16.

In this extract Mario relates some of the events which have led him into the position where he now works as a postman. His decisions were influenced by not "wanting to drift" when he left school. However, financial pressures constrained what he was able to do. For example, full-time study was just not feasible; as he states, "there were no free school meals at college", and he

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had to support himself.  He believes that his decisions have been responsible given his position.  He views himself as steady and resourceful.

*When I left school I didn't really know…*
*Didn't know what I wanted to do*
*But I didn't really let myself drift.*

*At the time most of my friends were going there (to that college)*
*It would have probably been easier to fit in*
*Cos obviously we've all grown up together*
*I was also worried about travelling expenses*
*The college was just around the corner.*

*I started, but because of my age and things happening in my life*
*I had to take on a part-time job at the time as well*
*So things started getting a bit difficult*
*Attendance and stuff like that.*

*I did the first six/seven months*
*After that I, dropped out and just kept working*
*I was working part-time*
*I was working 16-18 hours.*

*Yeah, yeah, the studying and the work it caused problems*
*I wasn't getting the studying in*
*And because I wasn't getting my studying in*
*Then I didn't really go to classes*
*Cos the teacher and stuff like that.*

*My mum she by herself and everything*
*No dad, so basically I had to erm…*
*find support for myself as well*
*So that's why I had to get a part-time job*
*Cos college lifestyle…it's a bit different*
*You have to erm…there's lunch and stuff like that*
*You don't get no free lunch*
*Clothes and stuff*
*Style, all that stuff as well*
*I had to kind of get a job*
*Like I can at least fit in or something.*

*I'd just come in, not have no work done*
*Take work and go*
*So eventually I just packed it in as well.*

*I don't really like dropping out, quitting and stuff*
*But it's just…I don't know, most of us…*
*It's the way it is, we just quit.*

*When I can get some time to do some evening classes*
*But right now, I just feel like settling down in the job that I've got*
*Cos I've just finished my probation which is 12 months*
*And I have got to get some experience*
*because seniority is important.*
*Before I can move on I have to get some experience*
*Before I can start looking to get some promotion.*

*But I definitely think I will do some further study*
*All the time, I think like, I cannot just sit in a job like this*
*I think I can't jus be at a job like this*
*I wanna do my own business*
*And I know a bit about business from what I've picked up from the past.*

Mario has tried to manage the demands of two conflicting lifestyles but ultimately chose the path of employment. This is a decision he is confident with; as he states,

> *I'm pretty content*
> *I have nothing wrong with my life*
> *I'm alright actually…*

A sense of optimism and resilience seeps through the narratives of even those young people who have experienced deeply troubling transitions. Rebecca left home at 17 as a consequence of family conflict. Over a four-year period she experienced periods of homelessness, moving between different hostels, and a succession of 'fiddly' part-time jobs. In the midst of this she also did 3 years' voluntary work with a church youth club and completed a further education qualification. She represents these experiences, almost casually, as "just part of learning about life";

> *I'd probably do everything exactly the same*
> *because despite everything I've done*
> *as low as I've fallen*
> *I've learnt from every single situation*
> *I've been in.*
>
> *I've picked myself up*
> *and I've grown as a person*
> *because of the situation*
> *I've been put in*
> *or put myself in.*
>
> *So I wouldn't change nothing*
> *Nothing at all*
> *As hard as it's been*
> *And as hurt as I've been sometimes.*

Rebecca's narrative retells her experiences of coping with a number of turbulent circumstances. She represents herself as someone who values independence, who has made numerous sacrifices to secure it. Despite her flight from home at 17, Rebecca presents her relationship with her mother very

positively.  Her mother and sister have been a reliable source of financial and emotional support.  She also has a close-knit network of friends who have helped her out in numerous different ways.  She values the fact that she has learnt the skill of careful financial management and 'manages to get by on very little'.

*I had problems being homeless for a while*
*While I was staying around different people's houses*
*I tried to get help from the homeless unit*
*I didn't have a wage packet.*

*But they didn't really help me too much*
*So I had to find my own hostel*
*And I had many problems from there*
*Until I got my flat*
*I got the flat the beginning of this year.*

*It took me about three years*
*Trying to sort out my housing*
*It should have taken about 6 months to a year.*

*The main problem I had was financial*
*Because, I was trying to go college*
*Trying to provide for myself*
*Pay rent, and the hostel rent is quite expensive*
*So I was working part-time*
*It was quite difficult.*

*I had several hostel moves*
*And suffered a bit of depression*
*Because obviously going from being with my family*
*And to being on my own*
*Finding independence*
*Which has actually taken me a long time*
*To actually reach full independence.*

*But to actually know that I'm a person*
*Providing for me*
*I'm the person that's getting me to the next stage*
*of where I'm going*
*I'm not relying on anybody.*

*It's only been recently*
*I've actually felt I'm at that level*
*Where I am doing it for myself.*

Like other young people in this research Rebecca is adept at cultivating multiple identities.  At the time of the interview she had just taken on a new role as an undergraduate and was now in the process of creating a new identity.  This new direction forms part of her life project to become 'someone'.

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Being "not naturally an academic person", she views this as a big step and is fraught with fear and anxiety about failing.

The typicality of the young people in this category is that, with one exception, they are from working class backgrounds but all display inventiveness and resilience in the face of raced and classed social experiences which has meant they have struggled to 'make ends meet' whilst striving to build cultural capital. In myriad ways they have managed to balance economic and family (e.g. poor family relations) constraints with developing capabilities for a better future because they possess identity capital – inner resourcefulness – which have enabled them to learn, to adapt and to resist certain institutional norms. Their inner resourcefulness has been utilised to counter the plethora of challenges arising in their environments. Their responses are individualised to the extent that each person seeks a personal solution to the statutory erosion of defined transition pathways. In response individual life plans are created based on addressing the imperatives of their social situation. Hence, Mario attempted to combine work with further education because his family could not/would not offer financial support beyond the age of 16. After various attempts to balance work and study he dropped study to concentrate on earning a living. These young people have drawn limited support from familial and social networks, but have nevertheless worked on creating credible future plans.

## 4.3.4  Resource Enriched

| Respondent | Key Transition Data |
|---|---|
| Susan<br><br>Aged 16 | • Lives with mother and two brothers; parents are divorced but they maintain close communication and her father always supports the family.<br><br>• Did poorly at GCSEs, taking 10 but achieving only two at grades A-C; parents were very disappointed and have encouraged her to start afresh; attends college some distance from home as part of the 'fresh start' commitment.  Her parents don't want her to work part-time, so that she can focus on gaining qualifications.  The 'whole family' are pushing from behind. |
| Ruth<br><br>Aged 18 | • Parents are divorced; lives with mother and four sisters.  Three sisters have completed university degrees or are currently doing degrees, so there is strong pressure on her not to let down the family.<br><br>• Achieved 9 GCSEs (8 A-C and 1 D); followed by 3 A levels.<br><br>• Intends to pursue business studies degree. |
| David<br><br>Aged 18 | • Lives with both parents and has one older sister who recently completed university.  His parents also expect him to complete university.<br><br>• Achieved 10 GCSEs and has progressed to 3 A' levels.  Intends to progress to university. Has part-time job and wants to continue working part-time whilst at university. |
| John<br><br>Aged 20 | • John intends to follow in the footsteps of his two sisters who have been to university. He lives with his parents and one sister.<br><br>• Achieved well at GCSE obtaining 10 at grades A-C, followed by A levels and a year doing an HNC, then began a degree in graphic design. |
| Kevin<br><br>Aged 23 | • Married with 3-year-old daughter and has bought his own home.<br><br>• Left school with 8 GCSEs A-C.  Has had a succession of jobs in sales-oriented environments which have been well paid.  Has no interest in further studying and plans to set up a business within the next three years. |
| Miriam<br><br>Aged 24 | • Miriam lives with parents and a younger brother.  She has bought a flat but rents this out.<br><br>• Has a well-paid position with major public sector employer, which she achieved after a circuitous route through various unrewarding administration jobs.<br><br>• Currently completing a degree (part-time) in computer science.<br><br>• Achieved 8 GCSEs A-C. Started but withdrew from two college courses after several months as they failed to meet her expectations.  She was very unclear about her direction of travel, but is now pleased that things have 'worked out just fine'. |
| Melanie<br><br>Aged 24 | • Lives with her two-year-old daughter at her mother's home.  Her parents are divorced but she maintains close communication with her father.<br><br>• She did less well than expected in terms of school achievement and has worked hard to make up ground.  She achieved 6 GCSEs A-C.  School was followed by college to retake maths and English, then a GNVQ in business studies; completed two years HND in early year's education. At the time of the interview she was in the third year of a part-time BA in early childhood studies.  She took a year out following the birth of her daughter but returned to her studies as she is determined to "get professional status". |

One third of the cohort have been placed within this category on the basis of their access to strong parental support (not to be equated with strong financial support), and good kinship and wider community support.  They have access to good transition capital, which in some cases is in the form of initial qualifications.   Their social environments are relatively rich in terms of avowedly high family expectations. Three of the young people, for example, speak about the influence of grandmothers who bolster their confidence through their stories of hardships, struggles and the poor opportunities they encountered in the 'mother country'.   These young people appear to have been nurtured on the moral message "you have the opportunity; make the most of it".  This cultural resource is an important source of transition capital as it has, for instance, influenced the evolution of constructive attitudes towards education. This has helped the young people develop resilience and strategies to contest behaviour which aims to pathologise them.  For example, David tells of an attempt to exclude him for what he, and his parents, thought was a minor transgression of school rules.  With the assistance of an aunt "who works in education and knows the system", they were able to successfully challenge the decision.  This is a good example of being able to exploit kinship resources to challenge institutional behaviour.

Even for those who are well resourced, their stories of transition are marked by layers of complexity where the risks of unintended consequences, false starts and mistaken decision-making are ever-present.  Even for those who could be classified as having linear transitions, when you look at their actual experience it's hard not to conclude that the term conceals more than it reveals.  Kevin

could be labelled as having had a linear transition. At the age of twenty-three he has been in continuous employment since leaving school, achieved through a series of eight different jobs. Of all the young people in the research his current situation most closely matches the normative criteria of adult status (married, mortgaged a parent and financially secure) but he has experienced a great deal of employment instability.

Two cases are selected for further comment and to illustrate the reality that even young people with strong resource foundations experience false starts, take detours and revise earlier decisions. They experience major turning points in the transition journey which can catapult them into paths which are very uncertain.

The extracts taken from Melanie's story reveal why certain decisions were made which then culminated in the variegated pattern of her post-16 transition:

*In my upbringing education was stressed*
*Well just seeing what education brings*
*It's always been put in my head that, you know*
*That it's the key to success really*
*And that without it you're not much really.*

*After that I came back to Croydon and done GNVQ in business*
*Because at the time I thought*
*OK I wanna open a nursery*
*So I thought Okay*
*If taking that route I would do the GNVQ in business*
*To give myself a foundation*
*Which I think I hated every moment of that.*

*The GNVQ in business, it wasn't specific enough to what I wanted to do*
*I also think that because my dad was in that kinda of a field, the business field*
*I was more erm…*
*It wasn't so much a decision for myself*
*I was doing what I felt he would think was right.*

*So those two years was really strenuous for me*
*because I mean it was bad enough doing a course*
*when you want to do it*
*but when you're doing it because of what someone else perhaps wants*
*It makes it even harder.*

*And then I went on to do the BA*
*Which I still don't feel erm*
*Without the honours*
*I'm much further on that I was*
*When I completed the HND.*

*I've just completed a BA in early childhood studies*
*I did complete the HND in the same subject*
*But later on I decided*
*That perhaps I wanted to go into primary teaching.*

*I just think I've been round the houses a bit (blames this on poor careers advice)*
*I think it's been on my own back really*
*What I think would be…*
*You know the right thing to do.*

*Just by you know, okay*
*I want to open a nursery, let me do a business course*
*But obviously if I had spoken to the right people*
*They'd perhaps be able to say*
*"well childhood studies would have covered childcare*
*so you know perhaps*
*I could have gone straight into that instead.*

*And I think it was just a case of not wanting to stray into work*
*Getting a job and straying away from what I wanted to do*
*So in my head, I thought it would be a better thing*
*To just keep on going in education*
*Even if it's a course I am not particularly interested in.*

*But stay in education*
*Otherwise I would be frightened*
*That I would get, you know used to money*
*And you know, just not fulfil what I wanted to do really.*

A metaphor for Melanie's experience is that of being in a maze, gingerly searching for the exit. She tells of decisions which arose from an obligation to meet parental expectations; decisions which subsequently turned out not to meet her personal needs or ambitions. We see her attempts to build a foundation by enhancing her education, and her feelings of ambivalence when, with hindsight, she reflects on the ill-considered nature of the options she exercised. She believes some of the consequences which arose have done so precisely because she has had to make decisions, "on her own back", without appropriate advice. One can observe the determination to augment her education, as it is valued as a goal, "the key to success really", without which she would amount to "not much really".

The second case selected for further discussion is that of Miriam. One can observe in the scenario a similarity in the unfolding of decisions wherein choices are made which subsequently prove to be unsatisfactory for various reasons. This gives rise to new choices engendered by an underlying commitment to 'furthering oneself' which results in the blending of work and study.

Miriam's first two years after leaving school were fraught with uncertainty: decisions turned out to be fragile, tentative and subject to change or 'fine tuning'. She changed jobs in rapid succession until she found something into which she could settle. The decision to do a part-time degree was entirely serendipitous. She describes how she ends up on the part-time degree:

> *My mum said she wanted to do a teaching course at London Met*
> *I went with her and was standing outside*
> *As they wouldn't let people in if you just gonna sit down there with your friend*
> *so I made out I was gonna do a computing course*
> *so I was speaking to this lady*
> *and I filled out some forms*
> *and then in the summer I got a letter saying*
> *I'd been accepted*
> *on a computing science degree*
> *this wasn't planned.*
>
> *Like, I rang my mum and she said*
> *"Miriam you've been accepted at university"*
> *I said, "Pardon? I didn't apply to go to university"*
> *She said, "Well you've been accepted".*
> *And I was like Okay*
> *So she was like, "I think you should go*
> *because you are not doing anything with yourself*
> *so you'd better . Just do something with yourself"*
> *And I was like, Okaaay.*
> *So I went and did it part-time*
> *By now I was 19 and I used to go like two days a week.*
>
> *So I continued to do it until last year*
> *And worked part-time in various jobs*
> *Then in September I decided I wanted to work full-time*
> *I needed a break from studying*
> *Then I started working for TfL*
> *I took a year out.*
>
> *I've done four years, and still have two left.*
> *My original plan was to go back and do A levels*
> *I was interested in further studying*
> *But I wasn't planning on going to university.*

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*I wish I had worked harder at the A levels*
*I wished I had finished them off in the first place*
*But I'm happy someone is looking out for me*
*and I got on a degree course.*

*Because if I'd finished A levels in the first place,*
*I wouldn't have lost out on a year*
*I'd have gone straight to university*
*I think I'm back on track now*
*My parents are happy that I'm at university*
*I'm happy*
*I just wanna get it over and done with*
*Have something to say that I've done it*
*I want to say I have a degree*
*Not "I didn't finish".*

The tone of Miriam's narrative does not convey a sense of regret with her decisions. She feels slight disappointment at not completing A' levels, but at the time thought they weren't for her. Otherwise she is confident she is back on track.

The two cases selected for further comment were used to exemplify the extent to which discontinuity is a common feature of the transition journey of the young people in the research. As the two examples illustrate, even for young people with access to good resources at the start of their transition odyssey, this journey does not unfold in a straight line. On the contrary it unravels through numerous twists and turns as earlier decisions are reassessed and found to be wanting. In the two cases explored (as in other cases examined earlier) there are anchor points that give an underlying continuity, so it is possible to see that decisions are not entirely ad hoc and random. One such anchor point is a persistent desire to enhance educational credentials. Decisions which subsequently turn out to be 'wrong' are approached pragmatically and are used as a stepping stone to the next thing, an opportunity to gain further clarity about the direction which is desired. Turning

points are used as a chance to refocus and are regarded not as examples of failures but as opportunities to make progress.

The positive effects of material resources are evident in the social experiences of this group of young people. The predictable link between economic capital and high achievement is evident, with the exception of respondent (2). Without exception, all these young people resided in homes where familial, aspirational and social capital coalesced to produce advantageous material and social psychological well-being. As in the trio in the 'resource miners' typology (respondents 1, 12 & 18) and a further trio (respondents 10, 14 & 17) from 'resource innovators', these young people shared vivid recollections of different racial encounters which made them aware of the power dynamics by which phenotypical differences place them in subordinated positions. Just over half (14/24) retold stories of how they had used their ethnic identities to build aspects of their character (asserting the type of people they want to be, resisting ascribed definitions) and credentials. These young people were able to describe practices which they found culturally affirming.

Respondent 22

*The teachers were great*
*Except for one*
*I had problems with my French teacher*

*Mum had to write a long letter*
*Complaining about him*
*He seemed to pick on me all the time*
*And send me out of the classroom*
*I remember one time*
*He said I would never pass French*
*I'm never going to do well in French*
*And, "my two year old daughter knows more French than you"*

*I told my mum*
*And she said' "right we are gonna do something about this"*

## 4.4    Conclusion

Factual data have been integrated with narrative extracts to provide insights into the structural locations of the respondents and their subjective interpretations of how they are 'making out' and 'making do' with the resources they have at their disposal. The cases were arranged into four typologies to contrast different outcomes and their relationship to the varied resource capacities of the respondents. As expected the less resourced fare worse than those who have stronger capital. For many of the respondents it is a truism to argue that their transitions are fragmentary and reversible; this is perhaps inevitable given their circumstances. Even for the most confident, the use of official sources of careers information was absent from the decision-making. The least confident floundered when attempting to map out their post-16 direction.

Yet many of the respondents remained committed to furthering their qualifications in order to optimise their future employment chances. A common concern for 'bettering oneself' was a common undercurrent, even for those in difficult financial circumstances. Cultural scripts embodying collective stories of racial disadvantage were used to strengthen and reinforce the drive for social improvement.

It can be observed from the narratives that respondents strive to manage risky and unpredictable transitions by being pragmatic and are inured to the risks of ending up in cul-de-sacs from which they have to reverse and attempt

something else.  One third of respondents have weak foundations on which they are building their adult identities.  The remaining two thirds remain optimistic of their capabilities for dealing with uncertainties.

# Chapter 5

## Young People's lives in focus: biography and career identity

### 5.1    Introduction

> Racism, sexism, poverty, homophobia, and disability – these issues touch us all.  We can't hide from them.  We're all complicit in some way.  No one's immune, invulnerable.  So it's important to get exposed to local stories that bring us into the worlds of experience that are unknown to us, show us the concrete daily details of people whose lives have been under represented or not represented at all, help us reduce marginalization, show us how partial and situated our understanding of the world is (Ellis and Bochner 2003: 223).

Chapter four presented a range of empirical data conveying aspects of the material circumstances of my research respondents.  Summaries of narrative extracts were presented to illustrate the transition capital possessed by the respondents and to provide a richer description of their social situations.  This chapter builds on this by providing further biographical insights into the experience of post-school transition.  Three biographical portraits are discussed.  These are presented as descriptive accounts provided by the respondents and feature details of their experiences of transition.  The presentation of the portraits privileges the perspectives of the narrator.  My interpretations are also interwoven into a discussion of the biographical portraits.

A feature of the narrative genre is that it restores agency to the author of the narrative (Parker 2005).  The narrator has the responsibility for the skilful creation of his/her story, which embodies causality (or how occurrences are connected) and the continuity of experience which creates coherence and biographical unity (Linde 1993).  Life events are selected and pieced together,

not exactly as they happened, but as reinterpretations of past experience making use of cultural repertoires and resources drawn from the narrator's social milieu (Polkinghorne 1995; Riessman 2003). Thus the narrator creates new configurations of situated knowledge, those "concrete daily details" that Ellis and Bochner (op. cit) refer to. It has been argued that an invitation to narrative opens up a "discursive space" for research subjects (Riessman ibid: 343) to produce rhetorical constructions of self identity. This task is accomplished by drawing on the historical past, social location, cultural background, and past events to produce something distinctive about the life of the individual.

Over the past decade there has been an expansion of methodological approaches to the study of youth transitions (Heath et al 2009; Schoon and Silbereisen 2009). Emphasis has shifted beyond the dominant paradigm, which concentrated on the macroeconomic effects of labour market deregulation, destandardisation of employment relations, high youth unemployment, and the impact of these structural changes on youth transitions. Three trends can be observed which have generated a range of methodological approaches yielding more diverse and holistic understandings of the lives of young people and their responses to socio-structural change.

Firstly, there have been challenges to Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) 'risk society' and 'individualisation' thesis. These can be regarded as a couplet, in a symbiotic relationship, postulating a newly conceptualised social theory etching the dynamics of contemporary society.

They suggest a number of features which typify modern societies. Overwhelmingly, 'high modernity' is characterised by instability, uncertainty, and unpredictability, whereby societies (Western) are described as pervaded by an "atmosphere of ambient fear" (Bauman 2001: 83). This is a product of universal deregulation and unfettered freedoms characteristic of market capitalism. One consequence of this is that in rich Europe poverty is 'hidden in plain sight', where at least 3 million are homeless, the redundant labour pool approximates 20 million and 30 million live below the poverty line (Bauman, ibid: 35). Conceptualisations of class and class analysis have required reformulations to take account of the notion that we are no longer in a "wealth-distributing" but a "risk-distributing" society (Beck 1992: 20). Concomitant to this is the emergence of "social risk positions" which are induced by the unequal distribution and growth of risks, which, Beck argues, broadly follow inequalities of class and strata. He makes it clear that risks are distributed by, overlap and are amplified by class inequality. Thus, for example, credentials have become instrumental across the occupational hierarchy. However, the attainment gap between middle- and working-class school leavers has not narrowed appreciably (Rothon 2007). In fact, the gap between the highest- and lowest-attaining ethnic groups is actually widening (Gillborn 2008), contrary to public policy rhetoric. In objective terms there appears to be a solidifying and intensification of risks (e.g. persistent high levels of youth unemployment) at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy.

Social researchers and commentators have attempted to understand how individualisation is expressed at the level of social institutions, groups and

individuals (Mythen 2005; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Rudd & Evans 1998; Côté 2002; Devadason 2006; Cebulla 2007). This considerable body of evidence broadly supports the social theory of late modern society popularised by Beck. Studies have focused on the changes wrought by economic and technological advances which have reshaped the organisation of international labour markets (Felstead and Jewson 1999), diminished collective class identity and the scope for collective responses to social pressures (Furlong and Cartmel 2007), and compelled individuals to take responsibility, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim state:

> People are condemned to individualization. Individualization is a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to manage, not only one's biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it…while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state etc. (2002: 4)

The question as to whether individuals have had to become stage directors, script writers and lead actors in the drama of their life course has increasingly dominated youth research agendas (Schoon and Silbereisen 2009). Evidence has established persistent patterns of high youth unemployment, the disappearance of entry level jobs requiring few qualifications, and the lengthening of transitions whereby young people have few alternatives but to pursue further education (Furlong et al 2003, Webster et al 2004). However, the social risks and vulnerabilities, the by-products of individualisation, are not equally distributed (Jones 2002; Te Rieli 2004; Mythen 2005). Furlong and Cartmel (2007) used the term 'epistemological fallacy' to capture the illusion that mechanisms reproducing social inequality have been eroded and replaced by individual self-determination and autonomy. Importantly, Furlong and Cartmel (op cit) argue that the epochal change and discontinuity between

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Fordist industrial social structures and those popularised in the individualisation thesis are not as accentuated, sweeping or universal as claimed by Beck; a critique also supported by Mythen (2005).

These contradictions are being explored through the evolution of biographical methods within youth research.  It is believed that such methods are well suited to examine the risk society perspective at the level of actual experience.  Recent examples attesting to the significance of biographical approaches to youth can be observed in the contributions of Hubbard (2000); Furlong and Cartmel (2007); Furlong (2009); Du Bois-Reymond and Stauber (2005); Devadadson (2006, 2007); Henderson et al (2007); Thomson (2009) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009).

The third evident trend is that youth researchers have increasingly examined the extent to which young people are becoming the architects of their life projects, sculpting and refashioning new youth identities and lifestyle choices (Stokes and Wyn 2005).  As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggest, the process of individualisation "consists of transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' – and charging actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences of their performance" (2002: 4).  Consequently, it has been argued that "life narratives provide an ideal medium for research into reflexive processes" (Devadason 2007: 204).  Examining the construction of youth identities to understand young people's negotiation of risks and their strategies for managing the destandardisation of transition pathways raises

questions about the interrelationship between structure and agency and the use of narratives to explore this theme (Hubbard 2000; Thomson 2009).

Scrutinising the accounts young people articulate about their social worlds, in the context of exploring their transition journeys, can reveal the identities that respondents construct, how they piece together biographical plans, and the resources and strategies deployed to achieve these ends. Narrative extracts from three respondents are discussed in depth. These extracts are used as the platform to explore three interrelated themes: firstly, a discussion of the racial identities constructed and interwoven into the stories shared about transition experiences; connected to this, an exploration of the extent to which there is engagement with the notion of the "reflexive project of the self" (Giddens 1991), in which young people consciously develop "do-it-yourself biographies" and "choice biographies" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002); and consequently, an inquiry into what we can learn about the interplay of agency and structure through what these young people reveal in their stories.

Polkinghorne (1995: 16-17) offered seven criteria which should be held in mind to guide and elucidate the features of a story when developing it for presentation. These have been used to help structure the extracts selected, the order in which they are presented (which is not necessarily the order in which they were told) and the interpretations that follow each extract. This process of "narrative smoothing" is explained as follows:

> Human experience does not match a carefully crafted congruent story. It consists of extraneous happenings and everyday chores as well as simultaneous multiple projects. The very act of bringing these happenings into language imposes a higher level of order on them than they have in the flux of everyday experience. (ibid: 16)

The seven criteria are presented below, summarised into keywords.

- cultural heritage and environment

- embodied nature of the protagonist – any physical aspect of the individual's life which is relevant to the story

- influence of significant others

- choices and actions of the central character

- recollection of past experience – human experience is always historically situated

- temporality – beginning, middle and denouement

- a reconstructed outcome which appears plausible and understandable.


## 5.2    Dwight – The biographical trendsetter

The setting in which I first met Dwight and his purpose for being in that location are of biographical significance.   The setting is the conference "London Schools and the Black Child": an event hosted by the MP Diane Abbott and graced with keynote addresses from senior government figures, the Mayor of London, and academics such as David Gillborn and Maude Blair.   The principal debates focus on the school achievements/under-achievements of black pupils.   The conference attendance is huge, usually around 2000 delegates, who are overwhelmingly from minority ethnic communities.   Dwight is there as part of a team of students and staff from Kings College Medical School to promote careers in medicine.   He's been involved in a number of similar events and feels passionate about what he contributes:

> *I like to show that there are ordinary people like me who can do it*
> *It's true*
> *In that respect I feel very strongly about it.*
> *There's a lot of people who could be doctors*

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*who don't have a chance.*
*Given the right guidance*
*they can definitely do it.*

My research interested him as it resonated with his self-identity as someone with a generalised sense of responsibility for making a positive contribution to issues affecting the 'Black community'. Dwight's racial consciousness surfaced in different ways as he shared experiences of his post-school transition. He used the metaphor 'chameleon' to portray versatility and resilience of character.

*Because of the situations I've experienced in life*
*I'm sort of like a chameleon*
*In a sense.*
*You have to be able to adapt to situations*
*you are thrown into.*
*So I've learnt to adapt, really.*

Being like a chameleon and adjusting to the vicissitudes of the circumstances of his life is the hallmark of his narrative. The central thrust of his narrative is his depiction of a character that thinks and acts strategically and frames the identity of a self-starter. It begins with the decision he made to leave his parental home at the age of 11 to live with his grandparents, to get away from "fights, arguments and a lot of physical aggression".

*It seemed the only option to me.*
*I didn't feel the situation I was in was sustainable.*
*I had to pick up and go.*

*And I suppose that's how I'll be*
*for the rest of my life.*
*You just have to do, what you have to do to progress.*
*My main focus in life now*
*is progressing with my degree.*

*But since school days*
*from the age of 11*
*it's been tough.*
*Big transitions.*
*Problems with my family,*
*primary and secondary school.*

*It's been crazy.*
*Everything thrown up in the air.*

He never returned to live with his parents and has infrequent contact with them. He continued living with his grandparents until he moved into student accommodation when he started university. Financial independence came early too. From the age of 14 he had part-time jobs and worked through the summer holidays as he was concerned about being a financial burden on his grandparents. This tumultuous experience also served as a "fateful moment" where he decided it is important to "get somewhere in life", and this internalised self-belief manifests itself in his recollections of certain formative experiences at school. He attended a predominantly "white school" and describes having a "very systematic thought system" when it came to certain things like the "journey with education". This was rooted in the discovery that:

*Not everyone is in the ideal family situation*
*So I was just another person with a difficult situation to deal with*
*So that was cool.*

Dwight also describes being very aware of the prevailing racial stereotypes, the discourse of low expectations, and the anti-school confrontational attitudes which supposedly characterise the behaviour of most black pupils, especially boys. He decided that it didn't make sense to leave school without credentials.

*I know I had to take school seriously.*
*Taking school seriously meant,*
*I guess, taking every opportunity you are given*
*I ended up being put in all the top classes for GCSE.*

*Not because I was good*
*but because I showed I wanted to do better*
*Regardless of what results I got*
*I always felt*
*you may as well do your best.*
*I did and passed 12 GCSEs.*
*It felt good, to have those passes.*

Having worked out that the formal educational culture has the power to impose invidious labels which can lead to the cyclical self-fulfilling prophecy in which black pupils are cast as problematic and undesirable learners (Gillborn 2008), Dwight developed strategies to distance himself from peers who might attract surveillance and control from school authorities. He is acutely sensitised to racial stereotyping which institutionally adheres to Black Caribbean pupils in particular. He takes ameliorative actions to avoid institutional "identity traps" (Youdell 2003) through what he describes as "systematic thought processes". This discussion illustrates the interplay between agency and structure. The narrator is aware of the pervasive practices which racialise the behaviour of particular categories of pupils – based on skin tone and ethnicity – and which can and do lead to poorer educational outcomes (Gillborn 2008; Youdell 2003; Mirza 2009) for those afflicted. Alerted to these risks, Dwight adopts a pro-school strategy. This account further illustrates Dwight's identity claim to be "like a chameleon", making it difficult to cast him one-dimensionally.

In discussing how he arrived at his primary career decision – to study medicine – he recounts the decision to choose a college attended by a higher proportion of black students as he wanted a different experience from what he had at school (being in the minority). Furthermore he experienced a lack of direction in the immediate aftermath of completing GCSEs.

> *To be honest I wasn't sure what to do.*
> *A lot of people felt the same.*
> *You're sort of not sure*
> *as you're not given any direction*
> *so I felt a bit lost.*
>
> *They (teachers) are quick to tell you*
> *What you can't do*
> *Which was based on how you behaved.*
> *But they're not quick*

*to tell you in what areas you might excel.*

*I don't think I ever actually had any careers advice.*
*Ever.*
*Or if I did, it wasn't particularly memorable*
*as it didn't impact at all.*
*Careers advice just didn't exist.*

Two factors catalysed the decision to study medicine. He was academically strong in science subjects and influenced by his work experience at school. He explains;

*I'm interested in forensic pathology.*
*Yeah, it seems like death is a whole taboo.*
*I ended up working with a funeral director*
*when I was at school.*

*I was the only Black guy there.*
*Initially it was a three week placement*
*but I worked there for a while.*
*They liked me and I liked the job.*
*It was really interesting.*

*It seemed a career that no one was interested in.*
*There seemed to be only one Black funeral director*
*in the whole country.*

*I conducted a funeral in Southwick.*
*You should have seen the looks.*
*When the family saw me*
*they were like, "aarghh! That guy*
*he's not part of the family.*
*What's going on here?".*

*They were as confused as hell.*
*It was quite funny.*
*Yeah, it was cool.*
*People had these smiles that was like*
*"Oh you mean Black people do this?"*
*You could tell.*

*All the pall bearers and that were like*
*"look at all the attention you're getting*
*because you're a Black guy doing this"*
*Yeah it was interesting.*
*I felt wow!*
*It must be pretty unusual to see Black people doing this.*

*That was one of the determining factors for me getting into medical school.*
*I felt passionately about the work I'd done before.*
*I used to do embalming*
*with quite a prestigious embalmer in the country*
*he showed me how to embalm.*

*When it came to my medical interview*
*I could show that I had evidence*
*that I was interested in medicine.*

*I was quite passionate about it.*
*I really enjoyed it.*

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*It was good fun.*

In these extracts we see that a causal link is drawn between the unusualness of a black person working for an undertaker; the unusualness of having this type of exposure to a medical environment and the subsequent unusualness of being a young black guy studying medicine.  The foundations of his career identity were clearly laid by this formative experience.  We also witness that he reflexively challenges culturally embedded stereotypes that impose ideological and material limits on the careers that black people pursue. The lesson from the work experience evolved into a "fateful biographical turning point" (Thomson 2009) as he had the right credentials to capitalise on the opportunity to enter medical school.  A central part of the identity constructed by Dwight is that of someone who is acutely aware of the operation of racial hierarchies but who has the capability to formulate self-definitions which support his life plan. His capacity to act reflexively and to "keep a particular narrative going" (Giddens 1991) is sorely tested in medical school where his 'difference' and 'otherness' are made palpable through routine social interactions.

*In terms of my medical programme,*
*I feel proud to be one of the first West Indians on the programme*
*Yeah, I feel pretty good about that.*
*I had to wait until I came to university to see*
*My first West Indian doctor.*

*In some ways it's quite depressing.*
*But it was also exciting to see that people*
*From the West Indies over here*
*are doing medicine*
*and graduating to consultancy level.*

*I've just been trying to prove myself*
*to the people around me.*
*Because you still have people*
*looking down on you*
*because you're a Black guy*
*with cornrows.*

*You're perceived differently*
*because of the way you dress*
*the way you behave*

*the way you talk.*

*It's obvious you are not from the same upbringing or social class*
*As the majority of students here*
*not just the medical students*
*a lot of students who study at Kings.*

*They always think, "he's not gone to public school".*
*Makes you want to prove that you are good*
*if not a better candidate for medicine than they are*
*Yeah it's true*
*Because of the situations I've experienced in life*
*I'm sort of like a chameleon, in a sense.*

Both race and class differences culminate in self-imposed pressures to prove himself, an example of an individualised response to social risks. Dwight engages in sophisticated identity work to manage the pressures which ensue from being a black guy while interacting in a culturally elite environment. We see up close how he skilfully manages his transition as a reflexive biographical project where, as the central character, he takes ownership of developing and executing this phase of his life plan.

## 5.3    Melanie – "there are many opportunities to get it wrong"

*And you know, if you haven't got the wider thinking*
*About education*
*Like education is the answer*
*Then things fall apart*
*They fall apart.*

Melanie has struggled to develop a clear career direction, although she has a strong sense of the sort of person she plans to become and the lifestyle she plans to create, and education is a core part of this imagery. Her educational journey hasn't always delivered what she anticipated and she has experienced a great deal of uncertainty with the choices she has made. Yet her educational trajectory has been unfolding over the past eight years – punctuated by a year out on maternity leave but resumed in her continued

quest to satisfy her educational desires. Preventing things "falling apart" is central to her experience of transition. Education is the goal she has pursued to meet social expectations on a number of levels: personal ambition for social mobility; the determination to have social status through having a professional occupation; the commitment to confirm to her parents that their struggles as migrants in British society has been worthwhile, by advancing socially and economically in ways unavailable to their generation.

Parental aspiration for her and her brother to do well academically is prominent in her story.

*In my upbringing education was stressed.*
*It's always been put in my head*
*that, you know, it's the key*
*the key to success really*
*and that without it*
*You're not much*

*My parents always gave extra help*
*Saturday school*
*Private tuition*
*So it's always been drummed into me*
*That education is the right and natural thing.*

Melanie didn't do as well as expected at school so her early post-16 decisions were based on retaking GCSEs. This was followed by doing a two-year business course because she hoped to please her father, a course of action she later regretted because she believed it was simply the wrong thing to do.

*The GNVQ in business, it wasn't specific enough to what I wanted to do*
*I also think that because my dad was in that kind of a field, the business field*
*I was erm…trying to please him*
*It wasn't so much a decision for myself*
*I was doing what I felt he would think was right.*

*So those two years was really strenuous for me*
*Because I mean it was bad enough doing a course*
*When you want to do it*
*But when you are doing it because of what someone else perhaps wants*
*It makes it even harder.*

After she completed this course of study, Melanie's frustration with her educational decision was compounded by her realisation that having a basic business qualification did not equip her to start a nursery business.

*I did that GNVQ*
*because at the time I thought*
*OK I wanna open a nursery*
*so I thought taking that route, the GNVQ*
*would give me the foundation*
*Which I think I hated every moment of that.*

*But obviously if I had spoken to the right people*
*perhaps they'd be able to say*
*Well childhood studies would have covered childcare*
*so you know, perhaps I could have gone straight into that instead.*

*Because even now*
*I don't think the knowledge that I gained*
*from that GNVQ*
*has furthered me any more*
*Or even helped me really.*

*And I think it was a case as well*
*Of not wanting to stray into work*
*You know.*
*Getting a job and straying away from what I wanted to do*
*So in my head, I thought it would be better*
*To keep going*
*Even if it's a course I'm not particularly interested in.*

*As well as working part-time*
*I've always worked part-time from the age of 15*
*And particularly being in those jobs*
*That's not where you want to be*
*And unless you further yourself educationally*
*Well, what else are you gonna do?*

*Then I went on to do the childhood studies HND*
*I completed that*
*From there I went on to start the BA*
*Which I'm still not 100% about.*

*Well without the honours*
*I'm not much further on than*
*When I competed the HND.*
*I don't think it's really recognised out there*
*Without the honours*
*So I'm going to go back and do the honours*
*Simply because it would make this year*
*A waste of time really.*

*It makes sense for me to complete the honours*
*and that's where I'm at the moment.*

At the time of her interview she was almost at the end of the BA degree with a further year to complete to receive an honours classification, which she

subsequently did achieve.  She regards her post-16 journey as tortuous as she feels she did not receive the right advice at the right time, which resulted in her making ill-conceived decisions.  Education has been an important part of her life project; this is the thread which prevents things falling apart.  She had the opportunity to convert her part-time job to full-time but she chose instead to continue to balance study, employment and motherhood.  This decision is based on her strong identification with securing higher-status, professional work, possibly in the field of teaching or social work.

A firm sense of who she wants to become and her lifestyle aspirations drove Melanie to make a long-term commitment to develop human capital in spite of experiencing disappointments with the career options exercised. For example, at the time of her first interview she was living at home with her mother and her young daughter.  This enabled her to accumulate some savings, and with her father's help she planned within the following 12 months to purchase a property.  When I had a further conversation with her some 15 months after the first interview, she had just bought a house in the same road where her mother lived.

She lays some blame for her poor career decisions on herself, because of her uncertainty about what profession she wants to go into, and on the fact that her family are not well connected: for instance, there's no family history of further or higher education, so neither informal nor formal knowledge was available through social networks.  Neither did she find official information sources useful, and therefore she "did it off her own back" through trial and

error.  The risk of becoming distracted from her educational trajectory was ever present throughout the eight-year period.  Strategies for managing these risks appear threefold.  Strong obligations to her parents, in what Thomson (2009) described as "a family educational project" of reciprocal obligations, were manifested in the strong desire for upward social mobility.  Failing to get into a professional occupation would have been tantamount to betraying her parents' struggle as first generation migrants.  As she explains:

> *Yeah, you know part of it (sticking to plans) was doing the right thing.*
> *What your parents think you should do*
> *like stay in education.*
> *I think I knew it was the right thing for myself*
> *but I also think it was expected of me.*
>
> *It was expected of me to go to college.*
> *And it was expected of me to go to university.*
> *So you don't want to let yourself down*
> *but not to let down your family as well*
> *you continue on*
> *whether you feel it's right for you or not.*

Anxieties about ending up in 'dead-end jobs' and being a 'statistic' (single mother in social housing) motivated the commitment to long-term educational goals.  Anxieties about her longer-term financial security underpinned her decision not to get bound to employment too early, where she would become committed to earnings today at the expense of positioning herself for higher earnings tomorrow.  These strategies form part of her "reflexive project of the self" (Giddens 1991) and the deployment of "identity capital" (Cote 2002) to nurture her capability of "fitting in" to late modern social environments requiring individualised responses to socially produced risks and contradictions.

**5.4    Wayne – "I'm in first gear, moving forward but at a snail's pace"**

Wayne is the eldest respondent and at 25 feels his life has not moved out of the slow lane.  However, that reality is presented by him as a subtext; his poor material circumstances do not define his sense of identity.  He adopts a very definite subject position: namely, he defines himself by his voluntary work as a playgroup leader and community role model; the fact of his underemployment is in the background.  These are dominant features of his identity.  Wayne lives with his mother and younger brother on the housing estate where the adventure playground is located.  He grew up and went to school and college in the same locality.  He works part-time for a large supermarket nearby.  He has a five-year-old son who lives with his former partner and he maintains his job in the supermarket because of his responsibilities.  Although he feels trapped, his options are limited and it's important to him to be able to support his son.  He has experienced several periods of unemployment, the longest being six months, but has not been unemployed since the birth of his son.

At 25 he believes he should be living independently.  Whilst there's no pressure to do so, he would like to move from the flat he shares with his mother and brother and rent his own accommodation, but he does not earn enough and is very uncertain as to when such a prospect would materialise.  This is why he describes himself as being in "first gear": he has no clear or firm plan which might bring about a change in his current situation, either in the near or the distant future.  He acknowledges that his poor record of achievement at school set in motion the subsequent pattern of poor employment prospects; he would like to get a job which interests him but his

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opportunities are curtailed by his limited qualifications. He shares what he's been up to the past few years:

> When I left school, I didn't really have much to do
> I didn't like have the grades, like top grades
> I did have a certain amount of grades.
> From year seven I was diagnosed as dyslexic
> and I didn't get much help
> I did stay on in school for another year
> and did a GNVQ in sports
> I was always interested in sports
> I passed that.
>
> I then did a football coaching course
> But I needed to be out working
> Like since I left secondary school
> I've been working; only once I couldn't find any work
> I haven't sat at home doing nothing.
>
> And then Fulham offered me a job
> coaching kids like
> I'm still working for them,
> coaching in the community
> I coach kids at different primary schools
> So I've been coaching ever since
> I get paid £15.00 an hour.
>
> If I had a higher badge, I would get more
> But right now I can't afford the course fees
> I like working with the young people
> And even if I had a 9-5 job
> I'd still be doing coaching.

The issues of the dyslexia diagnosis, institutional failures to provide an adequate response, and the subsequent poor outcomes at 16 are integrally linked for Wayne. However, he doesn't dwell on these failures, and instead focuses on portraying himself as someone who hasn't sat around doing nothing. A crucial aspect of his identity, the way he wishes to be seen, is the work he does "coaching in the community": an activity which he has undertaken for several years, and which he regards as a constant in an otherwise piecemeal employment history. This is not the only community-based work he does, as will be shown in later extracts. A core feature of his narrative is that he engages in socially responsible work in which he actively contributes to the betterment of his immediate community. These are activities

which he finds personally rewarding and which symbolise the qualities which define him. His circumstances are, however, limited by two structural constraints which affect his day-to-day existence. The first arises by virtue of low attainment, which means he is excluded from opportunities in the London labour market. In the first three years he attempted to improve his vocational credentials as he states:

> *There's a lot of things I would like to do personally*
> *Like get a better job*
> *I was thinking I might need to go back to college*
> *My dad's always been on at me to "get a trade".*
>
> *He says, "You can't go hungry if you got a trade"*
> *When I left 6th form, I did do a bricklaying course*
> *But I left after six weeks; I quit*
> *That's the first thing I actually did quit.*
>
> *But I didn't quit college*
> *I went and did a tiling course*
> *But that was a bit dull*
> *I did finish the course though*
> *But I haven't done any tiling since.*
>
> *I'm thinking of going back and doing something*
> *Like plumbing or electronics*
> *But I'm not sure.*

As he hasn't managed to "get himself a trade" by his mid 20s, his job prospects are limited. He's had various retail jobs and at the time of the interview he was working part-time in the local supermarket, but he is actually under-employed and desires to secure full-time employment. Whilst recognising that his employability is inhibited by inadequate skills, he hasn't managed to translate this knowledge into actions to improve his material circumstances.

The second structural constraint is integral to the first. His prospects for "bettering himself" are curtailed by insufficient financial means. Whilst he would like to achieve a higher-level football coaching certificate he cannot

afford the course fees. Also, his independence and adult status are compromised by being unable to "stand on his own two feet". He's uncertain, for example, when he would be able to afford to live independently.

In his account of how life has unfolded for him, he links his weak employment prospects to his failure to undertake specific vocational training, such as an apprenticeship, and to not receiving "proper advice".

> *Most likely, I'll need to get some more education*
> *whether it be electronics or plumbing*
> *to get to another level basically*
> *I really should have done an apprenticeship*
> *cos it's just more practical.*
>
> *If I'd done that*
> *I'll probably be working in something that I like doing*
> *I could have been developing my life better*
> *To give myself a better opportunity to do certain things.*
>
> *My mum made sure I never missed school*
> *She always told me not to muck about*
> *But then the school adviser was rubbish*
> *He really didn't give me much information.*
>
> *They should give you proper advice*
> *About getting into further education*
> *Or whether you should do an apprenticeship*
> *I didn't even know what's on offer*
> *They should arrange a date*
> *With your parents*
> *To discuss these things*
> *A lot of us would have benefited.*

The interplay of structure and agency can be observed in two respects. Wayne interprets his current restricted prospects as being linked to past poor careers information. This consequently (again through his eyes) meant he failed to acquire higher-level skills which could have helped to improve his employment outcomes. The exercise of agency is limited to ensuring that he attended school and did not "muck about", but does not extend to a sense of responsibility for actively managing his career path. He is sharply critical of the failings of official sources of advice and guidance. Lack of access to careers

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guidance can operate as a structural exclusion mechanism by depriving those who are disadvantaged of official support which, if available and used effectively, can have a constructive impact on life chances. However, it is also possible to observe that, at an individual level, Wayne lacks the knowledge to make realistic decisions and to capitalise on the 'choices' available to him in a commoditised education/labour market. His agency is "bounded" (Rudd & Evans 1998) by a lack of power to act instrumentally or pragmatically (Jones 2009) in the face of the demands of "institutionalised individualism" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 23) or the requirement that individuals assemble "do-it-yourself" biographies (op. cit).

Wayne's circumstances bear some resemblance to features which Jones (2009: 98) characterises as "failed fast-track transitions". This term describes the tendency, predominantly among working-class young people, to seek early financial independence through employment, while running the risk of unemployment and of being locked into a persistent cycle of insecure low-paid work. Such young people are more susceptible to risks of homelessness, lone parenthood, and drug or alcohol abuse. The description only applies in a limited way because Wayne has two important protective factors shielding him from these effects: continuing family support, and his voluntary work which is of biographical significance as it gives meaning to his daily practices; he explains:

> *I can maybe branch out*
> *Into youth work*
> *Or something like that*
> *Yeah it's possible, but not sure which direction yet.*
>
> *I do have skills*
> *I've learnt a lot from working here (adventure playground & youth club)*

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*I come every day*
*After my shift*
*The kids and the youth know me*
*Look up to me, like*
*I help them learn from their mistakes.*

*The kids need someone local*
*Where they know you and you know them*
*To encourage them like*
*That's gonna come up and say*
*"Alright then, you're doing the right thing".*
*That's gonna actually say, "well done"*
*That you're doing well and that*
*You're going in the right direction*
*And stuff like that.*

*That's why I keep doing this*
*For the youth*
*It's not like you're gonna find*
*Some sports people coming*
*Down here to encourage the kids*
*It's got to be someone local.*

Wayne certainly didn't regard himself as socially excluded or living at the margins of society. In the social policy lexicon such labels would seem appropriate descriptors of his circumstances. This reflects the dissonance between the labels so readily applied to young people and young people's actual constructions of their identity. What is demonstrated here is the sense in which his identity has multiple strands. Indeed, it has the characteristics of "frustrated agency" (Jones 2009) whereby progress towards independence and adult status is undermined by restricted access to employment. This is nevertheless moderated by the community work from which he acquires adult status and 'street credibility'. Doing this for a sustained period of time has given him biographical coherence as opposed to a 'breakdown biography'.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The three extracts illustrate in detail the social ingredients which influence and give shape to the experience of transition for these young people. The stories generated give insight into personal themes which are the undercurrents to

their biographical agency and which motivate their individual decision-making behaviour. It has been possible to glimpse the personal scenarios which unfolded in particular post-school trajectories. We also observed how these three individuals articulated the causes and effects of the choices they made. The purpose for examining narratives is, however, not restricted to peering into individual lives, driven by the cultural practice of the 'interview society' (Silverman 2005). The more serious intent is to engage in a wider sociological discussion about the social processes enmeshed within the particular narrative, and specifically to interpret the degree to which the accounts reveal processes of individualisation and how this might be framed and understood as related to racialised identities. Mythen (2005) refers to this as making a "hermeneutical leap" from macro-processes to assumed subjective experiences. Difficult though this is, as she contends, it is valuable to "factor in the missing experiential angles in order to understand how lay actors understand, negotiate and deal with individualization" (2005: 138) in the routine of living.

The three cases reflect three divergent individualised transition trajectories. The biographical plans are moulded by the "cultural knowledgeability" (Adams 2003) of the individual. For example, Wayne cannot be regarded as pursuing a reflexive project because he has limited knowledge about how to engineer opportunities and therefore experiences entrapment and dependence on meagre family resources. However, the case of Dwight is an example of how personal choice, unfettered by social conventions, has culminated in decisions which give the appearance of autonomy and self-direction. Thus, whilst we

see evidence of attempts at constructing reflexive projects, these are immanently bound to the economic, social and cultural resources available to the individual. Reflexive projects are neither divorced from nor meaningful outside the individual's socio-structural milieu. As Adams (2003) argues, reflexivity is integral to how the self is constructed in post-industrial society, and to imply that it has unique or special qualities to empower individuals to rise above social location is itself a product of an unreflexive modernist practice.

However, the value derived from seeing biographical plans as reflexive projects does not lie in the idea that individuals are liberated from structural impediments, able to act autonomously in pursuit of 'choice biographies', because the evidence for this is weak. The value of this notion lies in the insight produced into the interplay of structure and agency and how this underpins the decisions made by the young people. There is little value in privileging either structure or agency because they overlap and are intertwined. For example, a liberal transition regime is claimed to characterise the prevailing transition arrangements in the UK (Schoon and Silbereisen 2009). In this model, transition pathways and career options are loosely structured, welfare support is minimal, early financial independence of young adults is presumed and the availability of official careers information is sporadic and diffused. At the microscopic level of the three cases discussed, the winners are those with the ability (or, to borrow Cote's term, those who possess the "identity capital") to think and act strategically or tactically to engineer career plans. The losers are those bereft of the capacity to exercise

biographical agency because of impaired knowledge and the constraints born of economic and information poverty.

The accounts provide clues to the meanings these young people attribute to the career decisions/non-decisions they have made and the reflexive processes which have shaped the identities they have constructed. The cases can be placed along a continuum.  At one end you have an individual with highly evolved capabilities to function under the pressures of modern risk society (good human capital formation, social and cultural capital); at the other end an individual with much weaker capabilities to function as an adult, in the situation of being a 'neither-nor' (Mythen 2005); neither unemployed nor securely employed.  Between these extremes you have an individual who works tactically to improve her capabilities in spite of a number of false starts and cul-de-sacs.  Notwithstanding this diversity, some common features are shared.

Careers guidance and support is diffused and confusing and is perceived to be woefully inadequate, even for the more competent and accomplished.  The plethora of post-school options are like 'straws in the wind' if the most and least able lack confidence and access to appropriate sources of information. The three cases discussed shared their disillusionment with official sources of careers information.  The risk of exposure to yo-yo transitions is exacerbated even for those with strong transition capital.  The inadequacies of institutional arrangements were regarded as deleterious in their effects on future career/work opportunities.

# Chapter 6

## No Golden Age: How race matters in the experience of the transitions of black youth

> The issue is not about privileging the macro or the micro level of analysis, but rather how articulating discourses and practices inscribe social relations, subject positions and subjectivities (Brah 1996: 115).

### 6.1    Introduction

The discussion of the findings will concentrate on examining three propositions. Firstly, it is asserted that the tacit knowledge of the existence of racially hierarchical social structures (e.g. as manifested in multifarious social practices) colours constructions of the self and moulds young people's perceptions of their horizons (Archer and Yamashita 2003). In this respect race is inseparably entangled with transition decisions and experiences.

Secondly, institutional structures that play important roles in transition outcomes (schools, training provisions and labour markets) are not racially neutral, and operate in ways which reproduce unequal outcomes which are not wholly contingent on class location. When analysing factors connected to transition outcomes, Müller and Gangl (2003: 13) suggested one considers questions such as: how inequalities in education are translated into barriers to entry to the labour market, and whether there are inequalities in the transition process itself. The central argument is that black youth (including those of mixed heritage) are confronted with and have to negotiate myriad social risks as they make their transitions to adulthood. Degrees of vulnerability are mediated through class-based resources in the form of social, cultural and economic capital. Nevertheless, the uncertainty and risk pervading the social

environments of black youth are disproportionate in comparison to other young people.  For example, the threat of school exclusion is not strongly correlated to class but is to black youth identities (Wright et al 2005, 2010). Young people in this study, from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, have had to confront and negotiate ways around school exclusion practices.

Finally, the young people's accounts of their lives draw liberally on relevant aspects of their histories, display awareness of class differentials, and allude to the interactions of race and gender, in making sense of their past experiences, interpreting the present and envisioning the future.  This points to the necessity in youth transitions for developing a "theoretical consciousness" (Du Bois-Reymond 1997: 152) about the ways different social inequalities intersect (not just class and gender).  The final strand of this discussion will therefore emphasise that youth research has scope to explore the intersecting nature of the social categories that are the subject of our analyses.  This notion is well put by Prins (2006), commenting on the intersecting nature of forms of social inequality:

> Gender is always lived in the modality of ethnicity, class and nationality in the modalities of race and gender, and class in the modalities of gender and nationality. (p.277)

## 6.2    The insights of biography

The data presented in chapters four and five combine knowledge which can be regarded as objective (i.e. social locations of the young people in the study and their biographical trajectories) and subjective knowledge such as respondents' depictions of their fluid identities as they traverse their early adulthood.   This study aimed to make more transparent the micro-level

processes of transitions encountered by the research subjects, and to thrust into the spotlight snapshots in time of actual lives, so often obscured within grand sociological narratives (Knowles 1999: 110). By placing biographical accounts centre-stage it is possible to observe some of the processes alluded to in Brah's comment cited above. In the absence of investigations which seek to examine actual lives at close range, theory is adept at running ahead of itself, as cautioned by Roberts (1997). Goodwin and O'Connor's (2005) work is a good example of empirical work which challenged the consensus that in the 1960s and 70s youth transitions were fairly linear for the majority of young people. It was demonstrated that, in that era too, transitions were uncertain and reversible and often culminated in frustrated aspirations. We recognise the importance of large-scale cross-sectional studies which deliver insights into widespread socio-structural changes, such as the impact of deindustrialisation on youth employment opportunities (Blossfeld 2005).

However, patterns of aggregate change obscure the impact of societal processes on biographical circumstances (Elliott 2005). When the enquiry lens is angled on individual biographies, it brings into view new and different contours of the phenomena of our enquiry (Elliott 2005: 119). By using a biographical approach it has been possible to reveal who are socially disadvantaged face post-16 transitions with minimal capabilities to navigate the individualised post-16 marketplace. It has been observed that young people in my typology 'resource straitened', for example, experience structural disadvantage emanating from their race and class position. It has also been

possible to identify the importance of different forms of capital, including the strength of ethnic identities in fostering meaning in post-16 decisions.

Whilst the social position of minority youth has been the subject of extensive research generally, especially in disciplines such as education, cultural studies and criminology, only limited work has been done utilising biographical approaches within sociology (Knowles 1999). There has been a paucity of work examining the specific nature of post-16 transitions of minority youth (France 2007: 77), although there are some notable exceptions (Mirza 1992; Tamboukou and Ball 2002; Archer 2002; Cassidy et al 2006; Wright 2010).

This study builds on these contributions from several perspectives. It presents evidence of the relationship between the young people's structural locus and their subjective explanations of their career decisions. My explorations offer further insight, not only into the shaping of transitions by structural conditions, but also, and equally important, as Ecclestone (2007) observes, into the interaction of agency and identity in forming transition decisions. The identities that young people fashion and present are central to their transitions (Ball et al 2000; Thomson 2002). The narratives offer an appreciation of some of the unique ways in which race, class and identity intermesh in creating young people's sense of who they are and the futures they imagine. For black youth, transition paths are littered with risks and structural barriers. The evidence displays this. Yet the subjective accounts do not enact self-pity, nor do they convey individuals as hapless victims of personal or institutional failings. On the contrary, what is on display is evidence accentuating autonomy and self-

direction. The accounts do not portray transitions as "movement through ordered sequences" but as multiple engagements with different ways of "being" and "becoming" (Ecclestone 2007: 3).

Assumptions embedded in discourses within youth transitions research and theorising are questioned for their tendency to homogenise the experiences of disparate ethnic groups. Such approaches ignore and erase the distinctiveness of transition experiences. The importance of this is put succinctly by Gunaratnam (2003: 30) who argues that "all social identities are heterogeneous and when we homogenise we perform internal erasure of difference". The findings corroborate this by empirically revealing significant variations in social, economic and cultural practices within this small sample, and these variations create quite divergent transition outcomes.

Thus the acknowledgement of multiplicity and complexity undermines assertions of the similarity of social situations across diverse majority/minority ethnic groups. The Millennium Cohort Study is a longitudinal study designed to capture data about the impact of social conditions from birth to early childhood. In the design of the survey there was explicit recognition that, because social groups differ along multiple dimensions, combining groups together would obscure crucial differences (Dex and Rosenberg 2008). Generalisations of this nature have to be disputed:

> Claims of a crisis in black families [not all black families are working class] have to be placed alongside a crisis in white working-class families experiencing similar destabilising effects as neighbourhoods declined and work disappeared. (Webster 2009: 71-72)

They subsume ethnic inequalities under unitary categories such as 'working-class youth', thereby silencing the specificities of subordinate groups, and fail to unmask the ways in which inequalities have differential impacts upon various social groups.

To recapitulate, studying biographies can elicit the intricacies of the relationship between young people, their social context, their identities and the social actions that create particular experiences of transition. Furthermore, biographies reflect characteristics of racialised identities. Young people's interpretation of their social world is embedded within their identities, which exert important influences on their career decisions (Ball et al 2000). To understand the transition experience of this subset of young black people, it is necessary to look behind ostensible similarities of class location, for example, and to be receptive to the ways in which race is implicated in the experiences conveyed.

## 6.3    Identity: the intangible resource in transitions

In youth transitions research it is markedly unusual to find research contributions which discuss matters pertaining to race, identity and subjective experiences of transition in the same theoretical space (Tamboukou and Ball 2002). These facets are brought together in this discussion by exploring how ethnic identity is a strong undercurrent in the shaping of career decisions. Contrary to Willis' claim (cf Griffin 2005: 196) that race is an inert social category relative to class, it is shown that it is effective across different social classes in framing youth identities and biographical orientations.

There are many ways of conceptualising identity. The conceptualisation I have found useful is that offered by Ricoeur as interpreted by Elliott (2005: 125).

> Ricoeur highlights the fact that the term 'identity' can be understood in two different ways. On the one hand there is the notion of identity as exactly the same, equivalent or identical (i.e. an authentic, essential core with stable characteristics). Alternatively, identity can be used to refer to continuity or something that can be traced through time or permanence through time without sameness (or fixity).

The latter interpretation is the one of interest. Ricoeur suggests that narrative is the resource used to reconfigure past events to make sense of the present. Narratives fuel the sense of temporal unity of the self whereby the "reconstructed present and reinterpreted past" (ibid: 126) are perceived as a continuum, extending towards a projected future. The narratives are inscribed with what Hall (2000) refers to as the "Caribbean uniqueness" built on "ruptures and discontinuities" with history ascribing "what we have become" (Hall 2000: 394); namely, cultural identities fashioned from a colonial legacy which thrives in cultural discourses. Young people in this research have appropriated their racialised social identities as a resource both for contesting pervasive stigmatising stereotypes and for reaffirming positive identifications embodied in such notions as 'becoming somebody'. Identity is not a stable, settled phenomenon, but as depicted by Hall is subject to a "continuous play on history, culture and power" (p.394). In her study of Swedish migrants, Devadason (2006: 163) also argued that awareness of (stigmatised) ethnic minority status exerted a powerful influence on conceptions of identity and personal aspirations.

A useful illustration of this is a scene from the narrative of respondent 17, who was good at sports and "academics" (captain of the netball team and in top sets for most subjects). She recounts feeling under pressure to participate in sporting competitions ("to bring back those trophies") but felt that her academic potential was sidelined. To the chagrin of the school, her guardian withdrew her from all sporting activities and instructed her to concentrate on her academic work, because "the only thing you have as a black person is to have more qualifications than that white person". This is an example of how a racialised subject position has been exploited to challenge social practices interpreted as infringing on a preferred identity, i.e. one that balanced athletic prowess with academic conscientiousness.

Howarth (2006: 77-78) has used the idea of resistance to social representations to argue that stigmatised groups are active agents in the co-construction of identities that contest and resist "hegemonic representations" which disempower subordinate groups. She argues that the practice is articulated in marginalised identities. Support for this can be found across the four typologies presented in chapter four. Here we find a collective adherence to the belief in the existence of institutional discrimination and its myriad manifestations. The association between minority ethnic status and its attendant disadvantages is indelibly etched into the subjectivities portrayed by the majority of respondents. Evidence of this reproduction is located within family cultures (cf. Appendix 4.1: Kinship influences). In this regard, these cultural practices are not correlated to class location, as evidenced by Ogbu's work on racial stratification in the US (Ogbu 1997).

Across the four typologies, it was found that the majority of young people, even those who were socio-economically disadvantaged and with low attainments, were driven to do better than their parents' generation in terms of occupational attainment. As Mirza (1992, 2009) also found in her ethnographic work with black females, the majority had no desire to replicate the occupational status of their parents; they aspired to higher status positions. Their knowledge of the constraints experienced by their parents, as first generation migrants, combined with the awareness of continuing discriminatory forces operating in labour markets (Berthoud 1999; Fergusson 2007), has fuelled the quest for better and more qualifications. This factor influences the higher participation rates of students from minority backgrounds in further and higher education (Drew 1995; Modood et al 1997; Leslie and Drinkwater 1999). Another factor in this complex interplay of race and its inculcation in decisions, pre- and post-16, is the idea of racialised identity as a protective feature in the mitigation of risks and the reinforcement of resilience (Eccles 2006). This can be conceived as having self-awareness about the power dynamics at play between school authorities and black students, who are very aware of their vulnerability to greater surveillance, control and punishment. The perception that black kids are treated less favourably was held by the majority of respondents, a factor consistently identified by other research (Warren 2005; Wright et al 2005, 2010; Youdell 2003), and is a by-product of what Warren terms the "racialised and racialising effects of educational practices" (Warren 2005: 244).

How can racialised identities act as a protective feature in negotiating the passage through secondary education? Black Caribbean students are very aware that they are cast as folk devils by school cultures and practices. In research on risk and resilience, Schoon (2006) argued that individuals developed positive adaptations to risk exposure through "adaptive functioning", where psychosocial resources are used to develop new coping skills and the ability to navigate life course obstacles (Schoon 2006: 11). Others have suggested that the strategies black students develop for institutional survival are "intimately connected with having a positive identity" (Youdell 2003: 4) and having a "private racial regard and self-esteem" (Rowley et al 1997). This latter quality was found by Rowley to be positively related to success in public examination for African-American students. One explanation offered for this was the students' anticipation that their race would be an obstacle in society generally and consequently they had to work harder. This effect can work in the opposite direction too, where African-Americans opt out of education because they believe their efforts will not be rewarded fairly (Ogbu 1997). In the UK context, Maylor (2009) asserts that a political awareness of being 'black', where one is sensitised to the term's historical, cultural and political accretions, can lead to one behaving 'politically' through asserting one's identity.

In my sample there are examples of young people engaging in identity performances which, they believed, helped their passage through secondary schooling. These identity performances are observed particularly, but not exclusively, among young people with strong educational attainments.

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Examples of these were expressed in various ways: "keeping your head down" so as not to become entangled in webs of sub-cultural behaviours and thus become labelled as behaving "the way teachers expect black kids to behave" (respondents 14 and 17); avoiding the "self-fulfilling prophecy" (disruptive and confrontational – respondents 6 and 20); "being smarter and more confident than them (white kids) who treat you bad" (respondent 17); attending Saturday school to bolster confidence, learn about black history and to strengthen subject knowledge (respondents 1, 11 and 21); garnering support from family members who "know the system" to challenge successfully unjust attempts at exclusion (respondents 9 and 10).

In this study the more academically successful adopted positions diametrically opposite to the counter-school cultures that are widely reported as perpetuating the proportionally lower attainments of black students – especially boys (Sewell 1997; Youdell 2003). However, my evidence is more weighted towards an interpretation where young people's awareness of the longer-term consequences of poor educational outcomes leads some to reflexively evaluate the price of countering the perceived 'disrespect' they encounter in school environments against the risk of failing to acquire the credentials necessary to 'get somewhere in life'.

## 6.4    Risky transitions and uncertain horizons

> Ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in the labour market, in ways and to degrees, that go beyond the experience of whites ... even when explanatory variables (i.e. education, economic environment, age and fluency in English language) have been accounted for. (Cabinet Office 2003: 34)

> By almost any indicator, young people of Caribbean or African heritage receive the least benefit from their participation in English schools, whether

that be in terms of attainment, exclusions or entry into labour markets. (Warren 2005: 243)

A consistent theme in the wider literature on the education and labour market experience of black youth is that they are economically and socially disadvantaged relative to white groups from "charter populations" (Heath and Cheung 2007). Ethnic differentials are widely documented and persist over time. Patterns of ethnic inequalities are reported in terms of educational attainments (Tomlinson 1991; Mirza and Gillborn 2000; Rothon 2007; Gillborn 2008); participation in post-compulsory education (Drew 1995; Leslie and Drinkwater 1999; Owen et al 2000; Loury et al 2005); levels of employment/unemployment (Modood et al 1997; Heath and Cheung 2006); occupational status and income (Fitzgerald et al 2000; Clark and Drinkwater 2007); and levels of financial inclusion/exclusion and family poverty (Platt 2007).

The picture of the socio-economic position of black youth does reflect continuity and change. Socio-economic inequalities have been durable across generations but it would be an over-simplification to say there have been no intergenerational changes. Whilst my study is of the "soft qualitative type" (Roberts 2007), yielding evidence which is not generalisable, I hope to demonstrate that there are some broad upward shifts in occupational attainments, as found by Heath and McMahon (2005) and Clark and Drinkwater (2007) and reflected in the development of 'identity capital', components of which include human and cultural capital requisite for adaptive functioning in modern labour markets (Bynner 1998). Interestingly the

qualitative studies which have examined the school-to-work transition experiences of black youth have veered towards focusing on young people who tend to have low attainments, are economically marginalised by unemployment and are labelled as 'disaffected' (Wench and Hassan 1996; Britton 2002 et al; Archer and Yamashita 2003). There is no denying that a significant proportion of black youngsters do fall into these categories. However, as my findings have shown, fewer than 50% of the cohort fit into these categories, so it is important to highlight alternative examples of young people's social situations.

## 6.5    Precarious transitions

Solomos (1983) emphasised that the school-to-work transition of black youth was pervaded by the racially discriminatory effects of the labour market, resulting in extremely high levels of unemployment amongst black youth. A study of the educational and vocational experience of minority youth by Eggleston et al (1986: 243) found that 64 per cent of white youth seeking full-time employment secured work within a period of 1-3 months whilst only 12.5 per cent of Afro-Caribbeans managed to do the same. Black youths are likely to be unemployed for much longer periods than their white counterparts and their employment rates are highly sensitive to economic fluctuations (Berthoud 1999). It has consistently been shown that they experience rates of unemployment at least twice as high as those of white youths, with even higher rates in areas densely populated by other Black Caribbeans (Fitzgerald et al 2000). Fitzgerald found, for example, that the unemployment rate for Black Caribbean men aged 18-30 in his study was 33 per cent, compared to 8

per cent for white males. A number of studies have established a close relationship between qualifications and risk of unemployment. Poorly qualified young people experience higher levels and longer periods of unemployment (Drew 1995; Fitzgerald 2000; Berthoud 1999), a phenomenon also replicated across European economies (OECD 2005). Notwithstanding this, minority groups such as Black Caribbeans, as found by Berthoud (1999: 3), are "nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their white counterparts with similar qualifications". It has been shown that labour market returns from qualifications are consistently lower for minority groups (Heath and McMahon 2000).

Black Caribbeans are just as likely to participate in vocational training and programmes to ameliorate unemployment. Beck et al (2006) found that youngsters of Black Caribbean origin were more interested in participating in "full-time jobs with structured training" but were less informed about routes into apprenticeships (p.676). In an evaluation of the New Deal for Young People, Fergusson (2007) established that discriminatory practices were being reproduced. For example, the New Deal respondents from minority groups, on the whole, had higher levels of qualifications than their white counterparts but were less likely to secure a place on the 'subsidised employment' option and were found concentrated in areas with poor employment outcomes. A final example to show that Black Caribbeans experience many disadvantages in the labour market is the widely reported evidence of 'ethnic penalties'. This term is used to describe factors which contribute to labour market disadvantages. These disadvantages remain after explanatory variables have been factored

into analytical models isolating the effects of various factors contributing to ethnic differentials in the labour market. Heath and Cheung's (2006) extensive investigation into the operation of ethnic penalties concluded that the chance of securing employment in the salaried class is much weaker for Black Caribbeans even where they possess the requisite employment-enhancing characteristics.

These examples of social practices create discriminatory outcomes and evidently reproduce social inequality within transition pathways, consequently reinforcing exclusionary barriers. It is not suggested that the racialised practices illustrated are the only causes of the transition risks that black youth negotiate as normalised aspects of their transitions. The social significance of race/ethnicity interacts with social class to structure the conditions and intensity of the risks which emanate within transition processes, shaping options and 'choices'. As Weis (2009) observes, neither race nor class operates independently or autonomously; their interrelationship should be integral to our analyses of transition patterns of black youths. Schoon (2006: 14) reminds us that the term 'social class' is a homogeneous category and doesn't provide clues about the actual life circumstances of individuals.

Those in the most materially deprived circumstances represent 58 per cent of the cohort. Approximately two-thirds of these respondents were placed in the category 'resource straitened' because their transitions were the most precarious. Predictably, their foundations were weak. In common they had below-average educational attainments, limited social networks, and vaguely

conceived career plans in which decision-making largely involved trial and error.  Decisions to pursue further education were influenced by 'push factors' such as the desire to avoid unemployment.  These young people had a clear preference for full-time employment with training, preferably apprenticeships, but found it problematic even to secure part-time 'McJobs'.

A cocktail of risk factors is compounded by inadequate or non-existent careers information for those young people who are most susceptible to making ill-informed post-16 career 'choices'.  A number of respondents perceived that careers advice was implicitly linked to teachers' expectations, where 'good' students received such advice and 'bad' ones did not.  The absence of quality careers information contributes to confusion and mystification, undermining young people's capacity to discern the relative value of the options and 'choices' available in the post-compulsory marketplace.  The term 'choice' is contentious and is a misnomer for young people whose options are severely restricted by structural disadvantage.  Young people in the 'resource straitened' typology have the highest risk profile; their poor life chances will be compounded by barriers to entering the labour market because of its racially segregated features. Eight of the fourteen respondents experiencing the strains of material deprivation can aptly be depicted as "disaffected from the transition infrastructure" (Miles 2000: 44). They are incapacitated by the contraction of employment and by vocational training perceived as 'leading nowhere', and are discouraged from learning.

However, six out of fourteen respondents with a similar socio-economic profile (Table 4.3) displayed strategic competence in negotiating the risks prevalent in their social environment.  Two factors differentiated these young people. Firstly, they enjoyed school and learning, cultivated 'acceptable' learner identities and received high levels of support from kinship networks.  The 'triarchic' factors of individual disposition, supportive family characteristics and supportive school environments (Schoon 2009: 14) contributed to their capacities to adapt to and negotiate risky environments.  Secondly, they had fairly definite career aspirations, and clarity as to where further education fitted into these goals.  On this basis it is argued that they are surrounded by stronger cultural capital which has the potential to be converted into economic capital at some future point (Tolonen 2007).

It has been made apparent that, compared to their white counterparts, Black Caribbean young people are exposed to significantly greater risks in their transitions to adulthood.  They have to circumvent qualitatively different obstacles. It has also been illustrated that risks and insecurity inhere within transition pathways but can be mitigated by personal and family resources. However, it does not follow that personal exposure to material disadvantage will necessarily translate into a fragmented or problematic transition trajectory, as Fergusson (2004) established.  A number of studies tracking the frequency of changes to post-16 destinations correlate lower levels of attainments and class profiles to variable and unstable transition patterns (Fergusson et al 2000; Fergusson 2004; Fenton and Dermott 2006; Furlong and Cartmel 2007).

**6.6    Upwardly mobile: not such an unlikely prospect for some**

It is claimed that policy changes in the 1980s and 1990s fostered a marketplace ethos in educational provision by promoting parental choice of school, which encouraged, perhaps unintentionally, the spread of racially segregated schooling (Tomlinson 1997). One effect of this 'market framework in education' (ibid: 69) was that schools have become highly selective of their pupil populations, with certain minority ethnic pupils labelled as 'undesirable customers'. It was found in the data, for example, that all respondents, even those with a middle-class profile and strong commitment to their education, were aware of the potential negative consequences which this label implied (cf. Appendix 4.1: Influence of kinship). This ideological knowledge is strongly vocalised in certain narratives and not in others. However, the self-perception of walking a racialised tightrope through secondary schooling is one factor interacting with class which is found in the cases of young people who had lofty career aspirations.

Within the cohort, nine respondents came from more middle-class backgrounds (2, 7, 9, 10, 13, 18, 20, 21 & 22). With the exception of two (2 & 21) they achieved above-average credentials at 16. Respondent 20 entered employment and has remained in employment whilst the others have entered further or higher education. Education has been a 'pull' factor bound up with other factors such as family expectations of educational and professional success. These are young people who have constructed identities and career decisions drawing on symbolic and material resources. Tolonen (2007: 32) uses the term 'symbolic resources' to refer to sources of influence and power.

Respondents 2 and 9, for example, secured well-paid part-time jobs by drawing on the occupational positions of their parents. Respondents 21 and 22 were provided with financial assistance to become owner-occupiers whilst completing part-time degrees. The availability of symbolic and material resources is a feature common to these respondents, who have been fairly successful educationally; this has clearly shaped their post-16 decisions.

In the cases cited here, parents/guardians were interventionist and instrumental in developing career horizons (Wright et al 2010); although this does not apply in all cases. This is consistent with the findings of Lareau (1997) on the social class differences in parental promotion of educational success. For example, there are high levels of monitoring, scrutinising and enforcing the efficacy of education and not symbolically 'handing over' the responsibility for education to institutions (cf. Appendix 4.1: Influences of kinship). We can also observe in these cases the localised operation of class resources reproducing class advantages. There is no evidence of young people 'turning their backs on social mobility' (Shildick 2008: 214). The contrary is the case. The majority of respondents wished to 'trump' the lifestyles of their parents by enhancing their occupational status and income. But how realistic is this prospect for Black Caribbean youths, given Heath and Cheung's argument that "at all levels of their education, [for] Black Caribbean, African, Pakistani and Bangledeshi groups, their risk of unemployment is greater" (2007: 531)?

Absolute rates of intergenerational social mobility have declined for the British-born white population (Heath and McMahon 2005: 403).  This supports Shildick's observation (Shildick 2008: 214) that for contemporary youth there is real concern that they are spiralling further towards the economic margins as a result of deepening social inequality.  However, patterns of social mobility do differ between ethnic groups, and downward social mobility has not been the trajectory of minority groups, according to the analysis presented by Heath and Smith (2003) and Heath and McMahon (2005). This narrowing of the gap, in terms of occupational status and income, was found in the earlier work of Modood et al (1997). It is now conceivable that, with rising levels of education, minority groups will continue to increase their presence in salaried, white-collar employment, though not at dramatic rates.  However, it is very important to stress that minority ethnic groups continue to experience much greater disadvantage in the labour market.

It has also been found that class reproduction (internal social stratification) within minority ethnic groups operates in much the same way as it does within the White British population.  Therefore, children will, by and large, secure class positions similar to their parents'.  Given the middle-class profile of the nine respondents it is no surprise to find them espousing middle-class values and aspirations.

It would be too sanguine to interpret intra-group class stratification as evidence that class overrides race in determining life chances.   Evidence

overwhelmingly points to this not being the case. Commenting on class and racial stratification in the US, Ogbu (1997: 768) argues:

> In a racially stratified society, each racial (ethnic) stratum has its own social classes. The social classes of component strata are parallel but not equal. The reasons for the unequal social classes are that the origins of classes may be different and that members of the racial groups do not have equal access to societal resources that enhance class development.

Disentangling the effects of race and class on the opportunities accessible to and accessed by Black Caribbean young people is a daunting prospect; they are 'fuzzy', 'in process' and contested, yet embedded within structures (Archer and Francis 2007). A point of certainty in this contested terrain is that where we conflate race and class and analytically absorb race into class, we will not be alerted to the fact that different ethnic groups, even purportedly belonging to the same class category as the majority group, will have inferior opportunities. This is what Ogbu argues. There is some validity in his argument that racial and social stratification are different social processes reproducing unequal outcomes fir different ethnic groups. The operation of racial stratification produces the sort of results observed by Fergusson (2007). His evidence revealed that even where non-white participants had better qualification than their white counterparts, they failed to secure places on the employed status pathway; the most advantageous New Deal programme because it was more likely, than the other options, to lead to employment; non-whites systematically ended up in the least preferred options.

The marriage between social class and achievement reproduces unequal outcomes irrespective of ethnic status; the empirical evidence in this study supports this well established position. Importantly, the wider evidence

challenges the premise that transition pathways and outcomes are broadly similar regardless of ethnic status. Outcomes are differentiated along ethnic fault lines. Notwithstanding the importance of articulating how transition outcomes differ according to ascribed social status, there are patterns found within the data which mirror trends reported in the wider literature.

## 6.7   Normalised uncertainty

The trend towards protracted, complex and yo-yo transitions, extensively commented on in youth research, is reflected in my study. For instance, many of the young people will have long-term dependency on family resources and they will be in their late twenties before they are able to establish financial independence. Lower-achieving young people in particular find that their prospects of securing employment, even following a stint in further education, have dramatically diminished. They bear the brunt of what Fergusson et al (2000: 290) have described as the "instability in trajectories induced by a quasi-market". Similarly, as Fergusson found, and this study has also observed, many young people are compelled to participate in further education when their preference is to engage in paid work. Table 4.4 profiled the destinations and the "multiple relocations" experienced by 60 per cent of respondents within a 12 month period. Ten variations in post-16 school activities are recorded in the table, with a minority experiencing linear transitions, at that specific time point.

A further trend is the practice of combining part-time study or work with full-time employment or study, and similar formulations. Wolbers (2001) identified

this "double-status in youth transitions" as prevalent in the UK, resulting from its 'liberal transition regime' based on voluntaristic and unstructured vocational pathways. The policy assumption underpinning weak institutional support for post-16 transitions is the presumption of their early financial independence, which no doubt gave rise to the prevalence of the student/worker model.

Some research respondents interested in entering a structured training/employment pathway were denied this opportunity, usually because they did not have access to appropriate information at the appropriate time. For those who did secure this opportunity it occurred by chance.

Despite policy rhetoric claiming that instrumental rationality underpins young people's decision-making, research has uncovered randomness, spontaneity, short-term tactical manoeuvres and the willingness to make rapid changes in the light of immediate realities as the key facets of decision-making (Hodkinson 2008). It is paradoxical that those most likely to benefit from good quality careers information – 'contingent choosers' (Proulx 2008) who are likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds and who lack the cultural, social and economic capital to find and utilise quality careers information – are the least likely to know where and how to access this information (Proulx 2008). Both 'contingent' and 'embedded choosers' (those with firm career plans, supported by information and other resources) are found in my study. All young people expressed equivocation and trepidation about the choices they were making. They were aware, and commented upon the fact, that decisions were precarious and based on insufficient information and advice.

## 6.8    Making room for differences[16]

> Though I constantly obsess about the ways that my upper-middle-class whiteness influences what I see, I must emphasise my uncertainty about what I do not see and what I do not know that I have missed. (Duneier 2004: 101)

> What we have to do with banal facts is to discover – or try to discover – which specific and perhaps original problem is connected with them. (Foucault 1994: 328)

Here I intend to shift the discussion onto new terrain to raise questions concerned with the conceptualisation of difference in both theoretical and practical terms.  Analytical work rests on the conceptual tools we have at our disposal, or, according to Foucault, conceptualisations imply critical thought and continuous rechecking (1994).  In a similar vein, Duneier questions our capacity as researchers to be certain about the knowledge claims we invoke. Questioning assumptions about the populations to which our research findings apply is especially important in the context of multiethnic communities.  Oakley (2006) argues that inclusivity matters on the grounds of both science and ethics because we cannot assume our knowledge claims apply to populations we have not studied.

My main contention is that the conceptualisations of difference within the field of youth research do not adequately inform the various themes under investigation.  That is to say that major themes, such as the nature and extent of social divisions, youth inequalities, youth identities and the evolution of career trajectories, avoid accounting for differences in social conditions, migrant history, hierarchical relations of power inherent in differences of class, race/ethnicity, material circumstances and cultural experience (Brah 2000). Consequently, our appreciation of the interactions between these social

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[16] Archer 2001:468

categories, the micro-social practices on which they are premised and reproduced, and their subtle effects is obscured beneath totalising descriptions and explanations.

What might account for some of the difficulties researchers encounter in working with problematic social categories?  Categories such as class, race and gender are already homogeneous categories (Anthias 2001) which conceal multiple objective circumstances and subjectivities under their labels. Furthermore the available ethnic categories (from the Census 2001) are standardised and beneficial for capturing broad ethnic classifications, but are a blunt instrument for capturing details about ethnic self-identities which are unstable and difficult to operationalise (Nazroo 2006).  A category like 'Black-African', for example, conceals within it people of very different national origins, identities, religions and cultural practices.  The methodological untidiness of working with a category such as 'black respondents' was amplified by Maylor (2009), who discovered that the term had multiple meanings for different respondents and was embraced and resisted according to the various meanings that individuals attributed to the term 'black'.

Given that terminological tensions highlight the complex and fluid character of ethnic differences, our analyses need to be sufficiently subtle to accommodate plural and shifting representations fostering a more inclusive understanding of racialised experiences.  Despite the contentious and amorphous nature of social categories such as race/ethnicity, the banal fact is that exclusionary practices are organised by reference to these categories.  Across a wide range

of social/welfare outcomes, groups with minority ethnic status fare worse than the white majority (Nazroo 2006). For this reason, it is important that research discovers how experience differs amongst heterogeneous groups.

In youth research, class has been given primacy in discussions of social divisions (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Furlong 2009; MacDonald 1997). It has been argued that the practice of giving class precedence over race is reductive, placing them in a hierarchical relationship where class is afforded greater explanatory power in accounting for social inequalities (Anthias 2001; Yuval-Davis 2006).   Brah (2000: 440) emphasises: "Thinking about race means challenging reductive understandings of race, explaining and theorising its facets and not obscuring it within class categories."   Anthias (2001) provides a useful distinction, supporting the position that, whilst class and race do not operate autonomously, they are not reducible to each other and should be treated independently, whilst recognising that they pervade and transform each other.  Anthias further argues that, when class is given primacy, analysis generally concentrates on the economic relations of production and its central determinant, employment and occupation.  However, an important element in understanding social divisions is "the social allocation of resources to concrete individuals and groups and this involves relations of hierarchisation and inferiorisation" (Anthias 2001: 842).  These factors interrelate with class, race/ethnicity and gender to create specific positioning, identities, social circumstances and economic locations.

Examples of these interactions have been articulated in the narratives. Migrant history and its recurrent significance, for example, is an undercurrent in many of the narratives which shapes identities, aspirations and decision-making behaviour.  It has been shown that economic locations interact with other factors such as social capital in the form of kinship networks and provide symbolic resources supporting career intentions.  We also see that young people's ethnic identities are pervaded by a consciousness of social hierarchy and the cognizance that this can be an obstacle to life chances.  However, several other studies (Cassidy et al 2006; Helve and Bynner 2007; Wright et al 2010) have found ethnicity to be a source of social capital in its capacity to galvanise and motivate young people to act resiliently, for example by striving to improve their human capital characteristics.

It is evident that there are multiple dimensions to young people's transitions into adulthood; they are complex, contradictory and unpredictable.  I concur with Goodwin and O'Connor (2007), who appealed for school-to-work  to portray the "complex mix of social, psychological, economic, cultural and political processes" which structures this aspect of the life course (p.556).  To this must be added the need for studies which explore the simultaneous influence of race, class, gender and identity in the formation of the 'pragmatic rationality' which characterises young people's decision-making (Hodkinson 2004).  Hodkinson's (2004) extensive research into young people's practices in making career decisions is quite conclusive in arguing that 'pragmatic rationality' has three distinctive components: young people's positioning by class, gender, ethnicity and geography; their dispositions as influenced by

biographies; and access to and acquisition and deployment of various forms of capital: the shaping of career horizons is enabled and constrained by multiple factors. This leads into the question of how to engage adequately with social differences.

In answer I would offer a few pointers for further consideration, whilst recognising that it is easier to criticise than to provide tangible and feasible alternatives. Purportedly, differences should be treated as non-binary and are based on inherent tensions and ambiguities. Archer (2004: 246) captures the contrary nature of differences well:

Differences are:
fluid - AND - enduring
shifting - AND - patterned
discursive - AND - embodied
constructed - AND - structural/structurally produced
active - AND - imposed, not escaped
partial/incomplete -AND - lived as real

This conceptualisation of difference underscores the importance of balancing constructionist and materialist frames of reference in examining social processes connected with differences of social locations. It articulates the imperative to understand the social actions of groups and individuals in the context of the environs from which identities and social positioning emerges. It stresses complexity and the notion that socio-cultural categories are to be interrogated, not taken for granted, thus ensuring that epistemological contributions are informed by consideration of these dimensions.

To support the empirical investigation of difference, Brah (2000: 442) proposes recognising four modalities of difference; they are not mutually exclusive.

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There is "difference of experience", where the focus is on micro-level interpretations and meanings within the given social context. "Difference of social condition" relates to structural analysis of collective events or histories and their attendant array of social practices, generating understandings of structural social relations. "Difference of identity" relates to how the self is represented and constituted through social positions which are ascribed by self and others, resisted and negotiated. Lastly, "difference as subjectivity" relates to the construction of the self at a psychic level. Reflexivity throughout the research process is a core tenet in identifying and assuring the utility of culturally competent research strategies which could yield outputs by drawing on these theoretical strands in applied practice.

## 6.9    Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the issue of race/ethnicity is not peripheral but central to discussions about contemporary youth transitions. Young people's identities, dispositions and post-16 decisions are underscored by tacit and daily acknowledgements that racial hierarchies structure their life chances. Many young people articulate the reality and effects of racialised practices in positive terms, such as determined learner identities. It has been shown that young people's acute sense of their racialised identities, in particular circumstances, are vital resources used in negotiating transitions. This is a crucial element in post-16 decisions to pursue further qualifications.

The ability to fashion and negotiate transition pathways is contingent on access to forms of capital. It is not uncommon for young people, even if their

backgrounds are middle class, to experience multiple reversals and reconfigurations of earlier decisions.  Young people seem to regard this not as a disaster but as an inherent feature of risky transitions.  Most young people accept that they will be in their mid to late 20s before they achieve more settled labour market positions.  There are inequalities within transition infrastructures which produce poorer returns to young people of minority status; these patterns of inequality remain persistent even for those who achieve well.  Many young people in this study have poor life chances, and this feature is exacerbated by the weakness of the UK's vocational infrastructure and its elementary guidance provisions.

A key issue for further consideration in youth transitions research is the need to question the assumption that research applies to a cross-section of the population, even when samples from those populations are absent from research designs, and the assumption that class is the most important social category in analyses of social inequalities.  It is important to appreciate how social inequalities are reproduced by the interactions of both class and ethnic identities.

# Chapter 7

## Conclusion

This study investigated how race is important to the experiences of transition from education to the labour market for a cohort of 24 Black Caribbean young people aged 16-24. Consistent with studies in the micro-sociological tradition (Knowles 2010), the study explores individual and collective accounts of the social texture of lives set against the backdrop of social relations predicated on the de facto existence of racial hierarchies. As Knowles' (2005:17) pithy remark asserts, "Races may not exist but race does." To understand the place of race/ethnicity in the lives of the respondents, the focus in the study is upon the articulations and interpretations offered by the respondents. From these, inferences are made about the social processes, ideologies and structures interwoven into respondents' narratives.

The methodological framework was based on narrative analysis as this foregrounds the integrity of individual subject positions by elucidating the nuances and complexities of the social milieu inhabited by respondents. Individual stories reveal insights into the cultural repertoires which shape identity and the wider social contexts and embodied social practices of research subjects. This study adopted a critical methodological stance, which emphasised the perspectives of the racialised subject behind the respondent (Dunbar et al 2003), similar to the methodological commitment displayed by Smith (2005) in which the 'voice' of marginalised subjects was privileged. This

was done to understand the racialised dimensions of transitions from the world view of respondents.  This approach was adopted in anticipation that their perspectives would divulge interactions of power, contestation, and resistance interwoven into the meanings they construct as they experience the shifting landscapes marking post-16 transitions.

The complexity and contradictions surrounding the researching of racial categories was explored in chapters two and three.  Chapter three especially contributes to this contested terrain by demonstrating the application in research praxis of critical/ethical reflexivity (Gertwitz and Cripps 2006):  for example, in the tension associated with representing research subjects sensitively so as to acknowledge the power differential bound up with racialised subordinate status and balancing this with accurate representations which will not reinforce stereotypical judgements of those lives.

It was established (chapter two) that the research literature on the changing characteristics of youth transitions is extensive whereas representation of the material circumstances of black youth through the critical post-16 stage is limited.  Studies were found to be limited in two respects.  Given the preponderance of quantitative approaches, ethnically diverse research samples present abstracted details of general patterns and trends regarding the changing outlook of post-16 transitions.  What such contributions cannot reflect is the heterogeneity of the actual dynamic features of young people's lives.  The second and equally fundamental limitation observed concerns the presence of 'colour-blind scholarship' (Troyna 1994) within youth transitions

research.  I am not arguing that race/ethnicity is not recognised as an important influence in shaping social stratification; it is regarded as integral to life chances.  However, its structuring effects, its intersection with class and gender and young peoples' manoeuvrability within structuring contexts, are under-developed within the domain of youth transitions research.

The risks black youths are exposed to are alarming, as demonstrated in the narratives' extracts presented in chapters four and five.  Their susceptibility to riskier and perilous transitions compared to their white counterparts has received insufficient attention.  This research reveals some of the ways in which the lives of black youth are differentiated by race/ethnicity, and how they evaluate and construct meaningful responses to the risks they perceive to be present in their 'fields of existence'.  Thomson (2009) used the expression 'fields of existence' to capture the biographically significant structuring contexts which shaped the actions of the respondents.

Similarly this research presented four typologies to show the interplay of contextual conditions and resources, respondents' identity constructions rooted in their racialised subject positions, and their decision-making behaviours.  Chapters four and five explained the relatedness of racialised subject positions and transition histories.  The typologies are complemented by the presentation of individual cases which exemplify the intersecting nature of race/ethnicity, class and identity.  An important result revealed by the study, therefore, is the symbiosis of these social categories and some of the ways their influence penetrates the transition decisions and behaviours of

respondents. The typologies capture different dimensions of this symbiotic relationship.

The respondents have a predominantly working-class profile (75:25), but the resources (both material and symbolic) they use in negotiating transition pathways are highly diverse. The label 'working class' conceals wide differences in cultural beliefs, practices, aspirations, and competence in planning and responding to the vagaries of the post-16 marketplace. Young people in the typology, 'resource miners', are from economically disadvantaged families. They achieved well academically and have solid career plans. Their early transitions have not been disorderly. The coherence of their transition plans has been underpinned by strong symbolic capital, such as high parental expectation and strong obligations to parents who were first/second generation economic migrants with memories of the experience of prejudice and discrimination. For these young people, education is a highly valued commodity; they feel confident and in control, with aspirations to be more socially mobile than their parents.

At the other end of the spectrum are those in the typology 'resource straitened'. These young people are vulnerable to social marginalisation and exclusion. They are starting out their post-16 journey with poor educational inheritances, and, with one exception, have vague and/or unrealistic plans. Their experiences to date typify fragmentary transition patterns. The prospect of establishing independent adult status, marked by living independently for example, appears remote at that stage of their life. For this group, education

was more a 'push' factor, pursued because there were few alternatives. They were more interested in employment with structured training. However, their chances of accessing this were constrained by poor employment prospects and poor access to advice and guidance.

My third typology, 'resource innovators', characterises young people who have capricious family support, have low and high attainments and different degrees of fragmentation in their transition histories. What is common to this group is their resilient disposition in which they exhibited high levels of personal agency in working through the structural constraints prevailing in their environments. These young people deployed a range of tactics including actively contesting labels of black under-achievement, engaging in voluntary work to enhance employability, and self-employment. The final typology, 'resource enriched', typifies young people with the most advantageous personal circumstances; they are in financially secure families. With one exception, they have high attainments and exhibit orthodox middle-class values vis-à-vis education and occupational aspirations. They have experienced less precarious transitions.

Across all cases there were three constructs underpinning transition decisions and actions. Even those with low attainments believed that further education was important to their future prospects. There was acute awareness about the scarcity of jobs and the importance of further qualifications to strengthen the chances of finding work. Therefore the majority of respondents had engaged in some form of further learning and had enhanced their qualifications since leaving school.

Respondents perceived themselves to be in control of their life plans and felt responsible for the consequences of how events worked out. Whilst respondents' capacity to manoeuvre is highly contingent on their class-based resources, they are firmly wedded to the idea that their actions create their various life chances. This, however, contradicts a third theme common across the cases, which is the young people's awareness that the labour market is segmented along racial lines and that discrimination does make it harder to access opportunities. Responses to structural labour market barriers are individualised in that young people read this to mean they have to work harder to achieve good qualifications as an insurance against discriminatory practices. Narrative accounts were replete with recollections of the mundane reality of racism and the varied ways in which this influenced positive learner identities. Chapters five and six illustrated how some young people based their occupational visions and their commitments to 'trumping' hierarchical barriers constructed along racial lines.

These results can be taken as offering some empirical evidence corroborating analysis within youth transitions research which depicts contemporary (Western) youth transitions as fragmented, unpredictable and subject to prolonged delays into adulthood. Furthermore, the disappearance of structured pathways and their replacement by many 'choices' has invented and reinforced new forms of structural inequality and long-term dependence on families. Social risks have become privatised; young people feel wholly

responsible for the choices they exercise, the risks they encounter and the consequences produced by their actions.

This research reveals that the materiality of race and racism exerts powerful influences on the lives of the young people in this study. Race/ethnicity is a pervasive form of social division which reproduces exclusion and marginality, but also, as shown here, race/ethnic identity is used to resist and oppose exclusionary processes. Perhaps the most significant feature of the study has been to make the case that difference of race/ethnicity, class and subjectivity matter. Failing to acknowledge this is to erase the impact of migrant history, material circumstances and cultural experience in shaping educational inheritances and capacities for managing the risks thrown up by destandardisation of post-16 pathways.

This research has drawn attention to the importance of eschewing practices which regard 'black youth' as a homogeneous, unitary category instead of one that features the multiple social positions in which young people are situated. Finally, for analytic purposes, respondents were placed into four typologies. However, these are limited to capturing descriptions of young people's circumstances at a specific time point. I have learnt that the lives of the respondents are dynamic and change can be rapid. The study is limited by its time-specific quality, as it only captures features about the respondents at one time point. Further examination into the lives of these respondents would produce new evidence of continuity and change in the evolution of their transition histories.

**Appendices**

3.1(a) Interview topic guide

3.1(b) Narrative questions

3.1(c) Interview extract

4.1 Influences of kinship

5.1 Selection of biographical portraits

# Appendix 3.1(a) Interview Topic Guide

## A.      Personal Details

Name
Age
Address
Ethnic identification (person to self-define)
Status (single, cohabiting, married, separated) (explore whether status has changed since leaving school)

## B.      Family Background /social networks

Family heritage
Siblings/ages/education/what doing at present
Parent's married/not married/divorced/separated
Parent's educational background / occupation
Living arrangements/who and how many people living in accommodation
Paying rent/mortgage etc.  (residential status of parents)
How is time spent now and with whom?

## C.      School experiences
What age left school?
Qualifications gained
Tell me about your experiences of secondary school ( probe for anything significant )
Parent's involvement in education
What do you feel about your academic achievement?
Relationship with teachers

## D.      Career decisions
What happened at 16?
How did you decide what you would do at 16?
What shaped your decisions at 16 / finding out about what was available
What are your career aspirations/expectations for the future?
What decisions did you make & who was involved in these decisions?
What information did you receive to help you with your decision about what you would do when you reached 16?
How have your decisions worked out?
What role (if any) do you believe your ethnicity has played?

## E      Major Changes Experienced since leaving school (Life Changes)

Important changes since leaving school
Any particular difficulties experienced since leaving school

Anything that you would change and why?

When you think about your future is there anything that you feel concerned/worried/fearful about?

# Appendix 3.1(b) Narrative Questions

## Listening to and understanding narrative accounts

| Question No | Questions – used to create interpretions of the content of narrative accounts. |
|---|---|
| 1 | What is the person communicating?  Is this different friom what they are saying? |
| 2 | What are they trying to accomplish? |
| 3 | How exactly do they do this? What specific means/strategies are used? |
| 4 | What matters to the narrator? |
| 5 | Why is the story told this way? |
| 6 | How much agency does the young person display? How is this achieved? |
| 7 | How does the narrator position him/herself to the audience (the interviewer)? |
| 8 | What language is used to construct understanding of transitions by the narrator? |
| 9 | What social factors/processes/social structure/ideologies help in understanding what is going on? |
| 10 | How does this contribute to wider sociological discussions? |

# 3.1(c) Extract from Interview – respondent 15

| Interviewees' Name | Age | Interview No. | Date of Interview | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rebecca/respondent 15 Transcription commenced:  10/11/06 | 21 | 8 | 6/10/06 | Female |

1    Y:    I am interviewing Rebecca and you are how old Rebecca

2    R:    I am 21

3    Y:    and you live in gypsy hill so you are quite local and the interview is taking place at this, what's the name of this youth club?

4    R:    the old library centre in xxx

5    Y:    the old library centre in xxx. So Rachael (aahhmm)   so   if   you could tell me (aahhmm) how do you identify your ethnicity, black British, Black Caribbean?

6    R    I prefer myself as being black British

7    Y:    black British ok and why is that?

8    R:    because both my parents were born over here and I am a black person I consider myself to be British

9    Y:    ok do you have any Caribbean connections?

10   R:    yeah all my grandparents are from Jamaica

11   Y:    right grandmother and grandfather?

12   R:    yeah both sides

13   Y:    ok and any brothers or sisters?

14   R:    yeah I've got four younger brothers and 1 older sister

15   Y:    ok so you're in the middle?

16   R:    second

17   Y:    oh gosh sorry second of course you are. And where are you living  at the moment?

18   R:    in xxx. I live on my own

19   Y:    ok so you've moved out from your parents home when did that happen?

20   R:    I moved out when I was 17

21   Y:    you were very young then?

| 22 | R: | I guess so |
|----|----|------------|
| 23 | Y: | ok quite a big step for a young lady |
| 24 | R: | it's was one of them things that had to happen |
| 25 | Y: | ok why was that? |
| 26 | R: | (aahhmm) cause when I was around 16, 17 as teenagers do I started a rebellion and my mum said to me if I don't like the rules then get out and I chose to leave |
| 27 | Y: | ok how did you find somewhere to move to? |
| 38 | R: | (aahhmm) I had a bit of problem being homeless for a little while (aahhmm) like I was staying around at different people's houses tried to get help from the Homeless unit. I didn't have a wage packet, but they didn't really help me too much so I had to find my own hostel and I had a few problems from there I only got my flat  (aahhmm) the beginning of this year |
| 29 | Y: | right so how many years? |
| 30 | R: | it was about three years of trying to sort out my housing which should have taken me 6 months to a year |
| 31 | Y: | (aahhmm) so what were the difficulties that you face over the 3 years trying to sort it out what were some of the problems that you met? |
| 32 | R: | (aahhmm) the main problem I had was financial because like (pause) I was trying to go to college and then I was trying to provide for myself pay for my rent and the hostel rent is quite expensive as well so when you're working it ends up quite (pause) difficult |
| 33 | Y: | to actually find hostel accommodation? |
| 34 | R: | I did I found it in private sector |
| 35 | Y | ok and over the years how many hostel moves did you experience? |
| 36 | R: | (aahhmm) well I went from 1 hostel to shared accommodation but then I had a problem with the shared accommodation cause they went bankrupt and then I had to go back to the same hostel where I came from and then from there they housed me |

| 37 | Y: | right so in all how many moves to moving home to being in your flat now how many moves can you remember? |
|----|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 38 | R: | well I would say 4 proper moves |
| 39 | Y: | ok that time for you how did you cope with all of those, you know, challenges? |
| 40 | R: | (aahhm) it was quite difficult for me I ended up suffering a bit of depression cause obviously from going to being with my family and that to being on my own, finding independence which has actually taken me a long time to actually reach full independence and it was quite hard for me cause some of the types of people in the hostels that you come across as well are people like have been like living on the streets, homeless, taking drugs all of them sort of things so I've been around a lot of different type of people while staying in hostel and it was quite difficult for me |
| 41 | Y: | (aahhmm) (mm) what was it that was difficult for you? Rachael? |
| 42 | R: | (aahhmm) I don't know it was quite lonely as well because obviously they've got limits on that when people can visit you like visiting time sometimes you're not allowed visitors at all. I was lucky cause our hostel didn't have curfew time that I could stay out as long as I wanted and I didn't actually have to come back until I knew my rent was to be paid, but it was quite hard. |
| 43 | Y: | yeah I mean you used the word independence at least twice you said that you left home at 17 because you wanted your independence and then you said that (aahhmm) (aahhmm) establishing your independence has been quite a difficult thing, so just tell me (pause) pretend I don't understand the word independence (laugh) tell me what that means to you. |
| 44 | R: | (laugh) (aahhmm) independence to me is (pause) of learning how to do things on your own like I do understand that people needs support everyone always needs support, but to actually know that I'm the person providing for me, I'm the person that's getting me to the next stage where I am going I'm not relying on anybody else and it's only been recently I've actually I feel I'm at that level where I am doing it for myself. |

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| 45 | Y: | aahhmm), (aahhmm) and in terms of support where's your support come from over the time that you've been trying to establish your independence? |
|---|---|---|
| 46 | R: | most of my support has been from my mum right although she did ask me to leave me and my mum have got a strong relationship and I can talk to her about anything and she will help me with anything at all right she will never put me down or anything like that and then I've got my friends are very close, I have got a very close knit of friends that they actually help me through everything as well my emotional problems financial anything and they are there for me. |
| 47 | Y: | do you consider going back to live with your parent? |
| 48 | R: | well it would be difficult for me to go back home to my mum because like my sister she had already moved out but my mum lives in a 3 bedroom house and like my brothers were all getting bigger and they wouldn't really just face me in there, plus being the only girl apart from my mum it wouldn't be the option for me I wasn't going to go back. |
| 49 | Y: | (aahhmm) ok so what about your father? Where is he? |
| 50 | R: | (aahhm) well (pause) I don't know when it comes I've got a lot of negative vibes towards my dad he's been around throughout my life but I don't get on with him too well. |
| 51 | Y: | right, right presumably he and your mother are no longer together? |
| 53 | R: | no they haven't been together for a long time actually but it's not(aahhmm) anything to do with why he and my mum ain't together. He's just one of them people that you can't get on with. |
| 54 | Y: | (laugh) ok just talk to me about the relationship that you have had with your father over the years |
| 55 | R: | (aahhmm) it's seems very limited like my dad throughout my whole life my dad has always had another family anyway so is like there are other brothers and sisters on that side but I don't really consider them family because I am not close to them in anyway (aahhmm) but my relationship with my dad is never been |

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like that of a father and daughter its' more like he's somebody who is around and I basically don't really have respect for him as a father.

56      Y:      (aahhmm), (aahhmm) so why is that Rachael?

57      R:      (aahhmm) cause I feel he let me down as a parent he wasn't there to support me when I needed the support he doesn't understand (aahhmm) I don't know I just feel that he used me and my sister and my brothers to make him look like he is a proud father when it's more like trophy to show for this is all my kids and I don't like it.

58      Y:      (mmm), (mmm) so is your relationship still like that now even though you are much older?

59      R:      I haven't spoken to my dad for the past 2 years

60      Y:      ok, ok is that difficult for you?

61      R:      no (laugh) as long as he is there like as long as my brothers see him and  that they feel they've got a relationship with him and they are happy with where it is then I've got no problem whatsoever

62      Y:      so is your sister and other brothers have they got a better relationship with the father?

63      R:      my sister doesn't talk to him either because I suppose cause they obviously knows a lot more and because (mmmm) my dad feels like my mum turned us against him but we have our own minds and views and  opinions we see things for ourselves and it's just the case that I don't wanna like destroy my brother's views of my dad it's up to them to create their own views of him but I am not going to say anything about it  I'm just going to let them although it may be hard for them and difficult like though it may be for me and my sister they will find out in their own way and  they will deal with it their own way but I don't want them to ever sit down and thought I did something to stop them from having a relationship with their dad

64      Y:      ok and how old is your older sister?

65      R:      she is (pause) 23 yeah 23

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 66 | Y: | and your younger brother? |
| 67 | R: | (aahhmm) my younger brother, two of them aren't my dad's, one is 19, one is 15 and then the younger 2 are my dad's children and they're 13 and 11 |
| 68 | Y: | ok so your mum and dad so the 2 younger ones you're fully blood brothers and sisters but the 2 in the middle aren't ok (Aahhhhmm) so what about your sister what's your sister doing? |
| 69 | R: | at the moment she is studying social work she's got a 4 year old daughter |
| 70 | Y: | ok, ok so she is kinda studying part-time, full-time? |
| 71 | R: | yes she is studying full-time because like my niece is in school now full time as well so she is able to go back to college and study and stuff? |
| 72 | Y: | and your mum, does your mum work? |
| 73 | R: | she doesn't at the moment no |
| 74 | Y: | ok, ok when she has worked what has she done? |
| 75 | R: | she use to be a nurse but unfortunately she is unwell so she can't put in the work she can't handle it |
| 76 | Y: | yeah, yeah ok so you're usually home at 16, you finish school at 16 ok let's talk a bit about what happened at school maybe between 14 and 16. Where did you go to school? |
| 77 | R: | I went to school at xxx |
| 78 | Y: | alright so you are in xxx those schools are really good |
| 79 | R: | so they say (laugh) |
| 80 | Y: | so what was your experience of going there? |
| 81 | R: | (aahhmm) I don't really have a lot of memories of school it's just one of those things I am forced to do, I am not really naturally an academic person I don't enjoy doing work (aahhmm) to me going to school is a chore |
| 82 | Y: | (laugh) ok, ok, so did you do any exams at 16? |
| 83 | R: | yeah I did my GCSE's in English maths, science and IT and I did GNVQ's in business studies and IT |
| 84 | Y: | and how did you do in those exams? |

| 85 | R: | (aahhmm) I did ok, I got like1 B but everything was pretty much C's above board |
|---|---|---|
| 86 | Y: | well they're still passes for the national standards in terms of passes obviously so you've got at least 5 GCSE's that's good grounding. Leading up to 16 then (aahhmm) and you know obviously you're go to leave school at 16 (aahhmm) what decisions were you making at that time about your future beyond 16? |
| 87 | R: | at that point (aahhmm) I was spending a lot of time out of school and I didn't even want to go to college I didn't have an interest in college I didn't want to educate very well but I did go to 6$^{th}$ form at Harris because it was sorta like being pushed on me everybody else. |
| 88 | Y: | who by? |
| 89 | R: | by the school, by my parent everybody was telling me I have to do something I can't spend the rest of my life sitting in the house so I tried 6$^{th}$ form |
| 90 | Y: | what did you do I 6$^{th}$ form? |
| 91 | R: | (aahhmm) I tried business studies and IT but I wasn't there for the right reasons. I was there socially, and I wasn't doing the work so and then I dropped out at the end of the year |
| 92 | Y: | right so you left that course like before June the following year 93? |
| | R: | yeah |
| 94 | Y: | ok, ok (aahhmm) so what do you feel about going to 6$^{th}$ form just as a you know just as a routine thing to sort of please other people how does that feel? |
| 95 | R: | (aahhmm) (pause) I just took it in my stride at the time because I wasn't really interested I would have been happy enough to sit at home all day it wouldn't really bother me but I suppose it would because everybody else is doing something |
| 96 | Y: | it was like a social pressure there to do something? |

| 97 | R: | yeah, I'd never had an interest in IT and I'd never had an interest in business studies but because I'd done it for GCSE's I thought I'd might as well just carry on but It was OK I suppose |
|---|---|---|
| 98 | Y: | so what did you do when you left the 6<sup>th</sup> form at (aahhmm) xxx |
| 99 | R: | (aahhmm) I was working part time, I was working at xxx Park |
| 100 | Y: | was that before, that was June time? |
| 101 | R: | yeah about the same time while I was at college |
| 102 | Y: | was that the football club (laugh)? |
| 103 | R: | Yeah (laugh) it was the fast food section but that's what I did for a little bit while I was at college and then the following year (aahhmm). I enrolled at college in Croydon College to do the AVC in health and social care |
| 104 | Y: | AVC is the advanced vocational certificate? |
| 105 | R: | yeah, yeah, yeah (aahhhmm) but it was around that same time that I left home so then I ended up dropping out of college as well again at that time |
| 106 | Y: | right ok so did you do back to college? |
| 107 | R: | it took me another year before I went back to college |
| 108 | Y: | so by now you're 19 (at the time she started the BTEC) |
| 109 | R: | yeah I was about 19 and I went back and I did the BTEC in health and social care but that time I stuck it out |
| 110 | Y: | good, good how did that feel? |
| 111 | R: | it actually felt really good to actually know that I finished something and I pushed myself to finishing it. |
| 112 | Y: | (pause) and why did you push yourself to finish that? |
| 113 | R: | (aahhmm) because I realised there wasn't too much I could do it was like having cause like GCSE's and you can't do anything without GCSE's but GCSE's don't get you anything either and I am not the type of person to work in a shop it just never really interest me whereas other people would be happy to work in a shop it just weren't for me so I wanted to try and do a little bit better |
| 114 | Y: | (mmmmm) ok so you completed a BTEC in health and social care was that a 1 year course? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 115 | R: | 2 years |
| 116 | Y: | 2 years ok was that full time or part time? |
| 117 | R: | full time |
| 118 | Y: | full time, how did you manage to support yourself financially? |
| 119 | R: | (aahhmm) I was actually on job seekers allowance because I was studying just under 16 hrs a week so I was entitled to the job seekers so that mean that my rent was still getting paid but because I was living in Croydon borough at the same time like I wasn't entitled to EMS so whereas other people was getting there £30 a week to turn up to college I was living off £30 a week for all my food, social, clothes everything travel it was quite hard but I got through it I still have support from everybody else around me as well and I don't think I could have done it without them. |
| 120 | Y: | and your mother and friends is like help you out with money? |
| 121 | R: | even the people in the hostel actually they helped out a lot as well cause it was like it was quite a large hostel like people look out for each other if someone cooking food they share their food. |
| 122 | Y: | ok so you actually form it was like a social sort of network there ok and why did you choose health and social care? |
| 123 | R: | (aahhmm)(pause) I don't know really I feel actually (aahhmm). I wanted to do youth work I decided I wanted to do youth work and just before I enrolled at college I started at Emmanuel# church youth club in West Dulwich so I didn't really know how to get into youth work so I thought health and social care might get me somewhere and keep me going for a while. |
| 124 | Y: | ok and how did you get into the community youth work? |
| 125 | R: | I just walked into the centre and asked them if they needed any volunteers and started to work there. |
| 126 | Y: | right, right and how long did you volunteer there for? |
| 127 | R: | I volunteering there for about 2 years, 21/2 years maybe 3 it was a little while I was there for |
| 128 | Y: | so having completed the health and social care do you feel that it's been a stepping stone for you completing that? |

129    R:     not really because (aahhmm) the type of job that I want to do still takes more qualification because I want to do a lot more support work with the youth and that and health and social care doesn't do anything for you

# Appendix 4.1:  Influences of kinship

| Respondent no. | Parental Involvement in Young Persons' Education | | Influence of Significant Others |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Pre-16** | **Post-16** | |
| **1** | "Mum always encouraged me, like when I came in from school when I was in Year 9. She's like, have you got any homework?  You're not going out to play unless you have done your homework." | Mum wants her to have better opportunities than she had. Constantly reminds her that she's got to get good qualifications "which don't come on a plate."  Travels long distance to college as colleges in her borough are too rough. | God mother who went to university as a mature student and now has a really good job. "She's always encouraging me." |
| **2** | Close relationship with both parents.  "They never missed a parents evening.  I was always encouraged to read.  We have thousands of books." | Parents disappointed with poor GCSE results.  Advised by parents to attend college out of the area to avoid peer distractions. | Older brother was shot when she was 13.  "Our life stopped for a bit; I just couldn't be bothered." |
| **3** | Allowed to concentrate on sports as he wasn't strong on bookwork.  Didn't enjoy school. Parents played minor role in his education | Told mother which course he would do at college.  Left after 5 months as discovered it was the wrong course. | Two older brothers who encourages him to concentrate on football.  No pressure about schoolwork. |
| **4** | His mum was "very upset" about the GCSE results because "she knows I could have done better." | He knew he would have to go to college.  He didn't really have a choice about this.  This was what his mother expected. Then decided it was best he retake some GCSEs.  Chose a college some distance from home so he wouldn't be distracted. | 'Rites of passage' course for young black men.  "I learnt how to handle certain school situations". |
| **5** | His mother always tried to support him.  He wouldn't discuss schoolwork with her. "She was always working anyway." | Encouraged by mum to go to college to do GCSE retakes. Travels a long distance to college to get away from peers. Mother continues to support him financially. | Older sister who is at college doing GNVQ. |

| Respondent no. | Parental Involvement in Young Persons' Education | | Influence of Significant Others |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Pre-16** | **Post-16** | |
| **6** | Nancy was raised by grandmother. She experienced a lot of confrontation at school. "Cos they used to pull her (grandmother) into school. She used to say (grandma), 'you guys are black kids. If you go out to get jobs, they're looking at the colour of your skin. And if you and a white person go to get the same job, and you and that white person got the same qualifications, they're gonna choose the white kid over you. So you got to sit down and look into yourself and work hard to get more, to move ahead'. One day I thought, you know what, settle down and that's what I did. | She decided she would do GCSE retakes for one year and then has plans to take two A levels. Grandmother is fine about her decisions because she's doing something constructive. | Learning mentor with whom she had regular one-to-one support. "She listened and never gave up on me". |
| **7** | Mother and grandmother take active interest. "My mum always went on about education, education, education. Education is the main thing really, cos she never went to university." | "If I don't go to university it will be a disappointment for me, for my mother, for my grandmother, for two whole family really." | Two sisters have already completed university and third is in final year. |
| **8** | Her mother always emphasized that whatever she achieved at school she would be proud of her. | She made the decision to do hairdressing. "They were all very, very supportive. My aunt helped me to buy my hairdressing kit. They were like, "well we're finally going to have a hairdresser in the family." | Described the family as close-knit Catholic Irish. Aunts and uncles are proud of her. Whatever she does they back her. Qualifications are not everything. |
| **9** | "My dad's always wanted me to do well. And having that push behind me has helped me a lot with my studies and everything. Keeps me going." | Family supported his choice of A Levels. "Bought me all the books I could ever need. I get a lot of advice and encouragement from my parents". | Older sister has completed a degree, but cannot find a job 'using it' in the field that she's interested in. His sister gave advice about university. |

| Respondent no. | Parental Involvement in Young Persons' Education | | Influence of Significant Others |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Pre-16** | **Post-16** | |
| **10** | His step-father threatened dire consequences if he "bunked school". He responded positively to this threat and approached school life with some seriousness; although he also hung out with the "wrong crowd". His mother would always check up with the school about how he was doing. She was "always on my case" about homework and suchlike". | Parents wanted him to do the A levels and continue down this path. After six months, he completely lost interest. "I went through a year when I didn't want to do nothing." His mother was disappointed but encouraged him to see it as part of growing up. | Step-father, who "always took an interest." |
| **11** | Mother helped him with homework and assisted him to complete research projects. She would also take him to Saturday school which he attended for a few years. Lost interest in learning in secondary school. | "My parents knew I could do better but instead of giving me a hard time, they said that the best thing is to get some more GCSEs to make up for it (low grades). They didn't want me to do nothing. They wanted me to carry on so I could get some more results". | Older sister in her second year of A levels. |
| **12** | Her father has been a constant source of inspiration. "He's had a lot of struggles. He told me about these struggles which he had when he first came to this country from Barbados. And he always said that life should be better for me. He'd say, "I'm working this hard so that you can have more opportunities. Please not waste it."" "I remember when I was 9, he bought me a whole stack of encyclopaedias. I thought, I'm nine years old, what am I going to do with these?" | "Seeing my dad come home from work tired every day, this really pushed me." Her mother advised her to pursue her A levels with the school's 6th Form because she believed "College gives you too much independence too soon." She followed this advice. | Six brothers and sisters. She's the first to go to university. "They often say, 'we are really proud of you. You are the first one of us to go to university'." |
| **13** | "My parents always used to come to school. Every year they would come, even though sometimes I tried to hide the information they would always somehow find out. It made me work harder, even though it irritated me." | "I was taught by my parents since I was younger, that I should always go to school, that I would then go to college and then university. This was drummed in." | Has one older sister who has completed university and now works as a teacher. |
| **14** | Dwight left home at age 11 to live with his grandparents due to intractable family conflicts. His grandparents provided financial and moral support, | Chose to move into more independent accommodation at 17. He states that all his important decisions are based on his own power of self- | Neither biological parents nor his siblings feature in his narrative. He has great admiration and respect for his grandparents. |

| Respondent no. | Parental Involvement in Young Persons' Education | | Influence of Significant Others |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Pre-16** | **Post-16** | |
| | but didn't know anything about education or the education system. | reflection and ingenuity. | |
| **15** | Neither mother nor father put any pressure to do well academically. Her mother made her attend Saturday School, as "being dyslexic, she couldn't help us with schoolwork." "Going to school was a chore. I spent a lot of time out of school." | "I didn't have an interest in college. I wasn't interested in any more education but I did go to my school 6th Form because I was pushed into it by my mother. But I wasn't there for the right reasons so then I dropped out at the end of the first year." | At 21, she commenced a degree full-time at the same university where her older sister is studying. |
| **16** | Has had very little contact with his father, brought up by his mother. | His mother doesn't feature in his narrative in respect of educational influences. He spoke more of friends and his IT teacher with whom he enjoyed a good relationship because of which decided to do an IT GNVQ. | Has close relationship with five other young people whom he has known since primary school. They chose to go to the same college and do the same course at 16. |
| **17** | Debbie was raised by her grandmother until the age of 13 when she passed away. She joined her aunt in England and was living with her at the time of the interview. "My grandmother made sure I could read. When we came home from school, the first thing we had to do was homework. She was finding homework for you, even if the school never gave you any. I always, always, always had to read a book. I didn't have no choice when it came to reading, she always made sure I read a book. Sometimes I would have to read two books for the day she was adamant when it came to education. Maths was my weakest subject, so she got me a maths tutor. I even had to go to after school club and Saturday school for extra English and maths." | "My aunt really wanted me to aim for university. She said she would help me pay for the course. I filled out the ACAS Form. I don't know why I just changed my mind. My immigration status has really held me back." | Her two closest friends have completed GNVQ courses and are now working full-time. |
| **18** | "My mother always reminded me not to hang out with the wrong crowd. She's an educated person and she didn't want me to experience | "She helped me decide what to do at college. For example, we went through the various brochures and stuff like that. The choice was mine, but she | Her two closest friends have completed GNVQ courses and are now working full-time. |

| Respondent no. | Parental Involvement in Young Persons' Education | | Influence of Significant Others |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Pre-16** | **Post-16** | |
| | what a lot of people around here experience (trouble with the police and unemployment), she helped me a lot with my schoolwork, like maths. She's really smart in maths." | discussed it with me. She also helped me a lot when I went to university. She had some savings which she used to pay for my accommodation. I still have lots of debts from university, but she helped a lot." | |
| **19** | Has been raised by her grandmother and missed significant periods of schooling due to ill-health. Has only limited contact with both parents. | She is now, at 23, taking a part-time vocational course in floristry. | "All my family are educated. My cousins, my aunt and uncles. One of my cousins achieved 10 A Stars in GCSE. I don't want to be the outcast." |
| **20** | Both mother and step-father have been instrumental in his formative education. "My mum, she would have done absolutely everything for me in terms of education. She would set certain times aside each evening for my homework and things like that. My mother insisted on this as she wanted me to do well academically." | Against his mother's wishes, he decided he would go to work full-time as his step-father died and the family needed his income. "Well, certain things transpired then. He'd cancelled his life insurance about three months before he died. The financial burden fell solely on my mother and myself. I left college and jumped into work, so I could fill some of the gaps." | His grandparents have played an important role. "They've complemented my mother in bringing me up." |
| **21** | "They were always parents to give extra help. Saturday school, private tuition, so it was always drummed into me that education is the right and natural thing." | The decision to do a GNVQ in Business Studies was spurred by a concern to please her father. He advised that Business Studies was a good option because it was good to have business skills to fall back on. She states she regretted this. "Those two years doing the GNVQ was a struggle because I wasn't doing it for the right reasons. But, you know, I got through it. I got the qualification. But I do feel, even now, that what I was doing wasn't really for me." | "You know, my grandmother used to say when we were watching telly, "'Don't spend time watching those people on telly. Those people have got their education, you need to get yours.'" You know, that was her mentality." |
| **22** | "Mum was very assertive when it came to my education. Say if I said I'm having trouble with any of my lectures, she'd get me books. She'd get me a tutor – I had a tutor for French. She'd try and sit down with me (as long as it wasn't maths). There was always time. She was always active, always." | Her mother was really pleased with her GCSE results and advised A Levels. Miriam started A Levels but withdrew after several months. "I didn't like the college at all. I didn't think A Levels were for me." Following this, she went out to work full-time. Whilst her | |

| Respondent no. | Parental Involvement in Young Persons' Education | | Influence of Significant Others |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Pre-16** | **Post-16** | |
| | Her father had two rules, "respect your mother and make sure you do well in school." | mother supported her in this decision, she reminded her that she wouldn't get far without further qualifications. | |
| **23** | Michael didn't feel well supported by his parents. "I've been no good with learning. I'm more physical. Because I'm not that kind of person (who likes writing) in that way school was hard for me. And because I'm a twin and my brother was more academic than me, everyone concentrated more on him than they concentrated on me. You know what I'm saying?" | "Well, I done better than I thought, if I was being honest. I mean other people were more disappointed. Like my dad, he's like, "'you should have done better'", but I reckon I done as good as I could really. I was never into books." | Twin brother who has 'made it' to University. |
| **24** | Identifies himself as being a weak student. Suffered dyslexia which was diagnosed when he was 13, and nothing was done about it. | Took mum's advice to stay in school 6th Form to do GNVQ. She said "'When you leave school, if you're not working then you go to college,'" and that's the rule. | Dad always compared him unfavourably with others e.g. cousins. |

**Appendix 5.1:** Selection of Biographical Portraits

## Respondent 2: Susan - aged 16

### Recruitment to the research
I was introduced to Susan by the youth leader of a local youth club who had agreed to assist me to find young people who could participate in my research.

### Local context
Our interview took place at the local youth club. Her mother is the manager of the multipurpose space in which the youth club is housed.

Approximately four weeks before our interview a prominent member of the youth club had been shot and killed at the nearby ice rink. Susan mentioned that club members were in mourning and more generally horrified at what appears to be an escalation in violent youth crime. A few years earlier her older brother was shot and seriously wounded but fortunately recovered. This really demotivated her. She states that "life stopped being normal for the family for a while". Her father and mother are separated and have formed new families. However, they communicate every day and the two families have a close relationship.

### Narrative themes
*Expectations disappointed*

An important theme within Susan's narrative relates to the anticipation by her parents and within the wider family circle that she would have performed much better in her GCSEs than she did.

*I don't know what happened.*
*I was disappointed*
*But in a way it was something…it was my fault.*
*Because when I should have been studying*
*I wasn't putting in a lot of effort*
*I didn't enjoy it… the last couple of months.*
*It was just downhill really*
*I did care but it went down hill*
*for a lot of people.*

*They were disappointed*
*But still felt proud that I did do some exams.*
*There were lots of girls in my year*
*Who didn't do any.*

The disappointment is tempered by the fact that she got good enough grades to go to college, where she planned to retake subjects like mathematics in addition to starting a BTEC in health and social care. It was presumed that attending college would be the next stop after leaving school. A cause for concern, for both her and her parents, was which college she should attend, due to the poor reputation of the local college.

**Peer distancing**
The college selected by her and her parents was some considerable distance from where she lived. It was chosen because there would be "less distraction because I didn't know too many people", even though she was "scared at first" because she didn't know "what I would do at break times or who I was gonna sit with". She asserts this was the best decision, as not only has she made new friends but she is applying herself to her studies and is interested in studying once more.

**Fresh start**
Attending college and making new friends was the opportunity for a new start. The environment felt better.

*Now in college, you are more in control*
*It's like if you wanna learn, you wanna learn*
*If you don't you don't*
*And you're more respected cos you're older*
*And you've got more responsibilities for yourself*
*It's like you feel more mature in yourself.*

College is presented as a new opportunity to re-engage in more self-directed learning and to put things right with her parents. She recounts that her parents are positive about the course she is doing and she appears more focused. She believes it is important to her parents that she succeeds and moves into something higher. For her, to "get somewhere, not just anywhere, but into something proper" is just as important.

**"I'm taking stepping stones…"**
*I´ve sat down and thought about it*
*And I do wanna get somewhere*
*I´ve started college now*
*There's lots of people*
*who haven´t even thought about college.*

*I´ve taken the time to go into further education*
*And do something about my situation*
*And how I wanna be*
*And what I wanna do in life*
*I´m doing something positive about it.*

Susan presents a positive evaluation of her situation. Keeping occupied is stressed in other parts of her story. This is contrasted with members of her peer group who have `lost the focus to learn', which she did not want to do. In any event her parents would not have allowed her to sit around.
There are instances where she recounts feeling "short" of confidence and a little fearful that she may get bored with the course, drop it and have to start all over again.

*So sometimes I have to boost myself up with confidence*
*And remind myself that I'm not doing it*

*to prove to anyone else*
*only to myself*
*that I can do it*
*There's nothing stopping me.*

Achieving low GCSE grades was not specially regarded as a disadvantageous place to be at all. Susan has responded to this as an opportunity for a new departure on a journey which she hopes will lead to qualifications to help her secure a 'proper job', an 'apartment' and a 'car'.

# Respondent 5:  Richard - aged 17

**Recruitment to the research**
Richard agreed to be interviewed after I was introduced to him by a youth leader I met through my professional work. We met at his home.

**Local Context**
Richard lives in the borough of Aletown, in one of the poorest wards.  The area has high levels of unemployment and over the years has been the subject of various attempts at urban regeneration.  Youth unemployment is particularly acute.

**Family Background**
Richard lives at home with his mother, her partner, and his older sister and younger brother. His mother and her partner work full-time. His mother does domestic/catering work and her partner is a porter on the railways.  He explained that his older sister had completed an advanced GNVQ in health and social care but had been unable to secure employment since completing her course twelve months previously.  He feared the same thing would happen to him.

Richard has never had a job, despite looking for part-time work whilst at school. He emphasizes that his mother was always interested in his education but couldn't help him because "she doesn't know anything about education and so couldn't help me". School for him was a disaster. Fortunately, he is not under any pressure at home and does not see himself leaving home for the foreseeable future. He feels this will give him an opportunity to "sort himself and get some skills".

**Narrative Themes**
*I just didn't care either*

*Basically none of us cared about learning*
*like when the teacher was in class like*
*they (pupils) would all still be speaking*
*throwing stuff around the class.*
*Playing around in class.*

*Sometimes there weren't no teacher in class or anything*
*so basically no one cared*
*So basically I just didn't care either.*

*Cos if you are in a room with everyone else*
*that's willing to work*
*then you are not gonna be mucking around*
*and everyone is doing their work*
*so, you are gonna be sitting down*
*and doing your work as well.*

These sentiments encapsulate the experience of failure which was the result of his secondary education. He admits to following the crowd. He believes no one really cared about whether he was doing well or not. His mother repeatedly asked about his projects at school but he would "tell her what she wanted to hear; everything was okay like". But it was really downhill after year nine. He had no interest in school and would regularly truant.  It came as no surprise to him when he failed the five GCSEs he sat.  He decided there was no point in doing retakes even though he thought it best to go to college. College was an option because there was nothing else to do. He was reluctant about it and would have preferred to go into employment, but believed he wouldn't get any work.  He stressed he needed to learn "a skill of some sort" so that he could find work.

**A second chance at learning**
Richard did not want to "hang out on the streets" like the friends he had "moved with" when he was at school. He felt that his failure at school was his fault. "So this time I'm trying to do my best". He chose a college some 12 miles from home in order that he could "focus better"; to give himself a better chance a second this second time around.  He decided to do a GNVQ in sports, but he does not know why he chose to study a GNVQ in sports or how this might help him in the future.
He believes he will be a success at this course because "I'm more grown up and I've learnt from those negative experiences". The important thing for him is to prove to himself that he can get a qualification of some sort.

He is participating in further education to keep occupied and meanwhile hopes that what he learns will somehow enable him to obtain some form of secure employment.  Beyond keeping occupied, at this stage, Richard has little sense of direction and is unclear what his next step would be when he completes his GNVQ.

**Postscript**
In conversation with Richard in February 2008, he confirmed that he finished his sports GNVQ and passed. So he now has a certificate and has proved to himself that he can stick with something. Since September he has been studying painting and decorating at a new college. His girlfriend has also had a child, so he is now under even more pressure to find employment. He has so far been unable to find any part-time employment. Both he and his daughter are supported by his mother.

# Respondent 6:  Nancy - aged 18

**Recruitment to the research**
I met Nancy through a youth leader I know and had worked with professionally.
At the youth club where I met her, they ran a football club every Saturday.  I
visited the club on three consecutive Saturdays, talking to the young people
generally and getting to know a few of  them.  Nancy was one of two young
people who agreed to be interviewed for the research.

**Local Context**
Nancy lives in the London Borough of Westwick.

**Family Background**
Helping out at the youth club on a Saturday was Nancy's regular part-time
work.  Four weeks prior to the interview she had started working for them
again after a break of several months. She had previously worked with them
for eighteen months – since she was fifteen.  She worked four hours every
Saturday and this was her only paid work. The club was a short walk from
where she lives.

The narrative extracts presented here give some insight into the complex
situation Nancy finds herself in and how she adapts to it.

**Narrative Themes** *:*
***Resisting peer pressure – "I was quite disruptive you know"***

*But then like, problems started happening*
*so I went back (to work at youth club)*
*like some of the people I used to walk with*
*they would get into trouble*
*like causing trouble on the roads*
*being loud, anti-social.*

*I didn't want to go down that road*
*I feel I made the right decision*
*Cos maybe if I didn't do that*
*I'd probably end up in lots of trouble.*

Her narrative reflects other concerns about getting into trouble, attempting to
avoid getting into trouble and dealing with confrontational relationships with
teachers.

*I said to him*
*don't announce my grades to the whole class*
*I deserve some respect*
*Come and talk to us like individuals*
*One-on-one*
*So that we can know it's because ...      (the reason for the low grades)*
*If you shout the grades out*

*It's embarrassing*
*So I said this to him.*

*And he still reads out my grades*
*Even though it was a good grade*
*I told him it was out of order*
*That it's disrespectful*
*That he needs to talk to us one-on-one*
*He got me angry and I started shouting.*

Nancy believes that she was put in for the GCSE foundation paper (in this particular subject) as a consequence of this incident, and asserts that this was the punishment meted out by this teacher for her classroom insolence.

*I think he thought that my punishment*
*Was to put me down for foundation*
*Cos I always said*
*I need to get an A or B in English*
*To do my law*
*So I think that was my punishment.*

She connects this experience to other longer-term consequences which have affected her decisions about what she would do when she left school, such as scaling down her aspirations to study law. Even though she actually achieved several grades at C and above, she herself thought law was probably too much for her to cope with. However, she has remained committed to improving her credentials.

### Decision: The Catalyst

*That's why I'm doing GCSE retakes*
*To go along with what I've got*
*Plus get an extra subject*
*Just to give me more time*

(Yvonne: What about the law that you said earlier you were interested in?)

*I just don't know*
*With me having to go back to do GCSEs*
*I kinda just dismissed it , and said it's hard.*
*I love children*
*So I think I'll do that*
*So I'm thinking of doing some A levels as well*
*So that I have that to fall back on*
*Then after the two years A levels*
*I'm going back to do an extra year in childcare*

When questioned about how she arrived at these decisions Nancy did not recount any events which revealed access to or use of careers information, advice or guidance. Instead she gave a central role to her self-reliance and

reflexivity. The narrative extract above alludes to her belief that qualifications are important to her future plans.

Self-reflection comes up in other events in which her capacity for introspection is represented as leading to a decisive turning point. In the narrative extract to follow, we glimpse an undercurrent of confrontation and resistance and the constructing of a new identity in which she attempts to avoid negative stereotypes. In this little story she represents herself as adopting a different posture towards her education after some critical reflection. This enabled her "not to let myself down" and is connected to her later decision to take education more seriously.

*I used to get like warnings ( for being involved in confrontation)*
*I'd say most of the confrontation was with this ( sociology) teacher basically.*

*Always labelled the black kids in the class*
*Cos like in the class yeah*
*One section of the class is like the black kids*
*who sits next to each other*
*Same as the white kids*
*So like we used to get labelled*
*We used to get labelled a lot*
*She used to be like...*

*She used to be like to the boys*
*"You boys are typical (gives direct speech to the teacher)*
*examples of why black kids fail*
*and I'm here trying to assist; trying to change it".*
*But she's not trying to change it*
*Cos like at the end of the day*
*She keeps labelling us*
*Saying that we're gonna fail*
*And like all the black kids are down for foundation.*

*So like that class, the black kids wouldn't listen*
*Well I thought... well I started fulfilling the halo effect*
*The self-fulfilling prophesy, sorry*
*I started saying*
*"Oh (gives herself direct speech) we're not worth it*
*why, why bother listening"?*

*Then when I got to year 11*
*I sat down and looked into myself*
*Saying that, "if I'm being like this self-fulfilling prophesy*
*Then I'm letting myself down"*
*And BANG in year 11, I calmed down.*

*I completely changed*
*And like, if she used to say negative things*
*I'd just ignore it, brush it off*
*Saying, "you know what, that's your thought"*

*"I'm gonna change your thought"*
*Eventually I did*
*So she was proud.*

### Postscript
I spoke to Nancy in January 2008. She passed  the additional GCSEs she retook. She's currently doing the BTEC National Diploma in childcare.

## Respondent 15:  Rebecca - aged 21

**Recruitment to the research**
Rebecca works as a part-time detached youth worker.  Detached youth workers are attached to youth centres or clubs. They work a specific 'local patch', forming relationships with young people on their patch in order to encourage them to engage in 'constructive' positive activities in order to divert them from anti-social and potentially criminalising behaviour.  I met her through a youth leader with whom I've worked professionally.  At the time of the interview Rebecca had recently (within the previous three months) commenced a youth and community work degree at Greenwich University.

**Local Context**
Rebecca lives and works in the London Borough of Hambledon.

She currently lives on her own in one-bedroom housing association accommodation which she managed to secure after three years of moving between different hostels for homeless young people.

**Family background**
Rebecca left school at 16 with five good grade GCSEs.  She did not like academic work and said there was no pressure from her mother about school work; that however well they did she would be proud of them.

Rebecca left home at 17 after going through a rebellious streak. At that time home was with mum, older sister and four younger brothers.  Her father lives locally but they don't get on so she doesn't have any communication with him. She left home, she says, because her mother gave her a blunt ultimatum:

*My mother said, "if I don't like the rules*
*I can get out"*
*And I chose to leave.*

The following three years were problematic and difficult for her as she made efforts to secure permanent accommodation.  During that time she experienced several periods of homelessness, "literally staying at different people's houses", as she negotiated her way through obstacles to secure permanent housing.

Her older sister (aged 24) has a young daughter and attends Greenwich University (on the second year of her degree course).

In spite of having to leave home suddenly at 17, Rebecca explained that she remained on good terms with her family.

*Most of my support has come from my mum*
*Although she did ask me to leave*
*Me and my mum have a strong relationship*
*I can talk to her about anything*

*And she will help me with anything*
*Anything at all.*

**Narrative Themes**
***Becoming independent***

Rebecca had the option that she could have moved back home.  She explains that she didn't want to do this because the accommodation was already overcrowded.
She chose a more difficult path instead, which was to struggle to create independent living arrangements.  She explains:

*It took me about three years*
*Trying to sort out my housing*
*It should have taken about 6 months to a year.*

*The main problem I had was financial*
*Because, I was trying to go to college as well*
*Trying to provide for myself*
*Pay rent, and the hostel rent is quite expensive*
*So I was working part-time*
*It was quite difficult.*

*I had several hostel moves*
*And suffered a bit of depression*
*Because obviously going from being with my family*
*And to being on my own*
*Finding independence*
*Which has actually taken me a long time*
*To actually reach full independence.*

The preceding four years have undoubtedly been very challenging for Rebecca.  In her words there have been some 'very depressing times'. Yet she places great value on the experience and maturity which have resulted from this period in her life:

*So, I wouldn't change nothing*
*Nothing at all*
*As hard as it's been*
*And as hurt as I've been sometimes*
*I've grown as a person.*

***Passion for youth work***
Rebecca has had a difficult transition journey.  She was not fond of school.  She characterised it as a place where she was "forced to go" and where you were treated as "second class" if you're not into "academics".  She hated reading and writing, and studying of any kind does not come easily to her.

She made several false starts during her first two years after leaving school.  She dropped out of 6th form as she "wasn't there for the right reason"; she was

"pushed into it".  She then enrolled for an Advanced Vocational Certificate in Health and Social Care, but dropped out when she became homeless:

*So I dropped out, at that time as well*
*It took me another year before I went back to college*
*By now I was about 19*
*And I went back and did the BTEC in health and social care*
*But this time I stuck it out.*

*It actually felt really good to know that I had finished something*
*And that I'd pushed myself to finish*
*I realised that there wasn't too much I could do*
*Without some further qualifications.*

*Like it's OK having the GCSEs but they don't*
*Exactly get you anywhere either*
*And I'm not the sort of person to work in a shop*
*It just never really interested me*
*Other people would be happy to work in shops*
*But I felt I just wanted to try and do a little bit better.*

She wasn't sure why she chose health and social care.  She conveyed that, at that time, she had a vague interest in youth work.  Whilst doing the BTEC she found voluntary work in a church youth club and worked with them for two and a half years.  Her vague interest was to solidify into a determined commitment to pursue a career in youth work.  At the time of her first interview, this commitment had now materialised into regular, not very well paid detached youth work, alongside a full-time degree course.

# Respondent 23:  Michael - aged 24

**Recruitment to the research**
Michael was recruited to the research through a friend who was not involved in the research but knew about it and mentioned it to him.  He agreed for the colleague to pass on his number.  I spoke with him on the telephone and explained the nature of the research, and he agreed to participate. The interview took place at the home of a colleague as this was convenient to him.

**Local Context**
Michael lives in the London Borough of Westwick.

**Family Background**
Michael lives with his parents and three brothers in public rented accommodation.  His twin brother was about to leave home for university and Michael was under a lot of pressure from his parents to find his own accommodation.  This was causing him some anxiety as his work situation is precarious, rents are expensive and he could see no immediate solution to his housing situation.  His parents felt he is old enough to 'fend for himself'.  However, his work situation was such that he could go two/three months without any building work, especially in the winter months.  This unreliability in his income meant he was reluctant to take on the long-term commitment of renting accommodation.  Also he was still at the junior end of the trade, which meant that he could not yet command the market rate, so what he was earning was insufficient for the independent lifestyle his parents reckoned he should now be living.

Michael did not achieve well at school – 4 GCSEs at grade D.  However, he says he did better than he imagined he would as he is "no good with learning and writing".  He was not regarded as being as bright as his twin brother, and people "concentrated on him, more than they concentrated on me".  He felt ignored and isolated and this undermined his confidence.

**Narrative Themes**
***Unsure which pathway to take***

On leaving school, Michael was instructed by his father to "get a trade".  He was unsure which building trade, so started a two-year building construction course which covered many different trades.  He also enjoyed music so decided to pursue a music technology course at evening classes.  In his building construction course he majored in carpentry.  He completed the music technology course at the same time but then realised:

*There wasn't…I didn't…they didn't*
*Really tell you what you could do with it*
*They (college) weren't that helpful*
*So it didn't lead to anything concrete.*

Realising that he'd reached a dead end with music, Michael decided to concentrate on carpentry, and did a further part-time course for one year in this area. He worked full-time whenever he could get work. Initially he had to take whatever was offered so often this amounted to labouring work. But gradually he started picking up carpentry work and was surprised at how badly his college course had prepared him for actual site work:

*I done carpentry at college*
*But I didn't like it very much*
*In fact we were doing a lot more paperwork than practicals*
*Then when I went outside and go for jobs and stuff*
*And when I actually got a job, it was*
*Like the things I was learning (at college)*
*They said that it was wrong.*

*They say you have to do it in a different way*
*And that got me confused*
*Cos I mean, I spent two years doing it one way*
*And when I go to do it on the job they say it's not right*
*So the college stuff was just theory.*

*Basically that I should've done like an apprenticeship*
*some kind of training programme*
*Where I could've trained on the job*
*But I did finish the course and got a C&G.*

Michael has had carpentry work on and off for several years. At the time of the interview he said he was fed up with the insecurity, one month having work then nothing for another month. So he was about to start a plumbing course because he's learnt in the building trade that plumbers are more scarce and therefore earn more money.

### '*Finding my niche*'
Michael admits it's been difficult to develop a career pathway. Even though he's had exposure to a variety of building trades and has qualifications to show he has studied certain trades this was not enough, as he explains:

*Trying to find a job has been difficult*
*Like most of the jobs I've gone for they want like 5 years experience*
*Or six or ten years experience*
*IN carpentry!!*

*I mean like, I show them my certificates and all of that*
*But then they say, "have you got any experience?"*
*And then I say, "a little"*
*And they say, "well we're looking for five years"*
*And it's kind of impossible that way.*

*I was applying for anything that's with carpentry*
*And even labouring*

*But when I have the money I'm gonna go for the plumbing*
*It's been hard having regular work.*

His career path has had twists and turns, peaks and troughs.  He anticipates the plumbing will help to open up a niche for him where his skills will be in greater demand than is currently the case.  He laments that there is so much you're expected to know without anyone actually telling you and that so much is left to chance.


## Postscript

I found it difficult to re-establish contact with Michael, but eventually he did respond to my text and agreed a time I could call him.  I spoke with him in March 2008. The reason he's so difficult to reach is that he is currently doing two jobs.  He hasn't had the financial means to do the plumbing training.  Carpentry work dried up.  Michael now works for an after-school club and for Marks & Spencer.  He has moved out of his parent's accommodation and shares a rented flat with a colleague.

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