

# Victims and survivors of symbolic violence: An examination of the lived experiences of 'near-miss' pupils within an academically selective education system

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

UCL

# Declaration

I, Francesca Louise McCarthy, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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# Abstract

Eleven of the 151 Local Education Authorities which contain secondary schools in England are classified by the DfE as being 'highly selective'. Pupils who live in such areas take a test ('the 11+') in their final year of primary school which determines whether they gain access to an academically selective school ('a grammar school'). This thesis focuses on the lived experiences of three pupils who took but did not pass the 11+, but whose Key Stage 2 attainment (as measured by statutory testing administered to all pupils across England in the final year of primary school) categorised them as 'higher attainers' ('near-miss pupils').

This thesis draws upon Bourdieu's thinking tools to explore the relationship between the subjective lived experience of an individual pupil and the objective, but often unseen structures of the education system they were part of. I draw upon the Mosaic approach as a means of centralising the participant within this research and use a multi-method approach to create an overall 'picture' of their lived experiences. Using an analytical framework centred around a narrative approach, I construct and analyse thematic narratives based on the stories which emerged from the participants' data and then use these to re-present the lived experiences of the participants.

The synthesis of the re-presentations leads to the findings of this research. These demonstrate that in addition to falling victim to symbolic violence, the participants' survival was also evident, resulting from their knowledge of the 'game' and its rules. This therefore presents a more nuanced perspective on academically selective education than the dominant/dominated binary within Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic violence. In addition, this thesis highlights that qualitative engagement with pupils' perspectives on academically selective education has, to date, been largely underused within both education policy and academic literature. This thesis argues that centralising such perspectives serves to raise important considerations for the relationship between education and social justice by demonstrating what can be learned from engaging with the nuances within the lived experiences of pupils.

# Impact Statement

This statement is structured in two sections, exploring the impact this thesis has had and could continue to have inside and outside academia. Wherever possible, I make reference to specific examples to support my justifications.

## Inside academia

I have used both the theoretical and methodological aspects of this thesis within my higher education teaching. I delivered seminars on Bourdieu to undergraduate students on the BA Education Studies programme in the academic years 20/21 and 21/22. In addition, I was invited to deliver a guest lecture to undergraduate students on the programme in October 2022 which focused on how I had applied Bourdieu within my research. I have recently begun teaching at MA level and am able to draw on various elements of this thesis in order to engage students with Bourdieusian methodology in relation to their dissertation development.

I have presented various aspects of this thesis at academic conferences. I had papers accepted for BERA 2020 and BSA 2020 and I presented an individual paper at BERA 2021. I am awaiting a decision on my individual paper submission for BSA 2023 and plan to enter an individual paper submission for BERA 2023.

My publication <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13540602.2022.2098268> draws on data collected for this thesis. To generate impact within academia, I am planning future publications concerning the findings of this thesis and the methodology associated with combining Bourdieu with a narrative approach.

## Outside academia

I was awarded an IOE Early Career Impact Fellowship in 2022. The findings of this thesis were used in combination with funding to host an impact event titled 'See What I'm Saying?' This event used stories from the data within this thesis as starting points for discussion groups with pupils attending a non-academically selective school in an academically selective area. The event sustained the focus on lived experience which I used in this thesis and I worked with a graphic artist (Josh Knowles [www.joshknowles.co.uk](http://www.joshknowles.co.uk)) to develop a way that lived experiences could be 'seen' and therefore more easily disseminated. Josh live-drew the discussions and the drawings can be seen at appendix 13. These outputs were then promoted

via a blog published on the Comprehensive Future website <https://comprehensivefuture.org.uk/listening-to-the-silenced-majority/>

Following from this, I was invited to talk about my research for a film produced by the campaign group Time's Up For The Test (<https://timesupforthetest.org/>). I was also invited to present the images seen at appendix 13 at the launch event for the campaign. A short film of the launch event is also available on the above website.

Both of the above have brought the findings of this thesis to an audience beyond academia. This is evident from in tweet impressions data from my Twitter analytics account which rose to 1753 in October 2022. The above examples have also widened my network of contacts which I am incorporating into my development of a further impact strategy. My overall aim for future impact outside academia is to utilise this thesis' focus on pupils' lived experiences to gain a more critical engagement with academically selective education amongst policymakers and practitioners.

# Acknowledgements

I begin by thanking Boris, Poppy, Gaby and Will for being such willing and enthusiastic participants in this research. I have learned so much from the reflections and stories they shared with me. I would also like to thank the staff and pupils at Hillside for welcoming me back, in particular Paula who made meetings happen and Amanda who very kindly provided me with workspace and managed the logistics of having me chaperoned around the building.

Next, I am going to be forever indebted to my supervisory team. To Prof Martin Mills for staying with me despite moving to the other side of the globe, Prof Jacek Brant for taking on my supervision at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour with such kindness and encouragement and to Dr Becky Taylor for her seemingly endless willingness to listen and respond. I have been so very lucky to have had your support in facing the challenges a 'pandemic PhD' has presented.

There have been countless occasions when family and friends have asked the dreaded 'how's the PhD going?' question. Whilst my responses have varied, your support has remained consistent. I can assure you all that this has been appreciated, even if I have no doubt failed to say so at the time. A special thank you to the McCarthys in Newport Pagnell and the Jenkins in Tenby.

To Mum, who will never get to read this but whose constant assurance of 'as long as you try your best' stays with me.

Finally, to Anthony and Cecilia. My decision to take this on changed our family life completely and you both faced this change with such positivity. Thank you for understanding and for the space and time to write my 'words'. I recognise that as much as it is my name on the front of this thesis, both of you have been inherent in getting it to this point. You've both witnessed the highs and lows, celebrating with me when things have gone well and motivating me when they haven't. I love you both very much.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Rationale

The rationale behind this thesis stems from my experience of teaching in a non-academically selective school within an academically selective area of England. The following vignette draws on a particular incident which took place at the latter stage of my teaching career.

*It's early September and I've been called away from a non-teaching period to cover an absent colleague's lesson. It's Year 7 English and on arriving at the classroom, I'm pleased to find that work has been set for the class which they appear to be busy with. They are writing letters to their absent teacher, introducing themselves. The lesson passes by smoothly and as I'm collecting in work at the end, one of the pupils asks me if I'd worked in the school for a long time. I happily divulge that this was my fifth year at the school and mention that I'd previously worked at another school in the area before this one. I also share with the pupils that prior to that school, I'd worked as a lawyer in London. A boy next to me catches my eye and says, "That must've been a good job." I tell him that I prefer the one I'm doing now. He looks at me in a bit of disbelief, before adding "Well, I won't be a lawyer Miss, I failed my 11+." On hearing this, I immediately launch into what I think of in my head as the 'it's just a test' speech I've given so many times before. The bell goes, I dismiss the pupils and make my way back to my office.*

*As I'm walking down the corridor, two things strike me. Firstly, I question whether my reassurances to that pupil will have made any difference whatsoever and whether my 'it's just a test' speech had ever made any difference to any of the pupils who had heard it. Secondly, I realise that the only voice I heard contesting his claim was my own. No other pupil spoke up and the comment from him certainly didn't seem to have been considered controversial by any of his peers. For all of us in that classroom, that comment constituted a recognisable aspect of the academically selective system, something we all appeared to be familiar with.*

This thesis seeks to explore such familiarity and more specifically, how this familiarity plays out in the lived experiences of pupils who are educated within an academically selective system. I recognise that the first stage of this exploration is to make the reader familiar with the context in which this vignette took place. To do this, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the historical and political contexts in which the academically selective education system in England was established and developed. I use this overview to demonstrate how political control of education shaped the current status of academically selective education in England, providing a contextual understanding of its reduced, but continuing, existence.

## The continuing existence of academically selective education in England

Within England, schools which academically select pupils by means of an entrance test are colloquially referred to as 'grammar schools'. The entrance test is known as the '11+' which is referred to by the pupil in the vignette above. The number of grammar schools peaked at 1298 across England and Wales in 1964. Today the number stands at 163 and eleven of the 151 Local Education Authorities containing secondary schools within England are classified by the Department for Education as highly selective (Long et al., 2022).

The starting point for this overview is the 1944 Education Act which established state-funded secondary education for all children through the tripartite system of grammar schools, technical colleges and secondary modern schools (Jones, 2016). The 1944 Act was based on recommendations from the Spens Report of 1938 and the Norwood Report of 1943. Both of these reports make reference to the Platonic theory of tripartism which discusses differences in societal groups in terms of gold (leaders), silver (merchants and tradesmen) and copper (artisans and farmers) (Orr, 2017). Three key proponents of 'secondary education for all' throughout the inter-war period and up until the passing of the Act in 1944 were R.H. Tawney, Fred Clarke and Cyril Norwood. McCulloch (1998) identifies their broad agreement regarding the application of tripartism to the incoming secondary education system despite their differing stances on educational reform. As a socialist, Tawney advocated for 'schools differing in type and curriculum, but all complying with secondary standards' (Tawney, n.d). The liberal Clarke sought 'some effective amalgam of the best elements in European and American ideas of secondary education' (Clarke, 1933, p. 86), while the conservative Norwood openly acknowledged three distinct groupings of pupils which 'whatever may be their ground, have in fact established themselves in general educational experience' (Norwood, 1943, p. 2).

Despite an original endorsement from the Spens Report for 'parity of esteem' and a call for barriers between school types to be regarded as 'the legacies of an age which had a different educational and social outlook from our own' (Spens, 1938, p. xxxv) the final result of the promise of secondary education for all amounted to a hierarchical system of grammar schools, technical schools and secondary moderns. Grammar schools would provide

education to a select cohort who would go on to enter university and the 'professions'. The 11-year-olds who did not pass the 11+ would be educated either at a technical school or at a secondary modern, namely the 'silver' and 'bronze' elements of Plato's tripartism.

Within Clement Attlee's post-war Labour administration, Minister of Education Ellen Wilkinson and her parliamentary secretary David Hardman continued the support for tripartism. Their view was that the system and in particular the potential opportunity held by the new secondary modern schools was a 'new conception of secondary education for the majority of our children' (Hardman, 1946). However, these aspirations were not matched with institutional clarity regarding the organisation and development of the new secondary modern schools in terms of both buildings as well as curricula. The result was that whilst grammar schools maintained an established academic tradition akin to fee-paying schools, secondary modern schools varied. Some offered alternative styles of curriculum and teaching pedagogies delivered in newly built schools whilst others retained elementary style lessons which took place in over-crowded and dilapidated buildings (McCulloch, 2002). Consistency at the top of the hierarchy was matched with divergence at the bottom. By 1955, the number of secondary modern schools had increased to 3500 (Ministry of Education, 1956) but the third strand of the tripartite system (the technical schools) never fully developed, educating less than four percent of secondary age pupils (McCulloch, 1989).

The Conservative Government of 1951 – 1964 maintained pro-selection policies but on their election in 1964, Harold Wilson's Labour administration began to enact their policy toward comprehensive education in the face of ever-increasing public dis-satisfaction with secondary modern schools. Circular 10/65 was issued in 1965 but this fell short of legislating on the move to comprehensive schools; instead it merely requested Local Education Authorities to submit their plans for doing so (Simon, 1992). The pace of reorganisation to a comprehensive system moved relatively quickly and by the end of the 1960s nearly a third of secondary age pupils attended a comprehensive school (Benn, 1972). Conservative resistance to comprehensive education remained and on their return to power, Circular 10/70 was issued by Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher. This withdrew the request of 10/65 and local authorities regained the choice regarding a move to comprehensive education. Change of policy came with each successive change of government. Harold Wilson and later James Callaghan's Labour administration of 1974 – 1979 issued Circular 4/74 which reinstated the aims of

Circular 10/65 and later passed the Education Act 1976 which further required plans from Local Education Authorities for comprehensive reorganisation. However, the Conservatives, on gaining power in 1979 proceeded to pass the Education Act 1979 which repealed the 1976 Act. Local Education Authorities were then able to repeal plans for comprehensive reorganisation if they wished. Regardless, during the period 1964 to 1979 the number of grammar schools fell from 1298 to 261 (Long et al., 2022).

As a result of this substantial decrease in grammar school numbers, education policy of the 1980s and 1990s Conservative Government was comparatively quiet on the subject matter of academic selection. The establishment of the GCSE in 1985 as a replacement to the previous GCE O Level and CSE examinations and the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 under the Education Reform Act allowed all schools to be compared on the basis of their exam results. Not surprisingly given their intake, such comparison methods favoured the surviving grammar schools which remained part of the ever-increasing diverse choice of secondary provision.

On their return to power in 1997, the Labour Government introduced the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. In keeping with its 1997 manifesto, the focus on 'standards not structures' (Labour Party, 1997) allowed the continuation of existing grammar schools and passed the decision over their continuing existence over to parental ballot. The Act prohibited a local authority from opening new schools which selected by means of 'ability' (as measured by the 11+ test). New Labour's focus on increasing diversity of secondary school types (which numbered 16 in 2001) meant that, according to the then Education Secretary David Blunkett, 'Labour's war against grammars is over' (The Sunday Telegraph, 12 March 2000 cited in Chitty, 2013, p. 84). Grammar schools retained their place in an ever-transforming system of secondary education, in which debate surrounding the "Third Way" of the Academies Programme dominated. By this point, 163 grammar schools remained and debate surrounding academically selective education appeared to move further down the agenda of political parties.

Under the Cameron-Clegg Coalition Government (2010-2015), the expansion of all schools (including grammar schools) was made possible by changes to the Schools Admissions Code (DfE, 2014) which allowed any school to expand their pupil allocation number. In addition, the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations

2013 allowed for expansion of a school premises without statutory approval. It was not until 2015, when Nicky Morgan (Education Secretary 2014 – 2016) approved a satellite branch of an existing grammar school to be opened in Kent (BBC, 2015) that the grammar school debate appeared to once again become a political priority. Following the Conservative victory in the 2015 general election, the Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May suggested that the ban on the creation of new grammar schools would be lifted in order to provide ‘schools that work for everyone’ (DfE, 2016).

Grammar schools therefore returned to the political spotlight. Despite confirmation given by Justine Greening (Education Secretary 2016 – 2018) that the ban on new grammar schools would remain in place (ParliamentUK, 2017), the Chancellor’s statement of 2016 announced expansion funding for existing grammar schools of £50 million per year from 2017-2018 (H.M.Treasury, 2016). Existing grammar schools were able to apply for funding on their submission of plans to provide additional places to ‘disadvantaged pupils’. The DfE currently operates a system of additional ‘Pupil Premium’ funding to schools to support children who fall into any of the following categories: eligibility for free school meals or prior eligibility in the previous six years, children who are looked after by the local authority and children who have been adopted from or left care of the local authority (DfE, 2022a). As a result, pupil premium eligibility and free school meal eligibility are used interchangeably as proxies for disadvantage. To date, there have been two rounds of funding allocation. Sixteen schools received expansion funding in 2018-19 and six received expansion funding in 2019-20 (DfE, 2020). Initial analyses of admissions data from grammar schools in receipt of the 2018-19 funding has revealed that it had little (if any) impact on the number of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding who took up grammar school places in September 2020 (Comprehensive Future, 2022; Coombs, 2020; Whittaker, 2020). The DfE have not published their own analysis of funding impact and the funding has not continued beyond 2019-20. Although this could be attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the DfE has not updated any guidance or communication on expansion funding since 10 December 2020.

This overview has demonstrated how political context relates to academically selective education systems. The relationship appears as one which ebbs and flows in terms of political rhetoric but at no point have either Conservative or Labour governments sought to completely remove academically selective systems. Their continuing existence has been



found to have been called upon within political discourse, with the most recent example seen in the Conservative leadership campaign of Liz Truss who pledged to lift the ban on new grammar schools (Dickens, 2022) had she remained in leadership. The continuing existence of academically selective systems positions them as both an outlier to those who live in areas of England where they do not operate but also a familiar reality to those who live in areas where they do. Part of this reality is the segregation of pupils into different secondary schools based on the outcomes of the 11+ test. My research interest therefore developed from the continuing existence of academically selective education and more specifically how this continuing existence related to pupils' lived experiences of education.

### Structure of this thesis

This thesis continues in Chapter 2 with a Literature Review that concludes with my research questions. Chapter 3 presents my epistemological and methodological approach, along with my research design and ethical considerations. I discuss my analytical framework in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 – 7 present the data and discussion of the data can be found in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 concludes with a concise summary of findings and the implications of this thesis.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

This chapter is structured in three broad sections. I begin by problematising academically selective education in relation to issues concerning social injustice within state-funded education in England. I examine how conceptualisations of social mobility and meritocracy operate within the context of academically selective education. Such contextualisation demonstrates how these concepts appear to act as an implicit set of 'rules' to which academically selective education is aligned. The second section of the chapter considers the ways in which the 'thinking tools' of Pierre Bourdieu (Wacquant, 1989, p. 50) provide the means of exposing such 'rules', via the concepts of habitus, field, capital, doxa and symbolic violence. The section considers how the 'thinking tools' have been applied by scholars within the sociology of education to explicate and examine inequalities within education. It goes on to explore feminist critiques of Bourdieu, which argue that Bourdieu's consistent focus on a relational exploration of the social world allows for a more nuanced approach. This approach allows racialised, gendered and classed elements of an individual's lived experience to disrupt the simplistic interpretation of the dominant/dominated binary. In the final section, literature which focuses on pupils' lived experiences of academically selective systems and practices is explored. This section demonstrates the commonalities that are evident within the limited amount of qualitative research in this particular area. The chapter concludes by drawing the findings of the review together to form the research questions which this thesis will address and presenting literature relevant to an issue which became apparent during the process of analysis.

I begin this review by acknowledging that it is highly problematic to examine academically selective education without reference to the term 'ability'. Bradbury observes that while 'ability' can be considered as a 'loose and malleable concept' (2021, p. 39) the dominance of data focused practices within education serve to position pupils on a comparative spectrum which then goes on to 'establish and maintain the idea of fixed ability' (Bradbury, 2021, p. 118). The notion of 'ability' being both 'loose' and 'fixed' is evident in a claim made by the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at the University of Cambridge (one of the two providers of the grammar school entrance test). In a description of their assessment material

as being ‘designed to enable children to demonstrate their academic potential and ability’ (Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring, 2022), ‘ability’ (alongside ‘academic potential’) remains loosely defined and further clarification on what constitutes either is not provided. However, the claim also suggests that despite this looseness, ‘ability’ is fixed enough to allow it to be demonstrated and measured via assessment material which will subsequently operate as a sorting mechanism. Bradbury (2021, p. 144) acknowledges that the eugenicist ideology behind such practice appears to go largely unseen, as a result of ‘ability’ discourse and associated practices being ‘engrained within the education system’ (Bradbury, 2021, p. 134). Likewise Stables et al. (2019) highlight the assumptive basis on which ‘ability’ is conceptualised hegemonically which, they argue, renders it as ‘a contested term’ (Stables et al., 2019, p. 346). In order to find a way through the hegemonic and contested conceptualisation of ‘ability’, I have drawn upon the approach taken by previous research on academically selective practices within schools. Such literature has taken great pains to distinguish between pupil ‘ability’ and pupil attainment data and utilised the latter to generate findings (see for example Connolly et al., 2019; Francis, Archer, et al., 2017). I concede that this is by no means a perfect solution; as Bradbury (2021, p. 119) observes, such data are used to ‘label children as high or low ability, providing the numerical authority for these labels.’ However, it is also necessary to acknowledge that such authority and its consequent labelling are commonplace within the current discourse of education and therefore cannot be ignored. Throughout this thesis, my intention is to make clear how measurements of ‘ability’ have been generated, recognising that attainment data ‘cannot be treated as a neutral measure of abilities or skills that are independent of society’ (Stobart, 2008, p. 6). Therefore, my use of ‘ability’ will be qualified, an example being ‘*ability*’ (*as measured by the 11+ test*).

### Problematising academically selective education

Despite delivering universal secondary education, the tripartite system of the 1944 Education Act did not provide the *same* secondary education for all. Both Simon (1986) and McCulloch (2002) acknowledge that the system maintained the social order previously inherent in the provision of secondary schooling solely to pupils attending fee-paying public schools. However, tripartism modified such social order by creating ‘an institutional form and a variety of justifications for educational divisions’ (Jones, 2016, p. 24) which were no longer explicitly

controlled by wealth. Division by 'ability' (as measured by the 11+) was presented as offering an academic education (akin to that of a fee-paying school) to *any* child on the condition that they passed the 11+. Unsurprisingly, the divisive nature of the tripartite system soon became an area of consideration for academic criticism. I therefore begin this exploration of the problems associated with academically selective education by drawing upon two studies from the 1950s and demonstrate how such early findings continue to be evident in much more recent literature.

Himmelweit (1954) focused on boys in four areas within Greater London. She makes a particular observation linked to those boys whose 11+ results were on the borderline of gaining grammar school entrance and notes how boys from a middle class background were more likely to have been assigned a grammar school place when compared to their working class counterparts with a similar test result. Floud et al. (1956) focused on two geographical areas, South-West Hertfordshire and Middlesborough. The study (which again only concerned male pupils) found that pupils from middle-class backgrounds made up the majority of the cohort of pupils who passed the grammar school entrance test. Despite being close to seventy years old, these findings continue to be applicable today, albeit with a shift in political discourse away from 'working-class' towards 'disadvantaged'. Recently published statistics confirm that the cohort of pupils who attend grammar schools differs significantly in terms of eligibility for Free School Meals (henceforth FSM; often used as a proxy for social disadvantage); 3% of grammar school students in 2019 were eligible for FSM compared to 15% of all school students (Long et al., 2022).

The problem of academically selective systems not serving all societal groups equally has therefore existed for as long as the system itself and continues to exist in areas where selective systems are still in operation. A recent focused analysis of the data from academically selective local authorities within the 2015/16 National Pupil Database by Lu and Siddiqui (2022) finds segregation based on clustering of pupils according to socioeconomic status (Lu & Siddiqui, 2022, pp. 15-16). Gorard and Siddiqui (2018) also use data drawn from the 2015/16 National Pupil Database and draw comparisons between the entire cohort of pupils and those who attend school in a selective area. The authors use a series of regression models to find that within selective areas, segregation went beyond socioeconomic status

and also involved factors such as the special educational needs of pupils, pupils' first language, ethnicity and degrees of poverty:

Those attending grammar schools, on average, are less likely to be White UK or Black in ethnic origin, less likely to have English as an additional language, much less likely to report any special educational need, especially statemented ones, and are substantially less likely to be FSM-eligible at age 15. (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018, p. 915).

Burgess et al. (2018) make another contribution to the issue of segregation, claiming that even in situations where pupil attainment at Key Stage 2 was equally high, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds living in a selective area were less likely to attend a grammar school than similarly high attaining but less disadvantaged peers. Thus, Himmelweit's (1954) finding of an increased likelihood of grammar school attendance for middle class pupils continues. Jerrim and Sims (2019) apply a binary response model to sections of data drawn from the Millennium Cohort Study to investigate this continuation. Their focus on parental responses to questions regarding school selection highlights that private tutoring for the 11+ test was strongly associated with household income and grammar school attendance. Strength of parental preference for grammar schools was also found to associate with both household income and grammar school attendance, which aligns with patterns of middle-class preference for schools based on their exam attainment. In short, more affluent parents were found to prefer a grammar school place for their child and subsequently used their economic advantage in attempts to secure one. The authors present these factors as contributing towards the under-representation of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds within grammar schools. By doing so they provide reasoning why the segregation found by Himmelweit (1954) and Floud et al. (1956) is a continuing aspect of the academically selective system. This brings to the forefront the paradox that despite being originally presented as a solution to a socially unjust system in which secondary education was largely the preserve of the wealthy, the academically selective system continues to perpetuate instances of social injustice.

Modern political discourse is not blind to this paradox. In a 2016 speech, Theresa May (Prime Minister 2016-2019) highlighted the inequalities faced by 'ordinary working-class people' in relation to accessing educational opportunities, claiming that access to 'good schools' and particularly grammar schools, remained the domain of middle class families. Drawing on the concept of 'meritocracy' (which was referenced sixteen times in her speech) May suggested

grammar school expansion as a means of resolving such a problem (DfE, 2016). Grammar schools are exemplified within the speech as a source of meritocratic opportunity and therefore worthy of expansion so as to provide more places for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Rather than directly referencing selection based on ‘ability’ (as measured by the 11+) May’s speech draws on the ‘ethos’ of academically selective education as one that allows *any* individual to ‘go as far as you can’ on the condition that they ‘work hard’ and ‘do the right thing’ (DfE, 2016). More recently, grammar schools were referenced by Nadhim Zahawi (Education Secretary 2021-2022) at a speech launching a Government White Paper in March 2022. Although he did not make direct reference to expansion of grammar schools, the then Education Secretary was reported as claiming the ‘ethos’ of grammar schools was ‘fantastic’ (Parnaby, 2022). The grammar school ‘ethos’ therefore appears to draw on both social mobility and meritocracy in a conceptualisation of academically selective education as a solution to social disadvantage. This solution relies on the acceptance of division by academic ability (as measured by the 11+ test) which as Francis, Archer, et al. (2017, p. 9) observe, aligns with ‘long-standing cultural fantasies of identity, aspiration and “natural order”’. Problematising academically selective education has revealed that the system’s reliance on segregation by ‘ability’ (as measured by the 11+) continues to result in segregation by socio-economic status. In this case, very little has changed since sociological studies of the system from 1950s. However, unlike the open acceptance of division by ‘ability’ (as measured by the 11+) within the early years of tripartism, this division is now presented as a potential solution to social injustice via an ‘ethos’ reliant on social mobility and meritocracy. This therefore leads to consideration of how such conceptualisations operate within the context of academically selective education.

### [Social mobility and meritocracy – exploring the ‘ethos’ of academically selective education](#)

In this section I draw largely upon literature from both policy sociology and the sociology of education. This is occasionally supplemented by economic literature. The section demonstrates how conceptualisations of social mobility and meritocracy operate as part of the ‘ethos’ of academically selective education.

## Social mobility

Social mobility appears to be a mirage, a source of immense collective hopes and desires for those in the bottom two-thirds of society but in reality it is largely a figment of imagination brought to life in policy and political rhetoric. (Reay, 2013, p. 662)

Reay's recognition of social mobility as rhetoric, rather than a reality encapsulates sociological criticism of the concept. Major and Machin (2018) identify that lack of recognition means social mobility remains focused on upwards movement and appears to disregard movement in the opposite (i.e., downwards) direction. As Reay (2020, p. 410) highlights, social mobility therefore remains as an expectation solely borne by 'the upwardly mobile working classes', contrasting starkly with the 'stasis and continuity' of middle and upper class trajectories. In a recent exploration of social mobility discourses, Ingram and Gamsu (2022, pp. 192-193) problematise the assumption of 'room at the top' within social mobility discourse by highlighting that such an assumption disregards a reality in which space at the top is limited. The authors go on to highlight that recognition of this limited space has now shifted the discourse slightly, so that social mobility is conceptualised as a 'race to the top' which is reliant on the neoliberal ideology of competition. Should an individual not be an adequate competitor or alternatively, if they choose to not compete at all, they are considered to be lacking in the necessary talent and resilience. This therefore aligns with what Sayer (2005, p. 203) describes as 'the long history of discourses which distinguish between the deserving and underserving poor'.

Such discourses are evident in the work of McKenzie (2015) and of Reay (1998) who indicate that the behaviour of working class individuals who fail to conform to the expectations of social mobility is considered defiant. Not wanting to 'better' oneself positions an individual as deserving of blame. Positioning her enquiry into how such blame operates in an education context, Reay (2006, p. 303) cites a teacher who considers the lack of 'care' shown by working-class parents as 'the biggest thing holding the children back'. This resonates with the working-class cultural deprivation theories of Douglas (1964) and Hyman (1967) who conceptualised a working-class 'culture' of non-interest in education that they claim led to lack of upward social mobility. Reay (2020) contends that such a view still exists in contemporary society which 'positions the still working classes as a residuum, too stupid, too idle to make the requisite move towards becoming a better, brighter person' (2020, p. 406).

The sociological criticisms of social mobility do not impede its operation within a context of academically selective education. Academic selection operates in conjunction with the problematic, one-directional conceptualisation of social mobility, in which 'educational achievement is often assumed to be either synonymous with social mobility or a prerequisite for social mobility' (Ingram & Gamsu, 2022, p. 196). As Ware (2017, p. 280) observes, such operation aligns with a shaded historical view of the grammar school as a place where 'middleclass children...were joined by working-class counterparts whose sheer ability and industry gave them opportunities that previous generations had not enjoyed'. In addition to the clarification, Ware suggests that this was not necessarily the case prior to the shift towards comprehensive education from the mid-1960s onwards (Ware, 2017, p. 280). Recent economic studies of academically selective education demonstrate that such social mobility is no longer evident. Boliver and Swift (2011) and Kitchen and Hobbs (2016) concur that selective education systems do not translate into social mobility for the majority of working class pupils: 'any assistance to low-origin children provided by grammar schools is cancelled out by the hindrance suffered by those who attended secondary moderns' (Boliver & Swift, 2011, p. 89). Burgess et al. (2017) break down grammar school attendance in a selective area into SES percentiles and find a significant disparity. They highlight that 80% of pupils within the top SES percentile attend a grammar school, but this figure falls to 12% of pupils within the 20<sup>th</sup> to 40<sup>th</sup> percentile. As they succinctly summarise, 'academic selection is a policy that really only benefits the very affluent' (Burgess et al., 2017, p. 5)

The arguments raised above concerning the problematic nature of social mobility, read in line with economic evidence of academically selective education being accessed by a privileged few, provide a critical perspective to view the Selective School Expansion Fund (the 'SSEF') from. Social mobility lies at the heart of the SSEF (DfE, 2020) and its aim to provide more grammar school places for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to promote social mobility. Although the guidance suggests the possibility of lowering the 11+ pass mark for children who are categorised as disadvantaged (DfE, 2020), the requirement to sit and pass the 11+ remains. The pupils who stand to potentially benefit from the expansion funding are therefore those who are disadvantaged but academically 'able' (as measured by the 11+ test). Examination from this perspective highlights that addressing inequality by providing more grammar school places for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, merely moves,



rather than eliminates inequality. Sorting pupils by means of 'ability' (as measured by the 11+) purports to facilitate social mobility by allowing 'able' pupils to succeed academically, regardless of their background. Andrews et al. (2016, p. 44) make clear that such a strategy will not be effective: 'When considering social mobility, FSM pupils stand to lose the most from increasing selective school places'. In addition, such explicit identification of the 'able' also results in the explicit identification of the 'unable', or more accurately, those pupils who did not pass the 11+. Students are left in no doubt of where they have been placed in terms of this division as the end result is the type of secondary school they attend. Thus, the 'bright', disadvantaged pupil who gains a grammar school place is distinguished from the equally disadvantaged but less 'bright' pupil who does not.

The explicit segregation resulting from an academically selective system is accompanied with implicit suggestions that social mobility is contingent on abiding by certain sets of expectations. Ingram and Gamsu (2022) highlight one such expectation, emphasising how the individualisation inherent within social mobility discourse operates in tandem with the conceptualisation of meritocracy. Education is regarded as being key to providing a 'fair' means of facilitating social mobility via the 'hard work' and 'talent' of an individual. This therefore necessitates analysis of how meritocracy operates in relation to academic selection.

#### Meritocracy

According to Ball (2017), an individual's ability to triumph in a meritocracy is used as a justification for selection within educational policy discourse. Bradbury (2021, p. 8) uses the term 'meritocracy "common-sense"' when describing how the education system 'recognises talent and ability, combined with effort, and rewards this with success'. Thus, 'the best will rise up from the general populace if given a chance' (Bradbury, 2021, p. 136). Reay (2020, p. 405) claims meritocracy to be a 'key weapon in neoliberalism's armoury' and qualifies how the ideology of 'winner takes all' is regarded as fair:

A meritocratic system is a competition in which there are clear winners and losers, but in which the resulting inequalities are justified on the basis that participants have an equal opportunity to prove themselves (Reay, 2020, p. 405).

Meritocracy operates within academically selective systems to implicitly but effectively categorise those who do not succeed on the presumed level playing field as being undeserving, which as Bradbury (2021, p. 125) recognises, operates in tandem with 'the

principle of measurable ability'. In other words, only pupils who demonstrate the requisite 'ability' (as measured by the 11+) 'win' a grammar school place.

Such 'winning' has been found to be associated with highly competitive practices. In a report for the Sutton Trust based on data collected via IPSOS Mori polls of 11-16 year olds, Jerrim (2017) identifies the role played by private tutoring for the 11+ exam. The report highlights that young people from advantaged backgrounds were twice as likely to have received private tutoring than those from disadvantaged backgrounds and further, that 28% of the tutoring recounted by the poll respondents was in relation to the 11+. In summary, this means that 'those who can afford private tutors are paying to ensure their children do well in grammar school tests' (Jerrim, 2017, p. 5). This has not gone unnoticed or uncriticised (see a report from the House of Commons Education Committee, 2017) however solutions have only addressed test outcomes (for example, the lowering of the 11+ 'pass mark' for disadvantaged pupils referenced above). Despite providing a clear example of the playing field being unlevel, the 'toxic workings of meritocracy' (Reay, 2020, p. 411) result in the acceptance of private tutoring as part of the game being played on an unlevel field.

This would therefore suggest that despite a 'changed political and educational landscape characterised by school autonomy, diversity of provision and school choice' (Morris & Perry, 2016, p. 1), the vision of the 'future' as depicted by Young (1961) in *The Rise of the Meritocracy* has attained some degree of reality. Within an academically selective system, the scope of choice is limited by a barrier in the form of the 11+. However, unlike Young's portrayal of a future in which IQ testing is explicitly utilised as a sole means of identifying 'merit', such a barrier is also upheld more implicitly via the 'toxic workings' of meritocratic ideology.

In order to expose how such implicit toxicity operates in a context wider than that of academically selective education, it is necessary to also refer to literature that examines the extensive use of academically selective practices within schools. These practices include streaming (where a pupil is placed into an 'ability' group which remains the same across a number of subjects, sometimes referred to as 'banding') and setting (where a pupil is placed in different 'ability' groups which differ across subjects). As this thesis continues, it will draw upon literature (and later present findings) which focus on both academically selective systems as well as academically selective practices. Therefore, clarification between the two

will be observed with reference to 'academically selective systems' and 'academically selective practices' respectively.

Studies as far back as Jackson (1964), Jackson and Marsden (1966), Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970) all found a pattern of working class pupils being consigned to the lower streams across various types of schools (primary, secondary modern and grammar). The use of an interactionist approach within these studies drew their focus towards the internal effects of school systems, including teacher and peer assessment of academic and social potential as judged by appearance, language and social skills. Ball's study of Beachside Comprehensive (1981) similarly placed a great deal of emphasis on social relations within and between the children of a Band 1 class and a Band 2 class. However, Ball also looked beyond the internality of his case study school to explore the relationship between academically selective practices and the wider social context in which they are taking place. Of particular note is the emphasis on understanding phenomena (in this case the innovation of moving to mixed ability grouping within a comprehensive school) as a subjective process which is taking place within a wider social context.

As Bradbury (2021) argues, meritocracy is now embedded within the social context that schools operate within. Such a context allows 'the economic, social and cultural capitals that define educational success to be read as inherent ability' (Reay, 2020, p. 408). As a result, Ball's 40 year old observation that 'middle-class pupils are over-represented among those chosen for high-status positions' (1981, p. 278) appears as a continuing phenomenon, evident in more recent findings from studies on attainment grouping (see for example Francis, Archer, et al., 2017). Francis and colleagues make evident the over-representation of pupils from disadvantaged and particular ethnic backgrounds within lower sets in secondary schools and by doing so highlight the lack of recognition afforded by meritocracy to those who 'loose' within the neoliberal, 'winner takes all' ideology. As an aspect of society which appears to go beyond question, meritocracy assigns deficit discourses to those who do not succeed, in instances where success is conceptualised as being in the 'top' set or passing the 11+. Such pupils are considered as not 'able' enough, not hard working enough or potentially a combination of the two. Within the context of academically selective education, meritocratic ideology therefore appears to be willingly blind to forms of advantage in order to maintain a façade of equality.

Exploring how conceptualisations of social mobility and meritocracy operate within the 'ethos' of academically selective education has revealed that such conceptualisations relate to a neoliberal social context. By highlighting and problematising the role that social mobility and meritocracy play in relation to academically selective education, this section has demonstrated how the segregation that arises from academically selective practices and systems are justified via the use of 'ability' measurements. An integral part of such action is the unseen acceptance of social mobility and meritocracy which facilitates the largely unquestioned continuation of the academically selective 'ethos'. Problematising this ethos has revealed how social mobility and meritocracy contribute to this continuation by operating as unwritten rules within a social context. Thus, the boundary of objective and subjective structures becomes blurred, in that academically selective education appears to operate according to rules which are 'known' within the social context in which they occur but are not objectively evident in the same way that academically selective practices or systems are. Therefore, the focus of this chapter moves to exploring how social context can determine unwritten 'rules' by drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

### Bourdieu – understanding and applying the 'thinking tools'

This section will initially explore Bourdieu's thinking tools as theoretical concepts in order to establish concise working definitions which will subsequently be applied in later chapters of this thesis. I continue by drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of doxa and symbolic violence, demonstrating the applicability of these concepts to academically selective education. Finally, I conclude this section by examining feminist literature that engages with a critical application of Bourdieu's thinking tools. In doing so, I raise considerations concerning the applicability of Bourdieu's thinking tools when examining the intersection of class, race and gender within the lived experience of an individual.

#### Understanding the 'thinking tools'

The theoretical tools of Bourdieu are 'primarily geared to understanding the social world' (James, 2011). His approach is based upon an epistemological understanding of the social world which goes beyond a simplistic dichotomy of subjective and objective perspectives and instead uses the concepts of field, habitus and capital to demonstrate the relational interplay between the individual and their social world. Bourdieu consistently emphasises the

relational degree to which his concepts should be considered and summarises the relation as follows: '(habitus) (capital) + field = practice' (1986, p. 101).

This equation illustrates Bourdieu's approach which claims that the practice of an individual will result from the individual's dispositions (habitus) and their positioning (determined by capital) within a particular social space (field). The concepts will be further examined individually, although their relational nature means that such examination frequently requires reference to other concepts.

### Habitus

The concept of habitus seeks to explore the conundrum of structure and agency. Bourdieu summarises this with the following question 'how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?' (1990a, p. 65). Bourdieu's definition of habitus as a 'structured and structuring structure' (1990a, p. 170) suggests that the answer to this question requires recognition of three different elements within an individual's habitus. The 'structured' nature is determined by upbringing and educational circumstances, the 'structuring' capacity is such that the habitus can contribute to present and future practice and the 'structure' acknowledges that the habitus has a systematic order rather than being composed randomly. Maton (2014, p. 50) summarises that habitus is 'both structured by material conditions of existence and generates practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings...in accordance with its own structure'. The structuring that the habitus facilitates as a structured structure goes largely unseen by the individual, appearing as natural as a result of the habitus being an 'embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 56)

### Field

As evident from the equation above, habitus does not operate in a vacuum, rather in the variety of social spaces that an individual encounters throughout their life. The concept of field is one of a social space in which interactions, transactions and events occur (Bourdieu, 2005). The relation between habitus and field is described by Bourdieu as one of 'ontological complicity' (1982, p. 47). The field, in providing the context for an individual's life, structures the habitus whilst simultaneously, the habitus allows an individual to understand the field, thereby providing 'a feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63). As Bathmaker (2015) observes, Bourdieu frequently draws upon metaphors of both a 'game' and a 'marketplace'

in relation to field. Fields are simultaneously portrayed as social spaces with sets of rules (the 'rules of the game') where various degrees of struggle occur over positioning (see 'Capital' below). As we are reminded by Thomson (2014a, p. 72), Bourdieu's concept of field is a scholastic, rather than a mimetic device. Fields do not automatically relate to specific material places. Although Bourdieu did focus his work on specific fields, for example education (Bourdieu, 1990c, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) inherent to this work is the recognition of fields as fluid, rather than pre-formed structures. This allows the concept of field to be broken down into smaller sub-fields, for example a sub-field of academically selective education within the field of education. However, along with this fluidity comes Bourdieu's requirement that conceptualisations of field must be justified empirically. In qualifying the difference between a field and a functionalist interpretation of a system, Bourdieu makes clear that any formation of a field or sub-field requires justification:

A field is a game devoid of inventor and much more fluid and complex than any game that one might ever design. But to see fully everything that separates the concepts of field and system one must put them to work and compare them via the empirical objects they produce (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104).

The concept of field therefore offers a means of considering social spaces alongside the recognition that any individual will operate in numerous social spaces simultaneously and that such movement within and across social spaces can serve to change an individual's positioning within a field and also the structure of the field itself. Bourdieu's requirement that the shaping of a field is determined from empirical objects will be returned to in my discussion of methodology (see Chapter 3).

### Capital

The position of an individual within a field is determined by their capital. Bourdieu's concept of capital goes beyond an economic interpretation and recognises:

forms of exchange which ensure the transubstantiation whereby the most material types of capital – those which are economic in the restricted sense – can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital (2008, p. 280).

Bourdieu therefore presents a concept which can be recognised as holding extrinsic worth in its economic form (economic capital), but which can also be seen to take other forms (symbolic capital) which hold intrinsic worth. Despite utilising vocabulary such as 'exchange' and 'investment', Bourdieu was keen to stress that 'the only thing I share with economic

orthodoxy...are a number of words' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 118). Symbolic capital is used as a term to describe 'the form that one or another of these species [of capital] takes when it is grasped through categories of perception that recognise its specific logic' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Bourdieu provides detailed definitions of both cultural and social capital. Social capital is obtained via the possession of 'a durable network of...institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Cultural capital (which is also referred to as 'informational capital' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119) can take three forms: the embodied (in which capital has been inculcated to produce physical traits such as poise), the objectified (material forms such as paintings, writings and instruments) and the institutionalised (academic qualifications) (Bourdieu, 2008). Bourdieu returns to the metaphor of a game to demonstrate the relationship between field and capital. Using an analogy of coloured counters, Bourdieu demonstrates how certain forms of capital will be valued in terms of the field (the particular game at play) and therefore determine both an individual's positioning and their approach to the game (their 'strategic orientation'). Further, the value of certain capitals within a field is not constant and can change according to the demands of the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99). The field therefore produces different types of symbolic capitals and regulates their distribution. Moore (2014, p. 102) considers capital to be 'the enactment of the principle of the field. It is the realisation in specific forms of power in general' and goes on to argue that such realisation (in his example, institutionalised cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications) serve to 'inculcate the habitus' (Moore, 2014, p. 103).

Having explored each of the thinking tools individually, it is important to note that although theoretically based definitions are useful for purposes of clarification, Bourdieu stressed that the purpose of his concepts was to be 'put to work empirically in systematic fashion' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 96). Thus the underpinning of a Bourdieusian approach is to seek theory from practice and Bourdieu himself provides one such example, detailing how he arrived at the concept of cultural capital from the starting point of unequal educational achievement amongst children from differing social classes (Bourdieu, 2008). The focus of this section now moves to consider how Bourdieu himself and subsequent scholars have applied his thinking tools, focusing on how such application relates to academically selective education.

### Applying the 'thinking tools'

I begin this section by examining how Bourdieu applied his own thinking tools in relation to educational inequalities. The most logical starting point is therefore *Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) in which Bourdieu recognised that despite offering a democratic system of entry, the post-war educational system in France appeared to be reproducing class inequalities resulting in fewer children from working class backgrounds gaining academic qualifications and subsequently studying at university. As Daniel Schubert (2014, p. 183) summarises, Bourdieu's examination of educational institutions 'looks at the ways in which the structured and structuring habitus of agents are positioned within the fields in which they strategize and act'. Within the field of education, Bourdieu discovered behaviours, beliefs and dispositions which were familiar, to the point of appearing as natural and beyond question, to students of a middle-class background. He explains this using the concept of *doxa*, a form of pre-reflexive, intuitive knowledge that shapes dispositions of an individual without their conscious awareness and by doing so continually establishes and maintains the structure of the field (Deer, 2014a). Put simply, pupils from a middle-class background knew the 'rules of the game' as these were part of their habitus and therefore appeared as natural. To use one of Bourdieu's most famous analogies, 'when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water'' (1992, p. 127).

Bourdieu also observed how a merit-based system measured by academic qualification equated poor performance to inferiority and was therefore 'concealing its social function of legitimating class differences behind its technical function of producing qualifications' (1990, p. 164). This presents an example of symbolic violence, which Bourdieu defines as 'the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5). Bourdieu clarifies that such imposition operates alongside misrecognition, so that the dominant class merely needs to 'let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination' (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 190).

Bernstein's recognition that symbolic violence 'disguises and masks the way power relations, external to the school, produce the hierarchies of knowledge, possibility and value within the school' (Bernstein, 2000, p. xxii) has been demonstrated within literature concerning academically selective practices. Archer et al. (2018) provide an explanation of how symbolic



violence operates within the context of the academically selective practice of setting, arguing that setting is:

both explicitly and implicitly driven by the interests and values of the dominant social classes and is designed to ensure that privileged groups can reproduce their privilege through access to the 'best' learning resources and opportunities. These interests are hidden by the notion that setting reflects 'natural' differences in 'ability', which legitimises the practice (Archer et al., 2018, p. 122).

Thomson (2014b) also draws upon the practice of setting in describing how it demonstrates the operation of misrecognition:

those children who are not possessed of 'ability' or 'merit' are not simply demonised and seen as lacking but are systematically subject to practices of domination – for example, they are streamed and set, offered differentiated curriculum and set tasks and examinations at which they are expected to do poorly, and they do. Their failure, and the success of a few, acts to legitimate the belief that their failure was caused by lack of ability or application, as well as to re/produce hierarchies which already exist within the field (Thomson, 2014b, p. 92)

Bourdieu's thinking tools therefore constitute a means of analysing practices within an education system as well as education systems in their entirety. The tools take into account not only the individual actors within the system but also the structure of the system itself. With these tools, Bourdieu arrives at a conclusion which concurs with previously cited literature in establishing a relationship between social class and education which impacts negatively on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The examples of Archer et al. (2018) and Thomson (2014b) cited above demonstrate that both doxa and symbolic violence, along with habitus, field and capital are frequently called upon within the sociology of education to examine issues related to various forms of inequality and have generated a wide body of empirical findings which provide further insight into the relationship between education and social class.

Ball (2003) examines the competitive and often exclusionary practices of the middle-class, finding that 'within the fields of education the middle class have enough capitals in the right currency, to ensure a high probability of success for their children' (2003, p. 168). Concurring with the findings of Lareau (1989) he also observes processes which demonstrate practices of actors within their cultural context and which support Lareau's claim that this activity underpins Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Lareau, 1989, p. 145). Ball (2003) regards

parental action such as locating relevant information regarding schools from a multitude of formal and informal networks, sourcing additional tutoring, frequent communication with schools in relation to sometimes assumed concerns as middle class strategies, which rather than setting out to deliberately cause inequality and social division instead represent 'the hidden hand of class thinking' (Ball, 2003, p. 146). Thus, practices are misrecognised, legitimised and continue as part of the doxic structure of the field of education.

In addition to parental perspectives, Bourdieu's thinking tools have also been used as a theoretical framework when considering child and adolescent experiences of compulsory schooling as well as those of students within higher education. Archer, Hollingworth, et al. (2007) and Archer, Halsall, et al. (2007) both utilise Bourdieu's framework to investigate the interaction between habitus and capital within the sub-field of compulsory state education. Both studies examine how young people from socio-deprived areas afford value to forms of capital (in the first instance particular fashion brands and in the second a hyper heterosexual identity) which is not legitimated by other, more powerful discourse. The resultant findings of both studies are that the capital generated through such means actually serves to place the young people at a disadvantage within the wider field of education which recognises it as antithetical. For example, the focus on fashion brand identity can cause a young person to break school uniform rules and subsequently appear to their teacher as having an alternative focus than the one her school values: 'Because this culture is you have to look good, you have to wear the right stuff and they [pupils] focus more on that than they focus on their education' (Archer, Halsall, et al., 2007, pp. 169-170). It is possible to draw a parallel between these findings and the anti-school identity Willis (1977) found within his ethnographic study of 12 working-class 'lads'. The agency displayed in the creation and maintenance of anti-education values (whether by Willis' or Archer et al.'s participants) makes evident an apparent incompatibility between the values held in esteem by the education system and those of the participants. Willis (1977) recognises and highlights the degree to which this incompatibility serves to perpetuate division within education based on social class. The work of Archer and colleagues highlights that dislocation between value systems results in the young people concerned failing to reconcile their values with the doxa of the field of education. This also creates a form of division that Archer and colleagues conceptualise as symbolic violence

which became manifest in the participants' misrecognition and acceptance of education as non-compatible, something that is 'not for me'.

Reay et al. (2009) draw upon Bourdieu in their case studies of working-class students at an elite university and examine whether they face a situation of being 'fish out of water'. It is interesting to note the students in the study by Reay et al. (2009), like the working class boys at a grammar school interviewed by Ingram (2009, 2011), comment directly on the differences between the fields they encounter within their home and school communities. There is also evidence across this literature of the participants' employment of their own reflexive strategies to understand and potentially overcome such dichotomies and in doing so consciously align themselves with the doxa of the field. Further, and potentially because of the age and maturity levels of the participants in Reay et al. (2009), there is also evidence that this reflexivity allows the students to recognise both their propensity for dealing with feelings of alienation: 'I had nothing else to do but work in lessons, and I was pretty badly bullied', along with their highly developed sense of self-reliance: 'I was brought up in a context of individuals, I'd always been taught that the only person who can help you is yourself' (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1107). This final observation warrants additional focus in that it appears to counter some of the criticisms of determinism which have been levelled at Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic violence (see for example, Alexander, 1995; Jenkins, 1992). By recognising their own 'internal conversations' the students are able to see beyond their own habitus. Habitus therefore becomes conceptualised more broadly, allowing an individual to:

weave together conscious deliberation with unconscious dispositions so that we can attempt to grapple analytically with aspects of identity such as our personal and political commitments that current conceptualizations of habitus marginalize (Reay, 2004b, p. 438).

This widening of the conceptualisation of habitus is an example of the reminder issued by Reay (2004b) that Bourdieu's thinking tools are to be used as a means of interrogating and working with data rather than merely as a concept through which data can be explained. At this stage it therefore seems appropriate to suggest the application Bourdieu's tools may have in relation to academically selective education.

The concept of symbolic violence has previously been used to explore the process of attainment grouping within primary (McGillicuddy & Devine, 2018) and secondary schools (Archer et al., 2018). McGillicuddy and Devine (2018) explore how the process of legitimisation is embedded within the practice of teachers, rendering attainment grouping as a justifiable means of maintaining social order. Archer et al. (2018) take a different approach by exploring attainment grouping from the perspectives of pupils in top and bottom sets. Their findings reveal how the concept of symbolic violence operated via misrecognition by pupils who regarded themselves and others as 'deserving' of their set allocation, based on judgements they considered to be 'natural' (2018, p. 136). The authors stress the importance of 'foregrounding the interests and voices of those who occupy the lower sets/tracks as a means to challenge unjust power relations' (Archer et al., 2018, p. 124). Such foregrounding also links to Bourdieu's acknowledgement and questioning of the degree to which the dominated are complicit in their domination (Bourdieu, 1990b). However, although Bourdieu's tool of symbolic violence appears as particularly salient to the research of academically selective education, there is some contestation concerning an approach which portrays a deterministic binary of dominant (middle-class)/dominated (working class) (Jenkins, 1992). In addition, Bourdieu's reliance on social class in his exemplification of symbolic violence can also be interpreted as disregarding the operation of gender (Moi, 1991) and race (Wallace, 2018b) within such a binary. Such disregard causes us to question how the inequalities within education which have been found within this chapter as foci of both academic literature and political discourse relate to a social structure in which social disadvantage sits (uncomfortably) alongside gender and race and the 'rules' of social mobility and meritocracy. The following section will examine feminist literature which has adopted Bourdieu's claim that 'the real is the relational' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97) as a means of exploring more nuanced perspectives on the dominant/dominated binary.

#### [Applying the 'thinking tools' within a relational approach](#)

The use of Bourdieu's tools within a relational approach facilitates a recognition of a social world in which individual action takes place as a result of underlying motivations which can be both conscious and unconscious. Skeggs (1997, p. 94) argues that as a consequence, 'identities are continually in the process of being re-produced as responses to social positions, through access to representational systems and in the conversion of forms of capital'. Such

an approach presents a means of exploring nuances within the dominant/dominated binary by 'tracing the links between the phenomenal immediacy of experience and abstract systems of power that operate at one remove from everyday activity' (McNay, 2004). In opposition to claims of determinism, Skeggs argues that the relational exploration provided by taking a Bourdieusian approach 'enables us to think through different types of values and mobility' by providing a 'metaphoric model of social space in which human beings embody and carry with them the volumes and compositions of different capitals' (Skeggs, 2004, p. 21).

As Lawler (2004, p. 112) acknowledges, 'class, race, gender, sexuality...are all marked within the habitus' and thus, Bourdieu's thinking tools provide a means of incorporating such elements of an individual's social world into an analysis. As Lawler goes on to argue,

Bourdieu's attempt to cut through antinomies such as self/other, structure/agency...gives us a method for considering the ways in which inequalities can circulate culturally as well as materially' and therefore provides 'a way to challenge the taken-for-granted (Lawler, 2004, p. 113).

The resultant understanding is not one which produces a succinct list of categories or 'classes on paper' (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 725); in fact doing so would be an example of what Bourdieu terms the 'theory effect' (1985, p. 742) in which a theory shapes the reality it claims to define. In addition, such an approach lends itself easily to collectivist portrayal. Lawler (2004, p. 110) in an examination of media coverage of middle class and working class women observes that such portrayal leads to 'the drawing of classed distinctions [being] displaced and individualized. It is displaced on to individual persons (or families) who are approved or disapproved, normalized or pathologized.' Rather, the relational approach serves to examine the 'space of relationships' (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 725) recognising the relational interplay between the individual and the various classed, gendered and racialised elements of their social world which Bourdieu also conceptualises as 'an accumulated history' (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 280).

A relational exploration is evident in Reay's (1998) adaptation of Bourdieu's thinking tools that 'makes a space for women and extends to analyses of race' (1998, p. 4). She finds both class and race differentiated activities carried out by mothers in respect to their children's education and therefore confirms the role habitus plays in generating an individual's practice as well as being able to comprehend the practice of others within a field. Similarly, Archer's

(2010) investigation into the educational practices of minority ethnic middle-class families also disrupts the binary of dominant middle class and dominated working class by acknowledging the complexity of the positioning of such families. Such disruption is also evident in Wallace's (2018b) conceptualisation of Black cultural capital and Reay's (2004a) development of emotional capital, demonstrating how Bourdieu can be utilised to explore the inter-relation between class, race and gender. Such an approach therefore encompasses the complexity of both the individual participant and the social world they inhabit. Acknowledging this complexity via a relational exploration not only reveals how shaping of the habitus via class, gender and race serves to align an individual to 'routes [which] appear both more conceivable and achievable' (Archer et al., 2013, p. 73) but also incorporates consideration of the social fields in which the individual operates (Archer et al., 2013, p. 59). A relational approach does therefore not directly counter determinism but can be utilised to reveal how class, race and gender contribute to the nuanced ways in which 'the culture of the dominant acts in order to exclude that of the dominated' (Grenfell, 2014a, p. 157).

The capacity that a relational approach has to move beyond simplistic binaries has been demonstrated, drawing on feminist Bourdieusian scholarship. The literature cited has revealed that acknowledging the complexity within and between an individual and their social world can be a means of addressing how inequalities linked to social class, race, gender and their combination can be made evident. Bourdieu raises a compelling argument in terms of what such an approach can reveal:

People are not fools; they are much less bizarre or deluded than we would spontaneously believe precisely because they have internalized, through a protracted and multisided process of conditioning, the objective choices they face (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 130).

The exploration of what constitutes the 'protracted and multisided process' is therefore at the heart of a relational approach in which the binary of dominant/dominated can manifest itself but also be disrupted by gender and race in addition to social class. This lays the foundation for examining how the reality of social disadvantage continues to perpetuate despite the 'answers' of social mobility and meritocracy which are proposed via political discourse, and which have been found to be inherent to the unseen structure of academically selective education.

In drawing this section to a close, I wish to acknowledge challenges I encountered when compiling it. The breadth of literature concerning Bourdieu is vast, both as result of Bourdieu's own body of work and the extent to which this has subsequently been utilised across a wide range of disciplines. For the purpose of this literature review, I have endeavoured to 'unpack' Bourdieusian terminology as concisely as possible. The focus of this was not to provide an exhaustive account of the development of Bourdieusian concepts (both by Bourdieu himself as well as by subsequent scholarship) but rather to provide working definitions which will subsequently be utilised within the methodology, analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis. Justification of this focus can be sought from Bourdieu himself, who made the following acknowledgement in dialogue with Loic Wacquant:

concepts have no definition other than systemic ones and are designed to be *put to work empirically in systematic fashion*. Such notions as habitus, field and capital can be defined, but only within the theoretical system they constitute, not in isolation (original emphasis, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 96)

When selecting subsequent literature which has applied a Bourdieusian approach, my focus was directed by what had already been revealed within this literature review with regard to the operation of social mobility and meritocracy as the 'unwritten rules' of academically selective education. Therefore, I have demonstrated how previous scholarship has applied Bourdieu in relation to inequality within education, with the most pertinent points being how Bourdieu's thinking tools can reveal the relationship between the structure of education, the individual and resulting inequality. Such a relationship aligns with the argument raised in the first section of this chapter concerning the inequalities of academically selective education being shielded by conceptualisations of social mobility and meritocracy. Further exploration of how Bourdieu examines the relationship between inequality, the individual and educational structures brought the concepts of doxa and symbolic violence to the forefront and consequently, the binary of dominant/dominated. However, the review of feminist critique of Bourdieu has also revealed that Bourdieu offers potential to explore the nuances within such a binary. McNay (2004, p. 185) suggests that a means of facilitating a relational exploration is through the consideration of how lived experiences demonstrate lived relations. Doing so allows identities to be considered not merely as normatively constructed within language but also as a lived relation that is subject to conflict and tension. As she later argues, 'it is possible to acknowledge the often uncertain and confused present of lived

experience without relinquishing the possibility of tracing its connections to social status (McNay, 2004, p. 187). Thus, the focus of this chapter now moves to consider how academically selective systems and practices have been examined through a lens of lived experience.

## Lived experiences of academically selective systems and practices

### Conceptualising 'lived experience'

Farrell (2020, p. 1) claims that although phenomenological studies of lived experience are common in research fields such as nursing and health care, they are much less common in education. Such a claim rests upon the methodological determination of 'lived experience' as prescribed within phenomenology and which is indeed frequently used in studies which have examined adolescent lived experiences, particularly in relation to health care (see for example Sibeoni et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2016; for syntheses of literature concerning adolescent lived experiences of treatment for anorexia nervosa and fatigue in cancer respectively). However, Farrell's claim also demonstrates that lived experience has also been conceptualised much more broadly. This widens its application beyond phenomenology. It is this wider conceptualisation, which frequently manifests itself in research questions investigating 'pupils'/students'/teachers' experiences' that this literature review will consider. An additional element which has shaped the literature selected for review is questioning whose lived experience to investigate. This chapter has so far demonstrated that academically selective systems and practices facilitate social injustice that segregates pupils and that the concept of symbolic violence is pertinent to examining this segregation. Whilst pupils cannot be assumed to be 'victims', the lived experiences of pupils within an academically selective system becomes a logical focus of investigation. Such a focus will facilitate the exploration of literature concerning pupils' experiences of the academically selective system and subsequently academically selective practices.

### Pupils' experiences of academically selective systems and practices

In contrast to quantitative, large-scale studies that demonstrate the multitude of inequalities associated with the academically selective system (see for example Burgess et al., 2018; Jerrim & Sims, 2019 cited above) recent literature which focuses on pupils' lived experiences of the academically selective system is scarce. Pupil perspectives have been considered



quantitatively by Ahmavaara and Houston (2007) who found that within a selective education system pupils' aspirations were 'strongly related to school type, with those in selective schools having higher achievement aspiration' (2007, p. 626). Although this finding is useful in highlighting a trend, the study makes no further attempt to examine the 'how' and 'why' this trend is occurring. Similarly, quantitative data from the Millennium Cohort Study were used in a more recent study by Jerrim and Sims (2018) to examine how grammar school attendance affects pupils' socio-emotional outcomes. The authors find that not attending a grammar school had no detrimental effect on children's social-emotional outcomes, but the extent to which a closed-question questionnaire response adequately measures 'actual experience' needs to be acknowledged. A qualitative exploration of lived experience is evident in Hajar's (2020) study which examined year 6 pupils' perceptions of private tutoring for the 11+. The study acknowledges pupils' acceptance of private tutoring as a taken for granted aspect of 11+ preparation. Along with this acceptance, Hajar (2020) also demonstrates pupils' awareness of the challenges presented by private tutoring, including its economic demands upon their families and the resultant inequality for those who cannot meet such demands along with the psychological demands of additional work and pressure to pass. Recognising the value that can be gained from such qualitative insight, Hajar (2020, p. 476) observes that 'very limited evidence exists regarding pupils' embodied experiences and reflections' on the academically selective system.

One example of an individual's reflection on being a pupil within an academically selective system can be found in the work of Travers (2017). In her study of educationally successful working class males, Travers (2017) highlights the lived experience of one of her participants ('Ben') who undertook the 11+ and gained entrance to a grammar school. Ben not only acknowledges the support he received from both parental encouragement and coaching for the test provided by his year 6 teacher, but explains the assumptions he held about grammar schools:

I kind of assumed you would probably do better if you went to like, in your qualifications, if you went to a grammar school because the grades are higher, I wasn't blind to that (Travers, 2017, p. 32).

Whilst Travers (2017) does highlight this particular lived experience, she also explicitly clarifies that school experience only constituted an element of her data and further, that her

participants were reflecting on their school experiences from their perspectives as second year university students. However, she incorporates a Bourdieusian analysis of the lived experiences of her participants that relates their habitus and the capitals they held to the fields they were positioned in. Therefore, she uses the example of Ben above to demonstrate a disposition within his habitus that allowed him to be aware of the 'rules of the game'. In addition, Travers also observes how this disposition related to the cultural capital he gained from both parental encouragement and the provision of coaching from his teacher. To this extent, although the work of Travers (2017) focused on her participants' previous, rather than current lived experience of an academically selective system, the study does demonstrate how lived experiences can be used as the basis for a relational analysis.

The value of drawing upon pupils' lived experiences (this time via an ethnographic approach) is likewise commented on by Ingram (2018, p. 86) as providing opportunity to 'observe, and therefore attempt to understand, the everyday experiences of working-class boys' within the academically selective system of Northern Ireland. Ingram's focus on experiences 'within school and beyond the school gate' (2018, p. 103) incorporates the relational element of a Bourdieusian exploration, which allows her to 'understand [the boys'] habitus by considering the multiple influences under which it forms' (2018, p. 104). She directly connects aspects of her participants' lived experience to identity and how both locality and education 'impacts on their sense of who they are and also shapes the way that they think about their world and their place in it' (Ingram, 2018, p. 104).

It is the recognition of the complexity of elements which can be revealed by examining pupils' lived experiences and how these relate to the shaping of identity that distinguishes Ingram's (2009, 2011, 2018) approach from the much earlier studies of Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970). As discussed above, the interactionist approach evident within these differs methodologically so that social class descriptors are assigned via parental (usually father's) occupation and factors such as gender and race are not regarded. However, the value in such seminal literature lies in their recognition of pupils' lived experiences as a means of demonstrating not only pupil cultures but also how such cultures relate to pupil identity. In contrast to the academically selective system's prevalence during Hargreaves' and Lacey's work, more recent literature has moved to consider pupils' experiences of academically selective practices and how these in turn operate in a complex relationship with pupil identity

within and beyond schools. Such literature will therefore be examined in order to complement the limited range of literature that specifically focuses on academically selective systems.

Unlike academically selective systems, academically selective practices remain prevalent within schools, both in the UK and internationally (Francis, Archer, et al., 2017). As clarified above, these practices cover more established systems such as setting and streaming that can incorporate large cohorts within a school (for example entire year groups) and can also operate within classrooms by allocation of pupils into 'groups'. The latter is more frequently seen within a primary school context, given their smaller pupil numbers. As acknowledged in the work of Francis and colleagues (for example Francis, Archer, et al., 2017; Francis, Connolly, et al., 2017) the complexity resulting from the variety of academically selective practices, alongside the variation of their operation at institutional level, results in research that is 'diverse, complex and not without issues' (Francis, Connolly, et al., 2017, p. 96). However, within such complexity is a tendency towards large-scale quantitative studies which have been used to demonstrate patterns of inequalities such as under or over representation of certain categories of pupils within certain groups (Taylor et al., 2019) and misallocation of certain categories of pupils (Connolly et al., 2019). In a similar way to the literature concerning academically selective systems, research that incorporates a qualitative approach to explore pupils' lived experiences of academically selective practices is less common. Despite this apparent dearth, the following literature demonstrates what can be learned from qualitative exploration.

Hallam et al. (2004) report on primary pupils' experiences of selective practices which included setting, grouping and streaming. They detail pupils' experiences of stigmatisations resulting from academically selective practices, with the tendency for such experiences to be linked to pupils placed in lower groups. Alongside these, they also highlight that pupils in higher groups experienced teasing. Despite not viewing the responses of pupils through a sociological lens, Hallam et al. (2004) acknowledge that academically selective practices were justified by pupils in terms of 'ability' and that pupils' conceptualisations of 'ability' linked to assessment indicators (in this instance national curriculum levels) which the pupils went on to use to legitimise both the derogation of lower attainment and to enforce the superiority of higher groups. They argue that the pupils in their study had an 'acute awareness of the

effects of their experiences and the extent to which these prevail wherever particular grouping systems are adopted' (Hallam et al., 2004, p. 529).

Such awareness is also evident in the often poignant accounts reported in the work of Hargreaves and colleagues (Hargreaves, Buchanan, et al., 2021; Hargreaves, Quick, et al., 2021a, 2021b). The team utilise a life-history approach to collate longitudinal accounts of 23 primary school pupils' experiences of being categorised as 'low attaining'. Hargreaves and colleagues demonstrate that academically selective practices (which are manifest in the lived experiences of the pupils in their research in such forms as grouping, removal from certain lessons, provision of alternative work) constitute an 'institutionalised categorisation' which subsequently leads to the following:

their institutionalised categorisation as low-attainers limited their motivation, restricted their practice of social skills, reduced their independence, eroded their academic success, obstructed their learning engagement, and led to a sense of subordinate status in the school context (Hargreaves, Quick, et al., 2021a, p. 94).

The authors acknowledge that their engagement with the lived experiences of pupils has led them to these findings. By doing so they demonstrate how qualitative consideration of pupils' lived experiences can reveal how practice implemented at institutional level plays out in the everyday experience of the individual. Similar instances are evident in research of academically selective practices within secondary schools. Drawing on a mixed methods approach, Francis, Connolly, et al. (2017) demonstrate large scale quantitative patterns of inequality and also employ a qualitative exploration (via interviews and focus groups) of how such inequalities are manifest in pupils' everyday experiences of academically selective practices. They acknowledge pupils' perceptions of the practical impacts of segregation (completing different work, taking different tests), the social impact (exclusion from groups, splitting of friendship groups) and pupils' awareness of being labelled as 'top' or 'bottom' set. They find that implicit to such labelling is 'the designation of a set attainment group as a label of level of ability' (Francis, Connolly, et al., 2017, p. 102) and further that such labelling is 'not seen as ascribing present attainment, but rather, fixed ability' (Francis, Connolly, et al., 2017, p. 103). Similarly to the findings of Ball (1981), the authors argue that the segregated nature of academically selective practices 'not only comprises social segregation but also facilitates cultural perpetuation and exacerbation of this segregation between pupil groups within school contexts' (Francis, Connolly, et al., 2017, p. 104). The authors claim that such cultural

perpetuation is legitimised through the use of attainment measures as indicative of 'ability' but also through meritocracy. Drawing on similar qualitative data, Taylor et al. (2019, p. 91) provide the following concise summary of what can be understood from pupils' lived experiences about academically selective practices:

setting practice seemed justifiable for many high- and low-set pupils on the basis of 'natural' talent, 'ability', and meritocracy. They believed that set placement directly reflects merit, and that those in lower groups who excel will be rewarded by moving up, while those in higher groups who make less progress will be moved down accordingly.

Such findings complement the discussion of the academically selective practice of setting as a form of symbolic violence within Archer et al. (2018 see above) in which the authors highlight the operation of misrecognition of setting as a legitimate practice based upon measures of 'ability' (as measured by attainment). In two later papers (Archer et al., 2017; Archer et al., 2020) Archer and colleagues take up a similar theoretical positioning and investigate how symbolic violence operates in relation to the operation of explicit and implicit academic selection within science education at secondary schools. Despite being specific to science education, the findings of both Archer et al. (2017) and Archer et al. (2020) connect with unifying threads which run throughout the literature concerning pupils' experiences of academically selective practices, both at primary and secondary schools. These threads appear as pupils' awareness of the practices which are legitimised via labelling derived from 'ability' (in terms of various types of attainment measures) and conceptualisations of meritocracy that equate individual hard work to academic attainment. In a similar way, the literature concerning pupils' experiences of academically selective systems makes evident pupils' awareness of how such a system operates and how it also relies on the 'ability' measure of the 11+ as well as the concept of meritocracy as a means of legitimisation. The consideration of pupils' lived experiences within the literature serves to emphasise the argument raised in this review concerning the role played by meritocracy operating as an element of the doxa of the field of education. However, I contend that the literature within this section extends this argument by demonstrating how this meritocratic doxa contributes to the shaping of pupils' identities via legitimisation stemming from measurement of 'ability', particularly as measured by high stakes assessments. Such legitimisation is blatantly evident in Reay and Wiliam's (1999) example of a year 6 pupil preparing for the statutory testing that

occurs at the end of primary school. The authors demonstrate that this pupil ('Hannah') by labelling herself a 'nothing' should she fail to attain a 'good' level, 'comes to see herself entirely in terms of the level to which her performance in the SATs is ascribed' (Reay & Wiliam, 1999, p. 346). Gillborn and Youdell (2000) observe similar labelling at secondary school level, particularly in relation to pupils' perceptions of their schools' deployment of 'educational triage'. This concept is concisely articulated in the following description from a year 11 participant, 'Helen':

they're trying to get you more than five A-to-C grades. But there's people that have, won't definitely get them, but they haven't bothered with them (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000, p. 181).

This example demonstrates how pupils' lived experiences of education reflect their understanding of how attainment (in this instance at GCSE) is interpreted as an indicator of their 'worth' in terms of receiving additional resources (such as supplementary teaching) in order to boost attainment. Once again, the doxa of meritocracy (providing more to those who are willing and capable to do more) is reliant on 'ability' (as measured by potential GCSE attainment) for its legitimisation.

Archer and Yamashita (2003, p. 67) find that a consequential outcome of continued emphasis on attainment measurement in education 'evidently worked to constrain pupils' sense of 'limits' and lower their sense of personal worth.' However, they also observe that pupils' lived experiences of education are additionally permeated by their experience as a classed, racialised and gendered individual. This conceptualisation of a pupils' lived experience as not being constrained to their experience within school, leads back to the consideration of a relational analysis of lived experience. The literature examined in this section has demonstrated what has already been learnt from examining pupils' lived experiences of academically selective systems and practices, particularly in terms of how pupils' lived experiences demonstrate the reliance of academically selective systems and practices on meritocratic doxa that is legitimised via 'ability'. The literature has also raised the consideration that qualitative exploration of lived experience provides a means of exploring pupil identity as a unique entanglement of various influences which go far beyond those directly stemming from academic selection. The literature has therefore supported the arguments raised above. Bourdieu's thinking tools are a productive way of exploring how the

social justice problems presented by academically selective education play out in pupils' lived experiences of the system.

## Conclusion

This chapter began by problematising academically selective education in relation to social injustice. The finding of the system perpetuating segregation by social class which stemmed from studies of the 1950s was found to continue to exist today. However, the political support for academically selective systems continues to recognise them as a solution to social injustice on the basis of providing meritocratic opportunity. This review has demonstrated how such an interpretation is reliant on conceptualisations of social mobility and meritocracy.

These conceptualisations were examined in the context of academically selective education. Such contextualisation demonstrated the one-sided focus on upwards movement in regard to social mobility and its apparent application to a limited range of individuals (in this instance, the 'able', disadvantaged pupil). Meritocracy operates alongside social mobility to misrepresent social advantage as 'ability' and therefore justifying the triumph of upward social movement (or maintaining social advantage) as being deserved. The exercise of contextualisation revealed the conceptualisations' alignment with neoliberal ideology and the extent to which social mobility and meritocracy operate as unwritten rules. This therefore drew consideration towards the thinking tools of Bourdieu and how these provide a means of examining academically selective education in relation to wider social contexts.

Unpacking the 'rules of the game' turned the focus of the chapter to the thinking tools of Bourdieu. Acknowledgment was given to interpretations of Bourdieu which have been critical of his portrayal of a deterministic binary of dominant middle class and dominated working class and feminist critique of Bourdieusian approaches were examined in order to explore application of Bourdieu to issues of gender and race. Such critique highlighted the potential Bourdieu's tools have for a relational analysis which can recognise all aspects of an individual's social world, along with the recognition that an individual will be positioned in and move between a variety of social spaces. Such recognition acknowledges that habitus, field and capital operate relationally and therefore form the basis of an analysis of the lived relations within an individual's lived experience.

The exploration of lived experience was the final section. This drew on literature that asked questions concerning pupils' experiences of academically selective systems and practices. The literature within this area was found to be limited, but analysis of the available literature demonstrated pupils' awareness of academically selective systems and practices. Further, pupils' lived experiences were found to rely on a conceptualisation of meritocracy which was legitimised by pupils through 'ability' (frequently as measured by high stakes testing). The literature within this section highlighted how this conceptualisation and legitimisation contributed to pupils' conceptions of their own identities but also acknowledged that a relational exploration of pupils' lived experience will also provide space for the consideration of the pupil as a classed, gendered and raced individual.

This literature review has revealed the inequality inherent within academically selective education. Such inequality is evident not only in the most commonly criticised aspect of such a system (stratification by social class) but also in the less explored aspect in which justification of segregating by 'ability' (as measured by the 11+ test) is achieved by such segregation aligning with a wider political and social context in which individualised social mobility operates in tandem with meritocracy. However, as observed by Hattam and Smyth (2015), the assumption of emancipation from inequality within the sociology of education has to be treated with caution. To the extent that it constitutes a 'fundamental point of view on the world' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 99) within the field of the sociology of education, it has to be considered reflexively, in order to explore the 'unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought' (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 10). In other words, does academically selective education constitute an example of social injustice and if so, then so what? In order to explore such a question, Kenway and McLeod (2004) suggest significant consideration is made in relation to the perspective from which research is framed. This argument makes a fitting point to conclude this literature review; in that it allows me to highlight what I would consider as 'gaps' within the current literature on academically selective education. There appears to be a dearth of literature which qualitatively examines pupils' perspectives on academically selective education. Further, and given the potential demonstrated within this review that relational approaches have to disrupt the dominant/dominated binary, there does not appear to be any literature which provides a qualitative examination of perspectives from pupils who do not pass the 11+. This chapter has



demonstrated how the education system such pupils are part of has been shaped within a social and political context that positions such pupils as ‘failures’ and from a Bourdieusian perspective, prime candidates for falling victim to symbolic violence. The findings of this literature review will therefore be drawn upon in the research questions for this thesis.

### Arriving at my research questions

As stated in Chapter 1, my research interest in academically selective education stemmed from my experience of working in two different non-academically selective secondary schools within an academically selective area. As I moved into a leadership position in the second of these schools, I took on the responsibility of monitoring the progress of pupils who had been categorised according to DfE criteria as ‘higher-attaining’ as a consequence of their results from the statutory-imposed testing which occurs at the end of primary school (“Key Stage 2 results”). In addition, the pupils within this cohort had pre-dominantly sat the 11+ (the only exceptions being those who had transferred to the area at some point after commencing secondary school elsewhere) but had not qualified for a grammar school place as a consequence of their 11+ result. Such pupils therefore faced the potential contradiction of being high-attaining (as measured by Key Stage 2 results) but not high ‘ability’ (as measured by the 11+ test) in that they had not scored highly enough on the 11+ to qualify them for a grammar school place. My own experience of working with such pupils led to my conceptualisation of them as ‘near-miss’. This was based largely on the fact that the academically selective area in which I worked operated a system whereby pupils qualified for a grammar school place on obtaining a pre-defined ‘pass’ mark. On several occasions, I encountered pupils whose 11+ results fell within 5 or less marks of a pass. In their study of the academically selective area of Slough, Schagen and Schagen (2001) identify such pupils as ‘borderline’ but they do not give specific qualitative focus to examining the potential for contradiction within the lived experiences of these pupils. Having established a ‘gap’ within academic literature concerning pupils’ perspectives on academically selective education, I refined the focus of my questions to centre around the lived experiences of pupils who attend a non-academically selective school as a result of not passing the 11+ but who have Key Stage 2 attainment which is considered to be ‘high’, henceforth ‘near-miss’ pupils.

The research questions also incorporate the findings from my literature review. The Bourdieusian concept of symbolic violence was demonstrated to be inherent to the way in

which education can reproduce inequality. Archer et al. (2017) examine how symbolic violence operates in school-based stratifying systems, applying the concepts of pedagogic action, pedagogic work and pedagogic authority. They acknowledge a process of inculcation as a necessity in forming durable dispositions within a habitus which views pedagogic action as 'the way things are' and therefore 'fair'. In addition, they also analyse technologies employed by the school (for example, academically selective practices such as setting) as forms of pedagogic work. Their findings indicate that positions of prestige were frequently misrecognised by students as reflecting a 'natural order' and that the pedagogic work undertaken by the school further suggested to students what was 'right' and 'natural', thus 'irreversibly confirming and consecrating pedagogic authority' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 36). These findings suggest that in addition to identifying symbolic violence, consideration must also be made of *how* symbolic violence operates in terms of it being a 'prolonged process of inculcation' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 35).

My own previous experience made me aware of the potential contradiction faced by 'near-miss' pupils. However, as McNay (2004, p. 184) argues, it is necessary to recognise that 'action and struggle are motivated by perception and representation, not just by abstract social structures and economic forces'. In short, my awareness of contradiction as a struggle faced by near-miss pupils is based on my own, rather than their, perceptions. This then points towards a relational consideration of the lived experiences of near-miss pupils in order to provide 'a way of placing experience at the centre of social analysis without attributing to it some kind of apodictic or essential status' (McNay, 2004, p. 184). Utilising a relational exploration incorporates elements of near-miss pupils' lived experiences (such as race and gender) which go beyond their lived experiences of education. Such an exploration also provides a means of examining how structural factors play out in the experiences of near-miss pupils and thus reveal how binarised structures (such as dominant/dominated) are confirmed or disrupted. Bourdieu reminds us that looking beyond what is visible is necessary: 'the truth of any interaction is never entirely to be found within the interaction as it avails itself for observation' (Bourdieu, 1990a, pp. 126-127) and therefore examining the lived experiences of near-miss pupils also provides a means of examining 'truths' concerning academically selective education and social justice.

Therefore, the research questions which this thesis addresses are:

1. To what extent does symbolic violence operate in the lived experiences of near-miss pupils and what facilitates such operation?
2. How do near-miss pupils relate their lived experience of academically selective education to their lived experiences beyond education?
3. To what extent do the lived experiences of near-miss pupils confirm or disrupt the dominant/dominated binary?
4. What are the implications of the above on the relationship between academically selective education and social (in)justice?

Having demonstrated how these questions were formulated, the next chapter examines how my approach to answering them draws upon Bourdieusian epistemology and methodology. As will become evident, the application of Bourdieusian methodology meant working iteratively and seeking out additional literature in response to analytical outcomes. One particular outcome related to the interruption of field work caused by Covid-19, which is explained in detail in Chapter 3. Without pre-empting the explanation that follows, the end result of this interruption resulted in the participant numbers being reduced and this reduced number all sharing the common experience of arriving in the UK as non-English speaking immigrants during their first years of primary school. This therefore necessitated a review of literature relevant to this aspect of the participants' lived experiences.

#### Racialised experiences of young migrants

The participants all drew upon aspects of their immigrant status in relation to their lived experiences both within and beyond education. Each of them made reference to speaking a language other than English (to varying extents) within their families. According to the criteria specified by the DfE, this qualifies each of the participants as an English as an Additional Language ("EAL") pupil:

A pupil is recorded to have English as an additional language if they are exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English (DfE, 2022b).

The most recent published DfE statistics reveal that 21.2% of state-funded primary pupils and 17.5% of state-funded secondary pupils fall into this category (DfE, 2022b). This section of the review is structured into two categories: the problematisation of EAL categorisation and the racialisation of migrant young people.

## Problematisation

Several reports have critiqued the EAL categorisation, particularly in relation to its apparent homogenisation of a diverse cohort of pupils (Hutchinson, 2018; Strand & Hessel, 2018; Strand et al., 2015). It is therefore interesting to note the following sentence which follows directly on from the criteria cited above:

This measure is not a measure of English language proficiency or a good proxy for recent immigration (DfE, 2022b).

Rutgers et al. (2021) confront these problematic aspects of EAL categorisation and in doing so 'contest the EAL marker as a precise representation of school and individual multilingualism,' (Rutgers et al., 2021, p. 2). Rutgers and colleagues surveyed 818 year 11 pupils across seven secondary schools in South East England, combining demographic and attainment data sourced from schools (including school-reported EAL status) and pupil data sourced via questionnaire. The questionnaires provided pupils with opportunities to self-report their EAL status alongside using a Visual Analogue Scale ("VAS") to measure multilingual identity. They find a stronger correlation between self-reported EAL and VAS of multilingual identity than school-reported EAL. Rutgers et al. (2021, p. 14) relate this finding 'to "EAL" hiding important differences in students' actual experiences and proficiencies in English and their other language(s), but also to the extent to which different actors may be willing to claim that identity marker'.

Evans and Liu (2018) also focus on the relationship between EAL status and identity construction, focusing on the 'under-investigated dimensions of the English as additional language (EAL) newcomer experience in school' (Evans & Liu, 2018, p. 154). In contrast to the quantitative methodology of Rutgers et al. (2021), Evans and Liu (2018) base their findings on semi-structured interviews with pupils from two primary and two secondary schools in the east of England. The authors present four themes (unfamiliarity, linguistic enclosure, L1 as communicative capital, and simulation) which they claim to 'shed light on the interplay between language, identity, and social integration in the school experiences of the newly-arrived migrant children' (Evans & Liu, 2018, p. 158). The authors make clear reference to the qualitative data to support how the themes have been generated but do concede that they offer only a 'partial...perspective' (Evans & Liu, 2018, p. 164). The limitations of this perspective link to the study's focus on the role that language acquisition plays in relation to

identity. Whilst such a focus makes sense within the context of ‘newcomer’ experience, it does result in additional aspects that could contribute to identity formation being disregarded. As Phoenix (2009, p. 102) observes from her study of child migrants whose parents were Commonwealth citizens that migrated to UK following invitation by the then government to address post-war labour shortages in the UK, ‘children who are migrants have to negotiate complex everyday practices in their experience of education’ (Phoenix, 2009, p. 102). Mitchell (2013, pp. 356, discussed below) concurs, highlighting that “‘multilingual learners need to learn a great deal more than just English’.

Bourdieu’s tools of linguistic capital and his conceptualisation of the linguistic market place (Bourdieu, 1977a, 1991) have been used by scholars to explore how an element of ‘learning’ English as an EAL pupil also necessitates learning how English is positioned within the field of education. Bourdieu recognises that each social field has a ‘legitimate language, the authorized language which is also the language of authority’ (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 648) and acknowledges that competence within the legitimate language ‘functions as linguistic capital in relationship with a certain market’ (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 651). Continuing with the economic metaphor, Bourdieu considers the dominant language to provide a value within the market ‘against which the prices of the other modes of expression, and with them the values of the various competences, are defined’ (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 652). Bourdieu is clear on the role education plays as a linguistic marketplace:

The educational system is a crucial object of struggle because it has a monopoly over the production of the mass of producers and consumers, and hence over the reproduction of the market on which the value of linguistic competence depends (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 652)

He re-iterates this argument in *Reproduction* when considering ‘educationally profitable linguistic capital’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 114), a point which is drawn upon in Flynn’s description of the classroom ‘as a linguistic marketplace where proficiency in a dominant, capital-rich language like English gives access to social and cultural capital’ (2019, p. 67). Welply (2017, p. 439) recognises that this occurs through a dual process which operates in different ways in different fields. In a study which compared French and English systems, the field of the English school implicitly de-legitimised other languages as a result of English being the language of ‘literacy’ resulting in what Bourdieu terms as ‘institutionalised misrecognition’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 153). Such misrecognition is embedded into the

problematism of EAL categorisation. As Mitchell (2013, p. 356) recognises, the label EAL itself promotes 'a deficit ideology focused on the ever importance of English and suggests student deficit due to lack of proficiency in it.' More recent work by Szymczyk et al. (2022, p. 119) highlights the 2018 reactions to EAL pupils attaining beyond their non-EAL peers at GCSE level. Szymczyk and colleagues argue that such comparisons not only suggest a false homogeneity within the EAL categorisation but the accompanying media coverage of these comparisons emphasised both a presumed deficit associated with the positioning of EAL pupils as an 'Other' to their non-EAL peers. This therefore leads this review to consider the racialisation that accompanies EAL categorisation.

#### Racialisation of migrant young people

Examining the racialisation of migrant young people requires consideration of the extent to which EAL status relates not only to a young migrant's migratory status and proficiency in English but also how such factors operate intersectionally alongside conceptualisations of whiteness and social class. I begin by exploring how pupils' EAL status relates to two assumptions Leung et al. (1997, p. 546) claim to operate within education: the positioning of someone learning English as a 'social and linguistic outsider' and the automatic exclusion of ethnic and linguistic minorities from an 'abstracted notion of an idealised native speaker of English'.

Costley's (2014) overview of EAL provision within education in England outlines how the current approach of 'mainstreaming' (in which EAL provision is facilitated within mainstream classrooms, rather than by complete or partial withdrawal of EAL pupils) 'sought to challenge and to address charges of racism and inequality through catering for all students in a consistent way' (Costley, 2014, p. 284). Costley goes on to claim that a potentially unforeseen result of such an aim allowed for the removal of distinct EAL learning needs from the National Curriculum, leading to apparent disregard of difference that operated in tandem with the withdrawal of funding ring-fenced for EAL provision. Costley (2014, p. 284) concludes that the mainstreaming approach conflated the learning of English by all pupils, regardless of their EAL or non-EAL status. Leung (2016, p. 165) highlights how mainstreaming can be seen to have 'dovetailed well with an aspect of neo-liberalism in so far as both privileged the primacy afforded to working with common curriculum content and processes.' However, such a focus on equality has a consequential impact on the equity of the mainstreaming approach. As

Leung (2016, p. 166) summarises, ‘the responsibility of society is to ensure equality of access. Beyond that, it is up to individuals to avail themselves of the opportunities available.’ Such individualisation can also be linked to the disparity evident within the findings reported in Foley et al. (2013). Foley and colleagues analyse Scottish student-teacher’s perspectives on EAL provision and raise the social justice implications of EAL pupils becoming an ‘invisible’ group in receipt of an inconsistent provision. Although Costley (2014, p. 260) recognises a degree of consistency across EAL policies over time, she observes that this consistency stems solely from a ‘concern with the learning of English and Englishness’ within EAL policy and does not extend beyond this to consistency of EAL provision. In many ways, the assumptions of the EAL learner as a linguistic outsider automatically excluded from an idealised native English speaker raised by Leung et al. (1997) align with arguments raised in Costley (2014), Leung (2016) and Foley et al. (2013). Despite being centred around equality of access, the current mainstreaming approach to EAL provision supports the continuation of these assumptions in relation to migrant young people.

The assumptions of exclusion and outsidership are also evident in a criticism of EAL categorisation made by Tereshchenko et al. (2019, p. 56) who regard it as ‘an imbalance of power and a distinct form of Othering...based on speaking another language, a history of migration’. Tereshchenko and colleagues draw upon Mitchell’s (2013, p. 354) conceptualisation of ‘English is *all* that matters’ to explore experiences of racism encountered by young, white, Eastern-European migrants. Despite the differences in context between the two studies (Mitchell (2013) being a US study of non-white migrants and Tereshchenko et al. (2019) a UK study of white, Eastern-European migrants) both identify attribution of deficit discourses to bilingual or multilingual pupils in which lack of English speaking is equated to lack of knowledge ‘rather than a lack of ability to display that knowledge’ (Tereshchenko et al., 2019, p. 63). Such ‘lacking’ can therefore be considered to contribute to the racialisation of EAL pupils as excluded Others, but this contribution is far from simplistic. As Mitchell (2013, p. 351) observes, ‘language and race are often used to distribute power and privilege in complex ways’.

Tereshchenko et al. (2019, p. 67) identify such complexity in the experiences of racism encountered by the participants in their study:

...these young people are directly affected by discourses based on racist stereotypes, but perhaps feel less able to challenge this because they are racialised as white, and therefore seen as immune from 'racism'.

Therefore, the focus of this review moves to the operation of whiteness within racialisation.

I begin with the Nayak's (2007, p. 738) acknowledgement that consideration of whiteness

enables us to observe the many shades of difference that lie within this category – that some people are 'whiter' than others, some are not white enough and many are inescapably cast beneath the shadow of whiteness.

Exploring the 'shades' of whiteness also broadens the scope of racialisation to consider it as a process that operates intersectionally. As observed by Rollock et al. (2015, p. 171), there is an intersection between whiteness and social class:

Dominant notions of class within the British context are racialised; they are shaped and informed by Whiteness even when Whiteness is not explicitly named.

As Hayes and Shain (2021, p. 11) highlight, in the absence of visible markers of race, 'the focus in racialisation shifts towards students' citizenship status or those aspects of their whiteness that make students less white (like their English language proficiency)'. Language proficiency is one factor that contributes to Tereshchenko and colleagues' conceptualisation of the 'marginal whiteness' of Eastern European pupils. However they also identify 'associations with manual jobs' (Tereshchenko et al., 2019, p. 67) alongside presumptions of behaviours associated with white working class such as excessive drinking, smoking and aggression. In contrast, Hayes and Shain (2021, p. 11) identify what they regard as 'privileging associations...not being disruptive and aggressive, working hard and 'fitting in' well' which they claim to distance white EAL pupils from their non-white counterparts.

An additional contributor to racialisation is also acknowledged by Sime et al. (2022), who examine data collected from focus groups on racialised and xenophobic experiences encountered post-Brexit by young migrants who were Central and Eastern European born. Using racialisation as 'a theoretical tool to understand how experiences of everyday discrimination of new ethnic groups are informed by the social cultural dominance of the black/white binary' (Sime et al., 2022, p. 4538) the authors echo Nayak's (2007) claim concerning 'shades' of whiteness, which they consider to be 'constructed at the intersections between one's skin colour, nationality and markers of social class' (Sime et al., 2022, p. 4542). Sime et al. (2022) report participants' post-Brexit experiences of discrimination to



demonstrate that their 'whiteness has lost currency as a visible mark of privilege...they are perceived as members of a homogenous category of outsiders who pose an economic and cultural threat' (Sime et al., 2022, p. 4529). To paraphrase Nayak (2007), such outsider positioning constitutes being not white enough.

In contrast to this, Wallace (2018a) takes an alternative perspective on the interplay of class and race within the process of racialisation by considering the extent to which Black middle class pupils operationalise cultural capital. He does this by acknowledging the association between cultural capital and whiteness and questions whether and how such an association positions Black middle class pupils as outsiders and therefore not middle class enough. Using data generated from interviews with middle class, Black Caribbean pupils at a London secondary school, Wallace (2018a, p. 477) finds that 'race generally, and blackness specifically, matters in their operationalisation of cultural capital in their local settings'. At the heart of Wallace's findings lies a Bourdieusian focus on cultural capital as

fundamentally a class resource that is unequally distributed across social fields through systems of inheritance, informing the habitus and the accumulation of social and economic advantages in social fields (Wallace, 2018a, p. 468).

Therefore, Wallace places emphasis on undertaking a relational analysis and by doing so concurs with Archer's (2010, p. 466) claim:

the extent to which capitals can be mobilised and realised (i.e. translated into symbolic capital) is often highly dependent on context and...will be structured by the social location and embodiment of the actors in question.

The participants in Wallace's study demonstrate an intricate awareness of 'class imaging' that operates within the field of education, evident in their articulations of how certain cultural capitals (for example, knowledge of Shakespeare) appear to be valued more highly than knowledge of literature from Black authors. This leads Wallace to the following claim:

'Class imaging' is not simply an outgrowth of a doxa of racial misrepresentation, but a form of racialised violence of which middle-class participants in this study are acutely aware. 'Class imaging' simultaneously maintains white supremacy and middle-class privilege in ways that displaces those whose identities do not rest at the intersection of whiteness and middle-class identity.' (Wallace, 2018a, p. 478)

Wallace is not alone in his recognition of white supremacy operating within the field of education. The following claim by Gillborn (2005, p. 497) takes such recognition further, acknowledging 'the education system's active involvement in the defence and extension of

the present regime of white supremacy in the contemporary British state'. Rollock et al. (2015, p. 177) make a similar claim in their study of the Black middle class, arguing that the value of capital held by the Black middle class is determined and dependent on white power-holders within a field. They go on to claim:

There are two stages to the successful mobilisation of capital: it needs to be appropriately deployed by agents and also be recognised and accepted as legitimate by other agents within the field. Both stages need to be operational for the capital to have any ultimate worth or effect. (Rollock et al., 2015, p. 177)

This two-stage consideration creates an appropriate means of drawing together the findings of this section of the literature review. Problematising EAL categorisation highlighted the necessity of examining the participants' EAL experiences as heterogenous, recognising Bourdieu's tool of linguistic capital as an appropriate means to explore such micro-practices. However, the consideration of the racialisation process operating within EAL categorisation and the links within such a process to whiteness and social class also widens the remit of analysis to incorporate an intersectional approach. In agreement with Wallace (2018a), I recognise that although the findings raised within this literature review did not contribute to the original research questions of this thesis, they align with the Bourdieusian approach 'by illustrating how cultural capital is mediated by ethnicity and race according to social fields, all the while keeping to the tradition of Bourdieu's relational analysis' (Wallace, 2018a, p. 479). Therefore, the analysis and discussion which follows in Chapter 8 will incorporate findings of the literature above, particularly in relation to the participants' experience of symbolic violence as non-English speakers and the corresponding intersectional operation of symbolic violence.

# Chapter 3: Methodology, Methods & Ethics

This chapter begins by introducing my epistemological and methodological approach, drawing on Bourdieu's three stage methodology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 104-105). It continues by examining how my research design was underpinned by the Mosaic approach of Clark and Moss (Clark, 2005, 2017; Clark & Moss, 2001; Clark & Statham, 2016) and the methods I employed to facilitate such an approach. Following on from this, the chapter highlights the issues I encountered when putting the research design into action, focusing specifically on my positionality as a researcher and interruptions resulting from Covid-19. Finally, the chapter examines the ethical considerations I undertook at the various stages of my research.

## Epistemological and methodological approach

### Beginning with a practical context

Grenfell's observation that Bourdieu's methodological approach 'begins with a practical context' (2014b, p. 214) resonated with me as a result of my previous teaching experience. Working in an academically selective area had made me aware of a sense of general acceptance of the system amongst colleagues and pupils as 'the way things are'. This was something I found difficult to understand; to me 'the way things are' appeared as loaded with potential for inequality. Coupling such acceptance with the gap within academic literature concerning pupils' perspectives on academically selective education systems laid the foundation for what Bourdieu terms as the 'construction of the research object' (Wacquant, 1989, p. 51). My decision to focus on near-miss pupils (see Chapter 2) was the first step I made at this 'construction' stage, however several subsequent steps followed. Bourdieu acknowledges that the 'construction' stage is an iterative process, which 'is accomplished little by little through a whole series of rectifications and amendments' (Wacquant, 1989, p. 51). These rectifications and amendments began prior to data collection and continued throughout the subsequent analysis and discussion as I accepted Bourdieu's epistemological

approach of thinking relationally to move beyond a simplistic dichotomy of subjective and objective perspectives. His recognition of the relational interplay between the individual and their social world, in which the individual both shapes and is shaped by their social environment, resulted in a great deal of unpacking of the 'taken for granted'. This was at first daunting, but I was reminded that Bourdieu's epistemological stance seeks to develop theory from empirical findings. This is no better evidenced than in the foreword to *Reproduction* (1990) which stresses that the empirical analyses contained within the second part (Book 2) of the text 'were in fact the starting point for the construction of the principles stated in Book 1' (1990, p. xviii).

Without pre-empting the analysis which follows, several conceptualisations came under scrutiny. Two examples are 'hard work' and grammar schools as 'better'. Throughout this thesis, I have endeavoured to construct the research object by thinking relationally, so as to clarify conceptualisations and avoid confusing 'the reality of the representation with the representation of reality' (Grenfell, 2014b, p. 220). An integral aspect of such thinking was reflexivity, which as Grenfell claims, 'is more than a pragmatic option, it is rather an epistemological necessity' (2014b, p. 224).

### Reflexivity

Getting to grips with Bourdieu's 'signature obsession with reflexivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 36) meant moving beyond my recognition of how the origins and subsequent elements of this research stem from my own lived experiences. Thus, I soon recognised that 'reflexivity for Bourdieu does not refer simply to endless textual and autobiographical referentiality, or to the unconscious dispositions of the individual researcher' (Kenway & McLeod, 2004, p. 528). Instead, Bourdieu calls for the 'interrogation of the scholastic point of view' in order to reveal the 'epistemological unconscious' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 41). This latter point is considered by Schirato and Webb (2003, p. 545) as 'Bourdieu's most distinctive contribution to discussions of reflexivity'. Bourdieu advocates for 'theoretical reflection on the theoretical point of view, on the practical point of view and on their profound differences' in order to reveal 'partial contradictions and fuzziness which pervade' (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 384). However, the degree to which Bourdieu achieves this within his own work is open to critique. Kenway and McLeod's (2004) discussion concerning Bourdieu's use of reflexivity in his examination of social suffering in *The Weight of the World* (1999b)

argues that the extensive range of interviews with various groups of individuals presents ‘a relatively confined understanding of reflexivity, as a deliberate political and intellectual orientation’ which is enacted solely by the reflexive social scientist (Kenway & McLeod, 2004, p. 534). Mindful of the contradiction between potentially reifying the scholastic point of view whilst in the process of interrogating it, this thesis adopts reflexivity as ‘a guiding principle, rather than a well-defined goal’ (Deer, 2014b, p. 208). Viewing reflexivity in this way allowed me to utilise Bourdieu’s thinking tools to reveal how the taken for granted, unwritten structures serve to shape individual practice (Bourdieu, 1982). Similar to the findings of Sweetman (2003) and Reay et al. (2009), reflexivity was evident within the habitus of the participants and proved a useful tool when considering how their habitus related to the various social fields they were active in. Kenway and McLeod (2004, p. 526) raise the question of ‘whose reflexivity?’ and in relation to this thesis, my answer would be the reflexivity of the participants as well as myself. In adopting such an approach, my intention aligns with the Bourdieusian interpretation of reflexivity which seeks to avoid the authority of a singular perspective and abstract the logic of practice from practice itself. Therefore, the lived experiences of the participants and to a lesser extent, my own lived experience are central to this thesis, providing the practice from which findings are generated.

### Three-stage methodology

Utilising reflexivity in such a way required an iterative approach which itself links to the iterative nature of the three-stage methodology suggested by Bourdieu. These need to be read in line with my working definition of Bourdieu’s thinking tools (see Chapter 2). The three stages are:

- 1) look at the field in relation to the field of power
- 2) examine how different individuals are positioned within the field as expressed by the capital they hold
- 3) analyse the habitus of actors within the field, focusing on how they value particular attributes (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Whilst it is possible to view this as a ‘top-down’ or even a ‘bottom-up’ process, my interpretation of Bourdieu’s suggestion recognised the relational nature of such an approach. This required each ‘level’ to be considered against its influence and dependence on the others. Acknowledging the inter-influence of the three levels also supported Bourdieu’s

desire for authenticity; as Grenfell observes, ‘any theory of knowledge [has] to be both ontological *and* political in character, since it represents a particular worldview...together with the latent *interests* presented there’ (Grenfell, 2014b, p. 224 original emphasis). In order to explicate how I undertook such a methodological approach, the following review deals with each stage separately whilst simultaneously highlighting relational links between stages. It must also be stressed that this review represents the end result of an iterative process which lasted the duration of research design, fieldwork and subsequent analysis.

#### 1) Look at the field in relation to the field of power

This stage of the methodology raised the issue of identifying both the field and clarifying what Bourdieu considered to be the ‘field of power’. This in turn led to further consideration of how a field can be conceptualised and, subsequently, where boundaries lie between fields and how sub-fields can be distinguished from wider fields.

I began by returning to the three forms of field which are evident across Bourdieu’s use of the concept and which Bathmaker (2015, p. 65) drawing upon Wacquant (2007), summarises as ‘a topological space of positions, a field of relational forces, and a battlefield of contestation’. Whilst these provide useful analogies for consideration of what happens *within* a field, they offer less guidance when considering ‘the significance of deciding what constitutes the ‘field’ itself, and the implications of including or excluding particular institutions or agents in the conceptualisation of a particular field’ (Bathmaker, 2015, p. 69). Bathmaker (2015) highlights this complexity when examining the complexity of the relationship between higher and further education provision, proposing that such a phenomenon can be interpreted as a blurring of field boundaries as well as the existence of a subfield within a wider field. I began my own conceptualisation of what constituted the field of this research with Bourdieu’s own findings concerning the reproduction of inequalities within the field of education (for example Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and his analogies of the field as both a marketplace and a game. An iterative process of relating the ‘rules of the game’ within the field of education to the ‘market value’ of certain forms of capital caused me to acknowledge that while there were certain rules and capital values which created a bounded sub-field of academically selective education (for example, the value placed upon the 11+ entrance test) it was also possible to identify how such rules and values related to the wider field of education and ultimately, a much wider social space. This then led to consideration of the ‘field of power’.

Wacquant, in conversation with Akçaoğlu, (Wacquant & Akçaoğlu, 2017) provides the following clarification of Bourdieu's concept of the 'field of power':

one can argue also that the field of power, so-called, is really not a field (it is not the locus of concentration and distribution of a distinctive species of capital, it does not have a specific nomos, and it does not secrete a set of distinctive cognitive constructs, etc.) but a meta-field, as a multi-layered kind of social space (Wacquant & Akçaoğlu, 2017, p. 63)

Thinking of the field of power in this way, also linked back to advice provided by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, pp. 15-19, 94-115) in which the value of the concept lies in its capacity to support relational thinking, rather than an essentialist depiction of a central source of authority. This presented an alternative view of the 'field of power' which continued to develop as analysis continued. Alongside applying the analogies of the marketplace to the school the participants attended (and therefore creating a subfield within a subfield) I also related each of these fields back to the field of power. At a simplistic level this linked the field of education and the sub-fields to a field of power stemming from governmental control of state education. As demonstrated in the Literature Review, government policy has provided the means for the ongoing continuation of academically selective education. However, it was also evident that influence from the wider conceptualisation of field of power as a multi-layered social space shaped the fields in less obvious, but more powerful ways. Having used academically selective education to problematise neo-liberal conceptualisations of social mobility and meritocracy in the literature review, I was able to identify how such concepts related to the fields of education, academically selective education and the participants' school. In addition, this revealed how neo-liberal concepts such as individualisation and competitive practices were understood by the participants as 'rules of the game' which interconnected all three fields. Admittedly, this inter-connection aligned with government policy, but as 'rules' they also appeared to operate in the wider conception of the field of power as a multi-layered space. Grenfell and James (2004) acknowledge Bourdieu's concept of 'unconscious inclusion', 'where a whole world-view is imported into a discourse in the name of common sense' (2004, p. 512) when highlighting how competency-based teacher training approaches adopted in the 1990s relate to neo-liberal principles. Therefore, the degree to which the 'rules of the game' were considered by the participants as 'common sense' developed into a key area for consideration, particularly in relation to how alignment with

such rules operated to position the field of education and the sub-fields in a dominant position within the multi-layered social space of the field of power. As Bathmaker (2015) observes, the complexity lies within the recognition of the rules providing structure (and at times strategic direction) to play by whilst remaining dynamic. In an interview with Wacquant, Bourdieu acknowledges the education system as a 'central state of struggle' (Wacquant, 1993, p. 27) The struggles that accompanied playing in an ever-changing field were found to relate to the positioning of the participants within the field, therefore incorporating the next stage of the approach.

2) Examine how different individuals are positioned within the field as expressed by the capital they hold

This stage had significant overlap with the previous one in that it highlighted how the value of certain capitals could vary according to field and how this could be further complicated by recognising that simultaneous participation in differing fields was also possible. For example, an individual's participation in the field of academically selective education also had to be viewed as their participation in the wider field of education. It therefore became inherent to re-iterate questions of 'which field?' and 'what capital?' when undertaking this stage. On several instances, the educational field and its two sub fields (academically selective education and the participants' school) aligned with Naidoo's (2004) study of the field of higher education in South Africa. Naidoo finds that 'acts of cognition are implemented to select and consecrate what is classified as 'academic' and therefore what counts as valid criteria for entry and success' (2004, p. 459). In these instances, forms of capital were easy to identify, particularly those which took the form of external credentials (for example, institutionalised cultural capital in the form of GCSE exam results) or more tangible forms of economic capital. The analogy of the field as a marketplace was vital when considering fields beyond education which the participants were active in. The mechanisms by which certain fields 'valued' certain forms of capital over others was inherent to the recognition of individual field position being altered by forms of capital accruing or losing value when transferred across fields. In such instances it was necessary to consider how the logic of practice of the field operated to define 'what is and is not thinkable and what is do-able within the field' (Grenfell, 2014b, p. 222). It was in such situations, whereby capital was related to the dispositions of the individual participant, that the third stage of the approach came into



play. This involved analysing the relationship between the habitus of an individual and the field/s they were operating in.

3) Analyse the habitus of actors within the field, focusing on how they value particular attributes

Aware of the warnings issued by Reay (2004b) and Maton (2014) concerning the over and mis-use of habitus within empirical research, my approach at this stage endeavoured to remain focused on the relationship between habitus and field. Bourdieu explains this relationship as two-fold:

On one side it is a relation of *conditioning*: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of a field...On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or *cognitive construction*. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127, original emphasis)

I frequently drew upon Bourdieu's analogies of the 'fish in water' and the 'sense of the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 127-128) as these not only helped me to reveal the relationship between field and habitus but also to subsequently question how such a relationship had been formed. This latter question required an acknowledgement of the habitus as 'the product of social conditionings, and thus of a history' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 116) but also of its 'vagueness and indeterminacy' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 77). Recognising that habitus can be both 'straightforward and slippery' (Maton, 2014, p. 48) presented challenges. The first was in relation to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus as operating at an unconscious level and the second lay in the potential that collective treatment of habitus had for determinism.

Sayer (2005) is critical of Bourdieu's focus on the unconscious operation of habitus, arguing that an individual's 'feel for the game' exists somewhere in the space between rational considerations (such as conscious strategising) and pre-reflexive dispositions. My own analysis revealed several occurrences of participants undertaking conscious reflexivity which appeared as a dispositional attribute, rather than because of a disjuncture between field and habitus. In other words, part of their 'feel for the game' involved recognition (and at times criticism) of the game itself. This revealed how the participants' reflexive habitus was connected via multi-layered links to various social fields and at times revealed their own acts of problematising the taken for granted. Thus, their valuing of particular attributes was

related to not only unconscious dispositions but also appeared to demonstrate that the act of valuing was itself a dispositional attribute. This could be examined in relation to social fields to explore how the habitus acted to construct the field as well as be conditioned by it.

Bourdieu's claim that 'the subject is not the instantaneous ego of a sort of singular cogito, but the individual trace of an entire collective history' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 91), demonstrates how a collective view of habitus can be interpreted. Bourdieu himself appears to treat habitus both singularly and collectively. He acknowledges that 'just as no two individual histories are identical so no two individual habituses are identical' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 46) and at the same time argues that 'interpersonal relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 81). Methodologically, this presented me with a challenge. On the one hand, recognition of the collective nature of habitus pointed towards a potential recognition of a 'near-miss' habitus, one which would serve to connect the experiences of the participants within an academically selective system. Conversely, this process of collectively ascribing a habitus 'type' to the participants appeared to miss out on aspects within their lived experiences which related to other elements of their history (for example, how they conceptualised themselves as raced, classed or gendered). In order to overcome this difficulty, I turned to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'class habitus' within *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984). I noted that the collective habitus Bourdieu develops was based on correspondence analysis of a wide sample, matching patterns of preferences and practices to particular groupings. Throughout this process, it is clear that all such groupings are relational, rather than conforming to any pre-set structure and therefore not automatically transferable across cultural and temporal locations. It was the relational aspect that struck a chord with my own approach as it seemed to provide me with analytical opportunities to view the habitus of the participants from the perspective of differing fields and therefore examine how the collective aspects of their habitus played out within their individual lived experiences. This assured me that I was guarding against overly-deterministic claims based on a collective 'near-miss' habitus whilst at the same time acknowledging that their habitus related to forms of collective experiences and history which served to shape their dispositions. This is something which Reay (2004b, p. 435) describes as an 'internalized framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable'.

### Using the three-stage methodology – a worked example

I am very much aware that the ‘neatness’ of this discussion of my epistemological and methodological approach bears little resemblance to the messy reality of its implementation. I have taken space to address the challenges I encountered when working with Bourdieu to acknowledge how my interpretation of his work shaped my decisions and consequently, the findings of this thesis. However, I have also demonstrated how such an approach, complex and iterative as it was, made use of Bourdieu’s thinking tools to explore the relationship between objective (but frequently unseen) structures and the lived experiences of the participants. The discovery of this relationship did not take place as a final, concluding end point to the approach; rather it became apparent iteratively as I moved from research design to field work, to analysis and then back again, modifying and adjusting plans as I went along. Once again, this proved messy, but in agreement with the recognition made by Nash (1999) using Bourdieu’s concepts forced me to think, and to extend Nash’s point, forced me to think relationally.

Without pre-empting the analysis chapters which follow, it is useful at this point to include a worked example of my use of Bourdieu’s three stage methodology in order to demonstrate how thinking relationally meant that I worked iteratively across the three stages. The example focuses on the 11+ entrance test which each of the participants referred to.

I began my analysis at the first stage and used the 11+ to establish a link between the field of power as a multi-layered social space and the sub-field of academically selective education. The starting point for identifying this link was the legitimisation given to the use of the 11+ by education policy. In addition, there was also more indirect legitimisation, via neo-liberal ideology of competition which allows such testing to be seen as ‘natural’ and part of the ‘rules of the game’. This then moved to my consideration to whether the 11+ constituted a potential source of institutionalised cultural capital within the academically selective sub-field (Stage 2). This required moving to stage 3 and examining the habitus of the participants as individuals who did not possess this specific form of capital to understand whether and how it was valued by the field. Such examination revealed two points which returned me to stages 1 and 2 respectively. Within the academically selective sub-field, the 11+ was regarded by the participants as a source of institutionalised cultural capital which they were aware of not possessing. They were aware of being positioned differently when compared to those who

held it and were also aware of the ways in which the value of the 11+ (in terms of institutionalised cultural capital) varied in relation to the field they were operating within. In other words, whereas it 'mattered' within the sub-field of academically selective education, it held a lesser value in the wider field of education where it could be countered by other forms of institutionalised cultural capital such as GCSE results. However, the acceptance of the 11+ demonstrated by the participants also related to the field of power (stage 1). As a form of competition, the participants were aware of (and in one case had been a recipient of) additional practices such as private tutoring as a means of increasing chances of success and further accepted that competitive practices were part of the 'rules of the game'. Such rules were pre-reflexively assumed and beyond question.

This worked example therefore not only illustrates how my iterative use of the three-stage methodology worked relationally. It also demonstrates how this approach used the subjective experiences of the participants as a means of revealing objective structures. Whilst it could be argued that a limitation of this research lies in its use of subjective experience, the nature of my research questions meant that I was not seeking definitive, single perspective answers, given that the focus of the research was on the lived experiences of the participants. Rather, I sought to examine the extent to which the lived experiences of the participants related to the fields they participated in. This section has demonstrated how Bourdieusian epistemology and methodology lies as foundational to such an examination. I now move to consider how I realised this epistemology and methodology through my research design.

## Research design

Recognising that this research centres around participants' lived experiences, the principle which underpinned my strategy to research design was taking every step possible to centralise the participant throughout the research process. In the following section, I will demonstrate how this value shaped my decisions at the design stage and therefore influenced my selection of research methods. It begins with a discussion of how I drew upon the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005, 2017; Clark & Moss, 2001) at the design stage in order to meet this principle, prior to moving to examine how the research design was put into action.

### The Mosaic Approach

The Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005, 2017; Clark & Moss, 2001) was developed for use with young children. It is a multi-method and poly-vocal approach which aims to bring together

‘different perspectives in order to create *with* children an image of their worlds’ (Clark, 2017, p. 17). Each of these different perspectives contributes a piece of the mosaic, which, like a mosaic, have to be viewed together to understand the whole. As Ingram and Tarabini (2018, p. 205) recognise, ‘to understand the fabric of inequality, we need to holistically look at the woven texture rather than the individual threads’. The Mosaic approach focuses on the creation of knowledge *by* the participants rather than the extraction of knowledge *from* them and in so doing, acknowledges children ‘as experts in their own lives’ (Clark, 2017, p. 20). As such, children are regarded as being able to communicate their views and experiences (even at a very young age) and as taking an active role in meaning making within their own learning. In addition, the Mosaic approach recognises the child participant as a rights holder, particularly in regard to Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which state that children have a right to express views freely in media which are appropriate to them.

In order to facilitate the construction of knowledge *with* participants, the Mosaic approach provides a framework for listening. This framework regards listening as being multi-method, participatory, reflexive, adaptable, focused on children’s lived experiences and embedded into practice (Clark, 2017, p. 24). The framework is used below to examine and justify my decision to draw upon the Mosaic approach within this research.

#### Listening which is multi-method

Clark (2017, p. 24) highlights the importance of understanding listening as ‘a process which is not limited to the spoken word’ and suggests tools which provide a means by which children can ‘communicate their ideas and feelings to adults in other symbolic ways’ (2017, p. 25). It could be argued that participants from a secondary school age range (11 – 18 years) no longer require non-verbal means of communicating; their ability to articulate ‘ideas and feelings’ verbally is much more developed than those of the early-years participants of Clark’s studies. However, this argument fails to acknowledge the barrier that verbal communication can become when requesting an adolescent to speak openly about their lived experiences. In addition, the employment of a multi-method approach also afforded a variety of means through which the lived experience of the participant could be constructed. Providing the participant with the opportunity to further discuss and reflect upon the outcomes of the methods went some way to centralising them within the research process.

#### Listening which is participatory

Participatory methods (such as collage creation, see below) have the effect of giving control to the participant and acknowledges 'their rights to express their point of view or to remain silent' (Clark, 2017, p. 26). I also found that incorporation of a participatory method facilitated further discussion between the participant and myself through the process of examining and analysing outcomes of the method. This proved insightful as the discussions gave the participants an opportunity to reflexively step back and analyse their own outcomes from a differing perspective.

#### Listening which is reflexive

Reflexivity is central to Bourdieu's methodological approach and likewise plays a key role in the Mosaic approach. Through active involvement in the construction of data and the process of meaning making, opportunities arose for the participants to reflect and interpret. The reflexive nature of listening also impacted on my own interpretation. Similarly to the point raised above concerning participatory methods providing opportunities to step back, Stephenson (2009) highlights that such an opportunity is also available for the researcher. She observes that 'being prepared to do this, and to relinquish the narrow framework of the research agenda, allowed other messages to be 'heard', messages that were not answers to the questions that were being asked' (2009, p. 137). This point very much resonates with my own experience of reflexive listening which then fed through to the iterative nature of Bourdieu's three stage methodology.

#### Listening which is adaptable

The Mosaic approach requires that, to the extent to which it is possible, methods are adapted to suit the participant. Therefore, attention was given to particular styles of non-verbal communication (particularly in terms of virtual communication via online media) with which the participants were familiar. The participants' views were taken into consideration, not only in terms to gauge their familiarity and competency with various online platforms but also by offering them opportunity to offer their perspectives on the methods selected.

#### Listening which focuses on children's lived experiences

In one respect, this strand of the Mosaic approach's framework is the most relevant to this research, given that the research questions are concerned with the 'lived experiences' of 'near-miss' pupils. However, it also raises the issue of how I conceptualised lived experience for the purpose of this research. I once again return to the acknowledgement made by McNay

(2004, p. 184) that Bourdieu's relational approach 'provides a way of placing experience at the centre of social analysis without attributing to it some kind of apodictic or essential status' and therefore, whilst this research seeks to examine the lived experiences of the participants, it also recognises that any lived experience has to be related to the context in which that particular experience occurred. My conceptualisation of lived experience therefore developed as the research process continued. It began very loosely, akin to what McNay (2004, pp. 183-184) describes as 'the representations that actors have of the world and the way these inform action and interaction'. However, one incident in which a participant related a story concerning an experience his parents, rather than he, had 'lived' but which clearly appeared to relate to how he interpreted his social world, problematised this conceptualisation. This made clear that whilst lived experience could, and often did, result in participants explaining various aspects of the everyday, there were also other factors which contributed to their lived experiences. As Bourdieu acknowledges:

the visible, that which is immediately given, hides the invisible which determines it. One thus forgets that the truth of any interaction is never entirely to be found within the interaction as it avails itself for observation' (Bourdieu, 1990a, pp. 126-127)

Therefore, my conceptualisation of lived experience also recognises the existence of the 'invisible' which referring to the example above, would include how listening to the stories of others' lived experiences become part of the listener's lived experience. Thus, relational analysis makes space to reveal what is not immediately visible. Listening which is based upon lived experiences of participants regards such lived experiences as relational entities to be further explored, rather than ends in themselves.

#### *Listening which is embedded into practice*

Unlike Clark's work, this research is not linked to teacher pedagogy in that its focus is on near-miss pupils' perspectives of an academically selective education system rather than the practices and pedagogies of the school they attended. However, the cycle of construction, reflection and dialogue became fully embedded into my practice as a researcher as the process continued and aligned smoothly with the iterative nature of Bourdieu's three-stage methodology. In addition, at the end of the process I sought feedback from the participants on the experience of being a participant. They shared that taking part in the research had caused them to 'see things differently' and whilst this cannot be used to claim listening being

embedded, it does demonstrate the participants' awareness of having undertaken practices which changed their perspectives.

Using the Mosaic approach's framework for listening has allowed me to examine and justify my decision to draw upon it within my research design. It is evident that the Mosaic approach has a clear link to the underlying principle of the research. By focusing on research *with* rather than *on* participants, it allowed the participants to remain central to the research process. The approach afforded the participants several opportunities to construct, reflect and discuss as the process continued and thus aligned well with the iterative nature of Bourdieu's three-stage methodology. Further, and in some ways because of participant centrality, the research was situated within the context of the participants' social world. This was evident from the focus within the framework on 'lived experiences' and also linked to the utilisation of participatory methods as a means of examining how the participants regarded their relationship with their social world. This then meant that the relational nature of Bourdieusian methodology could be incorporated into a multi-method research design which drew upon the Mosaic approach. I therefore move to examine and justify each of the research methods used within my multi-method design.

### Interviews

Legard et al. (2003, pp. 141 - 142) identify four 'key features' of qualitative interviews: they combine 'structure with flexibility', they are 'interactive in nature', they explore 'reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs' and in doing so furnish 'explanatory evidence' and they are 'generative in the sense that new knowledge or thoughts are likely...to be created.' These key features are used to structure the discussion which follows.

Combining structure and flexibility was relevant to my use of interviews in various ways. Legard et al. (2003, p. 138) acknowledge the 'structured' element of an interview serves to distinguish it from 'everyday' conversation whilst appearing naturalistic. Whilst it could be argued that a degree of 'formality' may have proven inhibiting for the participants, I consider the marking of the interview as something 'different' from an everyday conversation was beneficial. The participants were aware of the degree to which their responses were being listened to in both the immediate context (because of interaction from me) and in the wider context of the research (as a result of discussion of the research focus as part of the informed consent process). However, too much emphasis on 'importance' was avoided within the semi-



structured interviews and although interview guides (see Appendix 1) were used to form a skeleton structure, discussion of participants' lived experiences meant that these remained adaptable to a plethora of responses. Throughout the interviews, I endeavoured to take the position of 'a facilitator, to enable the interviewee to talk about their thoughts, feelings, views and experiences' (Legard et al., 2003, p. 147).

It is recognition of the 'facilitator' role that leads into the second feature of interactivity. Both Kvale (1996) and Holstein and Gubrium (2016) acknowledge the collaboration between the researcher and the participant within an interview as a means of constructing knowledge. This focus on construction *with* the participant links back to the listening framework of the Mosaic approach which regards listening as a participatory process. However, this also raises the issue of positions of power within the interview context. Mellor et al. (2014) present two differing perceptions of power relations. They contrast the view of Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009, p. 282) who claim that 'control and ownership of the data seem to be in the hands of the participants' with that of Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) who purport that creating interview guides and determining the duration of the interview puts the interviewer in a more powerful position. This was of relevance within the research in relation to my own positionality and how the participants perceived it (see 'Researching at Hillside School' below). I incorporated reflexive strategies which provided the participants with opportunities to contribute and comment on initial analyses to move beyond tokenistic interaction towards constructing data with the participants. Such a reflexive approach allowed both the participants and me to consider various interpretations of particular contributions as part of an interactive process of constructing data. Miller and Glassner (2016, p. 53) argue that building on the interactive element of an interview means 'that "intersubjective depth" can be achieved and, with this, the achievement of knowledge of social worlds'. This is achieved through listening; 'trying to hear the meaning of what the participant is saying, understanding where there is a subtext that needs to be explored, and hearing the nuances in the participant's account' (Legard et al., 2003, p. 156). The role listening plays within an interview to seek out nuance links to the third of Legard et al.'s factors of gaining explanatory evidence from opinions and beliefs. However, the fundamental position of listening within the framework of the Mosaic approach meant that other sources of opinions and beliefs were available and that 'listening' took place within data constructed across each of the methods, rather than just within the interview

setting. As an interviewer, my 'understanding' of the participants was shaped not only by the interactions within the interview but also by recognising how such interactions related to outcomes from the other methods.

Legard et al. (2003) highlight the generation of new knowledge as their final key aspect of the interview process. I would refine this point slightly in the context of how interviews operated within my research design and argue that new knowledge was generated through the interactive process of listening. It must also be acknowledged that knowledge need not necessarily be 'new' to both the participant *and* the interviewer. In several instances, the interviews raised different perspectives on issues and in doing so invited the opportunity of employing a reflexive, autonomous approach. In doing so, the interviews contributed towards an interactive construction of insights into the lived experience of the participants.

### Observations

Observations contributed another piece of the mosaic. As Heritage (1984, p. 236) recognises, one cannot regard interviews 'as an appropriate substitute for the observation of actual behaviour'. My decision to include observations as part of the mosaic drew upon the following claim from McNaughton Nicholls et al. (2014, p. 250) regarding the potential observations have:

[Observations can be used to] identify themes to be explored in spoken accounts, provide an understanding of the physical context or behaviours and intersections, test out what is said in interview, show how something said in interview is enacted and provide explanations for inconsistencies.

My intention to use observation was to gain insight into the participants' 'everyday social settings and their everyday behaviour within them' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 551). Within the context of a secondary school in which pupils move between different locations over the course of a school day, I made the decision to centre observations on the participants' timetabled lessons, rather than attempt to observe them during free periods of time such as lunch breaks. This worked practically and fell in line with the safeguarding requirements of the school which prohibited me from moving around the site without being under staff supervision. Lareau (2021) provides advice concerning entrance into a field prior to undertaking observations, suggesting group meetings as one means of informing people of your intended actions. Staff at the school were informed about my research by means of a

notification in the weekly bulletin (see Appendix 5) and I introduced myself and sought permission to enter classrooms from the relevant teachers. I did not experience any instances of refusal. Further, the dates on which observations took place were agreed with the participants and I made clear to them that the focus of the observation was to see them in classes and that they should therefore carry on as if I was not present. Cohen et al. (2018, p. 545) present a diagrammatic continuum of observation which proved useful in planning my observation schedule. I recognised that observations would be focused on the individual participant, but at the same time be responsive to their behaviour and interactions within the classroom, with both the teacher and other pupils. I adapted a 'wide and narrow angle perspective' (Merriam, 1998) within my field notes, which prompted me to focus inward on the participant as well as consider the physical environment in which the observation was taking place and record my own reactions. The schedule which I used to structure my field notes can be found at Appendix 2.

Conducting observations raised two issues. The first is the degree to which observations were intrusive to both the participant and other individuals within the classrooms. Gobo and Marciniak (2016, p. 112) claim that we currently live in 'an 'observation society', a society in which observing...has become a fundamental activity and watching and scrutinizing are becoming important cognitive tools'. I made every effort to minimise the disruption I caused whilst observing and for the majority of time positioned myself at the back of a classroom. I became aware that my presence did not appear to cause too much disruption to the other pupils and on granting me access, the Headteacher of the school had advised that pupils were accustomed to the presence of 'others' in lessons as a result of a wide variety of lesson observation strategies used for staff training and development. Secondly, I recognised that the data generated in an observation is dependent on my own decisions regarding what is recorded. McNaughton Nicholls et al. (2014, p. 266) regard this as 'an important part of the dataset, something that stimulates further analysis and adds to the richness of observation as a method'. In order to access this richness, I organised a post-observation interview with the participants, during which time I shared my field notes in order to gain their perspectives. Employing this reflexive approach allowed me to interrogate the outcomes of my observations and the participants' input at this stage went some way to reveal influences of my own positionality as well as providing participants with an opportunity to contribute to

data construction. In some instances this revealed 'gaps' between attitudes and actions (La Piere, 1934), in other cases it also provided opportunity to draw clarifications between what was 'said' and what was 'done' (Gilbert & Mulkey, 1983). As part of the mosaic, the observation outcomes contributed part of the iterative research process in that they shaped and were shaped by data constructed using the other intended methods.

### Visual methods

To some extent, both of the previous methods can be regarded as visual research methods. We are reminded by Emmison and Smith (2000, p. 218) of the role of the visual within interviewing and observation; 'the use of the body in interaction is also a potent source of visual data'. As such, field notes taken during interviews and observations proved a valuable contribution to the data, particularly when considering the embodied nature of habitus. Further to these, the final piece of the mosaic consisted of visual methods created by the participant.

Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) regard creative visual methods as 'a good new way of building sociological knowledge' (2006, p. 83) which can challenge the 'taken-for-granted idea that you can explore the social world just by asking people questions, in language' (2006, p. 84). In her study of male, working-class grammar school pupils, Ingram (2018) asked participants to use different media to create representations of their identity. She recognises that this 'not only allowed them to determine what was important to express' but also gave her 'the opportunity to access what was legitimated by their culture' (Ingram, 2018, p. 91). Each of these points relate back to the research questions and methodological approach of this research. As stated above, the conceptualisation of lived experience was intentionally broad so to afford the participant an opportunity to contribute to its construction. My intention when selecting a visual method was to provide a means of achieving such breadth whilst also positioning the participant (as creator of the visual data) central to the research process. This section will move to discuss my choice of visual method and the degree to which this choice fulfilled my intentions.

Participants were asked to produce two collages using Padlet. Padlet is an application which acts as an online 'board' that allows users to post images, videos, text and links. It is available online ([www.Padlet.com](http://www.Padlet.com)) and also as a free app for phones and mobile devices. A Padlet

board can contain as many posts as the user wishes and the layout and design of the Padlet is determined by the user. My previous experience of using Padlet with secondary age students as a teaching tool had shown me that students responded positively and were particularly engaged by the potential scope it offered them.

Padlet was used as a tool for the participants to use when creating online collages. Having set up the Padlet boards, each participant was given two blank Padlets titled “How I See Myself” and “How I See My Future”. I deliberately selected titles which could have proven challenging to articulate if only explored using verbal communication, following Leitch (2008, p. 37) who acknowledges the potential collages may have in helping the participants to ‘narrate aspects of their consciously lived experience as well as uncovering the unrecognised, unacknowledged or ‘unsayable’ stories that they hold’. In addition Leitch (2008, p. 44) observes that using a collage task rather than a drawing task ‘does not generally stimulate individual concerns about artistic ability’. I considered the flexibility Padlet offered as beneficial because in contrast to a paper-based collage, participants could draw upon a variety of media, rather than being constrained to printed images.

The participants were given links to their respective Padlet boards and asked to create them in their own time. Owing to the disruption of field work caused by Covid-19 school closures (see below) the timescale of the research was significantly reduced and therefore participants had significantly less time to complete the Padlet collages than I had first anticipated. However, they each completed at least one, anonymised examples of which can be seen at appendices 9-12. These were then discussed at a follow-up interview.

It is without doubt that the task of creating Padlet collages centralised the participant within the research process, and I would argue that the subsequent discussion of their collages with me also supported such centralisation. In a study which utilised a scrapbook method alongside interviews, Bragg and Buckingham (2008, p. 121) claim that ‘the voices that emerged through the scrapbooks were very different to those in interview’, regarding this as ‘evidence that the methods give us access to a wider range of voices than might have been obtained through interviews alone’. Within the context of this research, I would consider that the Padlet collages went some way in revealing additional elements of the participants’ lived experiences but this was itself further enhanced by the discussions of the Padlet collages with the participants. Thomson and Hall (2008, p. 161) regard this stage as ‘generative’ and an

aspect which 'ought not to be omitted from research'. They recount how their conversations with child participants who had produced drawings 'could open tiny glimpses into some children's life worlds, they could also startle us through reminding us of the dangers of glib reading and easy assumptions' (2008, p. 161). The discussions provided a reflexive opportunity for the participants and me to consider how the visual material contributed towards the overarching mosaic and focusing the discussion on the participant-generated visual material effectively gave control of what was discussed to the participant. Further, these discussions also served to 'facilitate a context in which the...young person becomes an audience to themselves' (Leitch, 2008, p. 53). As such, this presented participants with an opportunity to 'see' themselves which at times led to realisation of a certain aspect of their lived experience being 'missing' from the Padlet. Thus, the contributions the Padlet collages made to the overall mosaics were as sources of visual data that also initiated discussions concerning the participants' lived experiences.

Within this section, I have examined each research method individually, justifying my decision to utilise it as part of the multi-method Mosaic approach and further made specific references to considerations I made in relation to use of these methods with adolescent participants. The iterative nature of Bourdieu's three-stage methodology aligned with my multi-method approach, to the extent that outcomes from one method contributed to the shaping of another. This 'back and forth' dialogue between methods resulted in an overall 'picture' of the participants' lived experiences. I have considered the inevitable limitations associated with the methods I selected which is most obviously the subjective nature of the methods. Once again, I return the reader to my research questions which are seeking to examine how structures which pass as 'unseen' relate to subjective experiences of individuals. By reviewing the methods, I have sought to demonstrate how participant centrality operated as an underlying principle bringing the methods together. However, I also recognise how my role as researcher was also central to this process and therefore move on to consider how the research design was put into action.

### Putting the research design into action

This section places the research design into a 'real life' context by examining the site where the research took place alongside my own positionality as a researcher. In addition, it

examines my sampling and participant recruitment strategies before exploring the impact of interruption to the research caused by Covid-19.

### Researching at Hillside School

Hillside School (a pseudonym) is a non-academically selective, co-educational secondary school within an academically selective area in the South-East of England. It has roughly 900 students on role. I had previously worked at Hillside and therefore can only present these limited details about the school in order to guard against potential identification (a point further discussed in 'Ethical considerations', see below). The remainder of this section therefore discusses my positionality as a researcher at Hillside, mindful of Greene's (2014, p. 12) claim that:

Qualitative researchers should recognize and address their position and role in the research project, as such reflection will not only provide the reader with a fuller, richer account of the methods employed but will also work to ensure that the participant's voice is heard in the narratives that the researcher shares.

I had not originally intended to use Hillside as a field-work site but gaining access to an alternative non-selective school within the area proved to be exceptionally challenging. Therefore, I drew upon my previous professional contacts and negotiated access to the school with the Headteacher. This presented me with some challenges concerning my positionality. I had left Hillside as a teacher and was now returning as a researcher, a situation which Perryman (2011, p. 858) identifies as a 'returning native'. Reflecting on this experience allows me to consider two different aspects of my positionality as a researcher. I begin by exploring the first of these which is my experience of returning to a former workplace. My reflection reveals that as a 'returning native' I encountered a complex mix of being a simultaneous 'insider' and 'outsider' in relation to former colleagues.

Like Perryman, my 'returning native' status meant that gaining access to Hillside was facilitated via professional contacts which in several cases were also individuals who I knew socially, some very well. Despite initial approval from the Headteacher, gaining access was made more complex by my visits being 'managed' by an administrative staff member (referred to as 'Manager' in the extract below) that I did know but who, from my perspective, did not appear to consider the research worthwhile. The following extract from my reflective journal (which I kept alongside field notes) makes clear my frustration:

The build up to this meeting has been frustrating and has caused me quite a bit of emotional upheaval. At one point this week, I did cry and have seriously considered abandoning this approach altogether...The school are being very strange about safeguarding, to the extent that I'm beginning to think they no longer want me. The Head passed it on to Manager who is yet to respond to any of my emails. She did respond to a WhatsApp message but essentially said she'd be too busy to meet with me. I get the feeling she has been lumbered with sorting out arrangements for me and is sticking to the letter of the law regarding visitors. To that extent, despite having parental and participant consent along with DBS clearance they are saying I will have to be chaperoned around site. I fear this is going to make things awkward, especially as its going to inconvenience a lot of people. It has also been difficult not to take this personally. In addition, I'm getting particularly worked up because I can't make any plans and time continues to tick away. I feel like every time I take one step forwards, I end up taking three backwards. (*Journal extract, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020*).

Reflecting back on this extract, it is evident that I was struggling with being treated as an 'outsider' by a former colleague who I considered as a friend and had kept in touch with since leaving. Perryman (2011, p. 862) acknowledges the 'complexity' encountered by a returning native in relation to 'bonds that have not been broken just because the researcher no longer works at the site'. I struggled with being treated as an 'outsider' (in terms of Hillside's safeguarding requirements) at a school where I had previously worked, and this was compounded by my 'insider' knowledge of the school's procedures. It is also interesting that my concern relating to being chaperoned around the school site was not based on potential effects on data collection but also relates to another aspect of my 'insider' knowledge regarding the inconvenience my presence could cause to staff who were already stretched in terms of capacity. My awareness of my positionality in terms of relationships with staff continues throughout subsequent journal entries. I acknowledge how I was frequently greeted warmly by former colleagues and yet felt isolated during break and lunch times as I no longer had a 'place' to be. I recognised that challenging the chaperoning requirement was futile and could also bring with it a risk of losing access completely. It turned out to be a requirement that was subsequently over-ridden by a different member of the administrative team, and this was something I also used 'returning native' knowledge to understand.

In Perryman's (2011) research, she considers her positionality as a 'returning native' in relation to the teaching staff participants of her study. In contrast, my positionality at Hillside was related not only to my own inner struggle with the complexities of being a 'returning native' but also has to be considered in relation to the pupil participants of my research.



Having created my sample of participants (see below), I discovered that I had taught each of them at some point during their time at Hillside. The nature of my former position meant that excluding pupils who I had previously taught would have effectively emptied the pool of potential participants and therefore my positionality (in terms of how the participants perceived me) had to be considered in terms of formerly being their teacher. Therefore, the 'returning native' (Perryman, 2011) conceptualisation could no longer be directly applied to my own positionality. It was necessary to widen it, recognising the cross-boundary nature of the research, which is defined widely by Oikonomidou and Wiest (2017, pp. 53-54) as

any type of inquiry that is conducted across cultural and/or structural boundaries, including but not limited to race, class, gender, language, religion, age, sexual identity and national origin.

Whilst it could be argued that interpretation of such a wide definition could result in all research falling under the term 'cross-boundary', I consider this definition to be relevant in terms of highlighting 'structural boundaries' and recognise that the structured teacher-pupil relationship I had formerly had with the participants altered over the course of the research. The degree to which such alteration interrelated to my positionality will now be examined.

It has been useful to use entries from my reflective journal when evaluating the extent to which I was aware of my relationships with the participants altering over the course of the research. I remembered them as pupils (albeit from teaching them three or four years prior to fieldwork) and they clearly remembered me. I therefore became aware that being in this position put me in a similar situation to that of Kim (2012, p. 268) in that I was able to 'short-cut' establishing an initial relationship but likewise, I also remained mindful of the influence of 'micro-aspects of communication' (Oikonomidou & Wiest, 2017, p. 60) which could potentially alter the participants' perception of me from one of a teacher to one of a 'non-authoritarian adult' (Davis, 1998, p. 329). Therefore, I gave emphasis to the participants calling me by my first name, rather than 'Miss' as well as to the fact that their responses to any of the data construction methods could be as honest and as open as they wished. I offered them the example that language which would have been classified as 'offensive' within my role as teacher would not be commented on. Two of the participants continued to call me 'Miss' throughout the research, which itself became a bit of a joke between us and therefore serves to demonstrate how our relationship altered. In addition, I was aware of myself

speaking a lot more openly to the participants than I would have as a teacher, particularly when asking questions about their experiences beyond school and also sharing my experiences within my university. Whilst it is not possible to measure the significance of such small actions, the fact that these took place naturally and without deliberate 'effort' on my part support my recognition of the altering that our relationship went through.

In agreement with Mercer (2007, p. 6) my positionality afforded me 'a better initial understanding of the social setting'. I understood how Hillside 'worked' both in itself and also within the wider context of the academically selective area. This understanding meant that I shared a 'common language' with the participants (Kim, 2012, p. 264) and was therefore not subject to a 'culture shock' on entering the field and meeting them. I was also aware of having a relationship with the participants that provided 'considerable credibility and rapport' with them, which Mercer (2007, p. 7) considers to 'engender a greater level of candour than would otherwise be the case'. However, recognising that such credibility was based on a teacher-pupil relationship, I also recognised it as a potential negative, or what Mercer (2007) conceptualises as a 'double-edged sword'. Thus, I made efforts to explore the 'taken for granted' with the participants, often asking questions which I already 'knew' the answers to. This had two benefits. On several occasions it proved a way of avoiding the negative consequences of assumption and demonstrated the ways in which my 'taken for granted' differed from that of the participants. In addition, it also contributed to the altering of our relationship in that it supported a shift in power. Oikonomidou and Wiest (2017, p. 59) acknowledge how an approach which focused on 'the fundamental human desire to be 'heard' and valued' shifted the power balance in their cross-cultural study and for me this meant that I was no longer the teacher 'telling' my pupils, but instead a researcher who acknowledged the value in what the participants told me. This was further enhanced by the participatory nature of a research design which drew upon the Mosaic approach. In her study of pupils attending a secondary school in rural Kenya, Milligan (2016, p. 237) claims that participatory methods allowed her to 'garner a degree of an authoritative insider perspective on their educational lives, both in and out of school', as well as providing 'the ability to enter spaces that as both an adult and an outsider I would not have otherwise been able to access'. In the context of my research, the 'spaces' my approach allowed me to enter included the participants' lived experiences within and beyond education. Despite my experience of

working at Hillside, I was positioned as an outsider to the lived experiences of individual participants and therefore, the participatory nature of my research design in which each method contributed a piece of the final 'mosaic', revealed 'both new insights and mutual understandings' (Milligan, 2016, p. 249) of the participants' lived experiences.

Gaining such insight and understanding also brought other aspects of my positionality into consideration. Oikonomidou and Wiest (2017, p. 62) recognise that 'ideological differences can exist during interactions in the field that can make a researcher uncomfortable' and for me, this occurred when the participants presented views which I initially interpreted as naively supporting academically selective education. The extract from my reflective journal written after an interview with a participant demonstrates one example:

Rather than being completely against the 11+ system, she [the participant] regarded it as being of use in separating students into the right type of group. I felt myself getting a bit frustrated at this and at times was very aware of my effort not to ask loaded questions. (*Journal extract 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020*).

The frustration mentioned within this extract stems from the insider knowledge I held as a researcher who had spent time engaging with Bourdieusian critique of the role education plays in social reproduction. My 'insider' knowledge meant that I could not easily accept her perspective and therefore our relationship underwent another alteration in that I felt distanced from her. This alteration is not in itself a negative; as Mercer (2007, p. 13) acknowledges 'the researcher's relationship with the researched is not static but fluctuates constantly, shifting back and forth along a continuum'. In many ways, feeling external to the participant supported my own reflexivity. Hellawell (2006, p. 487) argues that 'ideally the researcher should be both inside and outside the perceptions of the researched' and feeling 'outside' of the participant's perspective provided me with an opportunity to think reflexively about my own perspectives which, as part of my habitus, related to the conceptualisation of 'social justice' within the field of the sociology of education. Therefore, being confronted with an ideological counter to my perspective as a result of my interactions with the participants has also contributed to an ongoing alteration within our relationship, demonstrating how the relationship continues to develop via reflexive consideration.

In drawing this section to a close, I return to its purpose, which was to make clear to the reader the context in which my research took place. The fact that I had previously worked at

Hillside accounts for the minimal detail provided about the school and also for the discussion of my positionality. Undertaking research there means that I have had to remain silent on potential identifiers and therefore have not shared details regarding the school's intake in terms of commonly used markers (for example categories of ethnic diversity and proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding). However, I have demonstrated that returning to Hillside has also presented an opportunity for me to engage with an examination of researcher positionality within this thesis that would not have been possible had I undertaken research in a different location. I have made clear how despite initially considering myself a 'returning native' in terms of my relationships with former colleagues (Perryman, 2011) I had to re-consider this conceptualisation in light of my relationships with the participants who I had previously known as pupils. I have used the concept of 'alteration' to signify how our relationships changed in order to convey their movement along a continuum of insider/outsider and further, how such movement was related to shifts in power which meant that movements were found to be both within and outside of direct control. In presenting such a 'messy' examination, I was reassured by the work of Thomson and Gunter (2011) who highlight that the 'fluid identity' of a researcher is one that reflects the messiness of research. There are several commonalities between the findings of this paper and my own research. It discusses research with pupils and highlights the impact of the relationship between the authors and the Head of the school where the research took place. The paper illustrates how working within the blurred binary of insider/outsider led to awareness of fluidity being gained as a result of reflection rather than being strategically planned for in advance of fieldwork. To this extent, I am assured that drawing on extracts from my reflective journal in order to illustrate alterations and my reactions to them demonstrates how reflexivity operated in relation to my research.

As the above discussion has clarified, gaining access to Hillside provided the starting point for my reflexive consideration of my positionality as a researcher which then continued throughout the research process. References to my positionality contribute one aspect of the reflexive nature of this research and therefore will subsequently be examined as and when they relate to the continuation of this thesis. Having examined issues related to gaining access to Hillside, this chapter now moves to consider the strategies I utilised for sampling and participant recruitment.

### Sampling strategy and participant recruitment

Creating a purposive sample of 'near-miss' pupils was relatively simple. On my request, Hillside provided me with lists of pupils in their respective year groups, which were ranked according to Key Stage 2 attainment levels. I requested that the actual attainment level of pupils was removed before the list was shared with me, along with all other details, such as the ethnicity categorisations used by the school and pupils' eligibility for pupil premium funding. I then selected the top-ranked male and female pupil and requested that these pupils were given the information sheet concerning the research (see Appendix 3). A former colleague at Hillside offered to liaise with pupils on my behalf to make initial contact and all those who were approached expressed an interest in participating. I had made the decision to initially focus on pupils in years 11 and 13 in order to maximise the time I had available with them, prior to the onset of the GCSE and A Level exam period. Following this, my intention was to recruit pupils from years 7 and 9 which would have then created a cross-sectional sample across the secondary age-range of Hillside's pupils.

My decision to limit the details I had about potential participants to their names and sex as recorded by Hillside was my attempt to limit to avoid the 'struggle of classifications' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 243). I have made clear the extent to which some degree of classification took place as I was aware of where individuals had been 'ranked' within their year group in relation to their Key Stage 2 attainment data. However, whilst this type of classification was necessary in order for me to create my sample of participants, other classifying elements such as ethnic grouping and eligibility for pupil premium funding (as a proxy for social disadvantage and therefore, potentially indicative of social class) were not. Therefore, it is not possible to claim that the participants within this research were representative of 'near-miss' pupils at Hillside. Indeed, doing so would be contrary to the principle underpinning this research, which was to centralise the lived experiences of the individual participants, rather than seeking out unifying features between participants which would homogenise them into a 'near-miss' classification of their own. I therefore acknowledge how my sampling strategy contributes to the intersectionality of a methodological approach which utilises Bourdieu's thinking tools to examine how 'major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time, for example, race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and age operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but build on each other and work together' (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2018, p. 4).

Bourdieu’s thinking tools were a means of exploring the multitude of social identities held by an individual and how, through their inter-connectedness ‘each identity exists simultaneously with others; and therefore they can change the way we experience each’ (Romero, 2018, p. 36). The intention behind investigating the lived experiences of the participants was not to discover a ‘universal truth’; in concurrence with Romero (2018, p. 3) it sought to examine ‘what we miss in trying to capture universal truths in sociology’.

Having gone through the recruitment of participants with few complications, I had obtained informed consent from Boris and Poppy in year 13 and Will and Gaby in year 11 (all self-selected pseudonyms) along with the necessary parental consent for each. I therefore began the process of data construction in mid-February 2020. I had planned for the research design to take place over a relatively short time frame of about 6 – 8 weeks in an attempt to minimise drop out as well as to limit the commitment required from the participants. In the next section, I will demonstrate the various ways that school closures resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic impacted upon this planning and on this thesis as a whole.

#### Covid-19 interruption

Whilst I recognised that working within the time-constraints of a school timetable necessitated a flexible approach, my intention was for data construction activities to roughly adhere to the following process for each participant:

Session	Method	Purpose
1	Interview	Icebreaker, discussion of 11+ experience
2	Observation	‘Wide and narrow angle perspective’ (Merriam, 1998) of participants’ timetabled lessons across one school day.
3	Interview	Discuss outcomes of observation along with my analysis of previous interview. Gain participant feedback on both. Introduce Padlet and collage task.
4	Padlet collage	Participant to complete collages independently, prior to next interview.
5	Interview	Discussion opportunity during which the participant will present their collages.
6	Interview	Discussion and construction of the ‘mosaic’ of the participant. Reflections of the research process shared.

The process began relatively smoothly, and I established contact with the participants via email which then allowed me to organise visits to Hillside efficiently, often carrying out multiple interviews on the same day. This was partially facilitated by the flexibility the Year 13 participants had in terms of their timetable as they were willing to be interviewed during 'free' periods, when they did not have timetabled lessons. Both of the participants in Year 11 were only available to be interviewed during lunch times and they both brought along food to eat during the interviews.

The closure of schools to the majority of pupils as a result of Covid-19 was announced by Boris Johnson on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (Johnson, 2020) to have effect from the following Monday (23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020). At this point, I had completed the process outlined above with Poppy (year 13) but had two interviews remaining with the three others. I was able to return to Hillside on both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> March and carried out interviews with Boris and Gaby, condensing sessions 5 and 6 into one. Therefore, as of Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, when schools were no longer open, I had completed the above process with three of the four participants, albeit in a way which varied from my intentions. I made several attempts to contact Will via email in order to carry out the final interview online, but he did not respond. I therefore turned to the data I had obtained in order to formulate what to do next.

With support from my supervisors, I made the decision to not attempt to continue the research online. My decision to do so was based on the following justifications: the challenge of establishing a researcher-participant relationship with adolescents solely via an online platform (see Lareau, 2021, p. 26), the challenge of making initial contact with potential participants given that they were not currently attending school and the challenges of the uncertainty, potential anxiety and access to technology that participants were facing at this point as a result of Covid-19. Whilst none of these were individually insurmountable, their simultaneous occurrence effectively made this decision relatively straightforward, but without doubt, exceptionally frustrating. I recognised that I had only obtained half of my intended cross-sectional sample and even that was not totally complete owing to Will not having completed Padlet collages or the final interviews. To this extent, Covid-19 played a part in shaping this thesis as I had to engage with a smaller dataset than I had anticipated. This engagement revealed another factor which directed the course of my subsequent work, as Will slowly became recognisable as an outlier in contrast to Boris, Gaby and Poppy. Not

only had Will moved to Hillside from a non-selective system (and had therefore not sat the 11+) he was the only participant who had been born in the UK; facts which were not detectable until the research process unfolded. Boris, Gaby and Poppy had all moved to the UK during their first years of primary school, arriving as non-English speakers. I return to this aspect of their lived experience in the analysis chapters which follow. These factors, combined with the fact that Will's data set was incomplete resulted in me not presenting his data in this thesis.

In many ways, the impact Covid-19 had upon the research process went on to shape the continuation of this thesis. Moving from my original intention of a cross-sectional sample to one which focused solely on participants in the latter years of the secondary age range presented opportunities to examine how time within an academically selective system related to lived experiences beyond education. This was also further enhanced by a degree of commonality between the lived experiences of the three participants, in that they were all born outside of the UK and were non-native English speakers. Exploring the degrees to which these commonalities related to the lived experiences of the participants became an aspect of this research that I had not considered at the planning and design stages, but one which did align with the focus of my research questions. Having made the space within this section to explore my positionality as a researcher in relation to returning to Hillside, I also consider it necessary to have provided the reader with as clear an account as possible of how actioning the research was affected by Covid-19 and how this resulted in a dataset I had not planned. This section has demonstrated the 'mess' (Thomson & Gunter, 2011) of this research in many ways: my decision to draw upon the Mosaic approach to present a multi-method informed 'picture' of the participant, the complexity of my researcher positionality at Hillside, the unforeseen consequences of my sampling and the external disruption caused by Covid-19 which abruptly brought my research to a halt. However, rather than shy away from this mess, I recognise it as key to the outcomes of this thesis, as the analogy of the mess also links back to the iterative and reflexive nature of the methodological approach discussed above. Working with a mess presented analytical challenges and discussions of these contribute to subsequent chapters. However, it would be naïve to expect the examination of the lived experiences of individuals as creating anything other than a mess and I therefore consider the mess to demonstrate how my methodological approach and research design were successful



in that they provided a means of examining the messiness of lived experience. The focus of this chapter now moves to one component of such messiness, ethical considerations.

## Ethical considerations

In order to address the vast and complex assortment of ethical considerations this research created, I followed the approach of Alderson and Morrow (2011) and Cohen et al. (2018) who suggest using the stages of research to structure ethical considerations. I will therefore examine ethical issues which were considered and arose during the planning, data collection, writing up and reporting stages of this research. Ethical considerations occurred throughout the entirety of this research, involving an approach which both proactively planned but at times also had to reactively respond to issues far beyond my control. Therefore, despite being presented within a bounded section of this chapter, I will also demonstrate the degree to which ethical considerations pervaded the research process from start to finish.

### The planning stages

Following advice from the BERA Guidelines (BERA, 2018), at the outset of my planning I undertook a 'risk-benefit analysis' (BERA, 2018, p. 5). This led me to consideration of the issues below at the planning stage. Returning to these creates an opportunity for reflecting on how such consideration shaped the research planning and also allows me to evaluate the considerations I made at this stage.

### The 'importance' of the problem

The DfE's classification of only eleven out of 151 Local Education Authorities as highly selective (Long et al., 2022) suggests a potential limitation to the 'problem' of academically selective education. Alongside this, the unequal geographical spread of academically selective systems across England means that for many pupils, academically selective systems will not constitute part of their lived experiences of education. However, as demonstrated in my literature review, examining academically selective systems reveals problems relating to inequalities within education stemming from the alignment between segregation by 'ability' (as measured by the 11+ test) and neo-liberal conceptualisations of social mobility and meritocracy. Taken alongside a current political context in which grammar school expansion in England continues to be debated, the 'importance' of this research lies in the fact that it seeks to explore academically selective education from the perspective of pupils and in doing

so demonstrate how large scale, sociological 'problems' play out in the lived experiences of pupils.

#### Who will be the participants?

The focus of the research is 'near-miss' pupils, which I defined as pupils who attend a non-academically selective school as a result of not passing the 11+ but who have Key Stage 2 attainment which is considered to be 'high'. As discussed above, the research took place at Hillside School (a non-academically selective school within an academically selective area) and the participants were pupils there. The discussion above has also examined the complexities of the participants already being known to me as former pupils. I have also made clear how Covid-19 interruption resulted in the number of participants being limited to one pupil in year 11 and two pupils in year 13 rather than my original intention of eight pupils across the secondary age range. All three participants had moved to the UK at early primary school age, but this arose as a coincidental result of the sampling strategy rather than as an intentional focus of the research.

#### What risks will the research pose to participants?

The participants were asked to participate in the methods examined above. As Alderson and Morrow (2011, p. 27) observe, 'risks in social research...include distress and anxiety, embarrassment and loss of self-esteem.' I had anticipated that issues discussed in interviews could potentially create such risks, particularly in relation to any discussions concerning the participants' experiences of the 11+. In addition to regularly reminding participants of their right to not answer questions or request that certain topics were not discussed, I endeavoured to phrase questions concerning the 11+ in such a way that focused on the participants' experiences of it as a process, rather than merely on the outcome. Interestingly, although I made every effort to not use the word 'fail' or 'failure' in relation to the 11+, the participants made several references to 'failing' or on other occasions 'not passing'. I minimised the risk of causing distress to the participants by making direct references to their own comments concerning their experiences, emphasising their position as the 'expert' in all matters which they had experienced. To this extent, I drew upon Sennett's (2004) conceptualisation of autonomy as a means of maintaining respect by 'accepting in the other what you do not understand' (2004, p. 122). I regard the concept of autonomy as contributing to the reflexivity of this research by providing a means of overcoming the challenge presented

when I encountered the lived experiences of the participants which went far beyond my own experiential understanding. Throughout the process of data construction, I reminded the participants of their role as the 'expert' in terms of their lived experience and made clear to them that they had significant expertise in terms of their lived experiences as pupils in an academically selective system and as pupils who had entered the system as non-English speakers. Positioning the participants as 'experts' was not only inherent to the Mosaic approach; I also consider it a means by which I overcame the potential inequality between adult researcher and adolescent participant.

Another potential risk was the time participants would spend in taking part in the research which could have resulted in them missing out on contact time with teachers. As discussed above, I made the decision to prioritise year 11 and year 13 participants when planning the research, so that activities with them would be completed prior to the start of their exams. In addition, I made every effort to work flexibly around both the participants' timetables and their extra-curricular commitments which was in some way made easier by the use of the free periods of time the year 13 participants had on their timetables. I kept in regular contact with the participants via email which allowed them to contact me to re-schedule research activities due to unforeseen circumstances. I also undertook to conduct the research activities over a relatively short timeframe of roughly six weeks which I considered to strike the balance between allowing enough time to construct data but not demand too onerous a commitment from the participants.

What might be the benefits for the participants?

Although BERA pose this question as part of the research planning process (BERA, 2018), it also creates an interesting reflection point after the research. I incorporated reflective questions on research participation into the final interview with participants in order to capture their opinions on their lived experience of participation. All three participants considered the reflexive opportunities presented by participation as beneficial.

Everything I've said was already in my head, like I had my views on it but saying it out loud and putting it into sentences, it's made me realise things (*Poppy, Interview 4*).

It's interesting, because you always think it through but when you see it written down, you think 'hang on, a minute, this is actually me' and it was interesting. I liked it... It's interesting to get a different perspective and you don't sit and do this stuff kind of normally so it's kind of like...it's helped me as well. (*Boris, Interview 4*).

It made me step back and see what is going on right now. Like with me and what I actually see. And doing that thing on Padlet. That was actually what do I imagine myself like. (*Gaby, Interview 4*).

Although the impact of this research is discussed separately (see Impact Statement) the participants' comments demonstrate the benefit they feel themselves to have gained in terms of articulating thinking, encountering different perspectives on themselves and having an opportunity to undertake activities which differed from the 'everyday' of schoolwork. I consider these comments to demonstrate how this research's fundamental principle of centralising the participant contributed to the participants' engagement with reflexive practices.

Undertaking a risk-benefit analysis evidently shaped the research at the planning stage and returning to this analysis has highlighted the ways in which such analysis related to the reality of the research process itself. As such, I recognise that my initial considerations related to 'who' the participants were could have been strengthened. Having discussed my researcher positionality above, I acknowledge that my return to Hillside as a researcher was a factor I did not consider at the planning stage. My interactions with the participants were shaped by my having taught each of them four years prior to this research and I have endeavoured to make clear to the reader how this aspect of my positionality had both positive and negative implications. In relation to this risk-benefit analysis, I can now see how my initial planning concerning gaining access to participants had under-estimated the complexity associated with gaining access to participants, particularly in a school-based setting. I approached numerous alternative schools to Hillside and frequently received no acknowledgement of my request at all. In the two instances where I did receive some initial interest from Headteachers, one withdrew their interest without providing any further explanation on learning that I wanted to undertake observation of participants in lesson. The other Headteacher was a little more open as to their reasoning not to participate, acknowledging that their school's policy was not to refer to any pupils' experiences of the 11+. In addition to this directly resulting in my returning to Hillside, these Headteachers' reactions also remained with me in that they revealed how these particular individuals focused on the degree to which this research could potentially reveal what they wanted to be kept hidden. As an ethical consideration, this had the effect of stopping the research before it had even begun at those particular schools, but likewise it also provided me with greater insight into the academically

selective field which Hillside was a part of, and which subsequently contributed part of my iterative analysis. Having re-visited the risk-benefit analysis I undertook at the planning stage; my attention now turns to ethical considerations related to the process of data collection.

### Data Collection

Prior to beginning data collection, I gained institutional ethical approval (see Appendix 4). The discussion below examines several of the key considerations that contributed to this process.

#### Identification of participants

As outlined above, Hillside provided me with a list of pupils in each of the year groups I was intending to work with that was ranked in relation to Key Stage 2 attainment data. I requested that all other details about pupils was removed, including their Key Stage 2 result, ethnicity and eligibility for pupil premium funding. Although I still agree with the reasoning behind my decision (examined above), it did result in the anomaly in the case of Will (year 11) and ultimately, to his data not being used in this thesis. The additional consequence of receiving limited information about the participants was the coincidental fact of all three participants having moved to the UK during their first few years of primary school. It is impossible to determine the extent to which additional information about the participants at the identification stage would have affected my decision to invite them to participate. At the point of identifying four participants across years 11 and 13, I was not aware that these would be my only participants and that this number would be further reduced to three. Conjecture on the direction the research would have taken but for the interruption of Covid-19 is futile. However, what is certain is that the commonality between the lived experiences of the participants contributed to the analysis of the data, creating another lens through which the lived experiences of the participants could be viewed. This in turn led to additional ethical considerations during the later stage of writing up the research (see below). However, the only verification I did seek from Hillside was whether they were aware of any reason (for example, safeguarding concerns) that a potential participant should not be approached. The school confirmed no concerns regarding the four participants I had selected and therefore I moved on to the recruitment stage.

#### Opt in process

Potential participants were approached by a former colleague who was known as a Head of Year by the participants. She spoke to them individually to gauge their initial interest and

passed onto them the information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix 3) for themselves and their parents to sign. She also arranged an initial meeting between me and the participants which provided them with an opportunity to ask questions prior to data collection. Although there is a record of this meeting in my own reflective journal, it was not recorded as it did not constitute part of the methods which had been submitted for ethical approval.

#### Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from both the participants and their parent/carer, following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which stipulates that children should be involved in decisions which may affect them. The consent form made clear what the research was going to involve, the forms of data to be collected, the potential risks associated with participating and the participants' right to withdraw their consent at any point during the research (see Appendix 3). The consent form was written in recognition that adolescent participants required relevant information to be communicated clearly but without sounding overly patronising.

#### Information sharing

In addition to the information shared with participants and their parents via the information sheets, (see Appendix 3) I also provided information to all staff regarding the research and my potential observation of their lessons via a message in the weekly staff bulletin (see Appendix 5). I did not receive any additional enquiries for further information from staff as a result of this.

#### Anonymisation

In addition to allocating a pseudonym to the school (Hillside) and requesting that the participants selected their own pseudonyms, I have taken other steps to minimise the risk of identification. This was particularly important, given the fact that my work history as a teacher may be discoverable via internet searches. Therefore, I have presented very minimal details regarding Hillside and the area in which it is located. Other individuals from Hillside (e.g., staff members) have been identified using generic titles which reflect their positions at the school (e.g., Headteacher, Head of Year etc).

### Privacy and confidentiality

Participants were repeatedly informed that all information they shared would remain confidential and that the only reason for confidentiality to be broken would be if they disclosed information which suggested a potential safeguarding concern. I address additional privacy and confidentiality issues in relation to each individual method (see below, 'Method-specific issues'). Concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality were not raised by the participants throughout the research process.

### Data storage and access

Data was stored on an encrypted USB stick and regularly backed up to the UCL network in a personal area accessible only to me. Written records, such as field notes, were stored in a locked cupboard and audio recordings (made on a non-encrypted recording device) were destroyed once they had been transferred onto an encrypted USB. I remained the only person with access to the data throughout the research process, although anonymised data were shared with my supervisors throughout the analysis process. Participants were advised on data storage and access in the information sheet (see Appendix 3) which also made clear that their pseudonymised data (in forms of quotes and examples) may be shared as part of the research findings.

### Method-specific issues

#### *Interviews*

Conducting the interviews raised ethical considerations further to that of interviewer-interviewee power imbalances which were highlighted in the discussion of interviews as a research method. Hillside's safeguarding policy meant that I was required to conduct the interviews in an office with the door open which was located next to the office of a senior member of staff. This afforded as much privacy as possible whilst working within the confines of Hillside's safeguarding policies and owing to the location of the office in a quieter area of the school, there was little external disturbance to the interviews. On a practical level, I arranged the seating and furniture in the office to establish as neutral a space as possible and sat myself on the opposite side of a desk to the participant in order to allow them space without creating too much distance. I made every effort to emphasise that they could call me by my first name and to use language which they felt most comfortable with. Sometimes this resulted in me having to seek clarification from the participants on the meaning of terms I was not familiar with, and I consider this to have also contributed to their recognition of

themselves as the 'expert'. Listening back to the recordings made me very aware of the extent to which I used verbal cues to demonstrate interest and encouragement and frequently these resulted in additional comments from the participants. There were several instances when the participants referred to another school or individual by name, but these were all anonymised on transcription. The interviews varied slightly in length; the shortest lasting 28 minutes and the longest 63 minutes. The participants were informed that they could eat and drink during the interview if they wished, particularly if the interview was being conducted over lunch time.

#### *Participant observations*

I was not refused entry into any lesson to conduct observations. To this end, I consider the advance notice I had placed in the staff bulletin successful in that the staff I encountered immediately recognised the purpose of my appearance. Locating myself within the various classrooms was occasionally difficult, particularly if the room was a small one. I endeavoured to position myself somewhere 'out of the way' but close enough to the participant to allow me to monitor their actions and interactions within the lesson. Other individuals did feature within my field notes, but I named these generically (e.g., 'Geography teacher', 'pupil on Gaby's left') so as to minimise identification. I found the structure provided by my observation schedule (see Appendix 2) to be of great use. It moved my focus from the teacher (which after several years of observing lessons as a line manager was my default setting) to the participant. This is not to say that my field notes did not contain any comments relating to the teaching, but such comments also involved the participant (e.g., how they responded to a teacher's questioning or reaction).

#### *Visual method*

The completion of the Padlet collages by the participants prompted ethical considerations concerning access to the collages and the data stored on them. I set up a password protected Padlet account and created blank individual boards for each participant. Having clarified with the participants that they had access to the internet at home, they were sent a link to access their own Padlet boards. I stressed to the participants that completing the Padlet collages was by no means obligatory, and they were free to choose to not complete or partially complete without having to give a reason. The Padlet boards had the privacy setting of "private" and were therefore not viewable to anyone except me as the creator and the individual participant as contributor. All the participants gave their permission for screenshots of their



Padlet collages to be taken. Several potential identifiers on the collages have been redacted prior to their inclusion as appendices. According to its privacy policy, Padlet is GDPR compliant, and information related to sharing of personal data was clarified with participants through the process of informed consent. The Padlet account was deleted on the completion of the research, meaning all data associated with the account (including all Padlets) were permanently deleted.

Reflecting on the data collection stage of the research has revealed that the dialogue and support I received from my supervisors when collating my request for institutional ethical approval resulted in the relatively smooth running of data collection. In addition to Covid-19 as the obvious caveat to this claim, a dialogical approach certainly supported me whilst carrying out fieldwork in that it provided me with confidence in my actions and practices as a researcher. I recognise that planning for the unforeseeable is impossible and in addition to the major disruption of Covid-19, there were other, much smaller unforeseeable incidents which occurred during the data collection process. These largely related to me becoming aware of my own emotional reactions to incidents and outcomes resulting from the data collection methods. For instance, my journal reflects a wide range of emotions across the process including surprise, pity, sadness, frustration, humour and gratitude. I acknowledge that an aspect of ethical consideration I did not give much attention to were my own reactions, but a strategy I devised was to share my own reactions with the participants whenever appropriate. This not only led to the opportunity to explore their responses to my reactions but also served to re-centralise the focus back onto the participants. To this extent, I recognise how the underlying principle of participant centralisation shaped both the pro and re-active ethical considerations made throughout the data collection stage of the research.

#### [Writing up and reporting](#)

A significant proportion of the ethical considerations made at the writing up stage of this research related directly to data analysis. Certain considerations had a significant influence over my analytical approach and the examination of these therefore sits more logically within chapter 4, rather than being pre-empted at this point. I am aware that this last stage of the research has been the longest and have endeavoured to maintain some contact with the participants via email in order to keep them updated with the progress of the research. I was able to share details of a paper published during the completion of my thesis (McCarthy,

2022) and also how their contributions have constituted parts of papers I have presented at conferences. One participant responded positively about seeing their comments used within academic literature. I was also able to share with them how their contributions to the findings of this research have been subsequently utilised in relation to my impact strategy (see Impact Statement). Throughout the writing up and reporting stage, I have made every effort to report participant contributions with accuracy and to highlight such contributions within reports as well as through preceding or concluding acknowledgements.

Overall, I recognise that my principle of participant centrality has been inherent to all of the ethical considerations made over the course of this research. To that extent, this section has demonstrated the ways in which this inter-relationship shaped the research at a variety of levels. The manifestation of such shaping played out at stages which were proactively planned, such as choice of research methods and also those which were reactively undertaken, such as responding with flexibility to an unexpected response to an interview question. Far from being a self-contained 'stage' of the research process, I regard ethical considerations to have been a continual process throughout this research which has itself constituted part of an iterative and reflexive approach.

## Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring the methodological and epistemological approach I adopted in this research. I discussed Bourdieu's three-stage methodology and demonstrated how it provided a framework to an iterative and reflexive process of examining how unseen structures played out in the lived experiences of the participants. From here, the chapter moved to consider my research design, which drew upon the Mosaic approach (and particularly its focus on listening) as a means to centralise the lived experience of the participant. I discussed the methods within my multi-method design and highlighted how each operated in a way that aligned with both my methodological approach and my principle of centralising the participant. The chapter then explored how the research design was put into practice, focusing on my positionality as a 'returning native' to Hillside and the unforeseeable consequences caused by Covid-19 school closures in 2020. It concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations I made throughout this research which was structured using the stages undertaken in the completion of this thesis. Throughout this chapter, I have drawn the reader's attention to various manifestations of 'mess' I encountered. I consider

such 'mess' to be a thread running through each of the three sections of this chapter, serving to demonstrate how reflexivity and working iteratively shaped the methodology, methods and ethical considerations of this thesis.

# Chapter 4: Developing an analytical framework

The purpose of this short chapter is to provide the reader with insight into the analytical framework which this thesis uses. It seemed appropriate and necessary to outline the process through which the framework was developed and to discuss how the framework was operationalised alongside Bourdieu's thinking tools prior to presenting the chapters which follow. I begin by discussing how this framework came into being before examining how the framework draws upon thematic narrative analysis. I relate the framework to Bourdieu's thinking tools before concluding with an overview of how Padlet was used as a means of facilitating my analysis.

## Abandoning thematic analysis

Having transcribed the interview recordings and typed up all field notes of observations, I began the process of data analysis. My intention was to use thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013) as a means of identifying commonalities and differences between the different participants. I began this process by coding inductively, using NVivo software to create a list of codes. However, as I continued this process, several issues began to become apparent.

I had begun with Boris as his interviews (and therefore the transcripts) were the longest. As I attempted to code what Boris had said during the interview, I discovered that he used 'stories' frequently. These were sometimes short anecdotal examples of his lived experiences and at other times longer, more elaborated accounts. Breaking these stories up into shorter phrases relevant to the codes I had created de-contextualised them in two ways: from the story they had been part of and also from Boris as the narrator of the story. Both of these were problematic in terms of my research questions which were seeking to examine the lived experiences of the participants. Returning again to the metaphor of 'mess' I drew upon in the previous chapter, I found myself becoming aware that the 'neat' set of codes which resulted from thematic analysis did not adequately explore the complex 'mess' of Boris's lived experience. Compartmentalisation of the data set into themes prevented me from fully exploring how Boris's lived experience could be analysed relationally with the thinking tools of habitus, field and capital. I therefore made the decision to develop an alternative analytical

framework which would facilitate a relational analysis and therefore align with my methodological approach.

### Moving towards thematic narrative analysis

Polkinghorne's recognition of narrative as 'the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful' (1988, p. 1) positions stories and story-telling at the heart of narrative approaches. Having not previously considered a narrative approach, I quickly became aware not only of the volume of relevant literature but also of the diversity and sometimes disagreement within it. I will therefore present an examination and justification of the framework I developed to facilitate my approach to narrative analysis, fully acknowledging that in doing so I cannot claim to present the field in its entirety.

My approach began with the question of 'what is a narrative?' Several summary and outline texts (Andrews et al., 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Elliot, 2005; Riessman, 2008) begin by questioning, positioning and in some cases defining narrative and its many forms. Attempting the conceptualisation of narrative highlights a plethora of perspectives along with their historical and theoretical origins. These demonstrate the layers of complexity behind a simplistic conceptualisation of narrative as a 'story'. They also in turn lead to degrees of specificity within conceptualisation of narrative and subsequently, methods of analysis. This led me to consider how narrative related to my own research questions. Elliot (2005) highlights two areas in which narrative was relevant to my own focus:

- 1: An interest in people's lived experiences [...]
- 2: A desire to empower research participants and allow them to contribute to determining what are the most salient themes in an area of research. (2005, p. 6)

Given that my research questions centre around 'lived experience', I recognised that my conceptualisation of narrative would need to incorporate the person centred approaches evident in the narrative work of Polkinghorne (1988) and Bruner (1990). However, I also identified that my conceptualisation of narrative would also need to incorporate the social contexts in which the person was located. This would then facilitate a relational analysis using each of Bourdieu's thinking tools.

This therefore required further clarity on what constitutes a narrative. The narrowest conceptualisation of narrative operates within the field of social linguistics (as seen in the

work of Labov 1972, 1982) which provides an analytical framework that identifies structural features within a defined narrative episode, often in response to questions concerning one particular event. Whilst observing the seminal nature of such work, Patterson (2013, p. 28) also acknowledges its limitations; 'it embodies an understanding of the personal experience narrative as a text and takes little account of context'. A wider conceptualisation of narrative as a unit of analysis lies within the field of sociology which considers narrative to be shaped over longer episodes, such as extended answers to questions over a course of interviews (Patterson, 2013). In agreement with Luttrell (2003) I also recognised that narrative can be shaped through various types of interaction (such as researcher-participant and participant-wider social interaction) and through a multi-method approach. Such recognition shaped my working conceptualisation of narrative. The frustration I had felt with my attempt at thematic analysis had been caused by the fragmentation of stories arising from coding which did not have space to consider social context. Therefore, my conceptualisation of narrative needed to move beyond focusing on content alone. I adopted the term 'story' to indicate particular, individual accounts, often but not always, of a specified event (for example Boris's story of a job interview experience). This then allowed me to view a narrative more widely and by doing so I became aware that I could construct thematic narratives generated from the stories told to me by the participants in the interviews along with data sourced from my other methods. This aligned with Riessman's acknowledgement that thematic narratives provide a means of 'theorising from the case rather than from component themes across cases' (2008, p. 53). Thus, the unit of analysis became the narratives which emerged thematically from the data of each participant. The process of constructing these thematic narratives occurred iteratively, using Riessman's suggestion that consideration of what a narrative *does* in terms of remembering, persuading and engaging to be 'a point of entry for the narrative analyst' (2008, p. 8). I outline below the set of questions I developed which served to both construct and interrogate these thematic narratives.

### Remembering

Moen (2006, p. 63) recognises that 'narrative research always presents stories about remembered events and how these were experienced'. Whilst on the surface this claim may appear to be one which does not require further discussion, what Moen presents in this statement brings both temporality and context into consideration. Bruner's (2002) distinction

between a life lived (actual events), a life experienced (the thoughts and feelings accompanying an event) and a life told (how the event is expressed) helps us to recognise the processes occurring below the surface of a narrative. Any incidence of remembrance within a narrative necessitates the acknowledgement that the participant was actively involved in a sense-making process, one which involves 'a story told in, and about, the present as well as a story about the future' (Brockmeier, 2000, p. 56). Stories which remember past events therefore provide an insightful means of considering the present. Linked to this is consideration of the 'historical moment' in which the storytelling takes place. This moment also comes with its own 'circulating discourses and power relations' (Riessman, 2008, p. 8). Therefore, a story which 'remembers' involves a double layer of sense making, which Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 45) describe as 'relational'. This relational aspect therefore aligned well with my methodological approach. Within my analytical framework, this was addressed with the following question: What are the past and present contextual influences evident in the stories of remembrance within this narrative and how do they relate to each other?

### Persuading

The consideration of a narrative's persuasive role (which could also be constituted as an argument or a justification) is related to how meaning and subsequently truth are constructed by the narrative's teller and listener. Such construction relies on 'background knowledge' (Bruner, 1991) which as Franzosi (1998, p. 545) observes is employed 'consciously or unconsciously'. This background knowledge is used by both the teller and the listener to determine 'which understandings might be shared, and what needs to be told or explained or justified' (Shukla et al., 2014, p. 22). Whilst foregrounding background knowledge can provide insight into the persuading role of a narrative it also promotes the recognition of the 'multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience' (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 25). This firmly established the reflexivity inherent within this analytical framework which is addressed in the second question: how does the persuasiveness of the narrative relate to the 'background knowledge' of the teller and the listener?

### Engaging

The final strand of my analytical framework stems from Riessman's claim that narratives engage a listener when they 'invite us as listeners, readers and viewers to enter the

perspective of the narrator' (Riessman, 2008, p. 9). Engaging with a narrative and entering the narrator's perspective requires a move away from a researcher-participant relationship in which the researcher is able to remain objectively distant from the participant's story. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) examine two different consequences of such a move. First, they highlight the 'power of the particular' (2007, p. 24), developing Geertz's valuing of 'local knowledge' (1983) as a means of facilitating understanding of human experience. Second, they argue that relinquishing a focus on objectivity creates an impression of both the participant and the researcher which is dynamic rather than static, proposing that 'growth and learning are part of the research process' (2007, p. 14). However, they also contend that a consequence of such an approach means that generalisability lies beyond findings generated using narrative analysis (2007, p. 15), recognising voice as a key contributor to engagement. Examining the voice which tells a story (regardless of whether the story is told verbally or by other means) requires consideration of how personal stories are shaped by the multitude of influences upon the storyteller. Such recognition of multiple influences resonated with the second of my research questions, which sought to explore how the participants related their lived experiences of academically selective education to their lived experiences beyond education. Several researchers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2002; Gudmundsdottir, 2001) adopt the term 'voices' in order to facilitate analysis of the multitude of influences within a narrative. This then causes the listener to question which voices they hear and moreover, why. The consideration of voices can be used to explore both the lived experiences of the participant as well as the degree to which the voices facilitate engagement. The final question of the framework is therefore split into two parts. How and why do the voices within the narrative relate to: the participants' lived experience and my engagement with the narrative?

### [Analysing thematic narratives with Bourdieu's thinking tools](#)

The three questions within the framework were the basis from which I constructed and analysed thematic narratives which emerged from the data. The construction drew on a conceptualisation of narrative which incorporated comments, stories and responses across a course of interviews, as well as my observation field notes, and the visual material generated through the Padlet collages. I therefore constructed thematic narratives which were inherently linked to each individual, engaging robustly with the data so as to provide scope



for the subsequent analysis to explore multiple truths and therefore provide a strong argument for the trustworthiness of my findings. The three questions of the framework pay particular attention to local contexts of production and examine how these relate to broader social contexts. Bourdieu provided the tools I needed to answer these questions. Whilst the application of the tools is demonstrated in detail within the chapters that follow, I will outline below how Bourdieu's thinking tools facilitated this process.

Each of the three questions within my analytic framework sought to explore a relationship: between past and present contextual influences within a narrative, between background knowledge and persuasiveness of a narrative and between the voices within a narrative, the participants' lived experience and my own engagement. Bourdieu's presentation of his thinking tools as the schematic '(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 101) makes evident how they operate as a relational construct and therefore provided a means of addressing the relational aspect of the questions. This process revealed that the messiness within the narratives was a direct result of a complex and interwoven series of relationships which could be explored and revealed using the thinking tools.

Addressing this complexity was a challenging task which was at times compounded by the ambivalence that Bourdieu himself displayed towards the use of narrative analysis. He describes insider accounts as 'dangerous' (1990b, p. 102), fearing that they can lead to presumptions of practice as reflecting an individual's reflective understanding of their experiences and therefore fail to acknowledge how practice is 'non-random and yet never rationally mastered' (2000, pp. 116-117). He also recognises the how a discourse of familiarity within a narrative can 'leave unsaid all that goes without saying' (1977b, p. 18) and how censorship within the habitus will not reveal the unsayable and the unthinkable. However, despite these misgivings, Bourdieu's use of narrative is evident across his body of work, the most notable being *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu, 1999b). In this he acknowledges that 'narratives about the most "personal" difficulties, the apparently most strictly subjective tensions and contradictions, frequently articulate the deepest structures of the social world and their contradictions' (1999a, p. 511). More recent work (Allard, 2005; Davey, 2009; Green et al., 2015; Lin, 2014) has also used Bourdieu's thinking tools to explore narrative accounts and in doing so have revealed how such accounts can be seen to relate to various social structures.

Fortunately, Bourdieu also provides a means of resolving this ambivalence. As Barrett (2015) observes, Bourdieu is consistently adamant on the requirement to resist 'any unilateral, unidimensional and monomaniacal definition of sociological practice' (Wacquant, 1989, p. 54) and instead advocates for 'reflexive considerations of any attempt to formalise understandings of social life' (Barrett, 2015, p. 3). Such considerations were facilitated within my own analysis via the framework's questions. Using the thinking tools allowed me to move beyond the surface level of the narratives and reflexively explore how aspects such as context, background knowledge and voice were shaping of and shaped by how a narrative was expressed and how I (as a listener) interpreted the narrative. In Bourdieusian terms, it allowed me to go some way in objectifying the tools of objectivisation. Such objectivisation remained forefront in my mind in the next stage of my analysis.

### 'Re-presenting' lived experiences – the final stage in the analytical process

In contrast to Barrett's claim that 'narrative material may be employed to investigate the incorporated structures of the habitus' (2015, p. 6) my analytical framework allowed me to employ Bourdieu's thinking tools to investigate narrative material. As a result, my analyses of the thematic narratives were distanced enough from the participants to allow for reflexive consideration but not so distant that they became totally removed from the participants themselves. This distancing provided space to consider how the narratives could themselves be grouped together so as to 're-present' the participants' lived experiences. I made the distinction between 'representing' and 're-presenting', concurring with Squire's (2013) argument that narratives should only ever be considered as re-presentations of experience. I shaped such re-presentations by exploring how certain narratives could be considered as component parts of a re-presentation. Once again, the iterative nature of this process made it 'messy' as I experimented with various groupings of the narratives. The re-presentations lead to findings which have been established through trustworthiness, authenticity and resonance rather than through generalisability in relation to an objective truth (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1984). I fully acknowledge the potential for the lack of certainty that such a process could create. However, in agreement with Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 46) I consider this uncertainty as a 'trade-off' for the

‘proximity to ordinary lived experience and the scope of...considerations’ which my analytical framework has facilitated.

## Using Padlet as part of the analytical process

To draw this short chapter to a close, I will outline how Padlet provided me with a means of working through my analytical framework. I will refer in detail to the analytical Padlet for Boris and for ease of reference include a snapshot below. A larger version can be seen at Appendix 6, whilst the corresponding Padlets for Gaby and Poppy can be seen at appendices 7 and 8.

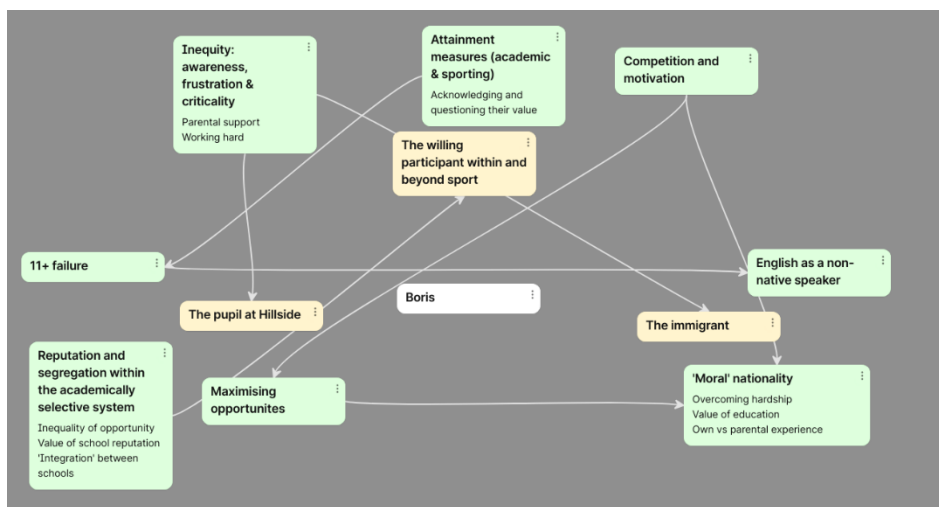


Fig 1. Boris Analysis Padlet

In the snapshot above, thematic narratives are in green boxes and re-presentations are in yellow boxes. The same colour coding has also been adopted in the analysis Padlets of Gaby (Appendix 7) and Poppy (Appendix 8). The thematic narratives have been grouped under the re-representation they construct (for example, the re-representation of ‘Boris the immigrant’ is based on the thematic narratives of ‘English as a non-native speaker’ and ‘moral’ nationality’). Links between narratives and between narratives and other re-presentations are demonstrated with arrows. Additional text within the green thematic narrative boxes demonstrates key points which structure that narrative. The structure of the analysis Padlet is replicated in the structure of the three chapters which follow. The reader may find it useful to view the corresponding Padlet prior to or alongside reading each of these chapters.

The purpose of the three chapters which follow (one each for Boris, Gaby and Poppy) is to present the thematic narratives and re-presentations I constructed by using this framework and to apply Bourdieu’s thinking tools to them. Each chapter briefly re-introduces the participant to the reader prior to presenting the thematic narratives and re-presentations.

Focusing on application of Bourdieu's tools has resulted in two consequences which the reader will encounter within the next three chapters. Firstly, clarification of terms used within this application (for example, 'symbolic violence') are not given, having already been provided in chapter 2. Secondly, the chapters do not attempt to theoretically analyse what the application of Bourdieu's thinking tools have revealed. Synthesis of the re-presentations, discussion and theoretical analysis are presented in chapter 8.

# Chapter 5: Boris

After providing the reader with a short re-introduction to Boris, this chapter is structured according to the outline presented in the Boris analysis Padlet (see Appendix 6). It consists of three re-presentations of Boris's lived experiences: the pupil at Hillside, the immigrant and the willing participant within and beyond sport. Owing to time constraints, Boris only completed one of the two collages 'How I See Myself' (see Appendix 9). Unless otherwise stated, all indented quotations are excerpts from responses Boris made during interviews.

## *Re-introduction*

Boris was a year 13 male pupil at Hillside and had attended the school since the start of Year 7. He identified sport as a significant interest. His parents were from Sri Lanka and his family had moved to the UK aged 5. Boris had accepted a conditional offer to study at university.

## Boris the pupil at Hillside

The re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as a Hillside pupil draws on three thematic narratives: 11+ failure, segregation and reputation within an academically selective system and maximising opportunities.

### 11+ failure

Boris introduced his lived experience of 11+ failure using a bounded 'story' to describe this specific event in his past. Over and above the fact that his being a pupil at Hillside was a direct consequence of 11+ failure, the salience of the story to Boris became evident in this remembrance, which was one of the first stories he told me:

I remember, I think out of my friendship group I can still remember this, I can visualise it. Two of my friends got full marks, one of my friends got three marks away from full marks and I was the only one that failed which did really put me down.

This vivid evocation, which Boris can 'visualise' and remember to the extent that he recalls the scores of his friends, demonstrates his recognition of the institutionalised cultural capital associated with an 11+ pass. His use of the phrase 'really put me down' can be interpreted as the voice of the younger, disappointed Boris but can also indicate that the older Boris is able to reflect upon wider consequences of his 11+ result. For Boris, being the only one out his friendship group to fail the 11+ resulted in separation and subsequent feelings of isolation

during the beginning of his time at Hillside. He described this emotional impact as being ‘hard’ and something which did not easily dissipate:

It took a long time to go away because, when I came here, I only had one other person from my primary school that I really talked to.

The story of Boris’s 11+ failure illustrates both the sense of isolation and his negative perception of being the ‘only one’. Within the context of a system that has a firm dividing line between scores which pass and scores which fail, Boris demonstrates an awareness of how lacking the institutionalised cultural capital of an 11+ pass had a consequential effect on his positioning within the field of academically selective education. He was ‘put down’ with those that had failed who he had previously not mixed with socially, rather than ‘up’ with his friends who had passed.

Boris developed his understanding of the ways in which the 11+ operated as well as its wider consequences largely through his own experience of it. He recalled preparation activity he had undertaken within school as well as private tuition he had received outside of school for the 11+ test. He told me what the latter had entailed: ‘There’s 21 types of different 11+ techniques and we learnt them, one by one.’

The economic capital Boris’s parents invested into private tutoring, therefore enhanced Boris’s cultural capital, providing him with a conceptualisation of the 11+ as operating according to specified ‘techniques’ which could be mastered. His knowledge of the 11+ selection system also drew on a wider awareness that went beyond his own geographical location:

There’s a lot of grammar schools in [name of area], so there was a high chance [that an 11+ pass would equate to a grammar school place]. It was never a matter of you got the place or not. If you passed the test then you got the place, whereas in London areas even if you pass the test you had to get a very high score to get in.

I consider this wider awareness to further illustrate the cultural capital Boris had in relation to the 11+. Whilst the accuracy of Boris’s claims regarding academic selection within London schools is itself potentially disputable, his cultural capital means that he understands (or at the very least, perceives himself to understand) aspects of how the 11+ system operates.

Boris’s cultural capital was also evident when he spoke about the process of appealing 11+ failure. He described how his parents had appealed his result based on the fact that it was

very close to the pass mark and how his Key Stage 2 results in English were given as a reason for him not being offered a grammar school place. Boris's parents' navigation of the appeals process, taken alongside their use of private tutoring to prepare Boris for the 11+ demonstrates their deployment of both economic and cultural capital. Boris went on to share how his parents had reacted to the result of the appeal:

I think my parents were like a little bit disappoint...they weren't disappointed, they were upset.

Boris's conscious change from 'disappointed' to 'upset' within this statement suggests his awareness not only of the expectational burden resulting from his parents' investment of economic and cultural capital but also his perception of the part he had played in not realising this investment. He used the following reasoning to explain this expectation:

There was a big build up to it because I'm the first gen born in a foreign country ... so education is very highly privileged and it's respected highly by my parents, so I think cos I'm the first child as well, they really wanted me to pass the 11+.

This statement serves as one example where thematic narratives overlay. In this instance, the story of Boris's failure of the 11+ illustrates his awareness of how contextual influences relating to his immigratory status were entangled within his lived experience as a near miss pupil. Boris recognises the value his parents appeared to place upon the 11+ as a manifestation of the 'high' levels of respect and privilege he perceives them to hold for education. He draws upon these beliefs in his own acceptance of such valuing, therefore acknowledging but misrecognising the burden it had placed him under.

The narrative of 11+ failure extended beyond the bounded story of Boris's remembrance. Despite the challenge that the emotional work of failing the 11+ had presented him with, Boris also considered it as having a positive impact:

B: [If I had passed the 11+] I would have just integrated quicker with the people, but also, I'd feel quite left out.

F: You'd have felt left out at the grammar?

B: Yeah, yeah... I think the best choice was to come to a state school cos...the opportunities are provided in [name of grammar school] and [name of grammar school] but they are very, very competitive.

Boris's claim that he would have 'integrated quicker' at grammar school indicates his awareness of the work he perceives himself to have undertaken to fit in as a pupil at Hillside. Being aware of this work indicates some degree of initial misalignment between Boris's habitus and the field of his non-selective school. However, misalignment is immediately compared with the feeling of being 'left out' which he refers to in relation to his perception of the competition for 'opportunities' at grammar school. The cultural capital Boris possesses in terms of understanding the 11+ system and the valuing of education he considers to have stemmed from his parents shapes a habitus which regards opportunity and competition as fundamental to how the academically selective system operates. This allows Boris to consider Hillside as the 'best choice' rather than a consequential outcome of his 11+ failure. It is evident that analysis of the 11+ failure narrative addresses both the bounded story of Boris's experience and how this is relationally shaped by and shaping of a re-presentation of his lived experiences as a Hillside pupil. Thus, whilst this re-representation focuses on Boris's lived experience as a Hillside pupil, the intertwining with the re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as an immigrant is also evident. The continuation of Boris's re-presentation as a Hillside pupil now moves to a narrative which focuses on Boris's perceptions and lived experiences of segregation and reputation within an academically selective education system. I begin my analysis of this narrative by revisiting Boris's apparent confusion regarding Hillside as a 'state school' and the grammar school as something different, despite them both receiving state funding.

#### [Reputation and segregation within the academically selective system](#)

When reflecting on the source of his opinions of academically selective education, Boris identified the role that his own lived experiences played:

I think it's coming to school actually, like seeing what I missed out on, comparing what grammar schools and state schools have to offer... I think it was that.

I use this statement as a starting point for exploring Boris's perceptions of reputation and segregation within an academically selective system. When Boris speaks of 'comparing what grammar schools and state schools have to offer' he appears to simultaneously understand the potential for increased capitals offered by grammar schools and how this positions them differently within the field of education. He therefore uses the label 'state school' to identify the type of school he attends, denoting the difference between Hillside and the grammar



schools despite them both being state funded schools. Further comments such as ‘any school that isn’t a grammar slash private is regarded as lower class’ demonstrates Boris’s recognition of a hierarchy of schools, suggesting the reputation of grammar schools equated them with private schools, both of which he segregates in terms of ‘class’ from Hillside. When questioned about what he meant by ‘lower class’, Boris explained this to mean ‘not regarded as the same standard’ with the emphasis on the reputation of the school, rather than a direct remark on the social class of its pupils. In addition to illustrating Boris’s perception of how Hillside was positioned compared to the grammar school, his hierarchisation also begins to convey how he understood school positioning within an academically selective field to be related to reputation and segregation. When constructing this narrative, I drew upon stories Boris shared relating to his experience of inequality of opportunity, the value of school reputation and his suggestion of ‘integration’ between schools.

#### Inequality of opportunity

Boris identified opportunities as a key element when discussing what made grammar schools different from his own:

I’d say it’s the opportunities they get provided with. Over here, we have a limited number of school trips a year... sporting wise I think more money is invested [in grammar schools] because more people wanna take part... they have like a criteria to meet, like they have a reputation, a standard.

Boris’s conceptualisation of opportunity unfolded over the course of the discussion. It ranged from tangible products, such as the provision of iPads to students at the grammar school to experiences which he considered to bring some advantage, such as school trips. Boris identified how opportunity and reputation appeared to mutually enforce the other; reputation provided opportunities and opportunities were maximised to maintain reputation:

I feel like in grammar schools there are, not on purpose, but there’s opportunities provided, and you are kinda forced into taking them.

Boris provided an example of how he had become directly aware of this through his own experience of sporting activity. Sport, particularly athletics constituted a major part of Boris’s free time and competing at a district level within athletics resulted in him socialising with students from other schools, including those from local grammar and private schools. As a result, he had become aware of a project in which students from these schools had worked

collaboratively and which was subsequently discussed during athletics training. Boris recognised the segregation resulting from this particular event, which he identified as an inequality of opportunity:

[My reaction] was like 'Why isn't my school involved?' or 'why haven't we been provided with these opportunities?'

Although Boris could identify inequality of opportunity and went as far as to question it, his misrecognition and acceptance of inequality as an inevitable consequence of an academically selective system is evident. He acknowledged larger sources of capitals he perceived to be available to grammar school pupils, such as the financial investment in sporting equipment and the social capital gained from working collaboratively with the private school. These were both attributed to the segregation and reputation in the system, with the effect that such practice was normalised and accepted. Boris acknowledged one potential consequence of such symbolic violence:

We've gotta make mistakes to learn. And we're not provided with opportunities to make those mistakes, so we never learn. And we learn when we leave school, when we go into the place of work when it's way too late.

Boris identifies that receiving opportunities provides cultural capital in terms of knowledge and awareness which for him will be delayed until he enters the workplace. Boris's own cultural capital is itself reflected through his awareness of what he is missing out on and how this missing out will potentially disadvantage him. He drew upon another story to further illustrate this recognition, recalling an encounter with a female grammar school pupil whilst undertaking a group interview at John Lewis:

They said wear a suit to the interview and I'd only worn a suit once or twice before...so it was a little bit weird. And then there was a girl from [grammar school] that was with me and some other people. So, we were all sitting around a table and they would give a scenario and the way she answered the questions made me think like 'she's got the job already' whereas I would say the same answer as her but you have to say it in a certain way or you have to present it in a certain way. Because the people from grammar schools are exposed to a lot more, they make a lot more mistakes earlier and learn a lot faster... So, I think it's the whole structure and the environment that they get put in helps them survive in the outside, in the real world.

In this story, Boris's perception of how the academically selective system appears to perpetuate inequality through provision of opportunity results in the contrast between the

ease the grammar school pupil displayed and the ‘fish out of water’ feelings Boris describes. He identifies that the disadvantage he considered himself to be under in comparison to the grammar school pupil was attributable to the style, rather than the content of his answers, something which he believes grammar school pupils gain from the ‘structure and environment’ of the school they attend. Thus, the interview scenario appears to align much more smoothly with the habitus of the grammar school pupil compared to that of Boris. However, the voice within this narrative also recognises the ‘certain way’ of speaking, suggesting once again that Boris is now himself more aware of how such advantage plays out in the ‘real world’. Consequently, Boris demonstrates his own understanding of how forms of capital obtainable (and according to him, instilled) within grammar schools can be transferred across to advantageous positioning in alternative fields.

Boris’s perception of inequality of opportunities serves to enhance the narrative of segregation and reputation within the re-presentation of his lived experience as a Hillside pupil. He recognises the separation this creates within stories of his own lived experience, in which he identifies grammar school pupils as being provided with both tangible products (such as sports facilities) as well as the more intangible outcomes of increased social and cultural capital. He acknowledges his lack of such opportunities and his knowledge of their existence indicate his awareness of their value. His acceptance of such inequality appears to be based upon the contextual influence of school reputation. The degree to which school reputation (as a type of classification) is evident within Boris’s local context and within his wider conceptualisation of the field of education will now be explored.

#### The value of school reputation – ‘the badge sticks’

Boris shared the following observation of an academically selective system:

That group are gonna succeed because they’ve filtered everyone out. You’ve got the best of the best and you’re training them to be even better and then here [Hillside] you’ve got ordinary and you’re training them to be just below.

Boris accepts a logical conclusion of ‘filter[ing] everyone out’ is success for those who remain within ‘that group’. The contrast between the collective ‘everyone’ and the otherness of the ‘group’ reinforces the narrative of segregation. However, Boris then moves to classify how the two differ. The ‘group’ are the ‘best’, training to be ‘better’ whilst ‘everyone’ is ‘ordinary’ training to be ‘just below’. This suggestion of positioning continues in how Boris perceives

attending Hillside to have a negative impact on his own positioning:

It's not the child's fault they're going to Hillside or (School Name) or (School Name). But the badge does stick though. Like I don't know what about the badge but it just... you're just categorising everyone, I think? 'Oh, you go to Hillside' or wherever.

Boris identifies the classification of school type based on reputation within the context of his locality. He explored this idea further, indicating how the commonly held assumptions within the locality had the effect of transferring the school reputation across to particular characteristics of an individual:

So, if you go to a grammar school you're automatically going to perform well...we just assume it. And if you go to a school like this...you might not do as well, you might mess about more, you might use more slang, you might swear more.

Boris appeared to accept that inaccurate assumptions based on reputational classification had forgone conclusions:

Someone attends a grammar school you think 'oh they must be intelligent'...like the uni you attend could be better than Oxford or Cambridge in your course but...that stuff, you just forget. You don't acknowledge it. You just think Oxford or Cambridge, yeah, they're winning.

Boris demonstrates his awareness of the effect of reputation within both local and the wider context of higher education. His own cultural capital becomes evident through such awareness, particularly the example he provides as a potential counter to such assumptions. However, the symbolic violence lies within Boris's acceptance of the degree to which 'the badge sticks':

It's like a label you add to yourself, isn't it? 'I go to [name of grammar school]'. Just straight away you assume it's good. Whether you spent half your time in isolation or not, it doesn't really matter.

Boris acknowledges potential counters to assumptions within his local context, using 'isolation' (which in Hillside equated to removal from lessons as a result of behaviour deemed inappropriate) as an example which did not itself override the reputation of the grammar school. For Boris, the cultural capital value of the grammar school 'label' meant that such potential counters had a minimal effect; they did not 'really matter'. Boris's lived experience of an academically selective system has served to inculcate acceptance of the cultural capital value of grammar school attendance and despite being able to employ his own cultural capital

to identify potential counters to such assumptions, the symbolic violence continues as result of such acceptance. Boris the Hillside pupil is evidently aware of the lesser cultural capital value his school provides in terms of reputation and how this positions him within the academically selective field. The reputation of the school 'sticks' and in doing so classifies positionality of schools, and of the schools' pupils, within the field. He accepts that the value of his counterarguments cannot outweigh the value (in terms of reputation) of a school badge.

### Integration

Boris's acceptance of academically selective education is evident in his response when asked what he would do if he could re-design the education system in his area:

I would say...it is good that we keep it how it is... We do need grammar schools, private schools and...state schools...the bar needs to be set high. We need to be able to reach...like we're always trying to get better and better results and if there is no-one that is better than us, we won't be improving.

Boris perceives a strength of the system to be the 'high bar' set by the exam results obtained by grammar schools which gives his school and therefore him, something which they 'need' to measure themselves against. This statement serves as another example of narratives overlapping; segregation and reputation within the system contribute towards Boris's conceptualisation of competition and motivation as a positive outcome of an academically selective education system. Inherent within this overlap is Boris's knowledge of the institutionalised cultural capital value of exam results within the field of education. He continued with the following observation of the academically selective system:

It's not a failed system. It's not collapsing, is it? But it can be improved.

The acceptance of the system as 'not failed' and the misrecognition of it 'not collapsing' as an indicator of its success, indicate symbolic violence. Whilst Boris does suggest an improvement, this did not go so far as to question the academically selective system. Instead, he saw a potential improvement to be schools 'working together':

I think spending more money on working together with people that have had more experience and more exposure to activities that you haven't, will kind of either motivate you or help you learn a little bit more... because there's a lot you could learn from different schools because they're exposed to different environments

He expanded on this, talking about 'integration':

It's the environment, it does have a massive impact on people, the opportunities of integrating with grammar schools and state schools and maybe private schools and the badge, the badge does stick...and this is not the kids' fault. I feel like it's the schools' fault because we're not exposed to different types of scenarios.

Evident within this comment is Boris's recognition of the 'massive impact' of the school environment as a result of a school 'badge'. Boris's own cultural capital allows him to conceptualise integration with grammar school pupils as something which will provide opportunities, motivation and increased learning. The irony being that such conceptualisation only serves to further emphasise the narrative of segregation and reputation via the recognition that the capitals held by pupils are related to the school 'badge' they wear. Boris recognises that integration is beyond the agency of the pupils themselves ('not the kids' fault') and the symbolic violence of the academically selective system is made evident when Boris attributes blame for failure to provide integration upon the schools within the system, rather than the system itself. Somewhat paradoxically, Boris accepts and even goes so far as to justify a system which he perceives to assign individuals differing amounts of cultural capital based on segregation by school but at the same time regards integration between schools as a way of mediating such segregation.

Analysis of the narrative of segregation and reputation contributes to a re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as a Hillside pupil who is fully aware of the capital he does not hold within the field of an academically selective system. His knowledge and awareness of how segregation and reputation 'work' within the field are in part a direct result of his lived experience within it. However, this knowledge and awareness also relate to other sources of cultural capital Boris has obtained via lived experience beyond the field. Thus, although he falls victim to the symbolic violence by accepting the 'game', he is also equipped with adequate cultural capital that allow him to perceive himself to understand its 'rules'. The ways in which this capital relates to Boris's habitus will be considered in the final narrative which explores the narrative of maximising opportunities.

#### Maximising opportunities

Analysis of this narrative further illustrates how Boris conceptualised 'opportunities': as phenomena which were created externally and 'taken' and also as phenomena which were 'made' as a result of his own actions. Boris's relating of education to opportunity was no

better evident than through explanation of his decision to include both his primary and secondary schools on his 'How I See Myself' Padlet collage (see Appendix 9):

They have both been such a big part of my life...I've got opportunities from them.

The degree to which Boris equated education with opportunity is also examined within the re-presentation of 'Boris the immigrant'. The overlap between narratives stems from Boris's claim that his parents 'highly regarded' education. The distinction between the two means that analysis of 'Boris the immigrant' explores aspects relating to the inculcation of such a disposition within Boris's habitus, whereas the narrative of 'maximising opportunities' considers how taking and making opportunities were manifest within the habitus of Boris the Hillside pupil.

Boris took and created opportunities in all the lessons I observed him in. This included volunteering answers to teacher questioning and asking questions of the teacher. In a biology lesson his teacher sought volunteers to for a one-on-one discussion concerning coursework and Boris volunteered. Throughout this discussion, Boris asked several direct questions, specifically related to what he needed to do. Boris identified the value (in terms of clarity of task) he gained from taking this opportunity:

It was better [than other activities] because she [the teacher] wrote down what I had to... and I just need to do it now.

In addition to taking opportunities within lessons which were facilitated by the teacher, Boris frequently led discussions with peers which focused on classwork:

That's the best way I learn I think...Sometimes I'll sit there, and I'll say I'm gonna test the person next to me but really...by me reading through it, it's me recalling my memory. So, I am testing them or maybe I'll be covering the answer as well, so I'll be testing the both of us...so not the traditional ways of revising like taking down notes.

By creating means of working which are different to 'traditional ways of revising' Boris makes his own opportunities to enhance his understanding of work covered in lessons. Alongside this collaborative working, he discussed another strategy he employed:

At the end of this lesson, I've gone online, and I've looked it up and I've found a document...so I'm just gonna copy it out so I can memorise it.

Boris's disposition to take and make opportunities in relation to schoolwork was something he considered as natural. He was willing to proactively undertake and create opportunities

which he anticipated would allow him to perform well in exams and therefore increase his institutionalised cultural capital, demonstrating how his habitus aligned with the positive value placed upon such behaviour within the field of education. However, the re-presentation of Boris the Hillside pupil also has to consider how the narrative of maximising opportunities was evident in Boris's lived experiences beyond the classrooms of Hillside.

When describing how he had decided to study environmental science at university, Boris made reference to a conference he had attended that had been organised by a local private school. He linked the subject of the conference (a plastic recycling initiative) to his university decision:

I really like the plastic idea but... I wanna go into renewable energy because that's something where there's gonna be jobs in the future as well. And it's not just jobs in the future...I like that topic as well. To study environmental science you have to study science first and so that's how I got to it.

Boris is clear on how taking this opportunity benefited him, relating this particular aspect of his lived experience to longer term aspirations of university study and subsequent employment within a related specialism. He gained cultural capital through increasing his understanding of a degree course which he then regards as potentially increasing his economic capital via future employability. By attending this event which took place at a local private school, Boris also showed his willingness to take externally provided opportunities. Recognising that taking this particular opportunity had taken place in an unfamiliar (private school) context, I asked him how he'd felt about attending:

When you get an opportunity you're just 'ok, what's the worst that can happen?' If you go on it, it's learning. If you don't go on it, you'll never know what could've happened. So you go on it and if it goes wrong then you fix it. If it goes right, then you've learned something.

Boris's willingness to 'take' opportunities is based on the value he perceives them to potentially offer. His use of 'learning' suggests gain and moreover an active attempt by Boris to obtain something. For Boris, maximising opportunities (as an inculcated disposition within his habitus) meant evaluating the future potential value of opportunities. Boris acknowledged an awareness that for some individuals, social and economic disadvantage could be potential barriers to maximising opportunity but remained resolute that such practice was unquestionable: 'It is what it is. You just gotta crack on.'



For Boris, maximising opportunities is a means of 'cracking on'. As part of his habitus this is not questioned, 'it is what it is' and therefore the responsibility to enable maximisation remains with the individual. The link between this narrative and the narrative of 11+ failure is that Boris identified a lack of competition at Hillside to have provided him with additional opportunities. For example, he had gained a place to compete at district sports level almost by default. His sense of responsibility to maximise opportunities also resulted in taking opportunities which nobody else wanted, such as volunteering for an athletics event that lay outside of his direct specialism:

Cos no one chooses to do that event so you can get a really good time and a really good rating on it

However, the advantage gained in maximising opportunities also gave Boris an increased awareness of opportunities that he was not being offered, therefore intertwining the narrative of maximising opportunities with inequality of opportunity. Boris acknowledged how he attempted to ameliorate inequality:

When I do get something similar, I take it and then put the maximum drive because I know what it's like to not have it and now I've got it, I've got no excuses. Then it's my fault.

Failure to maximise on the opportunities which are available to him once again leads Boris to conclusions of blame, similar to the inadequacy highlighted above. His misrecognition of such subjugation directs Boris's subsequent actions to pro-actively compensate for what he perceives himself to be missing out on. The symbolic violence lies within Boris's allocation of responsibility to himself, a responsibility which is not questioned by him due to the dispositions inculcated within his habitus. Analysis of the 'maximising opportunities' narrative has demonstrated how such inculcation was manifest within Boris's lived experiences both at, and beyond, Hillside.

Boris's lived experience as a Hillside pupil has been re-presented through the analysis of thematic narratives of 11+ failure, segregation and reputation and maximising opportunities. Such analysis has demonstrated Boris's knowledge and awareness of how the field of academically selective education operates, in terms of capitals which are valued and the manifestation of such capital within the habitus of an individual. Boris recognised and understood how segregation within the academically selective system shaped the cultural

capital valued within the field and how, as a pupil of Hillside, he considered himself to be lacking in the capital of the most value. The cultural capital Boris did have provided him with an awareness of what he did not have. Boris was critical of such inequality but at the same time misrecognised and accepted it as a consequence of an academically selective system. This symbolic violence extended further, with Boris using the concept of integration between segregated schools to resolve a problem caused by a system which is inherently reliant on segregation for its continued existence. Boris's disposition to maximise opportunities meant that he undertook responsibility to increase his cultural capital in a variety of ways. As a Hillside pupil, Boris was aware of the 'rules of the game' operating within the field of academically selective education and this awareness contributed a significant part of his lived experience.

## Boris the immigrant

The re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as an immigrant draws on two thematic narratives: English as a non-native speaker and 'moral' nationality.

### English as a non-native speaker

Boris's story of learning English foregrounded his migratory journey to the UK. His parents had moved from Sri Lanka to Bremen, Germany, as a result of civil unrest. Boris was born in Bremen, living there amongst a wider, extended family prior to his immediate family's move to the UK which occurred when Boris was 5 years old. He described his experience of learning English:

English is like almost like my third language...my mother tongue is Tamil and I learnt German at school there... And then I came here, and I dropped German and I learnt English, while learning Tamil, and my English was like, very bad. Even year 6, even till GCSEs, I just about passed it so... I can speak, I can write but when it comes to creative writing and the language on paper it's not very good so that didn't really support me.

Boris's parents' appeal of his 11+ failure had been rejected on the basis of his Key Stage 2 English results and he perceived this lack of early experience with English as having a continued impact on his attainment. Boris identifies a specific form of English ('language on paper') as the linguistic capital of the highest value within the field of education. He relates this to institutionalised cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications; the GCSE which he 'just about' gained.

Despite his perception of the disadvantage he had encountered, Boris did not see himself as a victim. Using the concept of a ladder, I asked him whether he considered his late start with English to have put him down a rung:

I think that I felt I was put a little bit down in some areas because I struggled to be able to write...I don't think it's fair but at the same time it's no-one's fault, is it?

Boris identifies how his lack of this particular form of capital related to his own field positioning but despite recognising the inequality, he accepts it. For Boris, the value placed within the field of education on written communication skills is 'how things are'. The representation of Boris's lived experience as an immigrant demonstrates this form of symbolic violence which consequently becomes involved in how Boris related his lived experience as a non-native English speaker to his lived experience of academically selective education. He recognised his lack of linguistic capital as not knowing how and when to write (or, as seen in his job interview story, speak) in the 'correct' way. He saw this as a dispositional attribute, aware of the work he had to employ compared to those who appeared to do so without any effort. As a non-native English speaker, Boris possessed adequate cultural capital to identify what he perceived himself to be lacking, causing him to identify that a lack of linguistic capital blocked his access to a grammar school.

Although Boris perceived himself to be lacking in linguistic capital, he also positioned himself to be in an advantageous position due to his experience of learning English in England:

Even if you live in another country, and you learn English, it will never be as good as learning English from England...That's one reason that people always move over here. Why there's such a lot of migrants in this country and it's such a multicultural country.

Boris demonstrates his recognition of the capital he now holds as a non-native English speaker, recognising the desirability of being in such a position as a pull factor for immigration. The voice within the reasoning of this statement appears as one which Boris has heard, rather than directly experienced, based on the fact that the decision regarding his migration to England was made by his parents. This indirect suggestion of his parents' motivation for migration demonstrates how Boris perceives the value of language as a form of capital and how this value can itself be distinguished. He is aware of the capital he has gained and how this has been in part determined by his geographical position; he is already 'over here'. The next narrative explores how Boris's lived experience as an immigrant was re-

presented via the concept of 'moral' nationality and how this related to his lived experience of education.

### 'Moral' nationality

'Moral' nationality was something which Boris himself conceptualised. His Padlet included no mention of Sri Lanka and instead described Bremen as 'my place of birth'. Boris explained this potential contradiction and in doing so defined his 'moral' nationality in comparison to his nationality as designated by his passport:

Morally speaking, my nationality should be Sri Lankan, so that's like cos of my skin colour and my family and my history and everything. But on my passport it says German. So that's what I take.

The narrative of 'moral' nationality therefore explores how Boris related aspects of his lived experience that lay beyond education (his family and history) to his lived experience within education. It takes as a starting point for such exploration Bourdieu's description of the habitus as an 'embodied history' which Boris himself acknowledged:

I think it's not Sri Lanka, but the culture has a high impact because most of the people that I know whose parents are from Sri Lanka, their kids haven't gone back to Sri Lanka. Everyone has moved out to a different country so going back all you would see is land. So, I think it's the culture with like the mindset, the work ethic, the background, the foods, the clothing, the events, I think that's the whole thing that makes me. It's like a part of me, I think.

Re-presenting Boris's lived experience as an immigrant therefore draws a distinction between Sri Lanka as a place, to which Boris feels very little affinity ('all you would see is land') and what Boris describes as Sri Lankan 'culture' which he recognises as 'part of me'. He recognised the role that his parents had played in cultivating this 'part' of him. As Sri Lankan Hindus, they had taken Boris to temple as a child and had encouraged him to play the miruthangam:

At temple you play like, it's like a set of drums. And as a young kid my parents got me to do drum lessons. I used to take classes once a week on a Saturday evening from when I was about seven till when I was about 14.

Boris initially omitted the miruthangam from his Padlet, only adding it when I questioned whether there was anything else he would like to add. I initially interpreted this, along with the phrase 'my parents got me to do drum lessons', to indicate that Boris did not value this aspect of his religion to the same degree as his parents. However, Boris questioned my

interpretation when explaining that he shared his expertise with a young friend who was learning the miruthangam. He also explained why he had not included the miruthangam on his Padlet:

I didn't add this [pointing to miruthangam] until you reminded me, do you do anything extra? To me, that's normal.

Boris's religious beliefs and his playing the miruthangam were dispositions inculcated by his parents. As aspects of his 'moral' nationality, the extent of this inculcation within Boris's habitus is evident when he appears to perceive them as taken for granted or 'normal'. I have used these as examples to illustrate how re-presenting Boris's lived experience as an immigrant draws on his embodied history. This was also evident in stories Boris shared regarding overcoming hardship.

Boris was able to share stories in great detail regarding his parents' experiences of hardship in Sri Lanka:

To make a phone call, Mum explained to me that you had to go all the way to town which was like a couple of miles or a bus ride and then you'd go to the post office and then you'd tell them the number and then they'd call it but before you got there, you'd have to wait in a queue, all for one phone!

My Dad was saying like 100 rupees which is like equivalent to er...50p? When he was young like you could go to the shops and do like your whole grocery shopping on that.

Although both of these are experiences that Boris had not had himself, the familiarity within the details of his re-telling of them suggests that he regards them as relevant to his own lived experience. Boris recognises how his own circumstances are considerably different from those his parents faced. He was able to contrast his own experience of applying to university to the one which his mum faced:

My mum, she did quite well in her A Levels, but there's only one university so it's very competitive to get into there and she didn't get in, so she couldn't study there. But over here, even if you don't do as well in your A Levels there are many unis you can go to and of course you get the loans. Over there you don't get loans.

Boris was therefore aware of how different his own situation was compared to circumstances faced by his parents and how this meant he did not have to face the hardship his parents had:

I'm first gen born in a foreign country...and compared to [his parents' childhoods] I'm living like a luxurious lifestyle.

Voices from the past are part of the narrative of Boris's 'moral' nationality, embodied within his habitus via the re-telling stories of overcoming hardship. Re-presenting Boris's lived experience as an immigrant has to acknowledge the existence of this narrative and relate it to the aspect of hardship Boris himself faced as an immigrant, evident within the narrative of English as a non-native speaker. It is also now possible to explore the link between the re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as an immigrant and the narrative of maximising opportunities. For Boris, part of his 'moral' nationality, which made him who he was, had been shaped by stories of hardship from the past. He was able to identify the source of this:

I think because opportunities were not provided as much in Sri Lanka, my parents have always explained to me 'we didn't get the opportunity to do this or that'

The disposition to maximise opportunities was inculcated within Boris's habitus via the narrative of 'moral' nationality. Taking up opportunities which had not been available to his parents became part of his embodied history. The narrative of maximising opportunities has explored how such a disposition became manifest in Boris's practice which appears as consciously and sub-consciously determined. This therefore links the re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as an immigrant to the re-presentation of his lived experience as a Hillside pupil. Another link between the two re-presentations occurs between the narratives of 11+ failure and English as a non-native speaker whereby Boris perceives his own experience of hardship as an immigrant to have caused him further disadvantage in terms of linguistic capital. Both such links themselves inter-link within a narrative of inequity, which Boris was aware of both a Hillside pupil and as an immigrant. This awareness of inequity, along with frustration and criticality towards inequity is a narrative within the final re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as a willing participant within and beyond sport.

### Boris the willing participant within and beyond sport

The influence sport had on Boris's lived experience was wide ranging. He described it as more than a hobby or pastime:

From a young age, sports were everything to me. When I woke up, I would always get my bike, go out, play cricket and then from Year 7 to Year 12, I was always in different sports, it wasn't just athletics. And like at the weekends I'm working at the leisure centre, so my life has always revolved around sport. So, it's kinda just part of me.

This re-presentation of Boris's lived experience uses the narratives of competition and

motivation, measuring attainment and inequity to explore the extent to which willingness to participate (both within and beyond sport) played out in Boris's practice. It takes as a starting point his claim that sport was 'part of' him and examines how such an inculcated disposition operated in relation to the field of academically selective education and other social spaces Boris inhabited. It begins with the narrative of competition and motivation which Boris made frequent reference to, across a variety of contexts.

### Competition and motivation

Overlapping with the narrative of 'maximising opportunities', Boris identified his participation with athletics to have been caused in part by a lack of competition at Hillside:

If I'd gone [to grammar school], I wouldn't have had that opportunity to do running on the field, to be able to acknowledge the fact that my sport is athletics, to be able to give me that opportunity to go to districts as well.

However, as well as being able to identify the capital he had gained from a lack of competition, he also identified a potential problem with it:

If there's no-one to catch up, we're always winning but are we actually winning though?

For Boris, lack of competition created a hollow victory, one which was not fought for and therefore of less value. In addition, he regarded competition as a source of motivation, not only as a participant in sport but also within other contexts:

I was always second place, but that's what motivated me. So I was like, 'next year ok, I'm gonna beat him' so my times were quicker...but I was still only second place. But that's what I mean, we've always gotta have a bar that's higher than us or else, what are we really aiming for? Like there is no goal. And we're always trying to get like a higher grade than the last test, always trying to get faster and fitter, trying to earn more money than yesterday. If there is no higher bar there's no meaning to life for most people.

Having examined how Boris considered the role played by grammar schools as providing the 'higher bar' within the narrative of 'segregation and reputation', it can be seen that Boris conceptualises 'trying' as an integral feature of society as a whole. The extent to the inculcation of such a concept causes Boris to position it as providing a 'meaning to life for most people'. Boris's unquestioning acceptance of competition and motivation indicates how his habitus has been shaped by values stemming from the neo-liberal field of power. Such acceptance also meant that Boris could identify sources of competition and motivation

without questioning the concepts themselves. For example, he shared how family influences created a sense of obligation to succeed, stemming from both his parents' experience:

I think it's had a positive impact on me cos it's motivated me to work harder and I understand how important it is if I don't

as well as from comparison with other family members:

Most of my cousins were born in a foreign country, like first gen and they've really worked their way up. Like they're doing really highly paid jobs. That kind of puts the bar high as well cos you're like 'ok so they've made it, so I've got to make it as well'.

Although Boris seemingly accepted the obligation to compete, he was able to identify its unwanted consequences at times when competing became overly challenging:

Sometimes it is very stressful. Like today in that chemistry lesson. It was like, you don't get it but everyone else around you gets it and you're like 'what's going on?' It makes you feel a bit left out, but you just pick up the pace and try it again.

The scenario which I had observed in Boris's chemistry lesson had involved him providing incorrect answers within a classroom discussion. He had been made aware of his classmates' understanding as the teacher had used their work to demonstrate the correct answer. In this situation, far from being faced with a lack of competition, Boris was now in the position of potentially facing too much competition, resulting in feelings of isolation. His willingness to 'try it again' was supported by the teacher who praised him for not giving up and also by one of his peers who showed him her work, talking him through it. Boris therefore recognised the potential influence that others had on determining both his motivation and success as a competitor, in addition to the sources of competition and motivation he obtained from his family.

Boris also acknowledged the power that competition could have, creating an insurmountable force as an element of the doxa of the academically selective field:

Surrounding yourself with competitive people you just get pulled along with the current...Over there [at the grammar school] I feel like everyone's doing all this extra work, and it seems you have to do it, there is no way around it.

Boris identifies the mutual relationship between habitus and field playing out through the concept of competition. By valuing competition, the doxa of the academically selective field shapes the habitus of pupils so that they employ competitive practices, which Boris perceives as 'all this extra work'. This alignment causes the practice to continue, to the extent that it



appears as an absolute necessity, something which ‘there is no way around.’ Boris’s lived experience as a willing participant provides him with insight into how this relationship operates within sport but how it also translates into the field of academically selective education. Analysis of the narrative of competition and motivation demonstrates how such insight contributes to the re-presentation of Boris’s lived experience. Part of being a willing participant involves demonstrating a willingness to compete.

### Attainment measures

The narrative of attainment measures was evident in stories and comments Boris shared about his experience as a participant within and beyond sport. He explained to me the athletics ranking information he had shared on his Padlet, explaining how his racing history was stored on a database used up to elite level and how this made him feel:

It’s a bit scary cos you always picture that it’s only the number of people who have run my race but...I’m very proud of it

Boris acknowledges the value such measurement provided him with through feelings of pride, along with the realisation that it could also simultaneously cause such pride to be diminished by placing his measurement within the wider field of competitive athletics. Boris recognised how the field of athletics valued measuring attainment as providing a means of ranking which then directly influenced the position an individual held within the field. Attainment measures were therefore regarded as sources of capital, something which was also evident within Boris’s experience of the academic field:

It’s A Levels, you’ve just gotta get those A Levels.

However, Boris also questioned the value of attainment measures, both in sport and education, using the concept of results ‘on paper’:

Cos on paper, a faster time looks better but as an experience and something that you can’t measure... It’s better to do the races and have those experiences than get a faster time.

Let’s say I got A, B, B or something...On paper I might look smarter than someone else, but they might have skills that can’t be represented on paper.

By making this comparison between the value of ‘results on paper’ and skills and experiences which do not align with such measurement, Boris demonstrates his awareness of the rules of the metaphorical game he is a participant in. Such awareness positions Boris as an informed

participant; knowing what is of value within a field can determine specific dispositions to be inculcated within the habitus. For Boris, this questioning of the value of attainment measures compounded an uncertainty he already held. Analysis of the narrative of attainment measures contributes towards a re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as a participant within and beyond sport. It demonstrates that Boris was an informed participant, aware of the game to be played within the field of academically selective education and how the rules which constituted this game related to the wider field of power. In addition, he was also able to identify weaknesses in the game, criticising its values which did not entirely align with his own. For Boris, the game's susceptibility to inequity was a source of such criticism, which is explored in the final narrative of this re-presentation.

### Inequity

Boris's participation in athletics at what he described as 'district' level meant that he trained alongside pupils from other schools within the local area, which included grammar school and private school pupils as well as pupils from other, non-academically selective secondary schools. Boris was aware of how this had increased his social capital:

Once I'd joined athletics...there was a massive social side. You meet so many different people with so many different categories of wealth, categories of knowledge, just different stories as well.

He also acknowledged times when he was aware of using this social capital. For example, the private school conference he attended which consequently influenced his degree course decision was an opportunity he had heard about via a contact within athletics. However, an increased amount of social capital also raised Boris's awareness of opportunities he could not access, such as the collaborative project between the private school and grammar school discussed in the narrative of 'segregation and reputation'. Although in many ways Boris's participation in athletics provided a source of the integration which he had suggested as a remedy for the segregation he observed within the academically selective system, it also had the effect of increasing his awareness of segregation by making inequity more visible. As discussed above, despite being critical of such inequity, Boris's acceptance of it as an inevitable consequence of the academically selective system contributed to the continuation of symbolic violence.

Throughout this analysis, Boris's own sources of cultural capital have come into consideration, particularly in relation to how the 'background knowledge' within his habitus provided him with a means of navigating the field. For Boris, an inculcated disposition to 'value education' went some way to align his habitus with the doxa of the field of education. In an overlap with the re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as an immigrant, he perceived the valuing of education as a source of parental support:

If the parents don't acknowledge education as a very important thing in their lives, the parent might plan holidays during school time...if the kid's feeling a little bit sick, they might be like 'ok it's fine you can stay home'... I think my parents' attitude towards education is as important as mine...If you don't get the academic side right, it's a kind of struggle later on in life.

Boris presents what he perceives to be examples of parenting which do not value education and therefore which do not (in his opinion) support a child. He is able to identify the potential consequences of such actions and in doing so recognises how he has benefited from parental support that is not available to everyone. Boris also provided other, more tangible examples of how his parents had provided him with advantageous opportunities. The first related to his participation in athletics, particularly when it came to travelling for events:

We're like a division from the main club so we have to get to [the main club] to get the coach. We have to get dropped off, so my Dad takes me there.

For Boris, the 15-mile journey from his home to where the coach departed was easily made via car, something he took for granted. Likewise, Boris's awareness of his parents as a fall-back option was also made evident when he described how they would provide opportunities when he could not afford them himself:

If I want something, I work, earn money and I can buy it, or my parents can buy it for me...Like during the Christmas period I wanted to go and see my cousins [in Germany] and Mum was like 'ok'.

Boris also shared that the choice regarding where he went to university had been his:

I didn't want to be too far from home so I can like go there and come back but they [parents] were fine. As long as I went to a uni and like study and get a job, they don't really mind.

Whilst Boris was by no means oblivious to financial constraints, neither did he appear to perceive himself to be restricted by them. In many ways, his awareness of parental support as a safety net eased his movement within different social spaces. Whilst it would be wrong

to say that Boris took his parents' support for granted, for him it was how things are. Boris was critical of inequity in terms of the 'game' within the field of academically selective education but in addition to falling victim of symbolic violence, Boris also gained advantage from economic stability and the alignment between his own habitus and the field. In this instance, such alignment resulted from the disposition of valuing education which Boris aligned with 'working hard'.

Boris regarded 'working hard' as an inherent part of being a participant within and beyond sport. He shared a story regarding training to get faster times within athletics events, but which did not always result in him winning races. He went on to widen the scope of the story, contextualising it beyond sport:

The harder you work on something, the more likely you are to get it. Not that you're gonna get it every single time cos sometimes you work really, really hard and you don't get anything but at least you learned that it's not worth it in the end.

Despite suggesting hard work as a potential solution to inequity, Boris also recognises the limitations of meritocracy, accepting that hard work does not always appear to pay off. He frames his acceptance as a lesson learned; teaching him that a former goal was 'not worth it'. His misrecognition of the inevitability of failure demonstrates the depth to which meritocracy is inculcated within his habitus. Despite having had experiences to the contrary, Boris still believes that hard work is an unquestionable element of success. The depth of this inculcation was also evident in Boris's recognition that social structures can result in the advantage of choice:

If people have everything, then they get to pick and choose. We don't get to pick and choose. You get what you're given and you just put all your effort into it.

Here, Boris distances himself from the 'people' who have everything, belonging instead to the 'we' who do not have a choice. Overlapping with the narrative of maximising opportunity, Boris's focus is on applying effort rather than frustration with inequity. Therefore, responsibility to overcome inequity lies with the individual. They are to blame when hard work does not pay off:

If I want something more then I'll work harder for it and if I don't get that then it's my fault isn't it? Like there's no one else to blame.

Boris's justification of the symbolic violence inherent within attributing blame to the

unsuccessful took a quasi-scientific approach:

If we've both been given the opportunity and they haven't used it well that's their problem... Survival of the fittest... if they don't wanna work as hard, well it's their loss.

Boris's reference to 'survival of the fittest' is an attempt to demonstrate the weight of his beliefs. He perceives them to be unquestionable and as representing a natural order. For Boris, being a willing participant equates to acting within such boundaries, recognising inequity within them but accepting it as part of this unquestionable and natural order. Boris's willingness to participate went even further, causing him to identify weaknesses within his own characteristics which could potentially disadvantage him:

I reckon I need to become more firm, like less nice. Like not cruel, but if you're too nice then everyone will take advantage of you, especially in the workplace... cos otherwise people are gonna tell you to do this, tell you to do that, and expect you to do it because you're the Mr Nice Guy.

Boris demonstrates another way in which he perceives himself to understand the rules of the game. For him, there is advantage to be gained by working hard but part of gaining such advantage is being aware of the boundary between hard work and potential exploitation. By reflecting on how he feels he needs to change, Boris identifies one aspect of inequity which he considers to be under his control. Boris's recognition of inequity has been demonstrated to be critical but accepting. For him it is part and parcel of being a participant in a variety of fields, including those which he has already participated in and those which he foresees himself participating in.

The re-presentation of Boris's lived experience as a participant within and beyond sport has drawn upon three narratives: competition and motivation, attainment measures and inequity. Throughout analysis of these narratives, Boris frequently related his lived experiences as a sporting participant to his lived experiences within academically selective education. He therefore demonstrated an awareness of the value both fields placed upon competition and motivation, resulting in him regarding these as integral and therefore unquestionable aspects of his practice. Consequently, analysis of this narrative demonstrates the relationship between habitus and field through the way that Boris's habitus has been shaped by the doxa of the field.

Analysis of the narrative of attainment measures indicates that Boris recognised the value of measurement, in the form of timing and rankings in the field of sport and exam results in the field of education. However, he also acknowledged the limitation of such measures in that their value was not always shared in other fields. As an informed participant, Boris was not only aware of what particular fields determined to be of value but also recognised that the value of such capital was dependent on the field.

Participating in sport had increased Boris's social capital and consequently made him more aware of inequity within the academically selective system. However, Boris also framed an aspect of his participation in sport as a positive outcome of failing the 11+ and attending Hillside. Participating in sport was, to a degree, reliant on his parents' economic capital and beyond sport, Boris benefited further from such economic capital in that he did not appear to question his parents' capacity to support him financially. Boris also gained advantage from two sources of cultural capital: valuing education and hard work. The degree to which both of these were inculcated within Boris's habitus meant that for him, they appeared as beyond questioning, even though he displayed an awareness of their limitations and resulting inequity. The symbolic violence attached to Boris's misrecognition became evident when he allocated blame and criticisms to those who failed and when he accepted instances of inequity as a natural consequence. Boris's willingness as a participant was evident across all three narratives. This willingness also demonstrated Boris's perception of the agency he held; he was willing to consciously modify his actions and behaviours (for example, by 'working hard') to those which best aligned with the field. Although Boris did at times question aspects of the various games involved in his lived experiences, his willingness to participate was evident in that doubts about taking part were never expressed.

### Bringing the re-presentations together

Although each of the three re-presentations within this chapter draw on different aspects of Boris's lived experiences, analysis of the thematic narratives used in their construction has also demonstrated the degree to which they overlap and intertwine. Therefore, it has become evident that Boris's lived experience of an academically selective education system cannot be separated from his lived experiences beyond it. Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated how the behaviour and dispositions inculcated within Boris's habitus were related to the field

in which he operated. On several occasions, I have made direct reference to the field of academically selective education and how Boris perceived himself to understand how certain capitals were valued by this field and consequently how he perceived his positioning within the field to relate to the capital he possessed. In other instances, Boris's habitus was related to a wider field of power and similar arguments were made in relation to Boris's perception of capital value and how this effected his positioning. Both types of comparison demonstrated the commonalities between these two fields and also how Boris's embodied history as an immigrant complemented such commonalities. All of these lead to a re-presentation of Boris as an individual who has a conscious perception of the rules of the game. This perception allowed him to identify strategies for success based on awareness of how he perceived the rules to operate both within distinct fields and also how certain rules appeared to translate into other fields. Boris's awareness of the rules stemmed from a degree of alignment between what was inculcated to be of value within his own habitus and what the field considered to be of value. Even in situations where rules appeared to cause inequality and inequity, such consequences were accepted as inevitable, or blame was attributed to an individual. Thus, Boris's unconscious acceptance of the rules of the game resulted in symbolic violence.

It is without doubt that re-presenting Boris's lived experience has demonstrated how Boris perceived himself to 'know' how the academically selective system operated and how it had shaped his own lived experience of education. It had made him acutely aware of the value of certain capitals. Part of this 'knowing' also stemmed from other aspects of Boris's lived experience. As an immigrant, his parents inculcated the disposition to value education and hard work. As a participant in sport, he valued the role of competition and motivation. However, these did not remain as separate entities and instead worked in relation to each other. As both the 'audience' to Boris's stories and an analyst who has subsequently re-presented them, I am able to recognise how various levels of contextual influence cause the re-presentations of Boris's lived experiences to appear as familiar and alien. Boris also acknowledged reflexive awareness of limitations to his 'knowing'. At the end of our last interview, I asked Boris for his thoughts on what being a research participant had been like. His response below demonstrates his reflexivity which has inherently contributed to this chapter:

You asking me questions has made me ask myself questions. Like, 'why do I do this or that?' and 'why does stuff happen in a certain way?' That's made me stop and think...Maybe I don't know everything I thought I did.



# Chapter 6: Gaby

After the short re-introduction to Gaby, this chapter is structured according to the outline presented in the Gaby analysis Padlet (see Appendix 7). It therefore consists of three representations of Gaby's lived experiences: the pupil at Hillside, the strategist and beyond education. Gaby's Padlet collages can be seen at appendices 10 and 11. Unless otherwise stated, all indented quotations are excerpts from responses Gaby made at interview.

## *Re-introduction*

Gaby was a year 11 female pupil at Hillside and had attended the school since the start of Year 7. She had been offered a place at a grammar school sixth form to study for her A Levels. Gaby had moved from Poland to the UK aged 5 with her mum and brother.

## The pupil at Hillside

The re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a Hillside pupil is constructed using two narratives: knowing the system and belief in selection which will be analysed individually. It takes as a starting point the recognition of Gaby operating within two fields simultaneously: the field of academically selective education and the field-within-a-field of Hillside. The re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a Hillside pupil will consider the extent to which the doxa of these fields were demonstrated within and through Gaby's lived experiences. It begins with the construction and analysis of the narrative of 'knowing the system'.

## Knowing the system

The narrative of knowing the system explores both the sources of knowledge Gaby demonstrated when talking about her lived experience as a Hillside pupil and also how such knowledge had been obtained via her lived experience. The narrative therefore incorporates Gaby's experiences of interacting with grammar school pupils and her awareness and experience of inequality within the academically selective system. However, before addressing these the narrative begins by exploring Gaby's experience of failing the 11+, paying particular attention to the ambivalence within the narrative.

## Being (not) 'bothered' by 11+ failure

Gaby described her 'stress free' experience of taking the 11+:

With the 11+, I never prepared for it. You know like, going to tuition and stuff, I never did that. It was very stress free. It was like you go in this one morning and you're having an exam and that was it. I wasn't bothered.

She went on to describe how this apparent carefree attitude continued into her receiving her result:

I never remember being disappointed about what I got. I know my mum did sort of want me to go to a grammar school just because she thought it was a better education, but I don't think we were upset about me not getting in or getting certain results. So... for me it was just a test. Open the result and I was like 'oh I didn't get in, fine'.

Although on the surface this story suggests that taking and failing the 11+ was something Gaby took in her stride, certain aspects demonstrate otherwise. She identifies how certain practices 'going to tuition and stuff' are normalised within the field of academically selective education and how not attending tuition for the 11+ facilitated an experience which did not align with practices valued within the field. She also highlights that her mother 'sort of' wanted her to attend a grammar school but this did not bring with it a sense of disappointment when Gaby's result dictated otherwise. Gaby's description of the 11+ as 'just a test' is her attempt to negate the value that the field of academically selective education places upon it. By failing to demonstrate alignment with such value, Gaby presents an impression of practice which did not conform to the rules of the game within the academically selective field. She went on to describe how this lack of conformity was in part due to unawareness:

I didn't even know I had the exam until the day before...I had no idea. I didn't even look around schools when I was in year 6 so it was like 'well I haven't been told this'.

Evident within this statement is Gaby's recognition that her experience had in some way been affected by inaction. The Gaby recalling these experiences now appears to be fully aware of practices such as visiting secondary schools, something which the Gaby in the memory did not know. This unawareness equates to a lack of cultural capital although Gaby never went so far as to position herself as a victim of such unawareness. However, she did reflect on her experience of failing the 11+ in a way that countered the 'carefree' attitude:

It's hard to describe. It just makes me feel like, what was wrong with me that I didn't pass that? Like, were those people better than me?

Within this reflection, Gaby the narrator questions the capabilities of Gaby the 11+ entrant, positioning her as inferior to peers who passed. For Gaby, the knowledge of the academically

selective system she has gained from her time within it results in an alternative view of the 11+. Rather than 'just a test', Gaby demonstrates her awareness of its value as a source of institutionalised cultural capital within the academically selective field.

However, Gaby did not blindly accept this value, recalling the following event from primary school:

I remember this one moment in year 6... I was top set in Maths and we had a leader board with our [attainment] levels on. And I remember this girl being at the bottom of the leader board and she was one of the only kids in our set to actually pass the 11+. And I was thinking 'hold on, she's a whole level lower than me and she passed, and I didn't?'... Like how does that work? How is that fair? Like one test, it's not based on if you're actually smart or not.

The sense of frustration within this remembrance demonstrates another way in which Gaby was 'bothered' by her 11+ result. Comparing attainment as measured within the Key Stage 2 curriculum (the 'level' in Maths) to attainment as measured by the 11+ result, causes Gaby to question the (in)compatibility between the two systems of measurement. For Gaby being 'actually smart' is not demonstrated by an 11+ pass, causing her to consider the 'fairness' of a system whose function is to separate according to 'ability'. Gaby's frustration concerning fairness presents further ambivalence regarding her experience of the 11+. Viewing her claims of it being 'stress free' through a Bourdieusian lens have revealed how Gaby's negation of its value equated to practice which did not align with the doxa of the field. Further, such practice was in part determined by unawareness resulting from a lack of cultural capital. Gaby's lived experience after the 11+ provided her with a greater awareness of the capitals valued within the field of academically selective education. This experience facilitated a reflection on her 11+ failure with increased awareness of the rules of the game. She could identify times when she did not conform to the rules and linked the lack of conformity to certain consequences. In addition, her lived experience also allowed her to identify elements of the game which she did not regard as 'fair'. This therefore leads to an exploration of Gaby's perceptions of inequality within the academically selective system as a whole.

#### Inequality

Gaby perceived inequality within the academically selective system in two ways. The first was the tangible benefits grammar school pupils appeared to receive in terms of facilities as well

as additional elements such as trips. She (incorrectly) attributed the latter to government funding:

I don't know if grammar schools get more funding from the government, but I've definitely noticed that they go on more trips

Gaby raised the concept of 'better' when discussing grammar school facilities and also used this concept in relation to teachers:

They do have better facilities, better teachers... teachers tend to [work in] grammar schools because they think it's better

Gaby therefore conceptualises what makes grammar schools 'better' by drawing on her own lived experience and evaluating aspects such as facilities, teachers and extra-curricular opportunities. As a result, she acknowledges how this translates to an elevated position within the academically selective field when grammar schools are compared to Hillside. Gaby described how she was made aware of this through an interaction with a teacher at a grammar school open evening:

G: I went to one grammar school open evening and the teacher... was like 'what school do you go to?' and I told him. His face was, he like frowned upon it as if, 'oh ok', thinking as if I couldn't get in

F: And how did that make you feel?

G: It...not embarrassed of my school because I do like this school, but it makes me feel like I am less than someone else because of what school I go to.

For Gaby, the concept of grammar schools being 'better' resulted in her feelings of inadequacy, feelings she had previously identified in relation to 11+ failure. Gaby's perception of feeling 'less' demonstrates the degree to which the doxa of the academically selective field was inculcated within her own habitus. Being a pupil at Hillside meant that she did not belong to the 'better' group of grammar school pupils. Gaby acknowledged a potential consequence of this:

I think some people, because they don't go to a grammar school, I think they get disheartened by it, and they actually think that they can't get as far in life.

Gaby distances herself from getting disheartened by describing it as a feeling of 'some people', rather than her own. However, her awareness of inequality within the field of the academically selective system means that she considers being a pupil at Hillside results in her

not being equal to a grammar school pupil. The symbolic violence within the system perpetuates via Gaby's acceptance of such inequality as a barrier to be overcome. She will 'get as far' *despite* not attending a grammar school. Gaby identified the key players in such perpetuation:

I think it's definitely people that have been to grammar schools themselves... People who have gone through this specific system, they just look down...I think that most people would agree that grammar school kids think they're better than us

This therefore leads to consideration of how Gaby moved the perception of 'better' from the grammar school to its pupils. This was supported by Gaby using stories from her own experience of interacting with grammar school pupils.

#### Interactions with 'better' grammar school pupils

Gaby described how she regularly interacted with grammar school pupils as a result of her participation in karate:

I'm in the adult class...like 15 to adult and some people there go to grammar school, some don't, and you can just tell how different they are...There's two girls my age and they are always talking about pressure from school. I'm on a private story on snap chat [a social media app] and they're constantly staying up till like three in the morning, doing work... Both of them complain about their school whereas me and the other non-grammar schoolgirl, we just don't really talk like that. It's sort of a stereotype you get with grammar schools. If I had to describe to you a typical grammar schoolgirl, it would be bitchy...constantly complains about her school and says how much pressure she's under. Like I wouldn't find anyone like them here. I'm not saying that they think they're better than everyone but [pause]. On social media...my friend got in an argument with [a grammar school pupil] who made comments like 'well you guys are stupid, you don't go grammar school, you didn't pass the 11+'.

Gaby's narrative of her interactions with grammar school pupils draws upon both experience and a degree of background knowledge. She is able to provide examples of negative interactions which she and her friend have been part of, which have taken place in person and via social media. In addition, Gaby mentions the characteristics of a 'stereotype' and the 'typical' grammar school (female) pupil, conveying what she regards to be an accepted and commonly held generalisation. She makes a direct comparison between the school-complaining behaviour of the grammar school pupils and her own and another non-grammar school pupil ('we just don't really talk like that') and also highlights how the traits of the 'typical' grammar school pupil does not align with Hillside ('I wouldn't find anyone like them

here'). Gaby therefore uses aspects of both her direct experience and her background knowledge to 'other' grammar school pupils. Her construction of such 'othering' is based on her perception that her own interactive experiences conform to what she perceives to be commonly held beliefs.

Gaby also demonstrates that an aspect of the 'otherness' relates to the grammar school pupils' perceptions of themselves to be 'better', something which is initially conveyed in her pause and then substantiated with the example of the negative comments received by her friend. She highlighted a source of this perception of being 'better' to go beyond the grammar schools' attainment in terms of exam results:

I think everyone will sometimes think they're better, 'my school got better grades' but grammar schools are just like, I don't know, I think they shape their students to think this way.

The 'shaping' Gaby mentions suggests inculcation. Being part of the 'better' group serves to re-emphasise 'otherness'. Within the field of academically selective education, membership of the 'other' group is highly valued and therefore this superior positioning becomes inculcated into the habitus of 'other' group members. Gaby recognises that the grammar school's position within the field of academically selective education facilitates such a process. The end result being Gaby's perception of 'betterness' that acts as a delineator between her as a Hillside pupil and the 'better' grammar school pupils.

The construction and analysis of the narrative of knowing the system demonstrates how Gaby's lived experience as a Hillside pupil created knowledge which was then used to navigate and comprehend the academically selective system. Such knowledge provided Gaby with an understanding of the values of the academically selective field and meant that she could identify times within her own lived experience when she failed to play by the rules of the game. The consequences of such failure increased Gaby's awareness of the capitals valued by the field. Throughout the narrative, this awareness has been perceived and described by Gaby through the concept of 'better'. Applying a Bourdieusian lens to this concept not only reveals Gaby's perception of the ways in which certain capitals held particular values within the academically selective field but also how 'better' (and its accompanying antithesis, 'less') were inculcated into the habitus of the individuals within the field as a result of the field's segregation via the 11+. Whilst Gaby was not blind to the inequality this created, her

acceptance of it became part of her knowledge. Thus, the narrative of ‘knowing the system’ contributes to a re-presentation of Gaby’s lived experience as a Hillside pupil through its demonstration of how such knowledge was shaped by and shaping of her lived experience.

### Belief in selection

Despite her awareness and experience of the inequality created by the practices of the academically selective system, Gaby demonstrated a belief in the concept of selection. The narrative is constructed around two stories she shared: her decision to leave Hillside and study A Levels at a grammar school and the value she perceived herself to have gained from being in the top set at Hillside.

### Joining a grammar school for A Levels

Although Hillside had a sixth form where Gaby could have studied A Levels, she was planning to leave Hillside on completion of her GCSEs and join the sixth form of a grammar school. She explained the reasoning behind her decision:

I feel like I will get a better education in [grammar school] sixth form because the people who have gone into that school...had to have higher grades.

Within this statement, Gaby is referring to her encounter with entrance criteria for sixth form which the grammar school imposed. Her offer of a place to study A Levels at a grammar school was conditional upon her attaining GCSE results which met the grammar school’s criteria. She conflates the pupil-level characteristic of exam attainment with the school-level characteristic of education quality, once again using the concept of ‘better’. In this instance, Gaby’s conceptualisation of ‘better’ recognises the institutionalised cultural capital value of ‘higher grades’ not only in terms of facilitating her entrance into a grammar school but also the role that ‘higher grades’ played as a sorting mechanism. She would now only be mixing with peers with ‘higher grades’ something which, for Gaby, categorised them as ‘better’ students. Gaby therefore displays her awareness of the value placed upon exam attainment within both the academically selective field as well as the wider field of education, suggesting implications of alignment between such awareness and the habitus of individual pupils. Mixing with such peers contributes to Gaby’s conceptualisation of the ‘better’ education potentially available to her at grammar school.

Gaby shared that the decision to leave Hillside had not been an easy one. She attempted to justify her decision based on the stage of education she was now at:

I sort of believe that there should be a higher and lower school after year 11 because you're at an age where you...do your own revision, learning and you develop a way of thinking.

In doing so she alludes to the role of the individual in taking responsibility for outcomes, accepting a structure of 'higher and lower' as one that recognises and facilitates this. However, the uncertainty in her 'sort of' belief was an aspect she discussed further:

Part of me was like 'do I really wanna be a part of something I don't truly believe in?' Cos, I don't think it's right however, the system's here so I might as well take advantage of it.

Gaby recognises that she is now in a position to 'take advantage' of a system on the basis of the institutionalised cultural capital brought by GCSE results. It is interesting to make the comparison between Gaby the 11+ entrant who did not prepare for her 11+ exam and who did not visit secondary schools and Gaby the year 11 pupil who is very aware of the institutionalised cultural capital value of GCSE results and who proactively visited and applied for a grammar school sixth form place. It suggests that as Gaby's time within academically selective education has continued, her awareness of how the system works has increased. As she makes clear, the strength of the system far outweighs the strength of her own beliefs and therefore presents her with what she perceives to be a logical answer to the question she poses herself. Gaby's increased awareness of academic selection has made her a better-informed player of the game. As a result, she is able to manage the conflict evident within this internal dialogue with the use of an instrumentalist attitude. Gaby's awareness of 'the system' and the potential, positive outcomes selective processes can offer have partly arisen through her lived experience of being a 'top set' pupil at Hillside.

#### Value of top set

Gaby shared with me that Hillside employed the practice of 'setting' pupils for Maths and Science. She alluded to test results being used by Hillside as a means of allocating pupils into sets and Gaby was in the 'top' set for both subjects. She discussed how her parents felt about this:

They [parents] said 'I'd rather you be top set at secondary than bottom set at grammar'...they'd rather me be top set and have the chance to outshine in a



secondary school than constantly be under pressure and feel like I'm worse in a grammar school.

Gaby also demonstrated that her own experience as a top set pupil had mirrored her parents' opinions:

I definitely know that here in class if I do something well, I'll get recognised for it but also I know how my friends in the bottom set feel about being like labelled as that...Maybe if I went to a grammar school I would be that bottom set and I don't really wanna feel what they're feeling

Within the field-within-a-field of Hillside, Gaby was aware of the capital she held as a top set pupil. She compared the opportunity to 'outshine' and be 'recognised' provided by membership of the top set, comparing it to the negative outcomes of the labelling her friends in the bottom set received. Such awareness allowed Gaby to evaluate the capital she held as top set pupil within the field of Hillside against the potential deficit of capital she would hold as a bottom set grammar school pupil. Although Gaby's evaluation was contingent on a presumption that she would have been bottom set at a grammar school, she used this evaluation to compare positioning mechanisms across two different fields. For Gaby, being strongly positioned within the field of Hillside was beneficial, despite her recognition that Hillside was positioned below the grammar school within the field of academically selective education. She described how she perceived this benefit:

I know that if I went to a grammar school and I was bottom set then I definitely would feel worse...Feeling bad about my own education, feeling that I don't learn well. I definitely don't come to school and feel like 'oh my God, I'm not getting this'...my own confidence, it's definitely higher here. This sort of helps me work harder to get good results so I know I'm doing well.

Gaby recognised the emotional barriers she did not encounter as a top set pupil, once again indicating how the doxa of individual responsibility for outcomes was inculcated into her habitus. Not having to deal with such feelings gave Gaby confidence, something she perceived to contribute to her willingness to work hard, which brought results, which increased her confidence and so the cycle continued.

As a top set pupil at Hillside, Gaby was able to identify how selection had worked in her favour. It had served to confirm and inculcate the doxa of meritocracy and measurement of attainment into her habitus. The end result was Gaby's anticipation of obtaining institutionalised cultural capital which was of value within the field of academically selective

education, and which facilitated Gaby's move into the grammar school, thereby gaining further capital within the field. Gaby was not unaware of the inequalities created by selection, in terms of the experiences of her friends in the bottom set and also her own experience of 11+ failure. The symbolic violence was created through Gaby's acceptance of academic selection as one of the rules of the game, which had consequently affected how Gaby perceived the game itself.

The re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a Hillside pupil has been constructed using the narratives of knowing the system and belief in selection. There has, at times been some crossover between these narratives in that selection is a fundamental aspect of the academically selective system. However, the analysis of each narrative separately has revealed Gaby's perceptions of how certain capitals were aligned with the doxa of the field of academically selective education and further, how operating within the field resulted in the inculcation of such perceptions into Gaby's habitus, providing her with knowledge of the rules of the game. With such knowledge came Gaby's perception of how the field positioned her as a Hillside pupil, something she measured in relation to her conceptualisation of the 'better' grammar school. Despite being aware of (and having directly experienced) the inequality associated with selection, Gaby regarded it as one of the rules of the game. She therefore not only accepted it, but it was inculcated into her habitus to the extent that it shaped her actions whilst navigating the field. As a Hillside pupil, Gaby perceived herself to have both lost out but also benefited from academic selection. With such values inculcated into her habitus, Gaby knew and played by the rules of the game. Such acceptance only served to facilitate the continuation of symbolic violence which Gaby, as a Hillside pupil, had been the victim of. A contributing factor to this symbolic violence was Gaby's misrecognition of her responsibility to overcome it. This therefore leads to the narratives which construct the next re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a strategist.

### The strategist

In order to re-present Gaby's lived experience as a strategist, I utilise three thematic narratives: using and consuming; belief in hard work; and confidence and questioning. The conceptualisation of 'strategist' is created via the construction and analysis of these

narratives, using Gaby's perceptions of and reasonings behind aspects of her lived experiences. The re-presentation begins with an analysis of the thematic narrative of 'using and consuming'.

### Using and consuming

This narrative explores the different ways in which the processes of using and consuming played out in the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experiences. When I asked her how much impact she felt school had over her life, she answered as follows:

I don't think the school I go to changes me in any way. I just think it's the school I go to, I get my education and then I go home... if I make friends along the way, great, but at the end of the day, we're all here just to get an education, no other reason.

Gaby demonstrates her conceptualisation of school as a place to 'get' an education. Her attitude towards it presents as transactional; she recognises school has something to offer her and she attends school in order to obtain it before returning to life beyond it when she 'goes home'. In contrast to the inculcation of 'betterness' she perceived to take place at grammar school, Gaby regards herself as unaffected by Hillside; she does not consider (or at least is not aware) of her school 'changing' her. Likewise, she dismisses friendships as an additional benefit of school, something which takes place as a side line occurrence 'along the way'. By regarding certain aspects relating to school as incidental, Gaby demonstrates a process of evaluation in which measurable outcomes dominate. In the case of 'getting an education' measurable outcomes are available in the form of exam results, a form of institutionalised cultural capital. Despite not having sat her GCSE exams when we spoke, Gaby was already able to identify one way in which she had deployed such capital:

I know my predicted [GCSE] grades got me into sixth form so I'm glad I did all that work for them

Gaby used her predicted GCSE grades to gain an offer to study A Levels at a grammar school sixth form. These predicted grades were (as Gaby recognises) the result of her own work but also constitute what Gaby considers as the 'education' provided by Hillside. Gaby's perception of the value placed upon exam results within the field of education, causes her to regard Hillside as somewhere to be used to gain this specific and tangible aspect of education. Such evaluation causes Gaby to centralise herself and more specifically, how she perceives herself to have benefited.

The awareness that Gaby had of using something for her own benefit also became evident when we were discussing her decision not to apply for a 'prefect' position at Hillside. The school operated a system whereby year 11 pupils would apply and be selected for the role of prefect and be allocated a specific responsibility, such as monitoring certain areas of the school during break and lunch times. Their contribution was immediately recognisable through them wearing a different colour school tie:

I don't know if this sounds a bit off, but I don't feel the need to be and do something if I don't get any benefits from it. I don't think prefects affect the school community much...you're just there with a golden tie on

Gaby's recognition that her observation 'sounds a bit off' indicates her awareness that her viewpoint could be interpreted negatively. However, she also regards the role of prefect to be of no use to her and also questions their impact on the community of Hillside. Once again, Gaby undertakes a process of evaluation, operating a type of costs/benefits analysis in which the sacrifices she would make as prefect in terms of losing her free time do not gain her any recognisable capital beyond the 'golden tie'. She demonstrated her awareness of the lack of transferability such capital had beyond the field of Hillside, later commenting that:

It's not like being a prefect is going to make the difference with you getting a job in the real world...plus it's something I could just lie about on my CV. Most people do.

Gaby's awareness of how the rules of the game operated within the 'real world' extends to an understanding of how rules could also be manipulated for individual benefit. Whilst the value of the institutionalised capital Hillside offered Gaby (in the form of qualifications) was considered to be of adequate value to justify hard work, the capital of a being a prefect was not only relatively non-transferrable but also easily fabricated. For Gaby, this aspect of Hillside was not worth using.

Gaby recognised the role she had to play in using and consuming:

I'm not the sort of person to sit back if I don't understand something cos, at the end of the day, that's what I'm here for. So, if I know I don't understand something and the teacher has to explain it again then I don't have a problem with that.

Throughout my time observing Gaby in lessons, I witnessed several instances of her asking teachers questions, verifying demands of tasks, interacting with her teachers and peers to seek feedback on her work and engaging with explanations provided by her teachers and her

peers. Gaby was never reticent to ask for support, as evidenced in this field note taken in an observation of Gaby's art lesson:

[Gaby is working on a portrait of a friend which is part of her GCSE coursework]. Gaby asks for help from the teacher. The teacher speaks to Gaby briefly, telling her to plan out her idea, before turning her attention to the pupil sat next to Gaby. As this conversation is drawing to a close, Gaby initiates another conversation with the teacher in which she talks through the plan she has just made. Gaby reacts with a smile when the teacher praises the plan and gives advice about use of colour. Gaby asks for specific help 'Can you just help me draw the hair?' The teacher makes a reference to previous help she has already given Gaby before leaving the table. Gaby pauses for a minute before turning to the pupil sat next to her and asking, 'shall I paint first and then add details in?'

Gaby accepts and consumes the advice from the teacher and is able to specifically identify the additional support she feels she needs in her request for help with drawing the hair. Her determination to gain further advice is evident in the repeated attempts she makes to further engage the teacher. Aware of how she has already benefited from consuming advice (her smile when receiving praise from the teacher), Gaby seeks out an additional source of advice from her peer when the teacher leaves the table. Seeking advice from sources she recognised as valuable was something Gaby referred to often. She told me how she had used her Mum's advice when she was confronted with new experiences whilst on a work placement and how she regularly sought advice on make-up from her cousin. She shared how taking advice had in some way shaped decisions about her future plans:

I went to the grammar school open evenings for sixth form, and they were like you should probably have an idea of what you wanna do in the future...I don't really have the background but I've always wanted to do something like solicitor or barrister, so a law degree and I just started looking at universities. I definitely wanted to go to a uni that does a year abroad, cos I spoke to my geography teacher, and she was like 'my worst regret is not doing that' and [name of university] have one in San Diego which is a nice area as well so at the moment that's what I'd like to do.

Gaby uses the two sources of advice within this example (the grammar school sixth form and her geography teacher) to compensate for the lack of cultural capital she perceives herself to have in relation to her aspiration to study law. Being aware that she does not have the 'background' causes Gaby to act on advice she perceives to be of use. Whilst Gaby did not explain what she meant by 'background'; she perceives herself to be some way in deficit. Her awareness of this deficit, along with her willingness to take advice she perceives will go some

way to remedy it, demonstrate Gaby's knowledge of how certain activities (such as researching university courses) create capital whose value can be transferred into other fields. Even though Gaby is still over a year away from making a university application, she is playing by the rules of the game by undertaking preparation activities the field determines as necessary. Once again, advice has been used and consumed for a perceived benefit.

The narrative of using and consuming has demonstrated the element of strategy within the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a strategist. She selected what to use and what to ignore in relation to the opportunities Hillside offered and identified that seeking and responding to advice provided a means of increasing her cultural capital. She therefore used sources of advice in relation to the capital they could affect, recognising that certain forms of capital (for example exam results) have a value which can be transferred across fields. Gaby's awareness of the rules of the game extended beyond the field of education as she was able to identify potential deficits in her own capital and take advice as a means to remedy them. In many ways, this demonstrates how individualisation, pertaining from a neo-liberal field of power is evident within this narrative. This is further examined in relation to Gaby's lived experience as a strategist, in the consideration of her belief in the concept of 'hard work'.

### Belief in hard work

Several of the posts on Gaby's 'How I See Myself' Padlet (see Appendix 10) are relevant to the construction of the 'hard work' narrative. Gaby explained her decision to include school work on the Padlet with the following reason:

I always found like schoolwork important. Like I just know that I need to get it done to move on and it is necessary...It gets me places

Gaby's explanation links back to the 'using and consuming' narrative, in that she is aware of the value schoolwork brings. Hard work is executed by Gaby the individual and for Gaby the individual and is focused on the potential gains available from the metaphorical and actual 'places' it opened up. Gaby was already convinced that her offer to study A Levels at a grammar school demonstrated one of the 'places' hard work could get her to, displaying her awareness of how her positioning in the field of academically selective education would be improved at a grammar school in contrast to Hillside:

It just shows hard work pays off, like I'm going to a sixth form in a grammar school even though I came from a normal secondary school

However, for Gaby working hard was something more than a strategy executed for her own perceived benefit. It was something she 'just kn[e]w' to be essential to facilitate what she perceives as progression. To this extent, the doxa of meritocracy within the field of education (which itself stems from the neo-liberal field of power) has been inculcated into Gaby's habitus via academic selection, thereby rendering the valuing of hard work as something which goes without saying.

In addition to being able to identify times where she believed hard work had brought rewards, Gaby also shared a story about a time when lack of hard work had brought an unwanted consequence. Within this story Gaby references GCSE grades which utilise a numerical system in which 9 is the highest and 1 the lowest:

Geography's one of my strongest subjects and I used to get 7s easily. Then I sat next to (friend) for a whole term, and we had an assessment which told us what our overall GCSE grade would have been if that had been our real exam...I opened my result and I got a 5. So I'd dropped down two grades...I definitely didn't blame (friend) because it's my own fault that I didn't focus but I definitely was like 'ok, I actually do need to focus if this is something I'm going to do well in'... because I saw the effect I knew...and I felt bad about myself, it was a subject I worked really hard towards and to lose it all wasn't worth it.

For Gaby, being made aware of a potential consequence of not working hard only served to confirm her valuing of it. Moreover, the depth to which this valuation was inculcated into her habitus is evident from the negative feelings she described. She not only regrets her actions but considers them to reflect negatively on her as a whole, causing her to 'feel bad' about herself. She once again uses a costs/benefits analysis which regards hard work as a type of investment to secure such capital and evaluates the potential loss of this investment to far outweigh the benefit of sitting next to her friend.

The narrative of the belief in hard work also draws upon two other posts on Gaby's 'How I See Myself' Padlet (Appendix 10) which, somewhat conversely, are the image of the bed and the gif captioned 'lazy sometimes'. I asked Gaby to explain what she considered these posts to say about her:

G: I like spending time in my bed and just like watching TV. That links to the next one as well, the 'lazy sometimes'

F: So what's the difference between the bed and the 'lazy sometimes'?

G: Lazy bed is physically like just laying down whereas lazy sometimes is like my mental attitude towards work. Like 'I just can't be bothered to do this today'

Gaby distinguishes physical laziness (as represented by the bed) from what she describes as her 'mental attitude' of 'can't be bothered'. She went on to explain that the 'lazy sometimes' trait could manifest in a variety of situations, including in relation to schoolwork. Gaby was not only aware of these feelings but also regarded both types of 'laziness' negatively, in that they contradicted her valuing of hard work. The extent to which Gaby was aware of negotiating this contradiction is evident from her inclusion of the seemingly contradictory Padlet posts, which is itself further emphasised by the side-by-side positioning of 'lazy sometimes' and 'schoolwork is important to me'.

Analysis of the narrative of 'belief in hard work' has demonstrated that the valuing of hard work was an inculcated aspect of Gaby's habitus. In addition, Gaby also recognised hard work as an individualised strategy which could be employed to increase her capital, akin to a type of investment. To this extent, Gaby's unquestioning acceptance of delayed gratification demonstrates how the value of meritocracy, originating from the field of power is now so inherent within the field of education that it is able to shape the habitus of a pupil within it. The alignment between Gaby's habitus and the field of education means that she moves as a 'fish in water' and further, is able to recognise and overcome any disruption to the fluidity of her movement caused by moments of what she perceives as 'lazy sometimes'. The narrative of 'belief in hard work' therefore becomes a key aspect of re-presenting Gaby's lived experience as a strategist in that it is both an underlying value which shapes her lived experience as well as a strategy she employs to evaluate and direct her own experience. Gaby's belief in hard work causes her to not only consider hard work as a means to an end but also as a valuable entity in itself.

### Confidence and questioning

The thematic narrative of confidence and questioning explores the ways in which these can be regarded as particular attributes of Gaby and how they collaboratively contribute to her lived experience as a strategist. It starts by considering how Gaby's confidence to ask questions in class was related to the confidence she gained from being asked questions by others. This became evident from the following incident in a geography lesson which I recorded in an observation field note:



Gaby answers a direct question from the teacher confidently and then watches the teacher demonstrate on the board how to answer the question. Gaby speaks out 'Miss, you're going the wrong way,' 'Miss, the scale is different.' The teacher readily acknowledges her mistake. Another student in the class speaks out and asks Gaby a question 'which one is it Gaby?'

Gaby reflected on this incident in a later interview as follows:

I feel like the further along you go in school like the more confident you are... [The teacher] did make the scale smaller so you just point that out and move on and learn from it. It was a bit confusing, and I always try and help others when they don't get stuff. It's just what I do. I tend to get asked for help in certain topics with certain people. Like if it's my friends and they don't understand something, they'll come to me. (Name of friend) struggles [with schoolwork] so...she just comes and asks me the question. I think she would call me intelligent, for sure, cos I know that's how (Name of friend) looks up to me.

Gaby's willingness to challenge the teacher's mistakes draws upon her perception that confidence to do so increases over time. She accepted her role in the situation to be one which provided clarity to others and used her confidence in her own understanding to rectify the confusion. Gaby acknowledges that this is a role she undertakes frequently and demonstrates her awareness that she is regarded as someone who can and will be asked questions, both by teachers and her peers. Thus, the label of 'intelligent' has been inculcated into Gaby's habitus via the reinforcement which takes place via her friends and her teachers seeing her as someone who can be called upon to correctly answer questions. In addition, Gaby herself recognises how such an alignment has developed over time; the longer this reinforcement has continued, the stronger the inculcation of belief in her own 'intelligence' has become. Gaby is able to reflexively identify what she describes as her own 'confidence' but regards confidence to have occurred almost naturally through her continued time at Hillside. She does not identify how the relationship between her habitus and the implicit academic selection via teacher questioning makes certain actions (for example helping others) appear as natural, things which she just does.

Gaby's perception of herself as willing to question also caused her to reflect on two other traits. The first was her willingness to question the opinions of others, something which she regarded as positive:

I always challenge people's viewpoints if I don't agree with them... If I have a different opinion, I'll just put it out there. Like it can't do any harm to start a debate, it's interesting.

This self-perception was echoed in my observation field notes which displayed several instances of Gaby engaging with debates which ranged from discussions with pupils she was sat in a group with to a whole class debate on the subject of euthanasia in which Gaby took a leading role. Raising questions of others and responding to questions from others was something Gaby acknowledged that she 'always' did. This inculcated disposition had the effect of elevating Gaby's position within the field of Hillside. It allowed her to demonstrate she possessed the confidence to ask questions (a disposition aligned with the doxa of the field of education) and further was able to employ this disposition in a way the field determined was appropriate (using questions to engage in a debating activity). Gaby acknowledged that this inculcated confidence and questioning was also reinforced beyond school:

I always challenge their [family's] views, political ones as well, all the time, even if we have the same political views. I'll always be like 'why would you choose that?'

Gaby's relationships with her family are more fully explored in the re-presentation of her lived experiences 'beyond school' but this overlap demonstrates how an activity undertaken within the family setting related to activities Gaby undertook whilst at school. Regardless of whether political debate was valued by Gaby's family, her acknowledgement of it taking place provided Gaby with further inculcation, allowing her to regard debate as an activity which felt natural.

Although the inculcation of Gaby's confidence and questioning meant that she did not strategically draw upon them, she was able to acknowledge their contribution to her willingness to enter a new field and apply for a sixth form place at a grammar school. She did question aspects of this decision, particularly in regard to potential loneliness and a lack of social capital in terms of friends:

I'm excited to meet new people but I am a bit scared...The sixth form that I'm planning on going to, no one from this school is going there...but I think it'll be ok once that first awkward bit is over with.

Gaby's self-reassurance along with her excitement indicate her understanding that the grammar school is the right choice for her. This suggests Gaby's perception that she holds enough of the cultural capital valued by the grammar school field to align her with it. Part of this capital, along with the institutionalised cultural capital in the form of exam results, is the intrinsic feeling of confidence Gaby has in herself which operates in collaboration with Gaby's role as a source of providing answers to questions. Although Gaby cannot be certain as to

whether she will continue to undertake this role in the grammar school, she uses the confidence it has already given her to justify her decision to herself. The confidence inculcated within her habitus causes her to recognise that 'it'll be ok'.

Analysis of the narrative of 'confidence and questioning' has demonstrated how these can be considered as attributes of Gaby and further how they appeared to work to mutually reinforce each other. In comparison to the other narrative themes of 'using and consuming' and 'belief in hard work', Gaby's awareness of her own deliberate employment of confidence and questioning was limited. They were dispositions inculcated within her habitus to the extent that she regarded them as part of who she was, thereby utilising them without the same degree of strategy. However, 'confidence and questioning' remains a key narrative within the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a strategist based on the fact that Gaby was aware of the cultural capital she gained from them, despite not being aware of the manner in which such dispositions had been inculcated into her habitus.

The narratives of 'using and consuming', 'belief in hard work' and 'confidence and questioning' create the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a strategist by highlighting her conscious strategising as well as certain dispositions which appeared to her as natural but whose operation also gained her a strategic advantage. All too often, Gaby was able to identify how any advantage she had was in relation not only to the field of Hillside but also to wider fields, which Gaby referenced as the 'real world'. When Gaby was aware of strategising, she frequently did so by means of making an evaluation and in doing so demonstrated not only her awareness of how certain capitals were valued within a particular field but also of how this value could be transferred to another field. Therefore, actions and behaviours were often considered in relation to the potential benefit in terms of capital they could later bestow. The underlying purpose of Gaby's strategising ties all the narratives together. Gaby endeavoured to maximise what she believed to be valuable opportunities and disregard those she considered of little value. Certain dispositions, such as that of 'hard work', were beyond questioning; her time in education had implicitly inculcated such a disposition within Gaby's habitus. These aligned her habitus with the doxa of the field of education, meaning that within the field of education, Gaby the strategist moved as a fish in water.

## Beyond education

The re-presentation of Gaby's lived experiences beyond education is constructed using two thematic narratives: 'Gaby and the 'real' world' and 'Gaby, family and friends'. Within each of these, links to narratives from previous re-presentations will also be highlighted. Therefore, re-presenting Gaby's lived experiences beyond education also reveals how Gaby perceives her lived experiences within education to relate to her lived experiences beyond school. It begins with the thematic narrative of 'Gaby and the 'real' world'.

### Gaby and the 'real' world

Constructing the narrative of Gaby and the 'real' world reveals several sources of Gaby's lived experiences. Analysis of these experiences with a Bourdieusian lens demonstrates the capitals Gaby possessed, the degree to which she was aware of possessing different types of capital and the extent to which she consciously deployed such capital. The 'real' world was itself conceptualised by Gaby to represent spaces beyond Hillside:

It's a bit like being in a bubble here [Hillside] isn't it? Like, who cares in the real world if you're sometimes a bit late? If I'm late meeting my friends, I just message them and if it was my job then I'd just say sorry to my boss and offer to work late. So much of what they say is important here doesn't really make any difference in the real world...I think the older you get, the more you can see that.

Gaby's comparison between the 'bubble' of Hillside and the 'real' world draws attention to her perception of needless rigidity of rules within school. She uses the concept of the 'real' world to demonstrate how she considers it to offer greater flexibility in relation to punctuality, something which was closely monitored at Hillside. Her examples recognise the 'real' world as a place which exists currently (where she can message friends about being late) and in the future (where she will offer to work late). Gaby suggests that the lived experiences which constitute part of age and maturity go hand in hand with increased awareness of how the 'real' world operates. This narrative therefore combines Gaby's reflections on her own lived experiences and her visions for her future lived experiences to examine her perception of the 'real' world and how she operates (or will potentially operate) within it. It begins by considering Gaby's aspiration to study law at university.

Gaby's perception of herself as not having the 'background' to study law was highlighted in the 'using and consuming' narrative within the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a strategist. Gaby's willingness to consume and use advice from others to overcome her

perceived deficit in cultural capital resulted in her researching a particular course at university and consequently creating a sense of certainty about her aspiration. However, Gaby later revealed that she had also gained further insight into the 'real' world of law via a work experience placement which was obtained using a contact of her stepdad:

My stepdad knows the boss and he emailed her and was like 'can Gaby do work experience?' And she was like 'sure'. I went for work experience for a week and then for two weeks in the summer I worked there. I enjoyed talking with lawyers, going through what I need to get there and what they enjoy about their job. The actual job they do is insurance which isn't what I wanna get to...it was really boring...I don't know which bit of law I'd like to work in. I was going to go into criminal law until I realised it's kind of underpaid, which, I know you shouldn't base your future on money but that's just the way I look at it.

Obtaining work experience using the social capital of her stepdad had provided Gaby with an increased understanding of the legal profession, in terms of the different areas of specialisms and also what the work of lawyers equated to in the 'real world'. This understanding then itself becomes a source of cultural capital, which Gaby can use to discount aspects of law she considers to be 'boring' or 'underpaid' and assist her with navigating the field of law in order to realise her aspiration.

Gaby linked her 'real world' perception of law to the 'lawyer' post on her 'How I See My Future' Padlet (Appendix 11), recognising the depiction of the lawyer she had selected (an image taken from a television series Gaby watched) as American and highly stylised. Gaby also made a link between the 'lawyer' post and the 'London' post on her Padlet:

The best five law firms are in London, they pay so much money...Travel is easier there too, you have the tube. It's just the opportunities.

Once again, Gaby uses the cultural capital she has in terms of understanding elements of the field of law to refine her aspiration. Gaby openly acknowledges financial reward as a motivation for her career, despite her recognition of the potential negativity such valuing has as something she 'shouldn't' do. Her knowledge of law firm rankings, along with their salary packages navigate her towards London, a place she regards as part of her future due to its 'opportunities'. Both the 'lawyer' and the 'money' posts featured a white, male character and I asked Gaby for her reflection on this:

I do think [the legal profession] is getting better now but it's definitely a male industry. But I'm not the sort of person that thinks 'someone else will get the job cos they're a man'. I don't think it's like that anymore to be honest. Well, I haven't experienced that first hand.

Gaby recognises her own lack of experience of outright discrimination based on gender and uses this to support a viewpoint which borders on post-feminism. However, the ambivalence between her perception of the legal profession being a 'male industry' and her post-feminist 'it's not like that anymore' statement demonstrates uncertainty concerning this aspect of the 'real' world. This was also evident in Gaby's evocation of how she saw herself in the future. She included 'married one day' on her Padlet but questioned how this would be compatible with a future as a lawyer:

At the moment, there's like two versions of me. There's a version of me that's independent and working and then there's part of me that would like to get married, have kids and just live with my husband and my kids, a bit like my mum does.

Gaby's awareness of the potential incompatibility between her future career and future family demonstrates another example of symbolic violence. She misrecognises male domination within the legal profession as something she has to proactively resist in order to overcome. In addition, her perception of the future 'real' world includes 'two versions' of herself, with the family-based version shaped by Gaby's lived experience. Whilst it is obvious that Gaby does not consider family-life as her only future, her presentation of the future as having 'two versions' demonstrates the degree to which she is aware of the potential challenge it will present her with. As a victim of symbolic violence, Gaby does not question the existence of such a challenge, misrecognising it as something to be overcome.

Gaby's aspiration to study law and become a lawyer demonstrates how she used the social and cultural capital she had available to her in the 'real world' to secure and employ additional capital which in turn advances her position in the 'real world' of the legal profession. As a potential player in the legal field, Gaby is already using her knowledge of its rules to navigate her entrance into it. Her knowledge of the rules provides her with an awareness of how her gender causes her to consider herself to be mis-aligned with the doxa of the field. The symbolic power of this doxa results in the symbolic violence of Gaby's misrecognition and acceptance of male dominance as something that she will have to challenge.

Gaby also included 'travel' on her 'How I See Myself' Padlet and explained its inclusion as follows:

I just love it. From waking up at like 4am, going to the airport, getting on the plane...And I know [the Padlet image] is a summer holiday but I think I love my snow holidays a bit more. Cos that's like a sporty holiday whereas on the summer holidays, I often get bored. I love travel and I'm so disappointed cos we've had five holidays cancelled from Coronavirus from now till September.

The familiarity Gaby has with travel is reflected through her excitement at describing certain aspects of air travel as well as her categorisation and comparison of 'summer' and 'snow' holidays. In addition to the cultural capital Gaby has gained from travelling, her revelation of the extent to which Covid-19 impacted her family's travel plans relates to the amount of economic capital her family had available to them. I spoke to Gaby in March 2020 so the five cancelled holidays will have originally been scheduled to take place during a six-month period. Gaby acknowledged that travel had become part of her lived experience as a result of her mum's passion for it. Gaby told me that she had been on 'loads' of holidays, to the extent that she could state and explain her preferred holiday. This led to a discussion about skiing, an activity which featured on both of her Padlets.

Skiing holidays incorporated two posts on her 'How I See Myself' Padlet and were also relevant to her 'How I See My Future' Padlet which featured a video clip from an Olympic skiing event. Gaby explained this post:

Better skiing, that's what I meant to show. I would love to be able to flip like that. I can only do a 360 at the moment. I see skiing as something I'll always do... I'm even thinking about a ski season if I take a gap year or let's say I'm a successful lawyer and I have enough money, I would love to buy a chalet in France or Switzerland and just go.

Gaby regarded skiing as part of her future and demonstrated adequate cultural capital to allow her to identify ways of realising this aspiration. Her inclusion of requiring 'enough money' indicates some awareness of the economic capital necessary in order to facilitate her aspiration but also references being a 'successful lawyer' as a potential means of facilitation. Gaby's assessment of her skiing capability of 'only' performing 360 degree turns indicates her skill level and also demonstrates the standard against which Gaby is measuring herself. Once again, Gaby displays her awareness of the measurement practices of a particular field (skiing), and she uses this awareness to set her own aspirations. There is a parallel between Gaby's

'real world' experience of skiing and Gaby the strategist; Gaby identifies an aspiration and has a strategy in place to achieve it.

Gaby's conceptualisation of the 'real world' drew upon lived experiences she had had herself, as well the types and amounts of capital she possessed which allowed her to understand and at times pre-empt experiences she had not yet had. As well as contributing to the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experiences beyond education, the analysis of this narrative has also demonstrated that Gaby's relationship with the concept of the 'real world' has parallels in other re-presentations of Gaby's lived experiences. In comparison to the 'bubble' of Hillside, Gaby's 'real world' was not bounded by geographical or temporal restrictions, however Gaby appeared to understand where (and when) the 'real world' was located. This understanding was demonstrated through the ways in which Gaby consciously and unconsciously deployed capitals she possessed. As a result, she was able to navigate her way through the 'real world' and in doing so recognise moments of alignment and mis-alignment between the 'real world' and other fields in which she operated.

#### Gaby, family and friends

The narrative of Gaby, family and friends explores Gaby's lived experiences of being a member of both her immediate and extended family as well as part of a friendship group. Gaby included posts concerning family and friends on her 'How I See Myself' Padlet (Appendix 10) and friends also featured on her 'How I See My Future' Padlet (Appendix 11). The construction and analysis of this narrative examines how Gaby positioned herself within her family and friendship groups as well as identifying how elements of this positioning link to a process of evaluation undertaken by Gaby. The starting point for the narrative is the 'family' post on Gaby's 'How I See Myself' Padlet.

Gaby compared the simplicity of the 'family' image on her Padlet to the reality of her own family:

I feel like my family looks like that from the outside, cos I have my younger brother and then Mum and [stepdad]. But my Dad's in Sweden, I still have contact with my Dad. He has a wife, so I have a step mum and so it is a bit mixed up but family to me is really important. However, sometimes my family are like, 'come on it's important to spend time together' and it's not really like quality family time [so she chooses not to participate]. But then I look back and I'm like 'oh, why did I do that? I should have spent more time with my family.' Which is annoying.



Gaby referred to her stepdad by his first name, retaining the title of 'Dad' for her biological father and she offered no further detail regarding the previous relationship between her mum and her biological father. Unlike the simplistic image on her Padlet, Gaby recognises the reality of her family is 'mixed up' but she does not dwell on this as a negative. Although she does not clarify how she measured the degree of 'quality' within her family time, it is evident that Gaby operated an evaluative process similar to that seen in the re-presentation of her lived experiences as a 'strategist' and she appears to regret occasions when such evaluation caused her to prioritise an alternative to her family. This regret is 'annoying' for Gaby; it has resulted in her wrongfully ascribing value and as a result losing out on something she perceives to be more valuable.

Gaby also shared some details on her extended family and in doing so made one of very few references to herself as an immigrant:

I moved here when I was five, I think? But I definitely do see myself as Polish, even though I didn't put it on [the Padlet]. And I'm the sort of person that when I have kids in the future, I want them to know Polish as well. I really like the culture and the massive family weddings we have there. My uncle and my cousins are here, but the rest are still in Poland. And my grandparents, I'm really close to my grandparents, and they live in Poland.

Despite not including it on either of her Padlets, Gaby claimed that being Polish was part of how she saw herself and also featured as part of her imagined future. I asked her why she had not included it:

I don't know... but it definitely should be there...I speak Polish, I have a GCSE in it and before my mum met my stepdad we spoke Polish at home but obviously he's English so it's unfair if we speak Polish now.

As an immigrant, Gaby identifies and values what she describes as 'culture' and also retains a relationship with extended family in Poland. She shared no detail regarding her own experience of moving from Poland to England, other than the change to the language spoken at home as a result of her mum's relationship with her stepdad. Gaby acknowledged how the linguistic capital she had in terms of speaking Polish had been transformed into the institutionalised cultural capital of a GCSE. Her sharing of this specific detail with me once again demonstrates Gaby's awareness of the value of specific forms of capital. She recognises that as far as the field of education is concerned, the GCSE qualification means that Gaby's

ability to speak Polish now has a particular, certifiable value which has facilitated its transfer across fields.

The narrative of Gaby as a member of both her immediate and extended family demonstrates the value she placed upon both of them. She did not problematise the complexity of her family nor her immigrant status. Instead, the narrative demonstrates how Gaby's use of evaluative practices extended into her lived experiences as both an immigrant and a family member. She used such practice to justify decisions regarding how she spent her free time and in evaluating how her embodied history as an immigrant had become a source of institutionalised cultural capital in the form of a GCSE. Although the degree to which Gaby knowingly centralised herself within such practice is not evident, the narrative does demonstrate that it was a practice she continued to employ in her lived experience beyond education. The narrative now widens to consider whether Gaby operated in a similar way as a member of a friendship group.

'Friendship' appeared as a post on both of Gaby's Padlets. She described her current friends as follows:

I love my friends so much. And I think that my friendship group right now, is the perfect friendship group for me... Honestly, I couldn't tell you the last time I argued with any of my friends...they're all so supportive and we never have any problems with each other.

The strength of Gaby's feelings towards her friends was also evident in that 'keep close with friends' was included on her 'How I See My Future' Padlet. Gaby demonstrated a positive but realistic attitude towards how this could potentially be achieved:

What I see in the future is hopefully my best friends will stay my best friends cos that's what happened to my Mum. I feel like it will spread out, the older we get. But even once a year it would be good to all meet each other again.

The prominence Gaby affords friendship in the future evidently draws upon her mum's rather than her own experience. However, it is notable that the value Gaby is allocating to friendship both in her current situation and in the future is in stark contrast to the view of friendship as an incidental bonus of attending school which was evident in the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a strategist. Gaby herself provided a form of explanation as to her differing views of the importance of friendship, using the concept of 'problematic' friendships:

I think the thing about my [current] friends being supportive and not problematic, that is compared to my past experiences. I've been in a friendship group before where there were four of us, all girls and we used to argue literally every single day and it was just so emotionally draining... I couldn't imagine myself going to an all-girls' school...Getting along with just girls is so much worse... And [Hillside being co-educational] is probably better for future life as well, cos you're never going to be surrounded by all girls...What's the point in me going home stressing over school and my friendships? I'd just rather cut myself from that.

Gaby acknowledges her previous 'problematic' experience with a former friendship group which she considers to have been 'emotionally draining'. It is noticeable that the 'problematic' friendship group were all girls in comparison to Gaby's current friendship group which she described as 'mixed'. Gaby regarded the future advantage of being in Hillside's co-educational environment was the preparation she considered it to give her, positioning a single sex school as an artificial environment. Attending Hillside meant that she had gained an experience not available at the single sex grammar schools within the locality. Not only did Gaby consider male friendship to be a valuable source of social capital, she also considered the experience of being educated alongside male students to provide her with cultural capital more relevant to the 'real world'. Gaby considers the value of her experience at Hillside as one which could be transferred across to alternative fields in the future. She contrasts this value with the toll of the emotional labour created by her previous friendship group and perceives it as a waste, a practice she undertook but which she evaluates as having brought her little reward. Gaby acknowledges the affirmative action she took to 'cut [her]self from that' as her preferred choice and as evident from the earlier quote, evaluates her current friendship group as 'perfect' in that it provides her with the valuable commodity of support, along with potentially transferrable social and cultural capital whilst not requiring the same degree of emotional labour as her previous group. Once again, Gaby's justifications are based around an evaluation of what her friendship group brings her, versus what she perceives herself as having to contribute.

The narrative of 'Gaby, family and friends' demonstrates that Gaby made use of evaluative practices within her relationships. Gaby appeared to be most aware of undertaking such practice when she considered herself to have made an incorrect evaluation, such as the 'problematic' friendships or losing an opportunity to spend time with her family. Whilst the process of evaluation has been made clear via analysis, attention must also be given to the values which shaped such evaluation. Earlier re-presentations have demonstrated how the

values of the field of education and consequently the field of power have shaped Gaby's habitus, aligning her values to those of the field. As these fields value self-reliance, the end result is that Gaby centralises herself within the evaluative practices she undertakes. Such centralisation of self, however, does not align as smoothly within Gaby's own experiences of being a member of a family or friendship group. This causes Gaby a degree of conflict:

What's really important to me is alone time. My parents hate this, but I prefer to be in my room watching a film than watching it with my parents. I'm the sort of person that likes to be in company but if I go out with my friends, I'm like 'ok, that is enough, I need to go home and be by myself now'. I dune, it's just I think alone time is really important.

As much as Gaby values being a friend or a family member, she also values being 'Gaby' during periods of 'alone time'. Her perception of such time as being 'really important' demonstrate that 'Gaby' is as inherent to this narrative as 'friends' and 'family' are. Therefore, this narrative contributes to the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experiences beyond education through its foregrounding of Gaby, which remains evident even within a narrative based on the theme of 'friends and family'.

Re-presenting Gaby's lived experiences beyond education has drawn upon two narratives: Gaby and the 'real' world and Gaby, family and friends. The inclusion of 'Gaby' within the title of each narrative was a deliberate choice. Not only do the narratives explore different aspects of Gaby's experiences but Gaby herself retains a central position in each of the narratives. This means that the evaluative practices which analysis of the narratives has demonstrated, are always undertaken by Gaby in relation to herself. Thus, the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experiences beyond education illustrates Gaby's awareness and activation of sources of capital valued by the field she is operating within, along with Gaby's perception of how certain types of capital (mis)align to certain fields. There have been several comparisons and cross-references made to other re-presentations throughout the construction of this one, demonstrating how Gaby's lived experiences beyond education relate to her lived experience within education. Gaby operates in a world beyond what she described as the 'bubble' of Hillside but likewise, the values within the field of education have been shown to have shaped her practice beyond education. Gaby herself constitutes the unifying element of this relationship.

## Bringing the re-presentations together

Constructing the three re-presentations of Gaby's lived experiences has revealed occasions of overlap and inter-twining between re-presentations. Such occasions can themselves be linked by Gaby's use of an analytical process which evaluated potential costs and benefits associated with subsequent practice. This process was evident across a range of scenarios within the re-presentations, including Gaby's decisions concerning application for a grammar school sixth form, her reasoning behind having a mixed-gender friendship group and her reflections on the relationship between her current life and what she conceptualised as the 'real world'. Gaby's use of an analytical process was reliant on her perceptions of how particular types of capital were related to particular fields. As highlighted in the re-presentation of Gaby's lived experience as a Hillside pupil, as Gaby gained more lived experience within the academically selective field, her awareness of the value of certain capitals became inculcated into her habitus, resulting in certain practices becoming dispositions which allowed her to move as a fish in water. The selection Gaby encountered in the academically selective system and in Hillside's practice of setting is one such example, leading on to her conceptualisation of 'better'. Gaby's knowledge of what constituted being 'better' went on to shape her actions and she therefore made use of strategic operations to gain what she perceived to be 'better' outcomes.

Gaby frequently drew upon her lived experience beyond education to qualify her use of analysis and evaluation, often drawing upon the cultural and economic capital she had available to her to justify deployment of certain strategic practices. In Bourdieusian terminology, she was aware of the game and its rules, making her an informed player. However, Gaby never once questioned her own analytical approach, in which she centralised herself within all of the evaluative practice she undertook, as both the actor of such practice as well as the beneficiary of any outcome it could bring. The individualisation and instrumentalism which are evident in Gaby's practice across all three re-presentations demonstrates how her practice within various social fields was ultimately related to the doxa of the neo-liberal field of power. This provides an under-lying root to the various sources of symbolic violence the analyses have found. Gaby's unquestioning acceptance of self-centralisation was a result of such practice being endorsed within the social fields she operated in and consequently became a rule Gaby was playing by whilst remaining unaware

of the game itself.

# Chapter 7: Poppy

After re-introducing Poppy, this chapter is structured according to the outline presented in the Poppy analysis Padlet (see Appendix 8). It therefore consists of three re-presentations of Poppy's lived experiences: the pupil at Hillside, the self-critic and the reconciler of contrasts. Similarly to Boris, time constraints meant that Poppy only completed one Padlet collage: 'How I See My Future' (see Appendix 12). Unless otherwise stated, all indented quotations are excerpts from responses Poppy made at interview.

## *Re-introduction*

Poppy was a year 13 female pupil at Hillside and had attended the school since the start of Year 7. She had moved from the Philippines to the UK at age 7. Poppy had accepted an unconditional offer to study at university.

## The Hillside Pupil

The re-presentation of Poppy's lived experience as a Hillside pupil consists of two narratives: her 11+ experience as a 'big thing' but 'not a big deal' and her concurrent acceptance and questioning of whether grammar schools are 'better'. The commonality between these two narratives is academic selection; something which is not only directly manifest in the first narrative concerning Poppy's experience of the 11+ but also as something which she relies upon when both questioning and accepting grammar schools as 'better' in the second narrative of this re-presentation.

### 11+ experience – a 'big thing' but 'not a big deal'

The narrative of Poppy's 11+ experience demonstrates and explores the ambivalence between her description of it as both a 'big thing' but also as 'not a big deal'. She described how her conceptualisation of the 11+ as a 'big thing' was influenced by her experience at primary school:

I remember they [primary school] made it like a big thing. Like the whole of primary school was leading up to the 11+...you know like here we're leading up to like GCSEs and possibly A Levels, it was like they were leading us to do the 11+. In year 6 some of our lessons were changed from typical lessons into the type of questions we'd get for the 11+ and they gave us booklets and then there'd be lessons when we'd just go through answers together, stuff like that... Then when I did mine, we went into a hall for it, so it was actually like proper ones.

Poppy's direct comparison between the 11+ and what she classes as 'proper' exams relies on her experiences of what she terms 'leading up'. She explains her perception through the examples of time and resources allocated specifically to 11+ test preparation at primary school, along with her experience of taking the 11+ in the exam-style setting of a hall. Poppy does not question the credentials associated with GCSE and A Levels, neither does she comment on school-based practice she has experienced which acts to support such credentialism. These are accepted as elements of the 'leading up' process. Instead, she uses her experience as a benchmark, against which she measures her 11+ experience. Her acknowledgement that this experience in many ways mimics her subsequent experience of practice related to high stakes, standardised tests results in her description of the 11+ as a 'big thing'. In addition, Poppy also references how this perception has been shaped via the actions of her primary school. This demonstrates how awareness of the value (in terms of institutionalised cultural capital) of testing has been inculcated into Poppy's habitus and consequently how school-based practices, such as lessons specifically focused on test preparation are conceptualised by Poppy as part of the 'leading up' process.

As Poppy's remembrance of the 11+ continued, she referred to her own and her family's reactions to her failure of it:

I was sad because obviously we were doing it in lessons and stuff and then I got a workbook for home given to me [from school] so I thought I was working really hard for it and then I didn't pass... but because my two older sisters, they didn't pass either, it was like, not a big deal... They [family] said it's fine and it just meant that I was going to go to the same school as my sisters, so it wasn't that big of a deal to them.

Poppy's juxtaposition of her family's 'not a big deal' reaction to her failure and the 'big thing' Poppy perceived herself to have worked 'really hard' for, creates an interesting contrast. The reassurance within the voice of her family equates Poppy's experience to that of her older sisters, acknowledging that this was not a new experience within Poppy's family and therefore not a 'big deal'. Poppy's 'sad' reaction to not passing stems from the attention 11+ preparation was receiving at her primary school which extended to them providing Poppy with resources to further extend her preparation. Poppy's commitment ('working really hard') to 11+ preparation resulted from the practice she experienced from her primary school which perpetuated the 11+ as a source of institutionalised cultural capital. The degree to which this



was inculcated into Poppy's habitus was made evident when she described the 11+ as an appropriate sorting mechanism:

I think the whole difference between grammar schools and combined schools is based on education really, like the level of academia you're able to work at so I feel like you do need some sort of test to see if you should go to a grammar school...The way it [the 11+ test] asks and phrases questions and stuff, it's not like your typical exam questions... you have to think of it in a certain way and I guess that's why they can maybe differentiate between people who might be able to handle grammar school work compared to not.

Poppy's experience of both the 11+ test and what she terms as 'typical' exams allow her to draw a distinction between the two. She demonstrates an understanding of the 'certain way' of answering 11+ questions correctly and equates knowledge of this 'certain way' with what she perceives as academic ability. Therefore, Poppy demonstrates how she understands the 11+ test to justify academic selection via allocation of individuals into groups who (to use Poppy's description) can or cannot 'handle grammar schoolwork'; work she perceives to be in some way different. This has been inculcated into Poppy's habitus to the extent that she considers it to demonstrate who 'should go to a grammar school' and consequently who should attend what she interestingly terms as 'combined schools'. She returned to the should/should not idea in the following reflection:

At the time I feel like [passing the 11+] would have made me feel smarter, at least initially. But feeling confidence in how clever you are and stuff, I feel like that changes throughout... like going to a grammar school well done, but if I'm keeping up then I'm meant to be there, if I'm not keeping up then maybe that was just a one off (laugh) and it was a fluke that I passed the 11+.

Poppy reflexively identifies a limitation of the 11+, recognising that although a pass result would have made her 'feel smarter', the durability of such inculcation has been weakened through her perception that this can 'change'. The voice in the narrative switches to position Poppy as someone who passed the 11+ and from this perspective, Poppy demonstrates her awareness that a 'fluke' could result in an erroneous placement. However, this criticism remains centred on herself and whether she is 'meant to be there' rather than recognising the system as being susceptible to error and manipulation. Thus, even when critiquing its potential flaws, Poppy remains convinced about academic selection. The degree to which it is inculcated into her habitus is evident in her portrayal of herself of passing by a 'fluke' without giving consideration to the possibility that a 'fluke' could have been the reason for her failure.

She also acknowledges 'keeping up' at the grammar school as the means by which academic selection continues, allowing her to distinguish between those who are 'meant to be there' and those for whom passing the 11+ was a 'fluke'.

The ambivalence within the narrative of Poppy's 11+ experience relates to her experience of it. Despite reassurances from her parents of it being 'not a big deal', Poppy's experiences at primary school inculcated her awareness of the 11+ as a 'big thing'. In addition, Poppy continued to experience similar practices as her lived experience in education continued, which served to confirm academic selection as a continually operating process. The degree to which academic selection was inculcated into Poppy's habitus caused her to regard her failure of the 11+ to mean that she did not belong at a grammar school. Therefore, by accepting academic selection as the 'way things are' and self-excluding via an attribution of herself as lacking, she in turn contributes to the symbolic violence which sustains the academically selective system.

### Grammar schools are 'better'?

This narrative also explores ambivalence, this time in relation to Poppy's opinion of grammar schools. The narrative begins by exploring how Poppy conceptualised 'better' before moving on to how she reflexively questioned aspects of her own lived experience within the academically selective system that she perceived to counter such conceptualisation.

Poppy made the following comparison between her experience at Hillside and her friends' experience at grammar school:

Obviously, the grammar schools are known for doing academically better...everyone there has already started off at a higher level...my friends, they talk about how it's really embarrassing when you don't do well, but here, you kind of just laugh it off, get a bit upset but you don't have pressure from your friends to make sure you keep up and everything. I think it's down to like the work ethic. I just always remember my friends making sure that they had specific time to do work every day after school...Obviously the teachers here tell us 'make sure you do this amount of hours', but I've never actually seen it be instructed so strictly here compared to [name of grammar school].

Poppy's conceptualisation of what makes grammar schools 'better' begins with the 'obvious' fact of grammar school reputation, highlighting the previous attainment of grammar school

pupils as a reason for them 'doing academically better'. Her focus remains on grammar schools *doing* rather than *being* better as her attention turns to what she describes as the 'work ethic' of the grammar schools. Poppy contrasts how the two different sub-fields of Hillside and the grammar school her friends attend appear to inculcate different dispositions towards school work. Poppy identifies teacher expectations as well as peer surveillance as the means of such inculcation. Whilst Poppy acknowledges teachers at Hillside as providing expectations regarding time spent independently on school work, she qualifies this as not being 'instructed so strictly' in comparison to the grammar school. In addition, whilst Poppy can 'laugh off' poor results with her Hillside peers, Poppy perceives her grammar school friends to be under peer pressure to avoid instances of poor results. Thus, Poppy's conceptualisation of 'better' draws upon a process in which the grammar school utilises teacher expectations and peer surveillance to inculcate certain dispositions. Poppy's awareness of this process of inculcation results in her identification of it as something which grammar schools 'do' which ultimately results in higher attainment for pupils. This 'work ethic' is used by Poppy to distinguish her own experience from that of her grammar school friends and also to explain the grammar school's reputation of 'doing better'.

Having explored Poppy's conceptualisation of 'better' in terms of what grammar schools do, the narrative continues with the mixed feelings about 'better' grammar schools which Poppy displayed. She justified their 'better' positioning as follows:

I think the idea of being able to separate kids who you could push to do greater things, I think the idea of separating them out and being able to have the facilities to be able to push them to become better, I think that idea's good.

The voice within this justification positions the grammar school pupils as 'them', a group who are removed and provided with 'facilities' to 'become better'. Thus, academic selection results in symbolic violence which is not only evident in Poppy's acceptance and misrecognition of academic selection as a 'good' idea but was also evident in Poppy's recognition of how not being one of 'them' had resulted in her not receiving similar opportunities:

I just feel like they [grammar school pupils] go on like more trips and stuff...at this school they said that we're going to be doing Duke of Edinburgh at the beginning of year 12 and we never actually got to do that but then all of my friends that went to grammar school they've all done it, all of them.

If I decided I want to join a club, like a netball club, most of [the club members] would probably be grammar schoolgirls and I feel like it'd be embarrassing for me to join them cos they do all this extra stuff which means their skill level compared to mine would be so much better.

Poppy demonstrates an awareness of what she perceives herself to have missed out on. She uses the specific example of the Duke of Edinburgh Award (a participatory award scheme for young people aged 14-24, see [www.dofe.org](http://www.dofe.org) ) to illustrate an opportunity provided at grammar school, but not at Hillside. In addition, she also identifies how her capabilities at sport are 'embarrassing' in comparison to those of grammar school pupils owing to the 'extra stuff' they have available. Therefore, Poppy is able to articulate how she considers herself to have been disadvantaged within the field of academically selective education, which she perceives to offer more opportunities to increase cultural capital to those who are positioned more advantageously in the field as a result of attending a grammar school. She identified this to result in the following consequence:

It makes people turn out differently, and I can't tell if it's a good or a bad thing because we all have similar situations, we all live in the same area but why is it that they have different opportunities than people who don't pass their 11+?

Poppy's use of 'we' and 'they' demonstrates her recognition of the inequity within the academically selective system and the consequence of 'turn[ing] out differently' emphasises her perception of how the system can impact upon the futures of the pupils within it. When acknowledging the inequity evident in a system that makes 'different opportunities' available, Poppy remains in a state where she 'can't tell if it's a good or bad thing' despite not articulating the benefits she feels she has gained from it. The degree to which the values of the academically selective field have been inculcated into Poppy's habitus via academic selection means that she is aware of its inequitable consequences, but she accepts the perpetuation of such inequity as an inevitable consequence of the system's continuation. In contrast, she reflexively identified an aspect of her own lived experience which had caused her to consider an alternative opinion of the academically selective system:

I just think there's like a stigma around it, people base your intelligence and things on whether you went to a grammar school or not...Some schools are actually better but I don't think it should be made that much of a deal. Cos the school you go to doesn't define who you are. I know some people that went to grammar school, and they were struggling a lot, they didn't really do that well but if people find out they went to a

grammar school then that's it, they think they're doing really good. It's like if people find out that you go to a Russell Group uni, compared to a non-Russell Group, they're like 'oh wow, congrats'... The way I see it is that even though I went to this school, my grades say I'm smart...But even if you did get good grades and you went here, it was more of a 'oh wow, you got that and you went to that school?' It's kind of like people expect you to not get those grades. They don't say 'Oh, you're not that clever' but just them saying they didn't expect that from you because you didn't go to a grammar school is still the same mindset. Part of me is like, 'they just complimented me, they just said that I'm smarter than they thought I was' but at the same time I'm like 'how not smart did you think I was if you were surprised that I got these good grades?'

Whilst Poppy appears to unquestionably accept that 'some schools are actually better' her conceptualisation of 'better' does not extend to it being applied to the individual pupils of such schools on the basis of presumption. As she succinctly argues 'the school you go to doesn't define who you are'. She continues by explaining how such presumptions operate, using examples from both the academically selective field and also the field of higher education. Her awareness of the value in terms of cultural capital that grammar school or Russell Group university reputations hold indicates her knowledge of the rules of the game and how these rules operate within the field of education and wider social fields. She acknowledges the institutionalised cultural capital she holds in the form of 'good' GCSE grades but then goes on to highlight how she perceives the value of such capital to be somewhat negated within the field of academically selective education due to the manner in which the field positions Hillside in comparison to the grammar schools. She articulates the confirmatory role she perceives her grades to hold; 'my grades say I'm smart', once again demonstrating how measurement in terms of academic attainment is an indicator of being 'better' that can be applied at both an individual (pupil) and institutional (school) level. However, she also highlights the inequity she faces by not conforming to expectations. The institutionalised cultural capital Poppy holds is misaligned with her position as a Hillside pupil within the field of academically selective education. This misalignment leads to the questioning Poppy talks about experiencing which serves to further emphasise the inequity Poppy perceives as a result of this misalignment.

The ambivalence within the narrative 'grammar schools are 'better'?' takes Poppy's conceptualisation of 'better' as a starting point. For Poppy, being 'better' is signified through attainment, which within the field of education is measured through results, particularly the high stakes, standardised testing of GCSE and A Levels. This conceptualisation has its origins

far beyond the field of academically selective education and can be regarded as one way in which neo-liberal influences (measurement and competition) stemming from the field of power have filtered down to an individual who is herself operating within a field that has its own distinctive value systems. Poppy is able to identify how her conceptualisation of 'better' works in relation to the field of academically selective education, which utilises academic selection to continually reinforce the grammar school reputation. Further, she also acknowledges how, as a Hillside pupil, she does not encounter the same inculcation of dispositions within her habitus as she notices in her friends who attend grammar school. Poppy labels this as a 'work ethic' attributable to attendance at a grammar school and her understanding of how 'work ethic' operates in relation to grammar school reputation and being 'better' demonstrates how the symbolic violence within the field of academically selective education is reproduced. Poppy articulates how academic selection creates a clear group of 'others' which she is excluded from and which she self-excludes from, despite her possession of institutionalised cultural capital (in the form of GCSE results) which equates her with the 'other' group. One of Poppy's justifications for self-exclusion is her perception of the continued academic success being a result of the dispositional attitude to hard work held by the 'others'. She therefore supports her self-exclusion using meritocratic reasoning; the 'work ethic' of the 'others' justifies their positioning within the field.

Poppy is aware that as an individual with what she perceives to be 'good' results obtained from Hillside, she in some way calls this meritocratic reasoning into question. However, she also recognises, as a result of her lived experience, that her attainment alone is not enough to dispel the stigma of being a Hillside pupil. In fact, such is the force of academic selection, she finds herself to be the source of questioning in relation to her misalignment within the academically selective field. As a Hillside pupil, Poppy is frustrated by what she perceives as unfair assumptions of her ability in relation to the school she attends and also by the unlevel playing field of the academically selective system. The system appears to her to operate inequitably in the provision of opportunity and, in designating Poppy to a position of misalignment, she considers the institutionalised cultural capital she holds to be in some way de-valued. Yet despite all of this, Poppy remains ambivalent about the academically selective system. The depth to which academic selection has inculcated these beliefs within her habitus

means she misrecognises and accepts the consequential symbolic violence as the way things are and therefore contributes to its continuation.

The re-presentation of Poppy's lived experience as a Hillside pupil has demonstrated how academic selection has shaped Poppy's habitus and how such shaping extends beyond the field of academically selective education, relying on the neo-liberal valuation of measurable attainment and meritocracy inherent within the field of power. The re-presentation examined various ways in which Poppy's lived experience has encountered academic selection. These included practices she first encountered at primary school which emphasised the credentialism and institutionalised cultural capital of the 11+; practices which Poppy became increasingly familiar with as her experience of education continued. In addition to the examples she shared regarding her perceptions of how academic selection was operationalised, the re-presentation also demonstrates the consequent effect of academic selection on Poppy. She is excluded from the successful group of 'others' and this is inculcated to the degree that despite her acknowledgement of the potential for 'flukes', she self-excludes from those who were 'meant to be' grammar school pupils. She relies on the concept of meritocracy to justify her self-exclusion. Her friends that attend grammar school are not only 'doing better' because of higher starting points but continue to 'do better' as a result of what she describes as the 'work ethic' of grammar school. Poppy articulates how meritocracy operates in relation to the concept of 'better', meaning that Poppy perceives her grammar school friends to be 'doing better' because they are working harder.

Poppy identifies the symbolic violence resulting from academic selection. This is evident in her examples of what she perceived as inequity within the system as well as the awareness she had of being mis-aligned as a consequence of the institutionalised cultural capital she held in the form of her GCSE results. However, as a victim of symbolic violence, Poppy the Hillside pupil also perpetuates it. Despite her awareness of various layers of inequity within the system she accepts such inequity as an unavoidable consequence of the system.

### The self-critic

Poppy made frequent, critical comments about herself in every conversation we had together and the re-presentation of her lived experience as a self-critic initially stemmed from this plethora of remarks. However, further analysis allowed me to construct two narratives which

bring this re-presentation together and which focus on how Poppy's self-criticisms were shaped via her awareness of the fields she was operating within. Both narratives examine how Poppy formed the conceptualisations within the narrative and how she then deployed such conceptualisations in the process of self-criticism. The re-presentation begins by presenting the narrative 'the right kind of 'smart'' before moving to the second narrative of 'being independent'.

### The right kind of 'smart'

This narrative explores how Poppy constructed the concept of being 'smart' and how she used this conceptualisation to consider and critique the degree to which she perceived herself to be 'smart'. Both the construction and employment of the concept of 'smart' were addressed by Poppy in this reflection:

I wouldn't consider myself like very, very, smart but I would consider myself above average. Like my GCSE grades aren't outstanding, but they're not too shabby... My friends think I'm smarter than I actually am though. I was always in like set 1 for Maths, English and Science, I always somehow managed to make my way into the top one. And then if they ended up in the same class as me cos it wasn't a subject with sets, they'd hear what my answers are and when they needed help for things, they'd ask me...I have good knowledge of things, like there's a load of information that I know that's just really useless for me but I still know it... I pick things up quickly, so in lessons I get it quicker than other people so they would consider that smart... so I would just count that as naturally being able to pick things up. But once my lesson's finished it kind of just goes out the window. Sometimes I remember it but other than that I don't really practice it enough, for it to stick in my head and to do really well in exams. I just don't really put it to good use. So, if I ever do bad in something or I don't get certain grades for a subject it's to do with that laziness. I feel like I could be doing a lot better now if I was really trying.

In a similar manner to Poppy's conceptualisation of 'better' in the previous narrative, she initially uses her GCSE grades as a measurement tool to demonstrate how 'smart' she is. Once again, her awareness of their value as a type of institutionalised cultural capital is evident in how she equates their value with her 'above average' position within the field of education. However, she immediately counters this with her perception of how an appearance of being 'smart' may prove inaccurate. For Poppy, being in the top set was something she 'somehow managed' rather than deserved, de-valuing any cultural capital she may potentially have gained within the field of Hillside. She goes on to explain the reasoning behind this de-valuation when she describes herself as 'just...naturally being able to pick things up'. Her



failure to employ strategies such as further practice and revision cause Poppy to consider herself as not maximising opportunity for further success. Poppy's conceptualisation of being 'smart' therefore incorporates recognition of how the field of education has shaped her dispositional attitude towards schoolwork. She identifies a causal relationship between what she perceives as 'laziness' and occurrences such as 'do[ing] bad in something'. For Poppy, being 'smart' extends into dispositions which facilitate academic success; surface level 'knowledge' has to be 'put to good use'. Her conceptualisation demonstrates the degree to which her habitus has been shaped by the field of education's doxa of meritocracy and her awareness of this causes her to be critical of any cultural capital she has gained (or could potentially gain) without employing the requisite 'hard work'. A 'smart' individual therefore not only possesses cultural capital in its institutionalised form but has also obtained such capital via practices which are themselves valued. Poppy's conceptualisation of 'smart' demonstrates the inter-relationship between capital and habitus in that dispositional practices not only secure cultural capital but in doing so become sources of cultural capital within themselves.

The inter-relationship between habitus and capital within Poppy's conceptualisation of 'smart' is further delineated in relation to a post on her 'How I See My Future' Padlet (Appendix 12). Poppy included an image which she labelled 'late night/last minute studying' and explained this as follows:

Having my laptop out and having lots of books out that's quite me actually, just on a table or desk not the bed. I would consider myself a night owl and I've always done last minute studying which is never really good, but I like doing things like that. And at uni that's probably how it's gonna end up. Maybe my work ethic will change. Maybe it will make it better or maybe it will make it worse...I want to be doing well, but at uni... I don't really know what that means... because I've been in school for like how many years now? Every year the grade boundaries might be different, the criteria to get things might be different but at the end of the day it's still within the same structure. With uni, it's like starting school over again but this time I don't know the structure, so I don't know how to work my way around things. It makes me feel really dumb, but I guess I've just got to try and work it out.

Poppy uses the image on her Padlet wall to demonstrate what she considers the practice of studying to look like and notes the similarities and differences with her own approach. She acknowledges that her preference of late nights and 'last minute' studying is 'never really good' and in doing so articulates an awareness of the 'right' and 'wrong' way to carry out the

practice of study. Poppy identifies her adherence to her preferred method as being negative and also projects this preference into her future life at university. She makes another use of the concept of 'work ethic' and once again makes an association between the institution, rather than the individual. This perception identifies the capacity of a social field to shape dispositional practices and how this subsequently leads to the operation of such practice becoming a source of cultural capital in itself. Part of being 'smart' is therefore related to having the requisite 'work ethic'. Not only does a 'smart' person work in ways most valued within the field, but the very act of working in such ways generates a source of cultural capital which positions the individual advantageously, providing them with a means of recognising how their dispositions align with the doxa of the field. For Poppy, being 'smart' incorporates knowledge of both the game at play within the field and the rules by which such a game is played. However, as much as Poppy acknowledges her understanding of how such a relationship operates within the field of Hillside, she also identifies that she is about to enter a field which is new to her; one in which she does not yet have an understanding of the game being played, let alone its rules. She articulates this using the concept of 'doing well', recognising how her unfamiliarity leaves her unable to operationalise this concept within the field of university. Not only does she 'not really know what that means', she consequently does not understand the practice expected of her to achieve such an outcome. She identifies a potential misalignment between her habitus and the field of university; immediately evoking the 'fish out of water' image. The 'dumb' feelings Poppy describes are far removed from being 'smart'.

The narrative of the 'right kind of smart' therefore contributes to the re-presentation of Poppy the self-critic in two ways. Firstly, it demonstrates how the field of education has shaped Poppy's habitus, leading to her conceptualisation of 'smart' as involving certain types of behaviours and dispositions. Within this conceptualisation lies recognition of the value that enacting such behaviours can bring. This value becomes manifest not only in the institutionalised cultural capital of exam results but also through the knowledge of how to behave as a 'smart' person, therefore becoming a form of cultural capital in itself. To align herself with the meritocratic doxa of the field, Poppy perceives educational success to be most deserved by those who 'work hard'. Poppy is therefore able to critique her behaviour in relation to schoolwork using her concept of 'smart'. She does not always behave as a 'smart'

person therefore she does not always consider herself to be a 'smart' person. However, the narrative of the 'right kind of smart' also illustrates Poppy's awareness of the limitations within her conceptualisation of 'smart'. She identifies that her conceptualisation has been shaped within the field of Hillside and remains uncertain as to how well such a conceptualisation will transfer into the field of university. For Poppy, a contributing factor to being the 'right kind of smart' is therefore linked to knowledge of the rules of the game. Poppy is critical of herself for not yet knowing what being 'smart' at university entails, but her reflexive questioning of the concept illustrates a source of cultural capital in that she is able to articulate what she does not know. Although she considers not knowing as a disadvantage, Poppy also identifies that part of being 'smart' necessitates rectifying this, using 'smart' behaviours with which she is already familiar.

### Being independent

The narrative of being independent begins by exploring a particular contrast I noted whilst observing Poppy in lessons and continues by drawing upon other contrasting elements in Poppy's attitude towards, and deployment of, independence. The construction of the narrative 'being independent' stems from her behaviour in a chemistry lesson, which was described as follows in my field notes:

Poppy is making notes from her laptop rather than from the teacher's presentation. Looks like she is working independently rather than being in a lesson...Poppy carries on working throughout the discussion taking place amongst the rest of the class. Could she have done this lesson by herself?

Conversely, in her maths lesson Poppy entered into several extended discussions with the teacher and worked collaboratively with the teacher and other pupils to solve an equation. Poppy made the following analysis of my observations of her behaviour in lessons:

When it comes to maths, the textbook can only do so much. It can show you the steps, but it doesn't tell you the reason behind it. So for me, I feel like I really have to understand what Miss [maths teacher] is saying, I really have to listen cos otherwise I can do the calculation but if I don't know the reason behind it, I won't be able to do it on my own...Whereas in chemistry, I was going from the beginning and moving forward but Miss [chemistry teacher] was moving from one side to the other. So, when I go and do my own notes, I don't actually know what lesson that was in. So I just try and do my own. [The textbook] tells you the meaning, it tells you what it is, you just learn it and then you can answer the questions on it by yourself.

Poppy's analysis of the contrast in her behaviour compares the value (in terms of understanding) she perceives herself to gain from her teacher and her textbook. The narrative of being independent is evident within her ultimate aim across both subjects; being able to 'do it on my own' and 'by yourself'. However, her approach to achieving this aim differs. In maths, Poppy acknowledges her teacher as a source of expertise which has to be utilised alongside the textbook to achieve independence. In chemistry, Poppy evaluates her own approach as more logical than that of the teacher and perceives the textbook as providing the requisite material she requires to be independent. Poppy's apparent valuing of independence stems from the value placed upon it within the field of education. She is aware that, ultimately, her independent performance in exams will result in potential gains in institutionalised cultural capital. Her knowledge of the rules of the game therefore determines her approach to the game itself, in the form of deliberate and strategic deployment of certain behaviours. Over and above the institutionalised cultural capital that Poppy perceives can be gained from being independent, her analysis of her behaviour in lessons also demonstrates that independence itself is unquestionably accepted as a positive trait. To interrogate the degree to which valuing independence as a source of cultural capital in itself has been inculcated into Poppy's habitus, the narrative of 'being independent' moves to consider additional stories Poppy shared in relation to independence.

Independence appeared as a post on Poppy's 'How I See My Future' Padlet (Appendix 12) and she explained the image she used within the post which makes reference to 'The Ultimate Household Chore List':

At the moment it's my responsibility at home to get the dishes in the sink and make sure the chores are done and the house isn't much of a mess and then after that I have to find the energy to do schoolwork. I can't do it the other way round, cos if I do then by the time my siblings and my mum come home, they're going to have to do it because I haven't done it...Right now, I complain about doing the dishes or folding the clothes but ultimately when I move out in a few months everything is down to me, so everything's my responsibility...I consider myself independent now but being independent whilst living with my mum, living with my family, going to school, is different to being independent living alone and going to uni. I think I've always been one of those people who like independence. I like feeling I'm the one in charge and I'm doing it for myself in the real world. But on the other hand, doing everything for myself that's really scary. Cos I've never really done that before.

Somewhat ironically, Poppy makes an association between independence and the responsibilities she holds at home which themselves limit the independence she has over her free time. Her chores have to be completed before she begins schoolwork and Poppy acknowledges the challenge in terms of 'find[ing] the energy' that this balancing creates. However, she also recognises what she has gained from this experience in that it has increased her awareness of what she perceives as the reality of living independently. She articulates what she considers as degrees of independence, identifying how these differ in the 'real world' compared to her current social spaces. She goes on to acknowledge that her experiences of independence provide an understanding of how the 'real world' operates and are therefore a source of cultural capital whose value can be transferred into another social field. Poppy's description of 'liking' independence further suggests an alignment between Poppy's habitus and the fields in which she operates. This alignment is a direct result of the inculcation of the 'real world' valuing of independence, which can be traced back to the field of power's neoliberal valuing of self (rather than state) reliance. Poppy is aware of the cultural capital she possesses in terms of her experience of independence and also demonstrates how holding such capital increases her awareness of the rules of the game, providing her with a 'scary' awareness of what she does not yet have experience of. 'Being independent' is therefore something Poppy recognises and values within her lived experience whilst simultaneously remaining critical of the degree of independence she perceives herself to hold.

The final aspect of the 'being independent' narrative derives from Poppy's references to getting older and social activities. She explored these when she talked further about independence; explaining her inclusion of two other posts on her 'How I See My Future' Padlet (Appendix 12). She moved from analysing the image she included in the '19<sup>th</sup> birthday' post to her inclusion of the 'nights out' post in the following story:

[Referring to the image of a woman in the '19<sup>th</sup> birthday' post] She doesn't look particularly happy, so maybe getting older is not a happy thing? Cos you always hear young people wanting to be older, but I think once people are actually older, they don't really have the same mindset as that...Sometimes I feel like I'm living like I'm not my age. I don't act my age and I act older. It's good to keep in mind that I am 18 and I'm still young and it's always good to have fun. That's why I've included 'nights out' as part of my future...At the moment, I don't really go out as much as everyone else...most of my friends have this carefree attitude but sometimes I just prefer to be

at home, making sure things get done. I work in this milkshake place in town...I like that my job keeps me busy, so that I'm putting my time to good use, and I think you could say the same about doing chores to be honest. I like knowing that I earn my own money but when it comes to getting paid, most of my pay goes towards things I will need for school or need at home that my friends don't have to pay for, cos their parents do. So, most of their money just goes on nights out and things.

Poppy uses concept of 'acting my age' to criticise what she perceives as negative aspects associated with the independence she holds. She acknowledges that being independent provides opportunities for increased social freedom in the form of 'nights out' in addition to responsibilities such as paid employment. She compares her experience of being independent to that of her friends, highlighting their 'carefree attitude' and her own focus on ensuring 'things get done'. In making this comparison, she acknowledges the conflict between productivity and liberty within her conceptualisation of being independent. She uses her lack of economic capital to explain why she perceives this conflict to more frequently fall in favour of productivity. Having to use the economic capital she gains from being independent (in the form of paid employment) on items of necessity results in her not having adequate amounts of economic capital remaining to experience what she perceives as the social freedom aspect of independence. Whilst Poppy's valuing of 'putting my time to good use' and 'earn[ing] my own money' again demonstrate the alignment between her habitus and neo liberal values pertaining from the field of power, this alignment subsequently results in a misalignment between Poppy's habitus and her immediate social field, causing her to miss out on opportunities to 'have fun' and potentially enhance her social capital. She recognises an association between ageing and being independent and uses this to identify how her own experience of ageing has provided her with an experience of being independent that she considers as lacking in certain aspects.

The narrative of 'being independent' began by exploring how Poppy analysed her contrasting behaviours within maths and chemistry lessons using the concept of independence. She was able to articulate how and why she employed certain practices in relation to their potential to increase her capability to operate independently. This led to the consideration of the value placed upon independence within the field of education, initially suggesting the most obvious example of exam results as a type of institutionalised cultural capital which rely on an individual operating independently or as Poppy puts it 'doing it by myself'. However, Poppy's

apparent valuing of independence as a source of cultural capital in itself, prompted further development of the 'being independent' narrative. Poppy's description of 'doing everything for myself' allowed her to anticipate how independence might function in the 'real world'. This caused her to acknowledge the cultural capital she already possessed in terms of her experience of independence, which she believed herself to have obtained from the responsibilities for domestic work she held within her family. Poppy's recognition that her cultural capital (in terms of independence) could be transferred to other social spaces, along with her identification that she may not yet hold an adequate supply of such cultural capital, suggested the alignment between Poppy's habitus and the neoliberal valuation of self-reliance stemming from the field of power. This alignment was also evident when the narrative drew upon Poppy's lived experience of ageing and paid employment. In addition, these particular aspects of Poppy's lived experience also demonstrated her reflexive questioning of such alignment, which she perceived to result in a misalignment within the social field of her friendship group. Poppy's acknowledgement of the 'fun' aspect of independence illustrated another facet to her conceptualisation, one which she considered herself to be lacking. She identified that although independence brought with it increased economic capital as a result of paid employment, this economic capital then had to be utilised to fulfil practical needs rather than used as a means to gain additional (and 'fun') independence. For Poppy, 'being independent' equated to behaviours and dispositions which were inculcated within her habitus to the extent that they were beyond question but did remain subject to some criticism.

The narratives of 'the right kind of smart' and 'being independent' share commonalities which result in their contribution to the re-presentation of Poppy the self-critic. Exploring both of these narratives has revealed how Poppy used her conceptualisations of both 'smartness' and 'independence' to facilitate self-criticism, providing her with a means to evaluate how 'smart' she was or the degree to which she was 'independent'. Whilst the stories and reflections Poppy shared with me require relatively little analysis to demonstrate her self-criticism, the analysis of the narratives which create the re-presentation of Poppy the self-critic demonstrates the sources of her conceptualisations. Thus, we are able to see how Poppy's conceptualisation of 'smart' was related to the value bestowed upon it within the field of

education; value which was enforced via testing and promotion of certain behaviours. Part of being the 'right kind of smart' meant acting in a way which aligned with the meritocratic doxa of the field of education; in other words, working hard to achieve good results and subsequently re-confirm cultural capital. Poppy was aware of how the rules of this particular game operated and to a degree the values of the field of education were inculcated within her habitus inasmuch as she recognised what the 'right kind of smart' meant. Conversely, Poppy also recognised moments of misalignment, manifest in behaviour she perceived as not equating to the 'right kind of smart'. It is this recognition that not only contributes to the re-presentation of Poppy the self-critic, but also demonstrates how the process of self-criticism relates to symbolic violence via misrecognition and acceptance of meritocratic justification.

Similarly, the narrative of 'being independent' revealed how Poppy's conceptualisation of independence related to the values of a particular field, in this instance the neoliberal valuation of self-reliance. To this extent, the narrative of 'being independent' moved from Poppy's recognition of how independence was a behaviour valued within the field of education (directly assessed and potentially rewarded with institutionalised cultural capital) to her acknowledgement of being independent as a source of cultural capital in itself which was transferable across fields. Once again Poppy identified a misalignment between her habitus and a field she operated within but in this instance the mis-alignment existed as a consequential effect of the degree to which her habitus aligned with the valuation of independence. Poppy recognised that the degree to which certain aspects of independence (the focus on productivity) were inculcated within her habitus caused her to behave differently to her friends. She identified economic necessity (having to pay for items independently whilst her friends relied on parental support) as causing her to deploy certain independent behaviours whilst neglecting others. Poppy once again used this misalignment as a source of self-criticism, recognising that the limitations to her own independence were attributable to the depth to which behaviours pertaining to 'being independent' were inculcated within her habitus.

Re-presenting Poppy's lived experience as a self-critic therefore demonstrates the degree to which her self-criticisms were made using concepts such as 'smart' and 'independent' which she created as a result of the doxa within the fields in which she practiced. Using them as a means of criticism further consolidates them and thus facilitates the continuation of symbolic



violence. The narratives have demonstrated how Poppy the self-critic articulated examples which positioned her as being in a deficit, either in relation to not being the 'right kind of smart' or by demonstrating a mis-aligned form of independence. The symbolic violence lies in the fact that Poppy's self-criticism always lay with herself as being responsible for rectifying any deficit, thereby sustaining the continuation of the symbolic violence itself.

## The reconciler of contrasts

The re-presentation of Poppy's lived experience as a reconciler of contrasts is constructed using two narratives: the contrast between playing it safe and taking a chance and the contrast between isolation and belonging. Each narrative uses Poppy's stories as a means of conceptualising and then analysing how she encountered such experiences and the means by which she attempted to reconcile the contrast. The depiction of Poppy as a 'reconciler' is therefore inherently linked to what the analysis of the narratives reveals, in that it seeks to re-present the conciliatory nature of Poppy's lived experiences, emerging as a theme which brings the narratives together to create this re-presentation. I begin by exploring the narrative of 'playing it safe and taking a chance'.

### Playing it safe and taking a chance

This narrative is constructed from three stories Poppy shared. The analysis of these stories provides insight into how 'playing it safe' and 'taking a chance' were evident within the stories Poppy shared and how viewing these concepts through a Bourdieusian lens creates a narrative that relates to how Poppy explained certain decisions; therefore reconciling the contrast between the two. The first story was one which Poppy told me in relation to her fondness for sport but her lack of participation in any sport-related activity or club which took place beyond Hillside:

I've never really joined a club outside of school. It's always been here [Hillside] during lunchtime. I just feel like it's a bit embarrassing at my age, like a pride thing. You don't wanna get shown up by younger people who've been training for hours every day. I remember I played badminton against girls from the year below in [name of grammar school] and they beat me! But when I go to uni it's like a fresh start. So, I'd like to join their clubs as well and be part of a sports team...Not being able to join a team outside of school, that's had an impact. So going to uni will help me join things.

Poppy demonstrates her awareness of certain 'rules of the game' which cause her to self-

exclude from sports clubs external to Hillside based on what she describes as a 'pride thing'. She identifies that enhanced skills which result from consistent training appear to be more apparent in grammar school pupils, causing her to judge herself as lacking in comparison and therefore reluctant to subject herself to further risk of being 'shown up'. She therefore plays it safe, self-excludes from external clubs and remains in clubs run within Hillside, despite recognising the 'impact' this has had. Her repetition of 'join' in relation to university sports clubs suggests that Poppy identifies not belonging to external sports clubs as a disadvantage which the 'fresh start' at university could help to remedy. She appears to consider university sports clubs to facilitate participatory opportunities which are less segregated in terms of previous experience and therefore more equitable. She does not identify them as a space which she has to self-exclude from and is therefore willing to take up the chance of joining.

Taking a chance is also evident in the second story, in which Poppy told me about her decision to study marine biology at university. The story was prompted by her inclusion of 'marine biology' on her 'How I See My Future' Padlet (see Appendix 12):

I watched these two documentaries. One was about a killer whale that's being held captive and the other was about the dolphin killing season in Japan and they both really upset me. I did my GCSE English presentation on it, and I found out that you can study marine animals as a course at uni so that's when I decided it was what I wanted to do... You know when you do your application to uni and people are like 'ever since I was three I've wanted to become an astronaut', that kind of thing? Well it was nice to be truthful and say I only really started thinking about this three years ago... My oldest sister was supportive of my choice, my middle sister supported me but kind of makes fun of me, calling me a 'hippy-dippy environmentalist, trying to save the turtles'. I took the same subjects as my middle sister and she's doing an apprenticeship to become a mechanical engineer and my mum always wanted one of us to become an engineer. My oldest sister is studying law and my mum wanted me to be a nurse. She didn't actually know what a marine biologist was but when I told her that I'm going to become a scientist at the end of it, she was like, 'oh ok, that's good as well'. She understood it once I'd said I'll be a scientist... It's nice to have this bit of structure in my life. Now I've got a pathway to take, it adds a bit of structure to my life and I quite like structure.

The three different voices within this story create an interesting means of analysis. The first voice, which Poppy exemplifies as what she considers to be a typical supporting statement of a university application, demonstrates her awareness of not only the rules of the 'game' of university applications but also how game playing can be deployed. Poppy qualifies her path

to course selection as being more 'truthful' and therefore potentially constituting a risk in that she does not directly conform to game playing behaviour. However, she also distinguishes her approach as one that goes beyond game playing and therefore illustrates her awareness of how authenticity is itself valued within the 'game' of university applications. The other two voices in the narrative belong to Poppy's middle sister and her mum. The critical, mocking tone within her sister's voice causes Poppy to highlight the different paths she and her sister have taken, despite having studied the same subjects at A Level. Poppy identifies how her choice of degree subject does not have the specific end point in terms of career as her sister's engineering apprenticeship. Her mum's voice echoes this and illustrates a lack of cultural capital in that she does not recognise Poppy's potential career in the same way that she recognises careers such as lawyer, engineer and nurse. By re-labelling the outcome of her course as being a 'scientist' and something that her mum therefore recognises, Poppy is able to negotiate a way to play it safe whilst simultaneously taking a chance. However, Poppy also acknowledges the 'structure' she has put in place by selecting her degree course and identifying a future career that stems from it. She acknowledges this as a positive feature, something which is 'nice' to have, and which allows her to create some sense of safety out of the chance she has taken on selecting to study marine biology.

The final story within this narrative concerns Poppy's choice of university. She explained this to me in relation to a post on her 'How I See My Future' Padlet (Appendix 12) which made specific reference to the post-1992 university which had made her an unconditional offer:

I had an offer from [Russell Group university] that I really wanted to go to and they lowered it down from ABB to BBB, but I still didn't think I'm going to get those grades...my maths teacher said I could get a B. Chemistry was like, 'well there's a possibility but more than likely it will be a C' and then my biology teacher said she didn't think I'd get a B in that. So obviously, two Cs and one B isn't the triple B they wanted so I kind of took that into consideration as well. I feel like if I'd worked hard from the beginning, I would have been able to reach it but because I didn't really take that route and I kinda took the more easier route in terms of not studying as much then that's kind of my fault. Obviously I could get upset but I can't do much about it. I didn't really put much effort in so I can't really get angry about that but it's still a bit sad cos that actually was my number one uni, but my second choice was more realistic. Cos it's not a Russell Group, they weren't asking for as high grades, so it was more realistic and more easy to achieve. It was my second choice and without even finding out about the unconditional offer from them, I already knew that. It's not just because I'm just settling for the unconditional or just choosing it for the sake of it being

unconditional. I visited the uni that I'm going to, and I really liked it, so it wasn't a big deal to me.

This story presents Poppy's most deliberate choice of playing it safe by accepting an unconditional offer from a university she considered as her second choice rather than taking a chance on the higher offer made to her by the Russell Group university she 'really wanted to go to'. She describes how she made this decision based on predicted A Level results, a source of institutionalised cultural capital she did not hold at the time of making the decision. In order to evaluate the amount of such capital she could potentially have; she relies on teacher judgements to make her evaluation. She seemingly accepts these judgements without question and resigns herself to them, blaming herself for the anticipated outcome. Rather than identifying that such predictions are not concrete and can be inaccurate, she acknowledges how her action of taking the 'easier route' has led her teachers to these conclusions. The acceptance of teacher predictions leaves Poppy feeling 'sad', whilst the accompanying self-blame means she does not allow herself to become 'angry' when faced with this incident of symbolic violence. In addition, the repetition of the word 'realistic' in relation to the offer from the post-1992 university emphasises Poppy's recognition of a misalignment between her habitus and the status which Russell Group universities hold within the field of education. For her, attending a Russell Group university transpired to be an option which was not 'realistic' and therefore not worth taking a chance upon. Once again, Poppy demonstrates her understanding of the rules of the game of university application, acknowledging how her decision could be perceived. Her keenness to stress how she was genuinely considering the post-1992 university suggests that she has sufficient cultural capital to allow her insight into how the university applications game can be played, but that this cultural capital fell short of the amount required to take a chance whilst playing it.

The narrative of 'playing it safe and taking a chance' has been constructed using stories Poppy shared concerning decisions, all of which centred around her intention to go to university after completing her A Levels. The contrast between playing it safe and taking a chance becomes most evident when viewed in relation to Poppy's perception of the capitals she possessed, and such perception resulted in her self-excluding from practices which considered as 'not for me'. Therefore, she played it safe and remained at school-led sports clubs, despite an awareness that this had limited her participation. The degree to which this

instance of self-exclusion results from academic selection was evident in Poppy's recognition of university sports clubs providing a more equitable opportunity, one which she was keen to take advantage of. In contrast, Poppy does not self-exclude from her aspiration to study marine biology and instead uses her motivation and interest in the discipline as a source of cultural capital when operating within the field of university admissions. She possesses adequate cultural capital to not only understand the rules of the game but is also able to deploy the tactic of authenticity to strengthen her application. Poppy's skill at negotiating the contrast between the established career-driven choices of her elder sisters and her own choice based solely on her personal interest, becomes evident in how she communicates her choice to her mum. Her deployment of the term 'scientist' indicates her recognition of her mum's initial lack of cultural capital which Poppy overcomes by deliberately selecting a potential job title which her mum not only recognises but values.

The narrative also demonstrates that despite Poppy's awareness of how the value of cultural capital can change and adapt when transferred between fields, she remains the victim of symbolic violence when faced with the operation of academic selection via the value placed upon institutionalised cultural capital within the field of education. Unlike the previous examples, in which Poppy reconciled contrast by recognising the degree of malleability within cultural capital and its deployment, she faces a contrast with two stark alternatives. In this instance, despite possessing enough cultural capital to understand how the field of education operates, she considers herself to be limited in terms of the amount of the specific, institutionalised cultural capital necessary to obtain what she desires. This limitation arises from both her teachers' judgements of her predicted grades as well as her self-identified failure to commit to a rule Poppy perceives as intrinsic to the field of education, the necessity of hard work. She combines the two of these when explaining her decision of accepting the unconditional and 'realistic' offer from a post-1992 university. She therefore acknowledges how her understanding of the rules of the game also causes her to consider a Russell Group university as somewhere that she would not belong. Her lived experience of teacher predicted grades and her own awareness of not conforming to the rule of hard work confirm this, despite the university itself lowering the entrance grades it required when making her the offer. The narrative therefore demonstrates that Poppy reconciles the contrast between playing it safe and taking a chance using her own sources of cultural capital. These provide

her with a means to recognise not only the game at play but also whether she has the requisite source of capital to play the game itself.

### Isolation and belonging

This narrative explores the contrast between episodes of isolation and belonging within Poppy's lived experience. It considers two stories Poppy shared relating to her lived experience as an immigrant but begins with the analysis of an incident which I observed in one of Poppy's lessons at Hillside. This was described in my fieldnotes as follows:

Poppy asks a question regarding a sentence written on the board which exposes the teacher's incorrect use of "complimentary" rather than "complementary". She raises this as a point and attempts to highlight the distinction between the two. Nobody (including the teacher) appears to understand the point she is making so she uses humour to divert attention.

In the interview which followed this observation, Poppy reflected on this as follows:

I was really frustrated cos I know I've seen the two different spellings. Like when things go well together you spell it with an 'e' but when we're giving someone a compliment you spell it with an 'i'. But everyone just said you spell it the same way and I'm like 'What? There's two spellings, you can't spell it the same way!'...They [classmates] started laughing but then I suppose I always make people laugh. Sometimes I try to, sometimes I don't, so I don't know if that's a compliment or not! But I always seem to be able to make people laugh. It's kind of what I do in the group and knowing that I make people laugh, that's a good feeling to me.

Poppy's recognition of the teacher's error and her subsequent attempt to highlight it puts her in a position of being completely isolated. She alone possesses a source of knowledge not shared by any other within the class and she shares her feeling of being 'frustrated' when faced with the lack of recognition of this mistake from her peers and her teacher. The cultural capital Poppy has, in terms of being able to articulate the error and the willingness to share this articulation with her class, would be valued within the field of education. Poppy's awareness of this contributes to her frustration. However, this particular cultural capital appears to be of no value within the social space of the classroom at Hillside, in that it puts Poppy into a position of isolation. Poppy identifies the different 'rules of the game' in operation within the social space of her classroom and acknowledges the social capital she gains from the deployment of humour. Poppy's statement that making people laugh is 'what I do in the group' confirms her recognition that this particular social space bestows value on this activity; deploying such an action allows Poppy to recognise the position she holds within

the class. She therefore reconciles the contrast between being isolated and belonging using her own awareness of how particular behaviours result in different sources and quantities of capital depending on the field in which they are deployed.

The construction of this narrative moves beyond Poppy's lived experience as a Hillside pupil to encompass stories she shared concerning her migratory journey into the UK. She shared two specific stories with me, the first relating to her experience of joining primary school in England at age 7 after moving from the Philippines:

Obviously, I didn't know what people were saying, but Filipino TV shows back then were like 'Taglish', parts were Tagalog but then some bits were in English. So there were some bits of English that I knew. But in terms of full-on conversations it was really scary and quite lonely, just not understanding what people were saying...I was quite lucky because in primary school, one of my classmates was Filipino as well. He couldn't speak Tagalog but because he knew that I was Filipino as well, we became friends, and he tried helping me. I don't really remember if he understood what I said or not, but he helped me and just taught me about school which helped me fit in.

Poppy highlights both the isolation and the ensuing fear and loneliness she experienced as a result of not being able to speak English when she first joined her primary school. She demonstrates how the linguistic capital she gained from her experience of 'Taglish' was distinguishable from the linguistic capital she required in order to understand and participate in 'full on conversations'. However, her friendship with another Filipino pupil does not appear to have required any form of common language and thus created a form of social capital which provided Poppy with a source of 'help'. Poppy's acknowledgement that her friend 'taught me about school' highlights that this was also something she identifies as having learnt, along with spoken language. In making this observation, Poppy demonstrates her awareness of learning how the social field she was now a part of operated. She therefore had to learn this along with the language to foster a sense of belonging, allowing her to 'fit in'. Poppy reconciled the contrast between isolation and belonging using a form of social capital which appears to some extent to undermine the value placed upon the linguistic capital inherent within her social space. However, she also identifies that this social capital provided her with a means of gaining additional sources of capital and helped her to navigate the process of familiarisation with the 'rules of the game' within school. She makes specific reference to how her Filipino identity fostered this source of social capital, which was also

evident in the story she told that conceptualised Filipino 'values' and linked them to her recent 18<sup>th</sup> birthday:

I'm still able to speak Tagalog. My mum always speaks to me in Tagalog, so I understand...Culturally I know quite a lot and my mum's always tried to make sure that we keep that with us. Like work ethic. I put a lot of effort into school which is a Filipino thing. Education's big there... and always putting family first. Things like that I would consider Filipino values...Traditionally with Filipinos we have a really big celebration with your family and friends when you turn 18...Overall it's a party, so I get presents and stuff, but the beginning part is like a traditional, ceremonial part... just because we're living here doesn't mean that we should forget about these things... I consider them an important part of my life and a big part of me.

Poppy's conceptualisation of Filipino 'values' makes reference to the Tagalog language along with work ethic and the valuing of both education and family. Although she identifies work ethic and valuing of education as Filipino, they are equally concepts of value within the field of education. Hard work (particularly in relation to schoolwork) has proven to be consistently evident in the re-presentations of Poppy's lived experiences as a Hillside pupil and as a self-critic. For Poppy, these values have therefore been doubly inculcated, by both the field of education and through the efforts of her mother. In some ways, this mirroring of values will have assisted Poppy's reconciliation of being both isolated (in terms of not initially speaking English) and belonging (in terms of recognising certain behaviours and dispositions to be unquestionable). This double inculcation therefore aligns Poppy's habitus within both the field of education and within the field of what she labels Filipino 'culture'. Poppy's consideration of Filipino culture as 'a big part of me' allows her to identify a source of belonging which creates a bond between the geographical 'here' she is currently occupying and an alternative social space which she still considers herself to belong to.

The narrative of 'isolation vs. belonging' demonstrates how Poppy's reconciliation of this contrast related to the alignment between her habitus and the values of the particular field she was operating within. Poppy reacted to the isolation resulting from moments of misalignment by deploying alternative sources of capital, such as her use of social capital within her Hillside classroom. When faced with a situation where she did not possess the capital valued within the field (such as her initial lack of linguistic capital at primary school) Poppy utilised alternative sources of capital to support her rectification of the deficit she



identified. These processes are both underpinned by Poppy's understanding of the 'rules of the game' in operation within particular social spaces and the subsequent symbolic violence experienced by Poppy when she did not conform to these rules. The final story within this narrative illustrates how the alignment between Poppy's habitus and two differing social spaces allowed her to employ the same sources of cultural capital and therefore 'belong' within both. This then adds a further dimension to this narrative by highlighting how certain behaviours and dispositions had been doubly inculcated, causing Poppy to move as a 'fish in water' in fields where certain forms of cultural capital were valued in similar ways.

The analysis of both narratives that construct the re-presentation of Poppy's lived experience as a reconciler of contrasts has revealed the commonality of her recognition and understanding of the 'rules of the game'. As an agent operating in a variety of social spaces, Poppy utilised her understanding of the rules of the game in order to evaluate whether she held adequate amounts of the form of capital required by a particular field in order to play it safe or take a chance. Similarly, Poppy's understanding of the rules of the game caused her to acknowledge incidents of isolation resulting from a misalignment between her habitus and certain fields. These processes went largely unseen by Poppy. Her awareness was raised only when she experienced disappointment at not being able to take a chance or incidents of isolation; in Bourdieusian terms when she felt or anticipated the prospect of being a 'fish out of water'. It was at such moments that her knowledge of the 'rules of the game' contributed to how she reconciled the contrast she was facing. However, the degree to which such reconciliation was effective was also itself subject to the 'rules of the game' of the particular social field. Whilst some contrasts could be reconciled, others remained irreconcilable, and Poppy accepted both the process of reconciliation and irreconcilable contrasts. As a reconciler of contrasts, her misrecognition of both reconciliation and irreconcilability as inevitable rendered her the victim of symbolic violence, as illustrated frequently throughout both narratives within the re-presentation.

### Bringing the re-presentations together

Viewing the three re-presentations of Poppy's lived experiences through a Bourdieusian lens has demonstrated how Poppy's awareness of the 'rules of the game' manifested itself in a

variety of contexts. She recognised and accepted academic selection and measurement based on academic attainment as sorting mechanisms. She therefore self-excluded from taking opportunities which she considered as 'not for me', despite being aware of potential flaws within such sorting mechanisms, as evident in both re-presentations of Poppy the Hillside pupil and Poppy the self-critic. Poppy's awareness of the 'rules of the game' aligned with neo-liberal doxa of measurable outcomes, self-reliance and meritocracy and therefore indicates the extent to which values originating from the field of power filtered down, over and across fields to determine Poppy's practice. The re-presentations of Poppy's lived experience have also demonstrated how Poppy consciously and sub-consciously deployed her awareness. She was able to identify that certain types of behaviours moved beyond facilitating the alignment between habitus and field and can become valued as a source of cultural capital themselves within corresponding fields. In instances where Poppy became aware of a misalignment between her habitus and the doxa of field she was operating in, she also utilised her awareness of the 'rules of the game' to seek out alternative sources of capital in order to re-align her habitus with the field. Thus, despite the different re-presentations revealing the variety of social spaces in which Poppy operated, the commonality between the re-presentations is Poppy's awareness that each social space maintained its own set of 'rules' which were shaping of and, albeit to a lesser extent, shaped by Poppy's practice within them.

The other commonality between each of the re-presentations was the acknowledgement of the various instances of symbolic violence which Poppy suffered. On certain occasions, Poppy commented critically on issues which she considered to be inequitable but misrecognised and accepted inequity as inevitable. This acceptance was often accompanied by self-blame for what she perceived as self-deficit and frequently resulted in self-exclusion which consequently allowed the symbolic violence to continue. The combination of these commonalities demonstrates that despite being aware of the 'rules of the game', Poppy remained a victim of symbolic violence by not calling the game itself into question.

# Chapter 8: Discussion

This discussion chapter is structured in two parts. Part 1 synthesises the application of Bourdieu's thinking tools presented in the preceding three chapters into two narratives: victims and survivors. Part 2 returns to the research questions to further examine the application of Bourdieu's tools and to address the methodological, analytical and ethical considerations and implications of such application.

## Part 1 – Synthesising the narratives of 'Victims' and 'Survivors'

This section uses Bourdieu's analogy of 'selection-survivors' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 80) as the starting point for an examination of the re-presentations of the preceding three chapters. In this section, I will discuss the ways in which the re-presentations of Boris, Gaby and Poppy provided examples of them falling victim to symbolic violence, but I will also explore how they survived in an academically selective system as near-miss pupils. By doing so, I widen the scope of the thesis presented in *Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), acknowledging that Boris, Gaby and Poppy's lived experiences did not begin and end with them being victims of symbolic violence as a result of their 11+ failure. Having remained within the academically selective field, they did not perish, but continued to survive. This section is structured in three parts. It begins by drawing together a synthesised narrative concerning the incidents of symbolic violence demonstrated within the re-presentations. The intention behind such synthesis is not to infer homogeneity upon the participants, but rather to provide an efficient means of exploring their lived experiences using Bourdieu's tools of pedagogic action, pedagogic work and pedagogic authority. The section then moves to consider how survival is evident within the lived experiences of Boris, Gaby and Poppy by viewing the re-presentations through a Bourdieusian lens. Finally, the section concludes by raising the implications of the discussion in terms of how the reproduction of social injustice relates to not only the lived experiences of Boris, Gaby and Poppy but also to the wider field of education.

## Victims of symbolic violence

The re-presentations of the lived experiences of Boris, Gaby and Poppy all demonstrated instances of symbolic violence which had occurred in relation to them being pupils at Hillside. The following narrative synthesises how such symbolic violence was evident within their re-presentations and this synthesised narrative is then viewed through a Bourdieusian lens to analyse *how* symbolic violence was constructed and operated. Other instances of symbolic violence, beyond those directly related to being Hillside pupils are drawn upon in the concluding part of this section in order to demonstrate that being a victim of symbolic violence related to aspects of the participants' lived experiences beyond Hillside.

### Narrative 1 – The 'way things are'

Boris, Gaby and Poppy all drew upon a conceptualisation of deficit when describing their 11+ failure. This deficit began with their 11+ result not reaching the mark required for a 'pass' and extended into other evocations. Boris spoke about being 'put down', Poppy considered the result to demonstrate that she had not worked hard enough, and Gaby reflected on her lack of awareness of how the 11+ operated. The consequential exclusion from attending a grammar school following their results was not challenged by either Poppy or Gaby and was justified by Boris on the basis of another attainment measure (his Key Stage 2 English result). Academic selection as a form of sorting mechanism was accepted by all three participants to the degree that it was beyond question. Although the 11+ was a specific incident of academic selection, it occurred within the lived experiences of the participants, for whom measurement of academic attainment was an integral (and therefore beyond question) aspect of education. Their experience beyond the 11+ at Hillside served to inculcate testing, measurement and attainment through a myriad of experiences, ranging from the highest stakes of GCSE and A Level exams to setting practices based on results from classroom tests. The participants all recognised the institutionalised cultural capital of exam results and both Gaby and Poppy demonstrated awareness of the value of such capital they held. Likewise, Gaby and Poppy also referenced being in the 'top set' and Gaby identified what she considered herself to have gained from such positioning. For the participants, the operation of academic selection constituted the 'way things are' within education.

Academic selection was not beyond the participants' criticism, and each spoke about how they perceived the inequity of enhanced 'opportunities' which were available to pupils at the grammar schools but not to them. The conceptualisation of 'opportunities' went beyond tangible items and encompassed examples of non-tangible dispositions, such as when Boris witnessed the grammar school pupil articulating interview responses in the 'right way'. Further, the participants made clear their awareness of the value of the 'grammar school badge', whereby wearers of the 'badge' gained reputational advantages merely by the act of wearing it. They also

recognised that the scope of reputational advantages also played out in the wider field of education, for example attending a Russell Group university. Conversely, Poppy articulated how being a Hillside pupil caused her GCSE results to be somehow devalued as a result of the 'surprise' reaction she encountered when sharing details of them. Getting *those* results from *that* school meant that Poppy appeared as unusual and therefore susceptible to questioning, which only further emphasised the 'way things are'.

Boris, Gaby and Poppy challenged the inequity they encountered, frequently labelling such inequity as 'not fair'. However, the inequity was accepted by them as a natural consequence of academic selection, even with their knowledge of how the processes of academic selection were not beyond error. Inequity was therefore a barrier to be overcome and all three agreed that hard work was the means of doing so. Poppy conceptualised this as a 'work ethic', part of a continual process which had to be adhered to and which allowed an individual to demonstrate and justify any benefits they received from academic selection. All three participants did not question that responsibility for hard work and maximising opportunities for hard work remained with the individual. Negative outcomes meant that either the individual had not worked hard enough or that such opportunity was not for them. Self-exclusion as well as externally imposed exclusion contributed to the continual reinforcement of the 'way things are'.

#### Interpreting the 'way things are' as pedagogic action

Constructing this narrative from the re-presentations demonstrates how the 'way things are' was integral to the participants' lived experiences. The 'ontological complicity' (Wacquant, 1989, p. 43) between the field and the habitus means that the subjective experiences of the participants reveal the objective structures within which they were situated. As evident from the narrative, the 'way things are' or alternatively 'the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5) lies at the heart of the structure. Bourdieu labels this as 'pedagogic action' which he then emphasises is 'objectively symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5). The description of pedagogic action as symbolic violence is qualified using power relations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 6) along with the continual reproduction of pedagogic action as a result of it being deemed worthy to reproduce (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 8). Applying these to the narrative, the continual reproduction of the 'way things are' is immediately evident, as is the participants' recognition of the worthiness of such reproduction (despite their criticality, they considered no alternative to the reproduction's continuation). With regard to power relations, Bourdieu is keen to stress that power in this instance is 'symbolic' and 'not implied in a formal definition of communication' but will 'correspond to the objective interests...of the dominant groups'

(Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 7). The narrative demonstrates that the 'way things are' serves one group of individuals more advantageously than others (for example, pupils who pass the 11+). However, as the narrative illustrates, the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences demonstrated that the 11+ as a form of academic selection was accompanied by other experiences in which academic selection served to delegate status. Gaby and Poppy both spoke about being in the 'top set' and all three participants articulated their understanding of what 'good grades' equated to. Thus, the delineation of membership of the 'dominant group' (and consequently, whose interests are being served by the pedagogic action of 'the way things are') incorporates academic 'success' in which 'success' itself is measured according to 'knowledges or styles whose value...is defined by the dominant pedagogic action' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 8). Being academically successful as pupils in the top set and with 'good' GCSE grades meant that the near-miss participants were members of this dominant group and therefore contributed to the continuation of the pedagogic action which went some, but not all, the way to serving their interests. This will be explored in further detail when considering how the participants 'survived' symbolic violence. Having established the 'way things are' as simultaneous pedagogic action and symbolic violence, attention will now be turned to how its requirements for pedagogic authority and pedagogic work are evident within the participants' narrative.

### Pedagogic authority

According to Bourdieu, 'pedagogic action necessarily implies, as a social condition of its exercise, pedagogic authority' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 11). Bourdieu later qualifies that pedagogic action implies pedagogic authority via acceptance and highlights that such acceptance can be direct (as in the case of accepting a currency) or in a symbolic sense (as in the case of artistic or dress styles) and 'is never more total than when totally unconscious' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 13). Pedagogic authority stems from *what* is being said and its relationship to a legitimate culture. Bourdieu concisely labels this as 'preach[ing] to the converted' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 25) and this analogy is useful when considering the acceptance evident in the participants' narrative. The 'way things are' was accepted by the participants, often to the extent that it was pre-supposed and could go without saying. It was therefore, as Bourdieu states 'not reducible to a pure and simple relation of communication' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 19). Instead, the pedagogic authority of a pedagogic action is

established via pedagogic communication and the parties to such communication (labelled by Bourdieu as 'receivers' and 'transmitters' respectively) can be agents or institutions. Application of this conceptualisation to the narrative which positions the participants as 'receivers' reveals how pedagogic communication operated in this instance. The narrative demonstrates various 'transmitters' of pedagogic communication; ranging from individual teachers to the institution of education itself. Bourdieu recognises that pedagogic authority goes beyond the 'technical competence or personal authority' of the transmitter (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 21) owing to the fact that legitimacy of the transmission is designated as worthy on the basis of it being transmitted (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 22). The 'way things are' was accepted by the participants on the basis that it made sense. It fell in line with a culture which legitimated measurement of academic attainment and the use of such measurements to select and segregate. This was evident not only via the participants lived experiences of the 11+ but also practices such as within-school testing and setting, university entrance requirements and standardised testing in the form of GCSE and A Level. Such was the degree of legitimation, that this culture was regarded by the participants as a necessity. Competition and measurement were required to demark the winners which in turn fuelled the motivation to compete. Taking part in the competition was undertaken on an individual level and meritocracy provided a universal opportunity for all to succeed, on the condition that they worked hard enough. The pedagogic authority of the symbolic violence of the 'way things are' also meant that it was 'entirely dispensed from the necessity of producing the conditions for its own establishment and perpetuation' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 20). The continuation of existence of the 'way things are' confirmed its authority which therefore put further continuation beyond question.

The tools of pedagogic action and authority are not only useful when considering the participants' acceptance of the 'way things are'. The tools also contribute to Bourdieu's methodological requirement to locate the field in relation to the field of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104). The prominence of neo-liberal discourse within the field of education was highlighted in chapter 3 as suggestive of the alignment between a neo-liberal field of power and the field of education and its sub-fields (such as the field of academically selective education and the field of Hillside). Such an alignment has been made evident within the narrative created from the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences in which

acceptance of the 'way things are' is based on neo-liberal ideologies of competition, measurement, individualisation and meritocracy. Such ideology played out in a myriad of ways across the re-presentations. Of the three participants, Boris spoke most explicitly about competition but awareness of the relationship between academic measurement and competition was evident across all three participants. Narratives such as 'using and consuming' within Gaby's re-presentation as a strategic aspirant and 'being independent' within Poppy's re-presentation as a self-critic demonstrated the participants' understanding of the competitive arena of education being a place of individualised practice overseen and controlled by meritocracy. This suggests an inter-dependence between the field of education and the field of power; each is shaped by and shaping of the other through mutual dependence which relies on acceptance. Having examined pedagogic authority with support from the 'thinking tool' of field, the focus of this discussion moves to how the acceptance inherent to pedagogic authority relates to the tool of pedagogic work.

### Pedagogic work

Despite pedagogic authority being presupposed by pedagogic action, it also entails 'pedagogic work' which is defined by Bourdieu as 'a prolonged process of inculcation producing a durable, transposable habitus' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 35). In other words, pedagogic work causes the habitus to internalise the pedagogic action to the extent that the pedagogic action is perpetuated. Bourdieu emphasises pedagogic work as a process and provides various means by which the productivity of such a process can be evaluated yet stops short of providing an exhaustive list of various practices that qualify as pedagogic work. Therefore, to reveal the pedagogic work in operation within the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences of education, it is necessary to refer back to the dominant cultural arbitrary of the 'way things are' and consider how processes operating within such a cultural arbitrary served to inculcate the arbitrary into the habitus of the participants.

As demonstrated above, the participants' recognised and accepted the operation of a range of academically selective practices as part of the 'way things are'. The concept of pedagogic work provides a means of examining *how* such recognition and acceptance are inculcated. Bourdieu helpfully provides a set of criteria as indicators of the productivity of pedagogic work which are: durability, transposability and exhaustiveness (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, pp. 33-34). These criteria can be read alongside the claim by Archer et al. (2020, p. 354) of pedagogic



work being 'achieved through the explicit and implicit practices of schooling'. Therefore, both the explicit and implicit elements of academic selection will be considered in relation to the criteria, in order to examine how academic selection (as a form of pedagogic work) served to produce 'the legitimacy of the product, and inseparably from this, the legitimate need for this produce' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 38).

#### The 11+ as a form of pedagogic work

The 11+ was evidently the most explicit form of academic selection within the re-presentations. Failing it meant that Boris, Gaby and Poppy were completely excluded from gaining entry to a grammar school at age 11 and as a form of pedagogic work, the 11+ meets Bourdieu's criterium of exhaustive in 'the completeness with which it reproduces the principles of the cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 34). This explicit exhaustiveness of the 11+ was also supported by implicit operation. This was evident in the participants' acceptance of it as demonstrating who 'belonged' at the 'better' grammar school. Grammar schools being 'better' and doing 'better' were explored in Gaby's and Poppy's re-presentations respectively. For Gaby, 'better' was based on an evaluation of what the school provided, in terms of facilities, teacher quality and the potential for increased institutionalised cultural capital in the form of exam results. For Poppy, 'better' was constructed in what grammar schools did, which included her perception of teacher expectations and peer surveillance creating what she labelled as a 'work ethic'. For both participants, not attending the grammar school meant that they were not in a position to receive the benefits they ascribed to the grammar school being 'better' and therefore the pedagogic work of 11+ implicitly continued, 'durably generating practices conforming with the principles of the inculcated arbitrary' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 33). The durability of the 11+ as a form of pedagogic work was called into question, most frequently by the participants' criticisms of superiority being ascribed to grammar school pupils solely based on the reputation of their school. Bourdieu acknowledges 'variable extent' to which the legitimacy of the dominant culture is internalised by individuals (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 41) and this variation in durability is explored below, when considering how and to what extent the participants survived symbolic violence.

Bourdieu's final indicator of the productivity of pedagogic work is the extent to which it is 'transposable...capable of generating practices conforming with the principles of the

inculcated arbitrary in a greater number of different fields' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 33). As a form of pedagogic work, the 11+ served to inculcate the 'way things are', which was accepted via pedagogic authority stemming from necessity and naturalness. As a result of this selection, those within the selected group were subject to practice which appeared to further justify their selection. For the participants, this practice manifested in not only tangible opportunities but forms of cultural capital such as Poppy's description of grammar school pupils having the 'right work ethic' and Boris's description of the grammar school pupil responding to interview questions in the 'right way'. Therefore, both Poppy and Boris's examples above demonstrate their understanding of the transposable nature of such practices and their alignment with different fields. By inculcating dispositions which are transposable, the pedagogic work of the 11+ goes some way to create a habitus which moves 'as a fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127) when it enters fields beyond education.

#### Additional forms of academic selection as pedagogic work

The participants also encountered the pedagogic work of academic selection in other explicit forms, such as standardised testing, setting and internal testing practices in Hillside and university entrance criteria. These all served to confirm the cultural arbitrary of the 'way things are' in that they resulted in accepted practices of segregation. The participants all recognised hard work as the means by which positive outcomes could be gained from such segregation in their acceptance of hard work providing a universal opportunity to obtain better results. Taken alongside the acknowledgement of the continual nature of academic selection as 'an irreversible process producing...an irreversible disposition' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 42) it is evident that academic selection relied on meritocracy to both inculcate and sustain dispositions within the habitus. The effect of this inculcation led to an implicit form of academic selection, in which the participants justified self-exclusion on the basis of either not working hard enough or by considering a specific practice as 'not for me'. This was most evident in Poppy's decision not to accept a Russell Group offer. She explained her self-exclusion on the basis of the explicit advice provided to her by her teachers concerning her likelihood of meeting the offer, which then implicitly suggested she had not worked hard enough. Self-blame went along with the recognition of individual responsibility for working hard, which was demonstrated across all three participants. Thus, in addition to explicit exclusion, academic selection also operated implicitly, rendering the participants

'prisoners' of limitations which were unconsciously enforced by self-discipline and self-censorship whilst they lived out their practice 'in the illusion of freedom and universality' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 40).

Pedagogic work is also considered by Bourdieu to have 'a function of keeping order' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 40). This is evident in Poppy's description of the questioning and surprised reactions she encountered when sharing her GCSE results with others. Poppy held an amount of institutionalised cultural capital which had potential to disrupt the order, but the disruption was minimised through the questioning, which acted to reinforce the order via emphasis on Poppy's results not aligning with the 'way things are'. Tied into this point, is the participants' awareness of the differences in reputation between Hillside and the local grammar schools, which Boris concisely described as 'the badge sticks'. Bourdieu explains that pedagogic work implicitly 'presupposes, produces and inculcates...ideologies', making specific reference to the 'ideology of the 'gift'' and its application to the distribution of pupils into 'sub-populations academically and socially hierarchized by type of establishment' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, pp. 52-53). The extent to which the ideology of giftedness is inculcated within the pedagogic work of academic selection was made obvious by the participants' description of school reputation as an assumption which could be proved wrong. Despite appearing to not believe in such ideology, their acceptance of the responsibility to undertake the work of proving wrong, demonstrates how such an ideology operated to maintain the 'way things are'.

Bourdieu's tools of pedagogic action, pedagogic work and pedagogic authority have been used to explore the facilitation of symbolic violence, specifically in relation to academically selective systems and practices. The contextual influences within the narrative demonstrated how the pedagogic authority of academically selective practices and systems aligned with neo-liberal ideology from the field of power. Thus, competition and individualisation constituted the 'background knowledge' of the participants which was consistently transmitted across the field of education and the related sub-fields of academically selective education and Hillside. The 'way things are' therefore obtained its pedagogic authority from the fact that it was replicated throughout the participants' lived experiences of education and this replication served to further justify its authority. The pedagogic work of the 'way things are' was evident in the explicit and implicit forms of academic selection Boris, Gaby and Poppy

encountered within their experience of education. Regardless of whether academic selection was as explicit as the 11+ or as implicit as Poppy's self-exclusion from a Russell Group university offer, academic selection was found to have inculcated certain dispositions into the habitus of the participants. The disposition which was most evident from the narratives was the belief in hard work which went hand in hand with belief in meritocracy and individualised self-blame. The pedagogic work of academic selection served to inculcate a belief in hard work which operated alongside a belief in meritocracy; success was achievable as long as you worked hard enough. Along with this, individualised self-blame pointed its accusatory finger back at the individual when success was not achieved. This not only justified segregation and self-exclusion but also meant that the pedagogic work of academic selection served 'a function of keeping order' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 40). The narrative reveals that the participants were not blind to the inequalities inherent within the order of the 'way things are' but also demonstrates that they assumed responsibility for proving such an order wrong. Unpicking the narrative with the tools of pedagogic work and pedagogic authority revealed a conceptualisation of the 'way things are' as a form of pedagogic action (and therefore, symbolic violence) that sourced its arbitrary power from the degree to which it aligned with the ideology of the field of power. To this extent, the 'way things are' was therefore beyond question because of this alignment and as a result appeared to be implemented without resistance through the pedagogic work of academic selection.

#### [Symbolic violence beyond academic selection](#)

The re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences demonstrate that the symbolic violence of the 'way things are' operated beyond academic selection. I begin by discussing the participants' lived experiences as young immigrants, drawing on the findings of the literature reviewed in support of such examination (see Chapter 2). The analysis therefore considers the participants' experiences of symbolic violence as EAL pupils and Gaby's experience of symbolic violence as a gendered individual with an aspiration for a career in the legal profession. This section concludes by applying an intersectional lens to the participants' experiences of symbolic violence.

#### [Experiencing symbolic violence as an EAL pupil](#)

In contrast to Gaby, Boris and Poppy spoke a lot more about their experiences as young migrants. The term EAL was not used at any point by the participants to describe themselves.

Whilst this could be attributed to the participants' unfamiliarity with the acronym, it also has some resonance with Rutgers et al. (2021), particularly their finding concerning unwillingness to claim EAL as an identity marker. Both Boris and Poppy spoke about their primary school experiences of the monolingual system of education which they entered on arriving in the UK as child immigrants. Their experiences make clear their awareness of having no alternative to learning to speak and write in English, or as Mitchell (2013, p. 354) terms it, 'English is really *all* that matters.' Boris and Poppy both speak of their perception of the barrier they encountered in terms of a lack of linguistic capital, a barrier which was accepted as something they had to overcome. Poppy spoke of the fear she encountered as part of this occurrence of symbolic violence. Not being able to speak to or understand her primary school classmates echoes the 'scary' experience of having 'no choice' but English as related by the participants in Evans and Liu (2018, p. 158).

Boris also made clear his awareness of 'no choice' but focused on his perceived lack of linguistic capital. Boris explained his lack of linguistic capital, particularly in the form of written English or as he described it 'language on paper', was a contributory factor to him failing his 11+ and in his opinion had had a consequential impact on his lived experience of education. In his succinct description of this as 'not fair but no-one's fault' Boris demonstrates the acceptance at the root of this occurrence of symbolic violence. Such acceptance meant that being bilingual (which both Gaby and Poppy also made specific reference to) was not afforded the same value in terms of linguistic capital. Welply (2017, p. 448) observes that 'children tended to downplay their proficiency in their home language because it did not correspond to the school norms of literacy' which mirrored Poppy making only the briefest reference to speaking Tagalog at home. Gaby mentioned speaking Polish at home to her mother but moved very quickly on to sharing that she had obtained an additional GCSE in Polish. Therefore, all three participants were subject to symbolic violence as a result of the education system 'legitimizing and imposing the dominant group's knowledge, language and values' (Kayaalp, 2016, p. 139). As Tereshchenko et al. (2019) observe, being bilingual served to position the participants as Others. Boris, Gaby and Poppy's apparent disregard of their own bilingualism suggests the degree to which the field's dominant language of English has inculcated such Othering to become part of the 'way things are'. Gaby did reference the value of the linguistic capital she held in terms of speaking Polish, but with another use of the

marketplace analogy, she emphasised the value of being bilingual in terms of it providing her with another source of capital, this time the institutionalised cultural capital of an additional GCSE in Polish. Gaby recognised that her bilingualism provided two simultaneous sources of capital which she perceived to be valued differently within the field of education. The symbolic violence of the 'way things are' meant that she accepted such value differential without question and similarly to the participants in Tereshchenko et al. (2019), Gaby also undertook the responsibility of 'proving wrong'. For Gaby this equated to countering the assumptions associated with Othering by aligning the linguistic capital she held as a Polish speaker to a form of capital valued within the field of education. As Flynn (2019, p. 72) observes, such symbolic violence disregards 'the linguistic capital that multilingualism might generate in the longer term' and Gaby's instrumentalist approach to her bilingualism mirrors that of the parent participants in Tereshchenko and Archer (2014). In this study, the Polish parents interviewed viewed education as something to be 'got' and saw 'barriers to achieving aspirations as linked to not working hard enough rather than socio-economic inequalities or discrimination' (Tereshchenko & Archer, 2014, pp. 36-37).

This analysis has used the tool of linguistic capital and Bourdieu's concept of the linguistic market place (Bourdieu, 1977a, 1991) to examine the participants' lived experiences as immigrant pupils within the English education system. The analysis revealed Boris and Poppy's acceptance of the value (in terms of linguistic capital) they perceived English to hold within the field of education, to the extent that its value was beyond question. From here, linguistic capital became a useful tool to examine the extent to which bilingualism positioned the participants as Others within the field of education. Somewhat ironically, the logic of practice within the field of education meant that the participants' viewed their bilingualism as an initial barrier and subsequently a source of capital which did not align with the field. This perception was most evident in Gaby's transformation of her linguistic capital into the institutionalised capital of a GCSE in Polish. Mitchell (2013, p. 354) makes a similar acknowledgement in relation to the multilingual participants in her study, highlighting the 'contradiction in which multilingualism is sought after and promoted for those who are already fluent in English, but is actively prevented in those who come from language minority backgrounds.' The 'way things are' meant that linguistic capital which did not conform to the requirements of the linguistic marketplace was of relatively little value and served to position

the participants as Others. As victims of symbolic violence, the participants unquestionably accepted that obtaining linguistic capital which did conform to marketplace requirements could act as a counter to the Othering they experienced. In addition, they also accepted that the responsibility for gaining such capital was for them to undertake as an individual.

#### Experiencing symbolic violence as a gendered individual

Gaby described another instance of accepting the 'way things are' when we discussed her aspiration of entering the legal profession, during which she demonstrated ambivalent opinions regarding its gendered reputation. She moved from describing it as a 'male industry' to acknowledging that gender discrimination was now a thing of the past within the profession: 'I don't think it's like that anymore'. In addition, she proposed two 'versions' of her future self, rather than attempting to reconcile being a lawyer and having a family. Gaby's opinions of the legal profession are echoed within literature which has found that despite an 'exponential increase in the number of female entrants' (Sommerlad, 2007, p. 192) the legal profession retains 'career trajectories essentially modelled on that of the unencumbered male' (Sommerlad, 2007, p. 203). Gaby's 'two versions' strongly echoes the findings of Bacik and Drew (2006), in which women working within the legal profession in Ireland described themselves as 'struggling with the impossible task of trying to balance a busy working life with the raising of children and the running of a household' (Bacik & Drew, 2006, p. 145). This struggle was also found in the context of the English and Welsh legal professions in a study carried out by Sommerlad et al. (2013). The authors not only identify 'working patterns based on male models of working, which therefore entailed very long hours' but also that attempts to mediate such patterns with approaches such as flexible working 'are either not permitted, or damage future promotion prospects' (Sommerlad et al., 2013, p. 8). The apparent concurrence of reproduction and disruption of gender norms links to the feminist critique and application of Bourdieu's thinking tools which are discussed in chapter 2. The ambivalence within Gaby's opinions of the legal profession and her potential future within it demonstrates the point raised by McNay (1999, p. 107):

While habitus draws attention to the entrenched nature of gender identity, it is important to consider the extent to which its effects may be attenuated by the movement of individuals across fields.

Drawing on the 'ontological complicity' (Wacquant, 1989, p. 43) between field and habitus, Gaby's lived experience across a number of social spaces has shaped a habitus which

subconsciously accepts but also reflexively acknowledges the 'contradictory effects and dissonance of crossing different fields' (McLeod, 2005, p. 12). The symbolic violence lies, therefore, not in the direct reproduction of gender norms but in Gaby's misrecognition and acceptance of the 'way things are'. This equates to the seemingly irreconcilable distance between the 'two visions' of her future self as well as Gaby's acceptance of any potential reconciliation as an inevitable burden to be overcome. This example goes some way in responding to the challenge issued by McLeod (2005, p. 24), in that it illustrates 'both change and continuity, invention and repetition, and understanding the forms they take today'.

#### *Applying an intersectional lens to symbolic violence*

The unifying element across the entirety of the discussion of the participants as victims of symbolic violence has been their acceptance of the 'way things are' as something which was beyond question. The re-presentations of various elements of each participant's lived experiences demonstrated how such acceptance related to various elements of the participants' intersectional identities of classed, racialised and gendered individuals. My decision to not distinguish the participants according to pre-existing social class or ethnicity categories (discussed in Chapter 3) both facilitated and to a lesser extent, impeded an intersectional consideration of the symbolic violence they experienced. Any discussion of social class or race was initiated by the participants which itself led to inconsistencies within the data set, particularly in terms of the extent to which immigrant lived experience features within the data. It is also notable, that of the three participants, only Gaby drew attention to the gendered aspect of her lived experience. However, I also recognise that such unprompted references demonstrate the participants' awareness of particular aspects of their lived experiences.

Positioning 'where' the participants are located in relation to the intersection of race, gender and social class means recognising that they do not constitute a coherent grouping in the same way as participants in both Wallace (2018a) and Rollock et al. (2015) are identified as Black and middle class. In many ways, the lack of commonality between the participants lends itself to an intersectional analysis, as discussed in Chapter 3. Therefore, this analysis continues with the methodological approach of this thesis which considers identity as a social relation and applies this conceptualisation to an intersectional consideration of the symbolic violence experienced by the participants. The analysis focuses more on the intersection between race



and social class as this was evident across all three participants. To support this I draw upon the work of Wallace (2018a, 2018b) who has incorporated the conceptualisation of whiteness into Bourdieusian analysis. I adopt a broad conceptualisation of whiteness as ‘constructed at the intersections between one’s skin colour, nationality and markers of social class’ (Sime et al., 2022, p. 4542) to provide an analytical tool that looks beyond visible markers and identifies ‘shades’ of whiteness (Nayak, 2007). I adopted such an approach in relation to how the participants themselves spoke about the racialised elements of their identity. Of the three participants, only Boris mentioned his ‘skin colour’ and did so on just one occasion when talking about his ‘moral nationality’ of Sri Lankan. Poppy made references to being Filipino but made no reference to how her national identity related to visible markers of her identity. Similarly, Gaby spoke of being Polish but did not mention being white. The following analysis is structured in three parts and applies an intersectional lens to incidents of symbolic violence experienced by each participant.

Boris’s perception of a causal link between his 11+ failure and his lack of linguistic capital in the ‘language on paper’ form of English makes for an interesting example to explore intersectionally. Boris described elements of his 11+ experience that aligned with middle class practices associated with the 11+. Not only did his parents employ economic capital to pay for private tutoring as preparation, they also possessed adequate cultural capital in order to navigate their way through the appeals process following Boris’s failure. Viewing this experience with an intersectional lens demonstrates what Wallace (2018a, p. 479) identifies as the ‘ethno-racial logics to the use of cultural capital and the performance of social class’. Such logic positioned Boris as a racialised Other whose lack of linguistic capital could not be overridden by the cultural and economic capital held by his parents. In other words, racialisation meant he was not middle class enough. Such symbolic violence relied on a logic of practice that on a surface level appeared to be colour-blind and meritocratic, therefore enabling its perpetuation. Boris’s description of the logic’s resulting inequality as ‘not fair but no-one’s fault’ demonstrates his acceptance of this symbolic violence as part of the ‘way things are’.

Poppy’s description of her early experiences as a primary school EAL pupil made specific reference to the fear and anxiety she had experienced and to a strategy her primary school had deployed in an attempt to support Poppy. Her recollection of being partnered with

another Filipino pupil somewhat resonates with the friendship grouping according to shared language found by Evans and Liu (2018, p. 159). Poppy's experience differed from the pupils in Evans and Liu (2018) as evident in her recollection that the Filipino boy she was partnered with did not speak Tagalog, therefore further enhancing Poppy's position as a non-white, racialised Other. Poppy's description of being in a classroom and not being able to understand what was going on evokes how the mainstreaming strategy of EAL provision is experienced by a pupil. Costley's (2014, p. 260) observation of EAL policy focusing on the 'learning of English and Englishness' aligns with Poppy's early classroom experiences, along with her recognition that despite a language barrier, her Filipino partner helped her to gain an understanding of 'how school worked'. Unlike Boris, Poppy did not mention sources of cultural capital related to her social class which could have potentially countered such symbolic violence. Instead, Poppy was left with no alternative but to accept the field's doxa of ascribing responsibility to the individual for overcoming structural inequality. An intersectional perspective of Poppy's experience as an immigrant pupil reveals similarities to the symbolic violence Poppy experienced from academic selection. Poppy was aware of the inequality she had encountered as a result of her position as a racialised Other in the field of education in the same way that she was aware of the inequality resulting from her positioning as a Hillside pupil within the academically selective field. Along with this awareness, Poppy did not display similar sources and quantities of economic and cultural capital as Boris, leaving her with no alternative but to accept such positioning as the symbolically violent 'way things are'.

In contrast to the findings of post-Brexit xenophobia and racialisation experienced by Eastern European young migrants reported by Sime et al. (2022), Gaby did not speak about any negative or distressing elements to her immigrant status. As mentioned above, she drew on this aspect of her lived experience to a much lesser extent than Boris and Poppy, mentioning being Polish in relation to her family and to speaking the language. She did not share any of her experiences concerning learning English and did not exhibit the same sense of awareness of Otherness as shown by Boris and Poppy. In some ways, this aligns with the findings of Tereshchenko et al. (2019) who suggest that a position of 'marginal whiteness' shielded young Eastern European migrants from the same degree of racialisation experienced by non-white peers. I fully acknowledge that this can only be implied from Gaby's lack of comments. It could

well be the case that additional questioning on the matter would have revealed experiences that countered such an implication. However, applying the broad conceptualisation of whiteness which considers its intersection with social class provides a valuable lens to view her 11+ experience from.

Gaby's recollection of not receiving 11+ tutoring alongside a non-strategic approach to selecting her secondary school displays a lack of cultural capital which Gaby described as her mother 'not really understanding how it worked'. Such action positions Gaby (and her mother) as Others within the field of education, occupying an intersectional place of being neither white or middle class enough to play by the 'rules of the game' of secondary school transition. Gaby recognised the inequality resulting from such 'not understanding' and it is interesting to observe that the year 11 Gaby who participated in the research had developed an understanding that saw her strategically selecting to study A Levels at a grammar school. In the same way that Gaby's awareness of the game meant that she used her Polish speaking to gain an additional GCSE, Gaby operates under an acceptance that 'adopting dominant values will lead to success in England' (Tereshchenko et al., 2019, p. 66) and further, that such adoption is the responsibility of an individual operating in a presumed meritocratic and colour-blind field.

The same acceptance of individual responsibility is evident in the discussion of Gaby's experience of symbolic violence as a gendered individual. Gaby's problematisation of the 'two versions' of herself describes the barriers she anticipates that being female in the legal profession will present. As the discussion above demonstrated, her anticipation is supported by findings within the literature. However, viewing this problematisation with an intersectional lens, also raises social class as an additional contributor. In terms of cultural capital, Gaby described herself as 'not having the right background for law' but did not clarify what she considered this 'right background' to be. Recent statistics demonstrate a significant difference in the proportion of lawyers from a privileged background, with the largest law firms having the highest proportion of lawyers who have been privately educated (Solicitors Regulation Authority, 2022). Such statistics also correlate with the experience of a middle class student attending a post-1992 university who abandoned her ambition for legal career due to the competition with students from elite universities along with additional costs and competitive hurdles (Bradley et al., 2022). Gaby's reference to the 'right background'

therefore aligns with the continuing elitism evident within the legal profession and once again, this form of inequality is accepted as part of the 'way things are'.

The consideration of symbolic violence through an intersectional lens has revealed the underlying awareness the participants had of their positioning within social fields. Viewing such awareness intersectionally has revealed how it relates to the complex intertwining of 'shades' of whiteness and social class. Applying this lens alongside Bourdieu's tools has revealed how symbolic violence operated within different areas of their lived experiences and further, how such operation inherently relied upon acceptance of the 'way things are' within different social fields. A unifying element of the 'way things are' was the recognition by the participants of particular challenges or inequities which social structures placed before them. Although acceptance left Boris, Gaby and Poppy victims of symbolic violence, awareness of inequity often went hand in hand with criticisms of it and the structures which appeared to perpetuate it. Whilst such criticality was not sufficient to overturn inequity, it did go some way to enhance their reflexivity. As McNay (1999, pp. 110-111) observes, 'reflexive awareness is predicated on a distancing of the subject with constitutive structures'. Therefore, having presented Boris, Gaby and Poppy as victims of symbolic violence, consideration also has to be given to how they employed the reflexive awareness they obtained from such victimisation as a means of surviving symbolic violence.

### Survivors of symbolic violence

Bourdieu uses the analogy of 'survival' in relation to the theoretical model he utilised to explore the patterns of reproduction of inequality within the supposed meritocracy of the French educational system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 80). His focus on those who 'survive in the system' facilitates a detailed exploration of the 'system of relations between differential selection and the social and scholastic factors of that selection' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 82). Bourdieu posits that the cultural capital held by an individual is a factor which defines their position within this system of relations but also stresses that the system operates as a 'continuous action', during which cultural capital can be 'converted and cashed at every stage of the school career' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 87). This then links to the re-presentations of Boris, Gaby and Poppy, in that their lived experiences of academic

selection existed prior to and continued beyond their failure of the 11+. Despite not 'surviving' one particular incident of academic selection, they remained within an academically selective system and therefore had to 'survive' within it. The construction of the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences made evident that belief in meritocracy, recognition of competitive practice and individualisation contributed to the participants' awareness of the 'way things are'. The following narrative uses the re-presentations to illustrate how each of these were manifest within Boris, Gaby's and Poppy's lived experiences. It will then be viewed through a Bourdieusian lens to explore how their lived experiences of surviving in an academically selective system related to their habitus and the degree to which their habitus aligned with the doxa of the field of education.

### Narrative 2 – Surviving the 'way things are'

Boris, Gaby and Poppy believed in meritocracy to the extent that 'working hard' was an unquestionable responsibility of the individual. Each of their re-presentations has demonstrated that their conceptualisation of 'working hard' incorporated their belief of it as a way of overcoming inequity. They all demonstrated an awareness of the benefits they had gained from 'working hard'. Both Poppy and Gaby explored benefits in terms of academic attainment, whilst Boris also extended it into his sporting attainment. They all acknowledged the motivation that resulted from successes obtained via 'working hard'. Conversely, they each shared examples of occasions when they considered themselves not to have worked hard and the feelings of guilt and regret that accompanied such episodes. The sources of their beliefs in 'working hard' differed. Boris and Poppy made a direct link between the value placed upon 'working hard' in an educational context and their status as immigrants, labelling it as a 'valuing' or 'belief' in education. Boris in particular made clear his awareness of having educational opportunities available to him that his parents had not had. Gaby did not call upon her immigrant status in relation to 'working hard' but did describe 'working hard' as an aspect of her habitus, in that it was something that she 'just knew'.

'Working hard' moved from directing certain practices to being regarded as a source of cultural capital in itself, providing reputational advantages to pupils who were recognised to work hard. Gaining such advantages meant undertaking the 'right' kind of work, which was itself responsive to competitive practices and focused on the individual. Navigating competition required an understanding of measurement practices. These ranged in clarity from academic attainment measures (such as GCSE results) to measurement of the extent and degree to which the individual participated in competitive practices. These were evident in Gaby's use of questioning and challenging peer and teacher opinions in debates and Boris and Poppy's apparent willingness to study independently to give themselves a competitive 'edge'. Of the three participants Boris spoke most frequently about competition, often drawing

comparisons to his experiences in sport. However, Poppy and Gaby also drew upon competitive practices when talking about their lived experiences, particularly in relation to measures of academic attainment. In terms of awareness of participating in competitive practices, the participants appeared more likely to acknowledge times when they considered themselves to have been unfairly disadvantaged. Thus, whilst each of them provided examples of how they perceived grammar school pupils to be advantaged, they did not display equivalent awareness of their own sources of advantage, which had a tendency to go unseen. Therefore, Boris did not acknowledge how his parents' cultural and economic capital facilitated his involvement in sport, neither did Gaby comment on the advantage she gained from using her stepfather's social capital to obtain her legal work experience.

It could be argued that such 'blindness' to advantage is linked to the individualisation evident within the participants' re-presentations. Whilst individualisation was manifest in Boris's focus on maximising opportunities and Poppy's focus on self-reliance, the re-presentations of Gaby's lived experiences consistently demonstrated her utilisation of a costs/benefits type analysis. Gaby operated this in relation to various aspects of her lived experience; ranging from her decision to move from Hillside to a grammar school sixth form through to her analysis of her friendship group and decisions concerning the amount of time she spent with her family. Gaby was rarely blind in relation to operating such analysis but instead justified it in relation to her conceptualisation of 'real world' practices. Akin to both Boris and Poppy, Gaby was aware of how competing as an individual within various social fields could be enhanced by the transferability of certain capitals across fields.

### Illusio and survival

Following the request by Deer (2014a, p. 117) to make explicit the doxa which underpins 'the implicit logic of practice, expectations and relations of those operating in these fields', the narrative above demonstrates that belief in meritocracy, competitive practice and individualisation constituted part of 'a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned' (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 166). For Boris, Gaby and Poppy such beliefs were part of 'the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense' that Bourdieu claims to arise as a result of doxa; 'the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a habitus and the field to which it is attuned' (1990b, p. 68). Thus, the mutual reinforcement of habitus and field provides a 'feel for the game' which is subjective in that it is played at an individual level but also objective in that it is perceived to have a discernible set of regularities (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 66). The mutual reinforcement which 'attuned' the participants' habitus to the field of education operates using the same mechanisms as those discussed in relation to symbolic violence. Pedagogic work and pedagogic authority serve to facilitate the pedagogic action of

the 'way things are' that has been shown to act in the interest of the dominant classes. However, within the narrative of 'surviving' are numerous examples of the participants sharing such interests: benefiting from the success of academic attainment, gaining such success from the 'right' kind of hard work and engaging in competitive and individualised practices. Their investment in the game is conceptualised as 'illusio' by Bourdieu, which he defines as:

To be invested, taken in and by the game...to accord a given social game that what happens in it matters, that its stakes are important...and worth pursuing (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 116).

The narrative of survival demonstrates how *illusio* played out in the re-presentations of Boris, Gaby and Poppy's lived experiences. Within the narrative, it is possible to discern between the conscious 'game-playing' (such as Gaby's disposition to operate a cost/benefit type analysis) and the *illusio* under which all participants were operating. Bourdieu recommends a means of articulating this difference is to 'suspend the commitment to the game that is implied in the feel for the game' (1990b, p. 66). By doing this, the logic of practice within the field of education becomes evident. The participants' commitment to the game was reliant on the accumulation of cultural capital. This is most easily identifiable in its institutionalised form, via the academic attainment credentials held by the participants. In addition, the narrative also demonstrates the embodied cultural capital held by Boris, Gaby and Poppy, evident in their conscious and strategic use of certain practices which they recognised as necessary to provide a competitive edge. Finally, the participants' interest in the game relates to the capital held within their habitus, in Bourdieusian terms, their dispositional and attitudinal knowledge of the 'rules of the game'. Whilst each of these forms of capital have been identified separately, they work in relation to one another to reinforce *illusio* and therefore align the participants with the *doxa* of the field. Thus, the participants' survival is a result of them moving as 'fish in water' in that the field of education provides a social world of which their habitus is a product (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127).

#### ['Learning' the rules of the game](#)

This leads to consideration of what has contributed to the habitus of Boris, Gaby and Poppy being attuned to the *doxa* of the field or to phrase the question differently, how have they gained their understanding of the 'rules of the game'? I explore three potential sources of

the participants' learning: their experience within education, their experience as immigrants and its intersection with social class and 'working hard'.

#### Learning from experience within education

The re-presentations of Boris, Gaby and Poppy demonstrated how their lived experience of education had provided them with an understanding of the rules of the game of education. These have been explored in relation to the participants' acceptance of the 'way things are'. The 'way things are' incorporated practices which align with neoliberal ideology, such as Gaby's increased engagement with marketised practices of attending Sixth Form open evenings and her recognition that she did not undertake such practice on entering secondary school. Bourdieu acknowledges that the habitus will be shaped via experiences which cannot be unlearned (1990, p. 43) and being in the upper (or in the cases of Boris and Poppy, final) years of school, the participants are in a position to have gained experiences (both positive and negative) which will have contributed to their understanding of the 'rules of the game' in the field of education and how this particular game relates to games operating in other social spaces. However, to attribute their understanding of the game solely to their time spent within it, fails to acknowledge the following claim:

The success of all school education...depends fundamentally on the education previously accomplished in the earliest years of life (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 43)

This highlights that in order to understand how Boris, Gaby and Poppy have survived education, it is necessary to consider aspects of their habitus which will have been shaped prior to entering education, which according to Bourdieu is counter to the ideology within the field of education that makes 'the school career a career with no history' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 43).

#### Learning from the embodied history of immigrant experience

A commonality within the histories of Boris, Gaby and Poppy was their arrival in the UK as immigrants during their first few years of primary education. As the participants' immigrant status did not constitute a particular focus of the investigation, discussions of the participants' lived experiences as immigrant pupils arose naturally from their drawing on particular stories or memories. As a result, the degree to which the participants referenced immigratory experience varied considerably, both in the frequency and emphasis they placed upon it in relation to other aspects of their lived experiences. The link between immigratory status and



education was made explicit by both Boris and Poppy, in that both attributed valuing education to a value pertaining to Sri Lankan and Filipino culture respectively. Whilst Gaby did not make the link between her valuing education and Polish culture, she did acknowledge such valuing as something she 'just did'. Despite offering an explanation, the discursive logic of immigrant valuing of education raises further complexities. How can it be viewed with a Bourdieusian lens and to what extent can it be seen to play out in relation to the entirety of the participants' lived experiences?

Moskal (2014, p. 288) argues that immigrant approaches to education are 'strongly influenced by their premigration experiences and by the culture of their country of origin'. Given that all three participants moved to the UK aged seven or under, such experiences and awareness of culture will undoubtedly have been shaped by their parents. This corresponds to both Boris and Poppy's claims regarding valuing education, in which they acknowledged their perception of the value placed upon education by their parents. However Erel (2010) criticises a 'rucksack' approach to migrant cultural capital (whereby migrants arrive with cultural capital which then 'fits' into the new field) in that it reifies migrant cultural capital and does not acknowledge processes of modification and validation of cultural capital. Thus it is necessary to 'consider the meanings the actors give to cultural practices' (Erel, 2010, p. 656) which then incorporates acknowledgement that practice operates in relation to 'structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 72). Archer and Francis (2005, 2006, 2007) examine the extent to which the discourse of valuing education became part of the 'collective habitus' of British Chinese pupils, observing that their participants exhibited 'a middle-class mode of engagement with the education system, irrespective of their own class positioning' (Archer & Francis, 2007, p. 45) This effectively 'troubles' the class positioning of British Chinese pupils, resulting in valuing of education becoming 'an expression of their 'Chineseness' and also as a method for 'bettering oneself' (Archer & Francis, 2007, p. 114). Whilst recognising that Boris, Gaby and Poppy differ from the pupil participants in Archer & Francis' research in that they are first generation migrants, each from a different country of origin, this twofold manifestation relates to their lived experiences. Boris and Poppy, by articulating valuing education as part of a 'culture' to which they considered themselves to be part of, also acknowledge valuing education as part of their habitus, in that it constitutes their embodied history as Sri Lankan and Filipino. In addition, all three

participants ascribed to a belief in the meritocratic opportunities associated with valuing education, echoing the findings of Lopez Rodriguez (2010), who in her study of Polish mothers found that ‘migrants rely on meritocratic values, striving for meritocracy to work for them’ (2010, p. 345). However, unlike the Polish mothers who ‘perceive the whole educational system as an equal arena in which it is possible and worthwhile to compete and gain success’ (Lopez Rodriguez, 2010, pp. 345-346), Boris, Gaby and Poppy had been made aware of the uneven playing field of academically selective education. Despite this (and in some instances because of this) their dispositional belief in meritocracy meant that they became ‘active generators’ of cultural capital via work orientation in school’ (Devine, 2009, p. 532), demonstrating how their habitus was structured by, but also structuring of meritocratic beliefs.

#### The intersection of social class and immigrant experience

In terms of relating the survival of the participants to their habitus, a causal link between their embodied history as immigrants and their survival within the academically selective field is far too simplistic. The scope of the participants’ habitus is evident throughout the re-presentations, demonstrating the ‘dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality’ (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 72). My deliberate decision to avoid direct questions relating to ‘classifying’ the participants (see chapter 3) meant that the ‘fuzzy’ elements of social class (Archer, Halsall, et al., 2007) were explored via their perceptions. As a result, Boris, Gaby and Poppy’s lived experiences are re-presented as neither specifically ‘classed’ or ‘immigrant’ but lie at the intersection of the two. Constructing the narratives resulted in certain class ‘indicators’ being evident, but these were often accompanied by conflicting stories which at times related to the participants’ lived experiences as immigrant pupils. This is most evident in the narrative of ‘playing it safe vs. taking a chance’ in Poppy’s re-presentation but is also demonstrated within the re-presentations of both Boris and Gaby. Darwin and Norton (2014) point towards the consideration of immigrant pupils’ social class in order to examine how ‘social class positions can lead to different educational and social trajectories that will offer different (i.e., unequal) opportunities’ (2014, p. 116). However, in contrast to their findings, the re-presentations display a much more nuanced intersection between the social class and immigrant status of Boris, Gaby and Poppy. Likewise, Devine (2009) asserts that the prioritisation of hard work and achievement of certification was a source of capital for the middle class pupils within her sample that allowed them to

consolidate class positioning (Devine, 2009, pp. 531-532) but the re-presentations of Boris, Gaby and Poppy all demonstrate what Lopez Rodriguez (2010, p. 355) identifies as 'manoeuvring within the structure, so it works for them rather than against them'. Within the re-presentations of the participants, such 'manoeuvring' was found at times to be strategic (particularly in relation to Gaby) but also occurred without conscious awareness, as a result of their dispositional acceptance of 'hard work' as an unquestionable rule of the game. At various points within the re-presentation of their lived experiences, Boris, Gaby and Poppy all allude to meritocracy as providing a means of 'success' in terms of providing opportunity for social mobility. This therefore leads to the consideration of the relationship between 'working hard' and the participants' survival.

#### *'Working hard' to survive*

'Working hard' and 'hard work' were spoken about (occasionally at length) by all three participants, particularly in relation to their lived experiences as a Hillside pupil. However, when constructing narratives involving 'hard work' it became apparent that the participants did not solely relate it to being a pupil at Hillside. Conceptually, 'working hard' or more accurately, the recognition of 'hard work' as one of the rules of the game, appeared to be something that was 'known' by the participants. I therefore heeded Bourdieu's advice of it being 'absurd to try to isolate the influence of any one factor' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 87) and rather than seeking a direct source of such knowledge, I focused my attention on how this knowledge played out within the lived experiences of the participants. As such, it became evident that the participants' knowledge concerning 'hard work' had been shaped by an ensemble of factors including belief in meritocracy, stories of parental hardship as immigrants and neo-liberal ideology of self-reliance. Regardless of how it had been constituted, the recognition of 'hard work' as a rule of the game went unquestioned, it was a disposition inculcated into the habitus of the participants which, to paraphrase a comment made by Gaby, rendered it as something they 'just knew'. Consequently, their habitus provided a means to make sense of the field of education. The alignment between their habitus and the doxa of 'hard work' within the field of education allowed them to gain a further, and more nuanced conceptualisation of what 'hard work' meant within the field. This therefore led to Poppy's narrative of the 'right kind of smart' and the contribution the narrative of 'belief in hard work' made to the re-presentation of Gaby as a 'strategic aspirant'.

### Survival by knowing and playing by the rules

Therefore, the confrontation between habitus and field evident in Ingram's exploration of working-class boys and educational success (2009, 2011, 2018) was not similarly part of the lived experiences of Boris, Gaby and Poppy. Their survival can therefore be re-framed as a lack of confrontation which was facilitated as a result of the alignment between their habitus and the fields in which they operated. For the participants, 'knowing' the rules of the game contributed to this alignment and I have demonstrated how this 'knowing' stems from the intersection of social class and migratory status within their embodied history. In a critique of the concept of symbolic violence, Watkins (2018, p. 49) argues that rather than being a 'conduit for class domination', certain knowledge 'transcends class boundaries pertinent to understanding the world and to effective engagement within it'. Conscious awareness of the existence of the game, in addition to its rules, offered the habitus of Boris, Gaby and Poppy some (albeit in certain instances, limited) 'agentic potential', which Watkins (2018, p. 51) claims Bourdieu assigns a 'minimal role' to. Conceptualising Boris, Gaby and Poppy as survivors has demonstrated how they utilised such potential but did so in accordance with the rules of the game. They were able to recognise how the 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5) operated within the field of education but also how this operation related to alternative fields. This recognition was facilitated through their own reflexive thinking which revealed how their subjective experiences of survival related to their recognition and 'success' within the objective structure of academic selection. The focus in this analysis on how such mechanisms operate has been 'sharpened' by the consideration of how such mechanisms are produced and sustained, rather than reifying them as pre-existing and subsequently, deterministic (Watkins, 2018, pp. 56-57). Boris, Gaby and Poppy were able to reflexively identify how aspects of their lived experiences related to the field of education but remained unquestioning of what the field demanded from its players. It was this combination that created their knowledge of the rules of the game and thus facilitated their survival in the field of education.

### Victims and survivors of the 'way things are'

Synthesising the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences to form the narratives of victims and survivors has illustrated how viewing the minutiae of participants' lives through

a Bourdieusian lens reveals the operation of social structures and how these structures then impact on the lived experiences of individuals.

Both of the narratives reveal the continual reproduction of the 'way things are', which within the context of education manifested itself in the lived experiences of Boris, Gaby and Poppy in various forms of academic selection. Such selection operated at a variety of levels, ranging from setting practices within Hillside to the 11+ and university entrance criteria but the operation of selection relied on the use of measurement of academic attainment, or to use the participants' terminology, the obtaining of 'good grades' via 'hard work'. Thus, the doxa of the field of education legitimised individualised success and any accompanying segregation on the basis of meritocratic competition evaluated via measurable attainment. Such neo-liberal ideologies not only played out in the lived experiences of the participants but were also embedded within the 'way things are' to the extent that they became beyond question and therefore worthy of reproduction. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic violence and its operation via pedagogic work and pedagogic authority were used in relation to the narrative of 'victims' to demonstrate this process of reproduction.

The same set of neo-liberal ideologies (competition, measurement, individualisation and meritocracy) were evident in the narrative of survival, but the analysis of this narrative demonstrated how Boris, Gaby and Poppy 'bought in' to such ideologies. Bourdieu's concept of 'illusio' was used to examine the extent to which such 'buy in' was part of the rules of the game and how knowing the rules of the game resulted in playing the game being both a pre-reflexive practice as well as practice which was consciously strategic. This fusion of pre-reflexive and reflexive practice was examined in relation to the intersection of social class and immigrant status evident within the habitus of the participants. This intersection not only appears to smooth the alignment between the field of education and the habitus of Boris, Gaby and Poppy, it also acknowledges how the scope of habitus can be widened to incorporate acts of 'everyday reflexivity' (Reay, 2004b, p. 441). This section has demonstrated how such widening provides an opportunity to 'grapple analytically with aspects of identity' (Reay, 2004b, p. 438), concurring with Sayer's (2005) argument that conscious deliberation is constitutive of the habitus. As victims, Boris, Gaby and Poppy have been shown to pre-reflexively accept and know the rules of the game. As survivors, their reflexive awareness of

how the rules of the game operated presented them with a means of playing the game accordingly.

## Part 2 – Returning to the research questions

The discussion within this section is shaped by my research questions. My intention is to demonstrate to the reader how the questions have shaped this thesis in terms of its methodological approach and analytical framework. I therefore discuss the questions in relation to the research's findings and also highlight the methodological, analytical and ethical considerations and implications that each of the questions generated.

*Research question 1: To what extent does symbolic violence operate in the lived experiences of near-miss pupils and what facilitates such operation?*

The re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences demonstrated the extent to which symbolic violence operated in the context of the participants' experiences within and beyond education. The synthesis of the re-presentations which created the narrative of 'victims' demonstrated a commonality of accepting the 'way things are'. Such acceptance was integral to each of the individual incidents of symbolic violence which were found; the 'way things are' was misrecognised by the participants to the extent that it was beyond question. In many ways, identifying the ways in which symbolic violence was facilitated within the lived experiences of the participants revealed the extent to which symbolic violence operated.

Methodologically, exploring symbolic violence began with two key acknowledgements. The first drew upon Bourdieu's claim that pedagogic action is 'objectively symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5) and the second from Bourdieu's description of pedagogic action as 'the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5). From an analytical perspective, the conceptualisation of the 'way things are' as a 'cultural arbitrary' was clearly evident from the participants' narratives, to the extent that the phrase was itself used by them over the course of data construction, particularly in relation to unseen structures (for example, the valuing of 'hard work' and the acceptance of competitive practice). However, the identification of *how* such an arbitrary was imposed and what constituted the arbitrary power that imposed it was more analytically challenging. This

necessitated using the tools of pedagogic authority and pedagogic work to unpick the ways in which symbolic violence was facilitated within the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences. As demonstrated in the discussion of the 'victim' narrative in Part 1 of this chapter, Bourdieu's tools were also used when considering how the participants' lived experiences demonstrated intersections of class, race and gender. A broad conceptualisation of whiteness facilitated exploration of the symbolic violence related to the participants' lived experiences as immigrant pupils. This highlighted how linguistic capital operated as part of the education field and therefore contributed to the positioning of the participants as racialised Others. In addition, analytical consideration was given to how such Otherness intersected with cultural capital associated with social class and thus further effected the positioning of the participants within the field. Alongside the intersection of class and gender that drew on Gaby's lived experience, the intersectional analysis of the participants' lived experiences of symbolic violence further emphasised how such symbolic violence was perpetuated via acceptance of the 'way things are'.

Exploring the extent to which symbolic violence operated within the lived experiences of the participants along with the means by which such operation was facilitated raised an ethical consideration which I had not anticipated. Bourdieu's writing on symbolic violence and particularly its applicability to education explored in *Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) provided the tools necessary to reveal and theoretically explain the symbolic violence itself but fell short of demonstrating what the experience of symbolic violence looked like within the context of an individual's lived experience. As Daniel Schubert (2014, p. 189) observes, 'Bourdieu's emphasis in much of his work is on symbolic violence rather than the suffering that results from that violence'. Whilst suffering is addressed by Bourdieu in the extensive narrative accounts found in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu, 1999b), I was aware that my own approach to relating the participants' experiences of symbolic violence would have to differ. It not only needed to be demonstrated in a more concise manner given the word limit of this thesis, but I also had to recognise that the participants themselves did not recognise their own suffering. I was therefore initially wary about ascribing them the label of 'victims' in that they did not present their experiences of symbolic violence in such a manner. Conversely, having established the existence of symbolic violence within their lived experiences, any effort to dilute the resulting suffering by ascribing an alternative label to

'victim' seemed not only contradictory but also an act of symbolic violence manifested in the 'measurement' of suffering. Fortunately, Bourdieu offered some guidance on this:

using material poverty as the sole measure of all suffering keeps us from *seeing* and understanding a whole side of the suffering characteristic of a social order which...has multiplied the social spaces and set up the conditions for an unprecedented development of all kinds of ordinary suffering (Bourdieu, 1999b, p. 4 original emphasis).

The findings of this research demonstrate the symbolic violence seen and understood from the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences and I consider my ethical concern over labelling the participants as 'victims' to be illustrative of the extent to which symbolic violence facilitates the 'ordinary suffering' Bourdieu mentions. Academically selective practices and systems have been shown to constitute symbolic violence which as Bourdieu observes, is sustained through misrecognition:

every educational system must produce and reproduce...the institutional conditions for misrecognition of the symbolic violence which it exerts (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 61).

The participants misrecognised academic selection along with additional examples of symbolic violence as the 'way things are'. This conceptualisation became a useful tool for examining both the extent of symbolic violence and its means of operation. The 'way things are' imposed structures and hierarchies that were occasionally explicit but at other times subtle to the extreme of being unrecognisable. As Bourdieu and Eagleton (1992, p. 115) acknowledge, symbolic violence was therefore both 'everywhere and nowhere' within the lived experiences of the participants.

Research question 2: How do near-miss pupils relate their lived experience of academically selective education to their lived experiences beyond education?

The intention behind this question stemmed from Bourdieu's recognition of the habitus as 'the social embodied' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 128) and therefore that the lived experiences of the participants were not only shaped by them being near-miss pupils but also by their movements and practices within and across different social fields. The thematic narratives and subsequent re-presentations demonstrated the array of nuanced lived experiences the participants drew upon. However, the uniting element discernible amidst



such nuance is the degree to which their lived experiences had provided the participants with the knowledge of the rules of the game. The rules had been inculcated into the participants' habitus as a result of their movement within and across different social fields. In some instances, relations between their lived experiences within and beyond education were drawn consciously, with the participants making comparisons between Hillside and what they conceptualised as 'real world'. At other times, relations operated pre-reflexively, without any conscious deliberation. This demonstrated how the participants' lived experiences operated as an ensemble, providing an understanding of the rules of the game within the field of academically selective education and the rules of games within additional fields. The participants did not always accept the rules and sometimes went as far as to criticise them, but the very knowing of their existence contributed to their movement as 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127) and consequently, their 'survival' of symbolic violence.

Methodologically, constructing the thematic narratives and drawing these together to form re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences provided opportunities to explore what Bourdieu identifies as the 'double and obscure relation between habitus and field' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). This not only required consideration of the habitus of the participants being conditioned by various fields but also how their habitus contributed to their pre-reflexive and reflexive understanding of the social fields they occupied. This revealed the role the participants' habitus played in 'constituting the field as a meaningful world' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127).

Analytically, rather than attempt to identify a singular source of such understanding, I sought to explore the 'ensemble' of factors which constituted it, mindful of the following acknowledgement by Bourdieu:

the structures sociology deals with are the products of transformations which, unfolding in time, cannot be considered as reversible except by a logical abstraction, a sociological absurdity since they express the successive states of a process that is aetiologically irreversible (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 88).

Bourdieu's argument aligned with my use of the Mosaic approach, in which each of the methods served to contribute a piece of the final picture, or ensemble of the individual. Likewise, the re-presentations constructed from the thematic narratives demonstrate how

differing elements of the participants' lived experiences operated as an ensemble which I drew on when conceptualising the participants as 'survivors'.

Finally, this research question raised two ethical considerations. The first relates to the extent to which the participants shared their lived experiences beyond education. I remained mindful throughout the data construction process that such sharing would be participant-led, rather than as a result of my direct questioning. This could be seen to have limited the dataset (for example, Gaby did not share as much detail as Boris and Poppy concerning her immigratory experience so her data was less relevant to the discussion concerning 'immigrant' narratives and survival) however I consider my approach to align with my aim of centralising the participant within the research process. Secondly, I felt a similar degree of concern regarding the ascription of the 'survivor' label as I did with the ascription of the 'victim' label. This concern is further examined below, in relation to the social (in)justice raised in research question 4.

Research question 3: To what extent do the lived experiences of near-miss pupils confirm or disrupt the dominant/dominated binary?

Wacquant claims that the focus across the entirety of Bourdieu's work is 'the specific contribution that various forms of symbolic violence make to the reproduction and transformation of structures of domination' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 15). Although Bourdieu does not explicitly refer to symbolic violence across the body of his work, he does consistently explore how categorisation and classification systems operate in society to position one group as 'dominant' and the other as 'dominated'. That Bourdieu was able to portray *how* a binary of dominant/dominated both existed and operated over a wide range of contexts is beyond contention. However, this research question raises the apparent opposition between these two groups and considers whether dominant/dominated exists only as a binarised, 'either/or'. In a development of the criticism raised above concerning the relative lack of attention Bourdieu pays to the lived experience of being a victim of symbolic violence (and therefore dominated), Bourdieu also appears to give scant consideration to the potential that certain lived experiences of individuals can appear to fall somewhere in the middle of dominant/dominated and therefore serve to disrupt this binary.

Methodologically, the implications of answering this research question problematised a binarised view of dominant/dominated. As argued in response to research question 1,

symbolic violence operated within the lives of the participants via the 'way things are'. Their acceptance of the 'way things are' positioned Boris, Gaby and Poppy as victims of symbolic violence and therefore confirms how the binary of dominant/dominated was evident in the re-presentations of their lived experience. However, I have also demonstrated how the ensemble of the participants' lived experiences contributed to the alignment between their habitus and the field of education. In short, they recognised how the 'way things are' operated as one of the rules of the game. It was this recognition of the participants which led to my conceptualisation of them as survivors.

Boris, Gaby and Poppy survived because they recognised the game at play and played by its rules. To this extent, their feel for the game put them into a dominant position. However, despite being aware of the inequalities inherent within the game, they accepted, rather than resisted the 'way things are', continued to play by the rules of the game and therefore continued to be dominated. This presents a paradox, which Bourdieu speaks of below in relation to what he terms 'popular culture':

In order to resist, I have no other resource than to lay claim to that in the name of which I am dominated, is this resistance? Second question: when on the other hand, the dominated work at destroying what makes them out as 'vulgar' and at appropriating that in relation to which they appear as vulgar (for instance in France the Parisian accent) is this submission? I think this is an insoluble contradiction...which is inscribed into the very logic of symbolic domination...Resistance may be alienating and submission may be liberating. Such is the paradox of the dominated and there is no way out of it (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 155).

This paradox presented the analytical challenges and implications of this research question. Constructing the thematic narratives and using these to re-present the lived experiences of the participants made me fully aware of their positioning as both dominant and dominated. This is best illustrated with the following example of 'hard work'.

The re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences demonstrate that their understanding of 'hard work' as one of the rules of the game recognised resistance to domination as potentially alienating. That is, they knew of the alternative option to 'hard work' but at the same time were aware of the consequential effects of such decisions in terms of how it could affect their positioning within the field of education. Recognising potential alienation constituted part of their understanding of the rules of the game which in turn

supported their submission, based on their perception of how such submission could provide liberation. Continuing with the 'hard work' example, such practice would result in good grades that could go some way to counter the domination the participants had experienced within the field of academically selective education. They resisted domination by intentionally complying with the dominant. This intentional compliance therefore placed the participants on both 'sides' of the dominant/dominated binary.

Lawler (2004, p. 122) acknowledges 'it is not that people lack agency; rather there is no 'innocent' position: no resistance that is not some way complicitous with power'. Re-presenting the lived experiences of the participants as victims and survivors reveals how such a relationship between resistance and complicity played out in the lives of Boris, Gaby and Poppy. This does not extend to a direct challenge to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic violence; I do not argue that the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences as both victims and survivors completely overturn the dominant/dominated binary. However, my analytical approach of considering the binary of dominant/dominated as something other than an either/or serves to demonstrate the methodological contribution of disrupting the binary by foregrounding the complexities in operation beneath the dichotomy.

This foregrounding of complexities served to resolve some of the ethical concerns raised by the ascription of 'victim'/'survivor', 'dominant'/'dominated' labels to the participants. As the lived experiences of the participants had provided examples of the dominant/dominated binary being disrupted, answering this research question presented an opportunity to make evident how such disruption played out in the lived experiences of Boris, Gaby and Poppy.

Research question 4: What are the implications of the above on the relationship between academically selective education and social (in)justice?

The concurrent portrayal of Boris, Gaby and Poppy as both victims and survivors leads to the final research question that can be summarised as: so what? If the participants were able to survive falling victim to symbolic violence, then does this imply that academically selective education raises no concerns regarding social (in)justice? I begin my answer to this question by examining the participants' conceptualisation of how academically selective education constituted part of the 'way things are' and how such a conceptualisation relates to social (in)justice. This addresses both the methodological and analytical implications of this

question. I conclude by demonstrating how the findings of this research point towards the ethical implications of an interpretation of social (in)justice that centres around recognition and articulation of the unseen elements of the academically selective system.

The literature review (see Chapter 2) problematised conceptualisations of social mobility and meritocracy and demonstrated how such conceptualisations operated within academically selective education. In brief, this equated to neo-liberal ideology that presented academically selective education as a meritocratic playing field in which opportunities for certain types of success were available to all on the condition that they aimed high and worked hard. Boris, Gaby and Poppy's understanding of the 'way things are' aligned with such ideology and I utilised this alignment methodologically when constructing and analysing the narratives which formed their re-presentations. This alignment provided a means of identifying and subsequently analysing the contextual influences and background knowledge evident within their data which were found to relate and inter-relate to the entirety of their lived experiences. Boris, Gaby and Poppy survived the symbolic violence of academically selective education by consciously and sub-consciously drawing on this alignment.

However, I do not argue that the participants' survival of symbolic violence in any way implies that academically selective education is therefore free of any implications related to social (in)justice. Over and above data that evidences the under-representation of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds attending grammar schools (Long et al., 2022), living within an academically selective area meant that the participants encountered a distinct form of academic selection. Sitting a test in the final year of primary school which determines applicability for entrance to certain secondary schools creates an additional form of social injustice in that it is not a universal experience throughout the (state-funded) English education system. This raises the point that, despite pertaining to the opposite, the field of education within England is far from level and as my findings have demonstrated, being a 'near-miss' pupil within an academically selective area significantly contributed to Boris, Gaby and Poppy's lived experiences of the 'way things are'. The participants were not completely blind to the operation of symbolic violence within the 'way things are'. They raised their perceptions of social injustices which were manifest within academically selective education and across the re-presentation of their other lived experiences. These were articulated in a myriad of ways, from Boris's recognition that 'the badge sticks' to Poppy's self-exclusion from

accepting a Russell Group university offer to Gaby's inability to reconcile her future with a family to her future as a lawyer.

Presenting the participants as victims of the symbolic violence resulting from academically selective education therefore demonstrates how social injustice was an accepted part of the 'way things are'. However, the very act of accepting the 'way things are' as a result of both pre-reflexive and reflexive practice has led to the conceptualisation of the participants as survivors. They understood the game to be played and consciously and sub-consciously played by its rules. As Bourdieu argues:

People are not fools; they are much less bizarre or deluded than we would spontaneously believe precisely because they have internalised, through a protracted and multisided process of conditioning, the objective choices the face (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 130).

The education system the participants were part of has been found to have contributed to the conditioning Bourdieu mentions. The nuances within the participants' perspectives have revealed criticisms but not total opposition to such a system, despite it facilitating symbolic violence. They justified their grounds for supporting the system on the basis of their recognition of the system's ideology as seemingly being beyond question, or to use Bourdieusian terminology, by recognising how the field of academically selective education related to the neo-liberal field of power. The participants were neither blind to the social injustice of the game nor unaware of how they could potentially overcome such injustice by playing by the game's rules.

This therefore leads to how the findings of this research can contribute to the ethical consideration raised by Francis, Mills, et al. (2017, p. 417):

education academics concerned with social justice have often been less clear on what socially just education provision would look like.

Although it initially seems counter-intuitive, drawing on Boris, Gaby and Poppy's lived experience of surviving the symbolic violence of academically selective education provides an alternative perspective on social justice and education. In many ways, this thesis can be viewed as falling in line with the criticism of work within the sociology of education raised by Francis and Mills (2012, p. 579) in that it has identified social injustice and how the academically selective system reproduces inequality. However, using Bourdieu's thinking

tools to examine the re-presentations of the participants lived experiences has provided a means of identifying how unseen and therefore unquestioned objective structures shaped their subjective experiences.

As Bourdieu acknowledges, the participants were 'not fools'. They were aware of the operation of such structures and used this awareness to support their survival. Employing a methodological approach which centred around the participants and positioned them as the 'experts in their own lives' (Clark, 2017, p. 20) revealed the extent to which they understood the game at play, which in turn allowed them to play by its rules. What can be learnt from this, in terms of the implications for social justice, is the value inherent to acknowledging what goes unseen and unsaid about an education system. Both Francis and Mills (2012) and Reay (2012) question what a socially just education system would look like in terms of policy but despite convincing arguments concerning potential policy development, neither article considers the extent to which the pupils within any educational system (regardless of the degree to which it can be evaluated as socially just) are uniquely placed to see what an education system looks like. This thesis demonstrates that a Bourdieusian examination of such perspectives can serve to hold a metaphorical mirror up to an education system, revealing that which goes unseen. The unseen element revealed by this research was the extent to which knowing the game within academically selective education and playing by its rules positioned Boris, Gaby and Poppy as both victims and survivors. They were both dominant and dominated and therefore disrupted a previously accepted binary. This disruption recognised and articulated the social injustice that the participants encountered as a result of an academically selective system, but such recognition and articulation also revealed how the participants survived such injustice by acknowledging it as an accepted aspect of the game they were playing. As near-miss pupils within an academically selective system, they were fully aware of what such a system looked like in terms of social injustice and how the operation of such a system served to present such injustice as an aspect that could go unseen.

Using the research questions to shape the discussion within this section has provided a means of demonstrating how my findings align with methodological, analytical and ethical considerations. I have used both parts within this discussion chapter to engage analytically with the data presented in chapters 5-7. This analytical engagement provided the pathway

towards the conceptualisation of the participants as both victims and survivors which was discussed in part 1. This discussion was then drawn upon in part 2, in which the research questions were used to present the findings of this thesis. My intention throughout the entirety of this discussion chapter was to build upon the application of Bourdieu's tools demonstrated in chapters 5 - 7. I therefore consider this chapter to demonstrate how I have adhered to Bourdieu's key focus of seeking theory from practice.



# Chapter 9: Conclusion

This chapter begins with a concise summary of my findings, following on from the discussion shaped by the research questions in the previous chapter. These provide key takeaway points which are then drawn upon in the discussion of the implications this thesis has for theory, policy and practice. The limitations of this thesis are acknowledged and to conclude, potential next steps are discussed.

## Summary of Findings

*Research question 1: To what extent does symbolic violence operate in the lived experiences of near-miss pupils and what facilitates such operation?*

Symbolic violence was found to operate within the lived experiences of the participants both within and beyond education. Viewing symbolic violence through an intersectional lens found a commonality in the form of acceptance of the 'way things are'. Analysis revealed structures which were at times explicit (such as the academically selective education system itself and the categorisation of the participants as EAL pupils) but at other times implicit (such as the conceptualisation of grammar schools as 'better' and racialisation linked to linguistic capital). Although the participants did demonstrate awareness of inequity linked to their experiences of symbolic violence, their misrecognition and acceptance of individual responsibility to overcome such inequity, contributed to the perpetuation of the 'way things are' and consequently the participants being victims of symbolic violence.

*Research question 2: How do near-miss pupils relate their lived experience of academically selective education to their lived experiences beyond education?*

The participants 'survival' of symbolic violence drew upon their knowledge of the rules of the game. This knowledge was found to operate both reflexively and pre-reflexively. The conceptualisation of habitus as an 'embodied history' was used to explore the pre-reflexive dispositions inculcated within the participants' habitus. These dispositions stemmed from a range of contexts (including the migratory experiences of the participants) and movement within and across differing social fields which served to align the participants with the doxa of the field of education. For the participants, this alignment meant that drawing relations between their lived experiences within and beyond education was not problematic. Moreover, drawing such relations contributed to their 'survival' of symbolic violence.

Research question 3: To what extent do the lived experiences of near-miss pupils confirm or disrupt the dominant/dominated binary?

As both 'victims' and 'survivors' of symbolic violence, the participants were found to be both dominant *and* dominated. This served to disrupt Bourdieu's presentation of the binary as either/or. This disruption was found to be manifest within the lived experiences of the participants on occasions when they resisted domination through intentional compliance with the dominant. Exploring the complexities within the participants' lived experiences made clear that occasions of intentional compliance were at times strategically employed by the participants and in other instances occurred pre-reflexively. The underpinning factor beneath the disruption to the binary was found to be the participants' awareness of, and playing by, the rules of the game.

Research question 4: What are the implications of the above on the relationship between academically selective education and social (in)justice?

Despite presentations within some political rhetoric as presenting opportunities for social justice, academically selective education was found to create instances of social injustice which the participants fell victim to. However, the participants' recognition of and alignment with the rules of the game provided them with a means of surviving such injustice. The disruption to the dominant/dominated binary that was evident within the lived experiences of the participants therefore makes clear that academically selective education operates according to both a seen and an unseen structure. The participants alignment with the unseen elements of this structure facilitated their survival. This therefore demonstrated how the relationship between social (in)justices and academically selective education relied upon what went unseen and unsaid about education.

## Implications of this thesis

This section will build upon the above findings to explore the potential implications of this thesis for theory, policy and practice.

### Theory

In this section I outline the theoretical implications of this research, using the following comment from Lahire's (2014) criticism of a Bourdieusian approach as a starting point:

To move on from what Bourdieu says... one has to ask oneself what it is that he specifically says... and what it is that he necessarily does not discuss and which we sometimes... want to study (Lahire, 2014, p. 65)

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic violence is the obvious starting point for examining what he 'specifically says' about it:

imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted through the most part by the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 1)

This description makes clear the means through which symbolic violence operates unseen upon its victims. This therefore falls in line with James's acknowledgement of a Bourdieusian approach being 'a sociology of domination, bringing with it a strong concept of power' (James, 2015, p. 108) in which there is a clear, binarised structure of dominant and dominated. This thesis has demonstrated how such a structure operated within the re-presentations of the lived experiences of the participants, resulting in their falling victim to symbolic violence. However, I have also examined the means and extent to which the participants survived such symbolic violence which (as observed by Lahire, above) is an aspect Bourdieu 'does not discuss'. To this extent, I consider a theoretical implication of this thesis is shifting the focus of symbolic violence away from a simplistic binary of dominant/dominated. In order to justify such a claim, I will examine it in relation to arguments proposed by scholars in critiques of symbolic violence and its component concept of misrecognition.

Watkins (2018) presents a critique of symbolic violence and centres her argument around Bourdieu's claim that 'the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5) objectively equates all pedagogic action to symbolic violence. Watkins questions the degree to which such an interpretation of pedagogic action is able to recognise how some forms of pedagogic action can result in transforming, rather than confirming power relations. She raises the following counter to Bourdieu's conceptualisation:

The symbolic violence that pedagogy inflicts is not so much the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power; rather, it occurs if knowledge and skill are either not, or only minimally, realised. (Watkins, 2018, p. 49).

Watkins acknowledges the binary between 'legitimate culture' and the culture of the dominated which Bourdieu considers as reproducing educational inequality (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and suggests one way of reducing such a binary is through exposing the

reliance of 'legitimate culture' upon particular cognitive skills which could then be taught to and acquired by those in a dominated position (Watkins, 2018, p. 52). If such a proposal was re-worded in the Bourdieusian terminology of teaching the dominated the 'rules of the game' then it is possible to draw a parallel between Watkins's argument and the findings of this thesis. Boris, Gaby and Poppy survived symbolic violence by knowing and playing by the rules of the game and therefore aligned (albeit with a somewhat variable degree) to the 'legitimate culture' of the field of education. However, what Watkins omits from her argument and what this thesis has demonstrated is that being equipped with knowledge of the rules of the game (which in the case of this thesis has been found to relate to the habitus of the participants and in Watkins's argument can result from pedagogic action itself) can serve to blur the dominant/dominated binary but in an individual's very playing by the rules, the game (and therefore the symbolic violence) will not itself cease.

Watkins also critiques the conceptualisation of game playing within symbolic violence as only viewing individuals in terms of their field positioning (as determined by the capital they hold):

it is not enough to give consideration to how social actors are positioned within a field; the focus of enquiry should be the actual relations that contribute to this.' (Watkins, 2018, p. 56).

Watkins considers such positions to reflect the structures of a macro view which cannot be used to assume the micro view of the actual interactions that constitute an individual's everyday life. This thesis has taken the micro approach Watkins calls for, focusing on the participants' lived experiences and how these were shaped by and shaping of their habitus which were in turn shaped by and shaping of the different social fields they operated within. The re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences have been constructed and analysed individually with the simultaneous recognition that each re-presentation contributes a piece of the mosaic of each participant. Thus, the relations encountered within one field have been found to have shaped the participants' relations within another field. For example, the micro view of Boris's interactions has demonstrated how he drew frequently upon his experience of competition within the field of sport and related it directly to his experience within the field of education. Whilst I therefore agree with Watkins's argument concerning the value of a micro view, I also recognise that such micro views when examined using Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox can reveal structures which operate on a macro level.

Working in this way serves to counter the criticism Lahire (2014, p. 90) makes of what he perceives as weaknesses in *Reproduction* which leave a reader:

no better informed as regards what makes the specificity of the school, namely the (historically variable) contents of the activities that go on there, the knowledges that circulate, the modes of study that are transmitted, the dispositions that are endlessly constituted, the forms of pedagogic relations (which are power relations) engaged there.

Building up from a micro view has demonstrated the micro points Lahire considers Bourdieu to overlook, along with the operation of macro structures within and across fields. The participants could identify the specific rules of the game within education and were able to recognise which of these were of relevance in alternative fields or, as they termed it, the 'real world'. By doing so, the simultaneous autonomy of social fields and the porous nature of their boundaries became evident. The participants used what they 'knew' in order to survive symbolic violence and examining the re-presentations of their lived experiences demonstrates how this knowledge drew upon pedagogy (in its broadest sense) which they had encountered across a variety of social fields. Watkins (2018, p. 58) claims that:

Bourdieu's position on pedagogy simply fails to account for the enabling dimensions of power, constituting a theoretical stance which is not always borne out in practice and leaving little room for capacitation and the possibility of transformation.

In relation to the findings of this thesis, I would suggest that the above claim could be amended. Whilst Bourdieu's position on pedagogy equating to symbolic violence does revolve around a dominant/dominated binary, this has been found to be blurred by the concurrent positioning of the participants as victims and survivors. It is this positioning as survivors which creates a space for the capacitation and transformation Watkins considers there to be little room for.

Returning to Lahire's comment which opened this section (Lahire, 2014, p. 65, see above) Bourdieu makes specific reference to misrecognition as an inherent aspect of the exertion of symbolic violence. Therefore, I consider it necessary to specifically address how the theoretical implication of blurring the dominant/dominated binary by presenting the participants as both victims and survivors relates to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of misrecognition.

In agreement with Telling (2020), I have adopted Bourdieu's conceptualisation of misrecognition as discussed in *The Logic of Practice* (1990b) to consider the ways in which 'actors are in a complex relation to their actions in a field: they both do and do not understand the real reasons for their actions and beliefs' (Telling, 2020, p. 930). Bourdieu describes the concept of misrecognition as follows:

a double game played with truth, through which the group, the source of all objectivity, in a sense lies to itself, by producing a truth whose sole function and meaning are to deny a truth known and recognized by all, a lie that would deceive no one, were not everyone determined to deceive himself. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 234)

Throughout the data, there were examples of the participants participating in such a 'double game'. An example that was evident across all three participants was their belief in the meritocratic opportunities available within education. I have demonstrated how such a belief was inculcated into the habitus of the participants and operated as a dispositional attitude which aligned them with the doxa of the field of education and therefore contributed to their survival. However, they also demonstrated an understanding of the rules of the game which at times critiqued the unlevel playing field of education and therefore saw through the façade of meritocracy. Nonetheless, the 'double game' operated so that meritocratic opportunities within education functioned as a 'truth' which, owing to the depth of its deception, resulted in the participants having no option but to subconsciously deceive themselves.

However, in presenting the participants as both victims and survivors and consequently blurring the dominant/dominated binary, this thesis suggests that conceptualisations of misrecognition (as a constituent element of symbolic violence) should move beyond attributing failure to acknowledging dominance as a trait of the dominated. Such an attribution is evident in the following explanation of symbolic violence made by Duckworth and Tett (2019, p. 369):

this type of violence is a symbolic mode of domination that includes labelling and stigma that results in those that are dominated failing to recognize the structures that manipulate them.

The findings of this research demonstrate an instance in which those who were in dominated position *were* able to recognise the structures which manipulated them and by so doing were able to survive as well as fall victim to symbolic violence. This does not deny the functioning of misrecognition but does indicate that misrecognition can at times be at least recognised

by those who perpetuate it. This would initially suggest an apparent contradiction, but as Thomson (2014b, pp. 90-91) acknowledges:

it is possible for players to be positioned to carry out the prevailing logic of the field, and to do so, but at the same time also take up a doxic position and adopt a partial practice which runs counter to that which prevails in the field.

The participants' acceptance of the 'way things are' followed the prevailing logic of the field of education. By following such logic, the participants misrecognised the symbolic violence that positioned academically selective practices as an element of the 'way things are' which was beyond question. Applying an intersectional lens to the symbolic violence experienced by the participants both within and beyond education confirmed how acceptance of the 'way things are' related to the intersections of class, race and gender that contributed to the social construct of the participants' identities. However, the findings have also demonstrated how the participants' perception of the 'way things are' provided them with an awareness of and alignment with how the 'way' operated. Aspects of the participants' pre-reflexive and reflexive practices positioned them as survivors of symbolic violence, and it is in this doxic position that they countered the logic of the field.

This thesis has identified an aspect of symbolic violence which to paraphrase Lahire (2014, p. 65) Bourdieu did 'not discuss' and proposes that conceptualisations of symbolic violence should look beyond the binary of dominant/dominated and seek to explore the extent and means by which victims of symbolic violence are able to survive. In contrast to Watkins's approach within her critique of symbolic violence (2018), my own exploration of symbolic violence has viewed a Bourdieusian approach as one which provides tools to unpick empirical investigation, or in Bourdieu's terminology to seek theory from practice. I therefore consider this thesis to demonstrate an additional way in which Bourdieu's conceptual tool of symbolic violence can be put to further work.

### Policy

My findings present the participants' knowledge of the rules of the game of education. Inherent to their conceptualisation of the 'way things are' in education was their pre-reflexive recognition of how academic attainment acted as a facilitator of success beyond the field of education and further, that the achievement of such academic attainment came as a result of 'hard work'. However, the participants reflexively identified the game at play and their

acceptance of the rules of the game of education was not blind to inequalities resulting from the game. Working with Bourdieu's thinking tools has provided a means of applying a critical epistemology to the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences. This, however, cannot be considered an end point; as Grenfell (2014c, p. 258) observes, employing such an approach necessitates consideration of 'the ramifications it has for knowledge and what is done with it.' This section therefore considers what can be done with the findings of this research in relation to education policy.

I begin with an acknowledgement that presenting the participants as both victims and survivors of academically selective education could, for policy makers, be highly problematic. Taken alongside James's recognition of policy makers' 'endemic reluctance to engage in problematising the ends of education' (2015, p. 108) the implications this thesis has for policy could be relatively limited. I therefore do not argue that the findings of this research can be considered to imply a seismic change in policy such as the removal of academically selective education systems from English state education. However, what can be taken from this thesis is the need for policy to address *all* aspects of an academically selective system. The participants openly displayed their recognition of the game of education and their interpretations of their experiences as near-miss pupils in relation to this game. This openness about the consequences of not winning the game is not mirrored in education policy which remains 'congenitally, sometimes infectiously, optimistic about what is possible and achievable through educational processes' (James, 2015, p. 108). The participants all acknowledged the experience of taking and not passing the 11+ as being far from an optimistic experience. Yet, they had no other choice but to accept what they had not wanted to hear and continue to play the game. In a similar way, the findings of this thesis can therefore be construed as something which policy makers may not want to hear, in that they demonstrate how education operates as a game played on an unlevel field. James (2015, p. 110) argues that the tendency for Bourdieusian approaches to be interpreted as pessimistic can limit their potential for policy implication:

even the most broad-minded educational policymakers are likely to find Bourdieusian research difficult to 'do' and difficult to 'hear', regardless of how ultimately practical or useful it might actually be.



This thesis has demonstrated how pupils' insight and understanding of the education game can provide challenging perspectives from which education policy can and should be considered. If a consequential outcome of education policy is to require that pupils hear what they find difficult (for instance the disappointment the participants spoke of in relation to their 11+ failure) then policymakers should likewise be willing to engage in a similar exercise. At a time when half of the UK population claim to not trust the national government (Office for National Statistics, 2022) policymakers should take heed of the openness the participants demonstrated when talking about the education game. Engaging in dialogue with pupils could be a small step towards honesty being beneficial for education policy.

### Practice

It is surely helpful to adopt a reflexive position which asks how our work might constitute a misrecognition, might perpetuate doxa, or might be easily taken up to further these ends. (Thomson, 2014b, p. 101)

The above quote from Thomson (2014b) illustrates what I consider to be the implications of this research on my practice as a researcher. Thinking reflexively about my own work has given me scope to consider the degree to which this research opened my eyes to a misrecognition I was operating under. In short, this equates to the emancipatory position that research in the sociology of education takes in relation to symbolic violence. My intention in this section is not to deny the value of significant amounts of literature which have utilised a Bourdieusian approach to demonstrate incidents and patterns of symbolic violence. Rather, it is to clarify how my internalisation of such literature created a misrecognition which I was able to identify as a result of the findings of this thesis.

In its simplest form, my misrecognition went as follows: symbolic violence is something that can be revealed via the application of Bourdieu's thinking tools by an individual who is positioned with the requisite knowledge to apply them (in this instance, me as a researcher). It is only through such revelation that victims of symbolic violence can be 'saved' and therefore provide a means of facilitating social justice. Within the context of my research, I had anticipated that re-presenting the participants' lived experiences would demonstrate the ways in which symbolic violence resulting from an academically selective education system played out in their everyday lives. To an extent, this happened and has been discussed in relation to the portrayal of the participants as victims (see Chapter 8, Part 1). However, by

taking a methodological approach that centralised the lived experiences of the participants, I have also found them to be survivors of symbolic violence. Initially, I considered this finding with great trepidation. It appeared to go some way in countering the charges of symbolic violence held up to academically selective education systems and by doing so presented me with a source of tension between what my findings were saying and what appeared as an established ethos of emancipation within the sociology of education. In short, the participants did not appear to require me to save them, as they were able to survive.

James (2015, p. 109) provided initial guidance on resolving such tension:

a Bourdieusian perspective includes considering how, like other professionals, educationists (and educational researchers) will have collective interests that include maintaining certain arrangements and a demand for their services.

I therefore acknowledge that an aspect of employing Bourdieusian epistemology and methodology is to give some consideration to how the findings of this research relate to the 'collective interests' of the sociology of education. Again, I re-iterate my assertion that this is not to suggest charges of instrumentalism against scholars, but merely to subject the doxa of the field of sociology of education to the same Bourdieusian scrutiny which is applied in this thesis. Doing so, led me back to emancipation, which can itself be traced back to Bourdieu's findings of educational inequalities in *Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Drawing attention to inequalities based on class, race and gender through the application of Bourdieu has been undertaken countless times and spans fields far beyond the sociology of education. To this extent, the use of Bourdieu's thinking tools to reveal how inequality positions certain individuals as victims has now become something which is an accepted (and unquestioned) practice, or doxa within the field. In many ways, it represents a pre-given structure. My decision to centre my methodological approach on what Watkins (2018, p. 57) terms the 'minutiae of fieldwork' revealed such doxa, in that it did not

treat these structural configurations as pre-existing but instead as a function of the relations that produce them, thereby avoiding their reification and the deterministic logic which this promotes (Watkins, 2018, p. 57).

In agreement with McNay (2004), I do not argue that my findings, based on the lived experiences of three near-miss pupils, serve to counter how symbolic violence operates within an academically selective system and consequently how a Bourdieusian approach

aligns with the doxa of sociology of education that seeks to emancipate individuals from incidents of inequality. However, the blurring of the dominant/dominated binary revealed by this research is also an 'uncovering of immanent structures contained in the contingent [through which] the singular complexity of actions and interactions can be understood' (McNay, 2004, pp. 184-185). By recognising my own assumptions concerning the emancipatory role played by the sociology of education and examining them with a Bourdieusian approach, I consider myself to meet the following demand from James (2015, p. 109):

When educationists become critical social researchers...they must begin to subject themselves and their educational assumptions to new forms of scrutiny.

Such scrutiny will have implications on my practice as a researcher and I argue that these implications should be considered by scholars within the sociology of education. From my own experience, I recognise how this can be challenging. As Grenfell and James (2004, p. 518) observe, 'it is perhaps a truism to state that no-one ever thanks you for pointing out misrecognitions.' However, I argue that to further the advancement of social justice, practice within the sociology of education needs to recognise the degree to which it is 'complicit in misrecognition' (Thomson, 2014b, p. 100). This thesis demonstrates that one means of achieving this is re-focusing attention away from an overly simplistic interpretation of the sociology of education acting in the interests of social justice by providing a means of emancipation for those who face inequality. Instead, this thesis demonstrates that engaging with the everyday lived experiences of participants can reveal complexities which further our understanding of the ways in which inequalities do (and at times, do not) play out in participants' lives. Within this research, this was achieved by simply listening to what the participants had to say. However, the challenge behind such simplicity was continuing to listen at times when what was being said countered the doxa of the sociology of education. Put differently, listening to the participants required me to move beyond conceptualising them as being in 'need' of the sociology of education to emancipate them from social injustice. To this extent, I suggest an implication of this research for practice within the sociology of education is the recognition that acting in the interests of social justice requires a willingness to engage critically with its conceptualisation. Questions should be asked concerning what social justice equates to in the particular research context. The findings of

this thesis demonstrate that such critical engagement acts to serve social justice by drawing attention to its nuances and complexities.

Discussing the implications this research has for theory, policy and practice has also caused me to consider the extent to which such implications all relate back to my methodological approach. By centring this research on the lived experiences of near-miss pupils and theorising outwards from them, I have been able to identify the ways in which their experiences offered much to be explored, examined and understood. When the disruption to field work caused by Covid-19 reduced my participant numbers from eight to three, I was concerned as to whether this would constitute 'enough' data. As my analysis continued, my concern slowly decreased as I realised the extent to which the data caused me to examine and question aspects relating to theory, policy and practice. As an end to this process of questioning, I acknowledge what can be gained from small-scale, in-depth research and consider the potential reach of the implications discussed above to signify what can be learned from something as simple as asking pupils to talk about their experiences of education.

## Limitations

I have endeavoured to be open and reflective about the limitations of this research throughout this thesis and have interwoven my acknowledgements of limitations across its entirety. I have addressed concerns such as the small sample size and critiqued my selection of methods. I have also made frequent, explicit acknowledgement of the data being representations rather than representative. I also cannot ignore the impact Covid-19 has had on this thesis. The focus on the immigrant aspect of the participants' lived experiences stemmed from the disruption to fieldwork. The analysis which followed brought this aspect to light but also highlighted that the racialised elements of the participants' lived experiences required further investigation which was unfortunately constrained by Covid-19. Viewing this retrospectively makes me aware of how further prompts and probes on the participants' lived experiences as immigrants would have strengthened the data set.

As discussed in my introduction to this thesis, my interest in academically selective education and specifically near-miss pupils stems from my previous teaching experience. Bourdieu

makes the following comment concerning research interest which has prompted a concluding reflection on the limitations of this research:

to say we are interested in a problem is a euphemistic way of naming the fundamental fact that we have vital stakes in our scientific productions. Those interests are not directly economic or political; we experience them as disinterested...The subject of scientific discourse needs to be asked the same questions that are put to the object of that discourse. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 49)

My initial reaction to Bourdieu's statement was to consider how my 'disinterest' developed across this research. I have openly explored how my positionality as a former teacher not only initiated my research interest but also had an impact on my epistemological and methodological approach that was not centred around seeking definitive answers to the 'problem' of academically selective education. At first sight, this seems far removed from 'disinterest'. However, I can also recognise that my 'disinterest' has developed as a result of my engagement with the participants' data. Listening to their reflections on their lived experiences of an academically selective system provided insight which led to the conceptualisation of the participants as survivors. This conceptualisation developed my 'disinterest' as it moved me beyond the interests I had held in the academically selective system as a result of my teaching experience. Using a Bourdieusian approach to construct and analyse the re-presentations of the participants' lived experiences provided an opportunity to see the academically selective system through a lens which was not solely formed of my own interests; the lens also served to distance or dis-interest me away from such interests. However, this point should not be considered as a denial of the 'vital stakes' I hold in the research I have produced. In agreement with the following claim from Grenfell and James (2004, pp. 515-516), such vital stakes have

a bearing on what we study, how we study it and even who will listen to the outcomes. Bourdieu encourages the researcher to make explicit these aspects of research and their relation to the object of study to map the field.

Drawing this thesis to a conclusion by returning the research questions and suggesting potential implications for theory, policy and practice has demonstrated how the 'vital stakes' of 'what' 'how' and 'who' have shaped this research. My 'what' is perhaps the simplest to state in that this thesis provides an examination of academically selective education from the perspective of near-miss pupils, which as the literature review demonstrates has been an

under-investigated aspect of the academically selective system. The ‘what’ has a clear relationship to the ‘how’ and in Chapter 3 I justify my epistemological and methodological approach as being an appropriate means of examining lived experiences. The ‘who will listen’ has been made clear in this concluding chapter, which has demonstrated the potential implications of the findings of this thesis. It is perhaps appropriate that a thesis based on listening ends with a consideration of who will listen to the findings it has produced. I acknowledge that the listening which was undertaken to create such findings was achieved by means of a small-scale, non-representative study and recognise that for those who construe this as a limitation, this thesis may constitute little to be listened to. However, I also consider listening to have been the key contributor to the research and therefore something far removed from a limitation. I have demonstrated how listening to the experiences of Boris, Gaby and Poppy has ultimately led to the implications explored above. I anticipate that those who will listen to the outcomes of this thesis will recognise the value that lies within what there is to be heard.

### Potential next steps

In many ways, it seems highly appropriate that comments from the participants have shaped my intentions for further research beyond this thesis. When asked for their reflections on the research process at the end of the final interviews, they all demonstrated appreciation for having the opportunity of being able to talk about the education system they were part of. Likewise, after running a discussion group based on my findings with a group of near-miss pupils who attend a different non-academically selective school, similar comments arose. As evident from the resulting illustrations of the conversation (see Appendix 13), key feedback comments related to pupils’ recognition that talking about education had not constituted part of their experience of education. These have revealed that another element of the ‘way things are’ within education appears to be not talking about education. I therefore aim to seek funding to pursue research into this area. My objective therefore draws upon a key element of this thesis, which began with the frustration I felt as a teacher when I encountered acceptance of the ‘way things are’. I consider this thesis to have demonstrated what can be learned from questioning the ‘way things are’ within the field of education, in relation to academically selective systems and practices. Writing this thesis has made clear to me what can be gained from challenging, rather than accepting, the ‘way things are’ within education.

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## Appendix 1 – Interview Guides

### Interview Guide 1

- What constitutes participants' lived experience of an academically selective education system?
- How do they relate their lived experience within school to their lived experience beyond school?

**Interview Theme** - What's it like going through education in this area?

#### **Question prompts**

- What do you remember about being in Y6 and transitioning to secondary?
- What do you think is different between this school and a grammar school?
- What do you think about the system in this area?
- What do peers think?
- What does family think?
- Other than the school you attend, does this system make any other difference?  
(Social interaction outside of school, experience of interacting with grammar school pupils, activities (clubs, groups, you do/do not take part in) employment (y11/13) judgements from others (outside family/social circle)
- What difference do you think going to a grammar school could have made for you?

### Poppy Interview Guide

- Whole of primary leading up to 11+ (lessons, booklets)
- Still have the result letter
- Sad about result. Worked really hard for it
- Lack of parental interest in result.
- Awareness of personal style, how this would differ if at a grammar
- Grammar offer of different opportunities (trips, extra curricular)
- Less academic pressure at current school
- Teacher expectations high at grammar school.
- Current school – get upset but you can laugh it off if you don't do well
- "Average" grades at GCSE – not outstanding enough for a grammar school
- Acceptance of system and testing "You do need some sort of test to see if you're right for the grammar school. That's how they know if you're someone who can cope with grammar school work" "I'm not sure how accurate it is"
- "Work ethic" at grammar
- Self-limiting Never joined sports club outside of school. It would probably be grammar school girls there and they'd be better than me.
- Under-selling herself "My GCSE grades aren't that shabby"
- Recognition of judgement from others based on type of school. My grades say I'm smart.
- Awareness of injustice of judgement "You got those grades even though you went to that school".
- Working harder in a grammar but this school means she's more open minded.
- It would have made me feel smarter.
- Diversity of friendship group. Hang out with boys.
- Confidence in ability to learn (Independence in Chemistry, Maths participation)
- Appreciate reassurance. "I assume what I'm doing is wrong"
- Complimentary vs complementary (mention of seeing complementary in a hotel)
- Able to articulate differences in teaching styles

## Gaby Interview Guide

- No tutor for 11+
- Told by grammar pupils “you’re stupid because you didn’t get in” (via social media)
- Mum bit disappointed, grammar would be better education. Lucy not upset
- Re-location has meant that grammar schools are closer to home “I can’t go there cos I didn’t pass”
- Single sex aspect of grammar school seen as a negative. Pressure (heard about this from friends) also seen as a negative to grammar.
- Grammars have better facilities, better teachers.
- Recognition of selective system as non-standard, experience on holiday of conversations with people who are unfamiliar with the system
- Planning on moving to a grammar for sixth form “better because the people there will have been accepted because they’ve got higher grades” “I looked around a grammar and I looked around a non-grammar and the grammar stood out...it was the way the teachers talked about their subjects, they were so passionate” “I think they are stricter”
- Belief in selection at 16 “because you’re at an age when you’ve developed your own way of thinking”
- Karate provides an opportunity to mix with grammar school pupils “there’s something about the grammar school girls that make them seem different”
- “If I had to describe for you a grammar school girl it would be bitchy, talks about her friend then goes and is all nice to her friend, constantly complains and says how much pressure she’s under”
- I don’t think the school I go to changes me in any way, it’s the school I go to, get my education and then go home. “Consumer” of education carries through to attitude to asking for help – sees it as something to be taken from school. Similar with prefect role – not much to be gained from it.
- “Because I go here I don’t think I’m the best person in the world but some people who go to grammar schools think I passed the test when I was 11 years old...and I’m so much better than you”
- London Law firm summer job (via step dad’s contact)
- Experience of being judged on the school she attends “it makes me feel less than someone else” feelings of frustration “why should someone feel better about themselves because of this one test?”
- Belief in meritocracy “I can get to wherever I want to in life as long as I put the work in, it doesn’t matter what school I go to”
- Recognition of peer consensus of feeling that “grammar school pupils think they’re better than us” “some people get disheartened about it”
- I’m going to a sixth form in a grammar school even though I went to a normal school
- On decision to leave – “do I really want to be part of something that I don’t truly believe in? I don’t think its right but the system is here so I might as well take advantage of it”
- The way people talk about it makes me so glad I didn’t go to a grammar. My parents said they’d rather me be top set in secondary than bottom set in grammar.
- Opportunities – range of trips at grammar schools compared to secondary. Lucy is interested in travel (San Diego university?)
- Recognition of talkative aspect of personality but can self-discipline and focus when necessary. Seen in lesson observations in a variety of ways. Seating arrangements dictates

interactions. Geography example of sitting next to friend having a negative effect. Realisation of this was “not fun” able to accept the resulting move away from friend as necessary to improve grades. Sacrifice of social opportunity.

- Confidence and willingness to provide “help” to friends, point out discrepancies to teachers

## Boris Interview Guide

- “Competitive” primary, peers got into grammar, revision classes in school in Y6
- Tutored for 11+. Score of 118. Appealed result. English score low (compared to Science and Maths) as a result of being a non-native speaker. Appeal rejected on grounds of English SATS score.
- Uses term “1<sup>st</sup> gen” – language of system
- Acknowledges parental belief/respect for education and their wish for grammar school (“they really wanted me to pass” “they weren’t disappointed, they were upset”)
- Out of friendship group, only one who did not pass.
- Splitting of friendship group (“it was hard”)
- Opportunities are a differing factor. Grammar schools have more trips, more competitive, money invested in sport.
- “They’ve got standards and a reputation”.
- “If you surround yourself with competitive people, you get pulled along by the current”
- “Grammar schools have opportunities provided and you’re forced into taking them. Over here there’s less opportunities provided and you’re not forced into taking them.”
- Understanding of the “system”: survival of the fittest, reliance on competition, inadequacies of measurement via standardized testing, how it relates to the “real world”, memorizing equations to get marks, learning to pass exam, exam passes as a benchmark,
- Athletic training outside of school – mix with grammar/private pupils. Raised V’s awareness of other opportunities (student conferences for grammar and private school pupils)
- Experience of segregation within sporting opportunities (only played against non-selective schools or grammar school B team)
- We do need grammar schools, public schools, state schools. “The bar needs to be set high” St M competing against grammar school.
- Family movement Sri Lanka, Germany, England
- Parental experience of education in Sri Lanka – recognition of value of education. Regards this as a motivating, positive influence. Gives examples of parenting which do not value education (term time holidays, sick days)
- Disadvantage associated with being a non-native English speaker, was down a few rungs on the ladder. “Not fair but its no-one’s fault”
- School segregation remains in social (non-school) environments.
- Sport bringing opportunities to get to know pupils from other schools. This comes with judgement from peers based on school you attend.
- “Any school that isn’t grammar slash private is regarded as lower class”
- Job interview at John Lewis. Experience of wearing a suit (unfamiliar). Group task scenario with grammar school pupil “I would say the same answer as her, but you have to say it in a certain way”
- Assumptions within the wider community of what you’ll be like based on school you attend.
- Knowledge of school demographics
- Being at a non-grammar gave opportunity to run 800m which wouldn’t have happened at a grammar owing to the competition
- Strong belief in the motivating element of competition
- Grammar mindset – have to do homework, if everyone around you is doing something you do it too.
- “the badge does stick” “we’ve gotta remove the badge cos its not the kid’s fault”



- Exposure, changing the “mindset”.
- Failure to understand – de-motivating and motivating. Leads to independent learning strategies (internet, revision techniques) “just naturally came to me”
- Willingness to try and open and accepting of his own errors and criticism from others. Seems to see this as a positive step towards improvement

## Appendix 2 – Observation Schedule

### Observation Schedule

#### WHAT IS HAPPENING AND WHY? (DeWalt & DeWalt 2002)

What are the interactions between columns?

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Location:**

Participant	Others	Me



## Appendix 3 – Consent Forms and Information Sheets



### A study examining the impact of academically selective education systems on the aspirations of high-attaining secondary school pupils

Researcher: Francesca McCarthy [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

Principal Supervisor: Professor Martin Mills [martin.mills@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:martin.mills@ucl.ac.uk)

#### Consent Form – Parent/Carer

	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my child can refuse to answer any or all of the interview questions and can also refuse to participate in the observations or collage tasks at any time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for all interviews to be audio-recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for my child to be observed in some of their timetabled lessons and for written notes of these observations to be made by the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that the researcher can contact my child via their school email to provide details necessary for the completion of research tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for my child to complete two collages using Padlet and for these to be shared with the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that small direct quotes from my child and screenshots of my child's collages may be used in reports (these will be given pseudonyms).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that a child was at risk. In these circumstances advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise as to the appropriate course of action.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Parent/Carer:.....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name of researcher:.....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

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## A study examining the impact of academically selective education systems on the aspirations of secondary school pupils

Researcher: Francesca McCarthy [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

Principal Supervisor: Professor Martin Mills [martin.mills@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:martin.mills@ucl.ac.uk)

### Information Sheet for Parents/Carers

#### **What is this about?**

This research is being undertaken as part of my PhD at UCL Institute of Education. As a former teacher within an academically selective area, I am looking to examine if and how the 11+ system impacts on the aspirations of secondary school pupils. My focus is on gaining further insight into the lives and aspirations of young people who are currently pupils at secondary schools within an academically selective area.

#### **Why has my child been invited to take part?**

Your son/daughter's school provided me with a list of potential participants for this study. Your son/daughter has been randomly selected from this list.

#### **Does my child have to take part?**

Your child does not have to take part. You should read this information page and if you have any questions you should use the contact details at the top of this page to contact me. Your child should not take part until you have had all your questions answered satisfactorily. If you decide to withdraw your child at any point, all the data your child has provided will be deleted.

#### **What will happen if my child takes part in this study?**

Your child will be asked to participate in three research activities:

1. Interviews – I will interview your child on three separate occasions about their experience of education within an academically selective area and their future aspirations. Each interview will last no more than one hour and will be conducted during the school day. Interviews will be audio-recorded and these recordings will be transcribed. Your child and his/her school will be given a fictitious name (a pseudonym) so that they cannot be identified.
2. Observations – Your child will be observed in some of their lessons. These observations may be discussed in the interviews.
3. Padlet collages – Your child will also be asked to complete two collages using Padlet, an online bulletin board. Your child will be sent a link and a password (using their school email account) to access their own Padlet boards which will not be viewable to anyone except me and your child. The collages will be discussed in the interviews. Screenshots of the collages may be taken but any content which could potentially identify your child will not be included. At the end of the research process the Padlet account will be deleted meaning that any content contained

within it is permanently removed. Further details regarding Padlet's security settings (including GDPR compliance) can be found at <https://Padlet.com/about/privacy>

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There is a risk that discussion of your child's experience within secondary school could cause some distress. Your child may stop taking part at any point without giving a reason and they will be reminded that they are able to refuse to continue with any discussion which makes them feel uncomfortable.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Your child's contribution to this study will allow them the opportunity to share their own perspectives on academically selective education. This will increase understanding and recognition of how academically selective education systems effect the lives and aspirations of secondary school pupils.

### **Will my child's taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All data is strictly confidential and pseudonyms will be used so that it will not be possible to identify your child or his/her school in any analyses or reporting. The information you provide will be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, which means it will be stored securely and not given to anyone else.

Your child does not have to take part in the case study if you do not want him/her to. If you later decide that you do not want your child's data used in this research you can ask for his/her data to be withdrawn from the project at any time until 31st July 2021, without giving a reason, by contacting me via email at [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

### **Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). UCL's Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk).

Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice> The legal basis that would be used to process your child's personal data will be performance of a task in the public interest. The legal basis used to process special category personal data will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes/explicit consent.

Your child's personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. I will undertake to pseudonymise the personal data you provide and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your child's personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk).

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results of the study will form part of my doctoral thesis. I also plan to make the research findings publicly available through publications such as research articles and blogs.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If this study has harmed you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study you can contact Professor Phil Jones, Chair of the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee, using this email address: [IOE.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:IOE.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk)

If you have any questions you would like to ask, please contact me by email at [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

Thank you for reading this information page and for considering taking part in this research.

**A study examining the impact of academically selective education systems on the aspirations of secondary school pupils**

Researcher: Francesca McCarthy [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

Principal Supervisor: Professor Martin Mills [martin.mills@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:martin.mills@ucl.ac.uk)

**Consent Form – Student**

	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part is voluntary and that I am free to stop at any time, without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that I can refuse to answer any or all of the interview questions and can also refuse to participate in the observations or collage tasks at any time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for the interviews to be audio-recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to be observed in some of my timetabled lessons and for written notes of these observations to be made by the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to provide the researcher with my school email address so that she can send me information I need to complete research tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to complete two collages using Padlet and for these to be shared with the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that small direct quotes of what I say and screenshots of my collages may be used in reports and that these will be given a different name so that I cannot be identified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that a child was at risk. In these circumstances advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise as to the appropriate course of action.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Student:.....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name of researcher:.....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

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## **A study examining the impact of academically selective education systems on the aspirations of secondary school pupils**

Researcher: Francesca McCarthy [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

Principal Supervisor: Professor Martin Mills [martin.mills@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:martin.mills@ucl.ac.uk)

### **Information Sheet for Students**

#### **What is this about?**

In this project I want to find out more about what it is like to be a secondary school student in an area where pupils sit the 11+ test in Year 6. I am interested in discovering how secondary school students like you see their futures and what your life is like as a secondary school student.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

You do not have to take part. You should read this information page and if you have any questions you should ask me. You should not take part until you have had all your questions answered. If you change your mind about taking part at any point, all the information you have provided will be deleted.

#### **What will happen if I choose to take part?**

You will be asked to participate in three research activities:

1. Interviews – You and I will meet on three separate occasions to talk about your experience of education and your thoughts about your future. Each interview will last no more than one hour and will take place during the school day. I will record and later type up the interviews. You will be asked to choose another name for yourself so that I can refer to what you say without identifying you.
2. Observations – I will visit some of your lessons to observe them. We might discuss some of the things I see in the observations during the interviews.
3. Padlet collages – You will also be asked to complete two collages using Padlet which is an online noticeboard. You will be sent a link and a password using your school email to access your own Padlet boards and be given instructions on how to create them. The Padlet boards will not be viewable to anyone except me and you. Once you have created your collages I will ask you to explain them to me. I might take screenshots of your collages but anything on them which could potentially identify you will not be included. At the end of the research process the Padlet account will be deleted meaning that any content contained within it is removed.

No-one outside the project team and your school will be given information that can identify you as an individual. I follow the rules of the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, which means I will look after your data safely and keep it protected. I will not use your name or the name of the school in any reports. This research has been approved by UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee. I have also written to your parent/carer to tell them about this research.

If you change your mind about taking part, you can email me at any time until 31 July 2021 at [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

You do not need to give me a reason for changing your mind. It's completely up to you whether you want to be involved or not.

If you have any questions you would like to ask, please contact me by email at [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There is a risk that discussion of your experience within secondary school could cause you some distress. Before any of the research activities I will remind you that you do not have to answer questions which make you feel uncomfortable. You can refuse for the activity to continue without giving a reason and you can also stop taking part at any point without giving a reason.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Your contribution to this study will allow you to share your perspectives on academically selective education. It will be a chance to have your opinions listened to as an individual who is currently going through an academically selective system. Your contribution will increase understanding and recognition of how academically selective education systems effect the lives and aspirations of secondary school pupils. Taking part in this research will give you an insight into how academic research at a university is conducted. If there are particular aspects of university or higher education you are interested in, I will do my best to help you find relevant information. I will also bring food along to any research activities which take place during lunch times.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results of this research will be written up. I also plan to make the research findings publicly available through publications such as research articles and blogs. This will mean that some of what you say could be read by a wide audience. I will also write to you individually to let you know the results of this research.

Thank you for reading this information page and for considering taking part in this research.

## Appendix 4 – Ethical Approval

Institute of Education



### Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

#### **Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process**

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**. To do this, email the complete ethics form to [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). Once your registration number is received, add it to the form\* and submit it to your supervisor for approval. If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

**Please note that the completion of the UCL GDPR online training is mandatory for all PhD students. The link is here:** <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/ucl-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/gdpr-online-training>

Section 1 Project details		
a.	Project title	<i>"I won't be a lawyer, I failed my 11+"</i> . An examination of how an academically selective education system impacts on the aspiration of "near-miss" secondary school students.
b.	Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678)	Francesca McCarthy 18156510
c.	<b>*UCL Data Protection Registration Number</b>	Z6364106/2019/10/82 social research
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor	Professor Martin Mills Dr Becky Taylor
d.	Department	Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		DEdPsy <input type="checkbox"/>
		EdD <input type="checkbox"/>
f.	<b>If applicable</b> , state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.	
g.	Intended research start date	January 2020
h.	Intended research end date	September 2022

November 2018

	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If research to be conducted abroad please check <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a> and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be <b>required</b> before ethical approval can be granted:</i> <a href="http://oenet.inst.iae.ac.uk/about/profservices/International/Pages/default.aspx">http://oenet.inst.iae.ac.uk/about/profservices/International/Pages/default.aspx</a>	England
j.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	External Committee Name:
	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 2	Date of Approval:
<b>If yes:</b> - Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application. - Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.		
<b>Note:</b> Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the <a href="#">National Research Ethics Service</a> (NRES) or <a href="#">Social Care Research Ethics Committee</a> (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.		

### Section 2 Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interviews<br><input type="checkbox"/> Focus groups<br><input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires<br><input type="checkbox"/> Action research<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Observation<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature review | <input type="checkbox"/> Controlled trial/other intervention study<br><input type="checkbox"/> Use of personal records<br><input type="checkbox"/> Systematic review ⇒ <i>if only method used go to Section 5.</i><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Secondary data analysis ⇒ <i>if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.</i><br><input type="checkbox"/> Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other, give details:<br>Visual method – completion of two collages using Padlet. |
|--|---|

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

#### **Purpose of the research**

The statement within the title of this research was made to me whilst I was working as a teacher in a secondary school within an academically selective area. The research will examine if and how secondary school students interpret not qualifying for a grammar school place as "failure" and in turn if and how this "failure" imposes aspirational limitations. Given the ongoing grammar school expansion plans of the current Conservative administration, this research seeks to explore this issue from the perspective of students who are ~~categorised~~ as 'high-attaining' (in terms of their Key Stage 2 result) but who attend non-academically secondary schools within an academically selective area ("near-miss students"). I want to further explore how they regard both the education system they are a part of and if and how being part of this system shapes their aspirations.

#### **Research Questions**

The research will examine the following research questions:

##### **How do near-miss students perceive themselves?**

- What constitutes their lived experience of an academically selective education system?

- How do they relate their lived experience within school to their lived experience beyond school?

#### How do the lived experiences of near-miss students shape their aspirations?

- What are their aspirations?
- How do they relate their aspirations to their lived experience?

#### Research Methodology

I intend to adopt Bourdieu's epistemological and methodological approach which allows theory to develop from practice. His thinking tools of habitus, field and capital will be ~~utilised~~ to allow concepts such as 'lived experience' and 'aspiration' to be constructed in relation to the participants' rather than my own ~~conceptualisation~~. Bourdieu's tools of habitus and capital will be used to explore the lived experiences of students within an academically selective system. The research will also encompass the consideration of academically selective education as a form of symbolic violence and the degree to which misrecognition of symbolic violence serves to justify the continuation of an academically selective education system.

This will require an iterative process during which participants' responses and constructive activity remain central and I have therefore selected to employ the Mosaic approach of Alison Clark (Clark, 2005, 2017; Clark & Moss, 2001) to answer the research questions. The Mosaic approach is a multi-method and poly-vocal approach which aims to bring together 'different perspectives in order to create with children an image of their worlds' (Clark, 2017, p. 17). Each of these different perspectives contributes a piece of the mosaic, which, like a mosaic, have to be viewed together to understand the whole. The approach focuses on the *creation* of knowledge with the participants rather than the *extraction* of knowledge *from* them and in so doing, acknowledges participants 'as experts in their own lives' (Clark, 2017, p. 20). As such, participants are regarded as being able to communicate their views and experiences and as taking an active role in meaning making. The participant remains central to the research process and the approach affords the participant several opportunities to construct, reflect upon and discuss the research. Further, the research is situated within the context of the participant's social world. This is evident from the focus within the framework on 'lived experiences' and also linked to the ~~utilisation~~ of participatory methods; these serve as a means of examining how the participant regards their relationship with their social world. Finally, the approach has an inherent focus on research *with* rather than *on* participants. I anticipate that being part of the research will provide the participants an opportunity to acknowledge that they are being listened to as part of a reciprocal process.

#### Research Design, Methods and Process

The research will take place in a secondary school within an academically selective Local Education Authority. Information will be sought from the school to identify and recruit two near-miss students (one male, one female) from Years 7, 9, 11 and 13, amounting to eight participants. The process will incorporate two phases; phase 1 being the construction of data and phase 2 being the discussion of constructed data with participants.

#### Phase 1 (Potentially January 2020 – April 2020)

Session	Intended Method	Purpose
1	Observations	<del>Familiarisation</del> with participants' school context. Develop themes for interview.
2	Interview	Discuss outcomes of observations and begin discussion of lived experience and aspirations. Introduce participant task.
3	Visual method	Participant to complete tasks within an agreed time frame.
4	Observations	Examining how issues raised in interview do or do not translate into participant <del>behaviour</del> s within a classroom situation

**Phase 2 (Potentially April 2020 – July 2020)**

Session	Intended Method	Purpose
5	Interview	Discussion opportunity during which the participant will present their completed tasks. This will also be a further chance to discuss outcomes of the previous interview.
6	Interview	Discussion and construction of the 'mosaic' of the participant. Reflections of the research process shared.

I intend to conduct three semi-structured interviews with each participant and anticipate that these interviews will each last no more than 60 minutes. It is also my intention to observe participants within lessons. The amount of observations undertaken will be dependent on the school's timetabling restraints but I will ~~endeavour~~ to carry out observations in a wide variety of lessons over the course of the research. With regard to the visual method, participants will be asked to produce two collages using Padlet. Padlet acts as an online board which allows users to post images, videos, text and weblinks. It is available online ([www.padlet.com](http://www.padlet.com)) and also as a free app for phones and mobile devices. The participants will be given two titles: "How I See Myself" and "How I See My Future" and asked to produce a ~~collage~~ board for each. They will be given information on using Padlet and reminded that I will be asking to look at the boards on an agreed date.

**Reporting and dissemination**

In addition to reporting the research in my thesis, I also plan to disseminate the findings through publications such as research articles, blogs and presentations at academic conferences.

**Section 3 Research Participants (tick all that apply)**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early years/pre-school             | <input type="checkbox"/> Adults <i>please specify below</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ages 5-11               | <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown – specify below            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ages 12-16              | <input type="checkbox"/> No participants                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Young people aged 17-18 |   |

**NB:** Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service \(NRES\)](#) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee \(SCREC\)](#).

**Section 4 Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)**

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

- |    |   |                                |  |
|----|---|--------------------------------|--|
| a. | Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist <del>organisations?</del>                          | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| c. | Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

\* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues

**Section 5 Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)**

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be <del>analysing</del> any secondary data?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>

*\* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues*

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) and if you have answered No to both questions, please go to Section 8 Attachments.*

### Section 6 Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a.	Name of dataset/s	Academic attainment records	
b.	Owner of dataset/s	The research school	
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<i>If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?</i> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
d.	Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
f.	If no, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
g.	If no, was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>

*\* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues*

*If secondary analysis is only method used and no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to Section 9 Attachments.*

### Section 7 Data Storage and Security

*Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.*

a.	<b>Data subjects - Who will the data be collected from?</b> Participants will be young people of secondary school age (11 – 18 years)
b.	<b>What data will be collected?</b> Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected In addition to interview responses, observation field notes and online collages, I will also collect data concerning participants' academic attainment (including Key Stage 2 test results, 11+ scores, GCSE results and school-generated progress data).

c.	<p><b>Is the data anonymised?</b></p> <p>Do you plan to anonymise the data?</p> <p>Do you plan to use individual level data?</p> <p>Do you plan to pseudonymise the data?</p> <p><i>* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues</i></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
e.	<p><b>i. Disclosure – Who will the results of your project be disclosed to?</b></p> <p>Initially, my supervisors whilst I am drafting my thesis. Results will be shared with participants via a summary document and also included in my thesis. I plan to publish articles relating to this research (for example on methodology and my findings) within academic journals and blogs. I may potentially write a policy briefing paper based on my findings.</p> <p><b>ii. Disclosure – Will personal data be disclosed as part of your project?</b></p> <p>Yes in a pseudonymised form.</p>	
f.	<p><b>Data storage – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick**, encrypted laptop** etc.</b></p> <p>** Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS</p> <p>Audio recordings will be made on a non-encrypted recorder which will then be uploaded on to a laptop encrypted to Advanced Encryption Standard 256.</p> <p>Written records (such as observation field notes) will be stored in a locked cupboard prior to them being typed up and saved onto the encrypted laptop.</p> <p>Data generated through the production of Padlet collages will be stored on a password protected account. The Padlet account will be categorized as "Private" meaning that it can only be accessed by invited contributors. Padlet's privacy policy can be found at <a href="https://padlet.com/about/privacy">https://padlet.com/about/privacy</a></p> <p>All data will be regularly backed up to the UCL network.</p>	
g.	<p><b>Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution) – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?</b></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
h.	<p><b>How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format?</b> Data stored electronically will be retained for 10 years. Hand-written notes will be scanned at the end of the writing process and the originals securely destroyed.</p> <p><b>Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with GDPR and state what these arrangements are)</b> No</p> <p><b>Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.)</b> No</p>	



i	<p>If personal data is used as part of your project, describe what measures you have in place to ensure that the data is only used for the research purpose e.g. <del>pseudonymisation</del> and short retention period of data'</p> <p>Data will be <del>pseudonymised</del> and only shared with my supervisors throughout the analysis and drafting process. Non-<del>pseudonymised</del> data and the <del>pseudonymisation</del> key will be destroyed once the final participant withdrawal rate has passed.</p>
	<p>* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues</p>

### Section 8 Ethical issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

All issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Methods</li> <li>- Sampling</li> <li>- Recruitment</li> <li>- Gatekeepers</li> <li>- Informed consent</li> <li>- Potentially vulnerable participants</li> <li>- Safeguarding/child protection</li> <li>- Sensitive topics</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International research</li> <li>- Risks to participants and/or researchers</li> <li>- Confidentiality/Anonymity</li> <li>- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality</li> <li>- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)</li> <li>- Reporting</li> <li>- Dissemination and use of findings</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

#### Methods

**Interviews** – Whilst formality may prove inhibiting for the participant, the marking of the interview as something 'different' from an everyday conversation can also be regarded as beneficial. I plan to use interview techniques which establish mutual respect (seating arrangements, using first names, having participants use language familiar to participants) to create an interview situation which facilitates respectful listening between an adult researcher and an adolescent participant.

**Observations** – Observation could be regarded as intrusive by both the participant and other individuals within the classroom. Observation will require the teacher's permission to be in the classroom which may serve to limit the number possible. Further, it is highly likely that observations of the participant will involve non-participants and the context of these interactions will determine whether I proceed to obtaining informed consent from non-participants so that their contributions can be included within the data. I also acknowledge my own involvement within the process of observation and plan to employ a reflexive approach will allow me to interrogate the outcomes of any observation I undertake and consider the influence of my own positionality.

**Visual method (Padlet collages)** - The completion of the Padlet collages by the participants raises several ethical considerations. I will set up a Padlet account and create individual boards for each participant. Participants will be sent a link and a password to access their own Padlet boards. The Padlet boards will have the privacy setting of "private" and will therefore not be viewable to anyone except myself as the creator (me) and the participant as contributor. I will ask the participant for their permission to take screenshots of their ~~padlet~~ collages and care will be taken to not include any content which could potentially identify the participant. These screenshots will be the only record I retain along with the recording of any discussion of them which takes place in the subsequent interview. According to its privacy policy, Padlet is GDPR compliant. Information related to sharing of personal data will be clarified with participants through the process of informed consent (see below).

### **Sampling**

I will require the support of the school in creating my sample. A purposive strategy will be undertaken which takes pupils year group, gender and attainment data into consideration. I am seeking two students (one male, one female) from Years 7, 9, 11 and 13 all of whom are identified as 'high attaining' by means of their Key Stage 2 result and any other subsequent attainment data held by the school. The extent to which these data are shared with me will be at the school's discretion. However, as the school is being asked to collate this list, they will be aware of the participants who are placed on it. I also intend to seek advice from the school as to their awareness of any reason for which certain potential participants should not be approached to participate in the research.

### **Recruitment**

Support from the school will be required in order to identify suitable participants and to provide contact details for them and their parents to gain informed consent.

### **Gatekeepers**

I will require permission from the Headteacher for the research to take place within the school as well as from relevant teachers in relation to undertaking observations.

### **Informed consent**

#### *Informed consent and information sharing*

Informed consent will be obtained from both the participants and their parent/carer. This will include detailed information on the type of data to be collected, with particular reference to data shared via Padlet. I also recognise that the wider school community may require some information regarding my presence in the school. This will be addressed in relation to the context in which this information is sought and advice will be taken from the school to ascertain any requirements they may have in sharing information regarding the research.

#### *Opt-in process*

Potential participants (and their parents) will be approached in writing using an opt-in process. As I am seeking a relatively small number of participants, I intend to contact potential participants individually, highlighting the research's purpose and focus. I anticipate that this will lay a positive foundation on which to develop the participant-researcher relationship and also encourage participation.

### **Potentially vulnerable participants**

My sample will consist of young people aged under 18. As such, all of the ethical considerations discussed both here and within the attached upgrade document acknowledge their potential vulnerability. In addition to gaining informed consent from the participants at the start of the research, a verbal check will also be made with them prior to the commencement of each method (eg at the start of the interview). They will be reminded that their participation can stop at any point and that they can avoid answering questions or request the method to pause should they wish.

### **Safeguarding/child protection**

I hold a current and valid DBS clearance. Prior to commencing the research, I will verify who the Designated Safeguarding Lead is within the school. I am aware of my duty to report any safeguarding concerns to that member of staff and will remind participants of this duty.

### **Sensitive topics/risks to participants**

Discussions of lived experience may cause participants to consider 11+ "failure" and in addition, create feelings of intrusion. Whilst I cannot eliminate these risks, every attempt will be made to minimise them. I will draw upon my extensive experience of working with adolescents to use method-specific strategies (seating arrangements, using first names, having participants use language familiar to them) that will contribute to a situation which facilitates respectful

listening between an adult researcher and an adolescent participant.  
 I also recognise the potential risk that participation may create in terms of time spent away from lessons, particularly for participants in exam years (Year 11 and Year 13). Therefore, I intend to seek advice from the school and will adapt the time frame of the research wherever possible to accommodate this.

**Confidentiality/anonymity**

The location of the school will remain confidential and the name of the school and all participants will be anonymised. Participants will be informed that all information shared will remain confidential subject to safeguarding concerns. Every effort will be made to identify a location in school for interviews which can create as much privacy as possible within the confines of safeguarding policies.

**Limits to confidentiality**

As the number of academically selective Local Education Authorities is relatively small it could be possible to identify the particular Local Education Authority in which the research will take place. In addition, contextual information about the locality of the school (for example socio-economic details) could potentially identify the school. Consideration of all potential identifiers will be made prior to their inclusion within any dissemination of findings and/or published work.

**Data storage and security (during and after the research)**

Data will be stored on an encrypted laptop. Written records, such as field notes, will be stored in a locked cupboard. I will be the only person with access to the data although anonymised data may be shared with my supervisors during periods of analysis.

See also Section 7 (above)

**Reporting**

Participants will be advised that their anonymised data (in forms of quotes and examples) may be shared as part of the research findings.

Participants and the Headteacher of the school will also receive a summary report on the research findings.

**Dissemination and use of findings**

In addition to my thesis, I may also produce other publications and/or presentations concerning my findings. In addition to the processes outlined above, I will also undertake a pre-publication check to ensure compliance.

Please confirm that the processing of the data is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual Yes

Section 9 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached		
a.	Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research ( <i>List attachments below</i> )	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Parent Information Sheet, Parent Consent Form, Student Information Sheet, Student Consent Form		
<i>If applicable/appropriate:</i>		
b.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
c.	The proposal ('case for support') for the project	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Full risk assessment	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>

**Section 10 Declaration**

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor. Yes  No

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course. Yes  No

**I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:**  
 The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name	F L McCarthy
Date	27/09/2019

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

**Notes and references**

#### Professional code of ethics

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

[British Psychological Society](#) (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*

or

[British Educational Research Association](#) (2018) *Ethical Guidelines*

or

[British Sociological Association](#) (2017) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/research-ethics>

#### Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

#### Further references

The [www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk](http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk) website is very useful for assisting you to think through the ethical issues arising from your project.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.


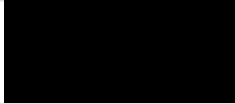
Wiles, R. (2013) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

#### Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor **must** refer the application to the Research Development Administrator (via [ioe\\_researchethics@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ioe_researchethics@ucl.ac.uk)) so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name	Francesca McCarthy
Student department	CPA
Course	PhD

Project title	<i>"I won't be a lawyer, I failed my 11+". An examination of how an academically selective education system impacts on the aspiration of "near-miss" secondary school students.</i>	
<b>Reviewer 1</b>		
Supervisor/first reviewer name	Martin Mills	
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	No	
Supervisor/first reviewer signature		
Date	9/10/19	
<b>Reviewer 2</b>		
Second reviewer name	Becky Taylor	
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	No	
Supervisor/second reviewer signature		
Date	9/10/19	
<b>Decision on behalf of reviews</b>		
Decision	Approved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Approved subject to the following additional measures	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not approved for the reasons given below	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Referred to REC for review	<input type="checkbox"/>
Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC	None	
Comments from reviewers for the applicant	None	
<i>Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: <a href="mailto:IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk">IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk</a>.</i>		

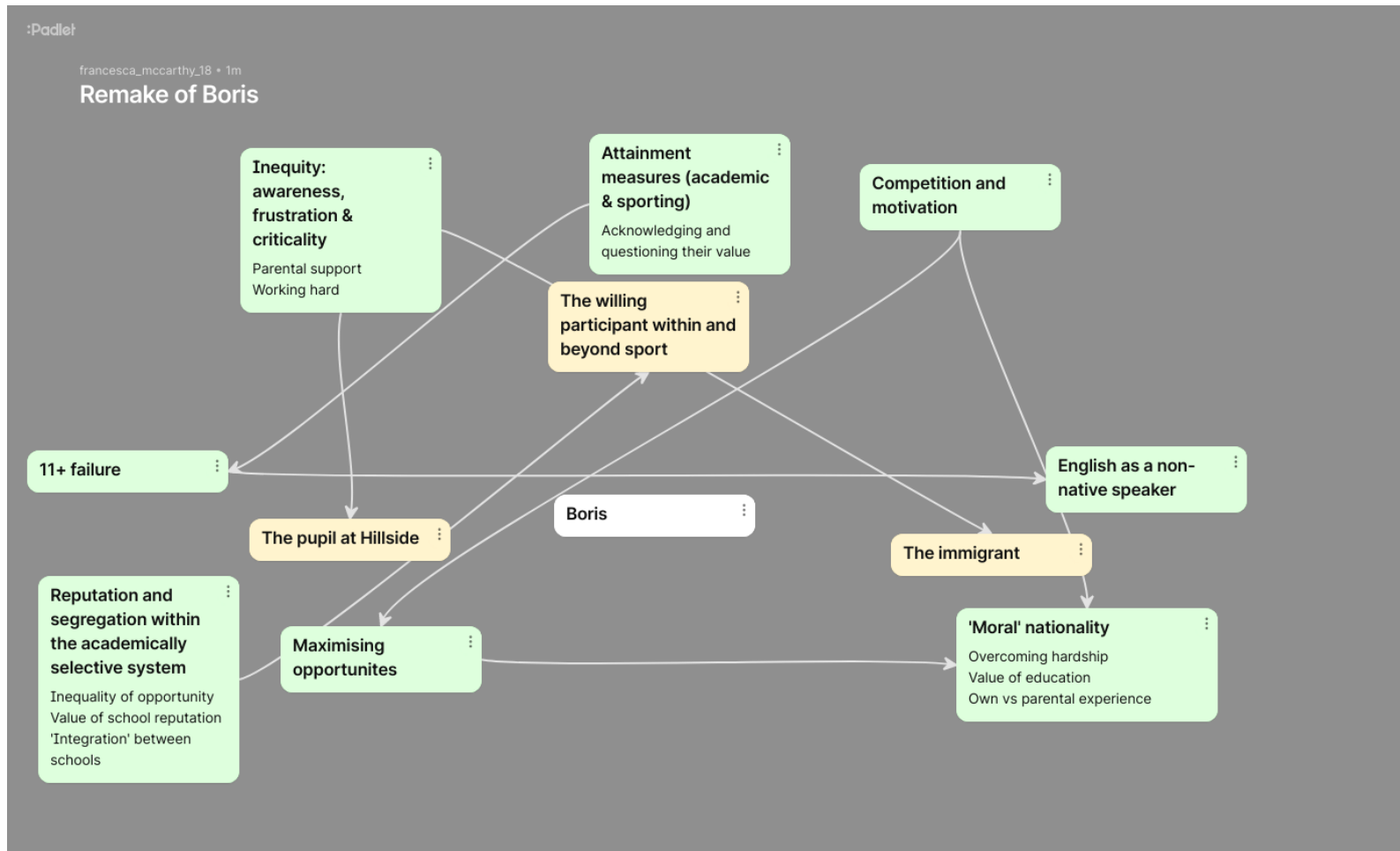
## Appendix 5 – Message for Hillside Staff Bulletin

### **A study examining the impact of academically selective education systems on the aspirations of higher-attaining secondary school pupils**

Researcher: Francesca McCarthy [Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.mccarthy.18@ucl.ac.uk)

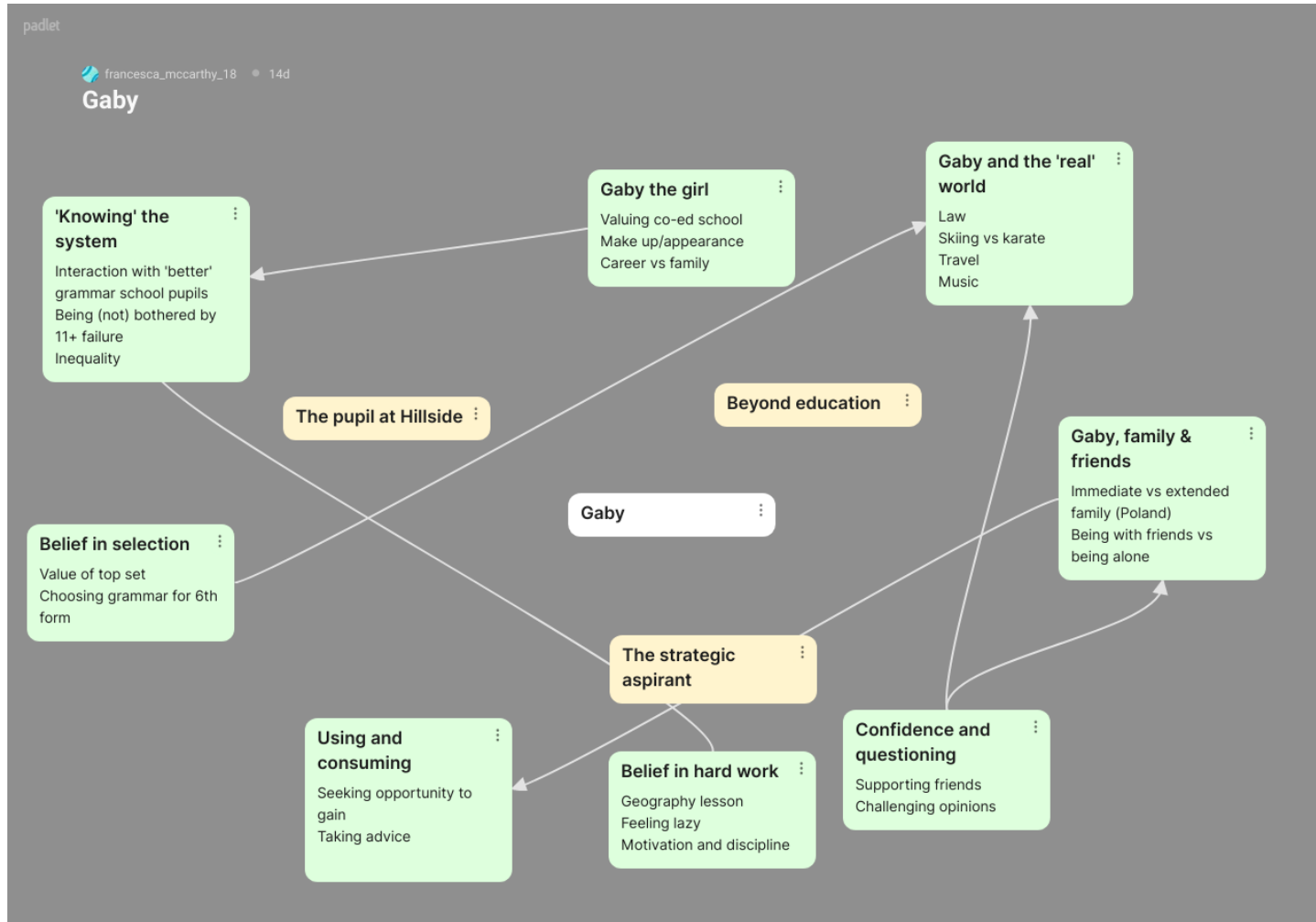
[Name of Headteacher] has kindly agreed that I can speak to some Hillside students from Years 7 – 13 as part of my PhD at UCL Institute of Education. The focus of my study is to examine if and how the 11+ system impacts on the aspirations of higher-attaining secondary school pupils. My focus is on gaining further insight into the lived experience and aspirations of young people who are currently pupils at secondary schools within an academically selective area. In order to do this I will be shadowing two students from each year group for a few days at different times during the remainder of this academic year. This will involve observing them in lessons to give me an insight into what their average school day looks like. I will therefore be extremely grateful to all staff who permit me to enter their lesson. The focus of my observation is the student-participant and any records and notes I make will centre around them. The conditions set by UCL's ethical approval committee mean that I cannot include any other details from the lesson as part of my research. I would be extremely grateful to all staff who are willing to allow me into their lessons to carry out observations and I will endeavour to keep my presence as discrete as possible. I appreciate that having a "stranger" in the room can sometimes cause disruption so please do be assured that you can refuse me entrance to the lesson or request me to leave at any point without giving a reason. I'm looking forward to my return to Hillside (albeit in a slightly different guise!) and the chance to catch up with former colleagues and meet staff who have joined the school since my leaving. Please do not hesitate to get in contact via the above email if you have any further questions about the project. I look forward to seeing you after February half-term!

## Appendix 6 – Boris analysis Padlet

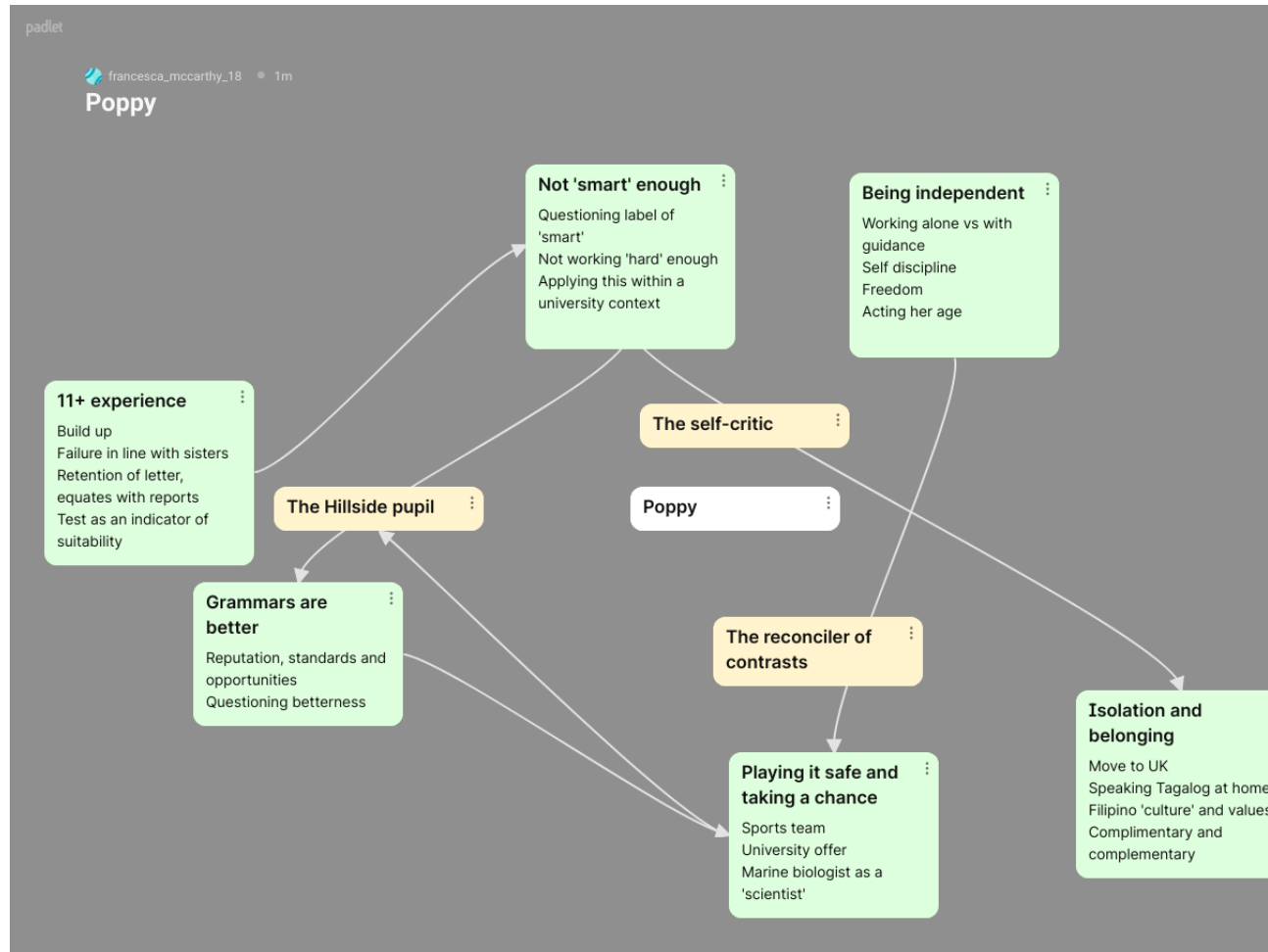




## Appendix 7 - Gaby analysis Padlet



## Appendix 8 – Poppy analysis Padlet



## Appendix 9 – Boris Padlet ‘How I See Myself’

The screenshot shows a Padlet board with a light wood background. At the top left, it says 'padlet' and 'francesca\_mccarthy\_18 + 2 • 12mo'. The title of the board is 'How I See Myself' followed by a redacted name. The board contains several notes:

- Miruthangam:** Includes an image of a mridangam drum and the text 'miruthangam - Bing images Mridangam Mridangam Instrument M... bing'.
- primary school:** Includes the text 'Recpetion - Year 6' and a large black oval redaction.
- School:** Includes the text 'Year 7- year 13 My secondary School education' and a large black rectangular redaction.
- Running:** A simple text note.
- Bremen, Germany:** Includes the text 'My place of birth' and a yellow progress bar.
- Athlete Profile:** Includes an image of a runner and the text 'Athlete Profile thepowerof10'.
- Athletics:** Includes the text 'My records and times appear when you type my name on the internet' and a screenshot of a Google search for the user's name, showing a profile link and search results.










At the bottom right, there is a pink circular button with a white plus sign. The top right corner of the Padlet interface shows icons for 'REMAKE', 'SHARE', and other settings.

# Appendix 10 – Gaby Padlet ‘How I See Myself’

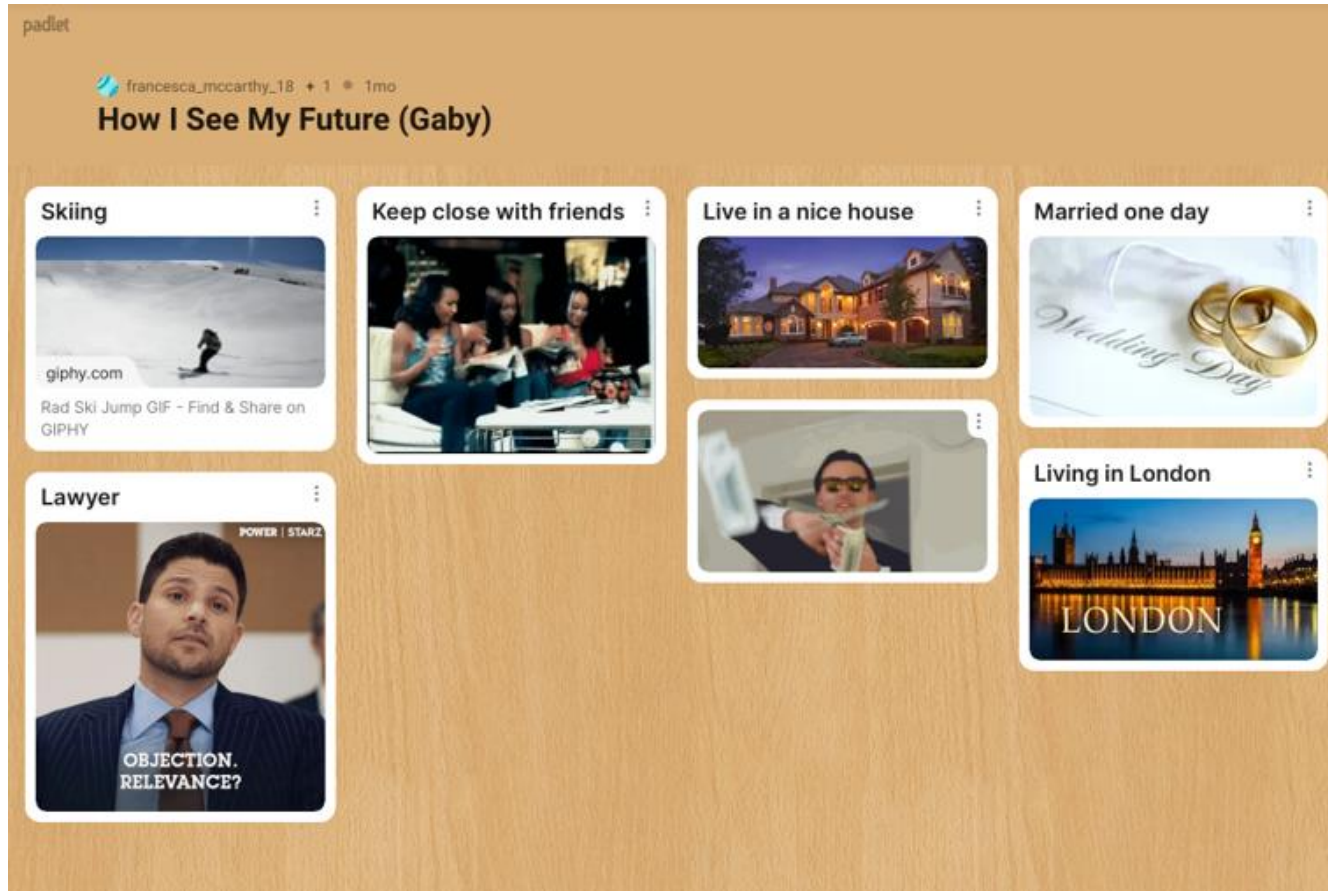
padlet

francesca\_mccarthy\_18 + 1 • 1mo

## How I See Myself (Gaby)

- Power- my favourite show**  

- Lazy (sometimes)**  

- School work is important to me**  

- Travel**  

- Makeup**  

- Travis Scott aka my fav rapper**  

- Sport**  

- Family**  

- Friendship**  


# Appendix 11 – Gaby Padlet ‘How I See My Future’




# Appendix 12 – Poppy Padlet ‘How I See My Future’

padlet

francesca\_mccarthy\_18 + 1 • 1m


## How I See My Future

**Late night/ last minute Studying**



-a lot of it

**Marine biology**



**Independence**


**THE ULTIMATE HOUSEHOLD CHORE LIST**


DAILY CHORES	WEEKLY CHORES
1. Make beds	1. Wash clothes, bed sheets and towels
2. Wash dishes	2. Vacuum or sweep floors
3. Deal with the mail	3. Mop and dust hard floor surfaces
4. Reopen high traffic areas	4. Wash all surfaces
5. Clean kitchen counter tops and stove top	5. Thoroughly clean bathrooms
6. Clean up spills, dirt and other messes	6. Attend to your refrigerator and freezer
7. Put things in their place	7. Wash kitchen cabinets and appliances
8. Wash the toilet, shower and bathtub	
9. Wipe off bathroom walls and mirrors	

MONTHLY CHORES	SEASONAL CHORES
1. Clean lint trap	1. Clean out drains and showers
2. Wash mailbox covers, gutters, eaves, downspouts	2. Vacuum attached screens
3. Clean the inside of your oven	3. Wash windows inside and out
4. Wipe down handrails, doorknobs, light switches	4. Deep clean the fridge, freezer and pantry
5. Wash ceiling light fixtures, wipe fan blades	5. Rent a carpet cleaner and clean your rug
6. Clean under the refrigerator	6. Clean out the bathtub
7. Wash windows to wash window coverings	7. Vacuum and dust out vents
8. Wipe light switches and door handles	8. Wash all pillows
	9. Clean wood furniture

Doing EVERYTHING for myself


**19th birthday**



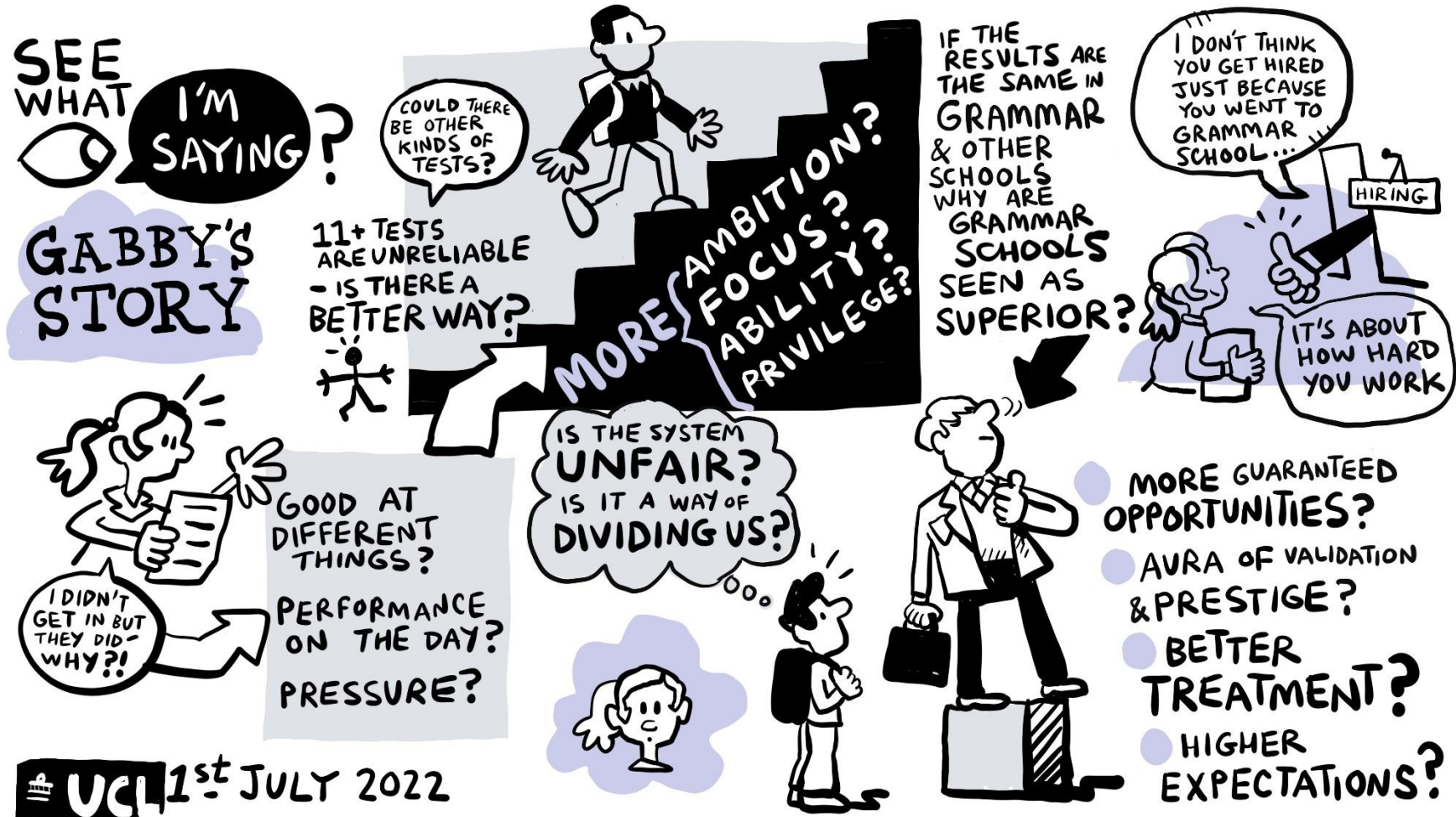


University

**Nights out**



Appendix 13 – Illustrations from ‘See What I’m Saying?’



SEE WHAT I'M SAYING?

I'M SAYING?



STATUS?

HIGH EXPECTATIONS?

AT THE END OF THE DAY IT'S ABOUT THE WAY YOU PRESENT YOURSELF

BUT THE HEADSTART PUTS YOU ON 'ANOTHER LEVEL'

LIVING IN A BUBBLE

- OR -

ALL SET FOR 'THE REAL WORLD'?

OXBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE IN A SUIT



DO GRAMMAR SCHOOL APPLICANTS HOLD THEMSELVES DIFFERENTLY? ARE THEY TRAINED FOR BETTER WORK?

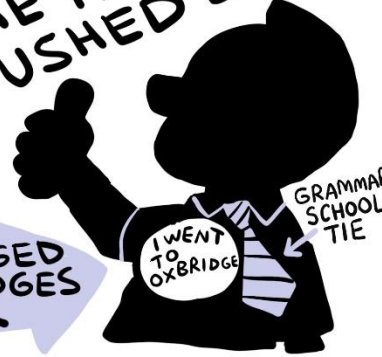
IS IT ABOUT:

- WEALTH?
- CLASS?
- MERIT?
- BRAINS?



THE PATH YOU'RE PUSHED DOWN?

WE ARE JUDGED BY THE BADGES WE WEAR



GRAMMAR SCHOOL TIE

UCL 1st JULY 2022



SEE WHAT I'M SAYING?

# POPPY'S STORY



NATURAL SELECTION -OR- GRAMMAR SCHOOL STUDENTS WORK HARDER?...

SMART GET SMARTER?

DO GRAMMAR SCHOOLS GET BETTER FUNDING & FACILITIES?



IS IT A CASE OF INEQUALITY?



SCHOOL SKIING TRIP ANYONE?

# RESEARCH FEEDBACK:

DO WE TALK ENOUGH ABOUT EDUCATION IN SCHOOL??

SCHOOL STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE A VOICE AT POLICY LEVEL

WE'VE NEVER TALKED ABOUT ALL THIS BEFORE. IT'S BEEN GOOD TO BE LISTENED TO



# DOES FAMILY BACKGROUND MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

PARENTS SHOULD HAVE MORE ACCESS TO POLICY DISCUSSIONS TOO

CAN I GET HELP WITH MY HOMEWORK?

YEH, SURE..



..BUT I DON'T REALLY KNOW HOW IT ALL WORKS.

UCL 1st JULY 2022