



Disengaged youth? Exploring the lives of 'hidden NEETs' outside the benefits system

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Disengaged Youth? Exploring the Lives of 'Hidden NEETs' Outside the Benefits System

Christopher Devany

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2021

Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the lived experiences of young men who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and do not access support from the welfare benefits system. They have been called 'hidden' NEETs as they are statistically absent from labour market datasets and seldom access support from charities and other organisations. The broad aims of this thesis are to understand how they become disengaged and how they search for meaning outside work.

The thesis diverges from the traditional approaches of youth studies through an enhanced theorisation of 'hidden NEETHood' by incorporating a set of relational theories. Bourdieu is used to understand how the dispositions and resources available to the participants shape their disengagement from education, employment, training and the welfare benefits system. The thesis also incorporates Goffman's theory of stigma as well as theories of 'masculinity' and 'intersectionality' to explore the roles of gender and ethnicity.

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with twenty-four young men living in Sheffield who were currently 'hidden NEET' or had recent experience of this status. The research presents several key findings. The literature review utilises Bourdieu's theory of 'hysteresis' to detail how long-term economic and policy processes have gradually created the conditions for 'hidden NEETHood'. The empirical chapters also detail the overlooked proximity between homelessness and unemployment when 'welfare conditionality' and precarious labour markets intersect, in doing so, showing how very small amounts of social capital can result in significant differences to the lived experience of 'hidden NEETHood'. Despite this, the thesis reveals how unemployment is not necessarily a state of marginalisation or disengagement as, for some, it can be a place of succour, particularly given experiences of 'poor work' in contemporary labour markets. A novel framework combines the concept of ontological security alongside the work of Bourdieu to explore the conditions and circumstances required for such young working-class men to feel 'secure' and find meaning in their lives. Finally, the thesis argues that NEETHood is not simply caused by poor employment prospects but is an outcome of wider socio-economic disadvantages.

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Overview

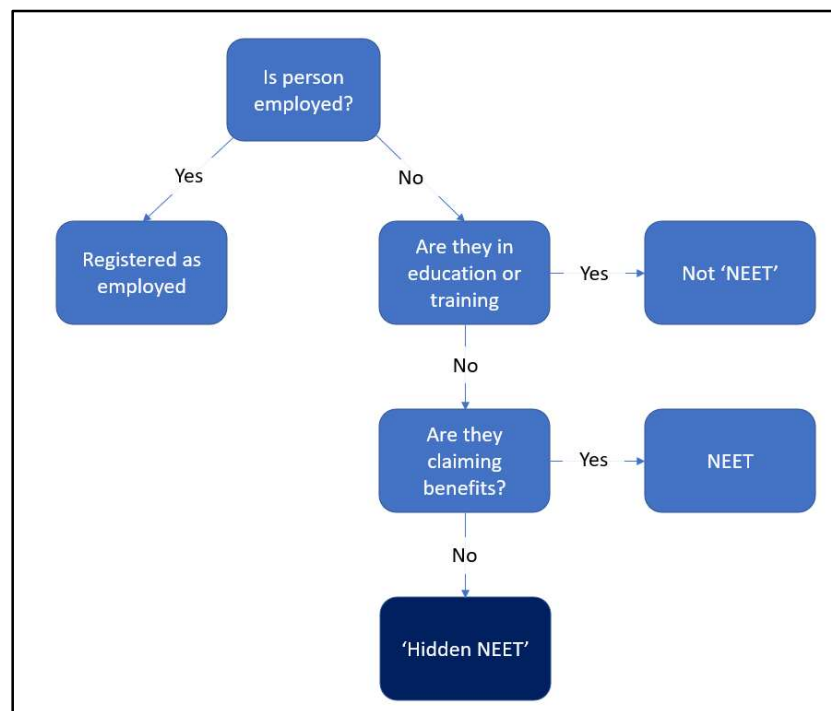
The term 'hidden NEET' is used to describe a person between the ages of 18 and 24 who is not receiving benefits and not in paid work, self-employed, on apprenticeship, in formal education or in training (see Damm et al., 2020a; ii). This thesis examines the lives of working-class young men who fall into this category. To date, very little research has been conducted upon the issue of young 'hidden NEET' men so very little is known about how young 'hidden NEET' men shape their lives and find meaning. This thesis aims to address this by presenting a detailed investigation into their experiences.

This is a particularly timely and pertinent issue due to the consistently higher rates of youth unemployment alongside the steadfastly negative discourse towards benefit claimants. Despite the lack of knowledge of 'hidden NEETs' in academia, research suggests that the numbers of young people in this position are very sizable, with a study commissioned by London Youth (2018) suggesting that there are around 480,000 across the UK. Moreover, it is estimated by London Youth that around 50% of the overall NEET population is 'hidden' (or referred to as 'non-claimant unemployed'), indicating that a large group of young people is seemingly disconnected from the structures of the state.

The word 'hidden' represents how this group is concealed from the socio-political gaze as they do not appear as a discrete category within official datasets. Furthermore, their disengagement from the welfare benefits system and their non-participation in education, employment or training means that they do not inhabit the same physical space as formal service providers. Their apparent disengagement touches upon several key issues relating to the role of young working-class men in the labour market, the stigmatization of welfare and its increasing 'conditionality', as well as the role of education provision.

The path to this 'hidden NEETHood' involves actively avoiding participation in the aforementioned structures or results from young people 'falling through the cracks' (see Fig. 1.1).

Figure 1.1: The Pathway into 'Hidden NEETHood'



The broad aims of this thesis are: i) to ascertain the factors that culminate in a young working-class man becoming a 'hidden NEET', and ii) to understand how they get by in the absence of employment and formal welfare provision. These aims are conceptualised in the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that culminate in disengagement from EET and not claiming benefits?
2. How is this disengagement shaped by attitudes to, or experiences of, education, employment and welfare?
3. How do young men experience NEETHood and to what extent are they able to engage in meaningful activity outside EET?
4. What role does access to resources in Bourdieu's forms of capital play in i) shaping disengagement from EET; and ii) engaging in meaningful activities outside EET?

The thesis presents the narratives of 24 young working-class men (aged 18-25) who were hidden NEETs at the time of interview or had recent experience of falling into this category. The lived experiences of the participants have been shaped by policy and structural reform but are seldom featured in research due to the difficulties in acquiring access and the understandable focus upon harms associated with welfare reform (Garthwaite, 2011; Patrick, 2017). Gaining access to the 24 young men involved spending a great deal of time with them to win their confidence. This ranged from making cups of tea and helping them on computers at a homeless support centre, playing team sports, visiting travellers' camps, and spending time with drug dealers to understand how they constructed their daily lives.

As this is the first academic study on this group it provides an opportunity to form a new conceptualisation of a sizable, yet under-researched group. By answering these research questions, the thesis contains several key contributions to knowledge. Conceptually, the thesis presents a compelling and novel case that the large numbers of 'hidden NEETs' must be understood in the context of over 50 years of social, economic and political change that has made it harder to succeed within opportunity structures facing young people in the contemporary Britain. Methodologically, it provides fascinating insights into the difficulties of accessing a series of disparate 'hard-to-reach' groups and how these can be overcome. Also, the methodology breaks from traditional unemployment studies by broadening the focus to include the experiences of homeless groups in contradistinction to the tendency for homelessness and unemployment policy and research to be viewed as distinct fields within academia and policy. This allows the thesis to demonstrate how young men navigate the closely entwined statuses of unemployment and homelessness.

By taking the methodological approaches outlined, the thesis can detail a further set of empirical contributions. Firstly, NEETHood is not just a deficit or absence, but a situation in which young men use resources and display tenacity to get by and secure meaning from alternative values and activities, albeit it with varying success. Secondly, it presents the attitudes of the welfare benefits system from a group of young men who are outside of the welfare benefits system and details how their relationship with it is shaped by the resources at their disposal. For some with access to alternative sources of financial support it is simply not considered an option. Thirdly, the thesis recounts

and theorises the often-exhaustive steps taken to maintain a position within education, employment, training, and the welfare benefits system, which often fail due to the lack of resources among young working-class men to succeed in these arenas. Fourthly, the thesis provides a view into the how some service sector employment erodes the wellbeing of some young working-class men to the extent that the state of unemployment can provide respite, thus providing a nuanced contribution to existing debates over masculinity and 'emotional labour'. Finally, novel insights into British-Pakistani cultural practices in relation to employment and the labour market are detailed throughout.

1.2 NEETs as a policy concern

The acronym 'NEET' entered the British social policy lexicon when Instance et al. (1994) created the conceptual category to define a group of young people in an empirical study of youth unemployment in Wales. 'NEET' was adopted by New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 and became widely used in labour market analyses and policy debates (see Furlong, 2006a). Since then, 'NEET' has become a significant element of debates within 'media discourse, social welfare, academia and globalised policy concerning young people' (Wrigley, 2019). The Social Exclusion Unit (1999; 6) argued that 'the best defence against social exclusion is to have a job', and furthermore, that 'the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training'. This view posited the notion that youth unemployment 'is a product of the low skills and aspirations of the young unemployed' and fundamentally that the 'problems of young people becoming NEET or trapped in poor-quality jobs can be solved by 'up-skilling'' (MacDonald, 2011; 434).

The characterisation of NEETs in public discourse has a moralistic strand - unemployed individuals within society are deemed to 'lack the values and behaviours deemed necessary to fulfil the societal obligation of work' (Crisp and Powell, 2017; 1788). Moreover, being a NEET labels a young person based upon a perceived lack of engagement with structure, as opposed to what they have. Such a deficit model, in the view of Nudzor (2010;17), is deeply problematic as is it 'presupposes invariably that for a young person to be NEET is automatically a negative or problematic state inherently linked either to social exclusion and/or disadvantage'.

The presupposition of 'NEETHood' as form of social exclusion and/or idleness has exerted influence upon policymakers as they seek to address the perceived issue. MacDonald (2011) asserts that the broad spectrum of experiences for NEETs are hidden by a veneer of perceived homogeneity. Additionally, the category forms a tendency 'to construe being NEET as a problem *with*¹ young people' (MacDonald, 2011; 431), thus negating the structural issues in the labour market that can contribute to the formation of 'NEETHood'. Finally, the fallacy of homogeneity does not adequately depict the 'dynamism and flux' experienced by young people as they navigate their way from adolescence to adulthood. As this thesis shows, in combination these factors have resulted in NEETs being erroneously presented as a homogenous and inactive group that lack the ability or desire to engage in education, employment, or training.

1.3 The Genealogy of 'Hidden NEETHood'

The large numbers of 'hidden NEETs' in the UK is not merely a contemporary phenomenon but is an outcome of long-term historical processes. Since the 1970s the labour prospects for young working-class men in the UK have seen the availability and security afforded to them in the labour market precipitously decline. A key factor in this long-term trend has been the decline of the industrial sector which was once the mainstay of the 'masculine' labour market (McDowell, 2011). In its place, emerged the service sector as the dominant force in the economy.

Debates over young working-class men's willingness to participate and their ability to succeed in this type of work have raged for decades, with the consensus being that a sizable portion of young men struggle to adapt to some aspects of the 'new' labour market (see Nixon, 2006; McDowell, 2011; Roberts, 2018). While the expectations of the world of work for young working-class men in the labour market are still shaped by historical processes (McDowell, 2011), the experience of work has become increasingly unstable and precarious as low-paid, fixed-term and temporary forms of employment have become more common (see MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2018). At the same time, the economy is now creating more low-skilled jobs due to increases in technology and the rise of low-paid service sector employment, deunionisation, shift in balance of profits and wages, off-shoring, outsourcing, privatisation to the detriment

¹ Original emphasis.

of working classes (Standing, 2014; Cullen and Bradford, 2018; Maguire, 2020). The implications of the macro-economic shifts go beyond difficulties of getting a reliable 'wage' as some scholars believe that it has brought the masculine 'breadwinner' identity into question as traditional working-class masculine cultures are less instrumental to the labour market (Holt and Thompson, 2004). These broad changes had a significant effect in locales such as Sheffield which have a deep cultural legacy of industrialisation as 'traditional ways of becoming a man are increasingly less available' (McDowell, 2011; 4).

In education and training, since the 1990s governments have 'sold' credentials in the form of qualifications as a solution to alleviate youth unemployment. However, education and training did not lay a 'yellow brick road' to security and a prosperous future for many young working-class men. The social class inequalities were still shaped by relational disadvantages in the form of credentialization in localised labour markets meaning that qualifications counted for little in weaker labour markets because of competition for jobs (Nayak, 2006; Formby, 2017; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2018). Alongside changes to education, employment and training, the push of 'creeping conditionality' reached its zenith after the financial crisis of 2008 as accessing support from the welfare benefits system became a complex endeavour for many groups in society (see Dwyer and Wright, 2014). Young people were specifically targeted by policies of 'ubiquitous conditionality' within new welfare policies (Dwyer and Wright, 2014), the result being 'that young people now face the most stringent requirements ever to look for work in the post-war period' (Crisp and Powell, 2017; 1796). Discourses around welfare also shifted as the stigmatisation of claimants became more deeply culturally embedded (see Patrick, 2017).

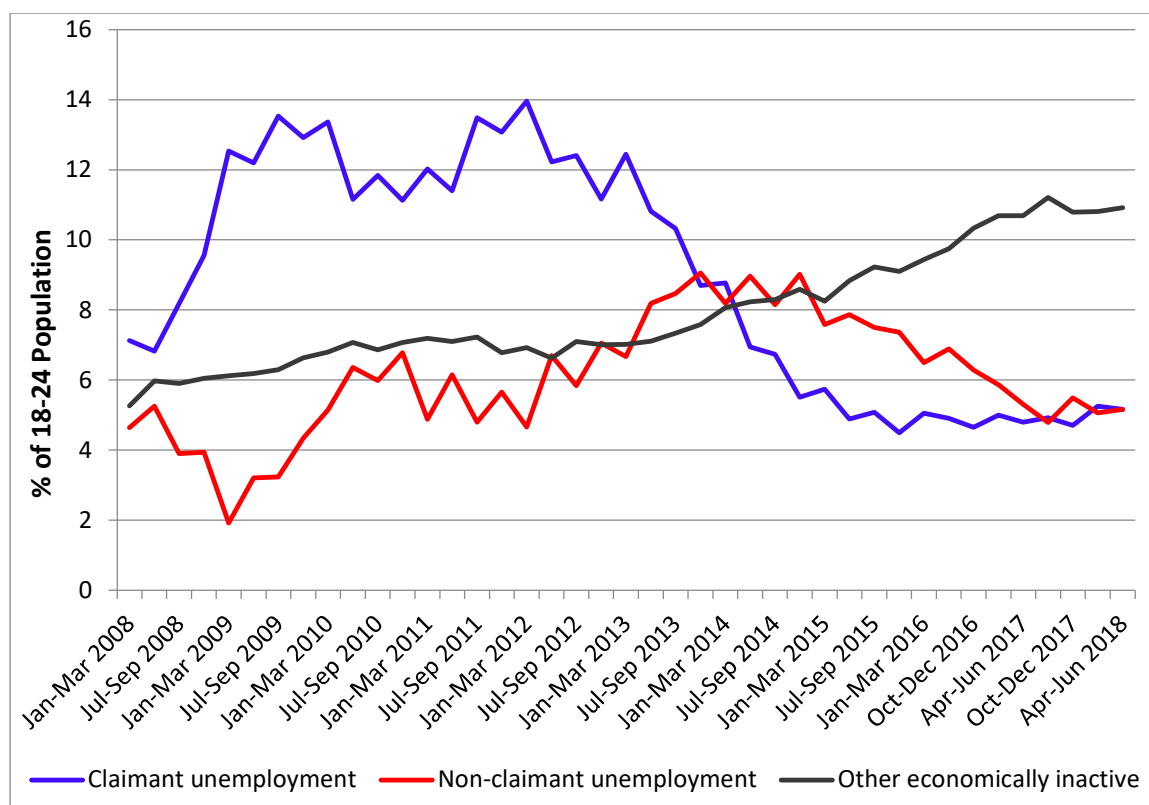
The socio-structural changes resulted in young working-class men being squeezed from every conceivable angle – education and training do not provide a solid pathway to 'good' and 'stable' work, their 'masculine' attributes are no longer granted the same value in the labour market and accessing the welfare benefits system is marked by conditionality and stigmatisation. When these factors are reviewed in combination it is unsurprising that the 'hidden NEET' issue has emerged in recent years.

1.4 Research on 'hidden NEETs'

Due to constraints related to the statistical monitoring of young people it is 'not possible to unequivocally state how many young people are currently 'hidden', nor describe the characteristics of this group and the circumstances in which they become 'hidden' (Edwards, 2017; 6). Prior to the defunding of the youth service Connexions in 2011 local authorities were able to track the status of young people and their interactions (or lack of) with education, employment, training, and the welfare benefits system. Since the closure of Connexions an increasing number of young people have been categorised as 'unknown', simply denoting that the local and national authorities simply do not know what these young people are doing. The only way to estimate the number of 'hidden NEETs' is to 'calculate the difference between the number of young people who are 'unemployed', and the number of young people claiming out-of-work benefits' (Edwards, 2017; 6).

Figure 1.2 shows the decline in numbers of young unemployed people who are unemployed and claiming benefits from the social security system. On the surface this may appear to be an indication of a healthy labour market. However, the chart also shows that the 'non-claimant unemployed' is roughly at the same level as the 'claimant unemployed', indicating that a very substantial number of young people are out of work (though still active in job search) with no support from the social security system. Equally concerning is the increasing number of young people who declare themselves to be economically inactive due to 'other' reasons. This will include many who have disengaged from the formal labour market but are not in full-time education, looking after a home or family nor self-categorised as permanently sick or disabled. Unfortunately, this 'disengaged' cohort is not tracked through any other governmental datasets, largely due to closing the Connexions service in 2010 (Brooks, 2014). However, although there are both ONS and local authority data sets relating to 'NEETs', these estimates are neither consistent nor comprehensive and therefore should be treated with extreme caution.

Figure 1.2: Claimant and Non-claimant Unemployment and 'Other' Inactivity among 18–24-Year-Olds, England, 2008-2018



NOTE: Previously unpublished graphic produced by Tony Gore

Data sources: Annual Population Survey (ONS); Combined JSA/UC Claimant Count (Nomis)

To date, only a small number of contract research projects on ‘hidden NEETs’ have been conducted. The most relevant studies were conducted by the University of Salford (Jones et al., 2018) (commissioned by the local authority), London Youth (2018), and as a stream within the wider Talent Match Evaluation (a £108 million National Lottery funded programme which supported young people along the road to employment). The study in Salford found that ‘hidden NEETs’ were reluctant to engage with the Jobcentre due to their negative perceptions of the system or because of their own previous experiences of attempting to claim benefits. The implementation of Universal Credit was also a key factor, the innovative social security policy merged existing ‘means tested in work and out of work benefits’ into one single payment (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; 28). Issues around Universal Credit highlighted by Jones et al (2018) include; the long wait to receive money through Universal Credit and the requirement to provide personal documentation (birth certificates, bank account details etc.). A small amount of evidence suggests that some claimants chose to disengage with Universal Credit due to the ‘rigid application of constant further job search and attendance at Job Centre Plus (Wright and Dwyer, 2020; 11). Parents were

also hesitant to encourage their children to claim benefits as they thought that it could be bad for their mental health. Although the participants were categorised as being ‘unemployed’ they frequently took low-paid work in informal work such as manual labouring and childcare.

London Youth (2018) produced similar findings, but also noted how local factors such as involvement in crime played a role in creating the propensity to become a ‘hidden NEET’. The final Talent Match evaluation (Damm et al., 2020a) found that 63 per cent of ‘hidden NEETs’ were men and that the educational profile of ‘hidden NEETs’ was directly comparable to the general population, suggesting that the cause of ‘hidden NEETHood’ was not necessarily linked to education. Finally, Damm et al. (2020b) highlighted the role of local voluntary and community sector organisations in recruiting ‘hidden NEETs’ to the project as larger charities struggled to access them.

It should be noted that the three studies were instigated, supported by, co-ordinated and/or funded by organisations who *already* provided support for ‘hidden NEETs’. This is an important distinction as existing research conducted on this group largely involves qualitative and quantitative research with young people who are already engaging with organisations to gain assistance of some form. These studies are welcomed, but unlike this research they do not have the range, scope, or adequate timeframes to fully assess the lives of the most difficult to reach or non-traditional groups who are seemingly disengaged from the labour market and the welfare benefits system.

1.5 Research on NEETs

Whilst the studies on ‘hidden NEETs’ are somewhat limited; much can be learned from research on NEETs. Over the last 25 years a number of studies have presented a set of ‘risk factors’ that are associated with the increased likelihood of a young person becoming ‘NEET’. Coles et al. (2002) discovered the role of ethnicity and concluded that ‘some minority ethnic groups (Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) are more likely to be NEET than their white counterparts, although those from an Indian background are less likely’ (18). Socio-economic factors also played a major role as young people from lower social class backgrounds were less likely to engage in education and leave school without qualifications, thus potentially impeding labour market transitions

(Office for National Statistics, 2000). Similarly, young people with fewer qualifications were shown to be more likely to experience precarious employment and periods of unemployment (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006). Geographical factors also play a role as being raised in an area with a depressed local labour market has been shown to greatly increase the likelihood of a young person to become NEET as opportunities to enter the labour market are more limited (Sissons and Jones, 2012).

Table 1.1 - Distinguishing between categories of NEETs

Definition	EET	NEET		‘Hidden NEET’
Activity	Employed or receiving education or training.	Not employed and not receiving education or training. Available to work.	Not employed and not receiving education or training. Not available to work.	Not employed and not receiving education or training. Not receiving benefits. Not available to work.
Out of work benefits	Not claiming out of work benefits	Claiming out of work benefits		Not out of work claiming benefits
Economic status	Economically active		Inactive	

Aside from the structural factors, Hodkinson (1996) suggested that young people can make a pragmatic decision to be detached from education, employment and training as they withdraw from the labour market due to negative experiences of work. The impact of being NEET has been shown to have significant negative impacts on long-term employment outcomes and mental health (Brandt and Hank, 2014; Strandh et al., 2014), with the mental health impacts of being NEET clearly shown by a YouGov (2008) survey as 60% of NEETs stated that they were ‘happy’, far less than the 71% for all young people.

In summary, research shows that NEETs are unevenly distributed upon the lines of ethnicity, social class and geography. Research also suggests that the impacts of being NEET can have both short and long-term implications for future opportunities and mental health.

1.6 Analysing place – a snapshot of Sheffield

According to McDowell (2011; 96), 'in the public imagination, Sheffield is forever a dirty industrial town, whose decline was well documented in the film *The Full Monty*'. However, Sheffield is far from unusual in many ways and is typical of many post-industrial cities in Northern England, albeit more depressed than its Yorkshire rival Leeds and the behemoth of the north, Manchester across the Pennines (Martin and Gardiner, 2018).

By most measures, Sheffield is an economically depressed city, with greater levels of unemployment than the national average, less inward investment, lower productivity and more broadly, a labour market reliant upon by low skilled roles in the service sector (Beatty and Fothergill, 2019; Magrini, 2019; Crisp and Waite, 2020). In the view of Etherington et al., (2018; 27) Sheffield (like many other Northern cities and towns) 'has not recovered from the 1980s', this has further been compounded by the public sector cuts that were enacted after the last recession around a decade ago. Furthermore, Rae (2011) showed that Sheffield is a city of vast inequalities, as areas in the west of the city are amongst some of the most affluent in Yorkshire, whereas a short distance away in the southeast of Sheffield some of the most deprived wards in the country are found.

The declining fortunes of Sheffield also have social and cultural impacts. For generations of young working-class men. The acquirement of well-paid labour after leaving school at aged 15 or 16 to do 'physical work' was a common rite of passage of many young working-class men (McDowell, 2011). This expectation instilled a tangible economic, social and cultural value on physical strength, 'graft' and the 'banter' associated with shop floor cultures. The industrial past is still venerated somewhat, with the 'Sheffield Steelmen' statue taking pride of place in the Meadowhall Shopping Centre and the 'Women of Steel' statue being in a main square of the city as a reminder of their essential work keeping the foundries going in WWII. As

discussed in Chapter 2, these reminders of the past are not merely cultural artefacts, but instead are still present (to some extent) in the expectations and performances of masculinity in Sheffield today.

1.7 Theoretical approaches to the study of youth

When deciding upon the theoretical approaches it was tempting to reach for the approaches that have been most utilised in the study of youth and unemployment and simply adapt them to fit the needs of this research project. However, the theories emanating from youth studies are less suited to the study of a heterogeneous group of participants and the broad themes of this thesis which require a more interdisciplinary focus.

The transitional approaches to youth studies emerged in the early 1980s as a theoretical lens in response to the critiques aimed at the previous subcultural approach. What became known as ‘youth transitions’ was soon established as the *lingua franca* of youth studies. However, the transitional approach is not a cohesive theory, but a patchwork of methodological and theoretical tools designed to capture the increasingly protracted transitions to adulthood (see Furlong and Cartmel, 2006). It seeks to determine how young people reflexively sculpt their identities and utilise agency as ‘navigators of their own biographies and careers’ (Wyn, 2004; 17). Whilst this broad approach to academic enquiry is valued, it negates the role of social class and overplays notions of agency. In that vein, it is argued that social class matters and continues to structure life trajectories for young working-class people (Roberts, 2018).

Since the early 1990s youth transitions literature has been heavily influenced by the work of Ulrich Beck. Beck (1992) was interested in how the decline of structure caused an erosion of social protections for all individuals (regardless of class position). As a result, Beck argued that we are forced to traverse the challenges and tensions of life by fashioning our own individualised biographies and negotiations with risks. Thus, to navigate these new risks, we now must ‘become active, inventive and resourceful, to develop ideas of one’s own, to be faster, nimbler and more creative – not just on one occasion, but constantly’ (Beck, 1992; 23).

A development of Beck's work which acknowledges the role of social class is the 'epistemological fallacy' of Furlong and Cartmel (2006; 114), who argue that 'blinded to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure'. A key feature of the 'epistemological fallacy' is the idea that young people can engage in self-blame for their perceived lack of success, something that is supported by the empirical studies of MacDonald and Marsh (2005).

The work of Beck (1992) and Woodman (2010) views social class as a 'zombie category' in need of 'reanimation' – this is a pertinent critique that must be addressed in this thesis by presenting a solid interpretation of class structures. Whilst it can be argued that structures such as social class have become more obscure and complex in recent decades, social class is not a moribund concept as chapters 5 to 8 clearly show that class is still a key determinant of employment, educational and training outcomes.

Youth transitions studies have been critiqued strongly for their demographic focus on young, white and working-class participants (see Gunter and Watt, 2009; Orrnert, 2016). In the view of Cohen and Ainley (2000; 80) this has led the youth transitions approach to become a 'limited research paradigm'. This critique primarily emanates from the methodological focus of youth transitions upon the experiences of young men from largely 'white' post-industrial cities in the UK. As such, youth transitions research provides few theoretical insights into the experiences of diverse communities or on the role of gender.

In summary, it is fair to argue that youth studies work tends to focus on the experiences of young white people, it overplays agency whilst negating social class, and largely fails to theorise gender and ethnicity. Additionally, because social class is still relevant as a structure, its rather simplistic application within youth studies needs to be addressed by presenting a nuanced and *relational* approach which sheds light upon the differing resources and socialisation as factors shaping outcomes for 'hidden NEETs'. As 'youth studies' frameworks are not best suited, an alternative set of theories are required.

The work of Bourdieu provides a conceptualisation of social class that can help to comprehend the complex social and cultural resources of the participants and demonstrate how these are reflected in their lived experiences. Bourdieu sees social theory as a 'system of relational concepts' (Bourdieu, 1997; 451). His conceptualisation of class can be distinguished from 'a class on paper' (using statistical measures) and 'a theoretical class' (for example, Marxist perspectives). Instead, a Bourdieusian theoretical framework delves into how individual and group dispositions are formed and acted upon. Furthermore, it allows for a nuanced assessment of differing types of resources and their utilization.

The thesis uses other relational theoretical tools to supplement the work of Bourdieu. Firstly, to link interactions with the social security system to notions of 'stigma' the work of Goffman helps to detail the psychosocial interactions with social security and the emotional attachments linked to accessing or avoiding claiming benefits. Secondly, theories of masculinity contribute to a detailed analysis of gender in relation to the labour market, education and the welfare benefits system. Finally, the thesis applies the theory of intersectionality to provide a deeper understanding of how multiple forms of discrimination (e.g., the intersection of unemployment and racial discrimination) overlap to shape the day-to-day experiences of some participants.

1.8 Outline of thesis

Chapter Two presents and analyses the key structural, political, and social changes that have come to shape the lives of young working-class men. Taking inspiration from Bourdieu, it reviews the period since the World-War II to show how the dispositions and outlooks of the participants have come to be formed. By taking a historical approach the chapter posits the view that 'hidden NEETHood' for many young working-class people needs to be understood in the context of a broad set of changes that have gradually 'nudged' this group away from the labour market and the welfare benefits system. The discussion highlights the how young working-class men have been disproportionately impacted by these changes to the present day.

Chapter Three addresses the theoretical framing of the thesis. With Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' at its core, it speaks to the aims and research questions of the overall

thesis. To supplement Bourdieu, three other theories are detailed. Firstly, Goffman's 'stigma' links the framework to contemporary studies on welfare conditionality and illuminates discussions on the welfare benefits system. Secondly, the theory of 'masculinity' is presented as an analytical tool to aid discussions relating to gender. Finally, 'intersectionality' provides an outline of how multiple forms of discrimination can compound barriers that shape experiences of 'hidden NEETs'.

Chapter Four provides a detailed account of the methodological steps taken throughout the research. It opens with a philosophical discussion on the theories of Bourdieu and details an ontological and epistemological framework that harmonises with his approach. The chapter includes a detailed analysis of data collection techniques before presenting the chosen tool of semi-structured interviews. Also, the chapter details how the study has diverged from previous research to include British-Pakistani young men and homeless individuals who have been overlooked by previous studies on NEETs, unemployment and welfare. Following this, a comprehensive account of the data collection process is provided, paying particular attention to the unprecedented challenges involved in recruiting young 'hidden NEET' men and a reflexive account of the personal challenges that needed to be negotiated. The chapter ends by presenting the ethical challenges, the acquisition of informed consent and data analysis processes.

Chapter Five is the first of four findings chapters. It focuses on the participants' experiences of education. Drawing upon literature from the sociology of education it presents three groups who had differing experiences of education. It chronicles how most of the participants attempted did not exit education in the 'dramatic' or 'spectacular' manners as suggested by youth transitions literature. Instead, most attempted to persevere in education but eventually left due to a range of differing factors, including, but not limited to; frictions with the institutional cultures, incompatible learning styles, being victims of bullying and a desire for greater autonomy.

Chapter Six follows the next step of their journey into adulthood as they moved towards and into the labour market. By drawing upon Bourdieu's theory of 'capital' it details three groups that possess and utilise forms of cultural and social capital to acquire economic capital in the absence of formal work or accessing the welfare

benefits system. Fundamentally, the chapter argues that engagement with even the most precarious end of the labour market is only possible with endowments of capital. Contributing to existing debates on the role of young men in the service sector, the chapter contributes by suggesting how the experience of 'bad' and insecure work has an eroding effect on wellbeing, to the extent to where many young men seek meaning and sources of income from different areas of their lives.

Chapter Seven details the young men's relationship (or lack thereof) with the welfare benefits system. It commences with an overview of policy themes related to the 'ramping up' of conditionality since the Global Financial Crisis and specifically highlights how young people have been targets of the harshest elements of conditionality. The chapter then presents three groups differentiated by their financial position during the state of 'hidden NEETHood'. These groups are dependent (upon their families or partners), self-sufficient (and/or able to build social networks) and deprived (due to the lack of economic capital available to them). The chapter unearths findings related to the informal economy, cultural 'norms' in British-Pakistani communities and the 'stigma' of welfare.

Chapter Eight chronicles the day-to-day experiences of being a 'hidden NEET'. It uses the concept of 'ontological security' as a framing mechanism to discuss the types of resources that are essential to provide security in the absence of formal support. In doing so, the chapter contributes to debates pertaining to the contemporary isolation experienced by young unemployed people.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by crystalising the methodological, empirical, and theoretical contributions from the research. It reflects upon the challenges of accessing a seemingly 'hidden' group and inequalities that form and shape the experience of being outside the nexus of the state and the labour market. The chapter also provides theoretical insights into role of masculinity across the study, limitations and avenues for future research and offers policy implications. Finally, the thesis concludes by reflecting upon the question on the extent to which this group of young men were 'disengaged' and discusses stoicism, masculinity, mental health and limits to agency.

Chapter Two – The genesis of ‘Hidden NEETHood’

2.1 Introduction

To understand the experiences of young working-class men outside education, employment, training and the welfare benefits system we must understand how this group has become detached from the structures. Whilst it may be tempting to suggest that ‘hidden NEETHood’ is entirely an outcome of the period since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), this chapter argues that detachment is the culmination of interlinked issues and long-term structural processes in the political economy of the UK. The overall argument of this chapter is that ‘hidden NEETHood’ is an outcome of long-term policy interventions and economic restructuring which started in the early 1970s. These policy and structural changes have materially shaped how young working-class men perceive the welfare benefits system and navigate opportunities in EET.

The chapter contends that young working-class men in society were at their relative height in terms of job prospects in the post-war period due to plentiful employment even for those with few or no qualifications. Subsequent decades have seen the gradual, yet continual erosion of their cultural and economic standing, culminating in the nadir of the GFC where their employment opportunities are more limited and, often poor quality, and require higher levels of qualifications. For those outside of the labour market the increasingly punitive and stigmatised welfare system now demands they adhere to stringent job search activities. The descent in the fortunes and opportunities for working-class men in the UK is contextualised in-line with the themes of the thesis and includes ‘light-touch’ theorisations on the sociology of social class, discourses of welfare and unemployment, as well as stigma to show how the experiences and outlooks of the participants in the study have been shaped.

The first section of this chapter is informed by the work of Bourdieu and briefly outlines the justification for taking a historical approach, as well as presenting the work of Levitas to analyse the succession of discourses pertaining to social exclusion which shape policy interventions. The main body of the chapter is structured in four chronological sections, each spanning the key junctures where social and political

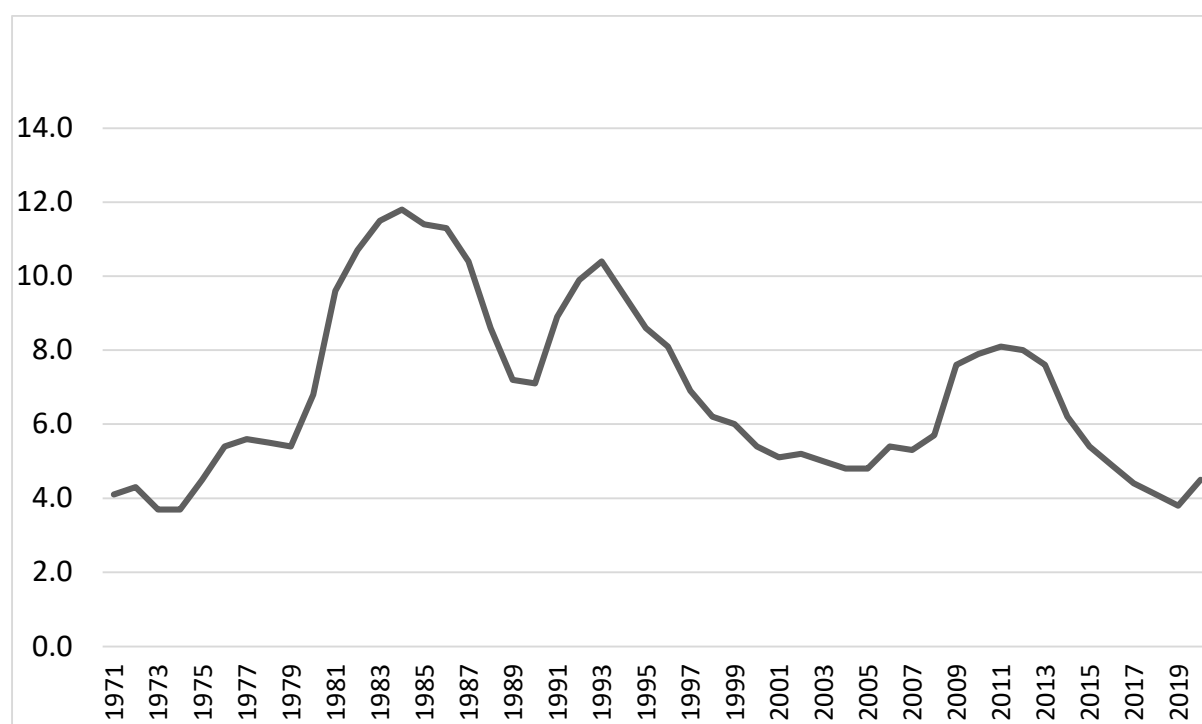
change was most evident. The four chronological periods and the key approaches to welfare, education, employment and training during which are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 - Key periods of change to 'EET' and welfare

	'Golden Age'	1973 – 1997	1998 – 2008	Post-financial crisis
Welfare	Universalistic	Limited conditionality	Creeping conditionality	Ubiquitous conditionality
Education	Tripartite and exclusive Higher Education	Tripartite to comprehensive model and exclusive Higher Education	Comprehensive and expansion of Higher Education	Comprehensive and marketization of Higher Education
Employment	Full employment	Mass unemployment	Peripheral unemployment	Mass youth unemployment
Training	Plentiful apprenticeships	Government training schemes and trainingfare	Government training schemes and trainingfare	Credentialised training schemes

The fluctuations in approaches to 'EET' and welfare are reflected in the changing levels of unemployment throughout the late 20th and early 21st century:

Figure 2.1- Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rate (age 16-64)



Data source: Data from the Office for National Statistics, 2021

In summary, this chapter concludes that ‘hidden NEETHood’ emerges from 50 years of statecraft and economic restructuring that has gradually eroded the levels of security afforded to young working-class men in post-industrial areas of the UK. As the later chapters highlight, understanding these changes are critical to understanding the interrelationship between objective opportunities and the subjective dispositions of young people and how this informs disengagement.

Despite significant state investment in education, significant structural inequalities endure. Changes to the labour market over the intervening decades through below inflation pay increases and reductions in their rights as workers have now resulted in many young working-class men losing their value in the labour market, leaving some with having ‘nothing to sell but their labour’ (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019). Their position within the labour market has become progressively more precarious as they have become employed in sectors which some researchers believe them to be ill suited to. Training opportunities have become more difficult to access due to the decline in numbers and the requirement for higher qualifications. For those outside employment, education and training, welfare has become progressively more difficult

to access and maintain due to the implementation of ubiquitous conditionality and benefit sanctions.

2.2 Theoretical Framing

The chapter takes inspiration from Bourdieu, who advocates a historical approach to the study of contemporary relations as ‘social agents are the *product of history*²’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 136). By focusing on the evolution of policies linked to education, employment, training and the welfare benefits system it details how the opportunities facing, and experiences of the young men in this study are shaped by historical processes. The utilisation of Bourdieu’s conceptual trinity of habitus, capital and field requires ‘a form of structural history’ to understand how dispositions and resources are formed and the mis/recognition of the value attributed to an individual’s characteristics (ibid. 1992; 91).

To conceptualise, the relational model of social class of Bourdieu consists of three concepts, termed as the ‘conceptual trinity’ (Devine and Savage, 2005; 13), composed of capital, habitus and field. *Capital* is broadly utilised to define the resources available to an individual; *habitus* describes the set of dispositions of an individual which are shaped by structural factors; and *field* explains the ‘competitive areas’ (Schwartz, 1997; 40) where the volumes of capital and the habitus are assigned value. This battle for recognition is conceptualised by Bourdieu (1984; 101) in his renowned equation which depicts the practice of social class to be an outcome of the habitus and field combining across differing fields³. The theory of hysteresis is also useful as it conceptualises how the habitus gradually becomes misaligned with changing conditions in fields.

² Original emphasis.

³ The theories of Bourdieu are detailed throughout Chapter 3.

Table 2.2: An overview of Bourdieu's 'theory of practice'

Habitus	Capital	Field	Hysteresis
<i>Habitus</i> describes the set of dispositions of an individual.	<i>Capital</i> is broadly utilised to define the resources available to an individual.	<i>Field</i> explains the 'competitive areas'.	Hysteresis refers to the mismatch between the habitus and the conditions of the field.

(Adapted from Bourdieu, 1986; Schwartz, 1997)

The discourses that frame and legitimise policies are key to understanding the historical evolution of statecraft, not least because the symbolic aspects of policymaking have real-world impacts upon the lives of young working-class men. To frame these political and social changes the chapter utilises Levitas' (2004) conceptualisation of social exclusion⁴ through her typology of 'RED', 'SID' and 'MUD'. To elaborate, the three labels are not discourses or policies in themselves, but are 'ways of thinking about exclusion that imply different strategies for its abolition' (Levitas, 1998; x). While 'social exclusion' no longer features in the political lexicon, Levitas's typology is still useful for the way it frames policy discourses around tackling social disadvantage. These approaches to social exclusion are political perspectives that often run concurrently within political and social spheres, yet typically with one discourse being most prominent at any given time.

Table 2.3: Approaches, discourses and interventions linked to social exclusion.

Approach to social exclusion	Political discourse	Common policy interventions

⁴ Levitas et al. (2007; 25) define 'social exclusion as '...a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.'

RED (redistributive discourse of exclusion)	Social exclusion can be alleviated by addressing the wider causes of poverty.	Increased government spending on welfare, training opportunities and public services. Higher levels of taxation on high earners.
SID (social integrationist discourse)	Social exclusion is caused by the lack of paid work.	Greater investments in training and tailoring the welfare system to reward labour market integration.
MUD (moral underclass discourse)	Social exclusion is the result of idleness and welfare dependency.	Reduced spending on welfare and the widespread use of conditionality to encourage people into employment. Fiscal policies aimed to reduce overall taxation and government spending.

(Adapted from Levitas, 1998).

Put simply, these three competing discourses are based around deficit models of social exclusion of 'what the poor/excluded are seen to lack: in RED they have no money, in SID they have no work, in MUD they have no morals' (Levitas, 1998; 27). Levitas (2005; 7-8) later argues that the ire of 'MUD' is particularly targeted at those perceived to be 'criminally-inclined, unemployable young men'. The changing approach to social exclusion mapped out in the historical analysis of this chapter is detailed in Table 2.4. This shows how redistributive approaches that once provided security to young working-class men have become increasingly scarce. In its place are social integrationist and moral underclass approaches that have gradually crystallised the denigrated status of unemployed young working-class men.

Table 2.4 - Timeline of ‘RED’, ‘SID’, ‘MUD’

	‘Golden Age’	1973 – 1997	1998 – 2008	Post-financial crisis
Approach to social exclusion	RED	MUD/SID	SID/MUD/RED	MUD/SID

The evolution of approaches, discourses and policies linked to social exclusion highlight how state investments in the ‘golden age’ aimed to increase the levels of employment through redistributing national resources after WWII. Subsequently, from the early 1970s to 1997 governments harnessed the power of the ‘moral underclass’ discourse to enact an increasingly punitive welfare system and a rolling back of state investment. The ‘New Labour’ years from 1997 to the financial crisis saw a range of approaches to ‘social exclusion’ through a strong focus on work as best route of welfare (SID) and ramped up conditionality (MUD) but quietly redistributed through ‘stealth’ taxes and tax credit system. More recently, since the financial crisis governments have ‘harped back’ to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s to reduce state investment and perpetuate the ‘moral underclass’ approach to public discourse.

The ‘RED’, ‘SID’, ‘MUD’ perspective is not a flawless tool for analysing the dialectic between structure and agency as all three typologies ‘tend to construct exclusion in terms of status or condition, while obfuscating considerations of agency’ (Doherty, 2003; 37). Lewis (2004) also critiques the typology for failing to recognise gendered aspects of social exclusion – specifically noting that women are either portrayed as workers or caregivers. With these critiques in mind, the typologies are nevertheless useful to chart the chronology of the competing discourses which shaped a range of policies that are central to the sociogenesis of ‘hidden NEETHood’.

2.3 ‘Golden Age’ - 1945 to 1973

This period of high government investment and low unemployment was shaped by the implementation of proposals from the Beveridge report of 1942 and is broadly seen to have ended at the beginning of the oil crisis in 1973 (Williams, 1999). The prevailing

discourses and the wider policy interventions in the post-WWII period were typical of the 'RED' discourse as the Beveridge Report (1942; 6) took aim at the 'five giants... of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness'. The recommendations taken forward from Beveridge created a redistributive social contract through the formation of a modern social security system, compulsory state education to age 15, creation of the National Health Service and 'economic management to achieve/maintain full employment⁵, founded on the model of the male breadwinner as head of a nuclear family household' (Anderson, 2004; 371; Bunford, 1955; Beveridge, 2014). The rights bestowed from the social contract were contingent on contributing to the post-war rebuilding effort through work (Jordan, 2003).

The experiences of working-class school leavers varied by gender and social class (Roberts et al., 1983). Whilst education was free and compulsory, opportunities for children differed across a Tripartite system. A child's educational trajectory was determined by the 11-plus - those with higher scores were placed in academic grammar or technical schools, whereas those who 'failed' were educated in secondary moderns (Hart et al., 2012). Inequalities existed within the Tripartite education system as only around 15% of working-class pupils attained grammar school places, with most pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds receiving a sub-par education and 'relatively poor subsequent labour market outcomes' at secondary moderns (Hart et al., 2012; 25; Taylor, 1960). This system limited social mobility as 'students who entered the secondary modern schools followed programmes which terminated at the minimum school leaving age', precluding them from 'qualifications which could secure access to higher education' and many 'white-collar' jobs (Eggleston, 1967; 85). There were considerable geographical differences in the allocation of places, with more grammar and technical school places in the wealthier south-east of England and far less in the industrialised Midlands and the North (Byrne, 1975). In general, the educational experiences of working-class boys were poor.

Despite education often being sub-par, this was not a barrier to finding work as most young working-class men experienced a 'smooth passage directly into the labour market at the age of 15' (Fergusson, 2017; 34) due to the high demand for unskilled

⁵ considered to be an unemployment rate below 3%

labour to support rising manufacturing output (see also Roberts, 1995). Upon leaving school the employment pathways were strongly gendered as young men transitioned 'from the classroom to the factories and building sites, while young women followed pathways leading straight from school to shops, offices and factories' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; 12). The transition to employment for young men was not only gendered, but also formed along structured intergenerational lines, as immediate career trajectories often aligned with their paternal occupations and/or localised labour markets, thus minimising young peoples' ability to exert agency (Goodman and Samuel, 1966; Vickerstaff, 2003). Demand for unskilled labour ensured comparatively high wages, thus enabling young working-class male school leavers in the 1960s to achieve historically unparalleled levels of financial independence in their teenage years and the capability to form their own family units at a young age (Abrams, 1959; Roberts, 1995; Allatt and Yeandle, 1986; Pollock, 1997). Overall, the post-WWII social contract enabled young people to gain work, but their agency was exercised within the parameters of limited opportunities and a working-class habitus which saw the progression into manual labour as a well-trodden path (Crisp, 2007).

In the post-war period a dominant route into manual skilled employment was the apprenticeship. By the mid-1960s, apprenticeships started to demand some form of academic qualification to filter applicants, commonly requiring five O-Levels (see Brooks, 2008). The distribution of apprenticeships was split evenly between grammar school and secondary modern leavers (Roberts, 2017). Unsurprisingly for the time, apprenticeships were strongly gendered as 'boys were apprenticed in engineering and construction' and 'most girls who were apprenticed were trained in hairdressing' (Roberts and Atherton, 2011; 62).

While much research suggests relatively uncomplicated transitions into employment, the prevailing view of the 1960s being a 'golden age' for school leavers is in question. Recently unearthed qualitative research conducted in the 1960s indicates that at least some young people experienced stressful and anxiety inducing school-to-work transitions due to precarious localised labour markets and the looming spectre of unemployment (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2013). This critique is increasingly accepted as an alternative and respected perspective alongside the 'Golden Age' as the labour market conditions in the 1960s were influenced more by the relative buoyancy of localised labour markets than originally thought (Vickerstaff, 2003; Roberts, 2011;

Furlong et al., 2017). Whilst these debates over the simplicity of youth transitions in the 'golden age' persist, historians have argued that the 1950s and 1960s was a good time to be a young working-class man; the opportunity to be a 'breadwinner' and start a family at a young age was more viable than for future generations (Cairncross, 2002; Todd, 2007). Furthermore, by historical standards young working-class men employed in the industrial sector still retained a high level of autonomy at work (see Humphries and Rubery, 1984; Todd 2007). High labour market participation and ample pay tended to result in young working-class men becoming 'more economically independent than those from the middle-classes who often remained dependent on their parents until their early 20s' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; 57).

Whilst there are positives to be drawn from the post-war period, Roberts (2017;2) argues that 'today's young people would not choose to recreate the conditions of the 1950s and 1960s even if they were able to do so'. At the forefront of Roberts' claims are the lack of agency and the structural determinism of this period – for many young working-class men the education system was riddled with educational inequalities. Furthermore, their future employment was aligned to paternal occupations and they were expected to get married and start a family at a comparatively young age. Thus, the generous social contract afforded them security but also constrained their opportunities and scope for agency. In a Bourdieusian sense their fields were socially and geographically limited but their habitus and volumes of capital were congruous to the fields in which they played, providing feelings of security and wellbeing (Bourdieu, 1999) (see Chapter 3).

The social security system in the post-war era was more generous than today, but it was not an unconditional source of financial support as conditionality was attached to young people's ability to access unemployment related welfare (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Specifically, 26 weeks of National Insurance contributions were needed to confer eligibility for support (Brown, 1990; Crisp, 2007). Moreover, from the outset of the social security system young people were only eligible to claim half the amount available to older unemployed people (Brown, 1990). Aside from the 26 weeks regulation, governments of the 1950s and 1960s did not include any conditionality or stipulations demanding young people undertake unpaid work or training (Brown, 1990). Debates over the inclusivity of the early social security system for young people

have intensified in recent years, with differing opinions being taken over the centrality of conditionality (see Phillips, 2000; Freud, 2007, Dwyer, 2010). However, discussions on welfare provision were largely absent from public discourse due to low levels of unemployment which meant 'unemployment benefits for young people in the 1950s and 1960s were almost wholly uncontroversial' (Brown, 1990; 103).

In summary, the post-war period was highly structured, particularly when compared to the challenges facing contemporary youth (see Kelly, 2001; McDowell, 2012; Coffey and Farrugia, 2014; Standing, 2014). Significant educational and employment inequalities emanating from the Tripartite system greatly restricted social mobility. Yet a strong social contract endowed young working-class men with plentiful paid employment and training opportunities. These structures provided them with the ability to attain financial independence at a relatively young age. The social security system was more inclusive (certainly by current standards) and provided a modest safety net to support them during times of unemployment. While the early social security system had a certain level of conditionality hardwired-in to alleviate the Beveridgian concern over 'idleness', the necessity for young working-class men to claim was largely absent due to very low levels of unemployment. Simply, equitable access to welfare and the availability of training schemes meant the issues connected to contemporary concerns over 'hidden NEETHood' were almost entirely absent. The dominant discourse throughout the period was certainly 'RED' as successive governments sought to rebuild the country in the post-WWII era through greater investment in public services, a programme of mass social housebuilding, progressive taxation and supporting a labour market which achieved full employment. There were also hints of 'SID' through the limited application of conditions attached to the social security system to encourage young people to participate in the labour market.

2.4 The Dawn of Neoliberalism - 1973 to 1997

While the post-war period was shaped by the 'RED' discourse, between 1973 and 1997 the UK firstly embraced 'SID' as the most prominent approach to social exclusion, but later shifted towards 'MUD' in the 1980s as the moral underclass debates and conditionality for welfare recipients gained traction. The wider political economy saw widespread changes which placed young men at the forefront of social change. For the first time since the 1930s the UK experienced mass unemployment

which disproportionately impacted young people. Successive policies relating to training and education, as well as a retrenchment of welfare provision constituted a roll-back from the post-WWII social contract for young people. Overall, it could be argued that the sociogenesis of 'hidden NEETs' commenced in the 1970s and 1980s.

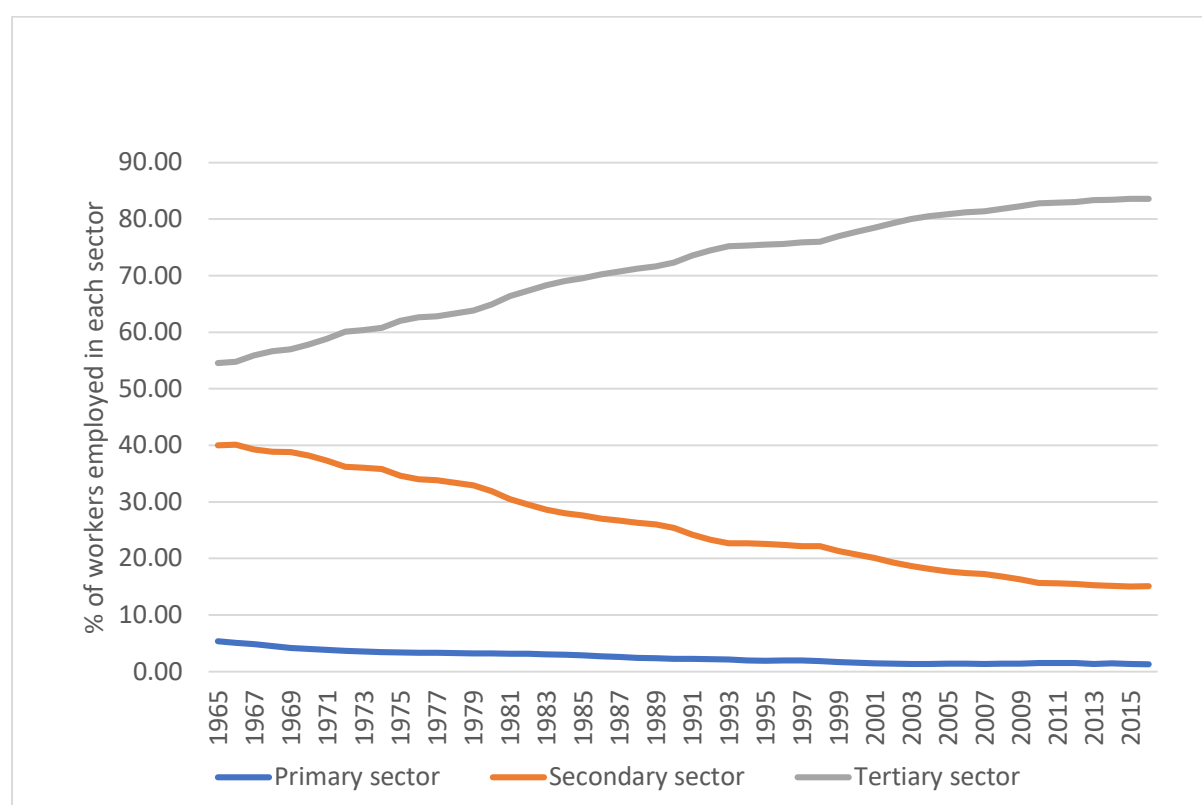
The (contested) 'Golden Age' was curtailed during the oil crisis of 1973, leading to a deep recession which disproportionately impacted the industrial sector and young working-class men. The UK responded by embracing a liberalised economic agenda through the implementation of policies designed to increase economic 'competitiveness', including moves to tertiary and foreign ownership of business, deregulation and privatisation (Harvey, 1989). These processes are retrospectively viewed to have heralded a feminisation and casualization of the workforce across the 'global North' as many jobs in heavy industry were outsourced to 'global South' (McDowell, 2003).

Researchers point to the late 1970s as the time when the social contract between young people and the state started to break down, citing greater levels of unemployment as well as declining educational standards and public/political discourses turning against young people (Allatt and Yeandle, 1986; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Bradley and Hickman (2004) state that the 1970s saw three broad changes to the experiences of young people in the labour market. Firstly, transitions into the labour market became extended as young people spent more time in education and/or experiencing periods of unemployment before gaining a foothold in the world of work. Secondly, young people were experiencing greater uncertainty in the labour market, primarily due to the growth of insecure or short-term employment contracts. Deindustrialisation greatly altered the structure and composition of youth labour markets in the UK by reducing the demand for low-skilled manual labour while seeing the increasing dominance of a service-based economy (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; McDowell, 2011). Thirdly, the alignment with paternal occupations fragmented, thus requiring young men to traverse transitions into the labour market without paternal reference points (McDowell, 2011).

By 1976 the unemployment rate for men under the age of 20 increased to 9.1 per cent (compared to 1.3 per cent in 1964); also, average weekly earnings for young men in the UK eroded throughout the decade, finally dropping to 15% below average female

earnings in 1979 (Layard, 1982; Rose and Rose, 1982; Murgatroyd and Urry, 1985). Roberts (1995) postulates three causes for young working-class men being impacted most greatly by unemployment and declining wages: i) slowing recruitment in traditionally male-dominated sectors reduced the opportunities available to school-leavers; ii) revenues declined, leading to training budgets being cut; and iii) school leavers were unable to compete with older and more experienced workers. The composition of the labour market also played a role as the recovery saw employment growth in 'female dominated sectors such as health, retail, catering, education financial services and clerical work' (McDowell, 2011; 29). As such, working-class masculine attributes became increasingly less valued in the labour market, with feminine attributes in turn becoming increasingly prized (Harvey, 1989; McDowell, 2011). The long-term decline in the manufacturing (secondary) sector and the continued growth of the tertiary (service) sector is detailed in table 2.2.

Table 2.2 - The evolution of sectoral distribution of employment in the UK



(Data from the Office for National Statistics, 2021)

The erosion of opportunities to secure employment for the cohort of young men who reached maturity in the 1970s and the incompatibility of their habitus to the changing labour market had significant economic and social impacts. Roberts (2007) argued that the 1970s reversed the trend of young working-class men becoming more independent than their middle-class peers, primarily due to both reductions in financial earnings and the increasingly normalised experience of being unemployed. Willis (1986) argued that kinship and relationship ties for young working-class men also became fraught as romantic relationships with the opposite sex became increasingly difficult to nurture due to their denigrated economic status. This halted the trend of forming families at a young age and left them 'trapped in the overcrowded home of their parents... lead(ing) to much heightened family tensions and difficulties' (ibid.,; 24). These tensions were deemed to be contributing factors behind the increased numbers of homeless young men in areas of northern England that were at the fore of deindustrialisation. More broadly, the reference points of young male identity started to fragment, not only due to the loss of secure wages and increasing challenges around their personal relationships, but also due to the 'significant structural, cultural and economic challenges to the dominant forms of masculinity' as some were forced into 'feminine' job roles (Willott and Griffin, 1997; 109). Despite such changes taking place, research on youth unemployment throughout the 1970s showed that young people saw unemployment as a short-term (or transitory) problem prior to gaining more sustainable employment in the future (Roberts et al., 1983; Main and Raffe, 1983).

To improve educational standards, the school leaving age was increased to 16 in 1973 (Trowler, 1973). It was around this time that Willis (1977) researched how a small group of 'lads' resisted against authority in a secondary modern school in the West Midlands. Previous research had concluded that young men had accepted working-class jobs due to a lack of alternatives. Conversely, Willis (1997) described how the attributes, behaviours and outlooks which conferred 'failure' at school were the same ones that were valorised or necessary in heavy industry. However, the decline of traditionally 'masculine' jobs made the adoption of working-class masculine cultures in school left them marginalised from many sections of the labour market where that culture was not accepted or valorised.

The decline of apprenticeships was mirrored by youth unemployment trends as the number of young people out of work increased from less than 50,000 in the early 1970s to over 1.2 million in 1985 (Bivand, 2012). The first policy to address unemployment was the formation of the Manpower Services Commission in 1974. The broad remit of this governmental department was to oversee the labour market policy by having autonomy from the Department of Employment. The second policy put in place to tackle rising youth unemployment was the Job Creation Programme (JCP) which ran from 1975 to 1978 (Furlong, 2006a). By 1978 the government recognised that more needed to be done to improve young people's prospects through the provision of training alongside work (Cook, 2007). The JCP was ended in 1978 to be replaced by the more ambitious Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) which included a training element, as well as opening the scheme up to all employers across the UK and covering the entire staff costs per participant (Raffe, 1981).

Government schemes to address youth unemployment culminated in the creation of the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) in 1983, which was essentially an amalgamation of the YOP and a range of smaller and locally devolved programmes (Dolton et al., 1994). The structure and amount of money paid to trainees was similar to the YOP but diverged from previous policies as it was designed to be a permanent scheme. In the view of Moon (1983) the permanency of the scheme showed that the government had recognised that youth unemployment was not merely a short-term issue. In short, for the first time the government saw youth unemployment as a structural issue which would not be alleviated without specific and sustained policy interventions. Despite the sizable investment, the schemes were also 'seen as a poor substitute for employment' (Bynner, 2010; 84), resulting in many trainees feeling stigmatised for being on 'govvy schemes' (Coffield et al., 1996). An overview of the key government schemes from the 1970s and 1980s can be seen in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 - Government Training Schemes (1975 – 1983)

Scheme	Length of support	Wages	Government contribution per participant	Eligibility	Training Requirement	No. of participants
Job Creation Programme (1975-1978)	32 weeks	Set by employer.	10% of wages	Any age but must be unemployed	None	200,000
Youth Opportunities Programme (1978 – 1983)	26 weeks	Up to £40 per week and up to £4 per week for travel expenses	Full cost of trainee	Aged 16 - 18	Variable – amount of training decided in conjunction with the trainee, unions and the employer.	600,000
Youth Training Scheme (1983 – 1989)	Up to two years	£35 per week	Full cost of trainee	Aged 16-17 (mandated from 1980)	Variable – training component decided by employer	500,000

(Raffe, 1981; Main and Shelly, 1990)

One key educational change that took place in the 1970s under the Labour government was the emergence of non-selective comprehensive schools as they sought to lessen educational inequalities and respond to parents concerns and fears of their children becoming unemployed. By the early 1980s the comprehensive model was implemented almost universally (Docking, 2018). Routes into work also altered and became increasingly limited - during the height of apprenticeships in the 1960s around one-third of 15- to 17-year-old boys embarked upon an apprenticeship, with the number on apprenticeship programmes totalling around 170,000 – by 1990 this had slumped to 34,000 (Ryan and Unwin, 2001). In the broadest sense, the key factors driving this decline are perceived to be: i) the raising of the school leaving age to 16 in 1973 presented young people with a wider set of educational and employment options; ii) the rising levels of precarity in the industrial sectors made other routes somewhat more desirable; iii) the low wages of apprenticeships in comparison to other forms of work limited their financial appeal; and iv) the downturn in labour demand and company revenues deprioritised investments in training (see Marsden and Ryan, 1990; Gospel, 1995).

The result of new training schemes and the clear decline of the industrial and manufacturing sectors precipitated a long-term fall in the supply of apprenticeships from 243,700 in 1966 to 53,000 by 1990 (Gospel, 1995). By the mid-1990s policy makers in the UK recognised that existing apprenticeships did not equip young people with the wide array of skills required by the labour market in which young people may change career multiple times throughout their lives (Roberts and Atherton, 2011). Subsequently the government implemented 'Modern Apprenticeships' (MAs). Whilst the model of delivery remained somewhat similar, there were two key developments in the formation of MAs. Firstly, MAs were not based upon the 'time served' model of older training schemes, thus allowing the apprentices to go at their own pace (Gray and Morgan, 1998). Secondly, the government created 'real' qualifications in the form of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) from Level One to University entry qualifications (Churchill, 1997; Huddleston, 1998).

Analysis of the MA found that the new model had similar faults to previous schemes, as very few of those enrolled persevered to complete level three qualifications (see Gray and Morgan, 1998; Maguire, 1999; Sims, 2004). The higher educational standards required for entry onto the MA scheme (five or more GCSEs at grades A-C) was also prohibitive for non-academic applicants (Sims, 2004). Finally, apprentices were still used by employers as sources of cheap labour due to the unregulated or business-led nature of training provision (Gray and Morgan, 1998).

The recession of the early 1980s saw a retrenchment in welfare provision with young people seeing their access to the social security system restricted through the implementation of 'creeping conditionality' when employment was scarce (Dwyer, 2004). During the 1980s the discursive tide started to turn against welfare recipients due in part to the creation of what Levitas referred to as 'MUD' through the 'underclass theory'. This theory is ill-defined by its author, Charles Murray (1984), but broadly depicts a 'feckless' group who are prone to unemployment, family breakdown, crime, substance use, moral disrepute, and welfare dependency. Despite vociferous critiques from the USA (Ellwood and Summers, 1986), and the UK (Mann, 1992) over Murray's dearth of empirical data and the lack of policy knowledge, his work provided the 'academic' justification for punitive welfare reform. The morality of Murray's work posited a considerable shift in the way welfare recipients were framed, sparking a wider political debate that sought to characterise welfare recipients as architects of their own moral misfortune. The Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher harnessed the 'underclass' theory as a tool which could be used to convince the UK population of the inefficacy of welfare and the necessity to cut public spending on welfare (Prideaux, 2010).

For young people, the first occurrence of conditionality was the condition of participating in the YTS to be eligible for welfare (Riddell, 1989). Crisp and Powell (2017; 1788) argue that the 1980s saw a 'switch in understanding from unemployment as a structural condition explained by a lack of employment to an individual problem caused by a lack of work ethic where unemployment is caused

by personalised character flaws' (see also Cole, 2008). This significant policy of conditionality is a clear demonstration of the shift from the inclusivity and social investments aligned to the 'RED' post-war period to a 'MUD' view that unemployment is an outcome of moral disrepute, idleness and welfare dependency. Elements of 'SID' were also present throughout the period as investments in training schemes aimed to integrate young people into the labour market.

Conditionality was ratcheted up in 1986 with the trial of 'Restart' interviews for people who had been unemployed for 12 months – the purpose of the interview was to 'link unemployed people into a range of other services within the wider system of provision for unemployment' (White and Lakey, 1992; 1). Failure to attend would result in a sanction of losing access to benefits for up to six weeks. In practice Restart interviews were a welfare policy tool which deployed 'special employment measures on a very large scale ensured that many long-term unemployed people' were forced into 'temporary work or self-employment' (Convery, 2009; 4). From 1987 the Restart interviews became biannual with the sanction increased to a maximum of 26 weeks. The next step on the conditionality ladder was introduced through the 1989 Social Security Act which required claimants to be 'actively seeking work' (see Timmins 2001), thus tying welfare eligibility to job search behaviours. Additional stipulations also required claimants to accept a job if it is offered to them, regardless of wages or suitability (Dolowitz, 1997).

Despite a plethora of supply-side interventions designed to create training opportunities the rate of youth unemployment remained around double that of the overall unemployment rate since the early 1970s (Makeham, 1990; Barwell, 2000; O'Higgins, 2001). The ramping up of supply-side interventions was largely ineffective as they failed to address the demand-side conditions in the labour market (O'Higgins, 2001). Furthermore, the rate of unemployment for the 18 to 24 age group UK fluctuated greatly between 1975 and 1995 as recessions and economic recoveries created a general trajectory of more worklessness amongst young people. A broader trend also showed that the number of men working in

heavy industry declined from over seven million to little over four million and areas for growth in the labour market were in the service sector where most women were employed (NOMIS, 2004). In statistical terms, the rate of labour market participation for working age men declined from 92 per cent in 1975 to 80 per cent in 1995, whereas the rate for women increased from 59 per cent to 70 per cent during the same period (McDowell, 2011).

The decline in the labour market conditions for the working-class deteriorated most in the industrial heartlands of the United Kingdom, with youth joblessness 'heavily concentrated north-west of a line from the Bristol Channel to the Wash' (Webster, 2000; 114), and particularly 'in northern towns such as Sheffield' (McDowell, 2011; 6). Whilst overall unemployment and broader issues of inequality increased for all young working-class men, it was young working-class BAME men who suffered the most throughout the 1970s and 1980s due to the ethnic pay gap and the higher rates of unemployment, with BAME groups faring worst (Blackaby et al., 1998). The situation for BAME groups only improved slightly in the 1990s, but largely because of higher wages in the south of England (Modood et al., 2000).

In summary, the period through the early 1970s through to the late 1990s saw a raft of social and economic changes which eroded the social contract endowed upon young working-class men in the previous decades. For young men, the three big changes during these decades were the increase in labour market precarity, the abundance of failed government schemes to address youth unemployment and increasing conditionality within the welfare system. Young working-class men in the north of England saw their opportunities to gain work recede as older workers predominated in a context of industry contraction. The geographical features of youth unemployment and economic decline set the scene for decades of regional inequalities (see Beatty and Fothergill, 2013). Government schemes to address the poor labour market outcomes for this group were largely unsuccessful and commonly resulted in the stigmatisation of participants. For those outside of the education, employment and training the

social security system became increasingly difficult to access, less generous and increasingly stigmatised by the 'underclass' discourse.

Wider political discourses and interventions in the UK throughout this period increasingly turned against working-class groups as the 'underclass theory' firstly gained traction with policy makers, and latterly shaped welfare policies to compel young people into 'workfare' and 'trainingfare'. The term 'workfare' denotes how unemployed people are forced 'to work for their benefits' (Convery, 2009' 26), similarly, 'trainingfare' refers to the 'hidden compulsion on training schemes in return for state benefit' (Jones, 1996; 137). In conjunction, 'workfare' and 'trainingfare' tied the receipt of benefits to the acceptance of work or training and meant that 'those who refuse to participate in training or employment lose state benefits' (Digby, 1989; 113). Between 1973 and 1997 the UK saw an abrupt shift away from the 'RED' (redistributive) discourses and policies which shaped the post-war period. As mass youth unemployment emerged the response to the crisis came from policies and discourses characterised by 'MUD' (moral underclass) and 'SID' (social integrationist). In essence, these discourses and policies asserted that unemployment was due (at least in part) to moral shortcomings that could be alleviated by providing greater incentives to find work, thus catalysing the welfare stigma that is so prominent today.

The broad implication of the changes was the dislocation of the school-to-work transitions for many young working-class men. Whereas their habitus and volumes of capital appeared to be congruous to the fields that they inhabited in the post-WWII period, throughout the latter period research indicates that the transition from the industrial to the service sector was difficult for some young working-class men. In summary, the period between 1973 and 1997 saw both political and socio-economic shifts that would later drive the increasing numbers of 'hidden NEETs' as support from the social security system became more difficult to access and maintain, youth worklessness in former industrial areas increased and became more entrenched, education outcomes stagnated, and training schemes often failed to help young people in their search for secure work.

2.5 1997 to 2008 – New Labour

Once again, by 1997 there were concerns regarding the high youth unemployment. The election of New Labour in 1997 heralded a wide set of education, employment, training, and welfare policies which in some ways diverged from those of previous decades, whereas some (particularly those related to welfare) were a continuation of trends from the 1970s. The overall approach to social policy from New Labour was a combination of 'MUD', 'SID' and 'RED'. The 'MUD' discourse played out through the prevailingly negative characterisation of some groups in society (including young working-class men and teenage mothers as a cornerstone of the Social Exclusion Unit); 'SID' was present in welfare and education policies which aimed to increase labour market and educational participation; and 'RED' shaped the formation policies such as 'tax credits' which increased the earnings of low-paid workers.

Young people in the UK were amongst the groups most impacted by the sets of policies and public discourses associated with New Labour (with lone parents and the disabled also being targeted) (Clarke et al., 2000; Brewer et al., 2002; France, 2007). For young people under the New Labour government the broad spectrum of policies involved greater investments in training and education (human capital) alongside a more restrictive welfare benefits system characterised by increased workfare and conditionality (France, 2007). Ryan (2005; 89) states how New Labour adhered to the fundamental view that 'a low tax, lightly regulated economy is more likely to lead to prosperity, and that the widening inequality of pre-tax income is a small price to pay for steady growth'. A key facet to New Labour was the aspiration to develop a 'high-skills' and 'knowledge based' economy through increasing investment in education to improve the opportunities available whilst simultaneously requiring citizens to take greater individual responsibility (Driver and Martell, 2000). Ball (1999) points out that these policies were borrowed from the USA, and the New Growth Theory of Robert Reich which dispelled 'the cleavage between economic and social policies' by viewing the social security and employment as interlinked entities

(see Reich, 1983; xx). Levitas (1998) states that the recalibration of the social security system was designed to alleviate the causes of poverty rather than easing the suffering of those who were struggling because of inequality.

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was formed in 1998 to address a range of societal issues, with an overriding emphasis on issues seen to be related to the 'social exclusion' of young people, such as, 'dead-end jobs, unemployment, poverty, ill-health and other kinds of exclusion' (SEU, 1999; 6). The justification for the focus on young people was both economic and social, as the SEU (1999;6) saw that 'society as a whole has to pay a very high price in terms of welfare bills and crime for failing to help people make the transition to becoming independent adults'. Whilst several minor interventions were made to address issues such as illiteracy, homelessness, offending, addictions and mental illness, the more pertinent concern for the SEU was to increase the number of young people participating in the labour market through more workfare (France, 2007).

The lexicon of the youth unemployment 'problem' in the UK soon included the buzzwords of 'employability' and 'NEET'. In many senses, the word 'employability' is loaded with negative connotations (see Philpott, 1999). Peck and Theodore (2000) proposed that the 'employability' discourse asserts that the 'causes of unemployment are... conceived in individualistic and behavioural terms' (724), in doing so presenting the tropes associated with 'MUD'. The term 'NEET' emerged from 'StatusZero' in the mid-1990s and linguistically represented the same broad discursive tropes from the 'underclass' theory of the 1980s. Both 'employability' and 'NEET' are clearly deficit models that characterise young people as the problem, in doing so relegating young people to a lesser form of citizenship by differentiating this group from others in society.

A core tenet of New Labour's policies on young people was the creation and implementation of the £2.5bn New Deal for Young People (NDYP) employment programme which mandated 'welfare to work' (Powell, 2000; France, 2007). New Labour retained the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) which had been implemented in the final years of the previous Conservative administration (see Levitas, 1998).

When discussing the New Deal programmes the then Chancellor of the Exchequer explained that 'when they [claimants] sign on for benefit, they will be signing up for work' (Brown, 1997, cited in Timmins, 2001). The approach by the New Labour administration was a combination of the 'underclass' discourse ('MUD') which portrayed worklessness as a moral hazard which damaged the lives of welfare claimants, and paternalism through the 'tough love' of conditionality and the ramping-up of workfare would be in the best interests of young welfare claimants ('SID') (Jessop, 2007).

The workfare element of the NDYP combined with JSA to specifically target young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who had been claiming benefits for six months, mandating that they took part in trainingfare or workfare to ensure future receipt of benefits (Finn, 2003). Throughout of the New Labour period rates of youth unemployment were typically low, dropping to their lowest level in 2004 before rising prior to the Global Financial Crisis (France, 2007). Despite the historically low rates, youth unemployment was typically double that of the overall working-age population (Bell and Blanchflower, 2010). However, the role of the New Deal in the driving down of youth unemployment is contested. Riley and Young (2001; 30) concluded that 'the number of young people in jobs has (only) risen by approximately 15 thousand as a result of NDYP'. To supplement the New Deal, a new organisation named Connexions was created in 2001 to deliver localised career guidance and advice to teenagers (a similar role to the decentralised and commonly disconnected careers service) (Garrett, 2002; Artaraz, 2006). A secondary function of Connexions was to gather data on the location and status of NEETs and to reduce the number of NEETs aged between 16 and 19 as research showed that this group was at risk of long-term unemployment if early interventions were not made (Roberts, 2013). Another significant intervention in the labour market was the implementation of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in 1999 'at an initial rate of £3.60 per hour for adults and £3.00 for those under 21 and for new employees in receipt of accredited training' (Forth and O'Mahoney, 2003; 3) with above inflation increases occurring annually prior to the financial crisis (Brown, 2009).

The very modest success of the NDYP, Connexions and the more positive outcomes of the NMW did not address the issues of the training and education system in the UK. Like many other countries, the UK attempted 'to establish a competitive edge in an advanced and increasingly global economy' by investing in education to 'develop a highly skilled workforce' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; 13). In the early days of its administration New Labour set an ambitious target of sending 50% of young people to university by 2010. This was a large expansion of the Higher Education sector in the UK and a significant step to raise investment in human capital (Coates, 2000). Alongside the desire to send more young people to university annual tuition fees of £1000 per annum were introduced in 2006 (Lunt, 2008). These fees were (and remain) highly controversial. Despite the implementation of tuition fees, universities thrived under New Labour as student numbers increased, particularly amongst working-class groups (Heath et al., 2013). The changes to the education system were not limited to higher education, with New Labour also implementing policies to promote technical pathways in schools (Tomlinson, 2005).

The investments in higher education and the greater numbers of working-class young people attending Universities in the UK made very little difference to the existing patterns of inequalities (Clayton et al., 2009). In essence, educational inequalities were simply inflated: working-class students obtained degrees from less prestigious institutions and middle-class students still dominated enrolments at the elite Russell Group universities as 'the rapid expansion of the higher education system disproportionately benefited children from richer families' (Machin and Vignoles, 2004; 108; Croxford and Raffe, 2015). Thus, instead of creating a pathway to a more meritocratic (or equal) society, universities under New Labour became another breeding ground of inequality. Moreover, one unfortunate consequence of focusing investment on education and overlooking the necessity to create greater employment demand for high skilled workers was that graduate unemployment/underemployment rose (Bosch and Charest, 2008). Hence, young people increasingly took jobs they were overqualified because of qualification inflation (Brown et al., 2010). The entry of more graduates into the labour market almost inevitably squeezed out large numbers of low/unskilled

working-class young people from entry and intermediate positions, particularly within the service sectors of the economy where the trappings of a university education are deemed to be valued (Purcell et al., 2007).

Despite youth unemployment rates being low throughout the period (albeit higher than the figure for older age groups), employment was becoming increasingly precarious, particularly for those at the lower end of the labour market in post-industrial areas. Furlong and Kelly (2005; 208) described how the UK labour market was evolving to resemble the developing world where 'temporary and insecure employment, discontinuity and loose informality' were normalised. The process of searching for work also changed throughout the New Labour period as recruitment by large firms increasingly shifted away from localised systems where social networks could provide a route into a new role towards a more impersonal and centralised system (Moore et al., 2018). This was a significant development for many young workers as the social capital which they accrued was no longer a valued resource in finding work. Instead, decisions upon recruitment were often made in the back offices where intangible assets such as charisma and the 'gift of the gab' could not be conveyed in standardised application forms.

Goos and Manning (2007) argue that the labour market under New Labour was essentially a continuation of trends towards the greater flux and precarity which commenced in the mid-1970s. One trend which sparked a range of debates pertained to how young men experienced the expanding service sector of the labour market before the financial crisis. Debates on the ability of young working-class men to adapt to the service sector have evolved significantly over the last 20 years. McDowell (2011; 237-8) stated that young working-class men 'are increasingly undervalued, even redundant in a service-based economy in which jobs for the unskilled and unqualified demand a quite other set of personal attributes'. Alternatively, Nixon (2009; 317) argues that young working-class men will participate and take pride in some roles within the service sector, albeit in 'masculine niches' such as security and driving taxis. Beatty, (2016) shows that over the last three decades men have slowly adapted to the changing labour

market whereby the masculine and feminine labour markets merged. Most recently, Roberts (2018) asserts that young working-class men not only find service sector employment to be acceptable, but deem this form of work to be enjoyable. By contrast, Lindsay and McQuaid (2004) contended that the young men in the early 2000s had no direct experience of working in heavy industry, and as such an employment transition into the service sector is exceedingly common and unproblematic. However, Lindsay and McQuaid (2004) dismissed the embeddedness of working-class cultures and values inside and outside work which are passed down the generations in industrial areas (see Nayak, 2006). Overall, there is a lack of consensus pertaining to the adaptability of young working-class men to the changing labour market. These debates would come to the fore once again during and after the financial crisis (see Chapter 6).

The final years of New Labour saw a global financial crisis that thrust youth unemployment to the centre of political, sociological, and economic debates (see Section 2.6). New Labour was critiqued by many on left for continuing the legacy of Thatcher and for diverging from the 'old' Labour tradition of challenging neoliberal hegemony (Jessop, 2007). Against that critique, it is important to note that the creation of the NMW reduced wage and gender inequality for the benefit of many young people. Whilst it potentially could have done more, 'New Labour may have left something that can be built on' (Brown, 2011; 53). In relation to young people, the consensus view is that 'education represents a modest success for New Labour' (Heath et al., 2013; 227; Dorling, 2010). That said, a major blot on the New Labour copybook was the imposition of student tuition fees and the inability to create skilled jobs for graduates (Wilton, 2011; Bradbury et al., 2013). The normalisation of workfare and restrictions on access to benefits through the NDYP remain extremely controversial (Peck, 2001; Fletcher, 2015). Finally, the adoption and proliferation of stigmatising terms and concepts towards young people are seen as a negative legacy of New Labour (see Nudzor, 2010).

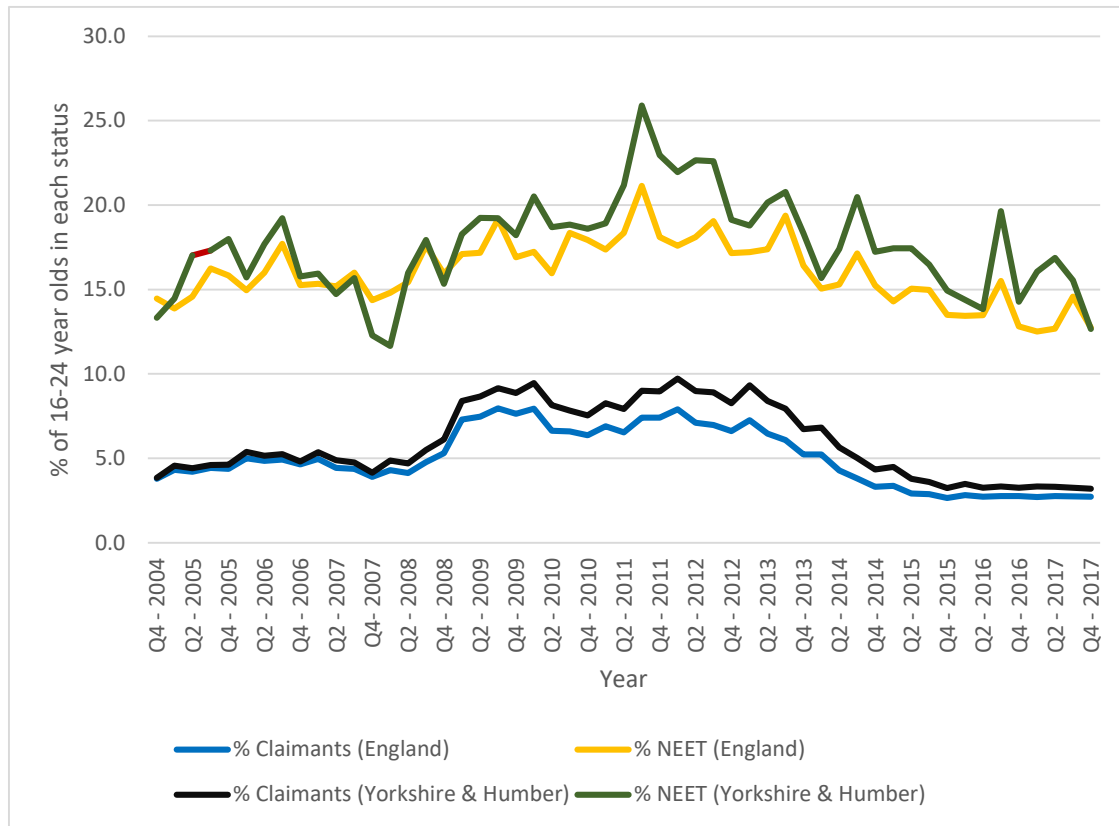
When reviewing the policies and structural changes through Levitas' theoretical lens several key themes emerge. As noted, there were elements of 'SID', 'RED' and 'MUD' across the policy agenda, but for young working-class men the

overriding approach was an abundance of 'MUD' through the proliferation of the 'employability' discourses and the singling out of young people for greater levels of welfare conditionality. Where there was 'RED' it was rarely afforded to young working-class men. One of the key themes throughout the period was the policies aligned to 'SID' as significant investments in 'human capital' were made in the form of education and training. These investments were clearly needed, but New Labour failed to harmonise the proliferation of skills and qualifications with the demand for high skilled jobs. As such, the inflation of qualifications saw more highly educated graduates compete with young people with fewer credentials. This in turn restricted access to the labour market and further marginalised many young working-class men. Debates over the role of masculinity in the labour market continued, with the broad consensus being that many young working-class men lacked the forms of capital and habitus required to be successful in emerging forms of service sector employment.

2.6 Global Financial Crisis – 2007 to 2018

During the final two years of the New Labour administration the global economy was hit by a significant downturn which came to be termed as the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). The immediate impact of the GFC was a sharp increase in youth unemployment in the UK from 14% in 2005 to over 20% by mid-2009 (House of Commons Library, 2020). As in previous economic downturns, young people and new entrants to the labour market were disproportionately impacted by unemployment, with the rate of unemployment for the 16-24 age rate peaking at over three times that of the 25-64 age range (see Bell and Blanchflower, 2010; 2011; Fergusson, 2017). During the height of the GFC between 2008 and 2010 'the number of young people unemployed had risen by 25 percentage points', alongside the number of NEETs in the UK peaking at around 1,000,000 (Maguire, 2015; 122). As seen in other European countries, the UK experienced geographical disparities with areas including Yorkshire and the Humber being amongst the hardest hit (Lee, 2014), see Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Rates of 'NEETs' and Claimants aged 16-24 in England and Yorkshire and Humber, 2004-2017



(Office of National Statistics, 2021)

To address the issues of youth unemployment at the onset of the GFC the New Labour government created the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) in 2009. The FJF was a particularly innovative intervention into the youth labour market as it was underpinned by the notion that unemployment was a demand-side structural issue that needed to be addressed by job creation, as opposed to the prevailing view from previous decades that framed worklessness as a supply-side issue characterised by low skills, fecklessness and a lack of employability (Crisp and Powell, 2017). The implementation of the FJF was still supplemented by the workfarist 'New Deal' and 'Young Person's Guarantee' initiatives of early New Labour as well as the 'Restart interviews' and JSA implemented by the Conservatives.

During the height of the financial crisis in 2010 an election took place which resulted in the formation of a coalition government involving the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. The range of policies implemented with relevance to young people was similar to the 1980s, with reduced spending on welfare and a ramping up of conditionality, cuts to education spending and the withdrawal of funding from organisations which supported young people (including Connexions) (Hepple, 2013; Oliff et al., 2013; Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Hamnett, 2014; Sharpe, 2018).

The underlying discourses which propelled the coalition government into power were strikingly reminiscent of those seen in the 1980s as welfare conditionality and the 'underclass' discourses saw a resurgence (Sloman, 2018). Key to the discursive justification for welfare reform was to 'make work pay' and to herald an end to 'welfare dependency' by introducing tighter restrictions 'in efforts to 'help' individuals off benefits' (Patrick, 2014; 760), as part of wider efforts to bring down public expenditure. These discourses set the transition from 'creeping conditionality' to a 'ubiquitous conditionality' where access to welfare support would become greatly restricted (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). In essence, the coalition responded to the financial crisis by adopting a discourse and policy measures which included an abundance of 'MUD' to justify welfare cuts and elements of 'SID' through coercive workfare/trainingfare.

A very significant, yet often overlooked, cut to youth provision was the withdrawal of funding of Connexions in 2010. Prior to 2010 Connexions was an important supplier of careers advice to hundreds of thousands of young people in the UK, but even more significantly, it was a vital source of localised data on NEETs (Hutchinson et al., 2016). Connexions was responsible at a local level for tracking every young person who was NEET, thus allowing for the creation of accurate datasets on the location and overall numbers of NEETs and those at risk of becoming NEET. The removal of funding for Connexions inadvertently resulted in local authorities and central government being unable to accurately estimate the numbers of NEETs and meant that very large numbers of young people were characterised as 'other economically inactive' (see Figure 1.2). Concerningly, it

meant that 'official data grossly understates NEET numbers in many local areas' (Brooks, 2014; ix). Furthermore, this prevented local authorities from being able to identify and allocate resources to support NEETs.

One of the very first decisions made by the coalition government in May 2010 was to end enrolments to the FJF (with it being fully shut down by March 2011), arguing that the £6,500 cost per person did not provide value for money and only provided 'temporary, short term placements, and the grants did not include any incentives to move people into permanent employment.' (Grayling, 2011a). The FJF was replaced in June 2011 by the new Work Programme and the Mandatory Work Activity. The Work Programme was loosely based on the 'welfare-to-work' models from the USA where the delivery was entirely outsourced to private sector providers through a payment-by-results model (see Rees et al., 2014).

The period at which a claimant was forced to enrol on the Work Programme was tiered depending upon age and economic status: i) NEETs were made to enrol after three months of claiming JSA; ii) those aged 18 to 24 and not NEET were enrolled after nine months of claiming; and iii) those aged over 25 were allowed to claim JSA for 12 months before the Work Programme became mandatory (Mirza-Davies and Brown, 2014). Evaluation of the Work Programme suggests that the scheme was beset with the same issues as those implemented in the 1980s as outcomes were generally poor, as well as strong suggestions that providers were 'creaming' and 'parking' the participants (Rees et al., 2014; Carter and Whitworth, 2015). Additionally, the Mandatory Work Activity scheme was implemented which required claimants of any age with little or no understanding of what behaviours are required to obtain and keep work to undertake work-related activity for up to 30 hours per week. Finally, young JSA claimants were offered work experience as well as additional appointments with Personal Advisers at Jobcentre Plus.

Throughout the GFC and the subsequent recovery the growth in jobs occurred largely through the proliferation of precarious work. Gregg and Gardiner (2015; 5) highlight a gendered aspect to this issue as 'men and in particular young

people have experienced strongly rising insecurity⁶ in the labour market. They also found that young people were struggling to gain entry to the labour market, and after obtaining work their ability to acquire better pay and conditions was hampered by a lack of opportunities. This is buttressed by Ralston and Formby (2020) who found that the youth labour market outside of the South-East collapsed in 2010 and has since seen few signs of significant recovery. Overall, the overriding theme in relation to the labour market has been a restructuring of work which has seen an increase in precarity, particularly for young workers (Gregg and Gardiner, 2015; Hardgrove et al., 2015; Beatty et al., 2017; Formby, 2017; Hoskins et al., 2018).

The new welfare regime was buttressed in 2012 by the Welfare Reform Act which included an enhanced sanctions regime which penalised JSA claimants for non-adherence to the conditions of the new welfare system (see Dwyer and Wright, 2014). The sanctions enabled Jobcentre Plus workers to remove benefits from claimants for 28 days on the first infringement, 91 days for the second, and finally up to three years on the third occasion (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Research shows that young people were disproportionately impacted by sanctions as JSA claimants under the age of 25 received around 40% of all sanctions between 2012 and 2014 (Watts et al., 2014). Analysis also suggests that young people were unduly squeezed out of the welfare system by the sanctions as 8.4 per cent of claimants under-25s were sanctioned each year, significantly higher than the 5.6 per cent for all claimants (Watts et al. 2014). Two reasons have been postulated for young people receiving more benefits sanctions than other age groups. Peters and Joyce (2006) suggest that young people may be more relaxed about being sanctioned as they may have a 'safety net' of familial support, thus reducing the immediate necessity to comply with the more taxing elements of welfare conditionality. However, a body of research emerging in recent years argues that strict conditionality for young (and often vulnerable) people is difficult to adhere to due to chaotic lives linked to austerity and poverty (see Batty et al., 2015; Redman, 2020; Wright et al., 2020).

⁶ Gregg and Gardiner (2015; 5) define 'insecure' as 'working part time or in temporary jobs, have not been in position long enough to have various employment rights, or are relatively low paid'

The disproportionate level of conditionality and sanctions upon young people was enhanced further in 2015 with the Youth Obligation that imposed tangible conditionality from the first day of the benefit claim. Young people between the ages of 18 and 21 were mandated to attend a three-week Intensive Activity Programme which included employment readiness activities (such as workshops, job application support sessions and mock interviews), with the threat of sanctions if they failed to attend (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018; Atfield and Green, 2019). If a young person was still out of work after six months of the initial claim then they would be mandated to attend training courses, complete community work or take an apprenticeship to ensure that benefits would be maintained (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018).

The political justification for implementing conditionality and sanctions from day one of a claim rested on four distinct strands. Firstly, drawing upon research on 'unemployment scarring' the government argued that this was an appropriate method to ward off long-term unemployment (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Secondly, Smith (2016) took a sceptical view by arguing that the electoral disengagement by young people allowed the government to treat the group more severely. Thirdly, and most pertinently, Watts and Fitzpatrick (2018) argue that this plays into the wider 'underclass' discourse which aimed to disincentivise a 'life on benefits'. Fourthly, during a time of economic crisis the government argued that maintaining pre-crisis levels of welfare spending were unaffordable (Edmiston, 2017). Research conducted by Atfield and Green (2019; 40) found that the Youth Obligation was a key driver in NEETs 'dropping out' of the welfare benefits system (and thus becoming 'hidden NEETs') to rely upon 'other sources of income' such as 'marginal, informal types of work, including casual, cash-in-hand arrangements, as well as in crime and prostitution'. Likewise, coalition welfare policy has been shown to be a key driver in the increase in food bank use (Loopstra et al., 2015), growing numbers of homeless people (Reeve, 2017), survival crime (Webster, 2016), and has even been implicated in the premature deaths of the vulnerable (Mooney, 2017).

An extensive body of research has shown that welfare sanctions are ineffectual. In an economic sense, the aim of getting young people into work through the policy mechanisms of sanctions, conditionality and mandatory training schemes is flawed, as these policies are attuned to the view that unemployment is a supply-side problem and governments have failed to address the demand for young workers in the labour market (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Furthermore, 'rather than producing a compliant working class... it pushes people out of the very system (social security) initially designed to protect them' (Reeve, 2017; 75), and only 'reinvents failed forms of 18th and 19th century punishment and surveillance that the imperial British state used to govern through brutality and fear' (Wright et al., 2020; 292).

In a mirroring of the 1980s, the clamping down on benefit claimants through reformed social policy was paired with an increasingly vociferous stigmatisation of recipients in societal discourse. The behaviours associated with worklessness throughout the financial crisis were shown to be a misrepresentation of the lived experiences of welfare recipients. One pertinent example is the myth of 'multiple generations of worklessness' which was first propagated in the 1980s and 1990s alongside the implementation of welfare reform (see Grayling, 2011b; MacDonald et al., 2014a; MacDonald et al., 2014b). Tyler and Slater (2018) argue that misinformation over the lives of welfare recipients was *intentionally* produced by the state through free market 'think-tanks' and sections of the media to generate public approval for increasingly punitive welfare provisions. The pervasive ramping up of welfare stigma during and after the financial crisis has been shown to have impacted upon how claimants perceive themselves (see Walker et al., 2013; Garthwaite, 2014; Pemberton et al., 2016; Patrick, 2017). Research has shown that some groups in society take steps to manage the stigma that they feel because of claiming benefits, (see Hamilton, 2012).

The investments in higher education throughout the 1990s and 2000s ensured that 'young people in the labour market in the Great Recession (of GFC) were better educated than in the previous two recessions' (Furlong et al., 2017; 65). Whilst the increased levels of education amongst young people did insulate some

from unemployment as many were in education throughout the height of the GFC, 20 per cent of graduates were out of work between 2008 and 2009 as the number of graduate positions dropped significantly (McDowell, 2012). Graduate unemployment started to become a focus of social policy researchers after the GFC as tighter youth labour markets meant that 'achieving success, in the form of a graduate job, can be elusive' (MacDonald, 2011; 433). Burke et al. (2020) highlight that the increasing levels of working-class students attending higher education establishments over the last two decades have failed to alleviate the inequalities in the graduate labour market as working-class students experience higher levels of unemployment, underemployment and non-graduate employment.

A key finding suggests that middle-class students invest in developing their social circles whilst at university (in doing so, sacrificing their degree classification), whereas working-class students were solely focused on their education (Burke et al., 2020). Another significant finding pertaining to Higher Education is the response of working-class students to the increase in standard student fees from around £3000 per annum to up to a maximum of £9000 per annum in 2012/3 (see Office for Fair Access, 2015). Despite the availability of student bursaries, Callender and Mason (2017) and Bachan (2014) showed that working-class students were far more debt averse, and hence less likely to attend university because of the increased fees. France et al. (2020) also highlights a gendered dimension, showing how the lower levels participation in higher education amongst young working-class men appears to be a global phenomenon. In searching for explanations France et al. (2020) suggest that this is largely due to historical cultures of masculinity which promote the ideals of paid employment over the pursuit of education. Furthermore, a reading of this fact may simply be that underrepresentation at universities is an outcome of lower attainment at school which were linked to cultures of masculinity (see Ingram, 2017; Simmons et al., 2020).

Even before the height of the GFC working-class graduates saw a degree as the basic minimum to provide entry to the labour market, rather than as a passport to

skilled or valued employment opportunities (Brooks and Everett, 2009). This perception of the labour market chimes with the work of Gallie et al. (2014) who showed that the number of jobs requiring no qualifications has seen a marked decline since 2006, alongside a significant increase in the number of jobs requiring degree level qualifications. Research also shows that despite their advanced education graduates also felt shame and stigma about being unemployed and having no option but to claim benefits (Formby, 2017).

Whilst the overall rate of unemployment and the number of NEETs has declined significantly from a high of 1,100,000 in 2011 to 700,000 in early 2020 (see Youth Futures Foundation, 2020), the precarious conditions of the labour market for young people has emerged as a substantial concern. Three key issues have emerged in particular: 'zero-hours contracts'; 'underemployment' and the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle'. Whilst all these matters have been shown to commonly overlap (Shildrick et al., 2012), they must be discussed individually to provide a detailed overview of the nuanced issues.

Since the recession there has been a rapid increase in the number of people employed on what have been colloquially termed; 'Zero Hours Contracts' (ZHCs). The exact numbers of people employed on ZHCs are difficult to obtain due to debates over what constitutes a ZHC (see Adams and Prassl, 2018), however the most reliable estimate suggests that around one million people in the UK are employed on such contracts with young, part-time, women or in full-time education forming the largest proportion of workers with nearly half of ZHC workers employed in administration or construction (Petkova, 2018). The overall trend clearly demonstrates a significant increase since the onset of the 2008-09 recession. After intense discussions surrounding ZHCs in public discourse and the media (see Pyper and McGuinness, 2013) the UK government amended legislation relating to employment law in 2015 to enact a ban on the exclusive ZHC's which removed 'Any provision of a zero hours contract which — '(a) prohibits the worker from doing work or performing services under another contract or under any other arrangement, or (b) prohibits the worker from doing

so without the employer's consent, is unenforceable against the worker' (The Stationary Office, 2015).

Whilst this move was welcomed by Trade Unions, concerns have been raised that employers could circumvent the legislation by guaranteeing employees a minimal number of hours which would permit exclusivity clauses (Unison, 2014). Furthermore, the new act falls short of alleviating the greater concerns relating to ZHCs, and more generally the proliferation of temporary contracts and low levels of employee rights (Brinkley et al., 2013). In international terms the UK maintains a reliance on temporary contracts across the spectrum, yet that are particularly prevalent in low paid sectors (Fuller and Stecy-Hildebrandt, 2015).

Since the GFC the issue of underemployment has also become a source of concern across many developed nations, particularly in the UK (see Skórska, 2019). Bell and Blanchflower (2019; 180) define underemployment as 'the expressed wish of employees and the self-employed to work more hours at the going wage rate'. In essence, it characterises the issue of employees working fewer hours than they have the capacity to work. Bell and Blanchflower (2019) suggest that by the end of the last decade around 3 per cent of the UK labour force was underemployed, compared to the unemployment rate of circa 4 per cent. During the New Labour years, the underemployment rate and the overall unemployment rate typically moved in tandem with the underemployment rate around half of the unemployment rate. However, underemployment spiked between 2009 and 2015 as it reached nearly five per cent of the overall workforce, before declining to three per cent at the end of the decade (Bell and Blanchflower, 2019).

The age distribution of underemployment is stark, as the 'underemployed are typically young, less well-qualified and poorly paid' (Bell and Blanchflower, 2019; 180). Bell and Blanchflower (2019) also showed that young underemployed people are far more likely to experience depression and poor mental health when compared to the overall population. Furthermore, the issue of underemployment strongly indicates a large amount of slack in the labour market which 'reduces

pressure on employers to increase pay rates in the UK', and can be seen as a key factor in the 6.5% fall in real wages over the last decade to 2019 (Bell and Blanchflower, 2019; 180).

Long-term precarity encompassing times of short-term employment and periods of unemployment has been conceptualised as the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle (see Shildrick et al., 2012). It is described as 'a longitudinal pattern of employment instability and movement between low-paid jobs and benefits' (Shildrick et al., 2012; 8). The 'churning' pattern of work, unemployment and welfare was observed prior to the GFC; however, numerous recent studies have shown that the experiences of this pattern of work are becoming more frequent amongst young people at the lower end of the labour market (see D'Arcy and Rahman, 2019). However, as noted by Shildrick et al. (2012), the existing conceptualisation of the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle presupposes the availability of benefits during periods of unemployment. Considering the changes to the social security system over the last decade (specifically conditionality and sanctions) and the large numbers of young people who are 'hidden NEETs' at any given moment in time, the contemporary 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle may be far more precarious than in the pre-GFC period.

A key contribution to the discussion around precarious work over the last decade comes from Standing (2011). This work proposes that the liberalisation of the economy and the decline in employee security has created a new 'class' of workers, which he defines as 'the Precariat'. This group typically experiences precarious work either through the 'gig economy', the 'platform economy' (e.g., Deliveroo, Uber and Amazon deliveries), ZHC's or any other form of work which provides little or no long-term security (Standing, 2011). Moreover, members of 'the Precariat' are characterised by a 'lack of work-based identity' (Standing, 2011; 12). Furlong et al. (2017) see little value in the identification of the precariat as a 'class' who have little or nothing in common, using examples of McDonald's employees and pilots for EasyJet. However, 'the Precariat' has spawned a range of sociological debates over what it means to be a precarious worker and the impacts on workers.

Debates over the 'crisis of masculinity' in the labour market and the potential for male disadvantage within the service sector re-emerged after the GFC (see Roberts, 2018). The most prominent scholars on this subject disagree, with McDowell and Harris (2019; 430) stating that many young working-class men lack the material and social resources to be successful in the contemporary service sector and 'gig' economy 'as they are disqualified by their lack of deference' (also, see McDowell 2019). Conversely, Roberts (2018; 217) argues that 'such roles are no longer considered women's work' and not only are these roles acceptable but are 'even enjoyable'. As noted in chapter one, the perceptions of service sector employment from the view of young working-class men are still strongly contested. The differing views are not necessarily mutually exclusive as masculinity theory would indicate that masculine identities (particularly in relation to work) are strongly influenced by the locale, suggesting that different cities and towns will present nuanced discrepancies in the formation and presentation of masculinity (see Ingram, 2018) (also, see section 3.6)

The green shoots of growth within the labour market before the Covid-19 pandemic came in the service sector such as social care and retail, areas which require the 'soft skills' which have been deemed to be lacking in the skillset of some young working-class men (see Nixon, 2009). At the lower end of the labour market the employment opportunities for working-class men were hit disproportionately as 'masculine' roles in construction and labourer positions declined significantly (McDowell, 2012).

In summary, the period since the financial crisis has seen a return to the punitive policies and discourses which proliferated in the 1980s. Many young working-class men were placed at the centre of a pincer movement – on one side they saw their levels of security within the labour market eroded by market forces, and on the other flank they were squeezed out of the welfare benefits system by the imposition of ubiquitous conditionality. In short, it became increasingly challenging to gain traction within the labour market, and those unable to do so found it steadily more difficult to acquire and maintain support from the welfare

benefits system. The impacts of these changes have been shown to be almost entirely negative with increases in income inequality, deprivation, and mental health issues. Beyond work and welfare, wider cuts to government expenditure saw a rapid decline in the support offered to young men as youth provision was cut. For the more fortunate minority who attended Higher Education or gained employment the promise of security and prosperity failed to materialise for many due to a lack of opportunities in a tight labour market.

2.7 Conclusion

This historical review of the political and economic changes impacting on young people clearly highlights the erosion over time of all forms of capital for young working-class men. Starting from the 1960s, they experienced relatively straightforward transitions from school in their mid-teenage years to the labour market or training schemes. However, it should be noted that the agency of young working-class men was bounded by familial influence and a limited range of employment opportunities in very localised labour markets. For the small number of young working-class men experiencing unemployment, the welfare benefits system had a small amount of conditionality to discourage 'idleness'. As a sign of the more collectively minded society in the post-war period their access to the welfare benefits system was entirely uncontroversial. Whilst some research has suggested that the transitions at this time were problematic for some, the overwhelming body of evidence states that young men in the post-war period had simpler transitions than we see today.

These simpler transitions started to fragment and become more elongated and interspersed with periods of unemployment during the 1970s and 1980s. From this point we can see the gradual emergence of changes that would eventually culminate in large numbers of young men becoming detached from employment, education, training and the welfare benefits system.

During this time the labour market gradually transformed from a source of relative security and well-paid employment for young working-class men to a more precarious system which increasingly offered low-paid, insecure jobs, a lack of

progression and poor working conditions. The structure of the labour market also shifted away from the heavy industrial and manufacturing sectors which provided a purpose and identity for many young men to the service sector which required different skills and attributes to the masculine shopfloor cultures of male manual work (McDowell, 2003). The position of young working-class men within the service sector has been debated at length, with some arguing that the habitus of young working-class men is incompatible with the contemporary labour market, and others who see young working-class men as willing participants. Whilst this debate continues, it must be acknowledged that young working-class men have been forced to adapt to the changing circumstances around them (with varying levels of success).

Throughout the last three decades education and the acquisition of skills have been sold as the panacea to improve the lives of young working-class people, yet for working-class men their acquisition of qualifications has not always been transferred into rewards in the form of economic capital in the labour market. Those who attend universities and obtain high level qualifications are often still beset by social class inequalities as working-class graduates are not afforded the same employment opportunities as their middle-class peers. Similarly, the training opportunities and government schemes since the 1980s (with the notable exception of the FJF) have also failed to adequately provide opportunities to young people.

Finally, the contemporary social security system bears little comparison to that conceived in the immediate post-war period. Until the mass youth unemployment of the 1970s accessing the welfare benefits system was not a stigmatising process, whereas today the experience of claiming benefits is almost universally tainted with such feelings. Administratively, since the 1980s the UK has seen a gradual retrenchment of welfare provision from 'creeping conditionality' to the 'ubiquitous conditionality' of today. The most significant changes have taken place since the GFC with government welfare policy crossing the Rubicon to conditionality on the first day of a benefit claim for young people at a time of high levels of youth unemployment. Discourses around welfare have also become

increasingly pernicious, culminating in claimants internalising the stigma associated with being reliant upon the state for financial support.

The chapter has shown how broad political, economic and social changes have impacted upon the lives of young working-class men. Their declining fortunes over the last 50 years shows that their forms of capital and habitus' have been gradually afforded less value. This chapter shows how the foundations for 'hidden NEETHood' were laid and sets the scene for the discussions later in the thesis. After reviewing the sociogenesis of the 'hidden NEET' problem it is somewhat remarkable that almost all young people persevered with 'EET' or welfare until the GFC and the welfare reforms that were subsequently enacted.

The worsening of socioeconomic conditions for young working-class people has been captured by Furlong et al. (2017) in the metaphor of a 'boiled frog'. They explain how change has slowly but surely presented greater risks and challenges to young working-class people, but the creep of precarity has meant that young people do not realise the extent of their denigrated status. The work of Bourdieu is useful in this regard – his concept of theory hysteresis conceptualises how the fields of 'EET' and welfare have gradually become mismatched from the habitus of many young working class men over the last half-century.

Chapter Three – Theoretical Approaches to Youth and Welfare

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive theoretical framework designed to assist in addressing the research questions. The aim is not to indulge in ‘arcane debates of social theory’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 26), but rather to deploy theory as a tool to achieve a deeper level of understanding of how working-class men experience and navigate ‘hidden NEETHood’. Fundamentally, the theories employed in this research must be attentive to matters of social class as it shapes the tools and resources at the disposal of the participants, as well as their dispositions and parameters for action. However, while class emerges as the most significant vector in determining how they navigate hidden NEETHood, the major role-played race and gender also needs to be acknowledged.

The chapter presents the four complementary theoretical tools that are well suited to address the research questions. Firstly, the work of Pierre Bourdieu allows for a deeper understanding of the socialisation (habitus) of the young men which shapes their propensity to participate in the labour market, seek support from the welfare benefits system, rely on other forms of assistance, or engage in crime. Bourdieu can also provide detailed insights into the resources (forms of capital) available to the young men, and how their social and cultural assets can be transferred into economic assets in different settings (fields). Secondly, Goffman provides a theory on the reflexive management of ‘stigma’ which can analyse the participants’ complex interactions (and occasionally the lack thereof) with the welfare benefits system. Where appropriate, the thesis also applies concepts linked to masculinity to explore the role of gender as a potential resource and the role of masculinity in the contemporary labour market. Finally, to reflect the ethnically diverse nature of the participants the analysis utilises the theory of intersectionality to explore how forms of discrimination and precarity can overlap to shape the lives of a set of marginalised young men.

3.2 Presenting a theorisation of ‘hidden NEETHood’

To reiterate, the research reported in this thesis addresses two broad strands of sociological enquiry. Firstly, it seeks to understand how this group of young men came to be outside formal state provision (education, employment, training and welfare) as hidden NEETs. Secondly, it strives to reveal how young men get by in the absence of such provision. To achieve the required level of theorisation to meet these aims, this section presents the four key elements of the theoretical framework deployed in the research. All four theories are relational and assert that class formation is based on the differences between groups and what is deemed to be of value. The value attributed to these practices are in a constant state of flux, meaning that what is deemed to be of value changes in different localities, cultures and over time. This approach to sociology is superior to classical sociological theories which view class relations as nominal categorisations.

The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has been largely overlooked by youth studies scholars who have traditionally relied upon Beck's theory of 'individualization' and the broader concept of 'modernity' as the cornerstone for the field. In a simplistic sense, the 'characterization of Bourdieu within the sociology of youth as emphasising social determinism, and of Beck emphasizing choice and agency, arises from conceptualizing their work within a structure/agency framework', and has led Bourdieu to often be labelled as a theorist on structure (Woodman, 2007; 5). As the primary concern of youth studies since the 1980s has been upon how young people exercise agency in response to greater precarity Bourdieu has been side-lined. Jenkins (1982; 272) argues that the work of Bourdieu 'constitutes no more than another form of determination' as it 'underestimates the importance of the *possibility*⁷ of mobility'. This critique of Bourdieu as a structuralist has become well established (see Jenkins, 1982; Alexander, 1990; King, 2000).

Wacquant (2016: 67) addresses this line of criticism by asserting that Bourdieu 'acknowledges that agents actively make the social world by engaging embodied

⁷ Original emphasis.

instruments of cognitive construction'. The sociology of Bourdieu (through the habitus) can therefore have great value to youth studies as it bridges the divide between structure/agency by theorising the dialectic relationship between the two. Beck (1992) saw social class as a 'zombie category' in need of 'reanimation' but did not see Bourdieu as offering a nuanced approach to social class due to the critique of being deterministic and too structural. However, this thesis challenges that interpretation by aligning with the work of Dean (2016) and Roberts (2018) who view Bourdieu as a key, yet underutilised theorist who can be used to 'animate' social class debates within the field of youth studies through the application of his trinity of habitus, capital, and field, as well as the underutilised theory of hysteresis.

3.3 A Bourdieusian Approach to Social Class

The work of Bourdieu provides a relational approach to social class by foregrounding 'the primacy of relations' between individuals (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15). Moreover, Bourdieu sees social class as an outcome of complex social and cultural relations and the recognition value attributed to resources and dispositions. This is viewed to be a superior framework for social class as it moves beyond 'the vague and wordy generalization on classes that re-enact the eternal and fictitious confrontation of Marx and Weber' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 160, also, see Morrison, 2006). This means that social class should not be understood as a set of social taxonomies, but rather is formed by hierarchies of legitimacy between individuals and the recognition afforded to their resources and dispositions.

The relational model of social class of Bourdieu consists of three concepts, termed as the 'conceptual trinity' (Devine and Savage, 2005; 13), and composed of capital, habitus and field. *Capital* is broadly utilised to define the resources available to an individual; *habitus* describes the set of dispositions of an individual which are shaped by structural factors; and *field* explains the 'competitive areas' where the volumes of capital and the habitus are assigned value (Schwartz, 1997; 40). This battle for recognition is conceptualised by Bourdieu (1984; 101) in his

renowned equation which depicts the practice of social class to be an outcome of the habitus and field combining across differing fields:

$$[(\text{habitus}) \times (\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$$

Maton (2014; 51) concisely explains this to mean that the practice of social class 'results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field) (2014: 51). For Bourdieu, 'cultural practices... are markers of class positions' (Schwartz, 1997; 143), or put more simply, 'inequality is both cultural *and*⁸ economic' (McKenzie, 2015; 25).

3.3.1 Capital

The concept of capital has been utilised across sociology, and particularly by Bourdieu and Marx. From a Marxist position, capital is seen as an economic outcome derived from the surplus value of labour which assigns power to those who control the means of production (Marx, 2004). Bourdieu's work is a shift away from the 'narrowly materialist conception of power and inequality' by stating how power and dominance derive not only from material resources but also from possession of cultural and social resources (Crossley, 2014; 88).

For Bourdieu (1984; 114), class positions 'derive from the overall volume of capital, understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers - economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital'. Capital 'takes time to accumulate' and the possession of capital has 'a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form' as it is passed down through the generations (Bourdieu, 1986; 15). Fundamentally, the value of capital is inscribed by hegemonic forces and volumes of capital are distributed unevenly (Bourdieu, 1986). The distribution of capital across society determines the 'immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the

⁸ Emphasis added.

very reality of the world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices' (Bourdieu, 1986; 15). Those with lower volumes of capital with recognised value will inhabit the lower end of the social class strata, and those with greater levels of capital which are afforded greater value are placed in an elevated level of the strata.

The forms of capital outlined below are economic, social and cultural. There is also an additional form known as symbolic capital; however due to its high barriers to entry this is not considered in any detail in the thesis. Bourdieu's theorisation of symbolic capital relates to the possession and acquisition of resources such as 'castles or land, titles of property, of nobility or of higher learning' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013; 298). The ownership of symbolic capital is therefore limited to middle and upper-class individuals as well as the trappings of highbrow culture. For this reason, economic, social and cultural capital are far more relevant as these are possessed by all individuals, whether they are recognised as being valuable or not.

Economic capital

The term 'economic capital' is 'immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights' (Bourdieu, 1986; 16). As such, economic capital is derived from employment, family inheritance, savings or other sources (Bourdieu, 1986), and is thus related to class divisions. Researching the volumes of economic capital available to the participants is important as access to these assets can shield young people from the severe impacts of precarity (see Vogel, 2015). Unlike the other forms of capital, economic capital is easily identifiable and universally recognised to be a source of legitimacy.

Social capital

Bourdieu (1986; 248) defined social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'. Thus, social capital is derived from the membership of social networks, as well

as associations formed through employment and family contacts. In *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu shows that volumes of social capital (social networks) held by differing social class groups ensure that individuals are often restricted to interacting with people in a similar position to themselves. For example, groups of low-skilled young people who experience unemployment are less likely to possess the social capital that might act as a source of job opportunities (although exceptions may exist, for example, securing manual work through 'word-of-mouth'). As such, possessing low levels of social capital can entrench social and economic inequalities. Bourdieu (1986) states that social capital can have a multiplier effect as individuals with large networks can tap into the resources of other people's networks. Overall, the value of researching social capital in this group provides insights into the role of networks (or lack thereof) in the pursuit of employment and navigate life outside of EET.

Cultural capital

Moore (2014; 99) states that 'cultural capital is to all intents and purposes a synonym for "status"'. More broadly, in the view of Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital embodies all non-economic attributes. Bourdieu (1986; 17) defines three distinct forms of cultural capital: i) the *embodied* state which includes mannerisms, predispositions and accent; ii) the *objectified* state, consisting of education and personal knowledge acquired from art and literature; and iii) the *institutionalized* state, forms of educational qualifications and titles. All forms of cultural capital can act as enablers to accessing certain fields of employment, higher education, or social networks where high levels of cultural knowledge are deemed to be of value. As with other forms of capital, levels of cultural capital in young people are invariably affected by the parental inheritance through socialisation to entrench forms of inequality. For example, being raised in a household where further or higher education is not necessarily valued or seen as attainable would be indicative of low levels of embodied cultural capital, which in turn may inhibit the acquisition of cultural capital in its objectified and institutionalised guises.

Transferability of capital

Key to the concept of capital is the ability for an individual in certain situations to transfer or convert their capital into another form. Bourdieu (1986; 19) explains how 'different types of capital can be distinguished according to their reproducibility or, more precisely, according to how easily they can be transmitted'. Broadly, capital can be transmitted through laws of inheritance, such as economic capital (money) and social capital through family contacts. Furthermore, one form of capital can be transferred into another form given the right conditions. For example, investments in acquiring social capital can be converted into economic capital as 'contacts' can be utilised to gain employment. Similarly, cultural capital in its institutionalized state through qualifications can be used to smooth the transition into paid employment. The scope for such capital transfer amongst the respondents is discussed in greater detail throughout the empirical chapters.

3.3.2 Habitus

The habitus is defined as a 'system of durable and transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge and act in the world' (Bourdieu, 1990b; 53). This system is 'acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings via the internalising of external constraints and possibilities' (Wacquant, 2006; 267). Its durability means that an individual's habitus is not set in stone but is constantly being shaped and reshaped to new social conditions and experiences, meaning that it is a receptacle for continuity and change (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu (1990a; 53) sees the habitus as a 'structuring structure', in that it allows us to understand how the decisions made by individuals are influenced by and strengthen objective structures. This is distinguished from postmodernist views on 'normal' and 'choice' biographies of youth transitions since Bourdieu's habitus is the sum of an individual's life experience, whilst also being shaped by societal structures. Thus, the habitus transcends the dichotomy of structure and agency, and escapes 'both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction 'without an agent' and the subjectivism which portrays actions as the 'deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention...' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 121).

Fundamentally, the habitus is conceptualised as the sum of an individual's socialisation and experiences which lead them to create a mind-state, or way of perceiving the social world, which influences future social and organisational interactions. The habitus has some similarities to the epistemological fallacy of Furlong and Cartmel (2006) as both recognise the structural and objective factors that culminate to shape life changes. However, the durability of the habitus provides a far superior framework to those used within youth studies as it takes account of how social class is practised and performed.

As an individual's habitus is shaped by life experiences and social structures, it is central to the process of social reproduction. In other words, the habitus predisposes people to feel comfortable in situations which are concurrent with their social conditioning. As such individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may feel that certain institutional settings are 'not for them'. Bourdieu argues that 'objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits, a "sense of one's place" which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, place and so forth from which one is excluded' (Bourdieu, 1986: 471). Thus, as the empirical chapters show, Bourdieu's work has resonance regarding the ways that the social structures of disadvantage become embodied within the habitus, resulting in some young people from working class backgrounds self-excluding themselves from certain forms of employment and education.

Bourdieu also states that the habitus can transcend the individual through the reproduction of collective habitus which encompasses the structural and symbolic meanings attributed to a particular social group. For example, there is a class habitus produced by the structured dispositions of class kinship (Bourdieu, 1987). Alternative forms of habitus also can be based on ethnicity, geography, employment and religion. As such, the multiplicity of habituses highlights Bourdieu's approach to the complexities of individual identities.

Through utilising habitus, Bourdieu manages to encapsulate the roles of structure and agency to create a broader and nuanced representation of the elements that

form social class inequalities. Despite this, the concept of habitus is contested by some. For example, Reay (2004) critiqued Bourdieu's idea of habitus for lacking a reflexive element which allows for individuals to question their position in the social strata and their own dispositions.

Côté (2014; 2016) argues that Bourdieu's concept of habitus should not form a key element of youth studies due to its all-encompassing nature and structural determinism. Côté (2016; 843) critiques the theory of habitus for being a 'everything but the kitchen sink' approach to social enquiry which is 'so general that they encompass clusters of concepts that perspectives like symbolic interactionism and social psychology break down into discrete concepts'⁹. That said, Côté (2016; 843) sees value in the habitus when it is used as a 'latent variable' or factor with 'manifest variables' in a structural equation measurement model'. This critique (or warning) of utilising habitus as a standalone concept is valid and recognised within this thesis. To counter the points made by Côté (2014; 2016) the habitus forms only one lens of enquiry for this study (alongside capital, field, stigma, masculinity and intersectionality).

3.3.3 Field

The theory of 'field' was developed and utilised by Bourdieu to analyse social interactions in a given setting. Bourdieu sees a field as a 'a structured social space' which 'contains people who dominate and people who are dominated' (Bourdieu, 1998a; 40). The field is where different agents (individuals or groups) with differing volumes of capital battle to acquire recognition. Bourdieu (1998b) asserts that the dominant agents within a field will use their higher volumes of capital to their advantage to maintain or increase their dominance. All agents who 'play the game' share fundamental interests in wishing to compete with one another. Bourdieu sees society as a collection of autonomous fields, all with different rules and structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). To develop, Bourdieu (1993; 73) states that there are 'general laws of fields: fields as different

⁹ Used to explain a wide range of thoughts and behaviours, such as attitudes, values, definitions of the situation, presentations of self, social perception, cognitive schemas, conformity, group processes, and so forth. See Côté (2016)

as the field of politics, the field of philosophy or the field of religion have invariant laws of functioning’.

A common analogy to describe ‘field’ is as a football pitch – a field has set boundaries and certain characteristics (or skills) are more efficacious depending upon the conditions in the field. To continue with the football analogy, if the playing surface is perfect then pace and technical ability will be rewarded. Similarly, if the grass is boggy and the wind is gusting then the ability to ‘head’ the ball will be more valued. The theory of field is relevant to this study as it can illuminate, for example, how individuals may have a certain ability to be successful in the field of crime due to their dispositions and volumes of capital being conducive to this field but have less success in the formal economy where different forms of capital and dispositions are valued by prospective employers (see Shammas and Sandberg, 2016).

3.3.4 Hysteresis

The theory of hysteresis ‘arises only infrequently within academic literature, even the Bourdieusian literature’ (Dean, 2017; 96). Despite its underutilisation, the theory is congruous to this research as it speaks to intergenerational change and the gradual dislocation of the habitus the in changing fields (Hardy, 2014). Bourdieu explains that hysteresis occurs when habitus and field are ‘too different from the one to which they are objectively adjusted’ (1990b; 62). In practical terms, hysteresis reflects the cultural lag where the habitus becomes ill attuned to changing fields. As noted in Chapter 2, the long-term socio-economic change in areas such as Sheffield form the conditions for hysteresis as cultures of working-class masculinity have become precipitously less valued due to the restructuring of the labour market.

3.4 Goffman’s Stigma

Goffman (1963; 1) traces the concept of stigma from ancient Greece where physical forms of stigma were ‘cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor - a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places’. Goffman moves beyond the physical

signifiers of stigma and posits a theory based upon its wider forms emanating from the blemishes of an individual's character. Goffman (1963; 4) states that stigma is most commonly experienced by individuals who are 'perceived as weak willed' and seen to display or possess 'domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty'. A stigmatised person is deemed to be in a 'discreditable state' due to their unenviable possession of 'stigmata' (Goffman, 1963). Recent studies have shown that accessing the welfare benefits system, utilising foodbanks, being homeless or experiencing unemployment can form a stigmatised status (see Garthwaite, 2016; Tyler, 2020).

Goffman situates the core issues pertaining to stigma to be the differential between the 'normals' and the stigmatized. The key challenge for a stigmatized individual is 'not that of managing tension generated during social contacts, but rather that of managing¹⁰ information about his failing' (Goffman, 1963; 42). In order to maintain an untarnished identity the stigmatized will attempt to shield their stigmata from public view by negotiating access to their 'true' identity by choosing 'To display or not to display ; to tell or not to tell ; to let on or not to let on ; to lie or not to lie ; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where' (Goffman, 1963; 42). Letkemann (2002) argues that the process of shielding the 'stigma' leads to additional stigmata as the initial stigma can result in perceptions of untrustworthiness. This is particularly pertinent as the young men in this study may experience multiple levels of stigma.

3.5 Masculinity

To understand and analyse the role of gender within the research the theoretical lens of masculinity is utilised. Masculinity is a broad theoretical concept, and as such it is not possible to cover the full range of theories and sociological outputs pertaining to this subject here, as they are outside the purview of the research questions. For the purposes of this research masculinity is taken to be a relational theory that pertains to the performance of gender in direct opposition to femininity.

¹⁰ Or disclosing

Connell (2005) made significant contributions to understanding the plurality of masculinities and the extent to which some men promote anti-feminism, misogyny and homophobia, or are complicit in the advancement of these discourses (also see McDowell, 2011; Ingram, 2018). More recently, authors such as Anderson (2009; 2011; 2014) and Roberts (2018) have argued that an increasing number of young men are becoming more inclusive in their views on feminism, gendered roles and consequently the aspiration to meet the archetypal and revered status of a hegemonic male is waning. Whilst these debates are fascinating and potentially relevant to this project, the sub-theories of 'masculine capital' and 'emotional labour' are utilised to address the research questions pertaining to their engagement with the labour market and their ability to get by in the absence of formal support.

Masculine capital is deemed to be the resource that is acquired through the recognition of the gendered traits which characterise the traditionally idealised tropes of masculinity, namely, 'domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism and control' (Cheng, 1999; 298). This concept has been utilised as a form of cultural capital within a Bourdieusian framework, particularly in the field of criminology (see Mullins et al., 2004; Klenowski et al.; 2011). There have been a range of debates pertaining to the usefulness of masculine capital; Atkinson (2017; 119) argues that 'while both masculinity and femininity appear to operate as resources, this is in fact nothing more than an illusion' as their attributes are not universally valued across fields. Moreover, Atkinson (2017) contends that masculine capital may be rewarded in certain social fields but may be far less effective in other fields. By way of example, 'masculine capital' may be valued within the field of criminality where physical strength and aggression can be of paramount importance, whereas in customer facing roles within the labour market the same characteristics are not recognised to be of value (McDowell, 2011; Roberts, 2011; Klenowski et al.; 2011). Understanding the application of masculine capital amongst a group of men without formal support could illuminate discussions on coping mechanisms and resources that are utilised to get by.

Within the field of masculinity it is now broadly acknowledged that male gendered roles are greatly influenced by the culture, traditions and values in which men live (see Nayak, 2003; Connell, 2005; McDowell, 2011; Anderson, 2014; Roberts, 2018). The changes to the labour market have resulted in young working-class men increasingly being employed in customer-facing roles which require ability to undertake 'emotional labour'. The term emotional labour is defined as 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value' (Hochschild, 2012; 8).

3.6 Intersectionality

There is a need for a theoretical tool that incorporates other vectors given diversity of the group in this study. To address the gap in knowledge pertaining to the theorisation of non-white young men within the field of youth studies this thesis utilises the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality was initially developed by Crenshaw (1989) in the field of legal studies to highlight the structural disadvantages of sexism and racism for black women in the USA. The theory of intersectionality asserts that 'subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality' (Nash, 2008; 1). The theory was developed to conceptualise how disadvantage arose not only because of sexism and racism on their own, but also how 'those systems overlap to create additional, hybrid forms of oppression' (Cooper, 2005; 853). Using intersectionality within a theoretical toolbox allows this research to analyse the 'discrete combinations of multiple sources of disadvantage' (Zuccotti and O'Reilly, 2019; 352) as they apply to men as well. Intersectionality need not focus upon the sources of disadvantage; instead, it can shine light upon how it shapes the lived experience of individuals who are subjects to intersecting forms of inequality.

The theory of intersectionality is deeply pertinent to this study of young working-class men in Sheffield. As outlined in Chapter 4, several participants belong to BAME groups, hence, intersectionality is an important means of understanding

how multiple forms of structural disadvantage (e.g., unemployment and ethnicity) intersect to shape the experience of 'hidden NEETHood'.

3.7 Harmonisation of theories

This combination of relational theories harmonise with one another, and collectively they align well with the research questions of this thesis. Bourdieu and Goffman have been amalgamated by Bourdieu's protégé Wacquant in the theory of territorial stigmatisation (see Wacquant, 2008). This theory is broadly concerned with how stigma can have a spatial element, and whilst it is not directly relevant to this thesis due to the size of Sheffield and the diversity of neighbourhoods, it clearly shows the compatibility of the theorists. Furthermore, Bourdieu and Goffman concern themselves with micro-interactions within a relational approach to sociology as they agree that 'intensive affiliative bonds and hierarchical boundaries are sustained through fine-grained tastes, styles of interaction, protean sensibilities' (Holt, 1997; 105).

The work of Bourdieu and the broad concept of masculinity can be complementary to each other. Indeed, Bourdieu fleetingly engaged with masculinity towards the end of his life in *Masculine Domination* (1998a). In a similarly relational sense, Bourdieu (1998a; 53) described 'manliness' as 'an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself'. This observation is somewhat simplistic but has been built upon by a succession of researchers in relation to education, namely Reay (2002) and Ingram (2009). Most recently, Roberts (2018) placed masculinity theory and Bourdieu's conceptual trinity at the core of his longitudinal research on the formation of identity and the performance of masculinity amongst young working-class men. For Roberts (2018), the concept of a *masculine habitus* is used to incorporate the expectations of masculinity that come from how the socio-economic structures are negotiated (and often rejected) by men. The concept of masculinity as *performance* of power/dominance is also complementary to Goffman's stigma. Butler (1988) also saw Goffman as a tool to bridge the tensions between subjectivity and agency,

as well as helping to understand the *stigma* associated with failure to adhere to the traditional expectations of masculinity.

Finally, intersectionality can be used as an overarching way to understand 'the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage' (Cole, 2009; 170). Moreover, when intersectionality is applied in a relational and non-essentialist manner it can work well alongside the work of Bourdieu, Goffman and masculinity theory as they all focus on the power of privilege and mis/recognition. The addition of intersectionality provides another dimension to these theories which allows for the analysis of the role of social class, stigma and gender.

As noted, this toolkit of theories has been carefully synthesised to provide a detailed approach to the analysis of power. Significantly, these theories are complementary to one another as they all utilise a relational sociological approach. Finally, these theories in conjunction appear to be far better placed to address the research questions and aims than those emanating from youth studies and the sociology of unemployment.

3.8 Summary

Whilst the concepts detailed throughout this chapter are useful, it must be noted that this the thesis is not seeking to make a significant reimagination of the aforementioned concepts. To address the critiques of youth studies theories this chapter has proposed a combination of theories that are well suited to the study of young working-class men. Firstly, the approach of Bourdieu provides a much greater level of insight regarding the roles of socialisation and available resources in the shaping of 'hidden NEETHood' and the experience of disengagement from the labour market. Subsequently, to address the contemporary concerns related to the 'stigma' associated with accessing support from the welfare benefits system the chapter utilises the work of Goffman to explain the processes and negotiations which take place on a micro level to manage the state of stigma. As Bourdieu has been critiqued for neglecting the issues of gender and race, this is addressed by incorporating selected elements of masculinity theory and

intersectionality. The former enables exploration of participants' attitudes to the expectations and experiences of being employed in the service sector within a post-industrial city; whilst the latter is utilised to aid the understanding and recognition that several participants experience intersecting (or compounded) levels of disadvantage.

The implication of using this combination of theories is that an in-depth qualitative approach should be taken. All four theories are reliant upon the research acquiring data on the lived experience of being outside formal support provision. The next chapter therefore seeks to operationalise the chosen theoretical approach and in doing so details the methodological approach adopted to answer the research questions and meet their objectives.

Chapter Four – Methodology: Reflections on Researching a ‘Hidden’ Group

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodological approaches taken during the research. As noted in chapter one, the aim of this thesis is to address the gap in knowledge pertaining to how young men become ‘hidden NEETs’ and understand how they utilise their volumes of capital to get by and perceive opportunities to (re)engage with EET. As such, the research seeks to acquire rich data on their daily negotiations, practices and rituals.

The aims are conceptualised in the research questions (see Chapter 1). Informed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, these questions presuppose that knowledge can be acquired through speaking to participants. A fundamental methodological concept for Bourdieu is reflexivity, which recognises how the researcher influences the process of the research ‘by questioning the privilege of the knowing subject’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 214). The methodology used in this study embraces the concept of reflexivity by detailing how the researcher developed relationships with the participants and how the life experiences of the researcher shaped the project. In doing so, the chapter details an assessment of the challenges that needed to be overcome. Furthermore, in a Bourdieusian tradition, the process of writing a reflexive methodology requires the researcher to be a little narcissistic as ‘reflexive practice may come across as self-absorbed, with the writer promoting their voice over the those of their participants’ (Dean, 2017; 141). Berger (1981; 220-1) states that a reflexive methodology ‘requires an ‘I’ and no apologies are needed’. With these statements in mind, this chapter sets out the step-by-step approaches taken to conduct the research reported in this thesis.

From the outset it is worth reiterating that this is an exploratory study of an under-researched group. Thus, there is no blueprint on how to access young men who are seemingly disengaged from all formal provision. A study of ‘hidden NEETs’ presents a set of unique challenges as this is a widely heterogeneous group

which requires a number of complex and concurrent recruitment strategies that evolve ‘as the situation changes before our eyes’ (Atkinson, 1994; 389). This presented challenges pertaining to ways of accessing relevant individuals. For example, if one were to explore the lives of young unemployed people or welfare recipients in a given place the logical approach would be to recruit participants from local job centres or any charity that provides a range of support initiatives (Simmons et al., 2014). Similarly, recruitment for research on street homelessness simply requires gaining access to daycentres (Devany, 2020). In this study following one exclusive avenue of recruitment was not an option because of the heterogeneity of the ‘hidden NEET’ group.

The chapter opens with a detailed ontological and epistemological framework which harmonises with the practicalities of the research and the theoretical framework. Subsequently, it outlines the qualitative methods that were utilised to gather information that enables the research questions to be answered. Latterly, the chapter details the exhaustive steps taken to recruit and analyse the lives of the 24 young men who are the subject of this study. As such, the success in recruiting such a diverse range of young men to this study are identified as a key contribution to knowledge. Finally, the chapter concludes by providing a reflexive account of the significant practical, emotional, positional, and ethical challenges that emerged throughout the research.

4.2 Philosophical Underpinnings

Bracken (2010; 2) states that ‘the purpose for social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality’. As such, researchers should outline a paradigm of ontological assumptions about the ‘nature of the social reality that it is investigating’ and the epistemological perspectives on the ‘way in which knowledge of this reality can be obtained’ (Blaikie, 2008; 12-13). Philosophical assumptions of ‘reality’ and ‘knowledge’ are linked as they shaped our understanding of the social world and influence the choice of methodological tools (e.g., qualitative/quantitative) to measure and comprehend it.

Ontology is a concept from Greek philosophy (see Anton et al., 1992) that addresses the question; 'What is the nature of social reality?' (Blaikie, 2008; 13). Ontology is a spectrum with the two extremes being *idealism* (reality as abstract) and *realism* (reality as tangible). An idealist ontology would assume that 'what we regard as the external world is just appearances and has no independent existence apart from our thoughts' (ibid; 13). Conversely, a realist ontology would assert that 'both natural and social phenomena are assumed to have an existence that is independent of the activities of the human observer' (ibid.; 13). The ontological position of this research must also consider how a chosen ontology aligns with the metaphysics of Bourdieu.

Epistemology is succinctly defined as 'a theory or science of the method or grounds of knowledge' (Blaikie, 2008; 18). As it involves 'a related set of assumptions about the way in which knowledge of this reality can be obtained' it informs the choice of methodological tools (Blaikie, 2008:12). As with ontology, epistemology presents a continuum of approaches. The first position is *objectivism*, which asserts that empirical 'truth' exists and can be obtained. The role of the researcher is 'to discover the meaning that already resides in them' (Blaikie, 2008; 18). The polar position is known as *subjectivism*, this asserts that 'truth' is not concrete or tangible, but instead is understood subjectively by different social actors (Layder, 2005).

The philosophy of Bourdieu transcends the respective binary ontological and epistemological dualisms of realism/idealism and objectivism/subjectivism. Bourdieu views these philosophical dualisms to be 'debilitating' and rails against a 'commonsensical perception of social reality of which sociology must rid itself' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 15). To transcend the dualisms of ontology and epistemology Bourdieu utilises the 'durable and transposable' habitus to explain how individual experiences are shaped by the subjective and the objective (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 6). Bourdieu argues that both subjectivism and objectivism are inadequate intellectual orientations. However, Thompson (1991; 11) argues that Bourdieu saw 'the latter (objectivism) as less inadequate than the

former (subjectivism)'. This analysis of Bourdieu is supported by Jenkins (1992; 91) who deems that Bourdieu's 'heart of hearts... is committed to an objectivist view' due to his vociferous critiques of subjectivists.

The practical approach adopted for this research rests upon the notion that understanding the lives of hidden NEETs requires the researcher to undertake qualitative investigations to ascertain how their habitus is shaped (see Chapter 3). This approach is established within sociology and has been utilised within investigations into the lived experience of welfare reform (see MacDonald et al., 2005; Garthwaite, 2016; Patrick; 2017; Roberts, 2018). As such, the chosen ontological and epistemological approach must enable the research to gather rich data on the lived experiences of life outside of formal provision.

To achieve these aims the approach utilises a subtle realist ontology. This is deemed appropriate for a range of qualitative methods to 'deal with the incompatible positions of realism and relativistic idealism' (Blaikie, 2008; 17). As a flexible philosophical approach it acknowledges that 'all knowledge is based on assumptions and purposes and is a human construction, but it rejects [the]... abandonment of the regulative idea of independent and knowable phenomena' (Hammersley, 1992; 52; Andrews, 2012). Moreover, subtle realism acknowledges the uncertainties at the root of ontology – specifically that researchers can obtain knowledge that represents a version of reality rather than seeking to attain objective 'truth' (Mays and Pope, 2000).

The research also utilises an interpretivist epistemology, a theory of knowledge that transcends objectivism and subjectivism by seeking knowledge through the insights of individuals with a lived experience of a given phenomenon (Bryman, 2004). An interpretivist approach acknowledges that there are multiple interpretations of a social reality, and furthermore, that a researcher can only get close to reality by exploring the participants' lifeworlds (Hammersley, 1992). The uniting of a subtle realist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology allows for the habitus to form a basis of social enquiry and is aligned with the qualitative approaches that are detailed below (Blaikie, 2008; Bryman, 2004).

4.3 Choosing a qualitative methodology

Utilising qualitative methodologies and a subtle realist approach can have significant benefits for researchers undertaking studies such as these. Primarily, qualitative approaches can acquire thick descriptions (see Geertz, 1973). A qualitative approach is also far better suited to an exploratory study as it allows the interviewee to inform the researcher of their otherwise unknown experiences (see Bryman, 2004; Silverman, 2013). Additionally, qualitative methods allow the research questions and topic guides to be refined as fieldwork progresses, granting the researcher freedom to adapt (Flick, 2007). Throughout the research it also transpired that a fundamental benefit of using qualitative methods was that it encouraged development of rapport with marginalised young men who may have otherwise been unwilling to be interviewed (see McDowell, 2011).

4.3.1 A qualitative approach

Qualitative methods encompass the techniques of interviews, ethnographies and focus groups (Flick, 2007). All three qualitative approaches were considered. However, for practical reasons a detailed ethnographical study or focus group data gathering were judged as inappropriate for the task in hand. As outlined in further detail in section 4.4, participants had to be recruited from disparate sources, posing an insurmountable challenge in attempting to bring them together in a focus group setting. Moreover, it was felt that this would be incompatible with ethical responsibilities to maintain anonymity (Bryman, 2004; Flick, 2007; Silverman, 2013). Similarly, undertaking a detailed and immersive ethnography with a group of 'hidden NEETs' was deemed impossible due to the lack of group coherence or co-existence, and the related isolated existence of many people in this situation. However, throughout fieldwork several opportunities arose where ethnographic data was actually collected and, although given a back seat in the analysis, some of this data is deployed at appropriate points in the findings chapters.

The core of the qualitative methodology in the research was the utilisation of face-to-face interviews. These can be categorised as being structured, semi-

structured or unstructured depending upon the level of flexibility required. Structured interviews are a rigid approach to social enquiry where the interviewer has little opportunity to interact naturally with the interviewee (Silverman, 2013). Whilst this technique may be valuable for approaches with very strict remits (such as expert interviews), it is likely to be unsuitable when interviewing individuals where rapport is required.

The opposing technique is an 'unstructured interview'. Classic ethnographers such as Malinowski (2002) and Mead (1963) suggest that unstructured interviews allow interviewers and interviewees to engage in free-flowing conversations, revealing greater insight than other qualitative techniques. However, there is a high risk of lack of focus using such an approach, and this can be problematic during the analysis stage due to the presence of data that may lack relevance (Flick, 2007).

The lack of uniformity in the target subjects and the need to have some semblance of order and consistency dictated the use of semi-structured interviews. There are several models for using semi-structured interviews to acquire in-depth data, some 'allowing interviewers to alter the sequence of questions or the way in which they are phrased' (Ritchie et al., 2013; 111). This approach is very common in the social sciences and is deemed most appropriate for interviewing participants (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). In taking inspiration from Bourdieu (1996; 19) the research took the technique of 'active and methodical listening' – this 'combines the display of total attention to the person questioned, submission to the singularity of their own life history'.

4.4 Recruiting a set of research participants

This section details the practical approaches taken to generate the final sample of 24 young male 'hidden NEETs' in Sheffield. To ascertain the role of social class and to utilise the relational theories of Bourdieu the initial intention was for the set of participants to be split evenly between working-class and middle-class groups. This would have provided a significant contribution to knowledge as middle-class groups have largely been overlooked in studies of young people (see MacDonald,

2011) and would have enabled the study to reflect upon how social class is practiced from a comparative perspective. However, the final sample for the research was 24 young working-class ‘hidden NEET’ men (see table 4.1). Whilst initially disappointing, this section shows that the inability to recruit middle-class young men remains a significant finding.

Table 4.1 – Fieldwork Plans and Final Set of Participants.

	Hidden NEETs	
Original Plan	15 working-class	15 middle-class
Final Sample	24 working-class	

As noted in chapter one, studies on ‘hidden NEETs’ only researched young people who are already receiving formal studies. Furthermore, as the studies have a homogenous set of participants (commonly white working-class), little is known about the experiences of BAME groups. The strength of this study is that an independent researcher working outside the constraints of contract research has the advantage of being able to spend months in the field painstakingly generating a sample, differing from contract research where time is limited (Batty, 2018). Having time in the field enables the researcher to pursue avenues of recruitment which may ‘fail’. The research used ‘failure proactively as a resource to improve research practice and outcomes’ (Harrowell et al., 2018; 231).

The research targeted young men who were ‘hidden NEET’ in the strict sense of not being in EET and not claiming benefits. This meant that the participants at the time of interview must not be in education, employment, or training; and not claiming employment related benefits (e.g. JSA or ESA). The socio-spatial disparities in Sheffield show that ‘the less deprived/more deprived balance is more equal but the geographical divide is striking, running north-west to south-east through the city’ (Rae, 2011; 7). This loosely asserts that the western side is predominantly middle-class and the eastern wards are largely working-class.

Subsequently, particular care was taken to try and engage groups and individuals on both sides of the north-west to south-east divide.

The plan for generating a sample of 'hidden NEETs' originally involved seeking support from gatekeepers such as the local authority, charities and youth workers. Subsequently, it was hoped that the young men who were interviewed could introduce me to their friends who are in similar situations via snowball sampling methods in 'order to draw on the networks and contacts of the initial wave of interviewees' (Hoolachan et al., 2017; 67). However, by March 2017 none of the meetings with gatekeepers were able to provide access to any 'hidden NEETs'. A review of their internal databases all their service users were either claiming benefits, in some form of education or were employed. The lack of success in recruiting any 'hidden NEETs' through gatekeepers was surprising and concerning. As very few appeared to be accessing support posed it significant questions regarding the ability of organisations and researchers to engage with 'hidden NEETs'.

In an attempt to identify participants it was decided that meetings with gatekeepers should continue for another month. The additional six meetings were fruitful, as the first two hidden NEET participants of the study were recruited and interviewed through these organisations. Whilst these interviews were insightful and I was able to build rapport with these young people, it was clear that they lived very isolated lives and were unable to connect me with any other 'hidden NEETs'. Informal meetings with a further eight youth organisations across Sheffield to ascertain whether they were supporting any 'hidden NEETs', and if so, whether they could provide introductions. Again, this was to no avail as each organisation had a maximum of one male 'hidden NEET' on their books, and the organisations were unable to contact them.

4.4.1 'Back to the drawing board' – developing targeted approaches

By April 2017 recruitment was not progressing and new approaches were required. By halting fieldwork for a week to revisit unemployment/dis-engagement

literature and reflecting upon experiences from my youth I was able to identify a number of new approaches to explore in the coming months: i) focusing on the South Asian diaspora, ii) trying to recruit young men from homeless daycentres who may have received sanctions from JCP and be experiencing homelessness, iii) approaching church groups, iv) recruitment through social media, v) the continuation of gatekeeper engagement, and vi) a geographically focused 'shoe-leather ethnography'. Furthermore, after consulting with my supervisors it was decided that the participant criteria could be loosened slightly, allowing young men with experience of being a 'hidden NEET' in the last 12 months to be interviewed. Methodologically and conceptually there is a sound justification for including participants who were formerly a 'hidden NEET' as 'research into the nature of employment obtained by formerly NEET young people is lacking', forming a gap in knowledge around 'young people's perspectives on transitions into the workplace' (Russell, 2014; 183).

One gatekeeper suggested that a significant number of young British Muslim men may not be claiming benefits. This chimed with my experiences growing up in Bedford¹¹ where I was always aware that my British–Bangladeshi and British–Pakistani friends would sometimes receive large amounts of financial support from family when they were out of work. Discussions with experienced researchers and colleagues working in this community and a review of literature validated this assertion (see Becher, 2008; Shaw, 2014).

By reviewing the findings of the 'Welfare Conditionality' project it appeared that some young men may become 'hidden NEETs' because of policies linked to welfare reform (specifically sanctions) (Wright and Stewart, 2016). Furthermore, research indicated that men under the age of 25 and those experiencing homelessness are the groups most likely to be sanctioned (Watts et al., 2014). This suggests that a two-pronged approach should be taken to the recruitment of 'hidden NEETs' affected by sanctions. Firstly, the Citizens Advice Bureau often assist claimants who wish to appeal their benefit sanction (Webster, 2016),

¹¹ Bedford is often deemed to be one of the most multicultural towns in the UK, with significant diasporic populations from Italy, eastern Europe, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (Craig and Beedie, 2010)

making this an avenue for recruitment. Secondly, homeless day centres in Sheffield could be supporting a number of 'hidden NEETs'.

The recruitment of middle-class 'hidden NEETs' was a struggle, with no progress whatsoever being made between February and April 2017. As the charities and youth organisations in more affluent areas in west Sheffield had been contacted in the first wave of recruitment, I thought it worthwhile to contact church groups. Existing research shows that such groups can be a 'hub' for many disengaged young people (see Harris, 2016).

Recent research shows that online communities of 'hidden' young people akin to the Japanese phenomena of 'Hikikomori'¹² are present in the UK (see Wong, 2016). Discussions on social class are absent from the Hikikomori literature, but logic dictates that young men who are socially isolated and financially supported would be in affluent areas. In recent years research projects have recruited young people through paid advertisements on Facebook and Instagram (see Baltar and Brunet 2012; Ramo and Prochaska, 2012; Kayrouz et al., 2016; Pederson et al., 2017). I therefore paid to place a recruitment poster that details the purpose of the research, the criteria of potential participants and the £10 reward on Facebook and Instagram. This advert geographically targeted young men in the western parts of Sheffield with stated hobbies including 'gaming'. To maintain the anonymity of any potential participants the 'like' and comments options were disabled.

As recruitment from middle-class areas was proving to be problematic, inspiration was taken from the methodologies of the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920s. This approach is termed a 'shoe-leather ethnography' (Park et al., 1925) consisting of 'hanging-around' and 'approaching members of the public to see if they fitted the recruitment criteria' (Shildrick et al., 2010; 11-12). This involved spending time in barbershops¹³, pubs, cafes, shops and local parks.

¹² Loosely defined as young men who physically isolate themselves from society and avoid social contact by staying in their bedrooms. Commonly they immerse themselves in online gaming and social media (see Furlong, 2008; Wong, 2016)

An additional approach was to continue contacting potential gatekeepers via email and telephone. Furthermore, I reconnected with gatekeepers from the first phase of fieldwork to ask whether they had contacts who could assist in finding participants. Throughout remaining fieldwork gatekeepers were contacted every two weeks.

4.4.2 Phase Two – Progress at last!

New approaches started to pay off, although progress was exclusively seen in the recruitment of working-class rather than middle-class interviewees. Of all the new approaches the most promising was the potential to recruit young men from the South Asian diaspora in Sheffield. One gatekeeper from the first phase was able to provide contact details of a charity that engaged young men in employability workshops through football. Utilising sport for engagement is a tried and tested approach within the sector of youth provision (see Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011; Kelly, 2011; Wilson and Platts, 2018). This organisation was initially difficult to engage at first due to staff being overstretched and telephone calls not being returned. Eventually I was able to ascertain when their head coach would be at a specific location. At the end of the training session I was able to introduce myself and ask questions related to the service users'. We organised a phone call, during which he confirmed that *'plenty of our lads are NEET and don't claim benefits'* and I was subsequently invited to attend their workshops and training sessions.

For the following three weeks I attended training sessions and workshops four times per week. As this was the first significant breakthrough concerted efforts were made to build rapport with the young men. I introduced myself as a researcher at Sheffield Hallam University, and that I wanted to speak to them about 'work and benefits at some point'. During the three weeks with the young men I was able to interview 10 participants – five were British-Pakistani, four were White-British and one was a migrant from sub-Saharan Africa with refugee status.

¹³ This was challenging as I had alopecia at the time of fieldwork.

The second approach to recruitment was gaining access to a homeless day-centre. The staff were happy for me to attend the centre and I was provided with a private room for interviews. A significant number of the men at the centre explained how they felt unsafe there due to drug related violence over the previous weeks (see Devany, 2020). This meant that many service users were only at the centre briefly to use the facilities and have a meal. With this in mind, I walked around the city centre every day after leaving the homeless centre to introduce myself to sellers of the 'Big Issue' homeless people who were begging to ask whether they knew of any young men who met the criteria for the study. After around a week one 'Big Issue' seller stated that he lived at a travellers' site, and that a couple of young men at the site met the criteria. This site was usually 'off-limits' to outsiders, but I was granted access after being 'vouched for'. Through this I was able to interview a further two young men.

The continual engagement with gatekeepers eventually paid dividends. One gatekeeper who in previous months was able to put me in contact with one young man organised interviews with another two participants. A further two participants were recruited through a private sector employment advisor – whilst he did not have any contact with 'hidden NEETs' through his work, he was a former organised crime operative who offered to introduce me to some drug dealers who were 'hidden NEETs'.

Reflecting on the aim to recruit middle-class 'hidden NEETs', the engagement with church groups was time-consuming due to the willingness of the church staff to converse in detail via email and telephone, however, only one participant was recruited through this channel. Also, the utilisation of social media and the 'shoe-leather ethnography' were eventually fruitless endeavours as no middle-class hidden NEETs could be recruited. This poses significant questions over the viability of accessing middle-class 'hidden NEETs' in a specific location. As shown by Wong (2016), the recruitment of middle-class 'hidden NEETs' may be possible through online gaming forums, but they would be located across the UK as opposed to a place-based study as online communities are geographically

broad. Hence, middle-class ‘hidden NEETs’ are incredibly difficult to find on a geographically focused basis. This begs the question of ‘Where are the middle-class ‘hidden NEETs’?’ As noted, previous research shows that this group can be accessed across a broad geographic area if the researcher immerses themselves into an online world (Wong, 2016), however, that is not possible for time-limited studies which require immense investments of time.

The recruitment of working-class young men was eventually successful, despite initial challenges. The process of recruiting 24 working-class ‘hidden NEETs’ to this study was incredibly challenging despite being able to dedicate many months to fieldwork. It also has implications of the ability of potential organisations to support this group. Thus, for organisations with financial constraints the challenges of accessing the most ‘hard-to-reach’ young men may be beyond their means. The failure of snowball sampling – except for the British-Pakistani men at the sports organisation- also highlights that hidden NEETs appear to live very isolated lives (this is debated throughout the findings chapters).

Table 4.2: The final set of participants

Participant Number	Recruitment Method	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity
1	Church group	John	25	White British
2	Employment advisor (and former drug dealer)	Baashir	23	British-Pakistani
3		Caleb	18	Black
4	Homeless Day Centre	Thomas	25	White British
5		Robert	24	White British
6		Gavin	23	White British
7		Tyler	25	White British
8		Jay	24	White British

9	Sports organisation	Martin	21	White British
10		Steven	23	White British
11		Mark	25	White British
12		Daniel	19	White British
13		Hamid	18	British-Pakistani
14		Zerdad	18	British-Pakistani
15		Umar	19	British-Pakistani
16		Sadio	19	Sub-Saharan African
17		Wahab	19	British-Pakistani
18		Sami	18	British-Pakistani
19	Traveller Site (via Big issue seller)	Anthony	25	White British
20		Joshua	25	White British
21	Youth charity (1)	Jason	24	White British
22		Nathan	22	White British
23		Justin	19	White British
24	Youth Charity (2)	Faizan	23	British-Pakistani

4.5 Reflecting on conducting interviews

For PhD students, ‘embarking upon empirical qualitative research can be a daunting and emotional task especially when research involves ‘vulnerable groups and emotive topics’ (Waters et al., 2020; 1). This comment has resonance due to the absence of a blueprint on how to access ‘hidden NEETs’. The challenges posed to me as a researcher during the fieldwork were seemingly endless, from struggling to contact gatekeepers, accessing a group of young

people who are incredibly 'hard-to-reach', the emotional toil of difficult conversations and finding spaces to conduct interviews.

4.5.1 Participant interviews

Being an independent researcher and spending time with these young men proved invaluable because I could get to know them a little before the interview and tailor questions accordingly. As suggested by Madden (2017) the formation of a good topic guide is an iterative process as the researcher reflects upon acquired knowledge. By reflecting on time spent with the participants before the interview I reformulated the topic guide to fit with their circumstances and probed into the most pertinent matters. For example, drug dealers shared insights into their social groups and personal finances that could be probed during the interview. Similarly, weeks spent at the sports organisation showed that formal employment was not always on their horizons, allowing me to formulate a topic guide which probed into the reasons for their detachment from the labour market. Moreover, learning about their lives before formal interviews allowed me to build rapport and buttressed the findings as their narratives could be compared to, and be supported by my ethnographic observations.

The process of recruiting participants is often the greatest challenge for research projects. However, conducting interviews for this project was especially difficult due to the differing situations which the participants were in when interviewed (ranging from being economically comfortable to sleeping on the streets with addictions). It was expected that some participants may be experiencing precarity, but I was unprepared for some of the emotionally challenging situations.

The research benefited from the participants either having the time to get to know me before the interview or from having built a strong relationship with someone who was able to 'vouch' for me. This level of trust prior to the interview reduced power imbalances somewhat and enabled them to feel comfortable in speaking about sensitive issues (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993).

Throughout fieldwork I developed techniques that put the participants at ease. Firstly, it became apparent that some of the young men felt uncomfortable with being interviewed by someone with a long list of questions – this seemed too inquisitorial for some. To lessen this issue, I memorised the key interview questions. This took time to perfect, but it created more relaxed interactions. To ensure rigour I would ask ‘... *can I just check whether I have asked you all the questions?*’, allowing me to review the topic guide at the end of each interview. This approach also allowed me to ‘think on my feet’ and be flexible when asking questions, for example, some probing questions on familial support would be inappropriate for the homeless participants, and detailed questions linked to experiences of claiming benefits would not be appropriate for the British-Pakistani young men. Similarly, when unforeseen matters emerged, I adapted the questions to focus on areas that seemed most pertinent.

Of the 24 interviews around seven were distressing for me as a researcher. The first was an interview with a young man that was organised through a church organisation in the city. I attended a ‘lunch club’ in a care home in which the participant and I were invited. Whilst the care home supported elderly people in residential accommodation, the young man was invited to attend as he had no other means of feeding himself after he lost his welfare benefits. Around halfway through our interview though the participant became incredibly depressed with his situation of having no money and the prospect of becoming homeless. He then confided in me that he had recently attempted suicide. At this point I asked whether he would like to stop the interview, this offer was refused as he wanted to take the opportunity to speak to someone in a cathartic way.

After the interview we left the care home, and I got the bus back to the city centre and he took a short walk home. I vividly remember saying our ‘goodbyes’ at the bus stop – as he walked home with a small bag of ‘leftovers’ I broke down in tears once he was out of sight as I was powerless to help. I then returned to the University in the city centre to confide in a senior colleague who assured me that my feelings were perfectly normal. After a discussion with the colleague, it was decided that I should maintain confidentiality over the content of the interview but

inform the gatekeeper that I was 'concerned over the mental health of the young man' and ask them 'to keep an eye on him'. Over the next fortnight I struggled to come to terms with the content of the interview, replaying my feeling of helplessness. Subsequently I (along with my supervisors) decided that I should take two weeks off fieldwork.

My time at the homeless day-centre was similarly disturbing at times. Whilst research with this group is challenging due to researchers being outsiders (Hoolachan, 2016), it was a particularly inhospitable atmosphere at the time due to the issues caused by the increased use of New Psychoactive Substances (see Devany, 2020¹⁴). This meant that I had to tread carefully due to concerns over my personal safety when searching for potential participants as many were unlikely to volunteer to stay in the centre to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted in a private room, the participants appreciated having a cup of tea made for them and being able to drink it in the security and comfort of the private interview. The interviews were all incredibly challenging, with emotive issues such as drug use, abuse, violence, and suicide commonly being discussed.

After being in the centre for two weeks a total of five young men were interviewed. The participants found the interview process to be cathartic and used the opportunity to offload their emotions. During two interviews at the daycentre the digital recorder needed to be paused for the participants to calm down when they were asked about their experience of claiming benefits. Bourdieu's 'active and methodical listening'¹⁵ was key in this regard as it gave the participants power and gave the comfort of knowing that they were valued. The issue of suicide emerged again as one participant vividly described how he attempted to commit suicide by purposefully starting a fight with an intimidating large group of men. The sense that I was unable to help their situation was incredibly painful, as was the guilt of returning to my comfortable and secure home.

¹⁴ This project for the Oak Foundation focused on the use of New Psycho-Active Substances and prescription drugs amongst homeless groups in Edinburgh and Sheffield.

¹⁵ This involves providing 'verbal signs of feedback' such as saying 'yes', 'OK' and 'right...'. Also, non-verbal expressions such as an open posture, nodding and good eye contact can aid the development of rapport and put the participant at ease.

As previously noted, I developed rapport with an older man who was selling the 'Big Issue' magazine in Sheffield City Centre. He invited me to his travellers' site to meet two young hidden NEETs. When visiting the site two large dogs ran towards me aggressively. As I had a large dog growing-up I was able to keep my calm - by standing still and putting my arms outstretched to my sides to exaggerate my size and show that I was not a threat. After a few moments both dogs sat on the floor at my feet, before rolling over onto their backs to request 'belly rubs'. After stroking the dogs for a few moments someone at the site shouted in my direction to enquire as to what I was doing there - by responding with the name of the person that invited me, I was warmly welcomed and offered a cup of tea. After a cup of tea and a tour of the site I was introduced to two young men who were happy to be interviewed, one interview was conducted that day, the other took place at a nearby pub two days later. These interviews were only able to be conducted because a member of the site had 'vouched' for me.

The time spent at the sports organisation started in a challenging manner due to one of the coaches explaining that I was 'doing a PhD, which is the *'highest possible* qualification...', before talking them through the stages of education (GCSE's, A-Levels, Degree, Masters and then PhD). Whilst this was meant positively, as an outsider the outcome was a colossal power imbalance that I worked hard to address. This took time and effort as I built rapport by playing football, helped them with the workshop tasks and general 'chit chat'. When playing football (often badly), some young men took the opportunity to 'leave one on me'¹⁶, to which I reciprocated. These seemingly minor instances of masculine 'banter' helped me build personal relationships and showed that I was not 'weak' or 'soft'. Interviews were conducted in an open space outside of the sports facility due to the (unusually) good summer weather. Of all the interviews that took place during this project, these were the most straightforward and enjoyable due to the bonds that were built with the participants.

¹⁶ A colloquial term of endearment meaning that they had kicked or elbowed me for no apparent reason.

The final interviews took place with the two young men whom I was introduced to by a former drug dealer who was now an employment adviser. The first took place on a park bench in the east of the city. While the interviewee was aware that I knew that he was a drug dealer, there was no awkwardness in asking questions linked to this element of his life. The value of being 'vouched for' was key to gaining access to this participant as without this level of trust being afforded, I would not have been able to meet him to ask questions pertaining to illegal activities. Three days later I was introduced to another young man who (according to the gatekeeper) also sold drugs. However, this participant was a little anxious and chose not to divulge any information pertaining to illegal activities, as such I disregarded what the gatekeeper had told me, instead just allowing the participant to say what he felt comfortable in discussing.

Overall, the process of conducting interviews were strongly linked to my ability to set aside time to build rapport with the participants or for a gatekeeper to 'vouch' for me as someone who could be trusted. Reflexively, I was constantly surprised by the level of detail that participants were willing to provide (particularly pertaining to their emotions and criminality) as I was clearly an outsider in a privileged position. The locations of the interviews were predominantly outdoors and not in formalised settings (with the exception of the homeless centre) and I believe that being forced to conduct research in informal settings allowed for the participants to be more at ease.

It was only by taking these exhaustive efforts that the research was able to recruit and interview some of the most disengaged young men in Sheffield. Whilst this is of benefit to this research project, it poses questions over the replicability of this research as very few researchers would be afforded such time and flexibility to acquire high levels of trust with the participants, nor would they be able to adapt the recruitment strategy so extensively. Furthermore, having the time to spend with the young men and seeing their day-to-day lives beyond the interview setting provides greater credibility to the research findings as the purview of the research interactions were far wider.

4.5.2 Summary

The four sections above detailed the intense 10 months of intense and challenging fieldwork as a range of significant challenges were overcome. Firstly, a set of potential gatekeepers were consulted using existing contacts and colleagues – it was unexpected that these gatekeepers were unable to provide access to participants. Subsequently, after being unable to recruit participants through gatekeepers a range of new approaches were developed which ultimately reaped rewards. The process of interviewing participants was often incredibly challenging due to the emotional context of the interactions during the formal interview and the wider research environment.

4.6 A ‘hard to reach’ group?

It is recognised that NEETs are a ‘hard to reach’ group for policy interventions and research agendas (see Simmons and Thompson, 2011; Russell, 2013; Tosun and Shore, 2017). However, the steps required to access these young men clearly demonstrates that ‘hidden NEETs’ are far more difficult to access than ‘NEETs’. If the research had sought to access ‘NEETs’ then the recruitment processes would have been relatively straightforward as nearly all of the gatekeepers were able to provide contacts to access this broader group. The invisibility of ‘hidden NEETs’ from mainstream support asserts that this group is beyond the purview of larger charities and local councils. In short, it should not have been this difficult to access ‘hidden NEETs’ when one considers that around 50% of ‘NEETs’ are ‘hidden’.

Reflections from the field assert that ‘the context of austerity and cuts to local services’ may have impeded many organisations’ ability to access the most marginalised young men (Jones et al., 2018; 15). In the current policy and research landscape this project may not be replicable due to the seeming inability of organisations to engage ‘hidden NEETs’ and restricted research budgets which limit the time in the field as concrete outputs are demanded. Furthermore, an inadvertent contribution from the recruitment process is that this research has broadened the study of ‘NEETs’ to include individuals who are homeless – this is

significant since traditional studies of 'NEETs' have not considered homeless people as a component of 'NEETHood'.

4.7 Reflexivity

For Bourdieu, reflexivity is 'a theory of intellectual practice' which forms an 'integral component and necessary condition of a critical theory of society' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 36). By being reflexive one accepts that objectivism is impossible due to the social relationship between the researcher and the participants. The process of being reflexive 'solidifies and buttresses the knowledge which researchers produce' (Dean, 2017; 35). In essence, Bourdieu sees the researcher as a central actor in the production of knowledge who must be critically analysed in the same way as the participants and the findings of the research (Barnard, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Scholars who utilise the work of Bourdieu must 'be aware of their own habitus, such as their own predispositions, knowledges, and competences while undertaking research, in order to produce if not objective, then honest and open research' (Dean, 2017; 33). To simplify, true reflexivity requires one to say: 'this is me, this is my research' (ibid; 33). The process of reflexivity is particularly important 'when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship' (Oakley, 1981: 41), this is of paramount significance as the quality of the data relied upon my ability to build rapport with interviewees from less privileged positions.

To follow the reflexive approach of Bourdieu, I recognise that by his analysis I am middle-class. This is an important point to make as white, straight, middle-class men (like myself) face the lowest levels of marginalisation (Connell, 2005). In educational terms it must also be recognised that as a student undertaking the

*'highest possible qualification'*¹⁷ my educational experience is different to interviewees. However, my trajectory into a lofty educational position was very unexpected – struggling with severe dyslexia (and the associated stigma of being labelled 'stupid') at school meant that the educational separation between myself and the participants was not as wide as it may first appear. Despite remaining in education to complete A-levels with very poor grades I was able to secure a place at a university to study a HND in hospitality, before quitting early on as it was very clear that I lacked the 'emotional capital' to succeed in that industry. The potential to successfully pursue higher education emerged as an option when I reached my mid-twenties when the interaction of experiencing unemployment in the post-GFC labour market, feeling the stigma of claiming benefits and my middle-class habitus led me to pursue a degree with the Open University alongside a full-time job to 'get ahead'.

Although it would be wrong to state that I have the same experience of education and claiming benefits as most of the young men in this research, my experiences provided insights which I drew upon tastefully during the research. Similarly, it is only recently that I have had the incredibly privilege of being employed in 'professional' or 'skilled work'. I and some of the participants have shared experiences of working in call-centres and service sector employment which provide little security or pay. Some of the social environments in which I have been in also provided me with additional insights into the experiences of some participants. For example, I have spent many weeks staying with my white working-class extended family in the North-West of England, a very large proportion of my friends were of British-Bangladeshi and British-Pakistani backgrounds, and in my late teenage years a number of my friends were drug dealers.

These experiences shaped my habitus. However, experiencing 'snapshots' is incomparable to having 'lived experiences' of the interviewees, and arguing so would be utterly absurd. The 'snapshots' that I have experienced were used

¹⁷ As stated by the Sports Coach.

minimally and respectfully during the research. For example, when some participants stated that they were dyslexic, I shared that I was also dyslexic. When interviewing drug dealers I would use the ‘slang’ terms for the substances and forms of measurement, and I used my knowledge of Muslim family structures to ask questions of their support networks.

4.8 Data Analysis Framework

This study utilised an inductive research strategy led by the data, as opposed to a deductive approach driven by the theoretical framework (Chapman et al., 2015). An inductive approach was chosen due to its compatibility with the philosophical underpinnings as ‘interpretive epistemologies... emphasize the emergent properties of the researcher working in a social setting where data have “yet to be discovered,” and therefore say they are “generating data” or “developing” them from new’ (Swain, 2018; 5). Furthermore, inductive research strategies embody realist ontologies ‘which assumes that reality is “out there” with regularities that can be described and explained’ (Blaikie, 2007; 60). Due to the ‘grounded’ (or ‘data driven’) nature of inductive approaches, this method of analysis is also well suited to exploratory studies, or studies which aim to merge a range of theories (Fife, 2005).

The practical method of analysing the qualitative data was thematic analysis. The approach taken for this research was first outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Their linear six-phased method provide an iterative method which details the processes from reviewing the raw data to completing the final research outputs. The six stages to data analysis for this thesis were:

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data.	Reviewing the transcripts and making notes of initial thoughts
2. Generating initial codes:	Using software to code the most pertinent sections of the interviews.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes.

4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic “map” of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the thesis:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006; 35).

To assist the creation of themes linked to the research questions, NVivo was utilised. This software package is the standard approach to the analysis of qualitative data and helps ‘tremendously from conceptualization and coding of data to an entire research project’ (Azeem et al., 2012; 262). Additionally, I used flipchart paper to create mind-maps and to assist with the planning of each findings chapter.

A key issue with using software such as N-Vivo when selecting quotes is the ‘pitfall’ of ‘quote pulling’ the most dramatic ‘gotcha’ quotes (Dean, 2017; 75). To minimise this issue and to represent the views of the participants I selected long quotes when required so that the wider context of the interviews was not lost. Furthermore, as large amounts of time were often spent with the participants outside of the interview setting, the analysis reflected upon the holistic interactions with each participant to ensure that any presented quotes were fair representations of their lived experiences.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research can present a set of unique ethical challenges that ‘must be thought through when researching ‘hard-to-reach’ young people such as those not in education, employment or training (NEET)’ (Russell, 2013; 46). Whilst standardised approaches to research ethics provide a framework which minimises harm to participants, research commonly introduces unforeseen dilemmas that must be considered and acted upon in real time (Skeggs, 1997; Valentine et al., 2010). Furthermore, research ethics has recently broadened to consider the hidden struggles as investigators are becoming gradually more exposed to ‘emotionally laden research which has increased the likelihood of them experiencing vicarious trauma’ (see Sampson et al., 2008; Punch, 2012; Scott et al., 2012; Thomas, 2017; Batty, 2018; 18; Markowitz, 2019). This section explains the approaches to conducting ethical research, expanding upon the emotional labour involved in this project.

4.9.1 Informed Consent and Anonymity

The concept of informed consent ‘attempts to capture and convey what is regarded as the appropriate relationship between researcher and research participant’ (Miller and Boulton, 2007; 2199). Gaining informed consent is central to conducting research as it aims to ‘protect the subjects against potential emotional or physical harm’ (Marvasti, 2004; 53). Practically, informed consent is the process where a participant agrees to participate in a research project after receiving information pertaining to the purpose and outcome of the research, as well as matters of confidentiality and anonymity (deVaus, 2001). This information was included within the ‘consent form’ for the participant to review, whilst I also explained the ramifications of being involved in the research, as well as the contact details of the researcher so that they can withdraw their data, and have it destroyed if they see fit in the following 14-days. Additionally, a ‘tick list’ and further information on the research is provided on a consent form which is signed by both the participant and the researcher. After informed consent is provided by the participant, I encouraged them to keep their signed copy of the consent form and the participant information sheet.

A challenge when conducting research within the homeless centre was the ability for potential participants to provide informed consent under the Mental Capacity Act Code of Practice (2005). As a result of the £10 incentive, some young men who fitted the criteria were very keen to be interviewed, but some of whom were clearly under the influence of drugs. Any potential participants who were deemed unable to give informed consent were politely told that they could not be interviewed that day but were invited to talk to me when they 'may be feeling a bit better'. However, when judgement calls had to be made, I requested the assistance of the experienced centre manager to help me decide on whether they were able to give consent – on all occasions I followed the conservative advice given by the centre manager.

In line with research procedures, I took appropriate steps to maintain the anonymity of each participant. This required participants to be given a pseudonym and ensure that qualitative data which could reveal their identities was omitted. For example, concealing the areas where they lived, not including specific information on their siblings or any other data which could be sensitive. The specific steps taken to maintain anonymity were explained in the information sheet and the consent form. However, it was made clear to the participants that anonymity would only be breached if I were concerned for their or another individual's welfare (in line with the Capacity Act Code of Conduct).

To compensate participants for their time and to thank them for engaging in the research, each interviewee was given a £10 high street voucher. All interviews were recorded on an encrypted Dictaphone and transcribed.

4.9.2 Avoiding distress to the participants

With all qualitative research one cannot confidently predict 'what an individual might find distressing and even fairly innocuous research topics can result in a research participant becoming distressed' (Wiles, 2012; 57). During one of the interviews at the homeless centre a participant became particularly anxious when he was asked about a former job and how his manager had treated him unfairly. This could not be predicted and required me to turn off the digital recorder and to

suggest that we cease the interview. After being left alone for around five minutes and being given a cup of tea the participant was adamant that he wanted to continue the interview. Following a short discussion and feeling assured over his wellbeing I was happy to recommence the recording. However, distress to the participants was not always clearly foreseeable as when asking seemingly innocuous questions some of the participants appeared to be deeply uncomfortable. Whenever I sensed unease, I would restate that we could move on to another question if it would make them feel more comfortable. This was usually welcomed by the participants and allowed them to take control of what they felt able to divulge.

4.9.3 Self-Care

My experiences of accessing participants and conducting interviews for this study is aligned with the views of Dickson-Swift et al. (2008; 136) who state that 'research work can be emotionally draining and exhausting, and it can lead to researcher burnout'. This is particularly true due to the emotional challenges involved in conducting interviews and spending time in some environments where mental health issues were commonplace. Furthermore, this sometimes confounded the expectations going into this research that the participants would be (largely) comfortable, with some experiencing a little precarity.

Recent studies have shown that researchers are often more concerned over the 'emotional risks' than the more obvious physical risks (Sampson et al., 2008). Such emotional risks are manifold, with Thomas (2017; 5) explaining how he felt 'feelings of doubt and self-consciousness, incompetence, imposterdom, being out of place, situational shyness, stress, boredom, confusion, and frustration' when conducting sensitive research. The emotional investment in research can take a significant toll, particularly when researchers are deeply invested in its success and failures. Furthermore, in the context of austerity the need to understand lived experiences of precarity some research centres have 'been slow to recognise the demands placed on them (researchers) in collecting evidence and listening to growing stories of hardship, and thus researchers are finding themselves lacking support, overloaded, burnt out and emotionally drained'

(Batty, 2018; 18). Whilst the challenges of research are easy to identify, devising a strategy to manage the emotional and physical toil of research is far more difficult.

My individual approach to coping with the challenges of conducting a series of very challenging interviews was to; i) seek advice from my supportive PhD supervisors and other experienced colleagues, in doing so gaining reassurance that such feelings are normal and that high levels of empathy should be encouraged amongst researchers, ii) taking time away from the 'field' when necessary, iii) discussing the challenges with friends and family (whilst maintaining participant anonymity), iv) reflecting on the specific instances that caused trauma, and v) going for solitary long walks in the Peak District to allow time alone with my thoughts.

The emotional labour involved in this research was difficult to handle at times, however I maintain that it was necessary (if not essential) to persevere since the narratives of the young men in this study needed to be heard to create greater awareness of their lived experiences.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter details the broad methodological approaches taken to the investigation on the lived experiences of young male 'hidden NEETs' in Sheffield. A philosophical approach was chosen that aligned with the research aims and questions and, in harnessing a subtle realist approach, harmonises with Bourdieu through his understanding of the social interactions and the 'theory of practice'.

To gain insights on the lived experiences of 'hidden NEETs' and to acquire rich data, a qualitative methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations was utilised. The research process was iterative and was constantly reshaped considering the data acquired in the field and the time spent with the participants.

The key contribution emanating from this chapter pertains to the steps taken to recruit a heterogeneous sample of young men to the study. As noted, previous studies on 'hidden NEETs' have only engaged those already receiving support from the organisation commissioning the research. However, the exhaustive steps taken during this project may not be replicable for future studies due to budgetary and time constraints. The research has expanded the traditional remit of youth unemployment research by including homeless groups in the 'NEET' category. It also acquired the perspectives of young BAME men who are historically absent from 'NEET' research.

The contributions of the research are buttressed by the findings reflecting upon the rich qualitative data in addition to the detailed observations made whilst spending time with the young men. Furthermore, by taking a meticulous approach to the analysis of the qualitative data the research ensures that the findings are both robust and ethically represent the perspectives of the participants.

By undertaking a reflexive approach it can be shown that the experiences of the researcher shaped the fieldwork and the outcomes of the research. In particular, the small amounts of life experience with British-South Asian communities, struggles within education and knowledge of drug dealing allowed the researcher to probe to a deeper level than may have been possible without such experiences.

Aside from the challenges of recruiting 'hidden NEETs' to the study, the emotional labour required during fieldwork took a significant toll. Unfortunately, such issues were unavoidable, but provided me with a skillset that has enabled me to forge a career as a qualitative researcher.

Chapter Five – Educational experiences and the process of disengagement

5.1 Introduction

This is the first empirical chapter and addresses the educational experiences of study participants and analyses the outcome of their interactions with the education system. It pays particular attention to the ways in which participants perceived their time in education. Furthermore, it aims to move beyond the traditional characterisation of working-class masculinity in education by presenting a set of more diverse accounts.

The theories that used in this chapter are the ‘theory of practice’ from Bourdieu and works around ‘masculinity’ and intersectionality. Utilising Bourdieu allows the chapter to analyse the role of social class within the education system, and how mis/recognition occurred for the participants within education. Theories of masculinity help to highlight the role of gender and the performance of masculinity within the educational environment. Finally, intersectionality is utilised to provide a lens to aid the understanding of ethnicity-based inequalities and experiences of racism.

The ‘strongest predictors of NEET’ have been shown to be ‘poor attendance, challenging behaviour in school and exclusion from mainstream education’ (Gadsby, 2019; 36; Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Damm et al., 2020a). However, attending school does not guarantee a future pathway into work as ‘poor experiences of compulsory education’ can also be ‘risk factors’ in becoming ‘NEET’ (Atfield and Green, 2019; 3). To date studies of ‘hidden NEETs’ have not sufficiently focused upon their educational experiences (see Chapter 1). However, these limited accounts assert that this group is amongst the most marginalised amongst young people, and thus it would be expected that their educational experiences would be interlaced with narratives of disengagement

(APPG, 2018; Jones et al., 2018). This hypothesis is examined in detail throughout this chapter.

The issue of education is highly pertinent today as intense debates have taken place over the lower levels of educational achievement amongst young men, particularly in terms of what has been framed as the ‘white’ working-class and ethnicity attainment gap across the anglosphere (specifically Australia, the UK and the USA) (see Reay, 2001; Gillborn, 2010; McDowell, 2011; Stahl, 2015; Williams, 2019). To critically examine the ethnicity attainment gap research must ‘do more than merely cite the difficulties and complexities of intersecting identities and oppressions’ and should aim to ‘detail these complexities and account for how categories and inequalities intersect, through what processes, and with what impacts’ (Gillborn, 2015; 5). In the view of Strand (2014; 131), detailed analysis of educational inequalities must interrogate ‘three dimensions: ethnic group, social class and gender’.

It is widely accepted that social class and education are inextricably linked, with ‘more privileged groups having significantly higher levels of participation and attainment than others’ (Simmons and Thompson, 2011; 448). In the view of Reay (2001; 334) the education system in the UK consistently ‘valorises middle rather than working-class cultural capital’ by regulating the behaviour of students against middle-class ideals, systematically devaluing aspirations that do not adhere to middle-class ideals¹⁸ and segregation across the lines of school catchment areas (also, see Reay, 2004; 2017). Another facet of education inequality is the creation hierarchies in schools based upon ability/intelligence (often referred to as ‘sets’) which further exacerbate social, economic and environmental inequalities (see Barnett, 1998; Lervåg et al., 2019).

For many years the experiences of young men in education have been a focus for researchers. The most pertinent study was by Willis (1977), in which he ethnographically followed the school-to-work transitions of a group of young men

¹⁸ Such as, beginning a family before completing further or higher education; single-parenthood; prioritising sexual and intimate relationships above the pursuit of educational ‘success’; and the pursuit of full-time employment rather than further or higher education (Roberts and Evans, 2013; 71)

in the West Midlands. These young men self-identified as 'the lads' and asserted their masculine working-class identity through rejection of authority within the school environment. Willis (1977) also argues that their attitudes and rebellion against authority were an active component of preparing to engage in employment within typically 'masculine' roles on the 'shop floor'. In recent years this work has been portrayed within academia to be a central text in the study of working-class masculinity, in the process creating a set view that working-class masculinity is synonymous with rebellion to authority, as well as misogyny and lack of adaptation to labour market changes (particularly the rise of the service sector). Furthermore, whilst we know much about 'the lads' in the research, we know comparatively little about the 'ear 'oles' in the school who were characterised by their adherence to authority and engagement within education. Roberts (2018; 23) argues that the representation of 'the lads' as working-class norms and overlooking the socialisation of the 'ear 'oles' has inadvertently assisted in the 'caricaturing of working-class masculinity'. In other words, one of the key texts relating to working-class masculinity may be criticised for being unrepresentative of the group as a whole.

The view that education is a receptacle for social class inequalities is not limited to the UK. The work of Pierre Bourdieu has shed light upon how education 'actively contributes to reproduction of the social class structure of society' (Croizet and Millet, 2011; 196). Before branching into other fields Bourdieu was first known as a sociologist of education – staking a claim that education is central to the 'affirmation of differences between groups and social classes and in the reproduction of those differences' (quoted in Craig, 1999; 253). Bourdieu's theory of practice 'still offers researchers powerful tools for analysing and understanding all national education systems, and the particular individual practical contexts within them' (Grenfell and James, 2003; 2).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) asserted that the education system creates inequality to the benefit of the dominant (higher social classes) through two interlocking processes. Firstly, the field of education only affords recognition to the specific forms of capital acquired by the dominant. Secondly, it sees the

success of the dominant to be an outcome of merit and ability, and specifically not resulting from privilege. In the view of Reay (1998), these characteristics constitute an 'institutional habitus' which is far less durable than an individual habitus due to its genealogy and collective nature which mutually enforces its culture upon all within it. In this context, a working-class identity is seen as a 'hurdle that needs to be overcome' because it is deemed 'invalid within the educational field, thus denying the attribution of any value to being working class' (Ingram, 2009; 423). The denial of value (or recognition) was famously described by Bourdieu (1990; 108) as creating the sense of being 'a fish out of water'. To develop, middle-class students are more likely to feel at ease in education due to their habitus being attuned to the institutional habitus, whereas the working-class habitus is out-of-place as students often feel that educational settings are not for 'the likes of us' (Reay, 2010; 2). Therefore, when education and social class intersect a common outcome for working-class students is failure which is perceived to be the outcome of the 'individual's own actions rather than as an experience shared by many in their class position' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2004; 159).

5.2. Groups formed from their experiences of education

The experiences of education amongst the young men in this study were shaped by a complex interplay between differing aspirations and learning cultures, the experience of the school environment, values, masculinities, and social class. These interlocking factors shaped their overall engagement with education, and in turn, shaped their educational experiences and trajectories. In doing so, this chapter, the findings reveal and illuminates how disengagement from education occurs.

The chapter presents and details three groups differentiated by subtle variations in their relationship with education and outside factors (such as culture) that shape their propensity to persevere and engage in education. To separate the 24 participants into groups this chapter presents the findings in three sections that are distinguished by their relationship with the education system:

- i) **Drift:** Strong desire to persevere in education, although they commonly drift out of education due to tensions between cultures of learning and the cultural values. Disengagement was largely voluntary.
- ii) **Opposition:** Not committed to education and disengage to develop oppositional identities. Disengagement was also largely voluntary.
- iii) **Detached:** Became detached because of factors outside of peer cultures in school (e.g., bullying or family factors that exclude them from learning). Due to a range of factors outside of their control, disengagement was involuntary.

To elaborate, the first group recognises the value of education and ‘drifts’ out of the system despite attempting to stay in education by negotiating a range of challenges. The second group actively ‘opposes’ the values and cultures of the education system. When young men leave education, it is usually expressed as an active/voluntary choice. Finally, a group was unable to engage and actively pursue education due to a range of negative circumstances that took place in their lives outside of education. This final group described the split from education in terms that suggest a lack of agency (see Table 5.2)

Overall, these groupings illuminate discussions on agency, identity, intersectionality, and gender. As it shall be noted, the three groups are all heterogeneous in terms of their ethnic composition and the overall experiences cannot be lineated or simplified into a singular pathway. Instead, the story of this chapter is one of diverse educational journeys, a range of masculine performances and the impact of intersectional disadvantages.

Table 5.2 - Groups formed from their experiences of education

Drift

Pseudonym	Age	Highest Qualification
Anthony	25	BA (Hons) in Fine Art
Daniel	19	GCSE
Faizan	23	GCSE
Hamid	18	GCSE
Joshua	25	GCSE
Martin	21	GCSE
Nathan	22	GCSE
Sadio	19	BTEC Level Three
Umar	19	GCSE
Wahab	19	GCSE
Zerdad	18	GCSE

Opposition

Pseudonym	Age	Highest Qualification
Baashir	23	GCSE
Caleb	19	No qualifications
John	25	GCSE
Mark	25	No qualifications
Sami	18	No qualifications

Detached

Pseudonym	Age	Highest Qualification
Gavin	23	GCSE
Jason	24	GCSE
Jay	24	GCSE
Justin	19	GCSE
Robert	24	GCSE
Steven	23	GCSE
Thomas	25	GCSE
Tyler	25	GCSE

5.3 Group One - Drift

Of the 24 participants, ten recognised the importance and value of education, demonstrated by their concerted efforts to engage, and persevere within education beyond the compulsory stage. The commonly held desire to pursue educational pathways is somewhat significant as discussions on NEETs are often interlaced with exclusions (Furlong, 2006b), disengagement (Kettlewell et al., 2012), multiple disadvantages (Schoon, 2014) and rebellious performances of masculinity (Nayak and Kehily, 2013). Despite efforts to stay within education beyond school a gradual drift away from learning often occurred due to internalised conflicts.

To develop, the young men in this group attempted to conform to the contemporary societal expectation of pursuing education (Reay, 2017) but their ability to stay within the system were often eroded by the culture of the educational establishments and interlinked issues pertaining to masculinity and learning styles. These factors often culminated in the young men drifting away from education. This drift was described in agentic terms, suggesting that they made a largely voluntary choice to remove themselves from education. Furthermore, two participants in this group felt similar pressures and conflicts but managed to persevere in education and secured places at universities.

Up until college Zerdad 'just got on with it' at school where he particularly enjoyed practical subjects, stating that *'in school I was really good at science, and I passed it...'*. Zerdad also held the view that education was central to success by expressing that *'...being out of education it is like saying you are going to do nothing in the future'*. For Zerdad, the key issue with college was the unstructured nature of the learning in combination with the exams:

Chris: Did you not enjoy college then?

Zerdad: No I don't like college.

Chris: Why?

Zerdad: It is different innit. School were different you know what I mean. College is you are doing your own thing.

Chris: Did you find it difficult to keep yourself organised and...

Zerdad: Yeah, and I had exams you see, so it was harder you see. If I don't know [what the questions will be] ... I am going to fail definite.

Zerdad expresses divergent thoughts towards his education at college. Whilst he liked that college was a little more flexible as he was able to his '*own thing*', he felt that examinations hindered his ability to adequately demonstrate his abilities. Due to this divergence he felt progressively disincentivised, eventually leading him to quit his A-levels after the first year. A significant factor towards his inability to succeed in education was the widespread use of progressively more difficult (compared to GCSEs) formal examinations as tools to determine academic ability. Reay (2017; 193) argues that the educational reforms and the centrality of examinations (which have been shown to be detrimental to working-class students) in recent years have compounded social inequalities within schools and colleges as the pedagogical field imposes 'hierarchies that appeal powerfully to middle-class desire(s) and aspirations'. This aligns with Bourdieu's assertion that the dominant groups in society utilise their power to their advantage to maintain or increase their dominance (Bourdieu, 1998c).

Faizan also struggled with college due to exams and left after the first year to pursue vocational courses with private providers. The difficulty with exams was a key 'turn-off' from college and largely explained why a number of participants continued education to this point but stopped after the exams in the first year. Torrance (2017; 92) argues that educational 'assessment processes and examinations provide the quintessential vehicle for individualising and responsabilising success and failure for both students and teachers – with respect to achievement, social mobility and school accountability'. Both Zerdad and Faizan expressed regret that they were unable to progress in education because they *struggled* with '*exams*' and '*theory*'. In this light, Bourdieu states that self-blame can stem from failing to achieve in a 'field' despite the 'player' being prevented from having the requisite 'kit' (or 'tools') to participate equitably (Bourdieu, 1997).

Umar left compulsory education as he had to visit Pakistan at aged 16 to attend a family funeral. However, Umar showed a determination to complete his studies as he returned to education to take level two (GCSE level) courses at a local college;

Chris: Once you left school, what did you do at that point?

Umar: At that point, I went to College, I studies foundation course... I carried on doing that course, that foundation course, I finished that and then I finished for the holidays and I didn't go back because I can't be arsed.

Chris: What kind of foundation course was it?

Umar: It was an entry level 2. And stuff like that.

Chris: So was it like English and Maths?

Umar: English, maths, sports, and then on a Wednesday you would have to do like choose an option, it was like an option day like you go like do sports, erm... you go and do gym, you will go and do painting and RE and stuff like that. I didn't like it. That is why I left college.

The key reason for Umar to leave college was his dislike of the teachers:

Chris: What didn't, what was it particularly that you didn't like?

Umar: Like, the teaching, especially the teachers, they teach you like you're a kid and stuff. I didn't like the teaching and I left, I thought I am not coming back to this place again.

Chris: So what kind of teaching would have worked for you?

Umar: Like ask me politely, tell me politely and they were like shouting on when you were late all the time, didn't like that.

This is somewhat reminiscent of Paul Willis's (1977) study on working-class boys as he pushed-back against the authority of the school. However, Umar was not pitted against the basic notion of education as he recognised its legitimacy by deciding to attend education beyond the age where it was compulsory. However, he resented the wielding of power as it compromised his dignity. Stahl (2015),

noted that the positioning of young men within the education system against teachers, particularly in the pursuit of 'respect', as a key element of social validation of their masculinity. As Umar spoke with regret over his lack of educational attainment but his ire was directed at the teacher whom he deemed to be acting unfairly, not towards the institution.

Martin's education journey started off successfully but he left post-16 education after a similar disagreement with a tutor.

Chris: Did you do GCSEs?

Martin: Yes, yes.

Chris: You mind me asking how it went?

Martin: I passed them all apart from my, well I did get a grade in them all but the only one I got below a C was a maths, yes maths... I smashed it ((laughs)).

Chris: You say you have been doing training courses, what kind of training courses?

Martin: I have done like music courses, sport courses erm... I did a construction one, to try and get into construction work but that failed erm... anything to get into work really. I, when you come out of school you don't really have experience with work, so to get work you need experience.

Chris: Yes, how did it feel when you left school?

Martin: I did go to college at first, erm...

Chris: What did you do at college?

Martin: Sport level III but I dropped out just before it finished. I had a big massive bust-up with erm... head of sort of department I were in so, that didn't work out ((laughs))... I just thought you know what I am done with you, I am leaving.

Similarly, Martin also described being frustrated and angry at one member of staff in his post-compulsory institution. The frictions with the education system are articulated in individualistic terms – i.e., they had disagreements with one

member of staff as opposed to the wider system or culture of education. Moreover, there was contradictory dispositions of the habitus as education was given value but their demand for respect and autonomy hindered their ability to maintain their engagement.

For Nathan, he showed a strong desire to pursue academic qualifications whilst at school. However, he too was a victim of bullying and felt that he never 'fitted-in' at school.

Nathan: I really don't keep in contact with anyone to be honest, they get on with their life, and you know. It's a bit weird because some of them that used to bully me at grammar school they have changed now I think, you know they are friends with me on Facebook because they don't actually remember what they did to me... even the ones that still bully me... basically ignore me now so at least that is a good thing at least. Because I got quite bullied, quite at school you know. I think basically out of primary school you know I never fitted in.

Since school Nathan has strived to undertake further educational and vocational training in a number of areas to improve his prospects of getting work. From this, it can be discerned that Nathan had a desire to be successful within his school career but was hindered by the bullying that he had been subjected to over several years. Analytically, the presence of bullying within the school gates points to 'hegemonic masculinity' being a core concept when discussing the school culture amongst the male students. Connell (1992) sheds light upon the concept of bullying within the school environment through the 'gender order' theory. Connell (1992) asserts that masculinity is a relational construct which forms hierarchies where one's position is determined by the proximity to 'hegemonic masculinity' – moreover, 'in modern social formations, certain constructions of masculinity are hegemonic, while others¹⁹ are subordinated or marginalized' (Connell, 1992; 736). Moller (2007; 269) sees bullying as a

¹⁹ Such as Nathan

malignant, yet 'unspoken aspect' of education for boys which is can be 'excessive, brutal and secretive'. Although bullying is outside of the accepted norms in other social settings, in schools the emotional and physical subordination can be borne as 'masculine traits, considered as personality characteristics that may be present in both boys and girls, may lead children to endorse aggressiveness and to bully their schoolmates' (Gini and Pozzoli, 2006; 588).

Moving on, whilst Wahab, Joshua and Daniel did not have a clear disagreement or 'bust-up' with anyone at college, but their commitment to education waned once their heads were turned by friends whom they describe as being a bad influence upon them:

Chris: can you talk me through what you have done since you left school at the age of 16?

Wahab: Since I left school I went to college, to college I did my first year in college, did a diploma in Science level 1, I passed that, I went to second year, got with the bad crowd in college. For the first two years, the first two years I was fine but then once I had this bad crowd with me of mates, I just my brain went out from education and it went into the street life²⁰.

Chris: How were things at school like did you do, did you go ahead, do your GCSEs, A levels.

Joshua: I did pretty good in my GCSEs ish I got 4 Cs and a B in maths. I did fail English like got a D and that which I retook and then got another D, and then went to re-sit it a third time and luckily came out with a C. But erm...

Chris: That's alright!

Joshua: I did, the first, well no I did do almost complete 3 A levels in computer games development, but I dropped out like later on in the

²⁰ 'Street life' is a slang term for anything loosely related to criminality.

second year. It was quite funny though cause all the guys there were mocking me like oh you are going to drop out in the first year, you are going to drop out in the first year, half of them like all dropped out in the first year and I was there like yes...

Chris: And you were the last one standing?

Joshua: Yes I was erm... probably a bit more of a wreck head in those days as well they were just like oh you are too wasted you are not going to like get the qualification I was like I fucking can ((laughs)).

Daniel pursued a series of college courses with no sense of where the courses would progress to, eventually he dropped out of college after he felt that it was not progressing anywhere:

Chris: Are you ok to talk me through what you have been doing since you left school.

Daniel: I have, I have been going to college, erm... first year I have been on a foundation course, for 1 year, erm... then the second year after that I did a sports course, level I, then after that I have continued to do it again but on level II and between the education I have been erm... looking what else is there for me to do.

A body of research focusing upon young people dropping-out of post-compulsory further education broadly asserts that young people do so for 'pragmatically rational' reasons (Hodkinson, 1998; 304; Daniel et al., 2006; Andrei et al., 2012). These reasons focused on an immediate desire for economic capital as over the acquisition of institutionalised cultural capital (qualifications) that might provide access to greater economic capital in the future. Interestingly, Zerdad, Faizan, Umar, Martin, Wahab, Joshua and Daniel all pursued additional education because they initially sought qualifications to ease the pathway to work. However, they were unable to persevere due to a range of factors, most prominent of which was the incompatibility of formal learning and working-class masculinity. At the time of the interview, Martin, Wahab, Joshua and Daniel expressed regret at their decisions and were considering alternative routes back into education.

These young men were not rebelling against the educational structures in the same way as Willis's *lads*. Instead, they were seeking autonomy. In the view of Connell (2005) autonomy is a central tenet of the masculine identity, which in the case of the young men interviewed was challenged by the monotony and lack of control over one's time imposed by the college environment. Furthermore, this hints towards Holt and Thompson's (2004) view that 'pangs of emasculation' from types of work and education result in a perceived necessity to seek recognition and reclaim a masculine identity in other fields. To summarise Zerdad, Faizan, Umar, Martin, Wahab, Joshua and Daniel all struggled with the transition beyond compulsory education for a range of reasons, including too much freedom with their time, a perceived lack of respect from tutors, 'bad crowds' and bullying. However, their attitudes and actions were not synonymous with the '*Macho Lads*' of Mac an Ghail (1994; 58) who overtly rejected the 'unofficial three Rs of rules, routines and regulations' to partake in the 'three Fs of fighting, fucking and football'. Instead, they showed a high level of perseverance with education and saw the value in gaining qualifications to enhance their future prospects but over time felt that the system dragged them down to the extent whereby other options became massively more appealing.

Hamid's experience with school was complex and interwoven with aspirations outside of the educational system as well as what he perceived to be racism enacted upon him from the authorities at school.

Chris: What you were saying about racism though you know, do you think, have you experienced racism in any other way, any other part of your life?

Hamid: At school yes... everyone [was] coming out of the last lesson now, and on the corridor each class has about 30 people, in it and there is about 7 or 8 rooms on one corridor so you are looking at a couple of hundred, 1 or 200 so out of all of them he decides to pick on a certain individual who happens to be Asian....

These instances commonly involved Hamid being individually blamed for fights and scuffles which involved a large number of young boys, most of whom were White. Whilst Wahab, Umar and Zerdad did not state that their experiences of education were interlaced with racism, it is essential to note that 'social identities of class, race, gender, and sexuality continue to rub up uncomfortably against learner identities within much educational research' (Reay, 2010; 281). Furthermore, Yuval-Davis (2011) argues that BAME often struggle to manage their cultural 'self' within the school gates, leaving some feeling disenfranchised and/or lacking a sense of belonging. As noted, intersectionality theory would assert that his sense of institutional racism is valid and would have shaped his interactions with power as well as his peers (see Crenshaw, 2017). Despite his views on the school, Hamid's attitude to school would be one of engagement as he was rarely truant and saw the value in education before leaving at aged 16 to gain informal employment for some money of his own.

Whereas the earlier participants drifted out of education, Sadio and Anthony are outliers as they excelled throughout their education, and in the case of Anthony, he went on to gain a First-Class Degree in Fine Art. The pursuit of Higher Education was also in the mind of Sadio as he was awarded a place at University but was forced to defer it to look after his father and younger siblings. Both spoke of school in sequential terms: in other words, school was a small step within the *process* of their transition to adulthood:

Chris: Can you just explain what you have been doing since you left school?

Sadio: Erm... when I left school I went to sixth form and I do a two years course on ICT and sport. And then afterwards I went to university for a month and then I left because erm... my Father was ill, he was in the hospital and so I decided to leave the university to get a year gap until the year after. So I can go find work and help my brothers and that. I decided that I would like to do some sort of apprenticeship rather than going to university again, but still I have still got a place at

university if I still want to go back in September. So, at the same time so I am looking for an apprenticeship, so I can work while I learn and get paid so I can use that money to help myself as well. But if I still don't find an apprenticeship I will still consider going back to university. I have got my student finance and everything sorted out.

Anthony also spoke of school, and education in general in similar terms:

Chris: Can you tell me what you had done up until that point from leaving school?

Anthony: I didn't really like school it was too, getting told what to do all the time... [but I] went to school as normal did my A levels, erm... just medium grade then decided that I should become an engineer so I went to uni to try and do mechanical engineering, found it was incredibly like maths heavy and struggled. Well I were only passing like the foundation year just like by 1 mark, on a pass so, I decided to cut my losses and change my degree and go somewhere else and do erm... art, cause I enjoy it. I perhaps would be good at it, rather than not. So, yes went to [town near Sheffield] ... because it was near Sheffield because, erm... nowhere else in the country really has a baseline music scene which I was into at the time, still am. So I went to... to do art, so smashed that, got a First!!!

Sadio and Anthony embarked upon what can be considered to be 'slow-track' transitions into adulthood, characterised by long-term investments in education prior to entering the labour market. Such transitions through, and beyond education were traditionally 'associated with middle-class young people' but in recent years this has expanded to working-class groups 'who have benefited from the expansion of higher education' (Heath, 2008; 9).

The educational trajectories of all the young men were similar until the age of 16 or 17 as they all remained within the formal system. The critical juncture appeared to be the second year of college where most found they were unable

to continue and drifted out of education, whereas Sadio and Anthony managed to prevail. The most discernable difference between those who persevered in education and those who did not seems to be having a plan of what they hoped to achieve in the long-term. Fundamentally, however, the Universities where they found places were marketed as institutions for working-class students. Hence, Anthony and Sadio both positioned themselves in institutions where working-class students often feel more comfortable (Reay et al., 2010).

In summary, those who left education did so (at least in part) due to their masculine habitus valuing autonomy and respect which was not recognised or valued in the field of education (Atkinson, 2017). Thus, whilst the range of opportunities available to young working-class men have expanded, there are still constraints put upon them by an education system due to the misalignment of their habitus and the field of education. Furthermore, this strengthens the points made in Chapter 2 regarding the process of hysteresis that have taken place over the last 50 years.

For some, school or college was an experience of being ‘misrecognition’ as ‘the social determinants of the educational career... gives the educational certificate the value of a natural right and makes the educational system one of the fundamental agencies of the maintenance of the social order (inequalities)’ (Bourdieu, 1984; 387). Despite being misrecognised, the participants showed enduring stoicism as they tried to acquire skills to provide them with positive labour market outcomes. However, as it shall be shown in the following chapters, stoicism should not be viewed as a universally positive character trait – discourses of stoicism highlight the necessity for emotional fortitude and resilience regardless of the long-term mental health issues (Martin, 2016).

5.4 Group Two - Opposition

Whilst many participants showed at least partial engagement with school or college, some had little or no desire to continue with education. As noted, while a majority attempted to persevere within the field of education, this group recognised that their attributes were incompatible with this field (Bourdieu,

1998). Indeed, some had actively decided to leave the field of education to acquire recognition in other fields.

Five participants simply did not engage with the school culture, although two described attending school frequently, but never paid attention to the authority figures. Firstly, John and Mark attended school relatively frequently, but described a distance between themselves and the academic side of the school:

Chris: Did you find school engaging or?

John: Erm... I don't know, school was pretty much the main thing that just made me lose focus in things. Going right back into primary school, I realised very quickly that I wasn't quite stupid enough to be happy licking a window or eating a bottle of glue or something, and I weren't quite smart enough to get it either. So, I was always just that guy, one of the kids who did other things so I just turned into like a clown or something and just look out of window.

After leaving school John participated in a number of media-related 'taster' courses that he describes as 'fun' rather than for an educational purpose, one in particular involved '*... prattin' about with music*'. He also stated how the courses were '*essentially for people who weren't smart enough to go to real colleges*'. Furthermore, he described his entire education as being cast in the role of '*the guy that just sat staring out of window looking for something*'. However, he believed that he '*couldn't be arsed with paying attention to stuff*'.

Baashir formed an oppositional attitude to school, first being truant, and subsequently leaving school the age of 16 to sell drugs. A key motivation was the desire to make money: '*We were going to school you see other kids with better things than you, and you think why can't it be me? So you go home and you look at your parents and you know they can't provide it for you, so you say to yourself, I am going to provide for myself kind of thing...*'. Thus, Baashir's decision to sell drugs as opposed to engaging with school can be portrayed as the highest form of rebellion to the culture of the school. Baashir's transition from

school was dramatic, and more easily aligned with the Teesside Studies. MacDonald (2006; 375) discusses truancy in terms of opposition to institutions as 'disengagement from school and engagement with 'street corner society' further established oppositional identities. This was certainly the case with Baashir as his growing distance from school came about because of oppositional activities and aspirations pitted against the rigidity authority of the school environment. However, reflecting back Baashir states that he regretted the decisions that he made earlier on in life:

I am 23 now, now I have learnt at this age that when the teachers would say to me, 'oh you need to do this', and I used to think, 'you know what, I am not going to listen to you today'. But they were right. I finally come to that age, when you was younger and your parents say you are going to get older and you are going to say 'remember when I told you this?'. I have finally come to that age now... I have realised what was I doing I have only hit it at 23. Some people might hit it later in life 25 maybe even 30 but that is too late.

In a study of young people discussing their experiences of truancy in Teesside, MacDonald and Marsh (2005; 154-5) state that in 'looking back from their current vantage points—and trying to understand the course of their lives since school—the majority of young people seemed to conclude that they had been wrong and the teachers right' and that 'working harder at school would have delivered better qualifications which, in turn, would have increased the chances of getting better jobs'. This may constitute an 'epistemological fallacy' as Baashir blames himself for his apparent failures, whilst not recognising the structural hurdles that contribute to his perception of what is possible. Despite the clear regret for his past actions, Baashir explained that it would be too late to change now and that he would continue in this form of 'work' in the future. The linkages between masculinity and this form of crime are well documented (see Payne 2006; Moloney et al., 2009). It is best summarised by O'Donnell and Sharpe (2002; 185), in stating how hegemonic masculinities are synonymous with 'tough, macho and risk-taking qualities, and this exacerbates conflict with authority even

further'. In terms of capital, it could be argued strongly that Baashir did not have the resources to fully participate in the school environment, however, he used his possession of physical strength and entrepreneurial aptitude to acquire economic capital through different means.

However, Baashir was not alone in having encounters with criminality that impacted upon his educational journey. Both Caleb and Sami were placed within youth offending institutions before the age of 16 and did not take any GCSEs or return to education upon release. The narratives of both young men were strikingly similar: both stabbed other young men but during interviews declined from engaging in a conversation about their school days, instead wanting to focus upon their futures. Their narratives were divergent to Baashir's in terms of their criminal activity and their motivations. Whereas Baashir sold drugs in a methodical (business-like) manner for a planned purpose (acquisition of economic capital), Caleb and Sami's involvement was more impulsive.

The unifying belief amongst this group was that school was 'not for the likes of them' suggesting that their habituses were not attuned or disposed to expect and value educational success engaging in education. The reasons for their disengagement were broad, as were the outcomes. John and Mark stopped engaging in education due to a sense of alienation. Baashir recognised that the school was not an environment in which he could thrive despite appearing to have the intellectual ability to excel in education. Instead, he utilised his position within the 'gendered order' and his cultural capital to acquire economic capital through criminality. The educational experiences of Caleb and Sami are difficult to detail as they did not wish to discuss them, as other areas of their lives now took precedence.

5.5 Group Three - Detached

The third group of young men were unable to engage in education due to factors outside their control. These factors are diverse and include bullying, mental health issues and family breakdown. The distinguishing feature of this group is that their circumstances did not allow its members to continue in education even though this was what they would have liked.

For Jason the key factor in not progressing was bullying from other students:

Chris: What (GCSE) grades did you get if you don't mind me asking?

Jason: I got Es, I did terrible at school. Obviously down to the bullying and stuff like that...

Chris: Not going to help is it?

Jason: Yes it was the secondary equivalent of hell ((laughs)). Erm... so it didn't really help me in that regards that sort of stuff. I had a, I had a lot of time off as well due to bullying, you don't want to get up in the morning, go to school and know somebody is going to start calling you names all day and stuff like that so...

Being bullied a significant factor in being truant as the experience of school became 'terrible'. Also, the relationship with his father actively contributed to the development of mental health issues:

Chris: Can I ask was it just the work that you hated that caused you to have mental health problems or was there other stuff?

Jason: I think it has been building over time. I suffered a lot during my childhood I had erm... regular beatings from my father, and stuff like that and it wasn't very interesting let's give it that way erm... a lot of bad stuff happened to me back then. After that obviously school with the bullying all sorts of stuff like that, which kind of killed it off as well so, it kind of, erm... murdered it (the opportunity to progress at school) in other words.

Several participants in the 'unable to engage' group experienced familial issues during their formative years that directly impacted upon their ability to get on at school. For example, Robert stated how he was frequently absent, missing years

of school between the ages of eight and 14. However, he was able to stay on and do his GCSEs:

Chris: Did you do your GCSE's?

Robert: I got Ds in maths, English and science and they are the only GCSEs I did. I missed 5 years of school.

Chris: Between what ages?

Robert: 13 and, no 8 and 14, just truanting school, running away from school and stuff like that cause of bullying I got so, I just missed it all the time couldn't be bothered with it.

Chris: Yes. Do you regret that now...

Robert: No. I shouldn't regret it. End of the day I got my qualifications I need what I want to be in life, so there is no regret there.

In addition to bullying, Robert was raised in the Care system, as such, experience of education cannot be viewed independently from other difficulties in his formative years. Indeed, debates over the underlying causes of truancy present a diverse range of ideas and discourses. Southwell (2006; 92) argues that schools and policy makers often attempt to frame truancy as 'a badness in its own right and presenting it as a precursor of almost certain delinquency and failure'. The role of social class in being truant from school is contested, with Reid (1999) suggesting that it represents resistance against the repressive environment of the school, thus implying a power dynamic where the working-class are afforded less power and influence. O'Keeffe and Stroll (1995) argue that social class is not a significant factor as middle-class students are truant to similar levels as working-class students. Aside from social class, micro factors such as 'the quality of teaching, teacher-pupil relations and pastoral care; a school's ethos, leadership and management style; the extent of bullying, out-of-school and after-school facilities and provision' also influence the likelihood and extent of truancy (Reid, 2005; 65). However, for Robert it is clear that he, like many others, 'cannot bear to lay themselves open to further abuse by continued attendance' (Southwell, 2006; 93).

Finally, some participants of this study were engaged at school, but were unable to pursue education due to family breakdowns at significant junctures of their school careers. Firstly, four young men, Gavin, Justin, Thomas and Tyler were engaged at school to a large extent before being forced to leave home at aged 15 or 16.

Interestingly, prior to the family breakdown, the young men in this group exhibited signs of being engaged in school and conforming to the culture of the school environment. Gavin showed promise at school until the age of 16 by achieving excellent GCSE results before leaving the Care system abruptly (Gavin did not wish to discuss the exact reason why he chose to leave the system). Despite being homeless at the time of interview Gavin demonstrated an affinity with education, expressing a desire to go to University:

I have been doing a lot of self-study on sociology and like politics and stuff like that... they are like subjects that I am interested. I have [to] keep myself occupied and busy than the most average homeless person, because I suppose education is the only way that has kept me sane in the circumstances to tell you the truth is the hope that erm... I might actually get somewhere in maybe a couple of months or a couple of years... I still actually have funding for university, so if I could try and get back into that do you know... I would like to knuckle down and research and stuff like that what I would like to study.

Justin achieved strong GCSE grades and looked back at his time at school fondly, however at the age of 16 his mother told him to leave the house when she caught him smoking cannabis; *'my mom kicked me out, I was studying at College, erm... and then once I moved to [town near Sheffield] it became really difficult for me to continue my studies and it steered me a lot more towards erm... getting money and moving out on my own'*. Similarly, Thomas was also engaged at school but was kicked out of the family home by his mother at the same age as Justin:

Chris: when you were in school did you stay on, did you do your GCSEs or,

Thomas: I did my GCSEs but my mom kicked me out when I were, just when I were turning 16 like 2 weeks before my 16th birthday so luckily I got all my GCSEs out of the way erm... and then yes I left home. And then, I suppose that is where everything went a bit more tits up for me ((laughs)) really.

Prior to having to leave home, Thomas was also engaged at school, completing his GCSEs to a sufficient standard to progress onto a course in preparation to become a chef. However, due to the challenges of living independently at age 16 he was unable to continue the course. Tyler also completed his GCSEs but was unable to stay at home or continue in education due to a relationship breakdown with his mother and step-father.

Chris: are you still in touch with family at the moment, or?

Tyler: No I don't talk to my mom anymore. She got married to a dickhead basically a violent dickhead.

Chris: went difficult with your stepdad how stressful it was and...

Tyler: Yes erm...

Chris: Don't worry, that's fine...

Tyler: Yes so basically she had a choice of like me at home, or him at home and she chose him over me, so I had to go and stay with my grandparents, which was fine because I got on with them probably better than what I did with my mom. But then erm... she decided to tell my grandparents that I had lied and tried to stitch her husband up, which was soul destroying to say the least, my mom and it made me like a fool and eventually like she told everybody else the truth but she never told my grandparents and they have passed away now. Erm...

The narratives of Gavin, Justin, Thomas and Tyler clearly highlight how their adherence to the culture of education, working hard for their GCSEs and having aspirations to pursue additional skills in Further Education can be hindered by

familial breakdown.

Finally, two young men in the study experienced their education was hampered by being placed in Care as a result of familial breakdown and not being engaged in school. Steven, was placed in care at aged 15, before leaving at the age of 16. He stated that whilst he was not the 'academic type', he enjoyed reading and learning:

Steven: I am not an academic type, in that sense, I love reading, I love knowledge...

After leaving home at aged 16 Steven stayed with an uncle for a short period of time before 'sofa-surfing' with friends. However, despite the day-to-day challenges faced, Steven still attempted to regain a place in education:

I wasted a lot of potential in dropping out of courses left, right and centre. I enrolled in about 6 different courses, 7 different courses since I left school and I have only, I don't think I have ever completed one of them²¹. The closest I got was to my access course, I just about nearly did it but I ran out of time, with deadlines of course that were it, that went ill health popped up there.

Thus, Steven struggled with the lack of autonomy at school, but persevered and adhered to the societal expectation of pursuing education at a post-16 level. Furthermore, his pre-16 education was marked with signs of passive engagement, rather than rebellion. Finally, Jay also engaged with school until he completed his GCSEs to grade 'D' at aged 15. However, after his GCSEs he experienced a family breakdown in relations which saw him leave home and get involved in crime and drugs, '*I got morally brought up properly, I left home at 15, not my choice, by the time I was 17 streets had dragged me down that much I were putting a needle in my arm and by 18, I were in jail*'. Jay clearly highlights

²¹ Later in the interview Steven explained that this was because of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.

above all others how the transition from school to adult life can be incredibly precarious, and moreover, can go awry all too easily.

The issues faced by participants in this group appear to be typical for many who experience the most common 'structural causes of poverty and disadvantage' (Bramley et al., 2020; 399). Frustratingly for the young men in this group, their habituses embodied the discourses around the centrality of education but were unable to progress due to factors resulting from issues linked to what Bourdieu considers to be the outcomes structural inequalities, such as family breakdown. Unlike the first group, these young men did not have the ability to stay in education and became NEET due to the storms that crossed their paths. They all expressed regret over their inability to persevere within education – this suggests that they are 'doomed if they do and doomed if they don't' as their agency was constrained to the point whereby successful engagement in education was no longer a choice.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings of this chapter do not fully align with other research that suggest how dramatic or spectacular exists from education are normalised (see Section 5.1). This is somewhat surprising as the literature on NEETs suggests a high degree of disengagement with education – findings presented here challenge this view (see Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Atfield and Green, 2019; Gadsby, 2019; Damm et al., 2020b). Instead, 19 of the 24 participants demonstrated a willingness to participate in education through attending school and often pursuing A-level or BTEC qualifications. On a cursory level this may appear to be positive, but the fact that engagement in education did not translate into labour market success is concerning. For the most part, these young men did what was expected of them and conformed to the school environment to the best of their ability. Most intriguingly, there appear to be no patterns on the basis of ethnicity, unlike in other aspects of the study's findings (see following chapters). This, therefore, highlights how young working-class men today are far from being a united group who can be categorised on the simple basis of economic and familial backgrounds.

The educational history of this study's participants clearly demonstrates a wide heterogeneity of the 'hidden NEET' group. There were participants who conformed to all of the aforementioned studies on young men. The experiences of the 'detached' group is somewhat similar to those seen in the Teesside Studies (Macdonald, 2006). Similarly, the 'missing middle' (see Roberts, 2018) can be mapped alongside the 'drift group'. Finally, the 'opposition' group is remarkably similar to 'the lads' of Willis (1977).

A very common 'pitfall' for many participants was the transition from school to college. Commonly they persevered through school and wanted to succeed at college but were unable to do so. Most who went to college managed to navigate the early days but left in the first year. This is of course highly relevant and concerning for practitioners as the desire and motivation to learn and succeed in education is scuppered by factors out of the control of boys in school and college, such as bullying, family breakdown and forms of masculinity misaligned with school cultures. Hence, the current structure of the education system is failing to harness the potential of the young men in this study.

The intersection of gender and social class suggests that their relative positions within each hierarchy greatly influenced their experiences of education. Masculinity worked as both a resource and an inhibitor to educational progress. For some, the desire to assert their masculinity and be treated with the respect that the performance acted to distance themselves from the school environment, creating discord and (in some cases) rebellion or disengagement. Conversely, for some, masculinity was a source of stoicism that helped them stay in education. The inequalities experienced by the participants were very broad, ranging from feelings of discrimination and bias, bullying, familial breakdown and disabilities. As a group there is a general adherence to the value of education but combinations of factors relating to class and gender shape disengagement from the system.

Those who disengaged with school commonly did so because of other factors, for example, disabilities, perceptions of racism or being involved in crime. The

most common path through school was, in fact, simply doing their best. As noted in Chapter 2, whilst post-16 educational opportunities have expanded for young people, they have increasingly recognised the value of education but class/gender factors limit their ability to achieve success because they do not possess the cultural capital to succeed in this field. Hence, there is a disconnect between structural changes in educational opportunities and the ability of young people to realise them.

The next chapter addresses the next stage in their transition to adulthood as it focuses upon their interactions with the labour market.

Chapter Six - Labour Market

6.1 Introduction

Experiences of the labour market are a key element to this study as NEETs have long been the focus of policy makers as they aim to alleviate the ‘downward spiral into market marginality’ that can (in some circumstances) result in ‘poverty and social isolation, which in turn reinforces the risk of long-term unemployment’ (Russell, 2016; 123). Furthermore, the findings on this theme promise to offer significant lessons for policy and practice as at present little is known about the labour market experiences of ‘hidden NEETs’ due to their invisibility in official datasets and the aforementioned difficulties in accessing them (see Brinkley et al., 2013; Edwards, 2017; Jones et al., 2018).

As noted in Chapter 2, the transition from education to employment has ‘altered radically over the past thirty years’ (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007; 590). The long-term trend of increased labour market precarity has gathered pace since the GFC resulting in ‘growing insecurity of working life for young adults in the UK’ (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019; 725). The unequal burden of precarious employment disproportionately impacts young working-class people and in turn forms ‘a web of precarity in which many young people need to navigate the stress of not knowing when their next payday will be, how they will pay for their living costs and how they will move towards a more stable future’ (Devany et al., 2020). The broad socioeconomic and cultural changes that have taken place in young people’s lives have been linked to an erosion in wellbeing amongst young people, causing ‘substantial mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and aggression control’ (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016; 7-8) for many young NEETs.

Several of the issues examined in this chapter help to address the gaps in knowledge pertaining to ‘hidden NEETS’, and these combine both empirical and theoretical contributions. Firstly, it reflects on how the participants view the service sector, specifically analysing whether they saw the sector as a long-term

source of security and employment, in doing so, contributing to the debates presented by Nixon, (2009), McDowell (2011) and Roberts (2018) (see section 1.3). Secondly, it reviews how they acquired (or sought to acquire) work, and which avenues to work were the most fruitful. Finally, the chapter reflects upon the resources at the participants' disposal and comment upon how some managed to insulate themselves from precarity.

The empirical factors relating to the disproportionate impact of precarity are detailed thoroughly in Chapters 2 and 3 (in particular, the erosion of security in the labour market, the erosion of typically masculine jobs and an increase in non-standard work patterns). However, Bourdieu can be used to enable us to see that cultural factors also play a significant role in the unequal burden of unemployment. Social class is experienced relationally and is 'hidden away deep in the body' as the habitus shapes the parameters which determine what is perceived to be possible in the labour market, and the volumes of capital that limit a person's ability to gain recognition in certain fields of work (Bourdieu, 1993; 166). Additionally, where appropriate, the findings reflect upon any 'stigma' associated with unemployment and the role of ethnicity through the application of the concept of intersectionality.

To separate the 24 participants into groups this chapter presents the findings in two sections that are differentiated by their level of exposure to the precarious labour market. The groups are as follows:

- i) **Exposed workers:** Participants who have experience of being 'exposed' to precarious employment, unemployment and wider personal/familial/structural issues that impact upon their wellbeing. This group of participants were 'exposed' to the most precarious end of the labour market – experiences of work were commonly interspersed with periods of unemployment, being 'let go' by their employers with very little notice and occasionally dangerous or discriminatory work practices. This group experienced the most precarious forms of employment and across other areas of their lives.

- ii) **Insulated workers:** Participants who have experience of employment and unemployment but have utilised their resources to insulate themselves from the most precarious end of the labour market. This second group were less precarious due to the resources at their disposal (principally, support from their families).

6.2 Exposed workers

When analysing their work biographies in relation to the empirical contributions from labour market researchers, the level of precarity experienced by the groups is unsurprising (see Shildrick et al., 2010; Jeffrey et al., 2018; MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019; Woodcock and Graham, 2019). However, the underlying reasons for their reliance upon precarious work is central to the study and has wider sociological ramifications as it asserts that some form of support is needed in order to maintain a position within the labour market due to ubiquitous precarity.

Of the 24 participants twelve (or half) have labour market biographies which can be construed as largely precarious working conditions. However, their experiences are heterogenous and are differentiated by the resources at their disposal. To reflect these differences this section details two sub-groups: the first includes those with limited resources to fall back upon during periods of unemployment; and the second presents the strategies that are used to translate non-economic resources into economic capital in the absence of formal work.

Table 6.1 – Exposed workers

Name	Age	Employment/Training History	Reason for being unemployed	Housing	Source of Income
Anthony	25	Secretary at a hospital and Artist	End of contract at hospital.	Traveller camp.	Art, savings and money from other residents at the camp
Baashir	23	Call centres and selling drugs.	End of contract at call centre.	With mother.	Drug Dealing
Gavin	23	Never worked	Homeless	Homeless	No income
Jay	24	Door-to-door sales.	Drug addiction (heroin)	Homeless	Begging
John	25	Nightclubs, apprenticeships, Factory work, door-to-door charity collection.	Short term contracts and mental health issues.	Council flat	No income
Joshua	25	Various factory jobs.	Back injury.	Traveller camp.	Money from other residents at the camp
Justin	19	Various call centres, Takeaway restaurants, selling drugs and Vegan Chef.	Short term contracts and companies going into liquidation.	Private renting with partner.	Drug Dealing
Martin	21	Warehouses and informal work (painting houses and clearing gardens).	Short term contracts and mental health issues.	Shared accommodation.	No income
Robert	24	Chef, occasionally selling the 'Big Issue', selling Spice and Cannabis.	Family breakdown leading to homelessness	Homeless (on the streets).	Begging
Sadio	19	Factory work. Started course at University but had to leave to earn money to support family.	Left factory work after being treated poorly	With family	Family and savings
Steven	23	Business Administration Apprentice, favours for friends and selling cannabis.	Was no longer required by company	Council flat.	Drug Dealing

			after initial Apprenticeship period.		
Thomas	25	Kitchen Manager.	Health - had epileptic fits whilst at work.	Council flat.	No income
Tyler	25	Various cleaning and call centre jobs.	Family breakdown leading to homelessness	Homeless (on the streets).	Begging

The qualifications possessed by interviewees in this group were exclusively at GCSE level (with differing grades). However, their ability to secure work low-paid and low-skilled work was unaffected by this. Similarly, for the most part, these participants had little or no support from their families when they were unemployed. This mandated paid employment as a survival strategy, thus offering little autonomy over which types of work they were willing to accept. This also meant that consideration of how their work identity aligned with their masculine identity was not a significant concern. However, their interactions with the service sector were largely negative, with many complaining of being treated poorly by employers and customers (particularly in 'call centres'). Over time this led to many experiencing poor mental health. The most significant factor in their ability to participate in the labour market was the presence (or lack) of financial and emotional support from their families. This is significant as it shows how those exposed to precarious work possess and utilise different abilities and resources to mitigate themselves from the worst effects of worklessness.

The ubiquity of precarious work is explained by John as he details how he struggled to acquire and maintain work after leaving school, and instead decided to supplement his CV by volunteering to gain experience.

Chris: So once you finished that training course, like what were you doing, were you looking for work at that time or?

John: Yes I mean I had to a bunch of stuff because like jobs weren't readily available then it were just like voluntary work and stuff, and lying to myself essentially thinking it would look good on a CV. I suppose it did, or something to some extent but then, once I got fed-up of that I decided to look for other work and stuff so, got a few jobs at like nightclubs and stuff in town but they were all like really temporary things...

Dean (2020) sees the misrecognition of volunteering as a valuable source of employability skills to be a form of 'symbolic violence'. He argues that some charities utilise a 'social status that enables them to take advantage of the cultural

resonance of their organisation type, and the individual's acceptance that they 'should' give in because of the charities' goodness' (ibid.; 80). The benefits of volunteering are often reserved for the 'engaged middle class who inhabit behaviours and possess capitals at the expense of opportunities for young people, often from working-class background' (Dean, 2016; 110). There is a wide body of literature which highlights the often-futile attempts by young working-class people to improve their 'employability' through volunteering (see Ryan, 2001; Warburton and Smith; 2003).

The work that John obtained was largely 'cash-in hand' as he was unable to secure anything more formal despite his volunteering experience. This was despite attending multiple training courses and applying for many jobs online. As time progressed the mental health impact of constant disappointment took its toll.

John: I was looking for a job like, one of the ones that is genuinely, not one of the [people] that Jeremy Kyle is slagging off because they are taking drugs all time, one of the ones that is genuinely looking and you are still not getting anywhere with it, it just gets you down really. It is hard to keep a high opinion of yourself, when you can't even get a job at Tesco's and then I ended up going on like, getting diagnosed with like clinical depression...

Chris: Are your family able to help you out at all?

John: I ain't really seen any of them since I were about 16. I was always like the black sheep in my family..

Having no financial or emotional support resulted in John being increasingly isolated. John also felt the 'stigma' of being unemployed, as noted by his reference to 'Jeremy Kyle' and his insistence that he was different to the guests on the show who are often portrayed as being 'feckless chavs' who take advantage of the welfare system (Skeggs, 2009; 630). As his period of unemployment continued his mental health deteriorated and the stigma of being in a similar situation to those on the 'Jeremy Kyle show' took hold. Goffman (1963; 24) asserts that identifying oneself with stigmatising (or 'deviant') behaviour or

status forms 'self-derogation' where the stigma of the self creates conditions whereby an individual can become 'depressed, hostile, anxious, and bewildered'.

Like John, Tyler also worked in a range of low-paid roles, but most recently worked at a customer service call centre near Sheffield. During this time his then partner was also employed:

Chris: Were you both working?

Tyler: Yes, yes she was erm... working doing cleaning jobs and that and I did customer service in [town near Sheffield] and worked for [outsourcing company]...

Chris: Ok how was that work did you enjoy it or?

Tyler: It was easy work erm... a lot of it was like just learning the computer systems, basically.

Chris: So was it on the phones then or was it?

Tyler: It was on the phones but you were using a computer and had about 12 systems that you had to get like used to using. So it is quite mind boggling to start with. But the only downside to it is, like an hour and half travelling in the morning and an hour and half in the evening [on public transport]. So you have got an 8 hour shift into a 12 hour shift... I was setting off at like 5.30 in the morning, getting to work for 8 o'clock and then setting off home at 5 and getting in for 7, it was crazy.

The lack of appropriate and efficient public transport can lead to long and convoluted long journeys to work many residents without cars living in low-income neighbourhoods (Crisp et al., 2018). Despite the transport difficulties, Tyler's experience of the day-to-day work was largely positive as he spoke of this job in an upbeat manner and made no complaints related to the tasks that he was asked to perform. Call centre work requires employees to be 'deferential and enduringly polite' (Forey and Lockwood, 2010; 245), hence, his apparent satisfaction with that work goes against some research on masculinity in the labour market. McDowell (2003) proposed that working-class young men struggle to balance the

mutually exclusive deference required in customer-engaging work and the class-based performances of masculinity. However, McDowell (2003; 226) also argues that 'ways of masculinity vary across time and locations', leaving open the possibility that many young working-class men (such as Tyler) no longer aspire to the historically venerated cultures of masculinity. More recently, Roberts (2018) claimed that young working-class men have greater levels of emotional capital now than in previous generations, thus allowing them to participate more successfully in the service sector where deference and the management of emotions are sought after attributes.

The importance of familial support as a crutch to maintain a position in the labour market is also highlighted by Tyler. He was living with his partner's family, but when that relationship broke-down he lost his access to housing and emotional support. Due to past abuse by his stepfather (with the complicity of his mother) returning to live with them was not an option. With the issues that he was facing maintaining a place in the labour market was no longer possible. Furthermore, his mental health deteriorated after breaking-up with his partner and eventually he became homeless as his drug use increased to problematic levels. Bourdieu (1998a; 139) sees relationship breakdown within families as one of the 'social costs of economic violence'. Moreover, Bourdieu (1979; 158) argues that home becomes a site of dispute and violence because the working-class are frequently denigrated or not valued in other areas, thus intra-family conflict arises as the home becomes the 'the site of last resistances'.

Martin's experience of the labour market was noticeably similar to Tyler's, transitioning between low-skilled employment training courses and periods of unemployment:

Chris: So how has your experience been looking for work?

Martin: Terrible... I have been in and out of work... I did work in a warehouse... they said they would guarantee you 48 hours, I did 21 in a month. At this time I was living in a shared accommo private renting as well, I couldn't even afford my rent.

His employment history was almost exclusively in the construction industry as a labourer, but after losing his job and being unable to access welfare benefits due to administrative errors he was left with no income and was on the verge of becoming homeless. Despite having a strained relationship with his mother she did provide him with food most days:

... for my tea and that I were having it... at my mom's erm... for travel I just walked... I lived next to town but my mom is in... the other end of Sheffield, so I had to walk to my mom's that is a bit far that, about half an hour, an hour walk yes. So I had to walk everywhere, erm... for interviews I had to walk it, it were terrible. I hated it.

Martin was unable to find work during this period but managed to make a little money by doing favours for friends, such as cleaning, painting and gardening. His efforts to gain work were redoubled at the time of the interview due to the arrival of his baby son created an immediate need to gain viable employment.

Chris: How old is your son?

Martin: He is a month Monday just gone yes.

Chris: Has that changed the way you think about things?

Martin: Definitely yes.

Chris: In what way?

Martin: I need a job ((laughs)). Before I were just looking for like experience with work and I were going in all sorts I were doing like work experience a lot, erm... like [large coffeeshop chain] and all that lot, and then now it is like, I don't need courses right I need a job, like definitely need a job so I can support them...

Clearly, the arrival of his son acted as a clarion call to become a provider. Fathers in the Western world are increasingly 'expected to be emotionally present and involved in their children's everyday lives' (Gottzen and Kremer-Sadlik, 2012: 640), and being a 'breadwinner' is central to the construction of fatherhood (Fagan and Norman, 2016). In Bourdieu's terms, Martin saw the connection

between fatherhood and being a provider as a doxic relationship, as the necessity to provide was 'self-evident' (Bourdieu, 1977; 164). This desire to be a adopt a 'breadwinner role' is unsurprising as 'each generation of men practises fathering and masculinity in relation to historical and place-specific norms and patterns' (Brandth, 2016; 437). Also, the field of social psychology has suggested that Martin's perceptions of fatherhood may be shaped by not wanting his son to have the same experience he did (see Levant, 1992).

Thomas entered the labour market on leaving home aged 15. Initially he worked at a quarry and then a pub, before becoming a chef there. He described the pride, happiness, and security that he felt whilst working as a chef. However, a medical issue resulted in him "*having fits and blackouts*". For insurance purposes the business owner was forced to terminate Thomas' employment. When asked about his employment since then Thomas stated:

"I have had a few jobs like that, you know working in call centres and I have never lasted long, never lasted long just because it is, yes it is... just intense. I have worked in kitchens I can deal with that. kitchen work is easy because it were my passion you know I enjoyed doing what I did, I mean days were fast, I enjoyed my work and then going from that like fast paced environment to dealing with awful people on the phone, telling you to f-off and stuff, and it is quite demoralising. I don't last long ((laughs)). I am used to compliments over my food and stuff rather than people having a go at me."

The culinary world inhabits an intriguing space within the service sector. Whereas many roles require deference and politeness (see Nixon, 2009; Forey and Lockwood, 2010), being a chef necessitates the acquisition or possession of a very different type of cultural capital. This is typified by the narrative of a chef which formed the basis of an article by Burrow et al. (2015). The interviewee known as 'John Smith' explains that working in kitchens entailed a unique set of skills; 'It taught me to have respect in myself... It built up my confidence massively... It was also a very aggressive kitchen, very regimented, much like

the army.’ (Burrow et al., 2015; 678).

Qualitative research with call centre agents by Holdsworth and Cartwright (2003; 139) found that they ‘perceive themselves to be less empowered than other workers in an office environment’, explaining how ‘empowerment dimensions seem to be differential predictors of job satisfaction and may have an indirect influence on mental and physical health’. After working in call centres Thomas developed drug and alcohol dependencies, which combined with a lack of social support and being unable to access the welfare benefits system led to him to become homeless.

Robert was also successfully employed as a chef:

Chris: You were working?

Robert: I had a two-bedroomed flat, I had a job as a chef, I were on £2800 a month after tax, I couldn’t complain mate. ((laughs))

Despite this successful entry into the labour market his career was adversely affected by a relationship breakdown and subsequent mental health issues. Like many of the other participants Robert had no family or other social ‘safety net’ to support him. He returned to Sheffield and attempted to rebuild the relationship with his mother. She was not receptive, and he became homeless, further distancing him from the labour market.

Finally, Jay has less work experience than the others:

Chris: ... so you say at one point you were working, what kind of job, what kind of work?

Jay: I were doing door to door sales, we were trying to raise funds for like to get kids off streets, to give more facilities to put them into football to get them into sports... I did a prize draw a monthly prize draw on local areas, and I did that raising funds for kids.

Chris: Did you enjoy it?

Jay: Yes I really enjoyed it. I mean I were the youngest there and I got best pick up because of how polite and honest I were... I always got best bonuses and I were youngest. They used to hate me... doing the door to door sales, is the thing that has made me be able to speak to people on street... that has helped me to be able to get what I need.

Chris: So did you always have that then? Did you always have the ability to be able to talk to people?

Jay: I have always been confident-ish like yes, so it is a bonus yes.

Chris: Where do you think it came from ?

Jay: Just who I am. I think my mom and dad were like that... I were youngest, so I were always like looked after in a way, I were always one who could show off.

Jay's ability to communicate effectively with customers and charity donors demonstrates how linguistic capital (a form of cultural capital) can be used in the real world to acquire economic capital through wages (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Having what could be called 'the gift of the gab' can be beneficial to such roles as it can act to lessen 'the symbolic power relation between the two speakers' (Bourdieu, 1977; 22). However, a family argument and breaking up with his girlfriend resulted in him being unable to continue working due to homelessness, developing mental health issues and drug misuse. Jay's circumstances meant that his 'linguistic capital' was utilised in a different field to help him get by on the streets. He clearly sees his possession of linguistic capital as a point of differentiation between himself and other people with whom he interacts.

Gavin also experienced multiple barriers to entering the labour market, as explained during the first exchange of the interview:

Chris: what is your story?

Gavin: What's my story?... well I am 23 years of age... I never actually have had a job ... I haven't paid taxes ... I have applied for lots of jobs in the past, I have never really got one. I have had several interviews

in my past... I have been on the dole... at one point I was actually sanctioned and I couldn't sign on.... [I am trying to get] my life back on track and stuff I haven't actually been looking for employment as much as what I possibly should be. I should maybe try a lot harder.

Despite being raised in the care system, having a drug addiction and physical injuries caused by being homeless, he maintained that he should be making a more concerted effort to acquire employment. In that sense, Gavin had internalised a stigmatised identity consistent with the notion that he possessed 'weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty' (Goffman, 1963: 4). Furthermore, the self-blame presented in the quote above highlights the tendency to omit or ignore structural failings only to embrace the flawed discourse of individualised failings (Bourdieu, 1984)

The narratives of the seven young men presented thus far illustrate the negative consequences of not having support from family members to shield them from the challenges of precarious work. Furthermore, the lack of support appears to increase the likelihood of experiencing homelessness, poor mental health and substance misuse (Mallett et al., 2005).

Analysis of the next five young men (Anthony, Joshua, Baashir, Justin, and Steven) were in some ways similar to those presented above as they had little or no support from their families and had multiple experiences of precarious work. However, the key difference is that the next five men were in possession of financial and non-financial resources that could be drawn upon when they were outside of the precarious labour market. The level and composition of these resources vary greatly, but the utilisation of them allowed the young men to avoid homelessness and in some circumstances allowed them to acquire economic capital from alternative forms of labour, thereby circumventing the most precarious end of the labour market.

As with the previous group, they were exposed to the most precarious forms of work throughout the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle. Anthony has the highest-level qualifications of all participants in the study, initially he was unhappy at school,

but he had stayed in education to gain a first-class degree in Fine Art. After completing university, Anthony gained agency work as a hospital secretary, a role that he described as being *'boring... I am too proactive to do that, but I mean I didn't really have a choice...'*. His decision to seek *any* form of work was shaped by the stigma of having to claim benefits – recent research has elaborated on this by asserting that many graduates see feel the stigma of being a welfare recipient despite acquiring high level qualifications (see Formby, 2017). Due to issues relating to the long commute to work and the temporary nature of the job Anthony left the role and invested the small amount of savings (£500) he had into renting an Art studio which he also used as a place to sleep (contravening the 'conditions of lease'). During this time, he received financial assistance from his family (£50 per week), prior to moving into a 'squat', and eventually settling at a travellers' site in Sheffield. Whilst there Anthony (like Joshua) received significant levels of practical support from other members of the community. Although he had very little financial security, he took pride in his ability to gain his own independence:

Chris: Where do you think that [pride] came from?

Anthony: Erm... I was raised to be independent... not to struggle but don't take any crap sort of attitude. In a good way. Know where you stand... I didn't really like school it was too, getting told what to do all the time, so all I wanted to do as a kid is break out you know like teenage angst I am off, but now as an adult I am genuinely off, I am like fuck here we go ((laughs)).

Moreover, Anthony believed that gaining independence was the key to acquiring an adult identity, giving it far greater importance than simply being successful in the labour market and/or acquiring economic capital. This chimes with other research that suggests young people's identities are shaped by a range of factors, not simply their 'worker identity'. (Worth, 2009). The act of frugality could be deemed to be a practice undertaken as 'a direct product of economic necessity' (Bourdieu, 1984; 178). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1984; 227) argues that 'the virtues of sobriety, simplicity, economy of means' acquiesces with the dominant construction of bourgeoisie aesthetics. In that sense, Anthony's thrift

may be closer to compliance with high culture than an act of rebellion, or as he puts it *'teenage angst'*.

Joshua also lived at the travellers' site, but experienced a higher level of precarity in the labour market:

Joshua: in 7 years I have had 18 jobs. Now most of those contracts I have worked as hard as I can to keep them ... I tried at a lot of them and well I tried at all of them really but a few of them more recently, since living like this (at a travellers' site) I have actually had the courage to stand up and go no I am not being treated like that. I am not working to be treated like a piece of shit. I am working to earn a wage and be treated fairly. I will happily graft, and I am a hard working person, erm... I don't think I look like someone that doesn't do hard work ((laughs))

Joshua's subjectivity of work and what it means to be a male worker is typical of deeply traditional constructions of anglophile working-class masculinity which idealise 'temperance, thrift and hard-work' (Denning, 1988, 170). More recently, many authors have highlighted the intractability of the idealised working-class masculine worker as one who achieves 'self-reliance' through 'graft' (see Laoire, 2005).

In addition to the constant 'churn' within the labour market Joshua also described an instance of dangerous work at a factory:

... the unsafe working standards at that factory were phenomenal but no one could do anything about it or dared do anything about it because they were too much at risk of losing their job... they had a machine that was running on high oil temperature, it was alarming-out for it while I was working on it, I had the luxury of seeing how they fixed that. They came over with a rag, stuck it over the alarm with gaffer tape so you couldn't hear it and carried on running it.

After being involved in a serious road traffic collision Joshua was signed off work for six weeks. He then returned to work at a roofing company but was sacked because *'(they said) I had an attitude problem because I refused to lift 25 kg sacks of plastic on my shoulder and carry it up a stepladder...'*. Joshua's insistence that he would not risk further injury goes against recent research that suggests many men in the construction industry 'create the need to demonstrate stoicism in the face of ill or poor health' to allow them to achieve the masculine ideals of eternal physical strength and muscular durability whilst keeping employment (Hanna et al., 2020; 637). Also, low-paid and precarious workers are often reluctant 'to refuse work that was known to be dangerous' for the fear of losing income (Huws et al., 2017; 10).

Joshua's narrative also provides another tactic employed to avoid extreme precarity during periods of unemployment within the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle, that of finding alternative social support. For him it was the community spirit within the traveller community that he had been invited to join:

I knew a fair amount of people who came up and then started to get to know more people ... I have got a caravan now... it is a really kind community really like. If I have got like money issues, sometimes I could like ask to borrow a bit of money and then like vice versa my mates have borrowed money off me'.

The micro-economy at the site provided a large amount of support to all members. Joshua believed that the community was his only route out of extreme precarity as without its support he stated that he would *'probably be fucking on my own in some building somewhere ((laughs)) like... or bumming around the streets'*. Furthermore, membership of the community imbued rights and responsibilities that members must adhere to (see Chapters 6 and 7 for further details). Moreover, instead of working-class solidarity being 'eroded by social atomization and negative individualism' (Wacquant, 2018a; 21), the travellers' site became a microcosm of solidarity and resistance against the formal economy

where skills and services could be traded for essential goods. For Bourdieu (1998b; 57), a reciprocal economy of this kind creates the conditions for 'non-professionals to equip themselves with specific weapons of resistance'. Membership of the traveller community enabled Joshua to circumvent the precarity he experienced within the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle.

For Baashir, his experience of the labour market was short-lived but equally as precarious:

Chris: Have you ever had a normal 9 – 5 job?

Baashir: I have had a job before.

Chris: What was it, how did it go? Did you enjoy it or?

Baashir: Yes it was just a call centre.

Chris: Did you enjoy it?

Baashir: I enjoyed it, but the only thing wrong with that is that the, the length of the job it weren't a permanent job... After 6 months it was done. So after that we were looking for a job again. You know what I mean. As a young person you don't want to be doing that, looking for jobs here and there, you just want a job and you just want to be focussed.

Baashir had no issue with performing what other researchers describe as 'recurring displays of seemingly authentic emotional labour' in a call centre (Brannan, 2005; 421), but was unhappy with the lack of security offered to his labour. Instead of persevering with call centre work like many of his peers he decided to pursue a criminal career selling drugs. His negative views on the labour market were further compounded once he learned the amount of money being earned by employment agencies as a result of his labour:

Baashir: And you know what hurts you the most? When they tell you how much the agency is getting paid for you, and then they tell you how much they pay you out of that same payment it is like £10 is getting cut out for your work. You think wow... There is like a big £10

difference and all them tenners count. You know what I mean? So people think of the, drug action with quick money, fast money.

Chris: Your own hours...

Baashir: No tax. Your own hours. Know what I mean. Choose who you sell it to, choose who you don't want to sell it to. You are the boss - just the feeling of saying I am the boss, of my business you know what I mean.

Chris: Do you feel like you are an entrepreneur?

Baashir: I do. I do think of that because, what is an entrepreneur? Something what you make yourself isn't it, something you start yourself.

This experience of exploitation as a call centre worker could be seen as a form of 'symbolic violence' as for a period Baashir was a social agent who accepted, or as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue became 'complicit' in the violence. In this sense, Baashir eventually resisted 'symbolic violence' by making an active decision to turn his back on the formal labour market. His decision to sell drugs was not out of economic necessity, but out of the deep-held desire to resist exploitation by reclaiming his autonomy. However, resistance requires resources. Here the concept of 'street capital' (Sandberg and Pedersen, 2011) can be used to encapsulate the resources required to achieve mastery in the field of drug dealing. The acquisition of 'street capital results from having little to lose in mainstream society and is a form of power that the structurally oppressed can use' and in certain circumstances can be converted into economic capital (Sandberg and Pedersen, 2011; 35). This is a form of cultural capital which accrued through 'many years of crime' and confers 'respect, power and status in the social context' of a locality (Sandberg and Pedersen, 2011; 21). However, whilst 'street capital' is perfectly attuned to matters of criminality, its ability to be converted into economic capital in different arenas is often limited.

Justin had comparable experiences in call centres to Baashir, but over a longer period. After becoming exasperated by insecure employment Justin also started to sell drugs to acquire greater autonomy:

Chris: Ok are you able to just talk me through what you have been up to since you left school?

Justin: Ok, yes well since I left school I started an apprenticeship erm... at a contact centre. That didn't last very long, because the company went into voluntary liquidation, so erm... so that left me in a bad place round about Christmas time a couple of years ago... I was going from call centre, to call centre, not really knowing what I was going to do in the long term just stuck with the fact that I needed a job, I needed money, didn't really have opportunity to look any further into it... it was just call centre, to call centre, to call centre because of how my CV is...

When discussing the possibility for returning to that form of employment whilst he was unemployed and not claiming benefits, Justin stated:

Justin: I was getting depressed really because I knew it wasn't what I want to do and it was just people talking to you like, really bad on the phone or like if it is a sales like, outbound sales, telesales like the PPI callers and things like that, that like doing that well 9 hours a day that's just, just horrible.

Chris: In that time did you ever get tempted to I don't know do something which was illegal to get yourself a bit of money?

Justin: I was selling weed for a little bit. Started selling, selling hash yes. So, erm... just little bits here and there to my mates, not really a lot but.

Like Baashir, Justin also described pride at being autonomous over his own labour:

Chris: ... did you feel a lot happier selling weed than you were going to the job centre?

Justin: Yes. I mean, I knew what I was doing, I was in control of my own money... because there is weed that people buy from dealers that is like really bad, it is sprayed with loads of shit... I knew mine... wasn't shit and like people really appreciated it. Erm... I actually had a few mates who were erm... dependent on opioids... I have been there myself and weed helped me get through that so, like I was helping them through that so it, yes I mean it felt good to help, not just help myself but help friends get out of a situation that was really bringing them down.

In other words, Justin also took immense pride in his ability to seemingly provide (what he perceived to be) 'therapeutic' support to his friends through providing alternatives to opioids. As such, for Justin selling drugs initially occurred because of becoming despondent regarding his prospects within the formal labour market, but then developed into a way to utilise his cultural capital resources to acquire economic capital. Inadvertently, selling drugs and the 'therapeutic' support provided to his friends sparked a desire to pursue a career as a vegan chef. This is somewhat against the grain for working-class men as veganism is 'highly classed' and is most associated with middle-class cultures of masculinity (Mycek, 2018; 235). This suggests that Justin possesses a different form of cultural capital to Baashir as the motivations are in stark contrast to one another. For Justin, his embodied cultural capital is aligned with superior knowledge of cannabis cultivation as his weed '*wasn't full of any sort of GMO pesticides stuff like that*'. This is differentiated with Baashir's 'drug dealing' that was centred around 'street capital'.

Like Justin, Steven also enrolled on an apprenticeship that failed to produce any significant results:

Steven: I got an apprenticeship erm... I did my level II Business and Admin, got that done, but... they only wanted me as an apprentice they don't want to take me on. Just wanted the free labour.

Chris: How long were you there for as an apprentice?

Steven: 8 months.

Chris: So you were there for 8 months so at the end they said essentially...

Steven: I were there for 8 month but then, from there I got put onto a level III Business and Admin, and that fell through, my mental health went downhill from there. I ended up leaving that job.

Unlike in the past, this shows that apprenticeships are no longer a guaranteed path to dignified work due to their systematic devaluation. The main barrier to securing employment for Steven was having ADHD. Fletcher and Wolfe (2009) suggest that individuals diagnosed with ADHD are at greater risk of unemployment and more likely to live in poverty and be involved in crime. Despite having embodied cultural capital by possessing the 'gift of the gab', Steven was unable to transfer this capital into its credentialised form to secure work as he did not have GCSE English and Maths at grade 'C' or above.

Chris: has anyone given you like any advice on how to apply for work?

Steven: I have always been good like that, I have always been good. I am quite eloquent with how I put myself across. Good at articulating myself. So when it comes to knowing what an employer is looking for I know, there is these like hidden traits that yes, they are kind of unspoken but I know what they are looking for.

Chris: What kind of things, you say unspoken, but what kind of things do you mean?

Steven: Nobody wants to work with somebody boring do they first off. So having a bit of a personality, a bit of charisma about you is always good. The fact that I am quite wordy as well, always gives me a bit more of a boost towards intelligence. **Chris: So yes, you were sofa surfing?**

Steven: Yes, yes, like doing odd jobs for people's parents and stuff you know if I were there for a couple of days, and like got any grass

needed cutting or they wanted house cleaning I would say I'll do that because I have just been there. So little things like that.

As noted in the previous chapter, Steven enjoyed self-learning and reading but struggled with the school environment as it was too restrictive for him. The key challenge for Steven in his years since leaving school was not having a clear plan:

'I am kind of like 5 different people at once. So, keeping focus on a career path, that were always sort of like one day I wanted to be in army, another day I wanted to be a civil engineer, and another day I wanted to do this, that and the other.

Simultaneously he was also at risk of homelessness after a fall-out with his mother, causing him stress and anxiety. At this time, he also lost access to benefits due to an 'admin error'. Despite significant challenges he was able to employ a range of strategies then enabled him to avoid extreme precarity and eventually recommence the search for work. By being 'well connected' with a large circle of friends he was able to translate his social capital into economic capital by procuring drugs that he could sell at a profit:

Chris: when you weren't working or claiming benefits, erm... how did you get by?

Steven: Selling weed. Selling other things as well, sometimes.

Chris: Do you mean other drugs?

Steven: Yes, yes. Yes. Just trying to do that, get by, I think I started selling weed originally when I were working, sold weed on the side, some stashed so I could smoke for free sort of thing but then I realised you know I ain't got work, if I buy more and I actively try and sell it I could probably make some more money.

Chris: So did you make a decent amount of money ...

Steven: Liveable, it weren't decent. It is not anything you could ever sustain yourself on.

Whereas Baashir and Justin spoke of selling drugs with a deeper philosophy (acquiring autonomy and ‘therapeutics’, respectively), Steven’s relationship with selling drugs was simply a transactional process borne out of necessity.

Moving on, Sadio was one of the more successful participants in the field of academia (see Chapter 5), being awarded a place studying Information Communications Technology at a university in Yorkshire. However, during the first few weeks of the course his father became ill, and he was then forced to quit his course to find work to support his family financially for six months whilst his father recovered. His experiences of the labour market were typical of the ‘worsening work conditions’ seen by many young workers since the GFC (Alberti et al., 2018; 452). After questioning his line manager over the safety conditions in the factory he was dismissed immediately and received a letter shortly afterwards:

Sadio: ‘... on the letter they said things that I didn’t even mention... when I had the meeting with the manager. Which pissed me off as well... the letter says that I swore to the manager... I never did. then 2 weeks later they sent me another letter, that said to me... we have still got work for you if you still want to come to work just ring us back. I said there is no way I am ringing you and so I chucked that letter to the bin.’

He gained employment at another factory in Sheffield but left due to racism and poor working conditions: *“the job wasn’t good either because the people who were there, they weren’t good people. They were racist...”*. The intersection of ethnicity and social class merged to form ‘additional, hybrid forms of oppression’ (Cooper, 2005; 853). Despite legislation being implemented to protect the rights of minorities, ‘racism and racial inequality have proven themselves to be historically resilient features of the British labour market’ (Ashe and Nazroo, 2017;4). The impacts of racism have been shown to shape long-term labour market experiences by creating ‘feelings of humiliation, ridicule, belittlement and worthlessness to a loss of confidence’ (Ashe and Nazroo, 2017; 19). In addition

to racism Sadio was also given inconsistent working hours with little or no notice. Moreover, the factory tried to pay Sadio for fewer hours than he had completed. After raising his concerns with his manager Sadio was effectively sacked as he was given no additional shifts. He spent the next three months trying to find work whilst not claiming welfare benefits. After his father's health returned the family's financial situation improved slightly, enabling his father to support Sadio throughout most of 2017.

6.2.1 Summary

The narratives of the participants who had been exposed to the precarious labour market clearly demonstrate three interconnected themes. Firstly, the contemporary labour market is so precarious that for certain young men even maintaining a position within the 'low-pay, no-pay cycle' requires a combination of resources. Despite being symptomatic of social disadvantage, even the 'dynamic process of churning between poor work and unemployment' may be difficult to maintain (Shildrick et al., 2010; 28). Respondents' employment and unemployment biographies also show that for some participants unemployment can afford opportunities for autonomy and securing respect that can be more meaningful than work. This is an unexpected finding as recent research by Chandola and Zhang (2018) asserts that the mental health impacts of unemployment are equal to the negative outcomes of poor or precarious employment. The findings thus far in this chapter go one step further and reaffirm research findings from the 1980s that work can contribute to the deterioration of mental health. Also, it suggests that unemployment can be beneficial when individuals are able to reclaim autonomy and engage in meaningful activities outside of the formal labour market (see Chapter 8).

Some men seek to navigate a highly precarious labour market by entering the informal or illegal labour market or engaging with alternative economies or ways of life. The description of resources available to 'drug dealers' is a divergence from traditional studies that focus on what this does not have (i.e., formal employment) (Sandberg and Pederson (2011). Those unable to command the

resources to do so seem more prone to homelessness, addiction and severe mental health problems. For example, the young men who dealt drugs were able to step away from the labour market due to the presence of cultural capital (specifically, 'street capital') or the social and cultural capital which can grant access to communities such as the 'travellers' site'. Exposure to poor quality work and 'the social costs of economic violence' without alternative sources of support or options can sometimes lead to a downward spiral (Bourdieu, 1998a; 129).

6.3 Insulated workers

This second group of young men share similar experiences to the preceding group, with encounters with the labour market marked by precarious and informal work which offered little in the way of security or progression. The most prominent difference is the presence of support from their families or partners who were able to insulate them from precarious work and the hardships caused by unemployment. Put simply, there were sources of economic capital available to them which meant that paid work was not an imperative for survival, and they could choose to not work. That said, work was central for many of them, and they desired to earn a living despite the insulation provided by others. This desire to work also resulted in mental health difficulties for some.

This section is considerably shorter than the previous one as there is a high level of homogeneity, thus there are fewer complex matters to analyse and discuss. Five of the nine young men in this group are British-Pakistani, live in the same area of Sheffield and were recruited through similar organisations. For this reason, the British-Pakistani men form a discrete group as their reasons and explanations for their relationship with the labour market were largely homogenous. Following, the last four young men in this group are analysed separately.

Table 6.2 – Insulated Workers

Name	Age	Employment History	Reason for being unemployed	Housing	Source of income
Caleb	18	Worked with father on a small number of occasions (window cleaning)	No work available.	With family	Family
Daniel	19	Never Worked	Searching for apprenticeships	With family	Family
Faizan	23	Weddings.	Work was only seasonal	With family	Family and informal work
Hamid	18	Weddings and restaurants,	Work was only seasonal	With family	Family and informal work
Jason	24	Engineering Apprenticeship, Supermarket and Call Centre	Mental Health issues caused him to leave work at call centre	With Fiancée	Fiancée
Mark	25	Volunteered	With Family (was previously in care).	With family (was previously in Care)	Family
Nathan	22	Tradesman and retail.	Was no longer required by company after initial Apprenticeship period. Retail work was only seasonal.	With parents.	
Sami	18	Never Worked	Was not seeking work	With parents.	Drug dealing
Umar	19	Volunteering at community projects. Weddings.	Seasonal work.	With family	Family and informal work
Wahab	19	One year of A-levels before leaving. Restaurants.	Downturn in business at the restaurant.	With family	Family and informal work
Zerdad	18	One year of A-levels before leaving. Volunteered at sports clubs. Weddings.	Seasonal work.	With family	Family and informal work

The employment biographies of all five young men were very similar in many aspects. All had engaged exclusively in the informal sector of the labour market for low wages (commonly around £5 per hour). This form of work was easy to obtain, commonly secured through friends or family members. The most common form of this work was serving at wedding receptions, which was particularly seasonal:

Chris: So are you doing any other informal work on the side like with like friends or family or anything?

Faizan: Help with a friend at weddings, like so when someone's wedding just go like serving, I help him out on weddings. And he gives me £25 a day.

Chris: So what kind of work was that, was it serving?

Zerdad: Serving stuff like that yes. Communicate with people, customer service basically.

Chris: Did you enjoy that or?

Zerdad: Yes it was good.

Chris: How much money were you earning when you were doing that kind of work?

Zerdad: Five pound an hour.

Chris: How often were you working?

Zerdad: In summer it is busy, by winter it gets dead.

Like Zerdad, Umar also worked informally at community events, most recently at the annual Eid festival near to where he lived:

Umar: We had a little like a little festival for like families and stuff, and I was helping out on that, and last month, last month this month just gone we had a festival... you know the Eid festival what happened on the second of July? I was helping... got involved with that and I helped out packing away, setting it up and stuff, like that [is the] kind of work I am looking for.

In addition to the work available at weddings and other community events Hamid and Umar also did paid favours for family friends. For Hamid this involved stacking shelves at a small local shop. Similarly, Umar frequently did the shopping for an elderly

neighbour and was paid around £5 to £10 per trip. The other main source of employment was restaurant work. This appeared to be the only form of work that was not undertaken for a family friend, but instead was more formalised (despite not being given a contract of employment).

Chris: What kind of work were you doing then?

Hamid: It was restaurant work. I worked at one in [area of Sheffield] and one nearer closer in town [Restaurant name], I don't know if you heard of it.

Chris: No...

Hamid: It was quite near really I was doing the same job, started off cleaning stuff and then from there just do waitering.

Chris: Did you enjoy it?

Hamid: At first yes but then after a while, long hours, hard work, not the best of pay. Gave me that ambition to go out and get something more... the thing is with restaurants the longer you work there the more respect you get, and the rest, the lower class they just get, you know they just get flung about, you know what I mean... either you take it on the chin, or you argue and get sacked basically that's it.

Wahab's experiences in restaurants were similar to Hamid's.

Chris: So when you were working at [restaurant name] was that like on a contract or were you just doing...

Wahab: Just whenever, whenever they called me in but permanently, I was there for weekends, it was a part time job.

Chris: Ok, but you never signed a contract or anything?

Wahab: No, no contract.

This type of work involved 'contact with customers and are often dependent on characteristics attributed to femininity such as deference and a pleasing manner' (McDowell, 2020; 975). Seemingly, participants involved appeared to have no issues with this type of work, with some enjoying the face-to-face contact with customers. The performance of service sector work amongst young men in South-Asian communities

should be reviewed and analysed in the cultural context in which they are found as the habitus 'produces history on the basis of history and so ensures that permanence within change that makes the individual agent a world within the world' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 56), hence the perceptions and practices of service sector work differ across cultures. Williams and Gurtoo (2012) and Ray (2018) shed light on this by highlighting how men (of all ages) in the street vending, food service and other interlinked industries perform an invaluable and respected function in the urban landscapes of South Asia. Hence, is customer facing roles may not be a denigrated form of work in South Asia cultures, and could be compatible with traditional forms of masculinity.

As the performance of masculinity is geographically bounded and socially constructed (Connell, 2005), its construction can be aligned with the required deference in certain social and geographic setting depending upon the cultural 'norms' associated with masculinity. That is not to say that the experience of this work was wholly positive as low pay and poor working conditions were detailed, but these issues stemmed from the working terms provided by their employers as opposed to the type of work on offer.

None of the five participants claimed that they were reliant upon the money for any specific purpose. Instead, they stated that the additional money earned through informal work was merely a way to supplement their hobbies, such as playing football or going to the gym. If money was not earned through work, then small amounts could be obtained from parents. Moreover, informal work was simply seen as 'pocket money' to spend on enjoying themselves, rather than a being a significant source that they would be reliant upon, as their families provided housing, food and small amount of money. In that sense, they were exposed to precarious work but not dependent upon it out of economic necessity.

That said, these participants did express concerns for their future and recognised that this period of freedom was fleeting, suggesting that transitions into the labour market amongst young British-Asian men may be delayed, but may not provide long term insulation from the precarity of the labour market. Analytically, this suggests an alternative to the fast/slow track dichotomy as family support provides a different track (MacDonald, 2011). There was also an underlying cultural valorisation of hard work that they felt the need to adhere to in the future. This was best articulated by Wahab:

Wahab: ... my dad has always told us that, when we were born he didn't have a penny in his pocket and he doesn't want us to go through that, that is why he pushes us to get somewhere in life, or find a job and make something out of your life, do something what you like. And that is what I have just got in my head.

Chris: Are they supportive of your situation?

Wahab: I did, I did let him down once when I left college. I passed my first year and he was proper happy and then second and third year I just started messing about, but now I just want to turn it around and make him happy again and take this personal training course further.

Chris: Was your father one of the things which turned everything around?

Wahab: I have lived it, it is not good for the few, for a few days you will be living the high life, selling drugs but then it just goes down the drain, it goes down for you. When you are in these higher paid jobs and that you will be loving it, and you will be having your dream cars that you wanted, you will have a nice house, get somewhere in life. Do something with your life. And that is, he just advises us of that.

This statement from Wahab is synonymous with what Ali and Al-Owaihnan (2008; 14) call the 'Islamic work ethic' which 'highlights that work is an obligatory activity and a virtue in light of the needs of human being and the necessity to establish equilibrium in one's individual and social life... (It) enables a person to be independent and is a source of self-respect, satisfaction and fulfilment'. Compared to others these five respondents may be said to be fortunate to be shielded from precarity, but equally such fortune may well be merely fleeting. They clearly feel pressure to be successful due to the cultural and familial valorisation of hard work and the need to acquire economic capital of their own, for example once they are married and wish to start a family. Their horizons also appeared to be limited as work was exclusively centred around their community. In a larger study McDowell et al. (2014) showed how some South-Asian communities exhibit a comparative form of 'privatism' to white working-class communities (see Goldthorpe et al., 1968). This 'privatism' is described as a form of 'communal regulation' that limits interactions with those from different racialised areas (McDowell et al., 2014; 855). It could be theorised as an element of the collective

habitus as it forms an ‘unconscious unity’ (Bourdieu, 1984; 77). It provides security and imparts good mental health but also limits opportunities to forge one’s own path and branch-out from one’s immediate social networks. Thus, the formation of ‘privatism’ is a ‘forced choice, produced by conditions of existence which rule out all alternatives as mere daydreams’ (Bourdieu, 1984; 178).

The four other ‘insulated’ young men had similarly experienced the ‘churn’ of un/employment but had been able to step away from the labour market due to economic support from others. This support was essential to their wellbeing as experiences of work were overwhelmingly negative and had an impact upon their mental health. Having access to financial support allowed them to take ‘time out’ from work and job search to recover from the negative impacts of poor work. This reflects research on the sociology of unemployment in the 1980s where it was observed that ‘wellbeing may improve on becoming unemployed’ (Ezzy, 1993; 41).

After college Jason moved to Sheffield with his partner (now fiancée) when she attended University in the city. At this point Jason found a job at a major supermarket but left as he was unable to progress beyond entry-level positions. The issue of in-work progression has been highlighted since the GFC, as Green (2017; 46) ascertained that ‘paid individuals in institutions and sectors with little chance of wage progression, find employment difficult to sustain, and therefore return to unemployment’. The lack of in-work progression amongst young workers has become commonplace in the UK labour market, and its impacts have been shown to be detrimental to mental health, motivation and general wellbeing (see Thompson, 2017; Tinson, 2020). Jason describes how being passed over for promotion left him feeling dejected:

Jason: ‘I got a position at [supermarket] for 2 years, erm... where I did everything pretty much across their front of house, I knew it like the back of my hand... I left there because... I wanted to be moved up to section leader, but they weren’t offering it to anybody. They just kept bringing people and it wasn’t working for me... Only [job] I felt secure in was [large supermarket]... I left that out of my own spite...’

After leaving the supermarket Jason worked at a call centre, which was also overwhelmingly negative: *"I am not going to lie... that is where my mental health issues started to stem up from big style. Erm... depression, anxiety, hearing voices all sorts of things like that. Erm... and that is where I started to seek counselling, went to the doctors and got tablets and all sorts of things like that"*. Jason subsequently dropped out of the labour market due to mental health issues that he specifically traces back to his employment at the call centre: *"I left [call centre] after I realised that my mental health wasn't going to get any better while I was there... having customers screaming in your ear all day and stuff like that, just doesn't help. So it has been 6 months since I have been unemployed but I have been obviously actively looking for work for about 3 now"*. The financial support from his fiancée eliminated the immediate necessity to 'work through' his mental health issues:

Chris: Is she is the one who is bringing in the money at the moment?

Jason: Yes

And that is no problem?

Jason: No, she is raking in a grand and half a month through nursing, so we are fine for bills everything like that the only reason now for me to get a job is just to have some play money really. So, that is it really but no we are completely fine on that aspect of everything.

After being out of work for six months Jason's mental health was slowly improving as his panic attacks became less frequent. This clearly shows that the simplistic dichotomy of work being 'good' and unemployment 'bad' overlooks the complexities ensuing from poor quality work. Furthermore, unemployment can be a positive condition, but only if emotional and financial support are present.

Nathan lived at home with his family, but despite receiving support he still experienced extremely negative impacts on his mental health due to the search for, and experience of work as he only gained seasonal work around Christmas. Despite setbacks he had an overwhelming desire to acquire paid work:

Chris: You have got a lot there haven't you? (referring to his portfolio of qualifications and references)

Nathan: I have got an old copy... Then a bit quiet again, applied for jobs but I didn't really get anywhere. I think it was due to the fact that I probably didn't have any experience in that particular job that I was applying for and erm... probably quite a lot of people applied for the job as well actually. Erm... then went to the next Prince's Trust course which was November 14 – 25 basically that get into hospitality... that was a waste of time basically. Only about 2 jobs, 2 apprenticeships going and that was a waste of time... then keep applying for jobs though, but didn't get anywhere.

The negative mental impact of the sudden cessation of educational and employment progression (detailed in the quote below) is not surprising as the 'severing of the commitments and attachments to the future which, like death, casts the anticipations of interrupted practice into the absurdity of the unfinished'. (Bourdieu, 1990b: 82). Nathan appeared to be experiencing anxiety in relation to his lack of success in his job search. This was further exacerbated by social isolation as his only contact with the outside world was visiting the library each day to use the internet to apply for jobs online:

Chris: ... how are you looking for work? are you doing it online or...?

Nathan: Well at the moment I have got no internet at home so, basically, I have to come up to the library every morning for 2 hours, to look for jobs basically... I have been applying for jobs [but] there is that many jobs I applied for and then they don't bother answering back or say unsuccessful, they don't say why...

Nathan's experience of unemployment aligned with the traditional views on unemployment from the 1980s where it was believed that 'people with a stronger personal commitment to having a job are likely to experience worse mental health during unemployment' (Warr et al., 1988; 64). This is somewhat 'against the grain' as many of the other participants found succour by being unemployed. The overriding themes of the interview with Nathan were the stigma he felt due to being unemployed and his lack of social contact. These factors may actually be intertwined: Goffman (1963) argues, individuals often insulate themselves from stigmatisation by practising social isolation. Here the socio-spatial environment also acts as a point of reference.

Hence, living in a small town in the edge of Sheffield characterised by low unemployment may have exacerbated Nathan's feelings of alienation.

Mark was 24 at the time of the interview and had no experience of paid employment. The key barrier that he faced was Asperger's Syndrome and its effect on his ability to be in the right place at the right time:

Chris: Does Asperger's hold you back at all?

Mark: Sometimes, like if I don't know the place then I won't turn up to a meeting... Like the job centre, I never used to turn up for the job centres, but now I do.

Grandin and Duffy (2008) highlight how issues linked to time management can act as a significant barrier for talented young people with Asperger's Syndrome to fully participate in the labour market. Mark started claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) shortly before the interview took place, after a long period when he was not claiming any welfare benefits at all. He was supported financially by his mother and was not actively looking for work. However, he frequently volunteered in the community, specifically supporting homeless people:

Chris: What kind of stuff have you, when you say you have not been paid, what so obviously...

Mark: Voluntary.

Chris: What kind of places were you volunteering at?

Mark: Erm... helping the homeless, cook for the old 'uns, coffee morning, and that's about it.

Chris: So what was it about volunteering that made you want to do it?

Mark: All my other family members volunteered back in Grimsby, so I went back to Sheffield and volunteered.

Unlike other participants Mark did not expect volunteering to result in a future offer of employment or an enhancement to his CV. Instead, Mark explained that he volunteered because he wished to help others. In the view of Dean (2020; 6), this shows that Mark's volunteering was not undertaken to 'bask in the sociological good

glow from others' but was done to acquire a quiet 'psychological warm glow... from doing something nice'. Thus, his volunteering was an act of pure good and not an action from which symbolic power was sought.

The final three participants to be analysed in this chapter are Daniel, Sami and Caleb (aged 19, 18 and 18, respectively). As noted earlier in this section, the fact that they have little or no experience of paid work should be unsurprising due to their young age. That said, their distance from the labour market can provide insights into the matters of credentialization and the potential labour market impacts of possessing a criminal record. That said, Daniel's circumstances clearly show the importance of receiving support from the immediate family. The three other 'untouched' participants are Daniel, Sami and Caleb (aged 19, 18 and 18, respectively). They have little or no experience of paid work, but this should probably be unsurprising given their young age. That said, their distance from the labour market provides insights into the issue of credentialization and the potential impact of possessing a criminal record. At the same time, Daniel's circumstances clearly show the importance of receiving support from the immediate family. At the time of interview he was searching for apprenticeships related to sport, or alternatively warehouse employment. However, he had not received responses to his applications. In his view this was as a result of his low GCSE grades, so he was focused on improving his grades before seeking to pursue his ambition of an apprenticeship in Sports Coaching. However, 'navigating the transition from education to work or career transitions in the contemporary labour market... is dependent on the possession of higher-level credentials' (Fuller et al., 2011; 141). This is a significant divergence from the 'golden-age' of the 1950s and 1960s where apprenticeships were the most common and (arguably) the simplest transitions for young male school leavers (see Furlong, 2009) (also, see Chapter 2). The outcome of unsuccessful job search activities was a palpable feeling of hopelessness when discussing his future, with no sense that this will improve significantly in the future.

The biographies of Caleb and Sami were remarkably similar in many respects as both did not complete their GCSEs due to being sentenced to a youth offenders institute during their final years of school for committing violent crimes. This meant that they had little or no experience of paid employment. After his release Sami started selling

small amounts of drugs to supplement the money provided by his family. Conversely, after being released Caleb vowed that he would not become involved in crime again. Both young men struggled when asked what they wanted to do in the future, mainly because they were acutely aware of the difficulties of finding work with no qualifications. After returning from the youth offenders centre both young men received small amounts of money from their families to enable them to take part in sports activities with friends. At the time neither was involved in any labour market-related activity. Looking further ahead, the double bind of possessing no qualifications and having a criminal record poses questions regarding their future employment trajectories.

6.3.1 Summary

This section highlights the importance of having access to a small amount of social and economic capital which can in some circumstances ward off or recover from the spectre of poor mental health caused by poor work. However, this is not universal as Nathan shows that a strong desire to work in conjunction with a lack of success in the labour market can lead to poor mental health.

As noted, the young British-Pakistani men formed a discrete grouping within this section. They found informal (if often insecure) low paid work relatively easy to come by. Intriguingly, this work was in the food and leisure sectors which required high levels of deference, but this form of work was accepted and often relished. This section posits the notion that the experiences of this work are the spatially, relationally, and historically constructed nature of notions of masculinity. Whilst this work was a valuable source of 'pocket money' it does pose questions over their long-term prospects in the labour market and the potentially detrimental impacts of 'privatism'.

For the second discrete group a small amount of economic capital acquired through their limited social and familial networks provided enough support to ensure that they did not experience the same levels of precarity as the 'exposed' group. A curious finding from the wider 'insulated' group pertains to a seemingly normalised experience of unemployment. The relational interactions between unemployed individuals with the potential to be stigmatised and the 'normals' with steady work has broken down as precarious work and unemployment is so ubiquitous as to become normalised,

especially when the work does not offer dignity or financial independence. Furthermore, 'hidden NEETHood' can be understood better in the context of a precarious labour market as a way of insulating themselves from the potentially harmful effects of poor work.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that disengagement from the labour market is driven by negative experiences of poor work. Also, it highlights how individuals can disengage from work to 'recuperate' from the negative experiences of poor-quality work. However, the ability to disengage and 'recuperate' is largely shaped by the availability of social and cultural capital that can be wielded to acquire economic capital. In that sense, disengagement from the labour market should be viewed in the context of wellbeing.

In a broader sense, the lived experiences of the labour market highlight the heterogeneity across the study participants. Some were able to live relatively comfortable lives due to the availability to familial support, whereas on the other extreme the chapter has presented the lived experiences of extreme precarity, homelessness, drug addiction and poor mental health which inhibit the acquisition of employment.

Despite the heterogeneity, certain themes emerge from the data. The first of which pertains to the poor quality of work at the lower end of the labour market characterised by low pay, little opportunity for progression (including from volunteering) and the often-inescapable spectre of poor mental health. Furthermore, for those with the most experience of work there was no sense that their situations would improve in the future as they resigned themselves 'to a world with no way out, dominated by poverty and the law of the jungle' (Bourdieu, 1991; 96). This encapsulates the increasingly normalised pattern of precarity as poor labour market outcomes of young people in previous decades were perceived by young people to be merely transitory glitches. Today, it appears that school-to-work transitions for many young working-class men are marked by insecurity, precarity and anxiety with no expectation of more fulfilling work.

Despite the largely negative experiences of formal work, many young men in the study showed admirable perseverance against the headwinds of uncertainty, low-pay and negative experiences of work. However, Bourdieu (1991; 96) may have argued that this perseverance was simply 'just one of the ways of making a virtue of necessity'. A further finding is that the participants did not struggle to acquire paid work. Instead, the key issue was their ability to find suitable, sustainable and fulfilling work.

When the proverbial 'camel's back' was broken by the compounding of negative experiences of work the participants' support networks (or lack thereof) came into focus. The lived reality of unemployment was determined by the availability of social, cultural and economic capital. The participants with access to any of these resources (or a combination thereof) largely experienced unemployment positively as it provided temporary respite from the seemingly relentless onslaught on their mental health. For those without these resources the common outcome was a slide which for some resulted in homelessness, and thus, further barriers to employment.

Finally, the data presented in this chapter shows that masculinity was both a gift and a curse in relation to the labour market. It was a gift in the sense that it enabled some of the participants to utilise the specific resources aligned to 'street capital' to acquire an income from criminality. However, more often, the experience of working in the service sector appeared to contribute to many experiencing unemployment as they sought alternative forms of work.

Chapter Seven – Material wellbeing beyond the welfare benefits system: ‘Supported, ‘Deprived’ and ‘Self-Sufficient’

7.1 Introduction

This chapter builds upon the examination of participants’ experiences of the labour market by analysing the reasons why they did not claim welfare benefits when NEET. In doing so, the chapter focuses on how individuals perceive, experience, navigate and respond to the welfare benefits system. The chapter explores the ways they use, access, receive, convert or develop different forms of capital, particularly in terms of managing or mitigating their disengagement from welfare. It explains the fundamental question of why and how ‘hidden NEETs’ do not access welfare beyond being sanctioned.

By taking this approach the chapter provides significant contributions to knowledge by expanding upon contemporary studies on the welfare benefits system that largely focuses on the narratives of individuals who already claim. As argued in Chapter 2, ‘hidden NEETHood’ is a phenomenon that can be seen, in part, as shaped by many years of socio-political statecraft. Welfare policies affecting young people since the early 1970s have gradually led to entitlement benefits becoming increasingly punitive, less generous, and more restricted. This reflects the growing tendency to frame approaches to welfare over the last 50 years around the ‘MUD’ (moral underclass) discourse narrative to achieve greater levels of labour market participation. Successive governments have sought to ‘provide incentives to encourage more people to enter the paid labour market, while simultaneously offering fairness to the tax-payer’ (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; 28). The long-term aim of such policies was to remould ‘the welfare welfare benefits system into a lever for changing behaviour’ (Rodger, 2008; 87), through ‘coercive support’ mechanisms’ (Dwyer, 2016; 156).

Policies to ‘disincentivise’ engagement with the welfare benefits system reached their apex in 2012 with the implementation of the Welfare Reform Act (see Chapter 2 for more detail). This was based on an underlying view that reducing welfare entitlements would encourage benefit recipients ‘to choose work over welfare by avoiding the stick

of sanctions and through the carrot that work pays more than benefits' (Tomlinson and Kelly 2013; 152). Evoking the spirit of the 'New Right' (see Murray, 1984; Mead, 1989) these policy instruments were supplemented by a 'political and media propaganda campaign which sought to manufacture public consent for austerity by stigmatising those in receipt of relief' (Tyler, 2020; 5). The prevailing narrative stigmatised welfare recipients as irresponsible citizens who evade work, in stark difference to their employed peers who were framed as contributors to society (Marsden and Duff, 1975; Garthwaite, 2011; Patrick, 2012; Jensen, 2014; Edmiston, 2018).

This approach resulted in welfare recipients being squeezed on one side by 'oppressive policy design' (Wright, 2016; 250), and by a 'vigorous and relentless assault upon human dignity' from the other (Tyler, 2020;7). Previous research has established that the contemporary welfare benefits system reforms are linked to negative outcomes including (but not limited to) greater use of foodbanks and food insecurity (Loopstra et al., 2018), rising levels of homelessness (Reeve, 2017) and a wider set of consequences (such as the management of stigma) to increased precarity and declining mental and physical wellbeing (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018; Wright and Patrick, 2019; Fletcher and Redman, 2021). These factors may account for an estimated 480,000 'hidden NEETs', of which 60% are male (London Youth, 2018). Furthermore, reports show that over half of NEETs do not access welfare, an increase from around 30 per cent in 2012 (Wells, 2018).

Whereas much has been written about the lack of engagement with education and employment, the lives of individuals outside of the welfare remains underexplored. This may be due to difficulties of accessing 'non-claimants' and a tendency to focus on encounters with the state/welfare nexus through the lens of street level bureaucracy (see Redman and Fletcher, 2021). More recently greater focus has been placed upon 'creeping conditionality' (Dwyer, 2004), wider welfare reform (Patrick, 2017) as well as the increase in numbers of people who have lost access to welfare due to sanctions (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Hence, the focus on those who claim benefits does not consider a wider range of behaviours, actions and circumstances around for 'hidden NEETHood'.

As with other aspects of their lives, participants' experiences were exceptionally diverse and hence difficult to fit into a simple interpretive framework. However, it is possible to discern three broad groupings which together help to bring some order to respondents' experience of lacking a formal source of income. Each group label is based on the adjective which best describes how they were able (or unable) to access economic capital.

- i) **Supported** (by their families or partners). This group were financially supported by others (typically family) and were afforded the required economic capital to enable them to live securely without the immediate imperative to acquire work or claim benefits.
- ii) **Self-sufficient** (and/or able to build social networks). This group did not have access to economic capital from others, however, they were in possession of other forms of capital that they utilised to acquire economic capital.
- iii) **Deprived** (due to the lack of economic capital available to them). This group had neither access to economic capital nor other forms of capital that could be utilised to acquire economic capital.

Succinctly, 'economic capital' is immediately and directly convertible into money' (Bourdieu, 1986; 16), hence economic capital simply refers to money. The work of Bourdieu is 'invaluable in understanding capital as conceptually distinguishable from its individual aberrations as a material phenomenon' (Casey, 2008; 2). In doing so, Bourdieu facilitates the analysis of resources and cultural dynamics that can shape the necessity (or lack thereof) to claim benefits in the absence of work. Furthermore, his theory of 'habitus' provides a deeper understanding of how individual and collective dispositions are shaped and reformed by historical and contemporary social conditions (Wacquant, 2006). Goffman is also key to understanding the potential manifestation of 'stigma' around claiming benefits, and how 'stigma' can shape their wider relationship with the welfare benefits system. Masculinity works alongside the two theories detailed above to reflect upon how gender can shape the relationship with the welfare benefits system through the desire for autonomy, self-reliance and (where appropriate) the propensity to acquire economic capital through criminality.

Agency also plays a key role in their occupation of a position outside the welfare benefits system. However, to claim that an outcome results purely from agency is an oversimplification. Rather researchers should aim to ‘capture the more nuanced aspects of agency – neither overstating the agency of some or all actors nor understating the implications of enduring patterns and processes of advantage and disadvantage’ (Wright, 2012; 324). Moreover, agency should be viewed in a relational sense as it is a ‘temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past but also oriented toward the future and toward the present’ (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; 962).

For relational sociologists such as Bourdieu and Goffman relationships are imbued with both structure and agency (in the habitus) and the outcomes of value judgements (stigmatisation) are made in the eye of the beholder. In that sense, researchers must look beneath the surface and aim to determine the range of social factors behind ‘what is possible is a relation to power’ (Bourdieu, 1990a; 4). Furthermore, as masculinity is a gendered performance influenced by culture, traditions, place and values, matters of agency should be viewed in the contexts where they are observed (see Connell, 2005; Anderson, 2009). Finally, intersectionality asserts that the ability to utilise individual agency is an outcome of contemporary power dynamics shaped by historical hierarchies and generational inequalities (Nash, 2008). Thus, all the theoretical tools used in this chapter highlight the need to interrogate not just the utilisation of agency but its limits as well.

7.2 Supported

This section focuses exclusively upon the young men who had economic capital conferred upon them by their families (or in one case, his fiancée). In other words, although they were eligible to claim financial support from the welfare benefits system for a range of reasons this was not taken up, nor did they seek to actively increase their endowments of economic capital. Respondents presented a range of reasons for this. These broadly revolved around partial reliance upon others (most commonly their families) for their economic capital in the absence of paid work or welfare benefits. Of the 24 participants in the study, 11 received significant support from others. However, it is important to note that their families were not wealthy and do not benefit from particularly high endowments of economic capital themselves. Thus, the economic

capital that is conferred upon these participants probably represents a burden on the familial purse.

Within the ‘supported’ category there are two distinct groups. The first are mostly British-Pakistani young men who had no need to claim benefits and possessed no knowledge on how to claim benefits. The second group are differentiated from the first as they possessed a small amount of knowledge relating to the welfare benefits system, put simply, they knew that it was an option, but they chose not to claim. This is primarily due to a lack of necessity as other sources of economic capital were available.

7.2.1 Group One – No need to claim benefits

As Table 7.1 indicates, members of this sub-group professed to have little or no knowledge of how the welfare benefits system functions, and this shaped their predisposition not to claim benefits whilst they were out of work. Therefore, their agency was constrained by the limits of what they deemed to be intuitively viable. At the same time this lack of knowledge closely intersects with cultural factors to remove the necessity not only to claim benefits. Thus, they had no need to claim *therefore* didn’t know how to. These cultural factors are manifested in two ways: firstly, in terms of attitudes towards the welfare benefits system; and secondly in relation to family support. For five of the six participants in this sub-group it is also tied up with their identity as British-Pakistani.

Table 7.1 – Supported – Group One

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Reason for not claiming
Faizan	23	British-Pakistani	- No need to claim benefits due to other sources of support. - No knowledge of how welfare benefits system functioned.
Hamid	18	British-Pakistani	
Zerdad	18	British-Pakistani	

Umar	19	British-Pakistani	
Wahab	19	British-Pakistani	
Daniel	19	White-British	

To set the scene, there is a dearth of literature relating to the self-exclusion from welfare support amongst ethnic groups in the UK. Research relating to the economic wellbeing of the British-Pakistani population in the UK has predominantly focused upon the community experience of marginality, for example around social care provision and young mothers (see Fazil et al., 2002; Moffatt and Mackintosh, 2009; Mokhtar and Platt, 2009). That said, quantitative research indicates that British-Pakistanis were less likely than other groups to engage with the welfare benefits system and ‘workfare’ (although no causes for disengagement were offered as part of this work) (Kalra, 2006; Mokhtar and Platt, 2009). This is juxtaposed against the propensity for British-Pakistani households to be larger than average in size, and to be more likely to reside in a deprived area and to live in persistent poverty (Hall et al., 2017; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017). This was reflected in the qualitative data sample as all participants were members of large families, came from areas that have been classified as ‘deprived’ (Rae, 2011) and from households where only one parent worked. The biography of Daniel was like the British-Pakistani sample as he was also from a low-income multigenerational household in an area defined as ‘deprived’ (Rae, 2011). Despite these economic stresses, they all passed up the opportunity to increase their household income by claiming unemployment related benefits.

In all cases, self-exclusion from welfare was explicitly articulated as a dual consequence of the lack of necessity due to the support that they were receiving and the associated lack of knowledge of how to access the welfare benefits system. Underpinning these was the presence of cultural factors and attitudes that were not evident for other participants. The following exchanges help to set the scene:

Chris: have you ever thought about going to claim benefits?

Wahab: No.

Chris: Never even thought of it?

Wahab: Never

Chris: How come?

Wahab: I never knew about it.

Chris: So yes you never thought about it.

Wahab: Never thought about it, never knew about it.

Chris: Ok, so have you ever thought about claiming benefits?

Zerdad: No

Chris: Why not?

Zerdad: I am not really sure about it. Like what is the benefits for what? It depends innit.

Chris: Yes, but that is interesting because obviously at the moment you are entitled to claim benefits, if you wanted to claim benefits you could...

Zerdad: A lot of people don't know how to do it and stuff like that. They don't know that information.

Chris: Do you know anyone who has claimed benefits?

Umar: Not really.

Chris: None of your mates have either?

Umar: None of them.

Chris: Why do you think no one (you know) has claimed any benefits?

Umar: I don't know really.

Evidently, the reference by Zerdad to '*a lot of people*' highlights how this self-exclusion from welfare may be more than individual choice, but rather could be indicative of a 'collective habitus'. This is defined as a 'community of practice, akin to Bourdieu's 'class habitus' but operating at the local rather than at the level of social classes' (Jawitz, 2009; 604). Whilst the notion of a 'collective habitus' could be perceived to be a form of 'doxa' in a certain field (Atkinson, 2011), it can be strongly argued that the 'collective habitus' in the British-Pakistani community operates on a higher level and shapes dispositions in a wide array of fields. This is further demonstrated by Hamid, who comments upon the prevalence of this disposition of self-exclusion:

Chris: Ok, have you thought about claiming benefits?

Hamid: No not really. I think, pretty sure that the people you have interviewed so far didn't know as well, I didn't know. Didn't really think about it no. I didn't know how, I never really understood it so I didn't know how to so... didn't have that knowledge and that...

Chris: So do you know anyone who claims benefits at the moment?

Hamid: Not that I know, no.

Chris: Why do you think that is?

Hamid: I think it is pretty much the same reason, think we don't really look into it as much, we just get quickly drawn away from it.

The literature concerning the form and function of British-Pakistani communities in the UK shines a helpful light on this lack of necessity to claim benefits and the associated paucity of knowledge of the welfare benefits system. The concept of biradari may shed light upon how the dispositions of the participants could be shaped by cultural practices. Biradari, functions as a source of economic capital through the sharing of resources amongst their local community and preserves religious identities by maintaining links to Pakistan (Lewis, 1994; 2008; Lien, 1997; Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life, 2017). The importance of biradari within British-Pakistani is life '... an integral part of Pakistani culture but most people do not even think about it, it's just there' (Lewis 2007; 48). Research indicates that biradari shapes daily life for British-Pakistani's in the UK and could be viewed as a factor in shaping the 'predisposition(s) tenden(cies), propensit(ies) and inclination(s)' (Bourdieu, 1977; 214; Anwar, 2020) to engage with the welfare benefits system.

The sharing of resources *may* play a role in families' ability and willingness to financially support young men who are out of work as they were able to access small amounts of funds from their families with little or no concern:

Umar: For like to get here (sports centre), £4... and then I go back home. I get about £10 to go back out, spend it with my mates and stuff.

Zerdad: It depends, how much you ask innit. If you ask about £100-200 they will ask what are you going to do with that? Cause they probably think you are buying smoking something like that, buy alcohol something like that. But I just get about £10 a day or £5 for the tram.

Hamid: Some of it is from (informal) work money and my savings but yes, they will if I need something and if I ask them they will support and give it.

Put simply, the presence of *biradari* seems to promote a form of reciprocal economy that acts to eliminate the necessity for the young men to seek support from elsewhere. Succinctly, it can be hypothesised that *biradari* acts as a source of capital. High levels of social capital are acquired and transferred hereditarily through the close connections with others in the community, this can then be converted into economic capital through the procurement of money from families via *biradari* and informal employment (see chapter six). Hence, the lack of knowledge or necessity to claim benefits may be resultant from membership of familial, cultural, and religious grouping that provide a large amount of support to young unemployed men.

The views of British-Pakistani participants about people in receipt of welfare benefits were broadly sympathetic to their plight. This was revealed through expressions of empathy as they reflected upon their own personal circumstances and admitted their good fortune in being supported by their families and communities. The only exception to this was Faizan who expressed views akin to the 'moral underclass' despite being unemployed himself:

Chris: How do you feel about people who do claim benefits?

Faizan: People that do, I would say to them stop being lazy and get a job. Yes, like homeless people sometimes, there are just some homeless people in Sheffield.... some that you know that, they are rich but they are just making more money or something. So why don't you just get up and just go and get a job or something.

Moving on, Daniel provided a similar response to the British-Pakistani young men when asked whether he had considered claiming benefits;

Chris: Have you ever thought about going to claim benefits?

Daniel: No. Not sure.

Chris: The idea has never really come up then?

Daniel: No it weren't, it has not really popped in my head to be honest you know. It is, it is not really what I really thought about... I don't really need it because erm... I can sort myself out with it all and, and apart from that I probably don't need it to be honest.

Daniel's personal and familial circumstances underpin how his views on welfare had been shaped by his parents being financially comfortable enough for him not to have to claim benefits. Certainly, it meant that they did not exert any pressure upon him to claim. His views on welfare claimants are shown by the following exchange:

Chris: How do you feel about people who claim benefits?

Daniel: Erm... I, if they claim benefits then I sometimes feel sorry for them if they need the help but, erm... but apart from that, erm... I hope they like get round it... and have an idea of what they can do in the future about it.

Fundamentally, evidence of welfare stigmatization is sparse within the first group. The clearest assumption being that the young men were able to reflect upon their circumstances and feel fortunate to be provided with the support that they received, and as such were sympathetic to those in more precarious positions.

7.2.2 Sub-group Two – Chose not to claim benefits

Whereas the first sub-group appeared to have no need to claim and no knowledge as a result, the other five participants appeared to utilise their agency to effectively exclude themselves from the welfare benefits system. Members of this sub-group received comparable levels of economic support from partners or family. However, the key difference is that they had knowledge of how to claim benefits and could have claimed if they wanted to but made an active choice not to.

Table 7.2 – Supported – Group Two

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Primary reason for not claiming
Jason	24	White-British	Received money from fiancé.
Nathan	22	White-British	Received money from family.
Sadio	19	Black-African	Had small amount in savings and money from family.
Caleb	18	Black-British	Received money from family.
Mark	25	White-British	Fear of being stigmatised by others and received money from family.

Jason had extremely negative views of the welfare benefits system which were derived from his family whom he perceived to possess *'no motivation'*. He declared that his decision not to claim was largely based upon the support that his fiancée was providing: *"if it got into that position where... I had to (claim), I had no choice then fair enough"*. In other words, welfare would be an option in times of extreme precarity, but only as a last resort. This disposition and his move to Sheffield were shaped by fractious relationships with his parents, whom he describes as being *"on the dole and haven't moved anywhere since... just sat there doing nothing long term"*. Jason wanted to differentiate himself from his family whom he viewed to have fallen foul of a moral code, forming a view that he would not *'touch that (benefits) with a 20-foot barge pole'*. According to Moses (2010; 986), such intra-family stigmatisation has been under-researched *'because it is challenging to tease out stigmatization from other types of negative family interactions, such as hostility, rejection or negative attributions that stem from other factors such as a history of negative reciprocal interactions'*. Bearing this in mind, it would be imprudent to assert that Jason's fraught relationship with his parents was the *sole* cause of his reluctance to claim benefits. That said, it is a fair assumption that their relationship with the welfare benefits system shaped his desire to avoid being 'dependent' upon the state like them. This divergence from familial values is a sharp contrast to those in Sub-group One and highlights the potential for the habitus to be transformed 'in part by the original structures of the habitus in question, (and) in part by the objective conditions under which the awakening of self-consciousness takes place' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 134).

It should be noted that Jason's ability to avoid claiming was only possible due to the economic capital provided by his fiancée.

An additional factor which influenced Jason's decision to not claim benefits was his experience of signing on when aged 18 (six years earlier):

Chris: How did you find that experience?

Jason: It was horrible.

Chris: Is that one of the main reasons why you didn't want to...

Jason: ... they treat you like scum, and then you get a phone call pretty much every day like; Have you been applying for jobs? Why have you not applied for jobs? and it is like I have, there is just nothing there. And they expect you to apply for the same jobs all the time ... they just want you to win a dead end position so at the end of the month they get their bonus from the government. So it is not, not on! ... I would rather slave off [do nothing] for 6 months... I am the controversial page in your book! ((laughs))

The negative experience of young benefit claimants is well-researched (as noted in Chapter 3). Young people have been subject to 'special' treatment as the 'target of spending cuts, less generous benefits, tighter eligibility criteria and more punitive forms of welfare' (Crisp and Powell, 2017; 1787). This has resulted in many claimants feeling that simply 'being on benefits' can feel 'like a punishment, and high levels of conditionality' engender feelings of being 'undeserving' (Povey, 2019; 52).

Mark received similar levels of financial support, but from his mother and stepfather. The financial support from his family clearly reduced the necessity to claim benefits, but he articulated a further contributing factor in deciding not to claim in terms of fear of being stigmatised if others knew:

Chris: ... did you ever think about claiming benefits?

Mark: No.

Chris: How come?

Mark: ... didn't want anyone talking shit about it behind my back... everyone watching you because everyone knows you in the area.

A common strategy to prevent being stigmatised is the act of 'avoiding situations where stigmatization is likely (i.e., disengagement)' (Bos et al., 2013; 3). Compas et al., (2001; 89) argue that the act of disengagement to mitigate the fear of being stigmatized is an evolutionary reaction aligned to the 'concept of the fight (engagement) or flight (disengagement) response'.

In some respects Nathan has similar characteristics to Jason. They were both raised in semi-rural areas, struggled to find work and acknowledged a lack of confidence when meeting new people. The key difference however is that Nathan has a very close relationship to his family and does not have a partner to provide emotional or financial support. Nathan initially resisted the idea of claiming welfare due to fear of being physically endangered at the Jobcentre, based on rumours he had heard. This perception was further entrenched once he discovered that each Jobcentre had bouncers at the door. His need to claim benefits was reduced as his family was able to support him. However, this changed significantly once his mother received notification that she could be made redundant in the coming months. This was discussed during the interview where he reflected upon the experience of going to the Jobcentre for the first time:

Chris: Did it bother you, that they had bouncers down there?

Nathan: No, not really. I am happy because at least if something happened at least they are there to protect you. The more of them the better ((laughs)).

In addition to his misplaced concerns over his physical safety at the Jobcentre, Nathan also commented how the process of claiming was not as bad as he first anticipated: *'It's not too bad... You know, you just go in and, talk about what you have done and that's it basically.'* This positivity in relation to claiming was rare amongst the interviewees but highlights how positive or negative experiences of claiming benefits can be largely reliant upon the discretion of street level bureaucrats (see Fletcher, 2011).

Sadio was experiencing unemployment and receiving a small amount of money from family until a family crisis forced him to claim benefits. Thus, some of this is driven by

distance from necessity as claiming benefits became necessary as precariousness increased. Through receiving support from his father Sadio was able to save small amounts of money to 'cushion' himself from precarity and the necessity to claim benefits whilst being unemployed. However, when his father became ill the family lost their main source of income during a period when Sadio was unemployed and there was little option but to claim JSA. Like Nathan, he found that the experience of 'signing on' was not as bad as expected:

Chris: How did you feel about going to the job centre?

Sadio: Erm... I am not saying that I was happy but it was it is ok... the job centre doesn't give me that much, it still helps, it is letting me do what I need to do (help family).

The experiences of Jason, Nathan and Sadio highlight three key themes. Firstly, the ability to resist claiming benefits is highly reliant upon receiving financial support from other sources (family or partner). Once this support becomes unviable or in danger of being lost the propensity to not claim can be lessened to the extent where it is perceived as the only option. Secondly, whilst all three young men were receiving support from those closest to them, there were no external sources of economic support or casual work. Finally, and arguably most importantly in the context of this study, the experience of claiming JSA was not as negative as Nathan and Sadio expected.

The other member of this sub-group, Caleb, stated that he had undertaken informal and infrequent employment as a window cleaner with his father whilst not claiming benefits before losing the job. At that point he started to claim JSA. His experience of claiming was far more negative than that of Nathan and Sadio:

Chris: Yes. How do you feel about claiming benefits, does it...

Caleb: Horrible... I would rather just get my own money, if you know what I mean like? My own money that I have actually worked for.

However, his negative experience was more aligned with his desire for independence as masculinity is achieved by 'aggression, autonomy, mastery... adventure and a considerable amount of toughness in mind and body' (Carrigan et al., 1987; 148).

7.2.3 Summary

This section of the chapter has highlighted the factors that contribute to the participants' disposition to distance themselves from the welfare benefits system. All of the young men were united (or at least at some point) by having access to 'supportive' financial support (economic capital) which meant they did not need to claim. Furthermore, amongst the British-Pakistani sub-group there was a lack of knowledge, awareness and engagement with the system because support was provided by inherited social capital which shared values (cultural capital) around self-sufficiency. For the other sub-group, disengagement with the welfare benefits system was driven more by stigma and/or the need to maintain autonomy/respectability.

There is evidence to suggest that prevailing social attitudes and the heightened politicisation of welfare stigma has permeated into intra-familial relations to the extent that family members question the characters of one-another due to the negativity associated with claiming benefits. The power of benefits stigma was manifested in a view that support from the welfare benefits system should not be entitlement bestowed through citizenship but should only be reserved for those in desperate need (see Hills, 2017). The agency over their relationship with the welfare benefits system was significantly constrained by the discursive framing of the welfare benefits system and the support from their families. Put simply, claiming benefits was not perceived to be a possible option as they were not 'needy' enough to require support from the state and they were not in a heightened state of precarity whereby placing themselves in a stigmatised social space was worth it.

7.3 Self-Sufficient

This section examines the perceptions and relationships with the welfare benefits system of young male hidden NEETs who had the requisite knowledge of how welfare functions, either first-hand or from family, but chose to this group generated their own economic capital.

This is a diverse sub-group of young men in terms of age, ethnicity, community membership and coping mechanisms. In combination they provide detailed accounts of insecure employment, family breakdown, drug dealing, mental health issues, homelessness and, most fundamentally, interactions with the welfare benefits system. This is in stark contrast to the ‘dependent’ sub-group which by and large were members of stable families or households. It is important to note that not all of the participants were hidden NEETs at the time of the study, but had been previously (see Table 7.3)

Table 7.3 – Self-sufficient

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Reason for not claiming
Anthony	25	White-British	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Received support from community at travellers’ site. - Thought that claiming was immoral.
Baashir	23	British-Pakistani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Felt that he was treated poorly at the Jobcentre Plus. - Felt pride in making his own money.
Joshua	25	White-British	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Received support from community at travellers’ site.
Justin	19	White-British	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was unable to claim. - Decided to make money through illegal activities.
Sami	18	British-Pakistani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Felt pride in making his own money.
Steven	23	White-British	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was unable to claim. - Decided to make money through illegal activities.

The diverse biographies of members of this sub-group should not be a surprise, as a number of scholars have highlighted how ‘NEET’ has been incorrectly constructed as

a homogeneous category, leading to an assumption that policy makers can address the issues for the group as a whole, rather than developing approaches that accept individual differences (Yates and Payne, 2006; Furlong, 2006b; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Roberts, 2011).

Anthony was a self-employed artist at the time of the interview. Prior to this he was renting a studio with some savings and sleeping on the floor. He only started making a living by selling art very shortly before the interview, prior to that he was reliant on a combination of savings, family and 'living frugally':

Chris: So... your parents giving you 50 quid a week, were they financially stable enough to be able to afford that?

Anthony: Just, they are both retired, it is a bit of a little bit of a push but erm... they don't mind too much but I mean, they know I am trying to make it. Before I got 50 quid a week it was quite a bit less, erm... just cause I didn't, I only asked for stuff when I really needed it, so if I was hungry, I would have to find some food myself. So I just learnt to live really frugally and I have learnt to quite enjoy it to be honest. Going in the supermarket bins and stuff, getting food out.

Anthony's pride at achieving independence and his commitment to being as autonomous as possible is aligned to the 'masculine performances of self-sufficiency' (Belmont and Stroud, 2020; 437). Furthermore, this 'performance' associated with the view 'that men should be stoic, controlled, and self-sufficient' and perform 'behaviours generally inconsistent with seeking help' (Vogel et al., 2011; 368). Whilst Anthony accepted financial assistance from his family, although he was at pains to stress that he did not request this help. For Anthony, his relationship with the welfare benefits system is clearly shaped by his desire for autonomy and independence. In viewing welfare, he "*used to find it quite immoral*" that he would be 'taking' from the system but not contributing. He disagrees "*with a lot of things the system does*", specifically the unequal distribution of wealth and unnecessary government expenditure. However, Anthony also stated how he had become "*... a bit of an anarchist*" and supported anyone's decision to claim benefits due to the inequalities in society.

Social bonds within the community at the travellers site provided a great deal of emotional and practical support (in a manner similar to the British-Pakistani men). Social bonds within the community at the travellers' site provided a great deal of emotional and practical support. However, membership of the group is strictly regulated and only granted to those with a habitus and embodied cultural capital that adheres to and values the ethos of the small community. Hetherington (1998: 335) states that membership of New Age Traveller communities is shaped around 'an identification with nomadism that is seen to be more authentic than the sociality of modern industrial societies'. In many ways, this pursuit of authenticity might seem to conflict with Anthony and Joshua return to claiming welfare benefits. However, whilst their perceptions of welfare are overwhelmingly negative, this disdain is converted into a disposition to claim benefits as a form of resistance. It is also consistent with the concept of 'collective habitus', as it constituted a 'shared repertoire of ... ways of doing things' which encompass 'understandings and assumptions held collectively in the community of practice' (Jawitz, 2009; 601-604). That said, gaining membership (and subsequently benefitting from the associated volumes of capital) of the travellers' site is contingent upon possessing, sharing and adhering to a doxa (see Chapter 8) as 'social collectives are continually engaged in a struggle to impose the definition of the world that is most congruent with their particular interests' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; 14).

Joshua lived at the same site and identified with the same 'anarchist' philosophy stated by Anthony. Furthermore, conversations with the individual who granted access to the community and other members clearly indicated the presence of a common philosophy of resistance and self-sufficiency of material resources. Joshua also did not claim benefits upon arrival into the community due to distrust of authority but changed his mind after considering structural inequalities in society. Furthermore, he stated that some community members are claiming benefits in order to give the money to local community projects, specifically those that help the homeless.

Both Baashir and Sami were not claiming benefits at the time of interview. Both lived at home with family and relied upon selling drugs to get by on a day-to-day basis. Whilst Baashir had experience of claiming benefits, Sami did not. When reflecting upon his experience at the Jobcentre Baashir stated:

When you claim benefits it is like you are getting... trapped in to the system... I have done it once in my whole life and I only had one appointment and I never went back again. I went there and they look at you like some piece of shit on the bottom of your shoe. They don't look at you human, they are like you are worthless.

The overriding reason for Baashir's decision not to claim welfare was the way that he was treated by Jobcentre staff rather than stigmatization. However, he stated that some of his friends who claim benefits feel stigmatized and dislike others' perception of them being lazy. This chimes with research in the USA which has found that for many young drug dealers the 'traditional search for respect has been radically transformed into a fear of disrespect' in hypermasculine environments (Bourgois, 1996; 415). Like the British-Pakistani young men in Section 7.2.1, Baashir also highlighted a rupture between his generation and his mother's, this time in the context of gaining work:

Baashir: ... my mom she was born in a different country, so when she has come to this country she is bringing the characteristics...

Chris: Where was she born?

Baashir: Pakistan.

Chris: Ok...

Baashir: So she is bringing the characteristics from Pakistan to England and thinking it is the same life. Whereas she thinks "oh you should be working", you know this and that, but it is not the same, you know what I mean?"

Baashir reflects upon the values instilled within him to conclude that his entrepreneurialism in selling drugs is resultant from being encouraged to be productive (although he highlights how his mother would be unhappy with his 'work' if she were aware). In a gendered sense, criminality and drug dealing can be seen as simply another form of gendered labour as 'men have been conditioned to perform an entrepreneurial masculinity with a culturally prescribed doxa' as it is interwoven with notions of self-sufficiency and power (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017; 51).

This link between work ethic and crime in young people was empirically observed by Baron (2008; 418) in a quantitative study of 400 young people in a large Canadian city. This study reported how 'having a strong work ethic and spending less time looking for work were related to violent offending'. Baron (2006) also stated that the propensity to engage in crime increases when job seeking is unsuccessful for a long period of time. This is reflected in Baashir's experience of job-seeking in which his criminal record had complicated matters.

Whilst Baashir was unable to secure formal employment, he had the requisite social and cultural capital to forge a 'career' in the illegal economy which has structures and hierarchies that mirror the formal economy. As he describes:

"... like the police like you have the sergeant or whatever at the top of the game, and in our area there will be a boss man. Under him there will be his, his little runners. Under him there will be us the juniors."

Sami was more guarded in his responses than any other participant in this study. When asked about his decision not to claim benefits he succinctly stated that he would never claim but did not wish to elaborate the reasons why in detail. However, he asserted that he took pride in his ability to provide for himself through selling drugs as opposed to being reliant upon state welfare provisions.

In stark contrast to Baashir's and Sami's desire to portray how they provided for themselves, both frequently received money from their families to dispel their suspicions regarding their source of money. In many ways Baashir and Sami provided similar narratives around family and culture to the British-Pakistani men in Section 7.2.1. However, the two key differences are that Baashir and Sami had criminal records, limiting their employment prospects, and appeared to be more aspirational in the illegal economy. As outlined by Baron (2006; 2008), high levels of aspiration in conjunction with unsuccessful job-seeking increases the propensity to engage in criminal activity.

The ability of Baashir and Sami to avoid claiming benefits was largely dependent upon creating and maintaining social and criminal networks that provide the means to gain

economic capital. Family support was available, albeit to a lesser extent as both young men belonged to families with very limited means. Above all, the decision not to claim benefits was primarily based upon the aspiration to provide for themselves and their lack of success in seeking work due to their criminal records.

Justin and Steven shared very similar experiences in terms of their family, welfare, crime and mental health. The key factor uniting the two participants is their experiences and interactions with the welfare benefits system. Both were once living at home whilst claiming benefits until a family breakdown left them homeless and reliant upon couch-surfing with friends and selling cannabis to get by. For Justin the problems began when he was living at home with his mother and she caught him smoking cannabis, because of which she asked him to move out. After a short period of living with his father he also told him to move out and to find his own accommodation. Initially this was successful, with Justin moving between paid work and claiming JSA for short periods. However, after losing one job Justin tried to claim JSA again, but due to repeated administration errors and lost paperwork he was left without benefits or a home for around four months. This echoes Reeve's findings on the most common reasons for losing access to welfare; 71 per cent of claimants in a survey of over 1000 recipients of welfare sanctions lost their claims due to 'difficulties getting the necessary help from the Jobcentre' and 64 per cent 'being given the wrong information' (2017; 72). These issues resulted in Justin deciding to stop trying to claim, instead focusing on *"helping myself and see where that actually gets me"*. 'Helping' himself constituted accepting homelessness and focusing upon selling cannabis. The notion of 'helping' himself was clearly intrinsically linked to the performance of masculinity which promoted self-determinism, autonomy, respect and power.

Steven was living with his father until he was 15 when he was placed in foster care. At the age of 16 he was provided with a flat and ESA due to being diagnosed with ADHD, before moving in with his mother when he was 17. A year later he had a disagreement and left home to couch-surf and sleep rough. For three months Steven was unemployed, homeless and without ESA due to missed appointments at the Jobcentre. Reeve also highlights this as a key contributor to people losing access to welfare, with 64 per cent missing appointments due to 'letters not reaching the

respondent' (2017; 72). As with Justin, he became resigned to being homeless and made money selling cannabis and *'other things as well'* (he did not wish to elaborate).

A key distinguishing feature of this sub-group is the fact that participants accepted their situations and developed alternative strategies to get by. This acceptance was largely shaped by previous interactions with the Jobcentre and the perception of claimants. For Steven, the relationship with his mother was central to his decision to cease his attempts to claim benefits:

"... my mom, she has never, she didn't like working, she is so work shy actually she has claimed benefits whatever she could all her life and I hate her for it."

Creating a distance between himself and the welfare benefits system was perceived to be central to becoming an adult and constructing his own identity:

"I didn't want to claim JSA because I didn't want to end up in the same boat as my mom.... If you get out of work, it is so hard to get back into it because it is a way of life, it is a mentality. You don't want to go to work every day, no one does but you have just got to and you fall out of it, so I didn't want to do that."

This statement from Steven highlights how the habitus can transform, in doing so, refuting critiques over determinism (see Jenkins, 1982; King, 2000). Moreover, Steven shows how the 'habitus contributes to transforming that which transforms it' through a continual process of adaptation and renewal (Bourdieu, 1997: 177). Despite his statements regarding his mother and welfare claimants more broadly he commented upon the hegemonic stigmatization in the media:

"I am a dirty communist now, I hate capitalism for this exact reason and my situation, you know, I have always felt like I were on my own and if the welfare state were built up better... if less people shamed you for being on it, a lot more people like me would feel more comfortable on it."

Justin did not comment upon the stigmatization of claimants, instead he expressed his anger at the way he was treated by staff:

“... every time I have been there it has always given me a reason to not claim rather than claim due to how I was spoken to... I went in there expecting help and then came out feeling a lot worse about myself than I thought I would really. I thought it was a place that I would get the help that I needed, but I didn’t in the end... they would rather keep people in this stagnant state of living where it is, never really knowing what you want to do... you are always claiming benefits, and it never really helps you get out of that... I think it should be a lot more positive when it comes to helping people.”

One reading of this might be that Justin’s negative experiences at the JobCentre Plus played an important (albeit indirect) role in his transition into criminality. Despite their extreme precarity both Steven and Justin felt the need to detach themselves from the welfare system so that they could assert agency over their lives, thus creating a disposition to become more self-reliant.

Chris: ... It almost sounds like you were happier selling weed than you were going to the job centre?

Justin: Yes. I mean, I knew what I was doing, I was in control of my own money.

Nevertheless, this ability to be self-reliant was reliant upon their social capital and networks to procure and sell cannabis and their embodied cultural capital through knowledge and entrepreneurialism to do so effectively. Furthermore, social capital played an essential role in finding individuals who could provide accommodation.

7.3.1 Summary

For this group, support was found by developing new networks and concerted efforts to be self-sufficient through crime or membership of travellers’ communities. The ability to be self-sufficient was only achieved through drawing on or developing various forms

of capital. Fundamentally, this differs to the previous group (in Section 7.2.1) as resources were not transferred from within existing networks. Whilst they were not as financially secure as they would have liked, self-determination provided a sense of security that could not be matched by accessing support from the welfare benefits system. The two young men in the travellers' site may appear to be interdependent upon others. However, a significant factor in them being granted membership of the community as their ability to help others in the community. Hence, this shows the ability to form structures of mutual self-sufficiency. In totality, this group demonstrates the capacity for masculinity to act as a resource of last resort once other options are eroded.

The values and practices associated with masculinity present through the performances of autonomy, entrepreneurialism, stoicism and frugality. Some of the participants in this group attempted to claim benefits but were unable to do so as they successfully followed a different path to acquire economic capital.

7.4 Deprived

The final sub-group to be examined in this chapter analyses the experiences of those who were financially 'deprived' in the absence of formal work and support from the welfare benefits system. This includes seven of the 24 research participants. Five of these were recruited for the study through a day centre which provides support to homeless people in Sheffield (Gavin, Jay, Robert, Thomas and Tyler), one through a religious organisation in the city (John), and one through a sports-based organisation that imparts employability skills (Martin). As shown in Table 7.4, all were white British, broadly in line with the service users of the homeless day centre.

Table 7.4 - Deprived

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Reason for being unable to claim
Gavin	23	White-British	lost their benefits due to sanctions imposed due to missed appointments.
Jay	24	White-British	lost their benefits due to sanctions imposed due to missed appointments.

John	24	White-British	reassessed for ESA and was deemed to be 'fit for work'.
Martin	21	White-British	unable to receive any funds for around six months due to administrative errors regarding his date of birth.
Robert	24	White-British	lost their benefits due to sanctions imposed due to missed appointments.
Thomas	25	White-British	lost their benefits due to sanctions imposed due to missed appointments.
Tyler	25	White-British	was left homeless with no money whilst waiting for his claim to be processed.

As noted in Chapter 2, the political reasoning for implementing the enhanced sanctions regime since 2013 has been to encourage recipients to adhere to job search activities (see Reeve, 2017). However, the individuals who receive sanctions may not be able to acquire paid work, nor to attend appointments on time and manage the administration that comes with making a benefit claim. Gavin explains how he struggled with these specific tasks:

Chris: ...do you know why you were sanctioned?

Gavin: Because I wasn't turning up on time, and I wasn't coming with the appropriate erm... paperwork. So I wasn't erm... like you have to ring three employers up and you have to hand out your CV 5 times and stuff like that. And I haven't, at that point in time I wasn't doing that so I was erm.. not doing the right thing.

Chris: How long was it for?

Gavin: About 6 – 7 months I wasn't in receipt of benefits, yes.

Chris: To be made homeless because you were sanctioned. I mean...

Gavin: Wasn't the best of circumstances.

Gavin largely blamed himself for receiving a benefit sanction for around six months:

Chris: So they sanctioned you because you were late attending meetings...

Gavin: Late and stuff like that. Wasn't come with the appropriate...

Chris: Okay...

Gavin: In a way it was my own fault wasn't it? But I was in a bit of a stressful point in life, my mom was in hospital do you know, erm... stuff like that along them lines, it is not like it was just excuses I was actually going through a really hard time.

These combined experiences of homelessness, isolation, poverty and the benefit sanction may have culminated in what Goffman (1963) termed 'self-stigma' as the individual internalises the ire of outsiders to 'spoil' their own identity. Patrick (2017; 257) comments upon this, stating that the 'processes of internalisation can be profoundly damaging for individuals' sense of self, and self-esteem, and may, ironically, make transitions into paid employment less rather than more likely'. Thus, it can be argued that 'sanctioning' individuals like Gavin is illogical from an economic perspective, let alone the social and moral arguments.

In the case of Robert, he did not know why he had been sanctioned:

Chris: So you were claiming benefits and then they stopped your benefits 'cause you missed an appointment? Is that right?

Robert: They cancelled it.

Chris: Oh, they cancelled it?

Robert: Yes.

Chris: So... they cancelled an appointment then you didn't get your benefits?

Robert: Yes.

Chris: Why?

Robert: I don't know. They have not explained yet. It is all going through a decision (appeal) at the moment.

This was symptomatic of a lack of transparency in the eyes of the young men. Furthermore, the imposition of structural violence through welfare sanctions upon the

vulnerable can be linked to Wacquant's concept of the 'centaur state', in which 'deregulation for social and economic elites is contrasted with an expansive and disciplining 'mesh' thrown over marginalised groups to 'correct' their conduct and to inculcate a habituation to precarious low-wage labour, founded on self-blame and passivity' (Flint, 2018; 2).

Moreover, due to the extreme precarity being experienced the young men described being 'worn down' and having no time or energy to support each other or partake in collective action to improve their situations. The ability to resist against such inequalities through the formation of collective action (even informally) is contingent upon volumes of social capital (e.g., 'connections' and 'kinship') (Bourdieu, 2003). The lack of social capital amongst this group is a direct consequence and a result of the necessity for the young homeless men to look after themselves to survive.

Chris: Have you got mates who help you out?

Jay: No ((laughs)). Everybody on these streets yes are all druggies, right. They will talk to you and feed you what you want to hear right, deep down nobody gives a fuck about nobody right. Nobody gives a fuck about anyone, they are all out for themselves.

Tyler: ... it does actually get quite tiring being on the street like.

Chris: What is the most tiring part?

Tyler: It is the fact that when you sleep you don't really sleep you are always... sleeping with your eye open. You are on your guard. So you don't really sleep properly.

The distance between the young men in this sub-group and sources of support frequently resulted in severe bouts of violence, depression, anxiety and thoughts of committing suicide.

Jay: I have just got a sickening feeling all time. I am just disappointed in myself, I am disappointed in people... I am a failure... people will look down at me and that I am worthless, you know what I mean? Then I get myself fucking riled up, and then I end up doing something stupid. I can't cope.

*And then I scare myself, I am not claiming to be hard, I have once run at six Somalis on *****, then they are all at me from different angles and me having to get pulled out by my feet, while I am getting stamped on I am unconscious, shit like that where you start thinking “fucking hell”, because you are that vulnerable... Nobody wants to know. I can’t ring my mom up and say “hey-up mom how are you today?”. I can’t do that, I can’t even ring my missus, ex-missus and say, “how is he doing. How is my lad?” Nowt.*

The quote from Jay is in stark contrast to the sense of autonomy, respect and agency highlighted throughout the ‘self-sufficient’ section. This clearly demonstrates how relatively small gradations in levels of capital can have dramatic impacts. The links between welfare reform (particularly conditionality and sanctions) and negative mental health are well established. Recent studies have demonstrated unintended ‘spill over’ effects for vulnerable groups that include self-harm, crime, and suicide attempts (Batty et al., 2015; Wright and Stewart 2016). Moreover, this indicates that contemporary welfare policy is not fit for purpose when applied to people with complex needs.

John and Martin also lost access to benefits but were fortunate to retain their accommodation as they were renting in the social housing sector. John was deemed to be ‘fit to work’ after an Employment Support Allowance²² (ESA), formerly assessment at the job centre:

John: I had one of, those... medical assessment thing that Jobcentre does. I went to that and from what I could gather from letter... I didn’t get enough points was cause I went there by myself, and answered the questions... I didn’t have no choice if I didn’t go they would have stopped my money anyway so, and like I didn’t have the support worker, or anything so money got stopped. And then erm... pretty much haven’t had any money since 28 April.

According to government rules, people who have been declined ESA should be transferred onto JSA (see Dwyer, 2016). Clearly this was not implemented correctly

²² A benefit designed to support people who are physically or mentally unable to work.

for John. Martin also lost his benefits, but due to an administrative error. After leaving a ZHC job because he was not offered enough work, he reapplied for JSA but an issue with his date of birth meant that his claim was not processed correctly:

Martin: ... when I tried going back on it (benefits), they messed up my date of birth by a day, so technically I was supposed to go back on it 3 month and I didn't go on for about 6 or 7 month, that were right bad and like from then I had no money, I wasn't doing anything really.

Although John and Martin's financial situations were comparable, their experiences of living with no income were very different. The crux of the disparity between them was Martin's small (but vitally significant) volume of social capital. This social capital enabled him to acquire the essentials like food:

Chris: How did you get by?

Martin: I were with somebody at the time, different lass ((laughs)) ... for my tea and that I were having it there or at my mom's erm... (I had no money) for travel so I just walked... my mom (the) other end of Sheffield, so I had to walk to my mom's that is a bit far that, about half an hour, an hour walk yes. So, I had to walk everywhere ... it were terrible. I hated it.

Chris: So how long was that for that was 6 months?

Martin: About 6 or 7 months yes.

Chris: Martin: Did your friends help you out at all?

Martin: Actually I don't have that many... I have about three friends... I used to go to his sometimes for my dinner and that like. If I needed anything at all, so like new toothbrush or something he would go out and buy me and stuff like that, but... yes.

While Martin was able to face his troubles stoically, John shows the unfortunate human consequences of leaving an individual who has mental health problems with no access to money or social contact:

Chris: So how have you managed to get by since 28 April? (interview took place in July)

John: Oh for first month or so I... just put up with it. I am a big lad I can go without food for a little while, and erm... then one thing got a bit too far on it so, I decided that I couldn't be arsed with it anymore... and I just drank a bottle of that laundry detergent... I got found by the housing officer ... he then like took me down to the doctors and stuff...

The experiences of the young men in this group and their relationship with the welfare benefits system highlights the impacts of the 'punishment' that 'pervades the 21st century British social security system' (Wright et al., 2020; 278).

7.4.1 Summary

The combination of extreme precarity, mental health problems, and a complex web of policies linked to welfare provision have exacerbated existing inequalities for this sub-group. They became deprived due to no fault of their own, but rather because they were unable to adhere to and negotiate a complex set of stipulations regulating access to welfare provision. Self-stigmatisation also occurred as the hegemonic discourses surrounding welfare became internalised. This reflects Shildrick and MacDonald's (2013) observation that people living in precarity commonly blame themselves and other individuals for their poverty as opposed to questioning the structures that create insecurity. The overarching theme emanating from this section attests to the value of social capital. Unlike the others, a meagre amount of social capital enabled Martin to evade the most harmful impacts of losing financial means.

The negative outcomes of welfare reform are clearly on display. It is self-evident that navigating the welfare benefits system requires resources embodied cultural capital in the form of knowledge to enable claimants to resolve 'administrative errors'. Thus, the social security system is no longer a universal source of support for those in desperate need but is a flawed structure that fails to support some of the most marginalised in society.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a range of views, dispositions, and economic positions in relation to the welfare benefits system. Interviewees' financial security and relationship with the welfare benefits system was shaped by several complex factors.

The relative volumes of capital and utilisation of resources across the three groups are detailed below:

Table 7.5 – Transference of Capital

	Supported	Self-Sufficient	Deprived
Economic Capital	Inherited from loved ones and social/cultural networks.	Acquired from entrepreneurialism or membership of tight social groups.	No source of economic capital.
Social Capital	Endowed from family members.	Acquired through membership of social groups.	Very few social links.
Cultural Capital	Endowed from family members.	Accrued from a knowledge and expertise that lubricates movement into tight social groups.	Knowledge and expertise is not valued.
Convertibility of capital	Social and cultural capital provided links to individuals or groups that can yield economic capital.	Relatively high levels of social and cultural capital were transferred into to economic capital.	Low levels of capital limit the ability for transference.

The first group who were 'supported' by others appeared to have been shaped by membership of cultural groups and close-knit families which conferred relatively high levels of social capital (in comparison to other participants) which were easily

transferred into economic capital. The embeddedness of their 'collective habitus' virtually removed the need to access financial support from outside their collectives. There was little evidence of 'stigma' as the welfare benefits system appeared to be superfluous and beyond their purview. This was articulately crystalised by Wahab as he stated that he '*... never thought about it, never knew about it*'. The second group in the 'dependent' section had knowledge (and often) experience of claiming benefits but chose to avoid claiming as they sought to avoid stigma, instead receiving money from families (or in one case, their partner). Interestingly, there was no stigma associated with receiving money from those closest to them, but the welfare benefits system appeared to be stigmatised except in the most precarious circumstances.

The second group of 'self-sufficient' young men forged their own path to acquire economic capital by utilising their resources linked to masculinity or/and criminality. For the young men who sold drugs, their transition into this form of 'labour' was the conclusion of unrewarding attempts at maintaining employment in the service sector. Overall, they found this work to be emasculating. For the same reasons, their masculinity was brought into question by the experience of the welfare system. They found solace in the ability to reassert their masculinity and reacquire autonomy through entrepreneurialism and performances of stoicism. Anthony and Joshua did not participate in criminal acts, but they also found happiness by using their social and cultural capital to join the travellers' site. This was not an economically profitable endeavour as they had little money, but they benefitted from being able to contribute to the welfare of others in their new community and took great pride in being stoic and living frugally.

Finally, the 'deprived' section highlighted the impacts of welfare policies that have been enacted in recent years. Due to the lack of recognised social and cultural capital (as well as mental and physical health problems) they were reliant upon the welfare benefits system for survival, but were often unable to access it. However, despite their denigrated social status and deservingness of support, they often self-stigmatised for their lack of success and their reliance upon the welfare benefits system. The labyrinthine set of barriers to claiming benefits in combination with their chaotic lives meant that they were often unable to keep-up with the demands placed upon them by Jobcentre Plus staff. In this sense, claiming benefits requires a level of capital (social,

economic and cultural) to shield oneself from the turbulent factors which cause homelessness and precarity to successfully claim benefits. This 'Gordian Knot' means that those in the most need of support are the ones who struggle most to access it.

To reflect on the notion of 'agency', there is little evidence to suggest that any of the young men interviewed were 'rational actors' making decisions over what would be most financially beneficial for them. Instead, they were all (to some extent) imbued with gendered, social or discursive expectations which influenced their propensity to claim benefits. This formed a broadly held notion that the welfare benefits system was only available to those in most need, and few of them met this high barrier of 'deservingness' despite all having little economic capital of their own.

These issues pose a troubling and powerful dilemma in relation to the welfare benefits system. The young men in the study who needed assistance most struggled to access it, whereas those with access to supporting resources were able to avoid it. Stigma, the high barriers to support, sanctions (and 'admin errors') and the erosion of autonomy associated with the welfare benefits system have 'real world' consequences, ranging from homelessness, poor mental health and pathways into criminality.

Chapter Eight: The Experience of Hidden NEETHood

8.1 Introduction

Having reviewed the participants' relationship with education, the labour market and the welfare benefits system, the final findings chapter of this thesis examines how they lived their day-to-day lives in the absence of EET and welfare. In doing so, this chapter specifically focuses upon the way that they experienced unemployment with limited means.

Despite the changing focus of unemployment studies, the validity of reviewing how young people construct their lives in the absence of EET and welfare is intensely relevant in relation to this study as 'we do not really know what the economically inactive groups (including hidden NEETS) actually do' (Franzén and Kassman, 2005; 422). This chapter seeks to outline what hidden NEETs 'actually do' on a day-to-day basis and how they experience this. This involves presenting data relating to the main themes of passing time, finding meaning, housing, family situations, and mental health. Finally, the empirical elements of this PhD culminate in a presentation of participants' aspirations in terms of desired futures.

Sociological studies from the 1930s to the 1970s paid close attention to the lived experience of individuals and communities with high levels of unemployment. For example, Jahoda et al. (2017) made the first links between the absence of work and physical and mental wellbeing when researching the impacts of industrial decline in 1930s rural Austria; similarly, Bakke's ethnographic observations of unemployed manual workers in urban America highlighted how the lack of work impacted upon an individual's physical and mental health. More recently, studies from the 1970s and 1980s followed in this tradition by reasserting the linkages between poor health and unemployment (Seabrook, 1978; Sinfield, 1981; Coffield et al., 1986; Hutson and Jenkins, 1989; Allatt and Yeandle, 1992).

It is established that being out of work can impact negatively on wellbeing (see Warr, 1987; Fryer, 1997; McQuaid, 2017); but it is also important to understand what worklessness means in the context of marginality, welfare conditionality and

precarious labour markets. Earlier research e.g., Waddell and Burton (2006) and Cole (2008) suggested that the meaning and satisfaction derived from work is a socially constructed and contingent upon the nature of work rather than an intrinsic feature of all work. In doing so, they challenged the longheld ‘work good/unemployment bad’ dichotomy. Hence, so the experiences and impact of hidden NEETHood are an important empirical question.

8.1.1 ‘Ontological Security’

This chapter uses the concept of ‘ontological security’ as a framing tool to understand the relative levels of wellbeing experienced by all the participants. Ontological security is ‘an emotional, rather than a cognitive, phenomenon, and it is rooted in the unconscious’ (Giddens, 1990: 92). It refers to the durable mental state that is obtained by one’s day-to-day life as this ‘security’ protects against anxiety and chaos. Ontological security is derived from stability, reliability (emotional, mental, and financial) and a sense of continuity (Giddens, 1990).

This chapter draws further work by Laing (2010) on ‘ontological security’ to identify two groups among the young men interviewed:

Table 8.1 – Classical interpretation of ‘ontological positions’

Ontological Position	Characteristics
Ontologically Secure	Laing (2010: 35) states that an ‘ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity’. Furthermore, ‘if a position of primary ontological security has been reached, the ordinary circumstances of life do not afford a perpetual threat to one's own existence’ (Laing, 2010; 42).

	<p>Participants in this group received sufficient levels of emotional and financial support to provide a state of security whereby they were not exposed to risks that could significantly harm their physical or mental wellbeing. Furthermore, they expressed a sense of optimism when discussing their future.</p>
Ontologically insecure.	<p>Laing (2010; 38) suggests that an 'ontologically insecure' individual 'is preoccupied with preserving rather than gratifying himself: the ordinary circumstances of living threaten his low threshold of security'. Conversely, this group were exposed to threats and dangers (such as depression or dangers emanating from crime) to their emotional and/or physical wellbeing that detrimentally impacted on their lives. This means that their immediate concerns were getting by on a day-to-day basis. Finally, negative expectations and perceptions of the future are consistent with insecurity.</p>

The 'ontological positions' detailed in Table 8.1 are not binary locations, but are instead a spectrum of relative security informed by resources (or lack thereof). Like the habitus, the ontological positions are not set, but are constantly being shaped and reshaped by changing social conditions. For this reason, the theory of practice by Bourdieu is highly relevant. The concept of ontological security does not naturally coalesce with relational theorists (such as Bourdieu and Goffman) as it was developed to understand reflexivity and agency in the 'unique conditions of modernity'

(Krolikowski, 2008; 125). Savage (2000) argued that the work of Giddens (including 'ontological security') is incompatible with social class analysis as it overplays agency and enduring social class inequalities. Despite the ongoing debates (see Chapter 3), Atkinson (2007) advocates merging Bourdieu's social class analysis with Giddens' 'ontological security' as in combination it addresses the misguided notion that the theory of 'habitus' is overly deterministic (see Wacquant, 2016) and allows a deeper understanding of how agency can be constrained or exercised. Put simply, 'ontological security' addresses the critique of 'determinism' in Bourdieu's work as it focuses upon agency.

For Bourdieu, the social exchanges expressed within friendships and wider social groups 'provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources' (1993; 143). However, membership of social groups does not naturally equate to such benefits, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, where it was shown that young British Pakistani men held high volumes of social capital but were unable to transfer their social capital into economic capital through access to sustained and viable employment. To develop, this chapter argues that wellbeing cannot be derived simply by analysing volumes/types of capital, hence there is a need for a deeper concept to capture self-perceived wellbeing.

However, it should be noted that the in/secure is not an either/or dichotomy as some individuals can have security in one areas of their lives, but insecurity in others. For example, they may have access to economic resources, but they way that they acquired such resources may pose a threat to their wellbeing (for example through drug-dealing).

8.2 Ontologically Secure

This group of 'hidden NEETs' had enough economic capital to ward off material precarity and possessed ample social capital to prevent social isolation. However, the source of ontological security differed significantly. The young British-Pakistani men benefitted from being born into, and living within, a social, ethnic, religious, and cultural diasporic group. Conversely, the two young men at the travellers' site (Anthony and Joshua) accrued their capital through 'investment strategies... aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term'

(Bourdieu, 1986; 32). Finally, one participant (Daniel) was an outlier as he was the only White-British participant to be ontologically secure whilst living with his family. Overall, the most important factor in the formation and preservation of ontological security was the high levels of financial, emotional and kinship provided by a community/family in addition to housing.

Table 8.2 – Ontologically Secure

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Activities	Social Networks
Anthony	White-British	25	Art and smoking cannabis with friends.	Friends at travellers' site. Occasional contact with family.
Daniel	White-British	19	Football.	Wide circle of friends and living with family.
Faizan	British-Pakistani	23	Gaming, cricket and football.	Wide circle of friends and living with family.
Hamid	British-Pakistani	18	Gaming, football, cricket and running.	Wide circle of friends and living with family.
Joshua	White-British	25	Gym, drinking with friends, dancing, riding bikes, and climbing.	Friends at travellers' site.
Sami	British-Pakistani	18	Football and gym.	Wide circle of friends, living with family and other drug dealers.

Umar	British-Pakistani	19	Gym, motorbikes, cricket, football and squash.	Wide circle of friends and living with family.
Wahab	British-Pakistani	19	Gym and football.	Wide circle of friends.
Zerdad	British-Pakistani	18	Gaming, gym, football and volunteering.	Wide circle of friends and living with family.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given findings in previous chapters, this group is largely composed of the British-Pakistani young men who commonly received economic and emotional support from their families, as well as social and emotional support from their friendship groups. However, it should be noted that whilst they received support from their community ties, this support was infrequently converted into economic capital through assistance to gain employment (see Chapter 6). The predominance of British-Pakistani men in the sample should not be surprising as the South Asian diaspora in the UK 'are acutely aware of the strategic value of reciprocity and mutual cooperation, which is, in turn, best maintained within their own self-constructed networks of kinship reciprocity' (Ballard, 2009; 149).

The support provided to the young British-Pakistani men was expected and seemingly unremarkable for them. This 'expected' provision was 'doxic' as they spoke of the financial assistance and emotional care as being 'taken for granted' (see section 7.2 for more detail on family structures and support) (Bourdieu, 1977; 6). Due to the 'doxic' set of relationships the participants had little to say regarding the support that they receive, in this sense it was 'expected'. Outside of the family home, the main benefit of social interaction outside of their families for Faizan, Hamid, Sami, Umar, Wahab and Zerdad was the ability to ward off stress, anxiety and boredom. All six of these young men were recruited for the study from a sports organisation which also provided employability skills and advice. Hence, they are a group of acquaintances who invariably share some similarities (findings of the research may be different if participants were accessed from different groups). Whilst they engaged with the

educational elements of the organisation, the overriding purpose of their attendance was to play sport with their friends. Unlike some other men in the study, Faizan, Hamid, Sami, Umar, Wahab and Zerdad were constantly busy and had many friends and activities to pass the time:

Chris: Do you have any hobbies?

Hamid: Football, cricket, black ops 3 [computer game] and anything like that... UFC2, FIFA, sometimes erm... jogging just to get back onto cardio level and playing pool. That is about it really.

Chris: Sounds like you have got quite a lot to keep you busy.

Hamid: Yes but it (boredom) does get you know... there are a lot of us²³...

Chris: How do you feel good in yourself at the moment, you don't or do you sometimes feel depressed and anxious and things?

Hamid: No, no, the only thing that stresses me out, is getting a better job... but mentally I am fine yes. No problems! No health issues, no nothing!

Similarly, Wahab stated the conscious desire to keep himself busy and to stay away from acquaintances who were living the 'street life':

Chris: you say street life, what kind of stuff were you up to?

Wahab: Football, messing about, and shit. (But I) stick in the gym, I thought gym was everything. Yes. Which I still think it is.

Chris: How often do you go to the gym?

Wahab: Oh 7 days a week!

On a number of occasions towards the end of my time with the group Wahab told me how going to the gym was beneficial for his mental health:

Chris: Is that one of the most important things?

Wahab: With me, with me if I don't go to gym, my stress levels will be a bit up, so when I am at gym, my anger, everything is under control. As soon

²³ Implying that it is difficult to organise 'get-togethers'.

as I leave gym for about a month or something my anger levels just shoot up in an instant. So I just need to keep myself busy.

The link between physical and mental health is long established, with the consensus being that ‘from a mental health point of view, regular but not daily, exercise seems to be associated with the lowest depression scores’ (Hassmen et al., 2000; 23), with daily exercise linked to higher levels of depression. It could be said that for Wahab, going to the gym was an act of *reflexive* self-management to ward off the stress of being unemployed. Like Wahab, Umar was frequently busy playing sport with his friends but appeared to do so purely out of enjoyment as opposed to a reflexive process of self-management to stave off boredom or stress:

Chris: Do you have any hobbies?

Umar: My hobby? My hobby is I love playing cricket, I love playing football, and squash... I play for a Sunday league... we play in a Sunday League and a Wednesday League as well.

Chris: Always busy?

Umar: Always!

In addition to playing sport, Umar also rode motorbikes and drove a car (without insurance) around Sheffield and the Peak District with his friends to pass time and enjoyed regaling tales of when he was chased by the police. He took pride in saying that “*They (the police) are not catching you*” in the snow due to police vehicles being rear-wheel drive. Umar clearly took pride in his rebellious attitude to the police but was also at pains to emphasise that he wanted to be a positive role model to young people in the future as he aspired to become a youth worker. The seeming paradox between his rebellion against authority and his desire to be a role model is best understood by considering two distinct factors. Firstly, Umar believed that scrapes with the police were normal, even expected, as his friends outside of the organisation in which we met regularly took part in such activities. This aligns with MacDonald and Shildrick’s (2007; 350) observation that “local, informal street culture places great value on becoming/being (seen as) a young man with a particular style of resilient, ‘hard’ masculinity”, which can be seen as a form of cultural capital valued in his social

network. Secondly, his desire to be a role model to young people could be understood in relation to 'biradari' and the British-Pakistani habitus of community kinship.

Whilst Sami's day-to-day life was like the other five men in many ways as all six spent most days at the sports organisation, Sami also sold cannabis to his other friends to make a little more money for himself. He largely spent his time with friends on the streets, playing football and with family, although he was at pains to say that he '*couldn't be at home all of the time*' due to a large family being cramped in the family home.

In summary, the habitus of the six British-Pakistani young men (Faizan, Hamid, Sami, Umar, Wahab and Zerdad) values the strong cultural links within the British-Pakistani community and provides membership of large groups. As Bourdieu (1986; 22) states 'the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible', hence, the profits (or benefits) of the social group are based upon the mutual recognition of their social assets. For these five young men, the 'profits' are clear – they all inhabit a social order which attributes negativity to unemployment and by working together they have learned to manage such negativity and maintain a positive outlook on their lives in ways that appear to collectively lessen the stress of unemployment and provide access to meaningful social interaction. Additionally, Wahab has developed a self-reflexive tool to manage his own mental state by focusing upon his physical fitness. Overall, this small group has developed successful strategies and methods to maintain positive mental health.

Like the six young British Pakistani young men Daniel was also involved in the sports organisation and tried to stay as busy as possible:

Chris: What an average week looks like in your life?

Daniel: Well up to now, in my life with day to day erm... Monday to Thursday I go to the [sports centre] but, erm... Tuesday I train for a football team every Tuesday, at 7 o'clock. Then after Monday to Thursday, I have a day off on Friday, erm... I either play football with my friends or just have a chill out day, and Saturday I either have a football match in the morning and then it is just a rest for Friday and Saturday to Sunday either just meet

my friends or either go somewhere with my family or, travel somewhere where I like to go.

Chris: So you stay pretty busy then?

Daniel: Yes I try, I try. I try and get busy because I don't want to get too bored just sit in the house all day and, I try and stay busy you know get more active, more with it all.

Daniel stated that the need to stay busy emanated from feeling depressed at not being able to find a job. An additional source of sadness for Daniel in the previous weeks prior to the interview was a breakup with his girlfriend. While she did not explicitly state the reason why, Daniel believed it to be due to the perception that he was not achieving anything, instead moving from one training scheme onto another.

The final two participants within the 'ontologically secure' umbrella is the two young men from a new age traveller community in Sheffield. The two young men in this study did not view their membership of the new age sub-culture from a 'deliberate rejection of house dwelling', as described by (Hetherington, 2000: 6). Instead, both young men joined the site because of negative circumstances in their lives. For Anthony, he was living in an art studio space that he was renting (paid for by his savings), as this was not a permanent solution to his housing needs, he took the opportunity to move into a caravan on the site:

Anthony: I ended up on site just by meeting people up there. Just from knocking around in Sheffield parties and stuff, and then got to know some people up there and then... when I moved back to Sheffield, last year I didn't have anywhere to live ... it was a bit more viable for me to move onto site. They can be a bit stand-offish you know if someone wants to (move in). People want to make sure they know you are alright and stuff first but, particularly if you have a house they are going to say why is he in a caravan, you can't just have a holiday home you have got to be, contributing a bit so.

Chris: why do you think they took you in?

Anthony: Well my friends vouched for me and then I kept going up there and meeting people, then they get to know you so they are ok with, and there was a spare caravan going so. Yes. Just I had to worm my way in.

Joshua joined the community in similar circumstances:

I had been squatting in various places on my own, erm... and erm... one of my friends told me about this place... I thought it sounds better than being on my own, like. So yes now I am here and erm... it is great.

Despite the statement above from Hetherington (2000), evidence suggests that the experiences of Anthony and Joshua were more common than it first appears. In a survey of 98 travellers, 29 reported homelessness to be the key factor in their decision to join a New Age Traveller community (Davis et al., 1994). The notion that New Age Travellers deliberately rejecting living in 'solid' homes was further dismissed, as (Davis et al., 1994; 6) concluded that 'the image of the typical Traveller as a middle class, educated person who chooses to travel as an alternative to other viable options was therefore not borne out by the study'. As noted in previous chapters, neither Anthony nor Joshua would be categorised as being 'middle-class' young men engaging in alternative lifestyle choices due to their obvious precarity prior to joining the community.

The interviews with Anthony and Joshua point to an active community where reciprocal aid is a core feature. Furthermore, membership of the group, and by extension, the social capital gained from being granted membership comes with distinct responsibilities. As Bourdieu (1994; 22) notes, 'the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short term or long term'. Thus, the social *investment* in the close-knit community for all creates collective resources that can be drawn upon in time of need. This is demonstrated by Joshua when discussing the benefits of joining the community:

Chris: Sounds like everyone really helps each other out.

Joshua: Yes like, yes, it is a really kind community really like. If I have got like money issues, sometimes I could like ask to borrow a bit of money and then like vice versa my mates have borrowed money off me.

Day-to-day life on the site for Joshua appeared to be eventful, frequently socialising with friends. At the time when he joined the site, he was a hidden NEET with very little money, relying upon borrowing money from other residents and not engaging in any activities which cost money. Shortly after joining the community he started to claim JSA, after which his social life expanded significantly, demonstrating how 'hidden NEETHood' is a fluid state (quote referring to the period before and after he started claiming benefits):

We get up to all sorts erm... it can vary. Some days I will go to the gym to do some exercise. Sometimes I will knock around with my mates and have a drink and a chat. Sometimes I go out dancing, go out to gigs erm... go out on bike rides, cross country to other places, go visit some of my old mates in different cities ... and probably do similar things then, go climbing erm... you know I have quite a busy itinerary really ((laughs)).

Anthony reported mental health benefits from being a part of a strong, close-knit community. For Anthony, a key reason source of enjoyment and pride was the ability to live independently, frugally and environmentally consciously:

Chris: What particularly about it do you enjoy?

Anthony: Living frugally? I just get a bit of a moral boost out of it. I know I am not, I say I am not living off the back of anyone else, I am going in the bins, I am not paying for my food but, I see that as recycling in a sense. Yes I don't know, because it is a bit of constant hardship, and obviously what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Later in the interview he described his philosophy in relation to the environment, in particular the importance of leaving no trace on the landscape:

Anthony: We are looking into melting the cans down, like at the crucible so we can make ingots of aluminium rather than just chuck you know cans lying round everywhere. They are not going to decompose are they, not in my lifetime anyway.

Chris: No not in anyone's!

Anthony: No. Glass takes a few thousand years or something...

The linkages between the new age travellers and the environmental movement have been noted by various scholars, with the broad consensus being that these forms of sub-culture branched off from the denuclearisation and 'hippy' movements of the 1970s (Martin, 1998; Halfacree, 2006). This could also be interpreted through a Bourdieusian lens as the presence of cultural capital in embodied and objectified forms, i.e., the embodied 'long lasting dispositions of the body and mind' recognising the importance of ecology and the objectified 'cultural goods' (Bourdieu, 1984; 17).

Overall, the presence of community ties and the purpose provided from helping others and the environment created 'ontological security' for both Anthony and Joshua. As described by Joshua, *'I am the happiest I have ever been... I have never been happier'*. However, the happiness felt by Anthony and Joshua cannot be prescribed as a solution to precarity or individual discontentment as joining such a community requires unique endowments of cultural capital in its embodied state in order that existing members of the community accept them as 'one of their own'. Furthermore, the social capital emanating from membership of the group came with responsibilities and obligations. Both Anthony and Joshua bought into the ethos (or collective habitus) of the community where the support they received upon arrival would need to be reciprocated for others. Such responsibilities create an element of control of the group over the individual, for example, members must take care of the site environment as much as possible. Hence, the social capital acquired by Anthony and Joshua was subject to a tacit form of contractualism as individuals who failed to adhere to the 'culture' of the site were removed.

8.2.1 Summary

Overall, this diverse group of young men shows that the higher levels of wellbeing associated with the presence of ontological security are an outcome of a range of factors and resources. In this sense, social capital was a greater factor than economic capital in reaching and maintaining a position of ontological security. When this is reviewed alongside the broad findings from chapter six (labour market) it can be

posited that the experience of unemployment can be far more positive than the experience of ‘bad’ work. This supports the view of Waddell and Burton (2006; 13; Pahl, 2017) who conclude that ‘not all unemployment is ‘bad’: for a minority of people unemployment may be better for their health than their previous work’. However, this assertion should be tempered by the fact that some of the young men in this group have little or no experience of formal work.

The six young British-Pakistani men show how their participation in sports activities warded off the stresses, pressures and lack of purpose experienced during unemployment. One participant, Wahab, took the additional step of maintaining high levels of physical fitness to consciously mitigate the potential negative consequences of unemployment.

8.3 Ontologically Insecure

This heterogenous group of young men exhibited varying levels of ‘ontological insecurity’, ranging from facing seemingly everyday situations from a position of precarity, to experiencing the existential difficulties (Laing, 2010). As ‘ontological insecurity’ is not a simple destination or a single ‘state of mind’, there is a spectrum of ‘ontological insecurity’ that varies across time and within groups of individuals (Giddens, 1990). For this reason, two discrete groups of ‘hidden NEETs’ are present within the data. These groups are differentiated on the by their housing status (the second group rough sleeping, staying in homeless hostels or the immediate threat of being homeless) and the levels of financial, emotional and kinship available to them.

Table 8.3 – Ontologically Insecure – Group One

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Hobbies	Social Networks
Baashir	British-Pakistani	23	Making music.	Large circle of friends, associates and customers.
Caleb	Black-British	18	Making music.	Small circle of friends and family.

Jason	White-British	24	Pokémon, coastal walks and reading history.	Two friends (not close relationships) and Fiancé. Little contact with family.
Justin	White-British	19	Travelling, cooking.	Small, but close circle of friends.
Mark	White-British	25	Football and snooker.	Volunteering and family.
Martin	White-British	21	Reading and making music.	One friend and occasional contact with family.
Nathan	White-British	22	Gaming and Lego	One friend and parents.
Sadio	Senegalese	19	Football	Small circle of friends and family.
Steven	White-British	23	Reading (history and conspiracy theories) and poetry.	Small circle of friends. No contact with family.

To commence, Mark, Sadio and Nathan had the most stable source of housing as all three young men lived at home with their families in a supportive environment. Nonetheless, they possessed lower levels of social capital than their peers in the study. The ways in which Mark, Nathan and Sadio passed time were remarkably similar on the surface - all lived with their families and had few friends with which to share large portions of their time. Firstly, whilst living at home with his mother and stepfather Mark passed the time by playing on a games console (PlayStation 4), and occasionally engaging in voluntary work in and around Sheffield:

Chris: What were you doing before coming down here?

Mark: Playing on my PS4. Doing my voluntary work. Do that 3 times a week and then all the rest just nothing.

The void in his life ('just nothing') was partially filled at the time of interview by attending a sports organisation which also provided employability skills and advice, although Mark was only there to play sport and did not engage in any other activities. The friendships that he possessed were comparatively weak as he only saw his friends every few weeks to play snooker on a Saturday afternoon. The only other activity which Mark undertook was a small amount of volunteering where he would *'help the homeless, cook for the old uns, coffee morning, and that's about it.'* The desire to get involved in volunteering was sparked by his adoptive family and their work in the community when he lived in a town around 40 miles from Sheffield. When discussing his future prospects he seemed relatively positive:

Chris: How do you feel about the future?

Mark: I am relaxed. See how it comes.

Chris: Were you always so relaxed about things or at some point did you used to get really anxious or?

Mark: [No, I was] Anxious every time, and then now I have just overcome that.

Whilst Mark had overcome the most pressing anxieties in the months before the interview as he reconnected with his biological family, he expressed anxieties and regret that he was unable to succeed at school:

Chris: When you were at school what kind of stuff did you want to do when you were older?

Mark: I wanted to be a paramedic. And then I didn't get the grades, so I never went back to it.

Mark was relaxed about his future, but at the same time had no expectation that his prospects would improve in the future. Furthermore, he had negative perceptions of intimate relationships and stated that *'girlfriends lied about having pregnancies, and*

that's all of them'. Whilst Mark has a level of security afforded to him by his family and housing situation, there was a sense of malaise that ran through Mark's interactions with others at the sports organisation as he shied away from conversations with others, lacked confidence and chose not to interact with the other young men outside of the organisation. Whilst it cannot be concluded with great confidence, interactions with Mark suggested a sense of ontological insecurity. However, it must be noted that that Mark had been diagnosed with a neurodiverse condition which could have significantly contributed to these emotions and his disengagement with the 'skills' elements of the sports organisation. Both Mark and Sadio moved to Sheffield in their mid to late teens, and hence were unable to accrue social capital through prolonged socialisation in a social group. Thus, it could be argued that the lack of 'ontological security' was directly related (at least in part) to their limited social circles.

Finally, as noted in Chapter 6, Nathan lived in a semi-rural area in the outskirts of Sheffield and viewed had low expectations for his future, in part due to his employment prospects being limited by poor transport connections. Nathan also described his social network to be limited and struggled to make friends, stating that he '*doesn't really go out socialise*'. As noted in chapter five (education) Nathan was also bullied at school, something which he perceives to be a factor in him having few friends at school, college and in later life. During the interview Nathan described his day-to-day activities and hobbies, rarely mentioning any friends or social contacts:

Nathan: ... during the morning... I would apply for jobs then spend most of the day in my bedroom basically. Model making, playing with Lego you know stuff like that basically... You know there should be more to life than Lego but there you go. I have got [nothing else]...

The only common activity for Nathan on a day-to-day basis is visiting the '*library every morning for 2 hours to look for jobs*'. The overriding emotion felt by Nathan in relation to his situation was a sense of desperation due to the fact that he was unable to find a job, combined with concerns over his parents' financial situation. His social isolation and the seemingly constant 'knockbacks' when applying for work had a severe impact on his mental health, as he stated that '*... some days, I feel silly saying this, but I do feel like I want to kill myself...*'. Looking forward, Nathan expressed little optimism, with

the only positive being that his parents had paid off the mortgage '*... so we won't be living in a cardboard box or anything like that*'. This final statement is typical of 'ontological insecurity' through the focus on preservation over gratification (see Laing, 2010).

Jason expressed similar feeling of insecurity. He left the family home around 40 miles from Sheffield to move to the city with his partner when she enrolled at a University in the city as he '*kind of toddled along, grabbed her leg and just got dragged along (laughs)*'. Whilst in Sheffield, Jason cultivated a small group of friends, although he rarely sees them due to their work commitments. As he was out of work and not claiming benefits, he was almost entirely reliant upon his fiancé for money, accommodation and companionship. As stated in chapter six, Jason suffered from mental health issues that he attributed to being treated poorly in previous work. When he was out of work, he passed the time by occasionally going on '*coastal walks and stuff like that*' near to his hometown. When in Sheffield he engaged in solitary hobbies, such as reading and gaming:

'I just tend to do nothing at all I just sit at the computer all day and just play games, but when I am wanting to do things, I go out, go walking, run, play Pokémon games stuff like that, that is a good thing to get you out of the house...'

Self-isolation is a typical experience associated with ontological insecurity as 'the self feels safe only in hiding, and isolated' (Laing, 2010; 76). Despite feeling lonely at times, Jason's mental health had improved significantly over the previous months, from hearing voices and experiencing severe depression. Jason's recuperation from his mental health difficulties was enabled by the financial support afforded by his fiancé, had it not been for her Jason admitted that his wellbeing would have decreased significantly.

Martin was also forced to leave the family home in unforeseen circumstances. His family home was 'full', and in addition he had a long series of disagreements with a parent that resulted in his presence in the house becoming untenable. At that point in time, he was working and could afford to rent a private rented apartment with his

girlfriend. After losing their jobs, however, they eventually lost the apartment and separated, after which Martin then regained employment and rented another apartment. Once again, Martin lost this job and became reliant upon benefits before they were cancelled due to what he describes as an '*administrative error*'. He was at risk of becoming homeless due to lack of income and not being able to afford his rent until a charitable organisation stepped in to mediate the relationship between Martin and his landlord. Whilst the risk of homelessness was averted, he became very isolated with few friends to call upon, and Martin spent most days alone surfing the internet, only interacting with one friend who made music:

'My landlord had internet but he paid for it, so it came in with the rent as well so like just whatever you do on internet, videos and just chill out. I do my own music as well, so at the time, I do it myself now, but at the time I had a friend who had his own studio setup, so I used to go to his and record some music and stuff like that.'

For food, Martin used to walk from the city centre for around 40 minutes to get to his mother's house for dinner, before walking back each evening.

The trajectories for Justin and Steven were very similar as they were both made homeless after family arguments, and both started to sell drugs to make money. The dynamics between Justin and Steven and their mothers appeared to be fractious for several years before culminating in them leaving the family home with little or no access to economic capital:

Justin: My mom didn't want me to live at her house anymore so I had to go.

Steven: I took my Xbox, and my guitar in my bag and just went to my Dad's.

After leaving their mothers' home both moved in with their fathers for short periods of time, before the relationship broke down, creating a 'chaotic' housing situation. From there, Justin and Steven became reliant upon sleeping on friends' sofas.

Justin: I ended up leaving that job and that is when I, I started sofa surfing again. Erm... I ended up living predominantly on a friend's sofa, he had a hostel flat so I stayed on his sofa for a nominal fee of like 20 quid a week, and that is all it were but things he started taking Michael out of me asking for more and more money even though he never had to pay any rent anyway he were asking for more and more money off me.

Steven: I became homeless, from there it was just sofa surfing from friends and I tried to mix it up as much as I could so I weren't at the same friends house every night.

Although they were both able to draw upon support from their social networks, the length of this support was commonly fleeting, resulting in them both having to move on frequently. However, after some time Steven was able to find more stable accommodation with a friend of his uncle's where he stayed for several months. This provided Steven with the opportunity to perform 'odd jobs' for acquaintances and he also sold drugs to make a little money in the absence of employment or welfare. During his spare time Steven took the opportunity to engage in a range of activities, such as reading non-fiction, informally studying history and politics, and examining 'Zeitgeist' conspiracy theories online. Justin was unsuccessful in gaining stable accommodation in the same way as Steven, instead continuing to 'sofa surf' for a number of months with various acquaintances. Justin was thus forced to selling drugs as an economic necessity. In time, Justin earned enough money to afford a backpacking trip.

Their criminality (selling drugs) only occurred because of their 'insecurity' and a lack of alternatives to acquire economic capital. They both struggled to find work due to the insecurity caused by being homeless and having to 'surf' from sofa-to-sofa. It should be noted that while Justin and Steven's volumes of social capital enabled the accumulation of modest levels of economic capital through drug-dealing, these were not strong relationships or wide networks. The importance of such networks has been highlighted in the past. Specifically, about the selling of drugs, McCarthy and Hagan (2001) argue that such weak connections between individuals are similarly utilised in the act of criminality for economic profit. The utilisation of acquaintances for Justin and Steven went beyond the simple acquisition of economic capital, extending into the

realm of informal housing. In short, both relied upon a loose network of contacts for all their basic needs.

The final two young men in this group are Baashir and Caleb. Interestingly, both Baashir and Caleb are rap musicians from the same areas of Sheffield, came from single parent families and embraced the culture of hip-hop to provide an outlet for their societal and economic frustrations. They both felt they had been 'wronged' by 'the system' and were at risk of being victims of crime themselves. That said, both rappers took a different approach to their artistic expression – Baashir rapped about his criminality and also expressed to bring different groups across Sheffield together to reduce gang violence, whereas Caleb saw hip-hop as a way to express his political contempt for 'the system':

Caleb: If you look at this area... 5 years ago it would be the same. The complete same. They [the government] have not done nothing to help us. And they are not planning to either.

However, they were both united in the underlying reason why they first got involved in music, which was largely as a result of trying to simultaneously impress their friends and project an image of strength or knowledge. The themes of criminality and the projection of oneself are generic themes within mainstream hip-hop since the late 1980s (Bennett, 1999; Dimitriadis, 2009; Gosa and Fields, 2012), and are commonly placed together within songs, as seen in rapper Jay-Z's (2008) lyrics '*I used to rap to impress my friends, To pass the time while I was gettin' it in*²⁴', for the accumulation of social and cultural capital. The life of criminality lived by Baashir was described in chapter six, but he was not alone in his activities as his '*best friends are in jail serving a 15 year stretch for a stabbing*'. When the perpetrator of the stabbing was identified to the police by another individual the family property was attacked, Baashir recalls his memory of the incident:

²⁴ "Gettin' it in" is a colloquial speech referring to criminality in the pursuit of economic profit.

I can remember walking past that house, and it was petrol bombed... within an hour... that is how united this area is. That you have chose to send away three good guys, obviously what they did was wrong.

Such incidents of violence were commonplace within Baashir's social circle. At the age of 18 Baashir was 'stabbed... over some stupid petty (stuff), some pettiness friend's mistakes and I got stabbed through it and nearly died'. After that incident Baashir took the decision to carry a knife at all times to defend himself. Around two years later Baashir was sent to jail for an incident that he denies being a part of:

There was a group of us. A male got stabbed, in court this male had said that I was there. At first he said I was the one who stabbed him I denied it cause it wasn't me. I got a plea bargain of affray, affray is basically like causing a fight in public or you know a nuisance in public. My friends check this, this is why so much hatred comes into the, because of the system. My friend has been done for affray twice, I am not a racist person but he is white. He didn't go to jail. I have been for affray never, first ever charge I went to jail for 16 months.

Baashir's day-to-day life was still intertwined with criminal activity through his own drug dealing 'businesses'; as such, his social capital was intertwined with criminality. In relation to similarly deprived areas of the UK, Pitts (2013; 63) argues that:

'It is not that people (gang members) in these neighbourhoods have no 'social capital' but rather that their social capital tends to be 'sustaining but constraining', enabling them to 'get by', to survive the day-to-day struggle, but not to 'get on', by moving out of their present situation and into the social and economic mainstream'

For Baashir, his involvement in crime (selling drugs) was a necessity, saying that

'We only do this because it is the only way that makes us happy. You know what I mean? Going home every night broke no one is going to be happy...

You are going to be like ‘what is this life?’. This is when suicides start happening some people can’t handle it.’..

For Baashir it is clear that he found crime to be financially advantageous and a way to enhance his wellbeing. It could be argued that Baashir’s experience of growing up in an area of social deprivation could be construed to be fundamental in what can be termed as ‘negative social capital’ – i.e., the presence of negative circumstances and individuals creates negative outcomes.

Despite Baashir’s description of the area in which he lived as being ‘unsafe’, ‘poor’ and ‘dangerous’ he spoke highly of the community spirit within the area, highlighting how ‘*Somalis, Arabs, Afghans, Pakistanis, Yemeni, Somali, we are all together unity*’. One of the key goals Baashir wanted to achieve in the future was to bring together not only the different ethnic groups in his area, but to use his contacts across Sheffield to include other (commonly rival) areas into his music. The outlet of music was also a key stand that ran throughout the interview. Caleb described himself as a ‘conscious rapper’, a label used for rap artists who confront ‘politically and social relevant issues’ (Howard, 2012; 35), in his case, the subject matter was violence, poverty, the monarchy, welfare and the media.

Chris: what do you rap about?

Caleb: David Cameron, I even think about like stuff like Donald Trump being president... He even said that his child, like his daughter was sexy. Do you remember that? He said something like ‘if she wasn’t my daughter I would shag her’... You are going to trust this guy to run the country? He is causing war with... what’s the name? Kim Jong-um, North Korea and when North Korea and USA have like a fight, if you think about it then all-out war, because of like World War II, England are going to have to get involved. Like, that just ruins all of us really. All because of Donald Trump and his big mouth.

A couple of years prior to being interviewed Caleb, like Baashir, was involved in violence - he robbed someone for a mobile phone and around £100 of cash. After serving his time he was released and vowed to stay away from crime in the future.

However, Caleb's life still revolved around what MacDonald and Shildrick (2007) would define as 'street corner society', typified by '*hanging around*' streets and estates with very little to occupy their time. When I met Caleb through a contact, he was playing basketball with friends outside a row of shops next to a busy road, he described that and '*hanging around*' the park as the main activity that he 'got up to'. In the coming months Caleb was hoping to get a placement at a music studio organised through his probation worker.

In the absence of employment or any other opportunities Baashir and Caleb were certainly at risk of, and later became involved in crime. This appeared to be a very common pattern for the young men in this area, especially given recent cuts in funding for youth activities:

Baashir: But his funding got cut (referring to an organiser of football tournaments), and from that one cut yes, about I would say 120 kids have been put straight back onto the streets. 120! It ran every Tuesday and Thursday then same 120 kids, were loyal to playing football because the guy who ran it... But as soon as that got cut, the kids are just back on the streets, about at least 20 of them out of 120 are in jail right now. You know what I mean?

Chris: All this for one cut?

Baashir: One cut. So imagine all the cuts all over the, all over England. And then they say why crime is rising. Come on? ((laughs)) Why is it rising? Come on? You tell me?

Similar points were echoed by Caleb in relation to underinvestment in the areas:

Caleb: what is she (Julie Dore, Leader of Sheffield City Council) doing to help this area? Nothing at all. As long as her family and the rest of the people are just, are just getting their money, they don't really care.

For Baashir, his social and cultural capital for the future comes in the form of artistic expression through the medium of hip-hop. Whilst Caleb and Baashir both had levels

of social and cultural capital, they are unable to successfully transfer them into the legal economy. This can be explained by reference to Bourdieu (1984; 16) who states that ‘cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital’. However, as their forms of cultural capital comprise embodied cultural capital of value only within a narrow field, they are not easily transferred into economic, social or institutionalized cultural capital that can materially improve their circumstances. Similarly, the social networks (or social capital) are equally bounded with a confined field – as such, this too cannot be transferred into resources with recognisable value.

The final discrete grouping details the lives of six young men who experienced what could be termed ‘chronic ontological insecurity’. Their lives were beset with poor mental health, trauma, unemployment and social isolation.

Table 8.3 – Ontologically Insecure – Group Two

Name	Ethnicity	Age
Gavin	White-British	23
Jay	White-British	24
John	White-British	25
Robert	White-British	24
Thomas	White-British	25
Tyler	White-British	25

The family relationships for the six young men in this group were fractious at best, and eventually ruptured, creating a significant risk of homelessness, John was the only participant who did not become homeless. For Jay, John, Thomas and Tyler, the change in circumstances from the family home to independent living occurred because of a family breakdown:

Jay: I beg, every day, I got morally brought up properly, I left home at 15, not my choice. Yes, by the time I was 17 streets had dragged me down that much I were putting a needle in my arm. 18, I were in jail.

John: I ain't really seen any of them since I were about 16. I was always like the black sheep in my family sort of thing so.

Thomas: I did my GCSEs but my mom kicked me out when I were, just when I were turning 16 like two weeks before my sixteenth birthday

Tyler: No I don't talk to my mom anymore. She got married to a dickhead, basically a violent dickhead.

Whilst the participants were willing to discuss the broader context of their movement away from the family home, they were often reluctant to dwell upon or divulge the specific events that culminated in them leaving home. The fact that these young men left the family home to become NEET is not surprising as recent research suggests a strong 'link between adverse childhood experiences and adult homelessness' (Herman et al., 1997; 254), and a further link suggesting that 'homelessness impedes young people's participation in employment, education, or training, with many becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) after leaving their last settled home' (Quilgars et al., 2008; xii).

Family breakdown was however not the only cause of homelessness within this group. Both Gavin and Robert were care leavers:

Chris: So you were in care until you were 18, is that right?

Gavin: I left a little bit early to tell you the truth erm... I was in the care system in Hull but I did live here for a good 7 years of my life when I was younger. So I grew up in primary school here. And erm... I like I said at the beginning I moved there from Hull in August.

Similarly, Robert also received no support as a care leaver:

Chris: Do your family help you out at all or?

Robert: No I were brought up in care. So, it were like, they did help me out when I were a kid and stuff and then they just stopped helping me.

Chris: So how old were you when you left care were you 18?

Robert: Yes. And then 21 they actually stopped dealing with my case completely.

Chris: How long ago was that, how old are you now?

Robert: 24.

Ascertaining the exact causes of greater risks of homelessness from the interviews were difficult to discern due to their complex biographies and multitude of risk factors. That said, Martijn and Sharpe (2006) identified five distinct pathways into homelessness, these are: (i) drug and alcohol, (ii) trauma and psychological illness, (iii) drug, alcohol and family problems (i.e., family members misusing substances), (iv) family problems, and v) trauma (with no apparent psychological illness). One of the participants within this group was not homeless but was allowed to stay in a local authority accommodation despite being unable to pay the rent. As noted in chapter seven, John lost access to ESA due to a reassessment deeming him 'fit to work' and would have become homeless were it not for a housing officer using his discretion to allow John to stay in the flat whilst his benefits were rectified. Broadly speaking, all the young men in this group experienced at least three of these five 'pathways', in addition to issues around welfare (see Chapter 7).

It can be argued that the instability during their childhood resulted in an inability to *invest in*, and subsequently a lack of, social capital that could be utilised in times of need. The data shows that insecure young lives lead to a lack of durable or profitable

social connections that can be utilised upon in hard times. This is succinctly explained by Gavin:

Do you know it is like two different types of homelessness if you ask me: homelessness where you are actually on the streets rough sleeping, and then there is homelessness as in sofa surfing, where you are on people's sofas and stuff like that... because you just having relationships with your friends really aren't you, and their families are helping you out and so on and so forth so it wasn't too bad. It was when I, I didn't quite hit rock bottom but when I started feeling the, you know the actual depression of things and that was when I did have to hit the streets.

In short, the acquisition of social capital requires strategic investment and the inability to make such investments during times of relative stability resulted in five of the young men resorting to rough sleeping. The only participant who successfully managed to avoid rough sleeping was Robert, who as explained in chapter seven, was allowed to live in his council flat without paying rent on compassionate grounds after his housing officer witnessed the outcome of attempted suicide. As with Gavin, Jay explains mental hardship caused by rough sleeping with no emotional or financial support:

I were a mentally strong person yes, and it is fucking me up... it is killing me, it is breaking me, to a point where I am waking up in the morning, and I feel like crying.

Life on the streets for all of the men was expensive due to having to purchase 'cups of coffee and takeaways' (Tyler) instead of having the means to make these simple comforts themselves. As noted in Chapter 6, a primary source of income on a day-to-day basis was through begging, an activity which brought with it high levels of stigmatisation and self-loathing. Despite this, Jay consciously developed a strategy of improving his appearance:

Chris: So visually, do you think (how much money you get from begging) comes down to how you look?

Jay: ... I mean, the more you look like a tramp the more people will give you money on streets, so people stay like that for a reason. You know, me personally ... I earn money through asking people erm... which it might be a bit of bullshit but, I get mine by looking smart and talking to people in a decent manner and making them believe that I need what I need.

Conversely, Tyler saw the success of begging to be more sporadic, following no discernible pattern:

Chris: Do you get much money through that?

Tyler: Yes you can make like, £20 in a couple of hours, and it will get you through the day. But it is sort of, it is just, it is one of those things that is quite demoralising, and you have got no choice but to do it. You do it, sometimes it is like one of those things that seems like, there is no light at the end of it. And then all of a sudden somebody will pass you £10 and you are off, you are done.

All of the young men that resorted to begging did so on a daily basis but only until they met their daily target of around £20. In the view of Jay, this was as a result of the traumatic nature of begging whilst having mental health problems and the logical decision to beg for as little time as possible, as *'some people in a depressed state would not (beg)... They won't come and ask for help and they will bury their head in sand'*.

All of the homeless young men spent time in a centre that provided facilities including showers, washing machines, food, computers, drug advice, and on some occasions, medical treatment. Whilst these services were broadly welcomed by the service users, the consensus was that this was not a space to develop friendships. Instead, homelessness was a lonely experience, with the main focus being fending for oneself. The centre did however provide a short period of safety for all of the young men, as explained by Robert: *'This is like one of my safe places. I can come here and I feel alright'*. That said, confrontations between service users were common occurrences throughout my time there, including one fight in an adjoining room during an interview:

(SHOUTING AND BANGING OUTSIDE)

Chris: *Sounds like it's kicking off...*

Robert: He is always kicking off about something him.

Chris: *So you know who it is without even seeing?*

Robert: Oh yeah!

Outside of the centre the focus on a day-to-day basis was surviving. A range of strategies were employed to achieve this aim. The most prominent of which was stealing items from shops which can then be sold on to other homeless people or the public:

Gavin: It came about because I was erm... sanctioned on the dole I was having no money and I was not wanting to rely on my erm... family and stuff ... several times I have actually tried to get myself sent to jail because of the circumstances I was in.

Chris: *Roof over your head?*

Gavin: Yes just a roof over my head, 3 meals a day, to be able to self-educate, to be able to watch TV, to be able to have a warm drink... several times I have actually done a crime, committed a crime to try and go to jail.

Chris: *What kind of stuff?*

Gavin: Just thefts and stuff like that, nothing ever serious.

Chris: *What kind of stuff were you taking?*

Gavin: Like as in from shops and stuff, just daft things do you know, like shavers and toothbrushes and do you know things that aren't too expensive but they have got a price range.

Jay also stole from a shop in order to get by, but unlike Gavin, showed great remorse and sadness that he may have to do the same thing again in the future:

Jay: I nicked £90 of cheese and they caught me, they released me and I won't do it again, but I have got to that desperate stage where I have gone in that shop and took what I have needed to take... I don't know what to do except for tap people in a morning.

Robert also stole items from shops for the same reason, but developed additional strategies to generate money with his only friend:

Robert: We all look after each other really. Me and one lad basically when we are together we are like partners whatever we do, we do together do you know what I mean. If we want money we do it together, like sometimes it might be begging it might be selling Big Issue, sometimes it might come down to stealing or, buying a bit of cannabis and then selling it onto our friends that smoke it as well to make a bit of profit, and we just do what we can to get a bit of money do you know to get by, you have got to do what you have got to do.

Robert was the only participant who spoke of selling drugs as a means of making money to get by on a day-to-day basis. In some ways, it could be stated that Robert was successfully utilising the forms of capital that he possessed, the small amount of social capital (through his friendship) and his cultural capital (the ability to 'carry oneself') enabled him to generate a small amount of economic capital. Gambetta (1993) presents a dichotomy of good/bad social capital, whereby within closed social networks agents can utilise their endowments of capital to generate positive outcomes for those inside of the network, but negative externalities to others. For other interviews, the desire to sell drugs to make money could not always be realised. John spoke of his wish to sell drugs due to his desperate situation, but believed that he did not have the required forms of capital to sell drugs successfully:

John: Hmm... It would be better if I were at least, like, you know, a tough guy or something. I could at least try selling drugs for someone or sort of thing but I am not that guy, no one would take me serious. 'Oh, do you want to buy some weed?'. They would just punch me in the face and take my weed ((laughs)). I am not like one of those like, posing guys. I don't even like fighting to be honest, I don't have it in me.

John's statement is consistent with 'drug dealing' being perceived as 'a hypermasculine occupation that requires skill, intelligence, and fearlessness' (Baker-Kimmons and McFarland, 2011; 337).

Most of the group were involved in the consumption rather than the distribution of drugs. Five of the six young men in this group spoke of their drug issues, with Gavin not wishing to comment. The linkages between drug use and homelessness are well established in the UK and across the world (Mallett et al., 2005), with recent data suggesting that over 30% of homeless people in London misuse substances (Sharman et al., 2016). The underlying reasons of drug use from this very small sample of homeless young men is broadly in line with Mallett et al. (2005), highlighting the role of mental health, normalised drug use amongst peers, unemployment, poverty and wider societal disadvantage. The typical transition into problematic drug use amongst this group was recreational use of 'softer' drugs whilst in housing, before homelessness and more harmful drug use develops (Ralphs et al., 2017). An emerging theme within this research is the prevalence of 'Spice' use within the sample (see Devany, 2020). Spice is a synthetic cannabinoid that is a signifier of extreme deprivation and social exclusion as 'Spice users are subjected to a double-stigma of being both homeless and for their use of 'Spice', including from *within*²⁵ the homeless population' (Devany, 2020; 18). The impact of the drug is explained by Jay:

Chris: What drugs do you do if you don't mind me asking?

Jay: Spice. I don't smoke cannabis, I don't take Bs (Heroin) and whites (Cocaine)... spice is my problem and I can't get off it and it is fucking horrible... like smack (Heroin)... I wish I had never [tried Spice], I am stupid.

This view is support further by John:

John: On this one time I couldn't get [any cannabis]... I figured I would try this other stuff... I figured it would be shit weed but it weren't... In my case I didn't really go paralytic or anything it was 3 drags in and I were done, for the day... I wanted to stop I then realised I were addicted to the stuff as well.

²⁵ Original emphasis.

The pain in their lives and lack of solidarity amongst the homeless 'community' of the centre can be theorised by the work of Bourdieu. He states that 'under emergency or high-stress conditions' multiple inequalities experienced by different social actors in a location can 'converge to weaken or abolish collective standards or solidarities' (Bourdieu, 2015). This is articulated by Jay and Thomas:

Jay: Everybody on these streets... are all druggies, right. They will talk to you and feed you what you want to hear right, deep down nobody gives a fuck about nobody right... they are all out for their selves... I ain't got a real friend here.

Thomas: ... I try and keep people... that at arm's length.

Their stigmatised status of being homeless and the 'doxa' of unconscious self-derision for those in this position results in 'bodily submission, unconscious submission, which may indicate a lot of internalized tension, a lot of bodily suffering' (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992: 120). Furthermore, Bourdieu and Eagleton (1992: 121) state that 'some may, for instance, become drug addicts' to numb 'the pain that comes from the fact that one internalizes silent suffering'. As pertinently summarised by Jay: '*Unless you have got family, if you are on the streets you ain't got no support ... if you suffer from mental health, depression, anxiety and all rest of it, you are fucked...*'

8.3.1 Summary

In summary, this diverse group of young men clearly show how precarious lives with low levels of social capital can be shaped in many ways. Firstly, fine gradations in volumes of social and economic capital can result in very different experiences of 'hidden NEETHood'. The young men in subgroup one who avoided 'chronic' insecurity had relatively low levels of social and economic capital, but this was enough to ensure that they maintained adequate housing and remained relatively close to the labour market by utilising their social networks. As shown by subgroup two, without these levels of capital, the present can be extremely precarious and the consequences can be brushes with life-threatening events through being involved in criminality or severe declines in mental wellbeing. Secondly, there is evidence that the young men who

were 'ontologically insecure' blamed themselves for their predicament despite their class-related situations and circumstances causing them to lack the economic capital to overcome ontological insecurity. Moreover, when security is lost and levels of precarity escalate it limits the ability to reclaim the security.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed how 'hidden NEETHood' is not simply a void but is a state in which various alternative sources of meaning can be accessed albeit to differing degrees of success across the group. Findings suggest that in order to be 'ontologically secure' as a 'hidden NEET' the following need to be present: access to economic resources, stable housing with family or a partner, friendships, and activities to pass the time. The absence of these factors may result in 'ontological insecurity' characterised by poor mental health, and often substance misuse with the necessity to commit crime in order to ward off homelessness. Hence, it would be mistaken to just see NEETHood as a problem of employment as it has been shown that a far wider set of social phenomena are in play.

The conditions of 'hidden NEETHood' vary dramatically from living securely with a supportive family with enough economic and social capital to enjoy hobbies with friends, to being destitute and sleeping on the streets. When comparing the findings of this chapter with Chapter 6, questions emerge pertaining the relative levels of wellbeing experienced in work and out of work. The answer to this question is complex and is intrinsically linked to the resources available and a range of protective characteristics. Broadly, if the experience of work is poor and uncertain then unemployment can provide solace if housing and emotional support is provided by family or a partner. However, if social connections are limited then the experience of unemployment can be daunting and beset by challenges.

In a divergence with traditional studies on 'NEETs', this chapter has included homeless young men who fall into the same category as other young unemployed men but have been overlooked or deemed to be different to other 'NEETs'. By presenting the experiences of homeless young men the chapter shows how relatively fine gradations in capital can result in *very* significant differences in terms of wellbeing. The fact that the initial cause of homelessness is difficult to ascertain is indicative of multiple disadvantages that exert influence over the lives of these participants. Due to the

increasing levels of precarity experienced by young working-class people and the difficulties in successfully transitioning from the 'family' home to an abode of oneself, it is essential for future 'NEET' (and other unemployment research) to carefully consider the issue of homelessness in more detail.

Chapter Nine – Conclusion

9.1 Thesis overview: summary of key findings

This thesis has provided a set of detailed accounts which shed light upon the factors which contribute to the creation of 'hidden NEETHood' amongst young men in Sheffield and the lives of those who experience it. The thesis commenced with a detailed analysis of the key sociological, economic and social policies that have slowly shaped the opportunities for young working-class men in cities such as Sheffield. In doing so, the analysis has framed the perspectives of the set of interviewees within the context of long-term social changes.

This concluding chapter of the thesis commences with a discussion on the process of disengagement before addressing the four research questions that shaped the methodological and theoretical approach of the study. Subsequently, the typologies used in the four empirical chapters are combined to form a spectrum of precarity that encompasses the main element of respondents' lives, ranging from the 'marginally' to 'extremely' precarious. Following this, a set of theoretical reflections debates the suitability of Bourdieu's theories in conjunction with ideas linked to stigma, masculinity and intersectionality to address the key themes raised throughout the thesis. Here it should be noted the thesis seeks to provide empirical contributions to knowledge, not a significant reimagination of sociological theory. The subsequent section details the methodological, theoretical and empirical contributions to knowledge emanating from the research. It notes the challenges of accessing and engaging with an under-researched group of 'hard to reach' young men. Due to the difficulties in accessing suitable respondents it may not be possible to exactly replicate the research underpinning this thesis. Nevertheless, the research findings have extensive relevance in terms of policy, practice and academic understanding, casting light on a group of young men which has hitherto received minimal attention. The findings are then translated into a set of insights and recommendations that could provide a more inclusive set of policy tools to support 'hidden NEETs'. Finally, the thesis concludes by reflecting upon its title through a discussion of the extent to which the young men who participated in the study were 'disengaged'.

As noted in Chapter 1, only a few studies have explored the lived experiences of 'hidden NEETs', and until now none have been able to engage successfully with those who are not receiving any form of support from charities or employment schemes (see Jones et al., 2018, London Youth, 2018; Damm et al., 2020a). Together these studies found that young people's propensity to claim benefits was shaped by negative perceptions of the welfare benefits system and the long wait-time for Universal Credit, the importance of informal work and how low educational qualifications were not predictors of future 'hidden NEETHood'. While these studies are of great value to practitioners and policy makers, a key additional contribution made by this thesis pertains to the process of disengagement.

9.2 The Process of Disengagement from EET and Welfare

The process whereby young men become 'hidden NEETs' cannot be simplified into statements akin to 'young working-class men struggle to adapt, and then drop out'. The research reported in this thesis instead points to complex sets of pathways shaped by interactions between the cultures, structures (such as education, employment, criminality, and the welfare benefits system), dispositions and resources available to the participants. As noted in Chapter 2, a helpful way of analysing and theorising these interactions and their effects in recent times is through the concept of hysteresis. The theory of hysteresis shows how changes to EET and welfare have moved at a greater pace than the dispositions (*habitus*) of many young working-class men in areas such as Sheffield. This hypothesis is supported by the empirical findings which clearly show how, for many, their resources (particularly masculinity), 'soft' skills and formal qualifications are less suited to the fields of education, employment and training than they were for their fathers' or grandfathers' generations.

Despite the socio-economic and structural changes that have limited their opportunities, it is very clear that most of the young men tried their best to persevere in settings where their resources and dispositions were ill-suited. For example, most showed a desire to stay within education and/or training for as long as possible, and only left when they could no longer stand the wearing-away of personal wellbeing. Similarly, many tried their best to stay within service sector employment (typically low-paid and customer facing) until the incompatibility of their resources and dispositions conflicted with the requirement of the jobs. Furthermore, some felt that they were

squeezed out of work by instances of temporary or fixed-term contracts on the one hand, and dictatorial managerial approaches on the other.

For some respondents leaving EET was a choice to retreat into the succour provided by unemployment. Furthermore, for many, it was also an attempt to find some meaning in their lives after being buffeted by the eroding winds caused by poor-quality work, a lack of autonomy and insecurity for meagre economic rewards. Hence, the choice not to access the welfare benefits system should be viewed in similar terms, i.e., the 'reward' of receiving benefits was not commensurate with all that it embodies, in terms of the performative conditions attached to continued receipt of benefits. Those with ample economic, social and cultural capital were able to survive, and in some cases thrive, in the state of 'hidden NEETHood' as they reclaimed their autonomy and managed to get by in a manner that corresponded with their habitus and allowed them to utilise their volumes of capital in a compatible field. In doing so, many attained levels of pride that could not be acquired through the typical channels of work or accessing the welfare benefits system.

Whilst some young men revelled in the state of 'hidden NEETHood', this was far from universal. For participants with less cultural, economic and social capital the experience of 'hidden NEETHood' was an isolating and debilitating state that was far worse than their experience of poor quality and/or low-paid work. Importantly, the young men who desperately needed support from the welfare benefits system were the ones who struggled most to access it due to their chaotic lives and lower levels of embodied cultural capital that prevented them from being able to navigate the complex systems linked to claiming benefits. In a far broader sense, many of their lives were shaped by what is defined as the 'social costs of economic violence', such as family breakdown, trauma and substance abuse (Bourdieu, 1998a; 129).

For the reasons detailed above, the process of disengagement has come to make transitions from school-to-work far more complex. Instead of the 'linear' or 'fast track' transitions of previous years (for example, see Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007), the movements into the lower end of the labour market are better characterised as 'pinball transitions' as individuals' fortunes are short-lived, unpredictable, and constantly threatened by obscured hazards (Brozsely, 2017).

9.3 Addressing the research questions.

The original aims of the research were to: i) ascertain the factors that culminate in a young working-class man to become a 'hidden NEET'; and ii) understand how they get by in the absence of employment and formal provisions. In doing so, the research addressed the following more specific research questions:

1. What are the factors that culminate in disengagement from EET and not claiming benefits?
2. How is this disengagement shaped by attitudes to, or experiences of, education, employment and welfare?
3. How do young men experience NEETHood and to what extent are they able to engage in meaningful activity outside EET?
4. What role does access to resources in Bourdieu's forms of capital play in i) shaping disengagement from EET; and ii) engaging in meaningful activities outside EET?

In the rest of this section each of these research questions is examined with reference to a summary of the most pertinent findings presented in Chapters 5 to 8. Due to their close overlap, questions 1 and 2 are addressed together.:

RQ1: What are the factors that culminate in disengagement from EET and not claiming benefits?

And

RQ2: How is this disengagement shaped by attitudes to, or experiences of, education, employment and welfare?

This thesis has shown that disengagement should be understood in the context of long-term social, economic and political change by shaping the ways that young men often struggle to navigate the opportunities and structures given their habitus, level of capital and circumstances. Chapter 2 illustrates this broad point by detailing the

context and structural settings that are framed against the experiences of the young men in the study.

To develop, over the last 50 years a process of hysteresis has seen the material conditions of EET become misaligned with the habituses of certain young working-class men. In essence, there is a time-lag between the socioeconomic/cultural changes in society and the dispositions of some young working-class men. This has resulted in a situation whereby they are no longer adapted to the conditions of the labour market, the education system and training opportunities in the way that their fathers and grandfathers once were. Since the GFC around 10 years ago these processes have become more even precipitous as the 'pincer movement' of greater welfare conditionality and increased precarity in the labour market has seen the emergence of 'hidden NEETHood' as a significant policy concern.

Throughout the thesis an array of complex reasons was presented as to why the young working-class men who took part in the research became 'hidden NEETs'. Reflecting upon this question chronologically in terms of life trajectories helps to shed light upon the ways in which a combination of factors culminated over time in disengagement from both the labour market and welfare provision.

Study participants often showed determination in their efforts to succeed in education. Hence, many progressed to secondary education, but the passage was seldom smooth, with many dropping out between the ages of the 16 and 18. Subsequently, good quality training opportunities were hard to acquire due to 'credentialism' as the high grades at GCSE required prevented many from pursuing this route. Where in bygone years the apprenticeship was a 'well-trodden' route into work for many young working-class men without qualifications, these opportunities have all but evaporated for those who struggled to be successful at school.

Having left education the young men were confronted with a labour market that offered few choices except poor quality and often 'feminised' work that requires attributes such as 'emotional labour' (see Section 2.5). Initially, many participants seemed willing to work in the service sector (call centres in particular), but the experiences of these forms of work were negative and slowly eroded their wellbeing as they felt frustrated, disrespected and experienced a loss of self-esteem. It is also worth noting that the

respondents were only able to access a limited range of service sector employment (typically the lowest paid and most insecure) given their general lack of qualifications. Furthermore, other factors come into play, such as disrespectful managerial attitudes that may be more prevalent in this segment of the service sector.

In some circumstances this led to disengagement from the labour market and engagement in criminality instead as an alternative source of income. In a gendered sense, masculinity was both a 'gift' and a 'curse'. The process of disengagement was slow because they persevered in poor quality work that was inconducive with their gendered identities. This juxtaposition meant that many participants eventually left the labour market to find solace in the respite provided by unemployment.

One impact of increasing credentialism appears to be that having GCSEs is not sufficient to get a reasonably good job. Hence, dropping out of education between the ages of 16 and 18 may be a key causal factor in the participants' inability to secure good jobs. In a theoretical sense, the acquisition of institutionalised cultural capital in the form of GCSE qualifications alone cannot be easily transferred into economic capital through obtaining secure work in the formal labour market. For most participants obtaining employment was not the primary issue. Instead, gaining good quality and meaningful employment was the greatest challenge. When linking this to their educational credentials it can be asserted that meaningful employment is reliant upon securing qualifications above GCSE level. This is demonstrated by the fact that many of the participants could get work with their (limited) GCSEs; however, the quality of that work was typically very low. Those who had limited work histories either had disabilities, significant mental health issues or were too young to have been able to build up much work experience. Access to social capital only played a substantial role in the procurement of employment in informal settings through 'word of mouth' and non-formal application processes. Most notably, the British-Pakistani men often worked in the local service sector in restaurants, organising events and serving at weddings. This form of work was not a pathway into more secure employment, however, as such activities were perceived mainly to be sources of 'pocket money' to supplement the financial support provided by their families.

One significant finding was that the perceptions and experiences of sporadic and insecure 'service work' by the British-Pakistani young men were relatively positive. As

noted, they often performed 'emotional labour', but these forms of work were not experienced negatively. The thesis has posited a possible explanation by citing the history of valuing masculine service sector labour in South Asian communities. Hence, the cultural constructions of masculine labour are different to the traditional white working-class notions of performing gender at work.

The stigmatisation of the welfare system also played a role in disengagement, although not to the extent anticipated. Accessing the welfare benefits system was seen as a safety parachute that would only be launched once all other mechanisms had failed as the primary choice was to achieve self-sufficiency. In short, welfare was viewed as the last resort. Firstly, familial and community resources were called upon as sources of economic capital. If they were not available and cultural capital aligned with powerful masculinity and entrepreneurship were present, then criminality would ensue. Finally, if no other options were available then the welfare benefits system would be called upon. However, a significant theme emerging from the research is the difficulties that many young men have in accessing support from the welfare benefits system. In short, those who were in most need of support from the welfare benefits system were the ones who struggled to navigate the labyrinth of stipulations and requirements. The group who needed the support most were the ones who lacked the ability to traverse and maintain the complex processes and obligations necessary to access the system due to being homeless.

RQ3: How do young men experience hidden NEETHood and to what extent are they able to engage in meaningful activity outside EET?

If social and economic capital were present, then the experience of unemployment often became a position of solace where 'ontological security' could be reached. In this regard, having no work was in some cases far preferable to the experiences of poor quality, insecure and low paid work. Additionally, being unemployed and not needing to claim benefits provided an insulating effect as being distanced from the requirements associated with claiming benefits allowed some participants to avoid the negative connotations of being a benefit recipient and having to navigate the various forms of behavioural conditionality (these themes are addressed in further detail in section 9.6.)

The large caveat is that homelessness and its associated ontological insecurity were experienced by some for whom family support was not available. Hence, even a small amount of social capital meant the difference between 'ontological security' and profound 'ontological insecurity'. The young British-Pakistani men, those at the travellers' site and those involved in the illegal economy as drug dealers found unemployment to be a communal experience due to the presence of kinship, shared cultural values and alternative economies. However, for other young men the experience of unemployment was a lonely one. In particular, those attending the homeless daycentre described how the experience of unemployment was beset by conflicts as they fought for limited resources.

RQ4: What role does access to resources in Bourdieu's forms of capital play in shaping disengagement from EET and in engaging in meaningful activities outside EET?

Outside work the value of social capital to insulate oneself from poor mental health was strikingly apparent. Fine gradations in the levels of available social capital resulted in noticeable differences in the lived experience of unemployment. Thus, even small endowments of social capital could be converted into a limited but significant amount of economic capital to ensure that meaningful activities could be undertaken. Furthermore, cultural capital in its embodied form aided the development and continuation of kinship that added another layer of security and improved wellbeing. In essence, the levels of social and cultural capital at the point when unemployment commenced were critical in shaping the experience of 'hidden NEETHood' because once in that position there were very few opportunities to develop social capital. The only exceptions to this were Anthony and Joshua, who made concerted efforts to acquire the social capital required for acceptance as members of the 'alternative' (or 'reciprocal') economy at the travellers' site. In other words, it was no coincidence that those with greater endowments of social capital had the most meaningful lives in the absence of work. Whilst capital played a significant role, participants' habitus also shaped the disengagement. The most prominent example of this was the desire for autonomy and respect in EET that comes from the dispositions associated with the habitus – seemingly, the greater the disposition for autonomy and respect, the greater the propensity to disengage from EET to find meaning in other fields.

9.3 Synthesising the empirical chapters.

Each of the four findings chapters used a different typology as a means of identifying key themes, similarities and differences in experience across the set of participants. These typologies proved to be invaluable not just in their own right but also as the basis for an overall synthesis of findings across the four domains of education, the labour market, the welfare benefits system and relative ontological security.

The research participants were assigned to one of the categories in the typology being deployed for each domain. When these statuses are examined together a hierarchy of precarity clearly emerges. According to Kalleberg and Vallas (2018) the theoretical foundations of ‘precarity’ are derived from the work of the modernist scholars Bauman, Beck and Giddens through their attempts to conceptualise the transition into a modern period whereby the foundations of solid structures (such as the family and the labour market) are weakened in advanced capitalism, to be replaced by instability and the redistribution of risk from the state to the individual (see Bauman, 2013).

In recent years ‘precarity’ has come to be adopted as a ‘buzz’ word in sociology and economics, as well as in a range of other academic fields. In this regard, this thesis utilises ‘precarity’ to encapsulate the sense of instability and insecurity that can permeate many corners of one’s existence. It captures both objective conditions in terms of (the lack of) opportunities facing young hidden HEETs and the subjective dimensions of their experience.

Table 9.1 – Synthesis of the participants’ analytical sub-groupings

Name of Participant	Chapter 5 Education	Chapter 6 Labour Market	Chapter 7 Finance	Chapter 8 Ontological Security	Level of Precarity
Daniel	Drift	Insulated	Supported	Secure	Marginally Precarious
Faizan	Drift	Insulated	Supported	Secure	
Hamid	Drift	Insulated	Supported	Secure	
Umar	Drift	Insulated	Supported	Secure	
Wahab	Drift	Insulated	Supported	Secure	
Zerdad	Drift	Insulated	Supported	Secure	

Anthony	Drift	Exposed	Self-sufficient	Secure	Moderately Precarious
Baashir	Opposition	Exposed	Self-sufficient	Insecure	
Caleb	Opposition	Insulated	Supported	Insecure	
Jason	Detached	Insulated	Supported	Insecure	
John	Opposition	Exposed	Deprived	Insecure	
Joshua	Drift	Exposed	Self-sufficient	Secure	
Justin	Detached	Exposed	Self-sufficient	Insecure	
Mark	Opposition	Insulated	Supported	Insecure	
Martin	Drift	Exposed	Deprived	Insecure	
Nathan	Drift	Insulated	Supported	Insecure	
Sadio	Drift	Exposed	Supported	Insecure	
Sami	Opposition	Insulated	Self-sufficient	Secure	
Steven	Detached	Exposed	Self-sufficient	Insecure	Extremely Precarious
Gavin	Detached	Exposed	Deprived	Insecure	
Jay	Detached	Exposed	Deprived	Insecure	
Robert	Detached	Exposed	Deprived	Insecure	
Thomas	Detached	Exposed	Deprived	Insecure	
Tyler	Detached	Exposed	Deprived	Insecure	

Table 9.1 shows the broad spectrum of precarity experienced by study participants. The two extreme positions of ‘Marginally Precarious’ and ‘Extremely Precarious’ are the fewest in number, six and five, respectively. This suggests that the holistic experience of being a young ‘hidden NEET’ man varies dramatically, but with the most common position being ‘Moderately Precarious’. By showing the heterogeneity of the ‘hidden NEET’ group the thesis has diverged from existing sociological disciplines. It has bridged the gap between homelessness and unemployment research as these disciplines are often viewed as independent entities. It also contributes to debates pertaining to welfare reform as it specifically engaged with individuals outside the mainstream welfare nexus. In doing so, this study shows that ‘NEETHood’ is not simply about relationships with work and the labour market but is constructed and moulded by personal circumstances and situations that interact with and may lead to disengagement from institutional settings/systems. By taking a divergent approach the research has captured the fluidity across the states of unemployment, work and

NEETHood to show how the group can experience precarity regardless of their employment status.

The marginally precarious group of participants (n=6) was insulated from the labour market as they were able to acquire enough money from their families to get by without requiring support from the welfare system (see Table 9.1). Furthermore, they had active social lives which in combination with sustainable and secure housing solutions allowed them to live 'ontologically secure' lives. This group was largely homogeneous in terms of their volumes of capital and the way that they transferred one form of capital into another. Broadly, they had high levels of social capital by virtue of being members of a tight social and ethnic group. This membership and adherence to a collective habitus in their communities conferred cultural capital (in its non-institutionalised form). The combination of social and cultural capital was easily transferred into small amounts of economic capital in the form of informal work and/or financial support from their families. Within the British-Pakistani community it appears that the dispositions of their habitus combined with access to social and cultural capital enabled them to develop support structures outside the state, negating the need to understand or navigate the welfare system. Regarding employment, they were willing to undertake forms of work seen as incompatible with traditional tropes of working-class masculinity which may reflect the greater cultural propensity to undertake these forms of work in the British-Pakistani community. Chapter 5 suggests that this may be a result of service sector employment amongst South Asian men to be influenced by a habitus which has historically normalised service sector work. The outlier in this group was Daniel, who had less social capital, but benefitted from being able to access the required economic capital from his family to live securely in the absence of employment. Similarly, Daniel also had no knowledge of how to claim support from the welfare benefits system, and subsequently had no need to seek such knowledge.

A large heterogeneous group (n=13) of participants experienced moderate levels of precarity in their lives. The source of this precarity varied significantly, ranging from the need to find (often insecure) work, being physically endangered by being involved in criminality, being socially isolated or having limited access to economic resources. The key difference was that their economic capital was not derived from their families or close-knit communities. Instead, they had to utilise the social or cultural capital that they possessed, often in innovative ways. For example, Baashir used his 'street

capital' (a form of embodied cultural capital) and his social capital to accrue economic capital through drug-dealing. Anthony and Joshua used their cultural and social capital to gain access to the travellers' site. Once access was granted, they were able to transfer their resources into economic capital through a system of mutual aid. Some participants such as Jason, Mark and Sadio were able to rely upon loving relationships with their families or partners for small amounts of economic capital, but their sense of security was limited as they had lower endowments of social and/or economic capital. It is important to note that while they had support from their families and partners, their social networks did not extend further. A strong theme that emerged for all members of this group was a sense of pride that they were able to get by in the absence of support from the welfare benefits system. This pride was not entirely shaped by the stigma attached to claiming benefits but was also influenced by the desire for autonomy and self-determination.

Finally, a smaller group (n=5) of participants were experiencing high levels of precarity as they were homeless, had no social contacts to rely upon for support and were unable to navigate the conditionality attached to the accessing the welfare benefits system. Unlike those in the other two groups, they had no capital of recognisable value that could be utilised (or converted) into resources to confer even a meagre level of security. Fundamentally, they all struggled to access the welfare benefits system due to their low levels of cultural capital and the barriers created by living chaotic lives. As such, they lived extremely precarious lives with little or no social or economic support.

When comparing the 'Marginally Precarious' and 'Moderately Precarious' groups it is clear that a little capital went a long way in warding off insecurity when out of work and not accessing the welfare benefits system. These differences in volumes of capital were very subtle and often differentiated by the presence of social and cultural capital which could be utilised to acquire small amounts of economic capital and wraparound support from family structures. These fine gradations of capital amongst the participants clearly resulted in very significant differences in the lived experience of 'hidden NEETHood'. For example, the possession of the requisite levels of cultural and social capital to sell drugs was (in the cases of Justin and Steven) enough to escape homelessness. Further examples of these fine gradations can be seen in the narratives of Anthony and Joshua as their entry to the travellers' site was dependent

upon endowments of capital that provided a level of security that would have otherwise been out of reach. These insights also show the heterogeneity of attitudes and experiences *within* the working-class despite their proximity to need and necessity.

9.4 Theoretical Reflections

As detailed in Chapter 3 and throughout the empirical chapters, this thesis has utilised a combination of perspectives including the theory of practice of Bourdieu, stigmatisation (principally from Goffman), masculinity and, where appropriate, intersectionality to demonstrate how ethnicity links to these theories. Applying these different strands together helps to shed light upon the ways in which participants disengaged from EET and shaped their day-to-day experiences and found meaning in their lives.

Of the theoretical tools, the work of Bourdieu took prominence. This is because his work enabled analysis not only of the role of social class in 'hidden NEETHood', but also how participants' actions were shaped by the forms of capital that are endowed, accrued and wielded to get by in the absence of EET and accessing the welfare benefits system. A fundamental component of the analysis of capital in the thesis is the concept of field, which has been used to demonstrate how capital in one area may be transferred by participants to gain an advantage in other realms of their lives. For example, those belonging to a distinct community were able to convert their embodied social and cultural capital into economic resources when required. Conversely, in some arenas such capital endowments can be an impediment. Thus, in the educational field the cultural capital linked to masculinity (physical strength, autonomy and the desire for self-sufficiency) was not deemed to be valued. However, such attributes were of great value in the field of criminality as such attributes were essential when acquiring economic capital through selling drugs. Hence, the ability for one form of capital to be successfully converted for 'profit' in another field can be very limited.

The habitus was also invaluable to show how individual dispositions are shaped by historical processes and structures. A prime example of this was the British-Pakistani participants who appeared to have a habitus that promoted self-reliance outside the welfare benefits system, a tendency potentially formed by historical cultural traits from Pakistan that encourage a more reciprocal economy through the concept of 'Biradari'

(see section 7.2.1). In addition, the findings in Chapter 5 suggest that the acceptance and performance of traditionally 'feminine labour' by young BP men was influenced by a habitus that perceives this type of work differently to other study participants.

The historical construction of 'hidden NEETHood' was also framed around the concept of hysteresis. Briefly, hysteresis refers to the mismatch between the habitus and the conditions of the field. Chapter 2 vividly details how long term political and economic changes over the last five decades have formed a disjuncture between the habitus of certain young working-class men and the types of work that they traditionally performed. This is highlighted by the findings pertaining to the difficulty for those lacking qualifications and 'appropriate' dispositions in finding 'good' and secure work.

The summary of findings in sections 9.2 and 9.3 underline the many benefits brought by the application of Bourdieu's concepts. However, there are areas where his theories fall short. Firstly, when analysing the lives of the men in the 'extremely precarious' group, their apparent 'lack' of capital only allows for somewhat simplistic conclusions around their agency. This could be linked back to the critique of Bourdieu focussing too greatly on the middle classes (see Pelletier, 2009). Furthermore, his theories do not provide a nuanced interpretation of the role of gender, particularly masculinity. The work of Cheng (1999) goes some way to bridge this gap, but applications of 'capital' alongside masculinity are often overly focused upon hegemonic masculinity, and as yet have failed to capture the albeit debated transition towards more inclusive (or 'progressive') forms of masculinity in current and more recent generations of men (see Roberts, 2018).

The theorisation of 'stigma' by Goffman has been utilised in the thesis to detail attitudes and experiences to claiming welfare in detail. In particular, the characterisation of claiming welfare as a 'marker' of stigma has been invaluable, as has the discussion on how stigma is subjectively managed on an individual level. Put simply, Goffman is well suited to frame and theorise the states of stigma and its negotiation. However, it falls short of providing an adequate theorisation of how individuals like those in this study actively disengage from a state or structure in order to avoid such feelings.

Theories of masculinity and ‘emotional labour’ have also proved to be insightful and useful in the understanding of how participants interacted with structures such as education, the labour market and the welfare benefits system. In particular, the notions of self-sufficiency, stoicism, respect and autonomy shine through the narratives of all the young men. Additionally, the theory of ‘emotional labour’ has allowed the thesis to ascertain that the experience of service sector employment may be shaped by ethnicity as well as gender. Nonetheless, further research is needed to develop more nuanced perspectives on working class masculine identities in the face of recent attitudinal shifts with respect to gender relations – and how these then feed through into the views and behaviours of young men in different situations.

Finally, the theory of intersectionality has been useful in some areas, such as the experiences of education and the labour market to clearly detail how interactions with these structures and institutions are shaped by intersecting factors of gender, ethnicity and social class. However, the theory of intersectionality is somewhat indefinable as it merely *encourages* researchers to consider the ways that different vectors interact and lacks a cohesive theorisation.

In summary, the collection of theories used has been shown to be effective in providing a complex theorisation of lives outside EET and the welfare benefits system. The selection of theories arguably provides a more complex, integrated and nuanced analytical framework beyond the youth transitions literature that is dominated by theories of individualisation that are less attentive to class, ethnicity and gender.

9.3 Contributions to knowledge

This thesis has moved away from the dominant research model of ‘youth transitions’ to present a novel set of findings that shed light upon the lived experiences of an under-researched group. Similarly, it has utilised a set of theoretical and conceptual tools that have diverged from the typical frameworks of ‘youth’ that overplay notions of agency and negate the role of ‘class’ based inequalities. By taking this approach an original set of empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions has been detailed throughout. This thesis has also significantly developed upon the knowledge provided by previous studies on ‘hidden NEETs’. In doing so, it has produced a series

of significant methodological, empirical and theoretical contributions that have the potential to alter how academia, policy and practice perceive the lives of seemingly 'disengaged' young working-class men.

The thesis commenced with a literature review that detailed and conceptualised the long-term processes that gradually created the conditions for 'hidden NEETHood' in the postwar era. Whilst these processes are well documented, this synthesis of social policy and socio-economic changes have diverged from existing studies which portray 'hidden NEETHood' as a contemporary phenomenon. In doing so, the thesis posited the finding that the habitus of certain young working-class men in cities such as Sheffield has become disconnected from the conditions of the labour market through hysteresis over the last 50 years. Hence, their dispositions are somewhat misaligned with the requirements of the contemporary labour market.

The thesis has vividly shown the heterogeneity of the 'hidden NEET' population. Past research has demonstrated this point (see Furlong, 2006a; MacDonald, 2011), but the research reported here has explored the experiences and circumstances of this group in a way that was hitherto lacking by including homeless people in the 'NEET' group. In doing so, the thesis provides a further contribution pertaining to the proximity of homelessness and unemployment in a time where ubiquitous 'welfare conditionality' and highly precarious labour markets intersect. It has also shown how very small amounts of social capital can result in significant changes to the experience of life outside EET and the welfare benefits system. For example, possessing a small amount of social capital can ward off homelessness if wielded successfully to earn money through selling drugs.

For the men in the study unemployment was not necessarily a state of marginalisation or disengagement. For some, unemployment became a source of refuge during which they could use their agency and ingenuity to engage in meaningful activity in this 'shadowland' beyond the labour market. Other studies have shown the potentially harmful effects of poor work in older groups (see Wadell and Burton, 2006; Cole, 2008; Marmot, 2020), but this study has shown how this operates amongst marginalised young men and detailed how they navigate 'hidden NEETHood' to access alternative

sources of meaning. Additionally, the thesis has adapted and developed the concept of ontological security alongside the work of Bourdieu to present a novel approach to the conditions required for such young working-class men to feel 'secure'. A connected finding is that NEETHood is not solely, or even predominantly a problem caused by labour market precarity or 'poor employability', but it is an outcome of what Bourdieu (1998a; 129) defines as the 'social costs of economic violence' which also includes family breakdown. Many of the study participants had experienced a lifetime of socio-economic disadvantage that cannot be understood or alleviated by simply analysing their interactions with the labour market, and can be illuminated by utilising the theory of practice, ideas around masculinity, the concept of stigma and an intersectionality perspective.

An unexpected contribution pertains to the way in which under-researched informal economies and traditional practices (such as biradari) can form a type of casual support structure within British-Pakistani communities. Whilst the data on this matter is too sparse to draw concrete conclusions, it notes that the welfare benefits system is beyond the purview of young men in this cultural group due to the presence of a shadow social security system within some communities.

An additional contribution comes from the time-limited nature of willingness to participate in emotional labour. The most recent contribution on this subject argues that young working-class men enjoy utilising their 'emotional capital' (Roberts, 2018). This thesis presents a more nuanced approach in suggesting that young working-class men are *initially* willing to work in the lower end of the service sector, but as time progresses their ability and willingness to continue in this work wanes as it increasingly challenges masculine identities. However, it should be noted that this finding may be different if the worker possesses the skills required to enter more fulfilling types of work in the service sector.

The thesis has also identified a number of key methodological contributions. Accessing 'hidden NEETs' is a challenge but not necessarily an insurmountable one as engaging this group has been shown to be possible. Most prominently, the research process has comprehensively shown that the heterogeneity of the 'hidden NEET' group brings with it the need for time consuming 'shoe leather' ethnographies with an abundance of perseverance across multiple research sites. Furthermore, small, locally

based voluntary and community sector organisations are key to engaging a group that is largely disengaged from formal provisions. However, as the thesis notes, this is a time-consuming process that may be prohibitive for researchers and practitioners with limited budgets.

9.4 Limitations and avenues for future research.

A limitation of this study is that cross-sectional data collection only allows for the analysis of young men's present situations. Taking inspiration from MacDonald et al. (2005) a significant development for this area of research would be to expand the data collection period to build a longitudinal approach shaped around the long-term 'lived experiences of 'social exclusion'' (MacDonald et al., 2005; 873-4). For this reason, a longitudinal study of 'hidden NEETs' would be invaluable in ascertaining the trajectories of marginalised young men similar to those in this study.

The experiences of young female 'hidden NEETs' are clearly absent as well, and a similar project which explores the lives of women would certainly highlight a different set of societal and structural issues. Moreover, exploring the lives of women would allow for a detailed and more comprehensive theorisation of the role of gender amongst those disengaged from the state.

Despite significant efforts this research study was unable to engage with middle-class 'hidden NEETs'. There could be great value in undertaking an investigation which specifically acquires insights into the lived experiences of this group. This would allow for the role of social class to be reviewed in a more relational sense and could provide interesting narratives relating to the perceptions of the welfare benefits system amongst those with greater economic resources. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to explore the impacts of fine gradations of capital amongst the working-classes more widely, not just for those in a marginalised position, in order to illustrate the outcomes of minor differences in social, economic and cultural resources in more detail across time and space.

Finally, the findings relating to the British-Pakistani men detail intriguing cultural 'norms' that appear to shape the propensity to engage with the welfare benefits system as well as the acquisition of work. Further in-depth studies are required to understand the perceptions of the welfare benefits system amongst a far wider range of ethnic and

cultural groups in the UK and to unearth the factors that may shape these relationships.

This doctoral thesis has explored the experiences of a small set of young working-class men from a broad set of social circumstances. Thus, there is not enough data to form concrete findings in all areas (as noted by the comments of the British-Pakistani group above). Such a small sample across the study also does not provide the same depth as studies with more participants. In other words, the findings are indicative rather than representative, but nevertheless provide valuable insights into the ways in which some young men can become disengaged from the world of education, training and employment.

9.5 Insights for policy

The inescapable debate of the day in relation to youth un/employment clearly relates to the impacts of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, there is lively discussion around the ways that policy makers can assist young people in returning to the labour market. Over the last 18 months the pandemic has ‘exacerbated pre-existing intergenerational inequalities’ as ‘young men have experienced a disproportionately large portion of the past year’s economic pain’ as they lost jobs or hours, were more likely to be furloughed, and be employed in the worst hit sectors (Brewer et al., 2020; Henehan, 2021; 3). Whilst vacancies have increased in recent months, and the economy appears to be recovering at pace, Jackson and Ortego-Marti (2021) suggest that significant ‘unemployment scarring’ will continue to impact the prospects of young people for many years to come.

The flagship government policy tasked with increasing labour market participation in the UK is the £2bn Kickstart Scheme that aims to fund ‘high quality jobs for over a quarter of a million young people’ (Sunak, 2020). Like many schemes in the past (see Chapter 2), Kickstart is targeted at young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are receiving support from the welfare system (specifically, Universal Credit) and will provide wages for 25 hours per week for up to six months at the National Minimum Wage, as well as covering the cost of National Insurance contributions (Palmer and Small, 2021). Whilst welcome, the Kickstart Scheme does not address the

disengagement of 'hidden NEETs' due to the requirement that entrants to the scheme be in receipt of Universal Credit. This alone excludes large numbers of young people from the support that they may need to enter the labour market due to restrictive rules around eligibility and conditionality. Hence, this thesis strongly argues that the linkage between Universal Credit and the Kickstart Scheme or any other support for young people should be removed to ensure that 'hidden NEETs' can be included. This would provide greater equity of opportunity for those who are excluded from or choose to disengage from the welfare benefits system.

To address the issue of large number of young people outside EET and the welfare benefits system properly a further set of progressive and research informed policies is required. Government policies for the labour market should place greater emphasis upon the creation of *good* and secure work rather than simply reducing worklessness. In this regard, implementing the recommendations of the Taylor Report and the Marmot Review would be a positive development (see Taylor et al., 2017; Marmot, 2020).

The current 'payment by results' contracting system used by government projects such as the 'Work and Health Programme' needs to be amended to financially reward organisations in the voluntary and charitable sectors for engaging the most 'hard to reach' groups and to eliminate 'parking and creaming'. As highlighted throughout this thesis, accessing disengaged young people is a painstaking process that requires large amounts of time. For youth focused charities and organisations, policy makers should look beyond the 'low-hanging fruit' of young people closest to the labour market and introduce more informal types of support that will appeal to those with negative previous involvement in employment and welfare.

In a broader sense, the current government policy of funnelling support through Jobcentre Plus discriminates against individuals and groups who wish to avoid the scrutiny associated with claiming benefits. For this reason, alternative sources of employment advice, such as a new service similar to Connexions, should be funded to fill this gap. Furthermore, an organisation with this function could attempt to 'gently' encourage young people to engage with the welfare benefits system by outlining the support that they are entitled to and to support them in making claims. An alternative model would be the adoption of a scheme akin to the National Lottery Fund's Talent

Match programme (now ended) on a national level to specifically target NEETs as well as other marginalised young people who are 'hidden' from mainstream support. The individualised approach of Talent Match has been shown to be successful. This success was based on several factors, including the voluntary nature of participation, implementation via youth-led partnerships and the deployment of a person-centred model that incorporated provision of therapeutic support, peer mentoring and specialist services that would otherwise be unavailable to young people (see Damm et al., 2020b). In addition, there is a need for national and local datasets to monitor the size of the 'hidden NEET' population so that programmes can understand their levels of reach and engagement.

Smaller organisations in the voluntary and charitable sectors tend to be closest to 'hidden NEETs', but they are often excluded from tendering processes due to their small size. There are two approaches which could alleviate this issue. Firstly, large funders should encourage (or even mandate) contractors to form partnerships with small, locally based voluntary and charitable sector organisations so that they can use their expertise in supporting young people. Alternatively, local authorities could provide small voluntary and charitable bodies with capacity building and evaluation support to evidence the good work that is taking place 'on the ground'. By doing this, smaller organisations could draw on external expertise to develop their evidence base to bid for funding.

Regarding the system of 'welfare conditionality', this research has clearly added weight to the already burgeoning evidence base from the Welfare Conditionality project showing that this approach does not 'incentivise' work (Fletcher, and Wright, 2018; Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Instead, the findings show that it creates greater stigma around welfare and disproportionately harms some of the most marginalised young people in society.

In a broader sense, this thesis has shown that youth unemployment is not simply caused by a lack of work but is indicative of a wider set of socio-economic disadvantages. The 'employability' lens needs to be replaced with a research informed discourse around the holistic causes of worklessness by developing schemes that (like Talent Match) consider the triggers and impacts of poor mental health, debt, housing, relationships, family breakdown and addictions.

9.6 Concluding remarks – ‘Disengaged youth?’

Returning to the fundamental question posed by the title of this thesis: can this group be labelled as ‘Disengaged Youth’? Simply labelling a group ‘disengaged’ does not adequately describe the complexities of their lives and negates the historical and structural inequalities that has culminated in what can appear to be ‘disengagement’.

It has been shown that ‘hidden NEETHood’ is intrinsically linked to long-term social, political and economic factors first evident around 50 years ago. Since the GFC many of these factors have intensified as securing ‘good’ employment has become increasingly difficult and the conditionality attached to accessing the welfare benefits system has become ubiquitous.

On an individual level, the lived experiences of the young men in the study clearly attests to the stoicism and dedication to remaining engaged in EET. In education, they recognised its value and aspired to do well but a combination of structural and personal factors led to disengagement; in the labour market they often accepted work that compromised their specific masculine identities; in terms of welfare many only resorted to support from the state when it was absolutely necessary; and socially they endeavoured to live fulfilling lives. The headwinds of long-term structural change appear to have narrowed educational and employment opportunities and personal circumstances have often militated against success, even if access to social and cultural capital has cushioned some from the worst effects of unemployment. Interestingly, their habitus has not adapted to the limited opportunities they face. This somewhat echoes the ‘epistemological fallacy’ thesis as they approach life as though they are responsible for their success while buffeted continually through structures that exclude them (see section 1.6).

Furthermore, the study participants occupy a peculiar socio-political space as they are distinct from the simplistic ‘deserving/undeserving’ dichotomy. As previously stated, they cannot be ‘undeserving’ because they do not claim benefits. For the most part, they became a ‘hidden NEET’ due to negative experiences with work and welfare – the ones who were ‘marginally’ or ‘moderately’ precarious typically perceived the act of ‘disengaging’ from EET and the welfare benefits system as a positive step as they sought to forge their own paths in ways that promote independence. In that sense, it

is possible that the search for autonomy, independence and respect occurs in a way that encourages withdrawal from state structures as a way of achieving those values.

More broadly, this is not a tale of abject victims or heroic resistance as participants' narratives fall somewhere in between. In this regard, the 'NEET' label is unhelpful as it creates a false sense of homogeneity and focuses upon what they lack, rather than what they possess.

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Appendix 1 –Participant topic guide

Before beginning the interview:

- **obtain written consent via consent form (participant and researcher copy)**

1. Introduction (2 mins)

- Introduce self.
- About the research: Talk the participant through the Information Sheet and Consent Form.
- Length of discussion: around 45 minutes to one hour.
- Recording: recordings and transcripts are only available to the researcher and supervisors. Copies of the audio file and/or transcript can be provided upon request.
- All opinions are valid, no right or wrong answers, I just want to know about their personal views and experiences
- Confidentiality/anonymity: re-assure respondent that all responses are anonymous and will not be shared with anyone else
- Participation is voluntary: they can pass over questions or withdraw from the interview at any time
- Get permission to record & transcribe the interview, and to use (anonymous) quotes before starting to record.

2. Current situation

- Can you tell me what you've been doing since leaving school?
[FE/HE/training/work/volunteering, informal work etc.]
- Can you describe what the last year has been like?
[housing, work, friends, family, partner, finances, welfare]

3. Employment/Looking For Work

- How long have you been out of work? Have you had periods out of work before? If so, for how long? And what was the main reason for leaving your job then/recently?
- Are you looking for work now?
- Where do you look? Where are the best places to look?
[Prompt: Jobcentre, Careers Advisors, Agencies, Talent Match, Volunteering...through friends and family etc]
- How long have you been looking for work? How important is it for you to be in work?
- Have you done informal work in the past? How long for? Was it worth it?
- What type of work would you like to do? Is this realistic/how likely is it you will get this kind of work? Is this kind of work available locally? What kind of work is available locally? How far afield would you be willing to travel to find work? How easy would you say it is to find work?
- What do you think is the biggest barrier to you finding the kind of job you would like? Are there other barriers?
[Qualifications, experience, connections, transport, health, caring responsibilities]
- What would need to happen/change to make it easier for you to find work (e.g. skills/experience/transport links etc)?
- How much would do you think would be a reasonable amount for you to earn? When you are thinking about this, what kind of things are you taking into account (e.g. *cost of travel, cost of housing, etc.*)
- Have you turned down any jobs? If so, why?
- Has anyone helped you with looking for work? What support did they provide? How useful was this? Do you need any more support? If so, do you know where you can get it?
- What kind of work do your friends do? And family? Is that of interest to you?

4. Labour Market Experiences

- How many jobs have you had?
- What types of work have you done?
[Sector, pay, duration, FT or PT etc?]

- Were those the types of jobs that you wanted?
- Did you enjoy any of them? Why/what was the best thing about them?
Was there anything about them you didn't like?
- How secure did you feel in those jobs? (Prompt around contract terms e.g. perm/temp, zero hours etc)
- Were there opportunities for you to progress? Was that something you wanted? Why did it/did it not happen?
[Prompt: promotion, more hours, permanent contract]
- Why did you leave your last job?

5. Experience Of Unemployment

- How do you feel about not being in work? How has that changed over time?
- What challenges and difficulties have you experienced in this time?
What's the worst thing(s) about it? Is there anything good about it?
- Other than employment advice, have you turned to any other organisations for support or advice?
[Prompt: Citizens Advice, Housing advice, Talent Match, Roundabout, FURD, Groundworks etc...]
- Who/what services have you found to be most (and least) helpful? Why

6. Welfare

- Why do you not claim Jobseekers allowance? Have you claimed it in the past? What was that experience like? Would you consider claiming it again in the future? Are you/have you claimed any other benefits?
[Stigmatisation, Sanctions, Hassle, Stress]
- Friends claiming?
- Family claiming?
- How do you get money? Is it enough to make ends meet? Have you had to cut back on anything recently to get by?
[Friends, family, 'off the books'?]

- Would you say your financial situation has got worse/better/stayed the same since being out of work?
- What about the financial situation of the whole household?
- What impact has [any change] had?

7. Future

- How do you feel about your future?
- Where would you like to be in twelve months/five years time?
- Have your expectations e.g. about finding work changed in the last few months?

8. Family Support And Relationships

- Do you live with family? If yes, do you plan to stay; would you like to move out eventually; what's stopping you? If no, where do you live; how do you manage the rent? How stable is your current housing situation (.e.g. risk of eviction, sofa surfing etc etc?)
- Is your family able to support you financially?
- Does most of your money come from your family?
- Is that enough money to get-by?
- Do your family put pressure on you to find work?

9. Getting By - Time/Hobbies & Mental Health

- What do you do on a typical day?
- Who do you spend time with on a day to day basis?
- Friends in a similar situation? If yes, what's stopping them from getting work?
- Family unemployed?
- Do you have any hobbies?
- [Prompt: How do you pass the time? Volunteering? Gaming?] Do you sometimes feel stressed or anxious about your situation? How often?
- Is there anything you do that makes you feel better?

At the end of the interview:

- Provide the interviewee with the £10 incentive payment and get them to sign for it. Explain that you may be conducting focus groups in the future, and ask if they are interested in attending..
- Ask for up-to-date contact details.
- Where relevant: provide interviewee with flyer on the list of support services available. Inform them that there is always somebody to talk to in confidence about their feelings of anxiety/stress/depression/unhappiness.
- Explain timescales for reporting and dissemination and how this information will be used.

Thank you very much for your time.