‘Stuck in place?’

A place-based study of how far education contributes to social mobility for working-class women in a former coalmining town.

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Abstract

If upward social mobility involves moving from one social position to a higher one, social immobility should involve staying still. Yet this thesis demonstrates that all social agents travel in social space, regardless of whether their trajectories are classed as mobile or immobile. Whilst policymakers see schools as sites of social mobility, the findings presented here suggest that education is just one field that social agents travel through, patterned with the inequalities that pervade other social fields and the overarching field of power. Place is the prism through which these social inequalities are refracted: the locus for a social agent's positions in overlapping social fields. By synthesising Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical-methodological toolkit with Doreen Massey's conception of space as relational, interconnected, and characterised by multiplicity, this place-based study maps the educational inequalities faced by working-class girls and women who have lived, learned, and worked in Coalville from the mid-20th century to the 21st century. Through historical ethnography, the study illustrates how inequalities are (re)produced over time. Schooling opens up or closes down opportunities for working-class women based on their positions within complex webs of social relations. Far from being engines of social mobility, the capacity of schools to promote upward mobility can be constrained by their own positions within social space and place.

Interviews with former educators reveal the dynamics of the local field of education. The study then moves beyond the school gates to explore working-class women's trajectories through the field of work in a local toy factory, tracing the implications of these for women's social mobility and the potential mobility of their daughters and granddaughters. The (re)production of working-class women's proficiencies across the generations can be as significant for upward mobility as the institutionalised cultural capital that is unequally offered by formal schooling. Finally, the thesis considers the aspirations of working-class girls studying in Coalville in 2021, relating these to the trajectories of those who lived, learned and worked in the town before them.

The thesis makes the case that policymakers should engage with complex webs of educational inequalities on a local level if they truly aspire to level up those parts of England that are viewed as left-behind through social mobility. It

outlines practical recommendations for schools serving deindustrialised communities and for researchers exploring social class, gender, education, and social mobility.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 A "fresh" approach to social mobility?

Policymakers have lauded social mobility as a solution to social inequality in England (Lawler and Payne, 2017). The Social Mobility Commission, founded as part of the Child Poverty Act (2010), serves as a useful barometer of both its importance and elusiveness, arguing that:

> "Being born privileged in Britain means that you are likely to remain privileged. Being born disadvantaged, however, means that you will have to overcome a series of barriers to ensure that you and your children are not stuck in the same trap" (Social Mobility Commission, 2019, p. v).

Whilst its reports suggested social mobility stagnated at best and declined at worst in recent years, Commissioner Katherine Birbalsingh – supposedly the "strictest" headteacher in the country (Mathers, 2021) - led a "fresh" approach in 2022. The Social Mobility Index was replaced, shifting focus from place to the individual. Success stories from those achieving "small steps" (Weale and Adams, 2022) of social mobility were shared, alongside the view that "there is a lot more to be said about family size, values, family drive and motivation – and how this influences outcomes" (Social Mobility Commission, 2022, p. 5). The overall messages were clear: society does not need to change to become fairer, people need to do more to take "small steps" of social mobility; some families have the "culture and values" (Social Mobility Commission, 2022, p. 5) that support success, whereas others do not; there is no issue with social mobility in England.

Whilst the 2022 report offers little to "left behind" (Department for Education, 2017) places or social mobility "cold spots" previously highlighted (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b), inequalities persist within and across places. The educational inequalities affecting coastal areas in England have been signposted (Ovenden-Hope, 2015), as well as for working-class, deindustrialised towns internationally (Thomson, 2002; Weis, 2004). Researchers have also raised awareness of the educational challenges faced by rural areas across Western nations (Gulson and Symes, 2007; Green and Corbett, 2013).

This study – which examines how far education facilitates social mobility for working-class women in an ex-coal mining town - makes a vital contribution to academic understanding of the relationship between education and social mobility. By rejecting political ideologies and orthodoxies, I engage with a genuinely "fresh" approach to the study of social mobility, exploring how the complexities of social class, gender, and age mediate educational opportunity and social mobility in one place. By privileging the lived experiences of working-class women over the quantitative datasets of social mobility theorists (Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2018), I respond to a significant gap in the field (Lawler and Payne, 2017). In problematising deficit models of working-class families and communities (Reay, 2017), I highlight their arbitrariness and challenge their ubiquity. Through grounding a Bourdieusian methodological approach spatially and temporally in one place, I am able to surface his socio-genetic[1] emphasis in a way that unites his early and later works (Gorski, 2013).

1.2 The roots of this project

Although it feels uncomfortable to write about myself so candidly, it is key to understanding my positionality. In the autobiographical reflection below, I considered the genesis of this project, reaching beyond my postgraduate studies since 2017 toward my childhood memories of living, learning, and working in Coalville:

I have always been fascinated by surnames - on war memorials, on school registers, they are etched into the histories of the places where we live. As a child, I would walk to primary school past a church that bore the names of fallen soldiers carved onto its bricks. Those names and surnames were often the same as those of my schoolfriends - their own stamps of local authenticity. My surname was my father's – a newcomer to the town, who only moved there in

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[1] Bourdieu's socio-genetic approach "combines an analysis of objective social structures with an analysis of the genesis, within particular individuals, of the socially constituted mental structures which generate practice" (Johnson, 2013b, p.4).

my lifetime. Although my mother's ancestors had spun their own threads above and below ground – in Coalville's pubs, coalmines, and schools – we were disconnected by ruptures in her childhood. Our local roots were present but severed.

The rootedness of my peers fascinated me. Whilst I was local insofar as the relationships I established, I did not have grandparents living on the next street nor webs of acquaintances stretching from the schoolfriends of parents to much-loved aunts, uncles, and cousins. Whereas my family unit was atomised, those webs of relations brought joy and comfort to those who were tangled up in them.

As I grew older, it wasn't just my lack of living, local connections that separated me from my peers. I became one of 'those' children, the kind that are usually sieved out of working-class communities because they are academically successful (Plummer, 2000). Whilst at primary school, my parents had returned to education through vocational institutions like Coalville Mining and Technical College, known locally as Coalville Tech. Enthralled by the books and ideas they returned home with, I would describe myself as having been fiercely academic – yet my primary school reports present me as "a very pleasant and reliable girl" whose "abilities" were conditional upon continuing "to apply herself wholeheartedly to her work."

My feelings of alienation crystallised at secondary school. There were few students like me and those that achieved similar academic results did not live on my council estate. To be intelligent – particularly as a girl – was to be awkward and self-conscious. I was usually, although not always, liked and respected by teachers as an exception to the rule. I seemed destined to succeed by virtue of these supposed merits.

Despite the sieve of the education system, I still faced many of the same obstacles as my peers, balancing school with paid work from the age of 15 and receiving little guidance on university or careers from my parents. Whilst I maintained my academic track record, by the time I enrolled at a university based on the NME's recommendation, the tug of working-class, adult life – my *older boyfriend, a monthly paycheck, and a rented house – became too strong and I dropped out, disappointing parents and teachers alike.*

Working full-time in a Wetherspoons pub, I fell pregnant. The implications of occupying the social position of a teenage mother were unexpected: from the dismissive way that I was treated in the local hospital to the looks I received on the street whilst out with my infant son. I had failed in achieving the "bright academic future" foretold in those school reports. Having lived in social housing as a child, I became a social housing tenant as an adult.

Whilst I struggled economically, socially, and emotionally, I saw through social media how peers who had not been bestowed with the same accolades at school were achieving more than I could dream of by that point. Supported by close family networks, they often lived at home with their parents whilst working full-time, saving up mortgage deposits so that they could buy houses locally. Their vast, local social networks meant that they often knew of good jobs, apprenticeships, and other opportunities, providing a foot in the door before they even applied. Not everyone had these advantages. Some moved into council flats near the council houses where they had grown up, struggled to find stable employment, and raised their children to attend the same schools where they too were still remembered. All of us were partway through our distinct, social trajectories. The seeming incongruity of mine meant that I was attuned to this.

I see myself as having come from a working-class background, yet I have accrued institutionalised cultural capital that is generally associated with more privileged backgrounds. There are ruptures in my own social trajectory. On the one hand, I am the daughter of social housing tenants, a teenage mother who subsequently lived in social housing herself. On the other, I was an academically able, working-class child whose CV is now filled with those arbitrary labels of success that enable government ministers to slap themselves on the back and repeat claims about educational success, meritocracy, and social mobility. My positionality as a researcher is tied to my occupation of social positions that are more distant from one another than those associated with more typical social trajectories. From star student to teenage mother, social housing tenant to homeowner, barmaid to qualified teacher, and distance-learning undergraduate *student to funded postgraduate researcher at a Russell Group university. Throughout most of this journey through social space, I have physically occupied Coalville.*

I have lived in Coalville throughout my upwardly mobile trajectory through the field of education. As a teenage mother, I balanced work and parenting with an undergraduate degree, then trained and worked as a teacher in Coalville, before commencing my postgraduate studies at the University of Nottingham in 2017 and beginning my PhD in 2019. This thesis enables me to tie up loose ends – both personal and professional - whilst still tracing the knots and tangles that bind one thread to another in their original "messiness" (Lather, 2017, p. 145).

1.3 Research question

This study engages with the following research question:

- How does education contribute to the social mobility of working-class women from different generations in Coalville?

This project explores how formal education has contributed to relative degrees of social mobility and social immobility in an ex-coalmining town in England. Social mobility refers to "the ability or potential of individuals within a society to move between different social levels… or between different occupations" (OED, 2022). Absolute mobility refers to an improvement in living standards for all, but with inequality gaps remaining consistent. In contrast, relative mobility involves upwardly and downwardly mobile trajectories, with some individuals experiencing improved living standards and others facing declining living standards (Major and Machin, 2018).

Policy discourse asserts that relative social mobility can be achieved through a straightforward mechanism: improved educational achievement for those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Politicians have described schools as "the greatest force for social progress" (Brown, 2007) and as "engines of social mobility" (Gibb, 2016). Despite grand statements, a variety of indicators suggest that unconstrained social mobility has yet to be achieved in England (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). Analysis of GCSE results from 1988-1997 (Thompson, 2019) demonstrated that, despite increased overall attainment, inequalities between different social class groups persisted. This situation has not improved. Recently, "disadvantaged students have fallen further behind during the pandemic" (EEF, 2021, p. 2), which resulted in periods of school closure and remote learning from 2020-2021. However, these inequalities are not patterned in the same ways across the country. Geography mediates the capacity of education to support social mobility, with disadvantaged 28-year-olds in the most socially mobile areas of the UK earning twice as much as disadvantaged 28-year-olds in the least (Social Mobility Commission, 2020).

Current educational policy in the UK links educational inequality to socioeconomic disadvantage, underpinned by the idea that economic prosperity supports educational achievement and, by extension, increases levels of social mobility. The government thus sees levelling up as the goal of education policy and provides additional funding to schools on a per pupil basis through the pupil premium[2], established under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010. The efficacy of the policy has been challenged (Goodman and Burton, 2012; Shain, 2016; Craske, 2018), but it remains a lever designed to focus schools on raising the attainment levels by which they are judged, whilst making them responsible for overcoming any barriers tied to social class, poverty, or place in the classroom.

Although geographers such as Allen, Massey, and Cochrane (1998) have highlighted the uneven, unequal nature of regional economic development within the neoliberal UK, the connection between educational achievement and economic prosperity remains seductive within the field of educational policy. The Department for Education's policy documents reflect that "schools are a potential cure to…rising levels of socio-economic inequality" (Barrett, 2018, p. 61). Although researchers argue that the relationship between social class and educational attainment is far more complex, resulting from the education system's systemic, structural role in (re)producing and justifying wider patterns of inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Reay, 2017), the idea that educational inequality can be solved through economic investment persists.

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[2] Accompanied by "clear transparency requirements to ensure it is spent on improving the life chances of our poorest young people" (Department for Education, 2010, p. 4), the pupil premium policy draws on the idea that financial investment is key to schools being able to increase educational achievement and social mobility.

I focus on one place to explore issues of education and social mobility in depth. Economic growth and educational achievement have not coincided in Coalville. Despite the Coalfields Regeneration Trust describing the North-West Leicestershire coalfield as experiencing "*below-average* levels of deprivation" (Foden, Fothergill and Gore, 2014, emphasis in original, p.27), the area has become associated with educational underachievement in terms of GCSE outcomes. Only 79% of pupils in the North West Leicestershire coalfield[3], achieved five or more A*-C grades at GCSE in 2012, compared with 84% in Northumberland and 90% in Durham (Foden, Fothergill and Gore, 2014). In their measure of coalfield deprivation, calculating the "share of LSOAs (or datazones) in the worst 30 per cent" (p.26) nationally, both Durham and Northumberland were considerably more deprived than the conflated measure for South Derbyshire and North West Leicestershire, with 51% of Durham's datazones in the most deprived 30% nationally, 43% of Northumberland's and just 11% of North West Leicestershire's. The economic regeneration of North West Leicestershire's coalfield has not been associated with increased educational achievement.

The situation has arguably worsened since the introduction of reformed GCSEs in 2017. By 2019, "levels of GCSE attainment (average attainment 8 score)…[were] worse than the England average" (Public Health England, 2020). Educational underachievement is not a universal problem across North West Leicestershire's former coalfield but rather is experienced most dramatically in Coalville. Figure 1 demonstrates the steady decline in the average Attainment 8 [4]score in Coalville's secondary school since 2015-2016, in comparison to the secondary school in North West Leicestershire's other town, Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

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[3] Conflated with the South Derbyshire coalfield in these figures.

[4] Attainment 8 was introduced by the government in 2015 to measure "the achievement of a pupil across 8 qualifications" (Department for Education, 2016, p. 2) including double-weighted mathematics and English, three GCSEs that count in the English Baccalaureate (thereby seen as academic) and three further GCSEs.

Educational underachievement is concentrated within the town of Coalville, rather than the North West Leicestershire coalfield as a whole.

Figure 1: Attainment 8 measures for the two GCSE schools in North West Leicestershire from 2015 - 2019.

	School A (Coalville) Attainment 8 Measure	School B (Ashby) Attainment 8 Measure	Difference (School B Attainment 8 - School A Attainment 8)	National Average Attainment 8 (Mean*)
2015-2016	46.2	51.6	5.4	49.9
2016-2017	40.2	46.6	6.4	46.2
2017-2018	39.3	50.4	11.1	46.2
2018-2019	38.8	47.9	9.1	46

The Attainment 8 measure for Ashby-de-la-Zouch has been higher than Coalville's every year, surpassing the national average. The disparities between qualification levels in Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch play out in adult demographics too, with only 16.2% of adults in Coalville holding level 4 qualifications or above in the 2011 census (Office for National Statistics, 2011b) compared to a national average of 27% (Office for National Statistics, 2013) and a figure of 33.8% in Ashby-de-la-Zouch (Office for National Statistics, 2011a).

As such, Coalville is a potentially fruitful site for a study of educational inequality and its relationship with social (im)mobility. As an economically regenerated town, yet one which is associated with persistent educational underachievement, the seductive myth that economic investment results in increased educational achievement is already problematised. This study explores the implications of this for social (im)mobility in Coalville.

Whilst responsibility for achieving social mobility has been placed on educational institutions, educational policy itself has been selectively space-blind (Green and Letts, 2007, p. 63), ignoring the complex ways in which the places where people are born, live, learn, and work are inextricably bound to their social class backgrounds and their future opportunities. Whilst cultural geographers have highlighted how inequalities are patterned across places as well as through analytical categories such as social class (Shi and Dorling, 2020), schools have often been viewed as islands (Nespor, 2004), disconnected from the complex webs of place-based social relations to which they are tied. For example, league tables compare the results achieved by individual schools with the national average, despite evidence of significant, persistent regional inequalities (The Social Market Foundation, 2017).

Where social policy has taken a geographical approach, this has usually focused on identifying areas as deficient and providing targeted support to improve them (Lupton, 2003; Steadman and Ellis, 2021). Towards the end of the 2010s, policy documents finally began to reflect the place-based context of inequality, with the Social Mobility Commission's (2020) *The Long Shadow of Deprivation* highlighting the stark inequalities not only between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged young people but also between disadvantaged young people in particular places.

Alongside this, the Conservative government's "levelling up" (The Conservative Party, 2019, p. 26) policies on education and the economy claimed they would help with "spreading opportunity" (The Conservative Party, 2019, p. 2) across areas of the country that had been "left behind" (Department for Education, 2017, p. 7) by uneven patterns of socioeconomic investment and prosperity. Policymakers increasingly acknowledged the importance of place to social mobility - and therefore, by association, educational success - conceding that "talent is evenly spread in this country, but opportunity is not" (The Conservative Party, 2019, p. 13).

The government advocates "identifying and spreading 'what works'" (Department for Education, 2017, p. 9) in schools in high-attaining areas and then exporting these approaches to schools in low-attaining areas. Whilst this represents an acknowledgement that inequalities manifest within and across places, it still presents a space-blind solution. Rather than acknowledging that the place-based contexts of schools affect their overall attainment, this essentialises the practices of schools serving less disadvantaged places within the monolithic category of "what works" (Biesta, 2010). This ignores the specificity of these practices to the wider set of social relations which make up and surround each school, as well as the reproductive nature of the place-based privileges and disadvantages tied to different school catchment areas.

Whilst previous governments have also asserted the effectiveness of particular approaches due to their success in particular areas, the difficulty in actually measuring the effectiveness of these approaches for disadvantaged pupils is problematic (Gorard, Siddiqui, and See, 2021). The Labour government implemented a place-based approach through the London Challenge, investing in system leadership, school improvement advisers, professional development, and teacher recruitment (Brighouse, 2015) to achieve the London effect from 2003-2013 (Hayes, Jopling, and Gul, 2018). Others have questioned how far this strategy increased outcomes in London's schools, arguing that the ethnic backgrounds of students in London were key to the city's educational successes. Burgess (2014) argues that there is "no significant difference between the progress of white British pupils in London and in the rest of the country" (p.9). This example highlights the complexities involved in trying to extricate education from wider social and geographical factors.

Age and gender - rather than ethnicity - are key to my study. As Reay (1998b) has argued, quantitative, income or occupation-based studies of social class ignored working-class women for decades, focusing instead on a household's male breadwinner. Whilst women's participation in the labour market has increased significantly since the 1980s (Scott, Dex, and Joshi, 2008), social mobility researchers have continued to rely on birth cohort studies and other large-scale quantitative datasets to analyse patterns over time, making it difficult to trace women's social mobility – in their terms – prior to this (Van

Leeuwen, 2009). In terms of age, I draw on Bourdieu's (1984, 1987) understanding of trajectories through social space as representing social ageing[5].

There is debate surrounding the roles of women in coalmining towns. In contrast with areas where the textile industry dominated, coalmining has been associated with traditional gender roles (Dennis, Henriques, and Slaughter, 1969; Massey and McDowell, 1994). However, there are examples of towns where coalmining was not the only industry, even if its economic importance still dominated the social imaginary. The presence of factories in some coalmining towns, for example, offered opportunities for women to work outside of the home (Smith, 2006). Alongside this, women's political activism in coalmining towns has been seen as liberatory[6] (Holden, 2005). It has also been argued that people living in ex-coalmining communities recognised the significant contribution of women's unpaid labour to daily life (Power, 2008). However, historians such as Humphries (Humphries and Thomas, 2023) have challenged these perspectives, arguing that the gender relations associated with the coalmining industry left a legacy of female disempowerment that persists today. Amidst this debate, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson (2022) identified an alternative value system relating to women's rights in coalmining towns. They associated child-centred mothering practices with "increased recognition of the individuality and rights of their mothers" (p. 306), highlighting how a number of working-class women associated autonomy in the home with gender equality. They suggest this provides an alternative explanation for working-class women's disidentification with feminism, as observed by Skeggs (1997).

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[5] For Bourdieu, differences across the generations represent the differences in objective conditions surrounding the inculcation of the habitus associated with different states of the fields at different times. These terms are defined in Chapter 2.

[6] The degree to which this would apply to Coalville is debatable, with only thirty Leicestershire miners on strike in 1984-5, but the role of women in the county's industrial action has been highlighted (Bell, 2009). In fact, a news report on the 1972 strike claims that local women organised against industrial action, using the slogan "are you miners or mice?" to encourage the town's miners to return to work. One local woman highlighted a possible strategy for the town's women to achieve their goal: "get nasty-tempered, that's what the miners do, so we might as well join them" (*ATV Today: Report on opposition to miner's strike by wives*, 1972).

The field of working-class studies has reflexively considered the dangers of "smokestack nostalgia" (Cowie and Heathcott, 2003; Strangleman, 2013), or the romanticisation of industrial labour. Research in an ex-coalmining town like Coalville risks valorising[7] the contribution of men rather than women. My study focuses on women to counterbalance traditionally masculine histories of coalmining towns (John, 1982), providing an opportunity to unpack the complex roles of women in these communities. I will focus on theories of gender in more detail in the first part of Chapter 4.

My place-based approach enables a wider focus on the relative degrees of social mobility that can and have been achieved by women in Coalville, reflecting the Social Mobility Commission's recent focus on "small steps" whilst still tracing the prevalence of inequalities between the privileged and the disadvantaged. My approach facilitates engagement with the complexity of educational inequality by viewing schools within the webs of social relations that shape them, rather than arbitrarily divorcing them from place-based contexts. I draw on theoretical resources from Massey (1991) and Bourdieu (2018) to engage meaningfully with Coalville as a place.

I retraced some of the social relations that make up the town, engaging with female, former Palitoy factory workers born between 1935 and 1967 and using a socio-genetic approach to connect their experiences of living, learning, and working in Coalville with those of some of their daughters and granddaughters. I also engaged with teenage girls at school in Coalville in 2021, examining their aspirations for the future, and former educators who taught in Coalville between the 1980s and 2010s, surfacing further continuities and contrasts. Through this approach, I was able to examine the uneven ways in which education can contribute to social mobility in one ex-coalmining town, problematising the view that education straightforwardly improves the social mobility trajectories of working-class women.

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[7] Whilst I am not criticising research about 20th century coalminers in Britain, the romanticisation of men's paid work in coalmining communities can overshadow the multiple roles of women. Literary writing about coalmining illustrates how industrial labour can be romanticised. Coalminers have been described as "iron statues" and "splendid men [with] noble bodies" (Orwell, 2001, p. 31). More recently, the field of cultural production has explored how industrial conflicts like the miners' strikes of the 1980s can illuminate inequalities in 21st century Britain (Gardner, 2014). In many of these retellings, the roles of women are purely domestic or, at best, involve political activism in support of strike action.

1.4 Introducing the thesis

As an ethnographer, reflexivity "is not confined to the practicalities of field work and data collection, but also applies to the writing we perform to transform our experience of a social world into a social science text" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 191). Whilst all aspects of my thesis represent choices, I will signpost key decisions here.

Although I conform to most academic conventions, I have not produced a separate literature review chapter. The reasons for this are both principled and practical. Whilst engaging deeply with literature is a fundamental aspect of ethnography, the textual conventions of the literature review are not (Atkinson *et al.*, 2007). I have seized the ethnographer's privilege described by Atkinson (2020) to bring literature and data together in my findings chapters. This representational decision reflects my desire "to take account of the bewildering array of interlocking factor patterns that…pose formidable problems of interpretation" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 84) in a study of education, social class, social mobility, gender, and place across decades. Weaving together literature, data, and interpretation throughout the thesis enables me to connect relevant work across diverse academic fields, rather than drawing neat, *a priori* boundaries around my work.

My approach is also fittingly recursive, reflecting that the research process is not linear. To separate the literature would be to adopt:

> "a pseudo-scientised version of a research tradition that relies on researcher subjectivity and interpretation practiced with integrity and high degrees of reflexivity" (Franks and Thomson, 2020, p. 230).

More than this, my own positionality – having lived, learned, and worked in Coalville for decades – would render a standalone literature chapter even more of a conceit, implicitly suggesting that my engagement with relevant literature has not already been mediated through my own dispositions, rooted in my experiences of gender, education, and social mobility in Coalville.

I have balanced this decision with others. I initially wrote narrative portraits as part of my analytical process, with a view that these would be presented in my eventual thesis. However, I decided to write my findings chapters in a more traditional way - relying on quotations from participants as evidence of my data and bringing these into conversation with the literature - to reflect the centrality of the work of others to this study.

Chapter 1 has summarised the focus of this study, signposting its rationale and significance to wider fields of educational research. Whilst Coalville can be seen as left-behind due to poor educational outcomes and relatively low rates of social mobility, the inequalities young people in the area face are masked when local authority statistics are analysed. Coalville was not classed as a social mobility coldspot in 2016 (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2016) as it shares its location in North West Leicestershire with the more affluent, educationally successful market town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch. My thesis shows that qualitative social mobility research can illuminate classed, gendered, and place-based inequalities that go unnoticed in larger-scale, quantitative social mobility studies (Lawler and Payne, 2017). Chapter 2 will explicate my methodological approach and the theoretical frameworks I draw on, evaluating my own positionality. Despite having lived, learned, and worked in the research field, I am not straightforwardly an insider.

Structurally, my thesis echoes Bourdieu's methodological approach, moving from analysis of the field of education to analysis of objective relations between positions. Drawing on the findings of these analyses, I then explore how the habitus of working-class women in Coalville both structures and is structured by these dynamics (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Social mobility is a set of possible positions. Upward mobility reflects a trajectory whereby each new position facilitates the accrual of valued capitals which in turn grant access to even more privileged positions in social space. From a Bourdieusian perspective, social mobility is a potentiality of the field as well as of the habitus. In the field, it is represented by the "space of the possibles" (Bourdieu, 1996a, p. 88): the objectively possible opportunities that working-class women are likely to aspire to. In the habitus, it is represented by the map of the possibles, the internalised perception of the space of the possibles, which is based on the working-class woman's previous positions and dispositions. The two can be similar or quite different, depending on the degree of 'fit' between the social agent and the field[8].

In Chapter 3, I map the field of education in North West Leicestershire, demonstrating that the hierarchical relationship between the two towns is reproduced in schools[9]. This relationship is not binary but instead highlights that symbolic hierarchies tied to field-positions, capitals, and doxa mediate opportunities for individuals based on place as well as class, gender, and other social categories.

Having highlighted the deficiency discourse surrounding formal education in Coalville, in Chapter 4, I put school into context in the life histories of three working-class women who all worked in Coalville's Palitoy factory between the 1970s and the 1990s. Their lack of educational success was not the end of their stories. Instead, I demonstrate how work and marriage enabled some of them to achieve "small steps" of social mobility within the town.

In Chapter 5, I pursue these social mobility trajectories into the factory itself. I trace the logics of practice of eleven women and show how some were able to achieve degrees of upward mobility even after they had been 'sorted' into 'unskilled' work.

In Chapter 6, I then examine the capitals and dispositions that facilitated socially mobile trajectories in the context of one family, showing that – despite the deficiency discourse – working-class women in Coalville had both aspirations and capitals that are valued within the field of education. I demonstrate that the educational underachievement and lack of social mobility in Coalville are not a result of innate deficiencies in its communities, but are instead caused by the complex interplay between education, gender, class, and place.

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[8] These terms are defined fully in Chapter 2

[9] Whilst some of the women in my study attended Coalville Mining and Technical College as well as the town's primary and secondary schools, my thesis focuses sharply on secondary schools in Coalville, as these were most clearly entangled with educational inequality in participants' life histories.

Finally in Chapter 7, I return to my starting point in Coalville's schools with an analysis of aspirations of female secondary school students in 2021. Many of these young women had high aspirations which involved leaving Coalville far behind them, yet my analysis demonstrates that these were accompanied by anxiety and fear about how to fulfil them. Whilst many rejected Coalville – reproducing the deficiency discourse surrounding it and distancing themselves from the place-based identities this offered – a minority aspired for academic success and professional careers in Coalville itself. Far from being deficient, left-behind, and unaspirational, my thesis illuminates how working-class women in Coalville have strived to accrue capitals and move up in the fields in which they are positioned, whilst all the time the heavy weight of doxa pressured them to internalise the structural disadvantages they faced as their own deficiencies.

Chapter 2: Methodological and theoretical approach

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical and methodological decision-making involved in this research project. Building on the brief autobiographical reflection I shared in Chapter 1, I reflect more deeply on my positionality, explaining the implications of this for the project's methodological approach. Next, I explain the original intentions and design of the study, before reflecting on key changes to the research design that took place. Some of these changes were inspired by my growing understanding of qualitative educational research over the course of the PhD, others were provoked by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. I then outline the final methodological approach of the study in detail, with explication of each specific research method alongside justification and evaluation of these choices.

2.2 Positionality

In Chapter 1, I shared a partial account of my social origins. Self-analysis has underpinned my research project, in line with Bourdieu's emphasis on "participant objectivation" (Grenfell, 2010, p. 19): a process by which the researcher must "objectify the objectifying subject" (Bourdieu, 1988, p. xii). Bourdieu emphasises the significance of the researcher's social positions and dispositions to how they conduct research (Bourdieu, 1993a), highlighting that researchers – in conducting research tied to social worlds they occupy[10] – concomitantly analyse themselves as sociological objects, as well as their participants (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu also conducted research into the peasant society in which he grew up, writing of "the sense of something like a betrayal" (Bourdieu, 2007b, p. 3) that pervaded his analysis of this "familiar universe" (Bourdieu, 2007b, p. 2).

My own dispositions and field-positions are key to how I inhabit the scholarly field as well as the research field (Bourdieu, 2007a; Reay, 2017). As outlined in Chapter 1, I have occupied social positions that are relatively distant from one another during my own upwardly mobile trajectory. Despite this, the most disadvantaged social positions perhaps had the most enduring and notable impact on my dispositions. After becoming a teenage mother, I worked tirelessly to gain academic qualifications and succeed in my career as a secondary school teacher and later as a teacher educator and researcher. Without doubt, these efforts were a reaction to the stigma I faced as a teenage mother living in social housing. The disjuncture between this and my own imagined future trajectory as a straight-A student who would go onto great things was stark.

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[10] This was a motivation – and implication - for *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 1988).

My upwardly mobile trajectory could be cast as a triumphant retrieval of a lost inheritance, but it was motivated by practical necessity as much as aspiration. As a barmaid and care worker when our son was born, there was no realistic way that my partner and I could coordinate our antisocial shifts to look after our child. There was no prospect of extended family helping with childcare. A chance meeting with my former headteacher led to a voluntary role as a teaching assistant for six months whilst I was on maternity leave. This led to a paid role as an Academic Mentor for nine hours a week. Around this, I raised my son and studied full-time for my undergraduate degree at the kitchen table with the Open University. My trajectory is marked by an "indefatigable capacity for work" (Steedman, 1986, p. 23) akin to that of many working-class women, including those in this study. I recognise acutely that my hard work has – in many ways – paid off. I have a wonderful family, a mortgage, paid work that I find fulfilling, and – through my postgraduate research journey – have been able to devote time to academic pursuits. The latter is a privilege not shared by many of the participants in this study, nor by many working-class women around the world.

I am acutely aware that my educational experiences themselves represent a significant privilege relative to those of my participants. Although we lived, learned, and worked in the same coalmining town, my university education separated me in many ways from the majority of the women who contributed to this study. However, it is also difficult to ignore – having spent time in the privileged context of a Russell Group university – that the degree of success associated with my trajectory is relative to my starting point. A privileged, privately educated secondary school student with the GCSE and A-level grades I

achieved would likely have been disappointed by my greatest successes, viewing them in relation to the elite social trajectories of those around them.
Offering up these reflections makes me vulnerable. I risk representing myself as envious and bitter (Steedman, 1986) or, perhaps worse, as self-satisfied and conceited. However, it is this vulnerability and discomfort that is key to the lived experience of social class and, in turn, social mobility. In highlighting that my secondary school qualifications were equal to those of privately educated young women who have since become lawyers, actors, authors, television producers, and so on, I invoke the injustices of social class and highlight the myth that academic achievement is the only lever that needs to be pulled for working-class young people to embark on upwardly mobile trajectories. Regardless of our perceived merit, we come up against the class ceiling (Friedman and Laurison, 2019).

Whilst my positionality as a researcher can seem – to others – deceptively simple, I have highlighted its complexity here. I am often described by fellow researchers as an insider researcher because I have lived in Coalville for most of my life, yet my supervisor perhaps summed it up best when she described me as an "alien". Drawing on Geertz's (1983) exposition of Kohut's distinction between experience near and experience distant, researchers have used the term experience near to describe living in the same place as participants (Mannay, 2014) and to reflect on positionality when conducting practitioner-research (Anderson, 2002).

The key tension, for Bourdieu, is rooted in the distance from practical necessity. For those who are dominated within a field, proximity to practical necessity contrasts with the distance of the dominant, which affords time for consideration of the symbolic rather than the practical (Bourdieu, 1984). The relative privilege of the scholarly field affords those occupying particular positions within it the luxury of time, studious leisure, or "*skholé*" (Bourdieu, 1996a, emphasis in original, p. 208), thus leading to a vast gap in both positions and dispositions. However, Bourdieu argues, "familiarity…with the practical mode of existence of those who do not have the freedom to distance the world can thus be the basis both of a more acute awareness of distance and of a real proximity, a kind of solidarity beyond cultural differences" (p.15). Whilst I am wholly aware of the privileges inherent in my position as an ESRC-funded doctoral researcher, I hope that my own familiarity with the practical mode of existence has supported reflexivity throughout this research project, preventing the adoption of a scientistic mode at the expense of surfacing objective relations and the mechanisms by which they are (re)produced.

2.3 Ontological principles, epistemological implications

Having outlined my own trajectory in more detail, the reasons for my resonance with the work of Pierre Bourdieu are clear. Propelled by access to elite education, Bourdieu’s experiences of an upwardly mobile trajectory shaped his sociological theory. Each social agent has a habitus, or set of dispositions, preferences, and beliefs, that is both shaped by and shapes the social field within which they are positioned (Bourdieu, 1977). The field is an arena of social space within which agents compete with one another to accumulate capitals. A capital is “accumulated labor” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241), which can be economic, cultural, social, or symbolic. Once accumulated, capital has a “capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). For Bourdieu, the education system plays an important role in reproducing and certifying the capitals accumulated by the elite as individual and inherent properties of their children (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996b). Each social agent accumulates capitals and is potentially repositioned within social space; over time, these movements in social space form a trajectory.

In summarising Bourdieu’s work so briefly, there is the potential for nuance to be lost. It is important to emphasise that, whilst his model can appear deterministic when summarised, Bourdieu was emphatic that the social agent has the capacity to act with independence and agency, but that their actions are inextricably connected to their own habitus and thus connected to the pre-existing workings of the social field. Despite this interconnectedness, his model does not preclude social change of the gradual or revolutionary kind (Gorski, 2013). As his theory is both relational and dynamic, fields are always contested, people occupy multiple positions, and positions are always about struggle. This relational complexity is key to Bourdieu’s work and often accusations of determinism are rooted in misreading or abstracting his findings from empirical research as sociological truisms or rules (Grenfell, 2010).

It is trajectories – conceived of here as 'stories' – that are at the heart of this study and my methodological approach. The interaction between the social agent's habitus and the field can be theorised as producing the space of the possibles. This concept theoretically outlines the multiple possibilities for action available to a social agent in relation to the trajectories of others within social space. These simultaneous, potentially intersecting trajectories show how Bourdieu's conception of lives lived through social space shares much with Massey's theory of space as "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005, p. 60). Both signpost the significance of unequal power relations to processes of distribution within space and emphasise multiplicity and relationality as well as possibilities for change. By using the term 'stories', I embrace its subjectivity as an intrinsic aspect of social research (Reed-Danahay, 2005), honouring the key aspects of Massey and Bourdieu's relational theories. In the same way that places are made of stories-so-far, so too are participants' lives and their recollections of their life experiences.

Whilst Bourdieu took issue with the notion of biography (Bourdieu, 1987), his later work[11] clearly emphasises the value of individuals sharing narratives of their own lives (Bourdieu, 1999; Barrett, 2015). In my study, the features of Bourdieu's social trajectories and Massey's stories-so-far were fulfilled through life history interviews, which were read in parallel to one another and in relation to the partial reconstruction of social fields relevant to Coalville as a place.

Fusing Bourdieu's theory of practice with a spatial approach to education in place opens up a multiplicity of interconnections and relations between people and places (Massey, 2005). Educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, and universities, are not individual islands (Nespor, 2002). Instead, they are produced through "interrelations and materially-embedded practices, connected in space and time to wider flows of ideas, technologies and discourses in society"

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[11] *The Weight of the World,* for example, presents various life histories to demonstrate "the social origin, collectively hidden, of unhappiness in all its forms" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 629).

(Mcgregor, 2003, p. 369). Like schools as institutions, Coalville itself is not boundaried nor static. As a place, it both constitutes and is constituted by complex social relations which stretch beyond the local (Massey, 1994). Through selecting key research sites and snowball sampling, I have attempted to trace some of these flows across space-time, surfacing some of the stories-so-far that form Coalville.

These ontological foundations have important epistemological implications. First, it follows that I would not have been able to engage fully with the research question at the heart of this project by focusing on just one educational institution in the town. To do so would have reinforced the dominant discourse that deliberately abstracts schools to present socio-economic issues as their responsibility, rather than acknowledging that they are rooted in and resolvable in the wider social world (Nespor, 2002). I interviewed women about their experiences in a range of educational institutions, only engaging with one specific school in the third phase of data collection to support participant recruitment and further explore the connections between past and present.

It was also important that Coalville was not considered in isolation. As I will explore in Chapter 3, Coalville is often seen as a boundaried, left-behind place. Helen, a former careers educator who lived, learned, and worked in the town, described it as surrounded by *"the Coalville wall"*. Massey argues that multiple meanings of places are "constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places" (Massey, 1994, p. 121). This insight enabled me to trace specific relationships between local people and other local places in my interviews, revealing important ways in which some of Coalville's meanings are (re)produced. The hierarchical relationship between Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch, for example, was key to experiences of and attitudes towards education for the younger women in this study. By drawing on Massey, I was able to research across scales to trace the relationship between the particular and general and between people and places (Nespor, 2004), invoking the capacity for social justice that a spatial approach to educational research provides (Bright, Manchester and Allendyke, 2013).

The fundamental interrelationship of space and time is also important to this study. As places both shape and are shaped by social relations, which are themselves dynamic, it follows that "the specifically spatial may be conceived of as an inherently dynamic simultaneity" (Massey, 1994, p. 3). Thus, theorists use Massey's concept of space-time (Massey, 1994; Nespor, 2000; Mcgregor, 2003; Taylor, 2013) to emphasise how places are relational and open, characterised by multiplicity, rather than isolated, singular and closed (Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011). In this study, historical ethnography has been used to explore how the past figures in – and shapes - the present. This allowed me to analyse changes spatio-temporally and socioeconomically. As an ex-coalmining town, the spectre of deindustrialisation haunts Coalville. This was key to some of the ways that participants defined the place and, in turn, conceived of their relationship to it.

2.4 Using a Bourdieusian toolkit

Bourdieu advocated for his concepts to be left "open and provisional" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 40). His toolkit was developed through empirical research and has been extended and adapted by researchers (Reay, 2000a; Burke, Emmerich, and Ingram, 2013; Ingram, 2018). Whilst this openness is associated with risks, such as the overextension of key concepts or their superficial use (Reay, 2004b; Grenfell, 2010), Bourdieu was emphatic that methodological prescriptiveness was tied to the power dynamics in the field of sociology and therefore "more often scientistic than scientific" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 607). He argued that a commitment to epistemological breaks and reflexivity – key to his approach – were compromised by methodological orthodoxy (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron, 1991). For Bourdieu, theory is "a set of *thinking tools* visible through the results they yield" (Wacquant, 1989, emphasis in original, p. 50) that is rooted in and facilitates the analysis of the empirical. Theory and method are thus recursive. To reflect this, I refer to his approach as a methodological-theoretical toolkit throughout my thesis.

In this section, I will briefly define some of Bourdieu's tools. I have engaged with a degree of risk in extending some of these to respond to my empirical data. As Grenfell (2010) argues:

> "One of the key qualities of Bourdieu's theoretical tools…is that they are kept to a minimum – as necessary and sufficient to the data – and not to be added to when another existing concept is sufficient" (Grenfell, 2010, p. 18).

My adaptations – and their justifications - are outlined in the relevant sections below.

2.4.1 Habitus and field

Through his toolkit of habitus, capitals, and field, Bourdieu sought to overcome the dichotomy between structure and agency that dominated the social sciences (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), with his trialectic enabling understanding of "particularity within generality and generality within particularity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.75). Mapping the field is the starting point for most Bourdieusian studies (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 2010). Once the relationship between the field and the overarching field of power is established, the objective positions within the field can be traced.

Social agents occupy positions within the field, tied to the volume and composition of the capitals they possess. Their field-positions influence their systems of dispositions, preferences, and perceptions, conceptualised as the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). The habitus is inculcated from birth and Bourdieu emphasises its historical nature (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990b, 1993a). Whilst habitus has been critiqued as deterministic (Jenkins, 1982; Giroux, 1983) due to the chronological nature of its formation and its reproductive tendency, it is not fixed nor static. Bourdieu uses the term "durable" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 53) to reflect how the habitus has a historical tendency but still adapts to objective conditions. The habitus:

> "is a system of open mechanisms that can be constantly subjected to experience, and by the same token transformed by these experiences" (Bourdieu and Chartier, 2014, p. 57).

Whilst Bourdieu saw the habitus as individual, he sometimes used the term class habitus (Bourdieu, 1993b, 1993a) to reflect that social agents who occupied similar positions in social space were statistically likely to share similar dispositions and could therefore be considered as a social group in some circumstances. Bourdieu's emphasis on objective probabilities and tendencies resulted in misreadings which accused him of generalising rather than providing "concrete field descriptions" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. viii). His argument that his work must be understood in the context of his empirical studies is tied to the ever-changing dynamics of field and habitus. Whilst the workings of fields are likely to reproduce inequalities, the structure of these can change over time as they are arbitrary and contingent. Even though these inequalities are likely to continue to involve the domination of the working-class by the upper class in Western capitalist societies, this will not necessarily always be the case.

Bourdieu's work on societies at a point of change (Bourdieu, 1977, 2007b) emphasises how changes in the field can result in:

> "mismatches between the *habitus* and the structures, and the misfirings of behaviour that result from it, can no doubt sometimes trigger critical revisions and conversions" (Bourdieu, 2007b, emphasis in original, p. 184).

To reify a particular manifestation of habitus - or a particular example of social relations - as universally applicable and eternal would be a brutal misrepresentation of Bourdieu's work (Grenfell, 2010). For this reason, I want to emphasise that I am not adding additional constructs to Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit when I occasionally use terms such as "professional habitus" or "working-class habitus", but merely describing the formations of habitus evident in my data. Whilst Grenfell (2014) argues that such "adjectival addition…often compensates for the lack of an analysis of the field" (p. 63), the place-based, historical nature of my study counterbalances this concern. My use of pre-modifiers reflects a need for clarity rather than a misunderstanding of Bourdieu's toolkit.

Bourdieu uses the term field to describe a series of potential positions which are relationally tied to one another. Fields are sites of struggle organised around cultural and economic capital, which act as poles. The positions within the field are "determined by their relationship to the two poles" (Thomson, 2012, p. 71).

Field-positions are associated with higher or lower volumes of each capital. Fields are related hierarchically to one another but are all dominated by the field of power. For Bourdieu, the field of power is characterised by "struggles among the holders of different forms of power" (Bourdieu, 1996b, p. 264), who compete to set the value and exchange rate for the capitals they possess. The field of power acts like Mount Olympus in Ancient Greek mythology: hidden from mortal eyes, those with the most power across all fields - the Gods - battle one another. Despite their lack of insight into these conflicts, mortals cannot escape their consequences. There is a temporal dimension to this too. The changing dynamics produced by the struggles within the field of power alter what is valued within other fields over time.

Social agents occupy multiple fields simultaneously (Thomson, 2012). There is also an issue of scale, in that fields operate on broad and specific levels (Thomson, 2012). For example, the field of education can be international or national, regional or local. Geographical perspectives on education and place are helpful (Nespor, 2004) in elucidating shifts in scale from individual teachers, students, and classrooms to larger scales with a focus on institutions or sectors (Thomson, Hall, and Jones, 2010). In this thesis, I see individual social agents and institutions as positioned within fields. My research focuses on familiar fields, such as education and work, as well as suggesting a field of the family, in which networks of social agents can exchange or share capitals. Specific families can be seen as subfields of the wider field, in which families are hierarchised based on volume and composition of capital.

2.4.2 Capital

Social agents compete to accrue valued capitals within the field. These can be economic, cultural, and social (Bourdieu, 1984) and generally take three forms: objectified, institutionalised, or embodied (Bourdieu, 1986). As well as being accumulated, capitals can be transmitted, exchanged, reproduced, or converted into different types and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1993a). For example, cultural capital can be exchanged for symbolic capital, which reflects "social importance" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 241) or "accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour" (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 7). Bourdieu also identified other "species of capital" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 99), such as linguistic, political, and educational (Bourdieu, 1991a, 1993b). Although social agents' capitals enable them to access particular field-positions, these capitals are not distributed equally. Social agents navigate fields, accruing capitals and moving to more or less privileged positions in social space accordingly.

Researchers have extended the concept of capital in numerous ways. Emotional capital[12] (Nowotny, 1981; Reay, 2000a, 2004a) is a variant of social capital – or embodied cultural capital (Illouz, 2007) - which is particularly useful in illuminating gendered practices related to motherhood (Reay, 1998b). Whilst it is not a focus of this study, ethnic capital (Modood, 2004) describes an ethnically specific set of resources, including "familial adult-child relationships, transmission of aspirations, and attitudes and norms enforcement – that can facilitate educational achievement and social mobility among those with limited economic capital" (Shah, Dwyer and Modood, 2010, p. 1112). Both examples demonstrate how researchers have embraced the openness of Bourdieu's toolkit to account for phenomena that they could not fully explain otherwise.

2.4.3 The space of the possibles and the map of the possibles

The habitus guides the social agent as they navigate the "space of possibles" (Bourdieu, 1996a, p. 234), the "actual or potential position-takings corresponding to the different positions" (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 30) in social space. As a social agent plays the game in the field, they undertake a trajectory through social space: "a series of successively occupied positions by the same agent…in a space which itself is constantly evolving and which is subject to incessant transformations" (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 301).

I have added to Bourdieu's toolkit in this thesis, using the term map of the possibles to reflect how the social agent's perception of the space of the possibles is tied to their habitus. In this way, I construct the space of the possibles as a property of the field and the map of the possibles as a property of the habitus. This is not to arbitrarily divorce the two – indeed, they are mutually reinforcing and inextricably connected (Bourdieu, 1977) – but to demonstrate that the social agent's perception of the space of the possibles is mediated through the habitus. The addition of the map enables me to analyse instances where this perception differs from the objective space of the possibles within the field.

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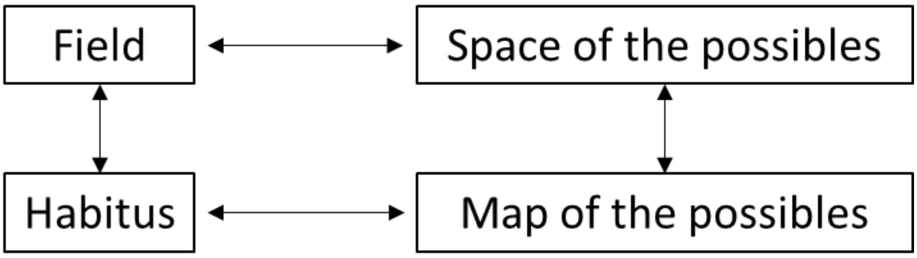
[12] This has been applied to women's investment in children's homework (Hutchison, 2012), as well as teachers and students in the field of education (Zembylas, 2007; Froyum, 2010).

Figure 2: A diagram showing the interconnections between field and habitus, the space of the possibles, and the map of the possibles



2.4.4 Hysteresis

Hysteresis helped Bourdieu to describe how the habitus and field can fall out of sync over time, in moments of "discordance" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 109) when the historical roots of habitus no longer reflect the objective conditions of the field. This can result in inherited or acquired capitals having very different exchange-values over time (Bourdieu, 1984) and is an important reminder that fields are dynamic and ever-changing. He explained that:

> "The hysteresis of habitus, which is inherent in the social conditions of the reproduction of the structures in habitus, is doubtless one of the foundations of the structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them which is the cause of missed opportunities" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 83).

2.4.5 Doxa

Bourdieu's concept of doxa is an important aspect of his trialectic of field, capital, and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). He describes doxa as "that which is taken for granted" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 168), referring to beliefs within the field that become naturalised and therefore do not "need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 15). It is a property of the field, but – due to the generated and generative nature of the habitus – is likely to be internalised as a property of the habitus too. The social agent misrecognises aspects of the field due to their internalisation of doxa. Misrecognition "occurs when agents are not entirely unaware of the truth of their practices, but act as if they must conceal it from themselves" (Thomson, 2014, p. 91). I will consider this further later in this chapter, in the section on ethical issues.

2.4.6 Illusio

Illusio refers to the social agent's interest – or stake – in the game being played within the field. Illusio is the result of an "ontological complicity between the habitus and the field" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 194). It is the social agent's commitment to the game that is played within the field. It is illusio – or investment - that propels ordinary social agents' actions within the fields in which they are positioned. Their actions are not necessarily driven by a desire for particular capitals but instead are intimately connected to the habitus and the workings of the field. As Bourdieu argues, "the hunt counts as much as, if not more than, the capture" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 195). Whilst this concept could itself be seen as solely reproductive (Griffiths, 2018), with each agent reinforcing the rules of the game – or doxa - within each field, Bourdieu's emphasis on each field being dominated by the workings of the field of power demonstrates how heterodoxy can arise when shifting power dynamics are met with resistance.

2.4.7 The logic of practice

The concepts outlined above guide a social agent's practice within the field. For Bourdieu, an individual's logic of practice is their way of engaging in the fields in which they are positioned. The field itself has its own logic or "sense of the game" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 11). The logic of practice is not necessarily logical but is always practically focused on action (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This practical sense comes from "a set of schemes functioning in their implicit state" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 113), that enables an agent to "understand a symbolic series" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 113). It is important to remember that this logic of practice is not necessarily goal-oriented as "the principle of our actions is more often practical sense than rational calculation" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 64). An individual's logic of practice is therefore underpinned by both "the history of the positions they occupy and the history of their dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 61).

2.4.8 Habitat

Whilst Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit emphasises the significance of social space, this does not undermine the importance of place to social inequality. Bourdieu has been used productively to explore place and educational inequality (Reay and Lucey, 2000b; Thomson, 2002; Reay and Lucey, 2004). For Bourdieu, "the sites and places of reified social space…are stakes in struggles (within different fields)" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 126). A physical place is not a stage set for social agents' practices, but rather reified social space. He used the term "locale" to describe:

> "a socially qualified, physical site, [which] offers aggregate opportunities of appropriation of different material or cultural goods and services available at a given time" (Bourdieu, 2018, p. 111).

Like social agents, places are positioned in multiple fields. Like fields, they exist across various scales: the physical location of a social agent at a point in time is as important as the dwellings they have lived in. Like the habitus, places are structuring structures. As Bourdieu explains, "it is the habitus that makes the habitat" (Bourdieu, 2018, p. 111), but the habitus is, in turn, shaped by its perception of the habitat in relational hierarchies. Whilst Bourdieu studied specific places (Bourdieu, 1962, 1977, 2007b), it was only towards the end of his career that he began to engage explicitly with the significance of place in social scientific research (Bourdieu, 1999, 2018). Whilst I have introduced key principles to Bourdieu's understanding of place here, there will be further discussion throughout the thesis as my research represents a significant step in using Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit to understand education inequality and social mobility in one place.

2.5 Starting points

This project began with a desire to focus on the family and social (re)production. I envisaged recruiting fourteen family 'nests', conducting life history interviews with women from three generations of each family. By tracing the relationships between grandmother, mother, and daughter, I hoped to explore how working-class women's attitudes toward education have been negotiated in Coalville. I quickly realised that there were significant practical issues with this approach. The random recruitment of family nests would not necessarily enable me to surface the experiences of working-class people. Furthermore, the recruitment criteria were dangerously narrow: I would have to recruit all three members of each family almost simultaneously or risk losing a generation or two from each family 'nest' if usual attrition rates held true. Most significantly, I began to worry that the discrete nature of each family nest would prevent me from tracing the webs of social relations that were so key to the geographical concepts of place that I had become drawn to (Massey, 1994, 2005).

I loosened the recruitment criteria and focused on a historical research site: a former toy factory in Coalville that had closed in the 1990s. In 2018, I took my son to an exhibition organised by a local heritage society, celebrating the town's toymaking history. One of the information boards quoted a BBC news report describing the toy factory as "the goldmine on top of the coalmine", captivating me and reflecting the shifting economic value of different commodities and the economic, social, and emotional restructuring of coalmining areas that was wrought by deindustrialisation (Strangleman, 2017). The exhibition alluded to the importance of women's manual labour in the toy factory. I contacted the heritage society, attended a reunion event they organised for former factory workers, and volunteered at their next exhibition. I will be forever grateful for the generosity and hard work of the members of the local heritage society and for all those I met during this time. I had the chance to talk to several women who worked on the factory floor, sharing their memories with me anonymously as they did not want to be formally interviewed as part of this project.

It was the ethnographic nature of some of this data – notes in notebooks, remembered conversations, recounts of *being* in places relevant to the project –

that crystallised my thinking around methodology. I still wanted life history interviews with working-class women to be a significant part of the dataset, but I realised how an ethnographic, place-based approach could help me to surface some of the elusive webs of relations operating in Coalville across time and, crucially, the implications of these for women's experiences of education and social (im)mobility. Burawoy (1991, 1998, 2000, 2009) highlighted the potential of ethnography-as-revisit and the extended case study "to emancipate… [ethnography] from the eternal present" (Burawoy, 2009, p. 74), critiquing how the ubiquity of participant observation often causes an overemphasis on the temporal 'present' in ethnographies. My research was not rooted in "an elastic ethnographic present" (Gorski, 2013, p. 36) and I needed to find precedence for ethnographic work that was historical.

2.6 The finalised methodology

This study used place-based historical ethnography and a mix of methods to examine how far education contributes to social mobility for working-class women in Coalville. The project attempted to trace objective relations between social agents in and around the town, partially reconstructing the field and field-positions occupied by social agents in the past and present.

Phase 1:

The first phase of the project utilised life history interviews with former educators and related staff who had previously worked in Coalville between the 1980s and early 2010s. These interviews sought to explore educators' perceptions of the girls they had once taught as well as to consider the relationship between place and education.

Phase 2:

The second phase of the project involved recruiting women who had previously worked at the Palitoy factory in Coalville, prior to its closure in 1994. I conducted life history interviews, exploring their experiences of living, learning, and working in Coalville over time. Some of the female descendants of these participants were also recruited, illuminating how attitudes and experiences changed over time across different generations of the same families.

Phase 3:
In the third phase of the project, I conducted focus group interviews with girls in a Coalville secondary school, exploring their aspirations for the future and considering how their anticipated trajectories related to the trajectories of the other participants.

2.7 Three generations of women

Based on year of birth, I categorised the women within three broad generations.

Figure 3: Three generations

Generation	Birth date range
First generation	Late 1930s to mid-1950s
Second generation	Late 1950s to late 1960s
Third generation	1990 to early 2010s

Like any classification, these generations mask differences within the groups. However, having interviewed 29 individuals during the study, nine of whom worked at the Palitoy factory, this broad brush enabled me to work with the data at an appropriate scale, tracing historical, social, and cultural trends at a broad as well as granular level. The nine participants I interviewed who worked at the Palitoy factory were all classified within the first or second generations, based on year of birth.

Having provided an overview of my research project, I will now explain and justify my methodological decisions in subsequent sections of this chapter.

2.8 Historical ethnography

Historical ethnography is a methodology rooted in anthropology (Hackett, 1989; Parman, 1990; King and Vullnetari, 2016). Early studies include descriptive information about the cultural group in question and are described as ‘historical ethnography’ without explicit methodological explication (Hackett, 1989). However, these studies all share a desire to understand a particular cultural group, usually residing in a particular place, through consideration of their present and past. A common feature is the use of participant observation and interviews, analysed in conjunction with other datasets. Whilst some studies lean on statistical analysis of demographic data (Hackett, 1989), others offer a detailed treatment of the social group in wider discourse, for example by exploring cultural representations of the Scottish crofter over time (Parman, 1990). These different approaches to researching past and present demonstrate the methodology's flexibility. The anthropological foundations of historical ethnography support the methodological coherence of this research project in that Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit was originally theorised through anthropological studies in Algeria (Bourdieu, 1962, 1977). Bourdieu's studies shifted the focus from anthropological concerns[13] to an emphasis on the internal workings of communities (Reed-Danahay, 2005).

Whilst historical ethnographies often rely on participant observation to surface interconnections between past and present (Hackett, 1989; Nkwi, 2015), the historical emphasis of this project precluded the use of this method. The changes that have taken place in Coalville due to deindustrialisation led to the closure of many of the town's factories, preventing participant observation in these locations. Similarly, the changing organisation of formal education over the last 80 years meant that many schools had changed age-range or moved sites. These shifting uses of particular buildings and the changing meanings associated with them in the local community meant that the ways in which these sites were tied to present-day webs of social relations may have been very different when compared with the past. By recruiting participants who all worked at the Palitoy factory at some point, there was an opportunity to retrace some social relations and reconstruct the workings of the field at particular moments. This bears out Vaughan's (2004) conception of historical ethnography as

> "the ethnographic practice of digging into the past, deliberately reconstructing history to identify and then track the processes connecting past and present" (p.316).

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[13] Such as contrasts between the communities of study and the Western world.

The sociological construction of these histories allowed continuities and changes to be traced over the course of participants' lives and, in some cases, the lives of their female descendants. By mapping positions, dispositions, and trajectories, I was able to engage with the project's focus on how far education contributed to social mobility for women in Coalville.

As a researcher navigating diverse academic disciplines, I understand fully the hazards[14] involved in embracing the historical. It is worth noting that it is not the discipline of history that I have invoked here, but rather the dimension of historical time, itself only arbitrarily separated from space through classical Western thought (Massey, 2005). The present is a less straightforward notion in social research than it may at first seem. How close to the present moment do ethnographic studies need to be to honour this unconscious commitment to the now? When does data reach its sell-by-date? This study embraces these challenges to push the boundaries of historical ethnography as methodology, drawing on Bourdieu's advocation of

> "a 'socio-genetic' reading…one which offered a way of understanding the historical and cultural forces that gave rise to, and shaped the phenomenon studied" (Hardy, 2011, p. 152).

Whilst Bourdieu's own emphasis on the historical has been honoured in some educational research (Gorski, 2013; Gamsu, 2018), the place-based, ethnographic, and historical elements of this project are unusual.

2.9 Geosemiotics

I also link to visual and material artefacts in this study, relying on the sociolinguistic theory of discourse to bridge the gap between the theoretical – although empirically informed - propositions of Massey and Bourdieu and the different discourses within which the interviews, research process, and this thesis itself are implicated. Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotics frame how the general can figure in the particular and vice versa. Human action arises from the interaction between social actors, habitus, interaction order, visual or other semiotic systems available, and the place semiotics invoked in their material surroundings.

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[14] For example, I have been asked by historians how I have approached 'fact-checking' the accounts of my participants for the sake of 'historical accuracy'.

This geosemiotic model works across multiple scales and allows the messiness of space-time to be engaged with. For example, I spoke to some former Palitoy employees in the former offices of the factory, which hosted a reunion event and heritage exhibitions. My own habitus – with its ungainly fusion of my role as a doctoral researcher and my identity as a longstanding local resident – and the habitus of the person or people I have spoken to both *influenced* and were *influenced by* the interaction order, the semiotic systems that we were navigating and appropriating, and the place semiotics involved in our positioning in this building, which itself served as a semiotic aggregate of multiple discourses that are not time-bound. For example, for many of the participants I spoke to who had previously worked on the factory floor, the former office block in which we stood in 2019, now a conference room in a business park, was a building that was both familiar to and detached from their own physical occupation of other areas of the former factory site in the 1970s and 1980s. Co-opted temporarily as an exhibition space for a local heritage society and its partners, the room represented a public display space.

The temporariness of our access to this space was key to the place semiotics – Coalville had recently lost its heritage museum (Martin, 2016) and many of the exhibition visitors were struck by the contrast between this relatively small room, filled with detailed and colourful exhibition boards and display cases, and the recent loss of a permanent space to house such material objects. At the same time, excitement around recent sales of Palitoy collections (Leicester Mercury, 2019) meant that the exhibits served as semiotic aggregates too, with their potential economic value interacting with more personal semiotic systems relating to visitors' memories of childhood or parenting, of their own toys or of those which they had only seen (and perhaps longed for) in television advertisements.

2.10 Life history interviews

The semi-structured interviews conducted with the former factory workers, their relatives, and former educators had a life history rather than life story focus, exploring relevant experiences rather than constructing a thorough biographical chronology (Rosenthal, 2003). The use of life history methods is also novel due to the potential for methodological incoherence. Bourdieu (1987) takes issue with the implicit associations that surround biography: the conceptual metaphor of life as a unitary journey viewed in hindsight fails to reflect the changing field dynamics that have interacted with the individual's life experiences. In this project, I generated life history data from a number of participants who occupied positions within the same field to map the "trajectories of those agents within the field who define their chances in relation to the same 'space of possibles'" (Lipstadt, 2008, p. 41). Rather than focusing on each life history as a singularity, the participants' life histories illuminate the workings of the field and are considered in concert with one another. As Bertaux and Berteaux-Wiame (1981) argue, "several life stories *taken from the same set of sociostructural relations* support each other and make up, all together, a strong body of evidence" (emphasis in original, p.187).

Terminology is important here. Bourdieu opposed terms such as biography and life history because of their connotations. He did not dismiss the value of individuals' past experiences but advocated understanding "individual sociological trajectories within the context of the space of possibles" (Barrett, 2015, p. 12). Bourdieu viewed his own life trajectory as a valid sociological focus (Bourdieu, 2007a).

I used life history interviews in a Bourdieusian framework, within the wider methodology of historical ethnography, attempting to reconstruct the workings of the fields within which participants were and are positioned, tracing their "unique manner of travelling through social space, where the dispositions of the habitus are expressed" (Bourdieu, 1996a, p. 259). This both builds on and extends researchers' previous uses of life history data to illuminate habitus (Merrill, 1999, 2015; Merrill and West, 2009; Burke, 2011).

The interviews were initially conducted face-to-face, usually in participants' homes. However, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 prompted a shift to telephone interviews to comply with social-distancing regulations in the UK and safeguard the health of my participants. My first telephone interview was suggested by a participant, Ivy, when the UK's first lockdown prevented us from meeting at a local café as we had arranged. As social-distancing shifted human interaction online, a degree of intimacy was afforded by talking on the telephone during a global emergency. Scott (2004) found that prior communication helped shy participants feel comfortable in qualitative interviews. As well as exchanging emails with participants to arrange telephone calls, I arranged a preliminary call to discuss the project and our relationship with the local area, giving me the opportunity to share detailed information and seek the participant's prospective consent. At the end of each conversation, I asked the participant if they still wanted to take part and arranged another time for our interview call. At the beginning of each interview call, I read out the project information sheet and participant consent form, before seeking the participant's verbal consent for participation and audio-recording.

Whilst none of my participants described themselves as shy, I was struck by the reticence many of the former factory workers showed toward the idea of being interviewed when I volunteered at the local heritage society's 2019 exhibition. One visitor, thrilled to see herself on archive film footage of the factory's production line, did not want her name recorded for the heritage society's archive because *"I'm not like that, I'm not a show-off."* Wariness and self-effacement, associating public identification with self-importance or conceit, presented a challenge to recruitment. In contrast, the telephone interview gave participants the opportunity to share their experiences with an enhanced degree of anonymity (Trier-Bieniek, 2012) as we did not meet in person and therefore would not be able to recognise each other face-to-face, providing pseudanonymity (Wilson, Roe and Wright, 1998). Telephone interviewing has been seen as useful for recruiting hard-to-reach participants (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004).

Weiss (1994) outlines some potential limitations around rapport and length of telephone interviews, explaining his own experience of a "shallower connection" (p.61) in telephone interviews compared to face-to-face interviews, which manifests in shorter interview lengths. This was challenged by my experience and telephone-based studies by other researchers (Glogowska, Young, and Lockyer, 2011; McCoyd and Kerson, 2006). Most of my telephone interviews reached the maximum length I outlined for the face-to-face interviews: two hours. The interviews were typified by warmth and increasing intimacy (Novick, 2008), perhaps supported by the fact that participants were "at home and more comfortable than most interview settings allow" (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006, p. 397). The telephone call felt like a valid tool for social interaction and my own gender, as well as that of my participants, perhaps supported this, with research suggesting women speak on the telephone for longer than men and use it mainly for social interaction (Smoreda and Licoppe, 2000).

2.11 Focus group interviews

Researchers have used focus group interviews to explore teenagers' post-secondary aspirations (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Forbes and Lingard, 2015; Grim, Moore-Vissing, and Mountford-Zimdars, 2019), as well as to consider connections between self-conception and social class amongst privileged teenage girls (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2010) and identity and assessment among primary school children (Reay and Wiliam, 1999). Mac Ruairc (2011) also used the "friendship focus group" (p.546) to explore linguistic expectations, schooling, and social class.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic had challenged my original, intergenerational research design, the staffing difficulties it presented to schools, alongside my position as a former secondary school teacher in the research site, led to me being approached by a local school to ask if I would be able to teach part-time from January to July 2021. I discussed the potential affordances of this with my supervisor, who agreed that I would be able to balance this work with my research project. Having already traced the trajectories of former factory workers through life history interviews, I was keen to explore the expected trajectories and aspirations of teenage girls living in Coalville in 2021. I applied for – and was granted - an amendment to my original ethics application, requesting that I be permitted to conduct focus group interviews with some of the school's female pupils. Having been granted institutional consent from the CEO and Head of School, I also sought parental consent as well as individual consent from the participants themselves (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, and Bottrell, 2014). I explained the project to prospective participants and, if they were keen to participate, asked them to nominate friends who may also be interested. As such, participants were interviewed in self-selected friendship groups, enhancing the "relaxed" (Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub, 1996, p. 19) potential of the focus groups and also respecting participants' rights to freedom of association, in line with article 15 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). I was committed to ensuring that my research project did not infringe on the participants' rights, whilst also being aware that the context of the research site and the relationship between pupil-participant and teacher-researcher meant that I was navigating the typical inequalities that are systemic in "child-adult power relationships" (Bucknall, 2014, p. 71).

I initially considered various innovative methods for the focus group interviews (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, and Bottrell, 2014). However, drawing on Christensen and James' (2017) view that "there is nothing particular or indeed peculiar to children that makes the use of any technique imperative" (p.4). I drew on Cruddas' (2007) advocation that "the social event of verbal interaction is therefore essential in moving imperfectly towards shared social meanings" (p.486), signposting that participants' voices "are the complex products of past meanings and sedimented histories enacted within a dialogic context" (p.486). I was concerned that a creative data collection method that required detailed explanation, fused with my positionality as a teacher, could disempower participants due to the typicality of this format within taught lessons. Introducing and explaining the research task would mirror the way that I introduced and explained lesson activities as a teacher. This could render my desire to honour children's rights in the research process as tokenistic (Lundy, 2018). In contrast, focus group discussions foregrounded the participants' thoughts and feelings, with no subsequent evaluation of their responses producing a more respectful, equitable power dynamic during data collection.

Conducting face-to-face focus group interviews in a secondary school in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging. Whilst I worked for the school from January 2021, I was not able to teach face-to-face until the government reopened schools for face-to-face learning from March 2021. The ever-changing demands placed on schools, coupled with my commitment to disrupting participants' schooling as little as possible in line with the approach to school-based focus group interviews taken by Thomson *et al.*, (2020), meant I regularly had to reschedule interviews. I also had to balance my initial expectations against plummeting attendance rates caused by rising COVID-19 cases in-school during the summer term. With public health recommendations in mind, I limited my focus groups to three participants at a time, aware that this did not fulfil recommended group sizes of four and above (Wilson, 1997). The aforementioned challenges meant that even groups of three became an aspiration rather than a limit. I was able to conduct two focus group interviews with pupils from Year 11, one with pupils from Year 10, and two with pupils from Year 12. Whilst this meant I was only able to draw on the perspectives of 11 pupils in total, each focus group interview was between 30 minutes and one hour in length. Smaller group sizes meant that each participant spent longer speaking than they might have in a larger group. Rather than seeking a larger sample size for generalisability, I embraced Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub's (1996) principle that:

> "with focus group interviews, the intent is not to elicit principles or tenets that can be extended to a wider population…[but to] elicit a greater, more in-depth understanding of perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences from multiple points of view and to document the context from which those understandings were derived" (p.16).

By exploring the dispositions and positions of present-day pupils, I was able to trace potential connections between past and present, in line with Vaughan's (2004) conception of historical ethnography and Bourdieu's advocation that "all sociology should be historical and all history sociological" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.90).

2.12 Analysis

To compile the "stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005, p. 60), I transcribed the life history interviews and composed a narrative portrait for each participant from Phase 1 and Phase 2, analysing these using Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit. The transcript, narrative portrait, and Bourdieusian analysis were then considered in conjunction with one another and with those produced for other participants. By incorporating additional layers of analysis through both texts, I engaged with participants' trajectories as stories and then, in turn, analysed the significance of these in relation to one another. I conducted a thematic analysis of the focus group interviews from Phase 3 before considering these in relation to the datasets produced for Phases 1 and 2.

At the heart of the analytical process has been thinking/writing, conceived of "as a way of understanding, as a mode of analysis" (Coles and Thomson, 2016, p. 258). The process of constructing each narrative portrait represented an "analytic move…a search for the things that seemed to be most important" (Coles and Thomson, 2016, p. 260). I composed the portraits one-by-one, but this process of composition also involved "writing between different descriptions and writing between descriptions and other literatures" (Coles and Thomson, 2016, p. 263). "Intertextuality" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 39) is key. Each word and phrase I use is simultaneously in conversation with everything else I have read, heard, said, and written.

2.13 Ethical issues

In line with Nespor's (2000) view that anonymising place names (re)produces place-based "silences and exclusions" (Nespor, 2000, p. 554), I referred to Coalville by its real name during the project. As a longstanding resident and a former teacher in a local secondary school, pseudonymising the place would be unlikely to disguise the research site but would obscure the importance of the town and its community to the research. As Nespor (2000) argues,

> "naming places and tracing their constitutive processes allows researchers to emphasise connections among people, places, and events and to highlight the systems of relations and processes of articulation that produce boundaries and entities" (p.556).

As Phase 1 participants were recruited based on their former employment at Palitoy, and recruitment involved "a level of public visibility and engagement"

(Nespor, 2000, p.547), the name of the factory has also been referenced in assessed work.

However, the individual identities of participants and their friends and relatives have been protected through pseudonyms. Printed copies of transcripts featured these pseudonyms and segments were redacted to preserve anonymity. Specific job titles were replaced with generic job titles where this did not distort the data. Where specific job titles or roles were relevant and specified, I ensured the time periods within which the women worked were described broadly to avoid identification of individuals. As I was aware that the life history focus of the interviews might prompt emotional responses in participants (Goodson and Sikes, 2001), I performed a risk-assessment in advance, considering what actions I would take in the event of a participant expressing emotional distress or making a disclosure. All participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the project at any time.

I used structured ethical reflection (Brydon-Miller, Rector Aranda, and Stevens, 2015) to identify values that were important to me in conducting the research project. Valuing excellence, as well as being caring and community-spirited, informed my actions across all research stages. Whilst specific ethical guidelines were followed too (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018), these values informed my reflection on typical features of research such as member-checking. In this case, with narrative portraits being produced, I did not feel it was appropriate to take these back to participants. Skeggs (1997) highlighted that, in her research with working-class women, "the women did not want their actions interpreted as class responses for this reproduced the position they wanted to disassociate from" (p.30). In my experience of living, learning, working, and researching in Coalville, social class has usually been ignored, misrecognised, or viewed suspiciously for its potential political connotations.

Bourdieu (1977) drew on Sartre to warn that:

> "Words wreak havoc…when they find a name for what had up to then been lived namelessly" (Sartre, cited in Bourdieu, 1977, p.170).

For Bourdieu, an individual's lack of understanding of their own oppression is a characteristic of an embedded habitus, so well-suited to the objective relations in which it was formed that the individual cannot see themselves from any other perspective that would be afforded by any other position. He sometimes refers to this as "native experience" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 18), which is also associated with misrecognition, defined as:

> "an everyday and dynamic social process where one thing (say, a situation, process, or action) is not recognised for what it is because it was not previously 'cognised' within the range of dispositions and propensities of the habitus of the person(s) confronting it" (James, 2015, p. 100).

Similarly to Marx's concept of false consciousness, James' definition of misrecognition arguably sets up a disconnection[15] between a Bourdieusian researcher's representation of their participants' lives and their participants' own representations of these. This tension had bothered me since I first read Bourdieu's work in 2017. While Bourdieu offers far more nuance in the concept of misrecognition than traditional conceptions of Marxist notions of false consciousness (Pines, 1993), I did not feel comfortable with the prospect of reading participants' dispositions and trajectories from a Bourdieusian perspective and then sharing this with them as supposed academic truth. Skeggs (1997) reflected on this dissonance, explaining that whilst researchers:

> "use an academic framework (which is now part of my cultural capital) to explain their experiences…[participants] use the different discourses to which they have access (their cultural capital)" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 29).

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[15] I previously explored this issue in the dissertation for my MA Social Science Research, analysing how researchers use Bourdieu in order to research working-class lives. One of my participants, a mid-career stage researcher, had advised that it was not necessary to label or 'diagnose' a participant as "dominated" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56). In my dissertation, I reflected on how the researcher:

> "explained that where there was dissonance between the researcher's Bourdieusian 'reading' of a participant and their own perspectives "you don't need to tell people that". This perspective seemed rooted in an ethical commitment to the wellbeing of participants…[she] saw no reason to diagnose the participants' social suffering where they themselves had not already perceived it" (Wright, 2019, p. 56).

Considering this, I felt it inappropriate to share my interpretations of participants' relative inequality with them directly. The point of my research is to raise awareness of working-class lives to an academic audience, rather than to import social science into my working-class community. Member-checking of narrative portraits would have opened up this unsolicited import process, so I omitted it from the research design, despite it being a common feature of qualitative research (Trainor and Graue, 2013). My participants engaged in my study because they wanted to reflect on their memories, share their stories with an interested listener, or contribute to a wider history of Coalville. They did not engage because they wanted to be placed in the context of what they may well see as a "culture war" (Sylvester, 2014; McKenzie, 2020).

In taking this stance, I appreciate that I could be accused of being untrustworthy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I draw on Price's (1996) admission that:

> "Member checking is a loaded issue; I continue to fear, despite contrary evidence, a participant's anger or pain in hearing my interpretation of their experience" (p.209).

Whilst it has become orthodox within qualitative research, unreflective reproduction of a particular process should not be deemed ethical merely because of this (Bourdieu, 1993a). I feel that it would have been emotionally harmful for my participants to have their life histories regurgitated to them in Bourdieusian terms. In the same way, I do not feel that a singular truth can be ascertained through the process of an interview itself. The interaction between us provided an opportunity for the participants to represent themselves and their experience, but this does not mean that they would necessarily enact this representation in the same way at a different time and place.

I have worked reflexively to interrogate my own responses to and readings of the interview data. In constructing a narrative portrait for each participant, I have emphasised the constructed nature of the research encounter itself (Bourdieu, 1999). In doing so, I have sought to:

"make explicit the intentions and the procedural principles that we put into practice in the research project whose findings we present here. The reader will thus be able to reproduce in the reading of the texts the work of both construction and understanding that produced them" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 607).

2.14 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have highlighted the multiplicity at the heart of this project. These myriad connections have been surfaced through the mix of methods used for data generation and the Bourdieusian-informed spatial approach, which helped to elicit "complexity and diversity" (Taylor, 2013, p. 813) in a study that could have sought a singular, typical story that has already been told elsewhere.

Coalville, as an ex-coalmining town, can be read solely as a casualty of 20th-century deindustrialisation in the United Kingdom, as a patriarchal place characterised by women's occupation of the domestic sphere and men's work as miners (Massey and McDowell, 1994). This story is tied to another: that of the connection between educational 'underachievement' and those places "left behind by economic change" (Department for Education, 2017, p. 24).

Yet, there are more stories than these. Resisting these dominant narratives has been and continues to be difficult, rooted as they are in a pervasive and dominant discourse that is invoked in my own social and material worlds as well as those of my participants. Yet the theoretical and methodological approaches outlined here have provided tools for resisting the seductiveness of stories of Coalville as left-behind and deficient. Instead, I have engaged with these stories in parallel to participants' stories of living, learning, and working in the town.

In the next chapter, I map the field of education in Coalville, analysing interviews with former educators to explore how inequalities are (re)produced.

Chapter 3: (Re)production of inequality in the field of education

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces Coalville as a habitat – a place in which social agents are physically located. Whilst the main focus of my study is the social (im)mobility of working-class women who inhabit Coalville, the educators who worked in Coalville's schools also physically occupied the place for some time, but without necessarily adopting the place-based habitus that served as "the tacitly required means of habitation" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 128). Their positions within Coalville differed from those of their students, resulting in distinct dispositions towards Coalville and its young people. Fields are occupied by institutions and organisations, as well as social agents. Both the dynamics of the field of education and the dispositions of the social agents positioned in the field produce and reproduce inequalities. These dynamics, dispositions, and inequalities can change over time, governed as they are by the overarching field of power.

This chapter is organised as follows:

- Introduction to the six former school staff
- Analysis of the changing symbolic value of a school building in Coalville, illustrating how inequalities within fields can change over time
- Analysis of place-based inequalities between Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch
- Exploration of educational doxa, suggesting Coalville is insular, left-behind, and traditional in terms of women's roles
- Tracing participants' positions, dispositions, and illusio to consider whether they had the capacity to reproduce or resist doxa within the field

I will introduce several arguments that are central to my thesis. First, I demonstrate that all social agents in a field undertake their own trajectories through social space. Their social relations at any point in time serve as a nexus for the trajectories of various other social agents. They are a set of stories-so-far (Massey, 2005). These trajectories, from a Bourdieusian perspective, are imbued with inequalities that structure the field of education and other fields. For this reason, the study of working-class experiences of education is not served by a straightforward identification of teachers and school staff as dominant and working-class students as dominated.

This chapter also shifts in scale, between analysis of the field of education:

- on a national scale
- on a local level
- on an institutional, school-based level
- at the individual, practice-based level

The interplay between these levels is important. As well as being key to Bourdieu’s methodological-theoretical toolkit, these shifts enable me to map the field of education and explore how place-based, class, and gender inequalities are (re)produced across them. Connecting the field of education in Coalville to the positions and associated dispositions that pattern the field serves two purposes. First, I demonstrate how habitat and habitus are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Second, I challenge homogenous readings of place, gender, and social class in education in Coalville. Inequalities are tied to positions within hierarchies rather than simplistic, enduring binaries. This opens up space in the final section of the chapter to consider the resistant as well as reproductive practices of school staff within the field of education.

3.2 Meet the staff

To introduce the participants, I will summarise their social backgrounds, educational trajectories, and the periods when they worked in Coalville (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Introducing pseudonyms and signposting dates when participants worked in Coalville schools

Alan Bourne
Worked in Coalville: 1980s-2010s
Working-class background, educated in a comprehensive school

Christine Backshall
Worked in Coalville: 1990s-2010s
Working-class background, grammar school educated

Kathryn Marsh
Worked in Coalville: 1990s-2000s
Working-class background, grammar school educated

Rachael Percy
Worked in Coalville: 2000s-2010s
Middle class background (father had working-class social origins), educated in a comprehensive school

Helen Bickerstaff
Worked in Coalville: 2000s-2010s
Working-class background, educated in Coalville

Holly Parman
Worked in Coalville: 2010s
Working-class background, educated in Ashby-de-la-Zouch

The first five participants were teachers. Alan Bourne taught in Coalville from the 1980s-2010s. Having grown up in a working-class industrial town, he attended his local comprehensive school, developing a *"chip on my shoulder"* about being working-class when at university. Christine Backshall worked in Coalville from the 1990s-2010s. Whilst she grew up on a council estate in an industrial city, she attended a grammar school which converted to a comprehensive school. Kathryn Marsh worked in Coalville from the 1990s-2000s. She too was raised in a working-class home and attended a grammar school. Rachael Percy was the only former teacher who saw herself as being from a middle-class background, but she was aware of her father's working-class social origins. She taught in Coalville between the 2000s-2010s. Like Alan, she attended a comprehensive school in a working-class industrial town. Holly Parman was raised on a council estate in Ashby-de-la-Zouch and worked in Coalville during the 2010s. She too was from a working-class background.

I also interviewed Helen Bickerstaff, who worked in Coalville schools in non-teaching roles, providing pastoral support and careers education. She attended school in Coalville, leaving at 16 to find work. Later, she engaged with adult education and began working with young people in Coalville schools between the 2000s and 2010s. As a longstanding resident of the area, her different trajectory to the former teachers helped to illuminate the similarities and differences in dispositions which were, in turn, tied to their journeys through social space.

Whilst most of the former educators self-identified as being from working-class backgrounds, I did not know that this would be the case beforehand. Far from offering a lone challenge to educational doxa, Helen’s complex position-taking and dispositions stood in concert with some of the teachers who resisted normative, middle-class ways of reading the town and its young people.

3.3 Mapping the field

Across England and beyond, there are schools that serve ex-coalmining towns. Despite their shared geological and economic contexts, a socio-genetic perspective highlights the specificities which (re)produce inequalities in the field of education. In this section, I map physical sites positioned within the field of education in Coalville, tracing the history of the field in the second half of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st. In doing so, I sketch a stark decline in the symbolic status of schools and students in Coalville.

Alongside several primary schools, there were three secondary schools in Coalville when I started this project in 2019. One former secondary modern occupied the Victorian building that used to house the town’s grammar school, reflecting how the shift to comprehensive education still involved the use of buildings strongly associated with the tripartite system of academic selection. The town’s other former secondary modern moved into a brand new building in 2006 (Castle Rock School, 2022). The third school was the town’s former grammar, which moved into a new building in 1962.

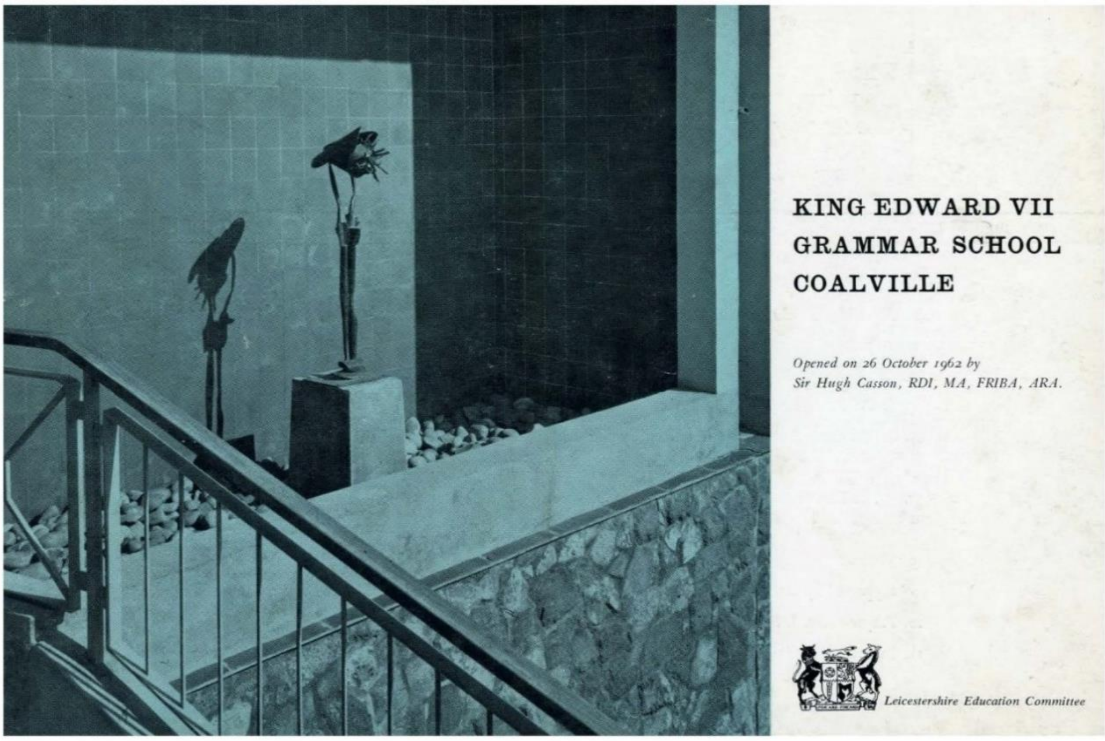
Coalville’s county, Leicestershire, played a key role in the shift from selective education to comprehensive schooling in the second half of the twentieth century. Leicestershire’s Chief Education Officer, Stewart Mason, reorganised the local secondary school system so as to resolve “the problem of [academic] selection which…caused him a great deal of anxiety” (Lowe, 1989, p. 23). The Mason Plan – which turned secondary modern schools into high schools serving all local children aged between 11-14 and grammar schools into upper schools attended by all pupils aged between 14-16 - was gradually rolled out across the county throughout the 1960s “despite strong opposition at Ashby de la Zouch” (Lowe, 1989, p. 27), the closest neighbouring town to Coalville. This effectively ended academic selection in Leicestershire years before the Labour government's acceleration of comprehensive education from 1965 (Watts, 1977).

This model remained from the 1960s-2021. The town's interesting educational legacy – inextricably bound to Stewart Mason's progressive agenda for Leicestershire schools from the 1950s-1970s (Lowe, 2007) – is rarely acknowledged on a national stage as so few areas maintained this model for so long. Whilst Coalville was an early testing ground for comprehensive education, Mason's makeshift solution was maintained even when comprehensive education was rolled out across the country. Over the course of the 1960s-1970s, the Leicestershire Education Authority (LEA) built on its progressive foundation, advocating that upper schools should serve as a "community college, a focus of youth and adult educational and recreational activities as well as a school" (Watts, 1977, p. 18).

The town's geological features drove its economy and influenced the physical sites of the town's schools. Unusually, Coalville's new grammar school in 1962 was built directly opposite one of the secondary modern schools, which was itself only constructed in 1958 (Castle Rock School, 2022). Their close proximity was linked to the logistical challenges of moving "schools to the eastern side of the town to follow the movement of population which results from rehousing on areas clear of [mining] subsidence" (Leicestershire Education Committee, 1962). These logistical factors reduced some of the spatial separation of grammar school students from secondary modern students, pre-empting the eventual amalgamation of students of all attainment levels in the same high schools and upper schools in the 1960s.

Coalville's newly built 1960s grammar school building demonstrates how physical places embody aspects of social fields. The new campus was designed to offer greater facilities for "science, technology and the arts" as "the conception of what constitutes a grammar school education…changed and widened" (Leicestershire Education Committee, 1962, p. 4) over the course of the twentieth century. The debate between C. P. Snow and F.R. Leavis in the early 1960s typified the intellectual context. Whilst Snow (1993), a novelist and chemist, argued that science and technology offered a hopeful future in contrast to the out-of-touch sensibility associated with literary, intellectual culture (Snow, 1993), Leavis saw university intellectualism as the last bastion against "economic and technical change" (Leavis, 2013, p. 38). The architectural design of the school buildings reflected Snow's vision of a grammar school, with science laboratories and practical workshops. The LEA revelled in this shift, with even the sculpture in Figure 5 being created by an artist who had turned his back on painting for "blacksmithing metal sculpture" (Leicestershire Education Committee, 1962, p. 10). From a Bourdieusian perspective, changes in taste reflected wider shifts in the fields of cultural production and education, in turn reflecting changes in the overarching field of power.

Figure 5: The front page of the brochure produced to commemorate the opening ceremony of King Edward VII Grammar School (Leicestershire Education Committee, 1962)



KING EDWARD VII
GRAMMAR SCHOOL
COALVILLE

Opened on 26 October 1962 by
Sir Hugh Casson, RDI, MA, FRIBA, ARA.

Leicestershire Education Committee

Arguably, the move from the site of the Victorian grammar school to the 1960s building – as well as the change of name from Coalville Grammar School to King Edward VII Grammar School - disrupted the school's historical legacies (Gamsu, 2016). As Burke and Grosvenor argue, "the discourse of the time, for schooling at all levels, emphasised a break with the past and projected the vision of a new dynamic relationship between school, community and wider society" (Burke and Grosvenor, 2008, p. 121). The name of King Edward VII Grammar School was changed to King Edward VII Community College in the early 1970s (Leicester Mercury, 1999) and community education was still key to Leicestershire's approach in subsequent years (Jones, 1988), arguably until academisation in the 2010s (Leicester Mercury, 2012). In reifying this new vision of education in the school building, policymakers, architects and educationalists envisaged that this model would endure.

The changing perceptions of the school site itself reflect the process by which physical places – and their buildings – are reevaluated over time. When Alan started working at the site in the 1980s, his first impression of the school was that *"it looked very leafy and looked very well-to-do and I thought 'this place might be a bit posh for me'".* By the time Holly began working on the same site in the 2010s, she felt that the school looked *"like a 70s popped up, just fill the spaces kind of school, which was the architecture of the time".* Holly's critique of the school building jars with the detailed account of the school's design in the brochure commemorating the opening of the building (Figure 6). With its signposting of the institutionalised capitals accrued by the sculptors and architects involved in its design – including graduates of prestigious institutions like the Royal College of Art and the Royal Academy – the brochure reflects a lost vision of a forward-facing school that valued its organ, performance stage, choir, and library as much as its science laboratories and "open air Physical Education Centre" (Leicestershire Education Committee, 1962, p. 6). Holly perceived the school building as "left behind" in a different past: the challenging economic period of the 1970s when England's process of deindustrialisation began. As such, she saw it as *"popped up"* to serve a practical rather than aesthetic or cultural need.

Figure 6: Page three of the brochure produced to commemorate the opening ceremony of King Edward VII Grammar School (Leicestershire Education Committee, 1962)

Main Entrance.
Above the porch is the Stained Glass window of the Devotional Room.
To the right can be seen the sculptured wall on the terrace.

I have highlighted this dissonance to emphasise how places are continually being reevaluated, with implications for the symbolic value associated with them. Whereas Leicestershire Education Committee described how the grammar school's former home in an old-fashioned Victorian building had been "outgrown" both practically – in terms of student numbers - and culturally, Holly saw the preservation of Victorian buildings at the former grammar school in Ashby-de-la-Zouch as a mark of status. She explained that:

> *it does have that look of being very well-to-do, well-established - it's been there a while, you know that sort of the architecture…it looks like a grammar school. It looks like a well-funded school.*

This reevaluation was not solely based on the schools' buildings. Holly encapsulated the way in which places can be understood as a series of intersecting sites and social relations, explaining that:

> *Ashby's got a posh high street and a school that's doing very well and therefore it's not working-class anymore. Whereas Coalville's got a school that's*

not doing as well and hasn't got that high street and that community, and therefore, is working-class and not as good.

This overlapping, mutually reinforcing interconnection between place and social space reflects Bourdieu's (1999) argument that "if the habitat shapes the habitus, the habitus also shapes the habitat" (p.128). Having briefly given one example of this in relation to the symbolic devaluation of Coalville's schools from 1962 to the first decade of the 21st century, I will examine how the place-based inequalities between Ashby and Coalville are otherwise (re)produced within the field of education.

3.4 Education, inequality, and social reproduction: from national to local

Thomson (2012) highlights that one of the key issues with Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit is the navigation of different scales both within and across fields. The field of education can be examined at various levels, with the focus ranging from one classroom – on a small scale – to the world's global education system – on a larger scale. In this case, I want to focus on patterns of educational inequality and social reproduction within England's national field of education before 'scaling down' to consider the significance of this in terms of the hierarchical relationship between Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch in the next section.

Education is a key mechanism in the reproduction of privilege (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Researchers have demonstrated the pervasive inequalities faced by working-class people across various domains of life, from parenting to school (Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz, 1995; Reay, 2017; Archer *et al.*, 2018) and from university to work (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Friedman and Laurison, 2019). Proxies for social class are used within educational discourse in England. Socio-economically disadvantaged children are eligible for the pupil premium, a sum of money allocated to individual schools on a per pupil basis to offset the inequalities they face (Department for Education, 2010). Whilst conceptualising social class is challenging (Thompson, 2019), few would refute the conclusion that children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds achieve lower outcomes than their more privileged peers (Reay, 2017; EEF, 2021).

Although social reproduction takes place on a mass scale, the intricacies of place mediate these processes. Social inequalities are patterned geographically (Allen, Cochrane, and Massey, 1998) and connected to complex webs of social relations that influence the life chances of individuals and the stories that are told about the places where they live (Massey, 1994). Thomson and Hall (2017) have critiqued generalised approaches to schools in educational research, warning that the abstraction required in viewing schools as generic on a national level can obscure important insights. Place-based studies illuminate how social class interacts with life opportunities and trajectories in particular socio-spatial contexts (Skeggs, 1997; Lupton, 2003; Taylor, 2012; Mckenzie, 2015). When local geographies of social class are obscured, it becomes all too easy to represent working-classness as deficiency or inherent vice (Mallman, 2017b), requiring treatment to marshal working-class people and places into forms deemed acceptable and respectable on dominant middle-class terms. Even when working-class people are able to adopt these behaviours, they are still not guaranteed to achieve the outcomes of their more advantaged peers, often acquiring shadow capital (Stich, 2012) rather than genuine forms of capital that can be exchanged within the field.

I have already signposted that Coalville's upper school was a former grammar school. Whilst this would usually provide a valuable, elite legacy for the school to draw on in competing for a dominant field-position against other schools (Gamsu, 2018), two factors combined to produce a local institutional hierarchy that subverts the characteristics of those analysed elsewhere (Orford, 2018). In embracing Stewart Mason's pursuit of comprehensive education in the 1960s – symbolised by the dropping of the name 'Coalville Grammar School' in the 1970s – local educationalists arguably established a more inclusive form of state education in Coalville. In contrast to this, the grammar school in the nearby town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch was staunchly opposed to Mason's reforms (Lowe, 1989) and retained its original name for decades even after the changes were enforced. Alan explained how these contrasting identities worked within the local educational field:

> *Ashby retained its grammar school name, it's now Ashby School and their first and only female head ever changed it from Ashby Grammar School to Ashby School because it had not been a grammar for 25 years then, but it's kind of retained its kind of grammar school ethos and played to that really, and they have recruited…middle-class youngsters out of the town [of Coalville] consistently.*

This had important implications for how educational inequality was reproduced in Coalville, which I will explore in more detail in the next section.

3.4.1 A tale of two towns: (re)producing social inequality between places

All of the participants I interviewed were positioned within a field that associated middle-class success with Ashby and working-class failure with Coalville. Whilst Alan, Christine, Helen, and Kathryn recognised this dynamic as symptomatic of a market-based education system - with middle-class parents strategising to ensure the best possible outcomes for their own children - Holly sought other explanations for the school's reputation. As a former student, she recalled *"more of an academic focus at Ashby"* than at the Coalville school in which she later worked. This academic ethos was also coupled with a commitment to competition. She noted that the Coalville school's musical performances were more inclusive, involving pupils regardless of their *"sense of rhythm",* in contrast to Ashby, where *"you weren't guaranteed a place…they definitely only wanted people who could perform, who could sing"*.

Whilst differences between those schools labelled working-class and those labelled middle-class have been explored (Stacey, 2019), my data suggested these distinctions were potentially exploited by staff and students at the rival school. Helen described a family friend's experience of *"the first [school] assembly [at Ashby, when the Headteacher said] how lucky they were that they hadn't gone to this other awful school - particularly girls, because you'll all be pregnant before the end of year 11 if you go there"*. Holly remembered similar events:

> *It was very much a case of 'we are better'. 'We are the better school' erm and they would make jokes and comments.*

Holly's own working-class social background arguably led to her being associated with the Coalville children who attended Ashby School. She explained that she had *"quite a lot of friends"* that lived in Coalville and recalled how the social class divide between herself and her more affluent peers was particularly pronounced in music lessons:

> *there was like a small group of three of us that…glued ourselves together…we kind of sort of migrated together like, ah, save me. And it was very much a case of we just didn't feel like we were part of, you know - a lot of them were boarders who'd been playing musical instruments since the age of two…as opposed to us that just quite like music*.

Holly described a process similar to the social sorting associated with off-rolling in more recent educational discourse (O'Brien, 2018):

> *I will never forget my friend being asked to leave at year 13 because she wasn't good enough. Her grades weren't quite high enough and so she had to step down and go somewhere else because she wasn't wanted. And there was a massive drop from year 12 to year 13, year 13 was far smaller…At Ashby there were lots of…my friends that were there with me as well were not there with me in year 13*.

Whilst the rival school was not the focus of this research project, its reproduction of doxic beliefs relating to its own academic success and exclusivity in contrast to doxa relating to academic failure and cultural inadequacy in Coalville is significant. Not only does this reflect the power of parental choice in local school markets (Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz, 1995) as well as the strategic ways that schools cultivate reputations (Gamsu, 2018), but the doxic beliefs about both schools parallel those related to both towns. Holly was interested in the perceived differences between the towns as she recognised from her own social background that *"Ashby still is fairly working-class. It just likes to think it's very middle-class"*. She elaborated:

> *somehow Ashby has got this middle-class label and Coalville has this working-class label whereas actually if you take the people that live there they're very similar.*

Despite her own identification of social class inequalities in Ashby, Holly clearly internalised aspects of her own time at *"the posh school."* The process by which this internalisation took place is interesting, with her recollections of some of the ways that Coalville was described by students at Ashby suggesting that stigmatisation was common:

> *you hear all the regular jokes that oh, you know, people in Coalville they'll have six fingers and, you know, count your toes and webbed feet and obviously you get that erm, it was sort of after being a mining community there was that sort of tinge of sadness about it because obviously, it had deteriorated quite significantly: shops were closing, there wasn't very much to do. And as a teenager who didn't really have access to any other areas, it was sort of like downtrodden and, even sort of [the school], I went to Ashby. And there was very much that rivalry between the two schools there. We were the good school.*

Holly described the doxa that those who lived, learned, or worked in Coalville navigated. Coalville as a place stuck in the past is evoked in her description of it as *"deteriorated"* and *"downtrodden"*. Her reflection that *"after being a mining community there was that sort of tinge of sadness"* emphasises the importance of the past – and its social hauntings – in Coalville's present.

Perhaps most significantly, Holly's retelling of the jokes that were told about people from Coalville in Ashby reflects doxa relating sexual impropriety and incest to working-class people and places (Skeggs, 2005). Holly was not the only participant to mention this – Rachael also recalled former colleagues (outside of education) who described how *"people in Coalville were 'backward' and 'inbred'"*. In Holly's quotation, these comments about *"six fingers"* and *"webbed feet"* reflect this stigmatisation of place, which goes beyond typical associations between educational achievement and economic indicators. Within this stereotype, there is a suggestion that the people of the town are immoral -

engaging in illegal sexual behaviours like incest - and almost subhuman (*Urban Dictionary: Coalville*, 2007). The idea that Holly's peers would mockingly ask those from Coalville to *"count your toes"* suggests peer-monitoring and surveillance, ensuring that those accepted into their community at *"the posh school"* are distinct from the other they refer to. The discourse surrounding Coalville is used here as a site onto which all that is immoral and undesirable can be projected, in order for those who are not from Coalville to express their social distance (Skeggs, 2004a).

Skeggs (2004a) argues that this process of "distinction and distanciation" helps to "produce the middle class" (p.97), highlighting that class formations are fluid and ever-changing in different contexts. From this perspective, the way that participants were unconvinced by Ashby's status as an authentically middle-class place becomes important. This place that *"likes to think it's very middle-class"* (Holly) is recognised by most participants as having *"rough"* areas (Helen). The stakes for those in Ashby then, lacking the assuredness of true distance from what it means to be working-class, are arguably high, perhaps contributing towards the class contempt (Sayer, 2005) shown here. As Reay (1998b) argues, "processes of ensuring class advantage often operated concurrently as practices of class exclusion" (p.271). By (re)producing doxa relating to the deficiency and innate vice of Coalville, its upper school, and its residents, those with more power in the local context were arguably able to produce their own identities in opposition to these, acting in line with their own illusio*.* Similarly, the *"middle-class youngsters"* of Coalville, who were recruited *"out of the town"* (Alan) by the upper school in Ashby, were able to produce their own middle-class subjectivities. As Holly explained when she reflected on her friends who had opted for the upper school in Ashby despite living in Coalville, *"they almost didn't want it to seem like [staying at a school in Coalville] had ever been an option."*

Kathryn attributed the positive reputation of Ashby School, in contrast to the less positive reputation of Coalville's upper school, to the:

> *very middle-class parents…people who came from the villages, the farms…they were quite aspirational for their kids, which is why you got that*

Ashby thing. They were happy with the high school but 'we don't think the upper school's good enough'.

These agentic, aspirational, middle-class parents contrast with passive, accepting working-class parents, whose children lack aspiration, reflecting doxic beliefs related to parents and their capacities to support their children (Lareau, 2003; Mills and Gale, 2010). They select from a range of options and thereby influence the workings of the field *en masse* through strategic choices (Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz, 1995).

This dichotomy between a successful place with its successful school and a failing place with its failing school was instituted in many ways. Helen described how her own children, who lived and were educated locally, were put under pressure to go to the upper school in Ashby at the age of 14. The Coalville high school they attended *"very much encouraged the brighter kids to go to Ashby because they thought that they would get a better chance and they would mix with a different group"*. Ashby had been ascribed a desirable social mix (Taylor, 2012), with this being presented as the key reason for the school advising parents of academically successful children to apply to this rival school rather than their catchment upper school in Coalville.

Another participant was able to reflect on their experiences of having worked at schools in both towns and described similar associations between identity and place. They recalled how pupils they had previously taught in Coalville ignored them, their former teacher, when they too made the move to Ashby: *"they didn't talk to me"*. The teacher empathised with the social challenges faced by these pupils who had moved school partway through their education: *"I think they probably went, 'oh, she's from Coalville,' and…probably had to put up with the stigma of having come from Coalville".* The teacher too felt stigmatised because of their association with Coalville:

> *I have no proof for any of this. But it's just what I felt. And I think it was like, 'well, you're from Coalville, you're shit' and I just thought 'my A-level kids [in Coalville] got better results than you'.*

Whilst Tyler (2020) explored stigma as a governmental technology used to dehumanise welfare claimants, a less severe, local manifestation of working-class stigma as educational doxa emerges here. These stories of former Coalville-based pupils and teachers adapting to the social world of the rival school emphasises how doxa relating to places and people are interlinked, with social class a key factor. For a headteacher in Ashby to allegedly reference high rates of teenage pregnancy in Coalville, associating this directly with the possible futures for their own school's pupils if they had suffered the misfortune of attending this other *"awful school"* (Helen), highlights how doxa are reproduced through the practices of social agents. Stories are told and retold by social agents to achieve particular ends. These stories are not neutral nor accidental but are mobilised to bolster their own positions within social fields – acting in line with their illusio - whether they are headteachers, teachers, parents, or pupils.

In this part of the chapter, I have explored how the hierarchical relationship between Ashby-de-la-Zouch and Coalville produced place-based inequalities within the field which were simultaneously (re)produced within the dispositions of social agents – both students and staff. Having sketched this overarching dynamic in the field of education, I will focus on the doxa revealed by the participants who worked in Coalville's schools, highlighting the deficiency discourse which surrounds the positions of Coalville's working-class women within the field of education.

3.5 Positions and dispositions in changing fields: doxa and the potential for hysteresis

In terms of education, Bourdieu's concept of doxa can reveal how 'the good student' is constructed (Hunter, 2004), illuminating the characteristics by which the education system sorts and sieves to (re)produce inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Teacher education researchers have highlighted that doxa can be noticed and subsequently resisted within a double-field structure (Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann, 2019). Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann (2019) highlight the significance of the relationship between the field of schools and the field of teacher education in relation to two distinct habitus formations. This double field structure opens up the possibility of resistance, breaking down doxa into orthodoxy through the challenges of heterodoxy. Whilst the double field structure offers this potential for resistance in that the social agent occupies two different field-positions at once, it is also worth considering how hysteresis can occur in fields that have undergone a significant change. If the fundamental doxa of a field are undermined in a process of social change, then new orthodoxies can replace the old and eventually embed doxa that are completely antithetical to those they displaced. In this way, the heterodox can almost become doxic. Bourdieu argues that orthodoxy "aims without ever entirely succeeding, at restoring the primal state of innocence of doxa" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169), highlighting how the crisis that forces social agents to question the unquestionable (doxa) cannot be undone.

The field of education has been subject to contestation and crisis over the last hundred years and beyond. This is demonstrated acutely in the way that Coalville's 1960s grammar school was built for Snow's (1993) vision of a future education system supported by industrial wealth and focused on science and technology. Yet from the 1980s onwards, it served a deindustrialised, ex-coalmining community, which harbored only memories of industrial wealth. Educational policy since 2010 has aligned with Snow's critic, Leavis (2013), advocating for neotraditional approaches to pedagogy and curriculum based on the work of E.D. Hirsch (Graham, 2018; Neumann *et al.*, 2020). The arguable triumph of these ideas reflects how changes in the field of power result in changes in other fields, such as the field of education. It is these changing field dynamics that produce different doxa. Whilst orthodoxy is the "necessarily imperfect substitute" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169) for doxa once it has been challenged, I have continued to use the term doxa here to reflect that recent educational reforms further silenced and limited the opportunity for heterodoxy. Whilst the "primal state of innocence" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169) of traditional educational doxa has been tainted by progressivism, the primacy of traditionalism from the 2010s to the present day means doxa is a more appropriate term.

Ongoing changes in the dynamics of the field of education may have left some social agents experiencing hysteresis, with their secondary – or professional -

habitus having been partly constituted within a different set of objective conditions to those which they later faced. A teacher such as Alan, who identified strongly with the ethos of community education when he started working in Coalville in the early 1980s, may have found the prospect of academisation and competition anathema to his beliefs about education and his illusio when he was working in Coalville in the 2010s.

To explore doxa within the field of education in Coalville, I will signpost how the six participants perceived place and people. These perceptions – imbued as they are with the values of the field by virtue of the participants' positions within it – reveal doxa, supporting my mapping of the field and surfacing the deficiency discourse surrounding both the place and people.

3.6 Doxa 1: Coalville as an insular place

One of the key stories told about Coalville was of insularity. This was framed by some participants within a modernising discourse, whereby Coalville's insularity was gradually being overcome because of migration into the area.

Helen described how many young people she worked with felt that:

> *there's a massive wall around it, and you can't possibly ever scale that or go, you know, across the boundaries. So things like getting kids out on work experience if they, they'd got to get a bus to get to work experience, it was a massive barrier.*

Christine described how *"people just thought it was very insular - which I think it was - and very isolated, not very forward-thinking"*. Rachael also described it as *"inward-looking"* but saw this as connected to its strong sense of community, similarly to Helen who concluded that *"close-knit communities become very insular and the world is a small place, particularly for working-class communities"*. Whilst Helen and Rachael emphasised how the insularity was not necessarily negative, Christine signposted how this was gradually being broken down as a result of *"new housing in Coalville…and I thought it was really good to have that balance really and to push…the boundaries, push the aspirations"*.

Whilst Christine meant no disrespect by her comment, she reflects a doxic view that positions those students and families that were historically tied to Coalville as inferior to those new to the area, who were perceived as bringing a modernising, aspirational influence with them.

Four of the six participants emphasised that Coalville was more socially mixed than it may at first appear. Alan explained that Coalville had a *"small middle-class…[who] were really proud that they were in an ordinary working town"*. Alan's identification of Coalville's middle-class residents speaks back to doxa representing the town as wholly working-class due to its coalmining legacy. However, for Kathryn, these middle-class locals were still tied to particular places within the Coalville area*: "people who came from the villages, the farms"*, suggesting that Alan's identification of a social mix reflected smaller-scale geographies of inequality. In her own account of growing up in a Coalville village, Helen emphasised that there were particular places within the village that were associated with particular social groups, contrasting the middle-class community centre with the working-class sports clubs and working-men's clubs. Both Christine and Kathryn felt a social mix was desirable, with this being reminiscent of middle-class notions of the types of social demographics that are desirable in particular places (Taylor, 2012).

The doxa relating to place reflect how young people in schools were positioned within the local educational field. These would have figured in teachers' perceptions of students and in students' perceptions of themselves: from the association of villages and farms with higher socioeconomic backgrounds to the perception that enduring familial legacies in the Coalville area indicated insularity.

3.7 Doxa 2: Coalville as left-behind

Geographies of inequality also privilege urban areas over rural areas (Theobald and Wood, 2010). Whilst Coalville is a post-industrial - or resource extraction – community, doxa operate within a temporal discourse, presenting cosmopolitan, urban places as synonymous with the future and others as representative of "a past condition that we have left behind" (Theobald and Wood, 2010, p. 27).

Whilst UK policy has frequently used a geographical lens to engage with educational inequalities, for example, New Labour's Education Action Zones (EAZs) in 1998 (Lupton, 2003), the UK government has more recently identified specific places and their communities as "left-behind" (Department for Education, 2017, p. 7).

Whilst the town of Coalville was not included on this government list, the idea of Coalville as left-behind was alluded to in my dataset. This mostly manifested in relation to gender roles, fashion, and social norms. Alan highlighted the contrast between the fashion-forward, urban place where he had previously worked and Coalville when he described how:

> *Fashion and trends…were like 10 years behind and it was like going back to the mid-70s. Kids dressed still glam rock type of stuff, you know, whereas punk and new wave had been and gone and all that ska stuff and it was new romantics really…Coalville was still heavy rock...That was really noticeable.*

The town itself seemed to be affected by hysteresis. Its economic system was disrupted by the closure of the coalmines in the 1980s, with significant consequences for the town's social organisation.

In recent years, researchers exploring ex-coalmining towns have employed Gordon's (2008) concept of social haunting[16] to explore how aspects of a 'lost' past figure in the present. Morrin (2016) traces examples of habitus-field disjuncture, using social haunting to argue that the "ghost of deficit" (p.135) related to parental educational trajectories played out in her interview with a female student in an ex-coalmining town. Morrin argued that the doxic ghost of deficit is a property of the field rather than of the student's own habitus as she rejected a deficit view of her parents' lack of engagement with higher education.

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[16] Bright (2018) documents the "unexplainable hangover from the past" (p.109) affecting young men and women in former coalmining villages in Derbyshire and South Yorkshire. He signposts how the dispositions of people living in these places reveal echoes of the objective conditions of the past, even when these objective conditions pre-dated the formation of the social agent's primary habitus. For Bright, social haunting manifests through a continued sense of struggle, reflecting the involvement of these pit villages in strike action in the 1980s. In contrast, only around thirty miners – "the Dirty Thirty" (Bell, 2009, p. 8) went out on strike in Coalville.

Social haunting reflects how the past figures in the present with the capacity to resist as well as reproduce doxa.

More recently, Simpson and Simmons (2021) applied the concept to ethnographic data relating to a primary school in a former coalmining town. In contrast to Bright's (2018) findings that schools were a site of struggle, they argued some school practices actually rejuvenated traditional social and cultural practices associated with the coalmining industry, such as the use of pit humour between teachers and pupils. Whilst they acknowledge the injuries suffered by the school's coalmining community because of deindustrialisation, Simpson and Simmons (2021) highlight how social haunting can be positive as well as negative, but that "working-class pupils' experiences of schooling remain characterised by rhythms and narratives of the past" (p.16).

Local people in Coalville bore the imprints of earlier objective conditions on their habitus, despite these objective conditions having dramatically shifted during – or prior to – their lifetimes. For the educators, the closure of the mines meant that the town's residents needed to look to more modern forms of employment, with education and training being of paramount importance. By the 1990s, Kathryn remembered being surprised that the legacy of coalmining was still so present:

> *I remember one guy whose son was quite badly behaved and he'd been in the mines…he seemed very young to me, but he had been a miner.*

Many commented on changes that took place in Coalville as positive. Inward migration was viewed positively by Christine. Holly saw her role as helping young people to go to university so they could leave Coalville, in line with Corbett's description of how young people in marginalised communities learn to leave through formal education (Corbett, 2008).

In terms of gender roles, Kathryn again felt that the social changes that enabled her to work in a professional career alongside having children had not yet influenced social norms in Coalville, producing a habitus-field disjuncture when she began to work in the town (Morrin, 2016). She explained that the options available to girls locally:

> *felt a bit like it had been for me in the 70s. I was, you know, quite shocked with this attitude that, you know, 'oh no, she'll have a baby'.*

Even by the 2010s, Holly observed that aspirations were highly gendered. She remembered that:

> *a lot of the parents I spoke to were in a nursing career, So it was kind of like, Okay, so what does mum do? Oh, she's a carer. Oh, she's a nurse. Oh, right. Or she's a teaching assistant. Very much those traditional roles again, in terms of caring roles. And so it was almost like they were just doing what they knew.*

Holly's words reflect how the caring associated with motherhood in the 1990s – described by Kathryn – echoed in the paid work of her students' mothers in the 2010s.

This idea of a left-behind community, trapped in – or haunted by - the past, was also reflected in Holly's reflection on how many of the young people she taught went on to be the first in their families to go to university. As with Kathryn's reflection on how girls in Coalville in the 1990s had not yet benefited from social changes to gender roles that had been wrought in the 1980s, Holly – the first in her immediate family to go to university – recognised that she was supporting young people in Coalville to follow her trajectory some years after it had been possible for her. These changes were viewed as developmental, supporting the town in evolving into a more desirable, future-focused place (Taylor, 2012).

As Holly explained:

> *We had a lot of kids from my memory that were sort of the first ones to go to university. So parents were sometimes quite frightened of uni. And, you know, they'd heard how much money it was and all of this and that it was a case that they didn't really know a lot about it.*

The data presented here emphasises the doxic view of education as a modernising force. Whereas the townspeople of Coalville were left-behind, educational achievement was perceived as a way for the town's young people to move temporally from past to present as well as geographically from Coalville to more desirable towns and cities which had their own universities. By contrast, those who were not educationally successful were associated negatively with the past and viewed as geographically stuck in Coalville, rather than as having chosen to stay there. Not all the former school staff subscribed to these doxic beliefs, but they all navigated them in their work in education in Coalville.

3.8 Doxa 3: Coalville's girls and education

Some participants resisted the temptation to describe pupils in Coalville as lacking in aspiration, setting out different conceptions of this that stretched beyond academia. For Kathryn, the presence of role models amongst parents, such as *"entrepreneurial guys who were like, plumbers, electricians, you know, that kind of had gone to tech college as they called it, and they'd done their night school"* meant that many of her male pupils strived for vocational success with a view to becoming a "*self-made man*".

Helen echoed this identification of vocational rather than academic aspirations. She gave examples of pupils *"wanting your own van or running your own hairdressers".* However, there was a key distinction between Kathryn and Helen's views on girls' aspirations in Coalville. Whereas Kathryn felt disappointed as *"a lot of the girls weren't very aspirational either because they wanted to leave school and have a baby…that was their aim because their sister before them had done that or whatever"*, Helen identified teenage pregnancy as subject to unfair doxa. She explained that:

> *at the time there was the teenage pregnancy strategy…and it was really looked down upon, you know. It's like working-class girls have been having babies quite young for generations and probably will do. And actually, for some of them having a child is the motivation that they need, it is the inspiration they need to kind of focus on - a lot of mental health issues resolved once people had*

had kids, you know - education, people come back into education because…they've got something to work for now.

Many of the stories about pupils at Coalville's upper school were gendered. Rachael described the *"girly girl"*, who was *"preened…doing [paid] work outside of school, so that they'd got loads of money so that they could have the bling. You know, very materialistic"*, as a key social group within the school community. She also identified *"unconfident girls…who thought they were rubbish"* as typical across the school. This contrasted with the *"cheeky chappies, who just wanted to have a laugh"* and *"the disaffected boys".*

Whilst these perceptions of Coalville's female students are varied, they reflect how the doxic view of Coalville as left-behind is inextricably tied to a view of its female students as uninterested in formal education, preferring to focus on their own attractiveness with a view to becoming wives and mothers.

3.9 Participants' illusio – positions, motivations, and stakes in the field of education

Whilst this section focuses on the illusio of the participants, I begin by emphasising the complexity of teachers' positions and dispositions within the field of education on a wider scale. On the one hand, educators are charged with ensuring upward social mobility through high levels of attainment for their students - within the 21st century UK state context at least. On the other, they may not personally share the government's conviction that education can markedly improve students' life chances in the face of widening social inequalities beyond the control of the school. These dissonances have been of interest to researchers (Ball, 2003b; Maguire, 2005). Teachers are sometimes presented as inflictors of the symbolic violence that the education system arguably perpetrates on the dominated in society (Dunkake and Schuchart, 2015; Gast, 2018; Mcgillicuddy and Devine, 2018) or at least as complicit within the wider processes of symbolic violence that manifest within educational institutions, for example through the valorisation of middle-class cultural dispositions (Croizet *et al.*, 2017; Archer *et al.*, 2018). However, the universal attribution of the labels of 'dominant' for teachers and 'dominated' for students belies the complex dynamics at work within national and local educational fields and also ignores the importance of teachers' own social origins and dispositions.

Required to achieve graduate qualifications themselves to be eligible for teacher training, a process of social sorting filters potential teachers, making middle-class, educated people more likely to be successful in entering the profession. If working-class children are less likely to achieve highly at school and less likely to go to university (Reay, 2017; Burgess and Thomson, 2019; Social Mobility Commission, 2019), then the argument follows that teachers are less likely to be working-class too. Some studies have suggested that teaching roles are often held by white, middle-class women (Causey, Thomas, and J. Armento, 2000). However, the experiences of pre-service and in-service teachers from working-class backgrounds have become a focus of research in recent years (Burn, 2001; Maguire, 2005; Kirk, 2008; Lampert, Burnett, and Lebhers, 2016).

The idea that those teachers who are from working-class backgrounds automatically become middle-class by virtue of their professional occupation has also been problematised (Ozga, 1988; Maguire, 2001; Kirk, 2008). Even where the connection between occupation and social class has been reasserted, labour process theorists have argued that numerous professional jobs have been increasingly proletarianised from the 1970s onwards (Wright, 1980; Braverman, 1998). This concept has been traced in empirical studies of elementary school teachers (Bergson, 1988) and secondary school teachers (Apple, 1988, 1993, 2012; Buswell, 1988; Lawn and Ozga, 1988). Central to these studies is the idea that the wider capitalist separation of conception from execution in the labour process, manifested in education through strategies such as curriculum reform, has resulted in a process of proletarianisation. Teachers have consequently lost autonomy and been subject to increased supervision. The trappings of professionalisation, such as high-status, managerial job titles, and the expansion of pastoral aspects of education, can be viewed as symptoms of labour processes that, far from increasing the status of the profession, serve to subjugate the teacher as worker. This proletarianised teacher is responsible for implementing classroom practices conceived by others, over which they have little autonomy.

Whilst this perspective may be unpopular with those convinced that teaching has become increasingly professionalised, the debate about the position of teachers is clearly of continued relevance to education in England particularly. In recent years, teachers have been characterised by government ministers as "enemies of promise" (Adams, 2013) and "the blob[17]" (Garner, 2014). As far back as 1918, increased professionalisation was seen as an antidote to teacher unionism (Ozga, 1988), yet government criticism of teachers' political activism is still rife more than a hundred years later. The theory of proletarianisation has also been applied to teacher education more recently (Ellis and McNicholl, 2015) and the work of theorists such as Ball (1988, 2012) has contextualised the paradoxically intertwined processes of increasing relative autonomy for schools through decentralisation, whilst increasing surveillance and central steering, within the wider context of neoliberalism. Ball (2012) names these mechanisms of covert control the "new arts of government" (p. 138). Whilst the concept of teacher proletarianisation has not been explored often in recent years, it does provide an interesting lens for considering the class positions of teachers within a local education field and offers an alternative to the view of teachers as "little prophets…of the state" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 20) or subconscious perpetrators of symbolic violence on disadvantaged pupils (Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann, 2017; Gast, 2018).

The complexity of class for individual teachers has been illustrated in a number of studies, with the interplay of past experience and present practice influencing teacher subjectivities, which can in turn be viewed through the lens of class. Some studies use Bourdieu's habitus or Williams' structure of feeling (Kirk, 2008; Lampert, Burnett, and Lebhers, 2016). Working-class teachers have been found to share an affinity with their working-class pupils (Burn, 2001; Maguire, 2001, 2005; Lampert, Burnett, and Lebhers, 2016) and have even experienced loyalty from working-class pupils that goes beyond that typically expected in formal, hierarchical institutions like schools (Maguire, 1999). Their experiences in schools can be read through the notions of inclusion and exclusion, with their relations to students, colleagues, and parents shaped by class (Maguire, 1999;

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[17] This term was resurrected to criticise those teaching unions that advocated school closures in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 (Stewart, 2020).

Burn, 2001; Kirk, 2008). Some working-class teachers have felt empowered by working within a broader collective of working-class teachers within their school (Kirk, 2008; Lampert, Burnett, and Lebhers, 2016), whilst others have felt marginalised by middle-class colleagues or middle-class institutions, 'sorted' so as to match them to particular students and schools that are deemed appropriate based on their own social background (Maguire, 1999). Similarly, some describe their working-class backgrounds as a source of pride, whilst also highlighting the struggles that have characterised their experiences of being working-class in middle-class educational institutions such as universities or particular schools (Maguire, 2005; Santoro, 2007; Lampert, Burnett, and Lebhers, 2016). For some, transition, transformation, or passing as middle-class is crucial to their construction of the teacherly self (Maguire, 2005; Lampert, Burnett, and Lebhers, 2016).

Classed school positions amplify the effects of the social backgrounds of individual teachers, with working-class teachers in working-class schools having very different experiences of teaching when compared to middle and upper-class teachers in higher-status institutions (Jones, 2019; Stacey, 2019). Some schools occupy dominated positions in contrast to more dominant positions, with implications for the teachers, students, and parents whose social relations make up these places (Bourdieu, 1996b; Gamsu, 2016; Stacey, 2019).

3.10 Playing the game of education in Coalville

Having sketched these wider factors influencing teachers in the field, as well as outlining three examples of doxa in the field of education, I will now consider how Bourdieu's concept of illusio illuminates processes of reproduction and resistance within the field in Coalville. Whilst analytical categories like social class can highlight patterns, individual social agents manifest different formations of class and gender heterogeneously based on the field-positions and dispositions that culminate in their trajectory through social space.

The pursuit of better exam results year-on-year is one example of how people who work in schools play the game in the field of education. All participants reflected a personal and professional commitment to self-improvement in their work roles. They also vocalised similar perceptions of what they were there to do, with most implying that their goals were to improve students' aspirations and attainment. The table below (Figure 7) gives an overview of their own social trajectories and a summary of their dispositions, based on the interview data. The first column provides the pseudonym of the former staff member and the decades in which they worked in Coalville. The second column sketches important aspects of their previous field-positions, such as the places where they lived as children and the type of school they attended. The third column signposts the participant's associated dispositions. The table is a useful resource for analysing a participant's capacity to reproduce or resist the doxa outlined previously, which asserted visions of Coalville as insular, left-behind, and typified by traditional gender roles.

Figure 7: Table showing the field-positions and dispositions of the six participants who worked in Coalville schools

Former educator	Position	Dispositions
Alan Bourne *Worked in Coalville 1980s-2010s*	• Raised in working-class industrial town • Had experience of being "naughty" and violent as a child • Had a real "chip on my shoulder" about being working-class at university • Studied for a PGCE in another UK city after his initial undergraduate degree • Balanced "two islands" or identities – the football crowd he still socialised with and the more middle-class teachers whom he also socialised with	• Felt recognition with economic and social demographics in Coalville • Felt comfortable with the parents and students whilst working in Coalville • Wanted to level the playing field for working-class pupils in Coalville on their own terms, without making them into facsimiles of middle-class pupils • Working in Coalville enabled him to retain aspects of his primary working-class habitus that may have been adapted in a more middle-class context
Christine Backshall *Worked in Coalville 1990s – 2010s*	• Raised on a council estate in an industrial city in the UK • Had an aspirational, immigrant mother "who pushed and believed I could do it" – Christine was very aware of racism and was not taught her mother's native language because of this • Attended grammar school at 11, but did not perform as well as expected at GCSE and A-level • Managed to get a place on an undergraduate teacher training degree • Reacted to the competitive nature of job hunting in teaching at the time by applying for "110 jobs" during this time	• Believed collaboration was key to improving education • Felt the hierarchical relationship between Coalville and Ashby was challenging for Coalville's schools • Felt low aspirations were problematic for young people in Coalville • Saw racism and sexism as issues in Coalville and tried to address these in her own work • Felt the local community's ethic of care and charitable nature was a strength • Felt the local community's insularity was a weakness and saw increased migration in the areas as beneficial • Worked hard in her role in Coalville to succeed as an educator • Honesty was key to Christine's approach in Coalville, with parents, colleagues, and students. She

	- During the interview for her role, she was told that the governors wanted a man for the job, so she "was totally honest and blunt with them" in the interview and was successful	explained that local people "wouldn't suffer fools gladly"
Helen Bickerstaff *Worked in Coalville 2000s – 2010s*	- Raised in the Coalville area - Experienced sexism while attending local schools in the 1980s - Worked in a range of working-class jobs after leaving school - Began working with children and young people in careers education - Chose between local schools for her own children, becoming personally involved in the local market-based education system	- Identified Coalville as insular - Supported local schools in introducing vocational qualifications - Felt teenage pregnancy should not be stigmatised - Problematised the idea young people in Coalville had low aspirations, explaining these were often vocational and entrepreneurial rather than academic - Identified a materialistic character to Coalville, tied to "massive" redundancy payments for some miners after pit-closures - Identified "hopefulness" in local young people, which could work negatively in that they sometimes thought "if I don't take this chance now then something else will come along" - Prioritised her children's friendship and wellbeing over their academic achievement by sending them to a local school - Saw the hierarchical relationship between Coalville and Ashby was particularly damaging for young people in Coalville and for Coalville's schools
Holly Parman *Worked in Coalville in mid-2010s*	- Raised on a council estate in Ashby - Aspirational mother used her own experience of teenage pregnancy as a warning to her children of what not to do - Remembered the stigma associated with being from Coalville at school – with jokes that "people in Coalville they'll have six fingers" – but did not experience any bullying because of her own residence on a council estate. Coalville seemed to serve as a proxy for social disadvantage locally, ameliorating some of the social suffering for academically successful working-class young people in Ashby - Inspired by a family member who had previously gone to university and moved into professional work - Identified strongly with Ashby's academic, middle-class ethos - Academically successful until A-levels, when she started to struggle and feared underachieving - Completed her undergraduate degree and then trained as a	- Felt differences between Ashby and Coalville were not as stark as some thought - Felt some young people in Coalville lacked aspiration, but that those who were successful aspired to leave the town in the same way that she had aspired to leave her council estate - Felt young people's career ambitions were gendered and stereotypical - Felt some teachers in Coalville judged Coalville's students harshly and looked down on them for being working-class - Felt some teachers in Coalville judged her for having attended school in Ashby, thinking she might have a superior attitude - Viewed parents in Coalville positively, explaining that they "were very protective of their kids" and of the town's reputation - Perceived the school in Coalville as not aspirational nor academic enough - Perceived the school in Coalville as inclusive

	teacher through a PGCE course • Sought work in Coalville due to lack of transport to go elsewhere and a need to stay local for financial reasons	
Kathryn Marsh *Worked in Coalville 1990s-2000s*	• Raised in a working-class family • Attended grammar school and felt out of place • Her parents read and listened to music • Parents paid for her to have music lessons • Experienced sexism from relatives in the 1970s, who couldn't understand why a "girl" would bother going to university • Aspired to be a teacher from a young age • Worked during the holidays to fund her studies • Studied at university for her undergraduate degree and then completed a PGCE • When she told her parents she was applying for a job in Coalville they praised the town for its "salt of the earth people"	• Felt academic trajectories were not for everyone and looked at family members' vocational experiences positively • Felt children should be treated with respect – teachers should not expect to be respected but should earn it • Perceived some parents from Coalville as lacking aspiration, linked to generations of unemployment following the closure of the coalmines, but contrasted these with middle-class parents who she felt exacerbated the Ashby-Coalville hierarchy • Identified motherhood as key to local female aspiration • Felt aspirations in Coalville were highly gendered and traditional • Identified entrepreneurialism and the figure of the self-made man as key to local male aspirations • Felt the young people in Coalville deserved a school they could be proud of
Rachael Percy – *Worked in Coalville 2000s – 2010s*	• Raised in a middle-class family but was aware of her father's working-class roots • Attended a comprehensive school and felt there was a lack of pastoral support there, exacerbating a lack of confidence in her teenage years • Succeeded at university in undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications • Entered a different career to teaching • Enrolled on a PGCE course to become a teacher for increased job security • Worked in a number of working-class schools, including the one in Coalville • Later worked at a school in Ashby	• Felt Coalville was "inward-looking" but that this produced "such community…they look after each other and, if you earnt their respect as a teacher, they extended that for you". • Remembered being angered by colleagues from her former job making jokes about people in Coalville being "backward" and "inbred" • Felt the school in Coalville was good, with some "extremely strong teachers" as well as some individual teachers who needed to be "firmer" in managing behaviour • Praised the work ethic of young people in Coalville and felt the tendency for young people to work part-time caused a tension with their school work, explaining that they "have to make a decision between money now and money in the future" • Felt parents in Ashby were more middle-class and "snooty"

Illusio supported certain doxa within the field of education. To play the game, teachers and non-teaching staff enacted particular practices. However, as the table above signposts, the illusio of some participants focused on resisting doxa, perhaps as a result of their own experiences of hysteresis or their ability to recognise arbitrariness due to their own socially mobile trajectories. Butler

(2019) demonstrated that different academic departments in different secondary schools can have different forms of illusio, causing different dispositions and practices within the field. In the rest of this section, I will elucidate key aspects of resistant or reproductive dispositions amongst the participants, demonstrating that these are not homogenously patterned within schools*.* Alan arguably exhibited the most resistant disposition towards the field’s doxa, arguing against schools being places where working-class young people are transformed into facsimiles of middle-class children.

Alan’s ability to maintain working-class characteristics was tied to his decision to work in a working-class school:

> *if I’d have worked in a more middle-class area, I would have had to put on a few airs and graces.*

He felt proud to still be viewed as working-class by others, despite his professional career, providing an anecdote about two tradesmen who presumed he was a caretaker when he told them he had worked in schools.

Alan rejected the idea of teachers automatically becoming middle-class, perceiving social mobility as a complex process that could be deliberate or accidental:

> *I suppose you can kind of airbrush it out of your life and your memory and move on and become middle-class and kind of deny, deliberately or otherwise or accidentally, whether that ever existed, but mostly people will kind of 'yeah, I remember what it was like and it wasn't easy.’*

Alan’s educational ethos emphasised levelling the playing field for working-class youngsters without detracting from their working-class identities. He saw confidence as a key trait of middle-class young people. In the context of the *“extremely nuanced but class-ridden society that we live in”*, Alan felt it was important for working-class students to:

> *know they can stand up and speak, they need to know that they've got ideas, that they'll be listened to, that they'll be valued, and that they shouldn't just stand there and wait for someone who's got more confidence but less ability to direct them…you as a member of staff are giving them permission to be aspirational and you're modelling an interest in academic things and things beyond their life outside school and you're opening up their minds to possibilities about what there is in life.*

Alan's account of working in Coalville attributed agency to students and parents. His emphasis was on building meaningful relationships characterised by *"understanding and trust."* Reflecting on the poor classroom behaviour he had experienced in Coalville when he first started teaching there, he felt that the students were testing him and then, when he did not leave, realised:

> *'he is bothered about us, he hasn't…turned his back on us and just done a term and cleared off'. And I think that fact that there was a familiarity then - I think it's…just purely down to that…there was more trust in you as a person that you were gonna stay and actually, you know, help them.*

Alan's illusio was about disruption more than reproduction. Whilst he acknowledged the rules of the game, he pursued these in line with his own values, appreciating and celebrating many aspects of working-class experience based on his own childhood.

Whilst Alan's investment in the field seemed the most obviously resistant, others also described similar practices. For some, the act of working in Coalville's schools – and believing that young people here could be academically successful – represented a striving for a better, more equal world. Whilst Kathryn felt frustrated by a lack of aspiration amongst girls in Coalville, she refused to accept the local authority's suggestion that its young people did not deserve a pleasant built environment:

> *He [the man from the local authority buildings department] said 'well, we just haven't bothered with Coalville…because the heads haven't really been very good, not really been very interested…and anyway, the kids always mess it up'.*

Kathryn disagreed vehemently with this attitude, replying with "*'no they won't, they don't, if we give them some surroundings that they'll value'".* Rachael recognised that teaching in a working-class area was not necessarily desirable, viewing her position within the field of education as influenced by the degree course she had chosen to study, which involved practical as well as academic content. Analysing the workings of the field, Rachael also showed how she had embraced her field-position as it enabled her to draw on her own family history relating to her father's socially mobile trajectory:

> *I knew what people thought about Coalville, but…I found myself in schools from poorer backgrounds. And that's the way - the direction that it went for me. Probably because [of my degree]…very often in the interview process, I think I'd just got sidelined because [of that]…I found it interesting because of the background of my father…in the 50s had been able to move himself up from a working-class background…I still do have a strong belief in education for all and that…everyone should have access to education.*

Despite understanding that – in working in a school in a disadvantaged area – she was occupying a hierarchically lower field-position than teachers working in more affluent areas, Rachael's illusio reflects a commitment to social justice, similarly to Alan.

Helen's illusio also resisted doxa, challenging negative attitudes towards teenage pregnancy and problematising the notion that young people locally had low aspirations. For Helen, as a longstanding local resident from a working-class background, her illusio reflected a commitment to caring about young people in schools and to ensuring their wellbeing in the future, with their success being defined on their own terms. Helen recalled seeing a former student again around fifteen years after working with them:

> *she was one that ended up going to the pupil referral unit, and I really felt like I'd like let her down. I'd tried so hard to work with her and it just didn't happen. And she'd just got too much going off in her life at the time. And there became a point whereby she was one of the very few that ended up going to the*

PRU… she was like, 'Oh, I remember you always told me that I was clever. And I could always do more than I actually did.' She says, 'I never forgot that, you never gave up on me.' And I was like 'alright, okay, and what are you doing now then?' and she would have been early 30s. And she'd gone to - she'd had a rough time, but she'd sorted herself out - she'd gone to college, done an access to HE course. And then went to [university] and trained as a midwife, and she was working at [a hospital]. And I was like…that's great.

Helen's feeling that *"I'd like let her down"* reflects how her illusio motivated her to ameliorate or break down the barriers faced by the young people that she worked with. Rather than reproducing and internalising doxa relating to disadvantaged young people, she showed unconditional positive regard and held herself responsible if they did not manage to stay in education. Whilst she initially perceived the outcome for this young person as unsuccessful, their chance meeting fifteen years later demonstrates that it was helping young people to live a happy life – associated with but not necessarily defined by academic attainment at the age of 16 – that motivated her work in the field of education. Her former student's trajectory reflects Holly's analysis of parents' careers in Coalville, when she identified caring roles as typical for women, whilst also demonstrating the importance of adult education, both of which were key to Helen's own social trajectory too.

Helen elaborated further on her motivations, explaining that:

> *one of the worst things about the job really was about never quite knowing where some of these kids end up. But also it was about the amount of emotional strain that it took out of you. I used to go home at night sometimes feeling absolutely battered, absolutely exhausted. But I kept going, because I really believed in it and I thought, well, actually, if it can make a difference to just one person's life.*

Emotion was important for Helen's practice within the field of education in Coalville. The desire to *"make a difference"* outweighed the emotional toll of working with young people who faced challenges inside and outside of school.

Of the six participants, Holly, Kathryn, Christine, and Rachael worked both with and against doxic beliefs about young people in Coalville. Holly's illusio demonstrated the complexity of her own socially mobile trajectory. On the one hand, she wanted young people to feel proud of themselves and where they lived, treating them and their parents with the utmost respect. On the other, she attributed a desire to leave Coalville to her students and saw this as twinned with her own trajectory, having left the council estate she grew up on to attend university and embark on a professional career as a teacher:

> *I feel like at Coalville It was definitely a case of…you want to leave Coalville, you want to go elsewhere, you want to try different areas. And maybe that's what made them grateful was that they wanted to be able to succeed and move out and do better for themselves. Which I could relate to because that's how I felt as a kid. I wanted to get off the council estate. And now looking back, I kind of miss it.*

Holly saw her own social mobility positively, but also recognised it was accompanied by loss. This complexity is common amongst class-crossing working-class women (Hey, 1997; Reay, 2000b). Whilst Holly sometimes praised the inclusivity of the Coalville school, she also argued it needed a more academic, competitive ethos like her alma mater in Ashby. At the same time as she highlighted her view that this competitive ethos was key to Ashby's success within the field, she also reflected sadly on how many of her fellow students were sieved out of their studies whilst in sixth form, being asked to leave because they were not achieving highly enough. These contradictions reflect the messy complexity of all social agents, particularly those whose social trajectories have seen them move a long way from objective conditions associated with childhood.

Despite her identification with *"the posh school"*, Holly was deeply committed to her working-class roots and shared these with her students to establish a positive, professional relationship with them. As a teacher within the school community, Holly also reflected on her own social class background and the way that this was framed within the school community, explaining that:

> *I think some members of staff did sort of look down on them or look at where they are as if it was a bad thing. Even if they'd come from that themselves and projected themselves forward. They still sort of saw - and I always feel like that idea of being working-class was something you shouldn't want to be. You should want to be higher up, you should want to be in the middle-class. And I would sit there and think 'what the hell is wrong with being working-class?' I'm quite proud of having been a working-class girl. You know, and a degree and a house doesn't take that from me. I'm still working-class deep down. What's wrong with that?*

Holly’s field-position, dispositions, and illusio are complex. Whilst part of her illusio reflects her commitment to helping young people in Coalville learn to leave, she also defends her own right to her working-class identity and, by extension, the rights of the young people in Coalville to retain these aspects of themselves. In her study of the relationship between people and place for primary school children, Reay (2000b) described this as “the tension between positive self/degraded place” (p. 156). At the same time as Holly reproduced doxa relating to the benefits of educational success and university education for working-class young people, she also resisted doxa relating to the deficiency of them and their families.

3.11 Conclusions

This chapter has mapped the field-positions, dispositions, and illusio of six former staff from Coalville schools. Through analysis of this interview data, I have sketched doxa within the field of education, demonstrating the significance of the hierarchical relationship between Coalville and Ashby to the reproduction of educational inequality in the ex-coalmining town, as well as the importance of individual social agents’ own trajectories to their practices within the field of education.

By mapping the dynamics of the field of education in Coalville, I have revealed the significance of inequalities associated with gender, class, and place. I have highlighted how some former school staff resisted aspects of deficiency discourse, striving for social justice within a rigged school system (Bourdieu and

Passeron, 1990; Reay, 2017). The complexity opened up here – with different social agents playing the game differently based on their own social positions and trajectories – is crucial to subsequent chapters. Having mapped the field in this chapter, I will now step back from Coalville's schools to focus on the way education figured in broader life histories of working-class women in Coalville in Chapter 4. Whilst educational inequalities are clearly important for social (im)mobility, I want to resist the doxic emphasis on education as the only "engine" by using Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit to examine social mobility beyond the school gates.

Chapter 4: Learning how to be a girl in the coalmining town

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on three women from the first generation of my study, born in the mid-1950s. Kathy, Valerie, and Cindy represent key trends in the wider dataset. Femininity was key to their formations of class and gender as children and as single women, with the habitus of each shifting when they became wives and mothers. All were fiercely protective towards their children, like the other factory-working mothers I interviewed. Although their stories are different, they represent how conditions and dispositions for social mobility were facilitated or limited for working-class women. The complex interplay between different influences - from the role of the family in childhood and beyond to the impact of school and work - is foregrounded. Bourdieusian understandings of habitus, capitals, and field illuminate how they *became* working-class women in a former coalmining town.

Social mobility is usually defined in economic terms. However, the trajectories of these women demonstrate that increased economic capital does not necessarily support the acquisition of the cultural and social capitals that increase the likelihood of maintaining a more privileged social position. Upwardly mobile trajectories were contingent – for example, on marriage – and potentially followed by downward mobility. Despite this, the women achieved "small steps" of social mobility, such as home ownership or the conspicuous consumption of particular goods or services. By balancing paid work, marriage, and family life, they created the conditions for upwardly mobile trajectories for their own children, even if not for themselves.

The role of women in Western societies transformed during the 20th century with "a loosening of dominant images of femininity" (McNay, 2000, p. 68). Women's changing participation in the labour market across social classes (McCarthy, 2016) had implications for the division of labour at home. Whilst working-class women already had long traditions of engaging with paid work (Massey and McDowell, 1994; Armstrong, 2010), the emergence of professional work opportunities for women in the 20th century has been viewed by Western policymakers as significant for gender equality. Whilst women's work is framed as key to social equity, Harriet Harman, the United Kingdom's first Minister for Women in 1997, emphasised that "our economy depends on women as well as men working" (Harman, 2008).

Whilst I obviously acknowledge the importance of paid work to women's rights and social mobility, I do so as a social agent who has lived and learned within social fields that are themselves structured by the capitalist economy. The economic benefits of two-income households for capitalism are not necessarily beneficial for women as individuals or as a social group. Like Bourdieu, I want to highlight the arbitrariness of the values we take for granted. Is the increased participation of women in the workforce a victory for social progressivism or simply a product of economic restructuring? Does it necessarily lead to upward social mobility for women or are its benefits structured in terms of other inequalities?

Although paid work – like education – is often associated with upward mobility, women still face gender-based inequalities. As well as engaging in paid work and unpaid domestic labour, they are also likely to manage the emotional landscape of family life. This "triple shift" (Duncombe and Marsden, 1995, p. 165) also involves identity work (Smith, 2017), as women negotiate their positions within the different fields they occupy and the habitus potentially flexes in response. Despite increasing participation and wages for women in paid work in the West:

> "women continue to earn less than men, and at every rung of the ladder, today's women earn less than men did at the same rung more than 30 years ago" (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2014, p. 12).

There have also been suggestions of an economic bonus for the daughters of women who did not previously work. Rampell (2014) argues that these daughters were more likely to marry better-paid men, achieving upward economic mobility through marriage rather than their own paid work. In contrast, their peers whose mothers worked full-time were also likely to work full-time themselves, suggesting the significance of intergenerational reproduction for work patterns and wages. Taken together, this research could suggest that a socially advantageous marriage offers a greater chance of upward social mobility than women’s participation in paid work.

Many of the women in my study recalled legacies of women’s work within their own families – a characteristic of working-class women’s experiences throughout most of the 20th century (Armstrong, 2010). Coalmining communities have traditionally been presented as patriarchal, with male employment in coalmines generating significant domestic labour that prevented women from going out to work (Massey and McDowell, 1994; Humphries and Thomas, 2023). However, many women in coalmining communities were engaging in paid work outside the home from the post-war period onwards (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 2022) and potentially before. With patterns of women’s labour varying based on the work of the husband, it is important to note that coalmining was not the only industry in Coalville. The coalmine brought the railway to North West Leicestershire, as well as an increased number of public houses and shops, and there was significant diversification of industry by the 1860s (Baker, 1982).

Whilst a husband working as a coalminer may have been associated with lower participation in paid work for working-class wives in the 19th century, other industries did not follow this pattern. Although issues have been raised with the reliability of census records for reporting women’s work (Horrell and Humphries, 1995), analysis of this data for the industrial town of Preston showed that 74% of women married to low-paid factory workers were in employment in 1851 (Anderson, 1999). Whilst coalmining was the largest employer of men in Coalville according to the 1931 census, 9% of working men were employed in transport and communication, 8% in commerce and finance, 7% as metal workers, and 4% as builders (GB Historical GIS Project - University of Portsmouth, 2009). By contrast, 45% of working women in Coalville were employed as textile workers, 14% in personal service, 12% in textile goods and clothing, and 9% in commerce and finance (GB Historical GIS Project - University of Portsmouth, 2009). Whilst other coalmining towns may have been typified by low participation of women in paid work, Coalville’s diversity of industries - as a Victorian boomtown (Duckworth, Baker and Jacobs, 2013) - meant that paid employment was a feature of some women’s lives in Coalville from at least the 1860s onwards.

This chapter is organised into three parts. I begin with theoretical groundwork, defining key terms like subject, habitus, and gender and outlining theoretical resources before moving to my empirical analysis to unpack the messiness of gender, class, and subjectivity. I then trace Valerie, Cindy, and Kathy's formations of class and gender chronologically. The table below (Figure 8) maps their dispositions across five phases of their life course: early childhood; school; adolescence; marriage; and motherhood. These dispositions – and my descriptions of them - are rooted in the narrative portraits[18] I composed for each participant.

Figure 8: A table showing dispositions in relation to life-course phases

	Early childhood	From home to school	Teenage aspirations	Marriage	Motherhood
Cindy	Feminine, aesthetic disposition expressed through dolls and women's magazines	Feminine, aesthetic disposition – labelled a "dumb blonde" by teachers	Aspired to become a make-up artist in London	Disposed to perform respectability as an upwardly mobile wife and mother	Proud provider as a single mother
Kathy	The formation of a care-giving disposition through scarcity	Reinforcement of care-giving disposition through the study of domestic science	Aspired to join the army		Fiercely loving protector

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[18] These narrative portraits are the analytical texts (Coles and Thomson, 2016) described in Chapter 2.

Valerie		Feminine, sociable disposition expressed through dancing	Aspired to earn money to buy make-up and clothes	Disposed to perform respectability	An equal parent; a loving mother

In the next section, I challenge views of Bourdieu as deterministic[19] (Jenkins, 1982; Giroux, 1983) by analysing key moments in the three women's life histories that reflect agency, independence, and a refusal to accept the positions and dispositions attributed to them by others. Finally, I illustrate how the evolving dispositions of the three women contributed to their relative degrees of social mobility.

4.2 Subjects in social space

In this section, I unpack key terms used within relevant literatures: self, individual, social agent, subject, and habitus. As Bourdieu argued, it is important to "beware of words" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 54). Each term has its own history and meanings, which must be explicated to avoid imprecision, misconceptions, or "empty theory" (Bourdieu, 1993a, p. 72). Like McLeod and Yates (2006), I have tried to "keep different things in play rather than produce a single resolution or reading" (p.88) of "subject". In doing so, I have married the notion of subject with that of habitus.

Identity, subject, and subjectivity are often tangled together. The term subject refers to the individual's being "in the world" (Adkins, 2004, p. 14). The world, for Bourdieu, is social space, within which individuals occupy positions within particular fields, accrue valued capitals within these, and embark on various trajectories through them. The term subject also has important connotations within poststructuralism, linking to Foucault's conception of the subject being "brought into existence as the upshot of some form of relational activity" (Taylor, 2011, p. 129). These relational activities are constituted by technologies of regulation (Foucault, 1995) and technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988). More recently, psychosocial theories of the subject have become popular, foregrounding:

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[19] Whilst Bourdieu's most famous works emphasise the broadly reproductive aspects of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), others emphasise the capacity for "the transformation of the…habitus in response to new conditions of existence" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 54), such as *The Ontology of Martin Heidegger* (Bourdieu, 1991b) and *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu, 1996a).

> "the importance of psychic and emotional dimensions of subjectivity and the interconnections between psychic and social processes" (McLeod and Yates, 2006, p. 88).

The focus on emotional states and subjectivity has led to more recent consideration of the role of affect, with the neoliberal emphasis on becoming a reflexive subject arguably reproducing inequalities even where it disrupts and restructures social relations (Threadgold, 2020).

Whilst the term self is not one which Bourdieu uses often, Skeggs (2004) argues that his characterisation of the middle-class habitus reflects an exchange-value self. Drawing on Foucault (1983), she traces the theoretical development of the exchange-value or possessive self, characterised by ownership of property and other characteristics, before mapping different forms of the self[20] in contemporary thought. Skeggs (2004) argues that none of these models provide "tools for understanding a great deal of working-class experience and value" (p.90) as they reflect self-making practices associated with dominant social groups. Instead, Skeggs argues that:

> "The self is seen not as a subject position, but as part of a system of exchange in which classed personhood is produced through different technologies" (Skeggs, 2004a, p. 5).

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[20] She describes the aesthetic self, formed and self-governed through technologies of subjectivity; the prosthetic self, formed through experimentation "with knowledge, objects and culture" (p.79) in relation to the "dominant symbolic" (p.80); the reflexive self, produced through the "technique of biography" (p.81); and, finally, the possessed individual self, whereby the self is possessed and forgotten, subsumed within the concept of modern freedom and becoming a subject as a result of random productive forces.

As the term self reflects the practices of the powerful and the dominant symbolic, I have opted for subject instead.

Bourdieu refers to each social agent as an individual who possesses their own habitus. Whilst some accuse habitus of retaining aspects of determinism, McNay (2004) and Crossley (2001), drawing on phenomenology, emphasise the importance of experience to habitus. Bourdieu's conception of habitus already implies "the intertwinement of corporeal being and agency" (McNay, 2000, p. 47). Crossley (2001) adds the phenomenological "habit", formed by lived, perceptual experience, to Bourdieu's earlier work. McNay (2004) also notes that Bourdieu uses the term social agent, rather than subject, to emphasise "embodiment as inseparable from social practice" (p.40).

Whilst the habitus is a property of the individual, Bourdieu also referred to gendered habitus (Bourdieu, 2002) and class habitus[21] (Bourdieu, 1984), reflecting the:

> "unity hidden under the diversity and multiplicity of the set of practices performed in fields governed by different logics and therefore inducing different forms of realisation" (p.101).

The groups which individuals can be members of, such as families or workplaces, can develop collective practices and perceptions, which shape and are shaped by the individual habitus of each member. Some have described these as family-specific doxa (Atkinson, 2011) or, in the case of schools, as reflecting Bourdieu's (1991a) analysis of the mystery of ministry, whereby an individual leader of an organisation becomes "a biological body to a constituted body" (p.107) as a result of their position of authority. Having only interviewed Kathy, Cindy, and Valerie, rather than their family members, collective forms of habitus are less relevant to my discussion. Whilst there are similarities between the working-class women, these are a logical consequence of the similarities in their objective conditions. Despite these similarities, there was not just one way of being a working-class woman in Coalville.

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[21] Some theorists have extended collective forms of habitus (Reay, 1998a; Reay, David and Ball, 2001; Archer *et al.*, 2012; Burke, Emmerich and Ingram, 2013), arguing that this analytical construct enables greater insights into how "habitus is formed and re-formed within social space" (Burke, Emmerich and Ingram, 2013, p. 179).

Foucault (1983) identifies three modes of objectification that can reveal formations of class and gender. Firstly, scientific modes of inquiry construct subjects. I construct these women as working-class women through my research. Secondly, society's dividing practices construct subjects, such as the divides between men and women, those who live in Coalville and those who do not, and between the dominant and dominated classes. Finally, an individual can turn themselves into a subject, by responding to or rejecting the other modes.

These different conceptions of self, subject, and social agent help me trace how Valerie, Kathy, and Cindy become working-class girls and women across the life course. Extensions of Bourdieu's habitus to include affect and emotion are particularly useful. However, I have outlined a broader set of theoretical tools as class, gender, and subjectivity are so complex.

4.3 Gender and Bourdieu

Gender is a multifaceted, structuring structure, that:

> "can be a resource, a form of regulation, an embodied disposition and/or a symbolically legitimate form of cultural capital" (Skeggs, 2004b, p. 24)

Whilst Bourdieu roots social class differences in social relations[22], gender is even more complex. A tight circular reinforcement between biology and socio-symbolic understanding of biology institutes a masculine and feminine opposition that is part of a wider system of homologous oppositions (Bourdieu, 2002), echoing Foucault's dividing practices. In Bourdieu's symbolic realm, which is in turn reconstructed in the social realm, the male is active and the female passive:

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[22] His methodological-theoretical toolkit facilitates the tracing of inequalities without bluntly categorising participants and essentialising arbitrary indicators drawn from other empirical studies.

> “Because woman is constituted as a negative entity, defined only by default, even her virtues can only be affirmed by a double negation, as vice denied or overcome, or as lesser evils” (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 27).

From this perspective, the woman is an object, although capable of accruing capitals on behalf of her family or husband. These formations of gender are internalised by male and female subjects through “a historical labour of construction” (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 54) which is reproduced across the generations. Individuals associated with each gender perceive themselves through the schemes of perception of the social order, which is internalised, embodied, and given the appearance of naturalness through childhood. They then reproduce these schemes of perception in their own practices, supporting their constancy and persistence within both habitus and field. The hysteresis associated with habitus, in that it retains traces of the objective conditions which existed during the early stages of its formation, alongside the generative capacity of the habitus to, in turn, exert field effects, is key to the reproduction of gender norms and the reinforcement of specific traits as natural characteristics of each gender.

Bourdieu is sometimes accused of essentialising the categories of male and female (Witz, 2004). However, Moi (1991) highlights how his work supports an understanding of gender that “is no longer to invoke a rather static or predictable social category, but to open for highly flexible analysis of a variable and often contradictory network of relations” (p.1040). Whilst a neat fit between habitus perceptions of gender and the dynamics of gender within a field supports a tight reproductive process, Bourdieu’s methodological-theoretical toolkit can also reveal how individual social agents negotiate, subvert and challenge doxa and the objective conditions that facilitate this, as well as the nuances and inequalities that hide behind supposed victories for gender equality. For example, Bourdieu highlighted that the expansion of employment opportunities for women in the late 20th century was still limited in that, despite the increasing academic success of women, prestigious occupations remained male-dominated (Bourdieu, 2002).

Some feminist scholars, such as McCall (1992), have argued that Bourdieu presents gender as secondary to social class. Others argue that he characterises women as objects of symbolic value rather than as capital-accruing social agents in their own right (Lovell, 2000). Most emphatically, Armengaud, Ghaïss, and Delphy (1995), criticise his ignorance – willful or accidental – of feminist theory and argue that he seeks "to throw a cloud of suspicion – the suspicion of non-objectivity – on *women alone*" (emphasis in original, p.47). McNay (1999) finds Bourdieu's work less problematic, arguing that he opens up a space in which it is possible to explore "the elements of variability and potential creativity immanent to even the most routine reproduction of gender identity" (McNay, 1999, p. 101). However, she does critique Bourdieu's emphasis on a close fit between habitus and field for women, which lacks his usual nuance. Nevertheless, the flexibility of Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit means that other researchers can fruitfully explore these diverse formations of gender with his tools.

I have extended Bourdieu's toolkit with the theoretical resources outlined in this section. Gender can be seen as a dimension of the field of power. Arguably, the symbolic value of a gendered position is tied to the gender of those occupying dominant positions in the field of power. Females are not biologically predisposed to be subjugated, but rather, we live in Western societies where the most privileged positions are usually occupied by men. This power is arbitrary and should not be read as an essentialised characteristic. However, the hierarchical relationship between the field of power and other social fields means that gender inequality is mediated across all fields to varying degrees and in various ways, with these in turn shaped by the relative autonomy of each specific field.

So far, this chapter has signposted Foucauldian theories of subject formation, phenomenological understandings of subject and self, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and different conceptualisations of gender. In the subsequent section, I show how these theoretical resources illuminate my analysis of the ways in which Kathy, Valerie, and Cindy become working-class women, considering their social positions and associated dispositions across the life course. The differences between these formations of class and gender highlight that women are in a continual state of becoming, navigating social space as capital-accruing subjects, and achieving relative degrees of social mobility for themselves and their descendants. Through social connections, Kathy was able to find work in a school despite her lack of qualifications. Through marriage, Cindy found respectability and status. In contrast, Valerie's life history showed less evidence of upward mobility but demonstrated that university education was more accessible – even if not completely comfortable – for the children of women in Generation 1. This was echoed in the trajectories of Kathy and Cindy's children too.

4.4 Childhood play: the formation of working-class girls' subjectivities in early childhood – scarcity, attractiveness, and emotional self-regulation

Whilst neither Kathy, Valerie nor Cindy knew that they would one day work in a factory producing dolls, these and other visual representations of femininity were key to Kathy and Cindy's early understandings of gender.

4.4.1 Cindy

Aesthetic distinctiveness was crucial to understanding Cindy's later trajectory, with marriage contributing significantly to a phase of upward mobility. As a child, her female subjectivity was formed in relation to her mother's glamour, as well as being rooted a generation prior with her grandmother, who had worked as a cook for a wealthy professional man in a nearby city and therefore *"knew all the nice things, like she knew how to cook, she knew what sorts of things to put on the table".*

As well as providing a fitting example of women working pre-war, the association between Cindy's mother and grandmother and *"the nice things"* reflected how her gendered subjectivity involved a sense of aesthetic distinctiveness, in line with Bourdieu's view that:

> "Explicit aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom the competition is most direct and most immediate, and more precisely, no doubt, in relation to those

choices most clearly marked by the intention (perceived as pretension) of marking distinction vis-a-vis lower groups" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 60).

Cindy presented the distinctiveness of her family in two ways: through her mother's glamour – despite her working-class background – and her uncle's academic success:

> *for saying they lived in a council house…and my uncle Howard was, you know these families that have one clever one and they show promise, well he was like that, he went to grammar school, which were unheard of for somebody living in a council house, but he was very creative.*

"Creative" was crucial to the family's distinctiveness. Whilst other residents of Coalville were viewed as ordinary, her mother was *"ahead of her time"*, having *"the first fitted kitchen in Coalville"* and buying products from *"Estee Lauder."* Cindy staked her mother's claim to higher levels of cultural capital – and *"highbrow"* taste - through these purchases. She also mapped how her mother was different from other women locally:

> *we were working-class… she's a creative person and she…liked nice things even then, so she used to send me up to the local paper shop…for Harper's, Vogue…Harper's Bazaar, and Vanity Fair.*

Collecting fashion[23] magazines served as a mechanism for reproduction of her mother's glamourous, feminine subjectivity. Cindy was not only aware of the magazines being in the home as part of the family's literacy landscape, but she also performed aesthetic distinctiveness in that she, as a young girl, went to the local shop to buy these *"highbrow"* items, associating herself with some of her mother's objectified cultural capital. These artefacts were available to purchase even in a coalmining town like Coalville, reflecting how the high street catered for this aesthetic distinctiveness at the same time as Cindy saw it as rare.

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[23] Bourdieu identified similar patterns in his ethnographic study of peasant society in his home region in the South of France, arguing that:

> "women are much more inclined to perceive urban models and integrate them into their behaviour, whether it be clothing or techniques of the body. The peasant woman speaks the language of urban fashion well because she hears it well, and she hears it well because the 'structure' of her cultural language predisposes her to do so" (Bourdieu, 2007b, p. 89).

According to Bourdieu, women accumulate capitals on behalf of their families and focus on the embodiment and reproduction of these capitals through childrearing practices (Bourdieu, 2002). Cindy's association of herself and other female family members with the *"nice things"* that her working-class peers had not yet learned to appreciate shows the socially reproductive nature of working-class mothers, as well as the perceived potential to distinguish oneself from a wider social group through taste, even if the accrual of other capitals remains elusive.

Cindy's connection to the glossy magazines went beyond merely collecting and reading them, she also:

> *used to cut all the faces out and keep them in a folder and I joined the beauty club and everything - but really for Coalville that was a bit highbrow.*

Her account~~s~~ reflect how "girls are encouraged to consider beauty as a full-time job demanding skill, patience and learning" (McRobbie, 1991, p. 122). Whilst this regular accrual of objectified cultural capital relating to fashion and beauty enabled Cindy's mother – and Cindy herself – to cultivate their distinctiveness in relation to other women in Coalville, Cindy's cataloguing of the faces and membership of the beauty club reflects how this objectified cultural capital was not sufficient in itself: it had to become embodied. Working-class women can be "identified by particular attention to appearance, signified by distinctions between hair styles …[which] operated as condensed class signifiers" (Skeggs, 2004a, p. 101). Cindy learned - through her mother - to embody cultural capital that could be exchanged for symbolic associations with glamour. Cindy recited her mother's stories of attending parties with Hollywood film stars in Leicester, demonstrating how this social capital – albeit limited in that the attendance at these parties did not lead to any social connections with these glamorous people – became key to the way in which Cindy and her mother perceived their own aesthetic distinctiveness in the coalmining town.

Cindy also learned about glamorous female subjectivity through dolls. Taking advantage of living near factories, Cindy used to hang around outside one where:

> *they used to make ladies' dresses out of…crimpolene, a bit old-fashioned really but I used to go and raid the dustbin so I could make an outfit for me Cindy doll…because we just couldn't afford stuff then, you only had outfits if it were Christmas or your birthday.*

Whilst the family's residence in a working-class, arguably unglamorous area could be seen as compromising their access to their desired forms of cultural capital, Cindy used local factories as a resource to practise fashion with her doll, despite the family's relative lack of economic capital. The anecdote also highlights how Cindy was, like her mother, *"a creative person".*

Having traced how Cindy's glamorous subjectivity was shaped in childhood, I will now explore how Kathy's caregiving disposition was formed.

4.4.2 Kathy

In contrast to Cindy, Kathy's childhood experiences involved playing with and caring for her many siblings. Raised in a rural part of the UK before moving to Coalville as a teenager for family work opportunities, Kathy remembered how poverty limited her and her siblings' toys. She recalled how she:

> *wanted this bride doll for Christmas. And every year I wanted this bride's doll. And, yeah, of course, money was nae with me. There was nae a lot of it. And I think I got this bride's doll when I was 12*.

The constancy of Kathy's childhood desire for the *"bride's doll"* is striking and reflects one of the ways in which girls are encouraged to see heterosexual marriage as their destiny (McRobbie, 1991). As with Cindy's interest in the outfits her doll wore, Kathy desired her doll for its bridal outfit and the symbolic associations that surrounded this.

However, the materiality of the doll became foregrounded in the next part of Kathy's story, highlighting how the physical act of play reinforces messages about appropriate forms of feminine subjectivity. Kathy recalled how:

> *my older sister and I had had a fallout. And I threw my doll down the stairs…she had a china face, and I broke it. I was so sad. I cried my eyes out.*

Kathy's anger, combined with the doll's fragility, broke the longed-for doll and she was distraught. This represented a lesson to Kathy, encouraging her to self-regulate her behaviour to avoid negative emotions in future. Kathy's childhood play was classed as well as gendered: the poverty of the family meant there was a scarcity of toys for the children to play with and, ultimately, the doll would not be replaced.

The doll's fragility served as a warning to Kathy and a reminder of her responsibilities as a future mother and caregiver. Rather than reproducing – or accepting - the objective condition of scarcity for her own children later, Kathy sought to provide as much as possible for them, demonstrating how she, like the other women in the study, strived to be more financially comfortable than her own parents had been.

4.5 From home to school: rejecting and humouring working-class girls

This section explores how dispositions formed in childhood were potentially (re)shaped within the school system. Whilst Cindy's glamorous feminine subjectivity was rejected in part, Kathy's caregiving disposition corresponded with school expectations and was further encouraged. For Valerie, schooling served social rather than academic purposes, with her favourite teacher encouraging the increasingly feminine subjectivities of his students.

4.5.1 Cindy

Cindy's glamorous subjectivity faced stigma at secondary school in Coalville. Due to ill health, she spent a lot of time at home, learning from her mother:

> *my mum taught me how to do home skills and how to wash properly and…make an apple pie.*

When she was well enough to go to school, she found certain academic subjects difficult. School was a place where achievement was rewarded and underachievement punished:

> *I'd say that teachers were very nasty then. You know how nicey nicey they are with them now - this is what I can't understand - because I thought if I'd had that in my day, I'd be really clever now because I never had that opportunity because they treat them with respect now. But if you got behind a bit at school, they didn't like it and you got punished.*

One of Cindy's memories of a teacher mocking her at secondary school serves as a useful example of how the feminine cultural capital she accrued and embodied in childhood was devalued in the field of education. Cindy remembered how:

> *I walked through the school one day and he [the teacher] said…"talk about dumb blonde" and they meant me because I'd got brunette hair, you see. This is what they were like - the cruelty and that.*

Whilst Cindy had accrued the cultural capital her mother valued, she felt *"punished"* at school as this was viewed negatively. Cindy was proud of her accomplishments, yet these did not result in symbolic value within the field - despite her being top of the class for subjects such as cookery.

Although this male teacher denigrated Cindy's feminine subjectivity, another was *"very supportive and he was lovely"*. She *"had a crush on"* him and they exchanged letters to one another after he left his job at the school and moved away. Cindy made no suggestion of impropriety here, but the teacher's interest in music and popular culture clearly appealed to her and their exchanging of letters suggests that he did not view her feminine subjectivity in the same way as his colleague. As a qualified teacher in the late 1960s, it is likely that he was from a higher social class background than Cindy. Arguably, her disposition towards aesthetic distinctiveness supported her in envisioning a romantic future that did not necessarily involve marriage to an ordinary working-class man like those her peers hoped to marry.

4.5.2 Kathy

Whilst Cindy’s feminine subjectivity was cultivated at home and symbolically devalued at school, Kathy experienced a closer fit between the two. She recalled her domestic science lessons:

> *I liked that. I really did enjoy that…there was nothing nicer than when you'd get home and the rest were all round the table to see what you'd made and how much was left.*

The meals she cooked at school were valued by the family. In turn, the school valued the female domestic duties that Kathy was being introduced to at home. This close fit meant the two were mutually reinforcing. Kathy remembered that:

> *the first thing you would be taught to do was to iron a tea towel and you'd have this iron and you'd put it on the heat, then you would take this tea towel and you would iron it flat…and you ironed it for a full lesson…And then you'd make soup. Soup because we all had vegetable gardens and mum would say "Go and dig some taters up for the dinner"… you were groomed to be a mum.*

In this recollection, Kathy shifted from school to home, reflecting how each built upon the other in teaching her about gendered domestic responsibilities. Although *“groomed”* has sinister connotations in the field of education, Kathy was emphatic that her experiences of domestic science were positive. Her choice of words perhaps reflects her implicit understanding that she had little agency in this educative process.

4.5.3 Valerie

For Valerie, who grew up in Leicester and later moved to Coalville to get married, school was not stigmatising, but it was not appealing either. Friendships, socialising, and fashion were her key interests as a teenager and the highlight of her week at school was when one of her teachers decided that he wouldn’t persevere with the curriculum on a Friday afternoon, but would instead let the girls practise their dancing:

> *he'd stand there and he'd be a lot like a dance teacher and he'd go 'you're a bit out of step there' and I'd go, 'okay then, right, you show us if you can do it better' and when you think he was our teacher, you know what I mean, but we had not - we had a rapport with him anyway, but yeah, we did look forward to Friday afternoons because really he used to say 'ah, be bothered with it', it were about like an hour before the end of school, 'Oh, we've done the lessons for the week, well, I suppose you're going to the Palais are you tomorrow night?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Right. well, let's put a record on then. What dance moves are you doing tomorrow night?' 'Right then, so we'll go with that.' It made it just a nice end to the week.*

Dancing was significant to the girls’ social lives at the time, in line with suggestions that dancing is simultaneously:

> “a social activity, a participative form enjoyed by people in leisure, a sexual ritual, a form of self-expression, a kind of exercise and a way of speaking through the body. Historians of working-class culture have acknowledged the place occupied by dance in leisure and the opportunities it has afforded for courtship, relaxation and even riotous behaviour” (McRobbie, 1991, p. 195).

Whilst the teacher in Valerie’s account gave up his pedagogic authority (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) to some extent each Friday afternoon, he still adopted the role of the critic, this time mimicking a dance teacher. Valerie’s recollection of the way that they would challenge him with phrases like *“you show us if you can do it better”* highlights the girls’ increased agency: *“and when you think he was our teacher”.*

As with Kathy, this correspondence between personal and school life was a source of pleasure for Valerie. The teacher’s knowledge of the girls’ social lives and their usual haunts was tied to their *“rapport with him”*. Rather than explicitly supporting their academic studies, the teacher’s decision did – either deliberately or inadvertently – allow the girls to practise something that was arguably important to their prospects. McRobbie (1991), drawing on a study by Mungham (1976), argued that dancing was important

> "in the life-cycle of working-class girls for whom getting a husband at a relatively young age is a social and an economic imperative, and for whom also the dance hall provides the main opportunity for finding a possible partner" (p.196).

Whilst spatially, the contrast between the school and the dance halls as "'dream worlds' where working-class men and women could be transported from the reality of their lives" (Nott, 2018, p. 227) seems vast, Valerie's teacher clearly wanted to bridge this gap in some small way, perhaps in a bid to develop the girls' enjoyment of school by proxy or perhaps because he felt that providing academic education for girls who seemed destined for working-class jobs represented a false logic. Whilst his motivations remain unknown, his decision illuminates the ways in which all three women in this chapter recognised that academic study was not for them. Their working-class backgrounds and lack of academic engagement with school meant that the latter did not seem to lead to a possible future. Instead, all three women focused on the opportunities offered by paid work and expected to get married.

4.6 Aspirations for the future

In the previous two sections, I traced formations of class and gender within the family and school. In this section, I explore how these dispositions were inextricably bound to Valerie, Cindy, and Kathy's aspirations. Whilst I will explore aspirations in more detail in Chapter 7, I demonstrate how Kathy and Cindy's career aspirations became – or perhaps always were – impossible for them, as well as showing that the social focus of Valerie's aspirations fitted much more closely with the opportunities available to her.

4.6.1 Unfulfilled ambitions for Kathy and Cindy

Due to the way that habitus both structures and is structured by wider social relations, there is usually a close fit between individuals' aspirations and their likely trajectories (Bourdieu, 1990). Despite this, both Kathy and Cindy recalled aspirations at the limit of – or outside - their space of the possibles.

Kathy foregrounded respectability when she described her father's opposition to her desire to join the army as a young woman. A coalminer, he was outraged at the prospect:

> *he said, 'No' - you know, at that time - 'you are not going to be a captain's blanket'...It meant that [as a] young lass in the army, you would be bedded.*

Kathy's working-class father felt responsible for her sexual propriety, believing that the army would lead to her losing respectability and drawing on an association between working-class women and excessive sexuality (Skeggs, 2004a), as well as resonating with Mungham's (1976) analysis of how working-class women navigated the sexual aspects of courtship so as to ensure a successful marriage for practical rather than moral reasons. The image of the *"captain's blanket"* evokes a belief that women working in the armed forces served as state-sanctioned sexual objects. Arguably, his emphasis on her respectability was motivated by his desire for her to marry and have children like her mother had.

Even by 2021, only 11.8% of military recruits were female (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2021), suggesting that Kathy's military aspirations were not typical for working-class women in the 1970s. She recalled a desire to travel:

> *I think it was just the fact that I think my life wasn't going anywhere at all. I wasn't doing nothing. I was just coming home from work and sitting in the chair and doing absolutely nothing…I just wanted to do something…I thought 'can't I go and sign up? What could I do? I could like, yeah, I could be a driver. So need mechanics and to learn to drive'. And I could have toured the world with the army. But dad said no. And that was that. That was it. And I mean, now, if it had been now, I would have said 'I'm sorry, dad, but I've already done it.' You just didn't go against your parents. If they said no, it meant no*.

Kathy's recollection of the frustration was palpable. As an act of novelty, working in the army would have offered her the opportunity *"to do something"* and enact agency, like those who occupied privileged field-positions (Bourdieu, 1996a). It is possible that Kathy recognised this association, but misrecognised novel actions as the cause of the increased agency, rather than both being the result of privilege.

Cindy, inspired by her mother's glossy magazines and fashion sense, aspired to become a beautician:

> *I always wanted to do that, but I hadn't got any money, you see, because I was 15 and I 'ant got a job, so I thought 'I'll just get a job at Palitoy to get some money beyond me, then I'll send myself off to London to this Lucy Clayton school', you see, I never got there, did I, because I started earning money. And I liked it. And then I met Doug because I was only 17 when I met him.*

Cindy's aspiration was not necessarily compatible with the objective conditions of her existence despite her consumption of middle-class objectified cultural capital. Cindy highlighted two barriers to her desire to study beauty therapy in London. Firstly, she lived over one hundred miles away, meaning that daily travel to and from the Lucy Clayton school was not feasible. Secondly, moving to London at the age of fifteen was not practical either due to a lack of economic or social capital. Cindy identified a field in which her cultural capital could potentially be exchanged but was unable to access it.

Cindy almost blamed herself for not fulfilling her aspiration, suggesting that she was foolish to stop saving to finance her dream. Cindy misrecognised the barriers to her aspiration as her own fault, perhaps to avoid acknowledging that her aspiration may have been unlikely in the first place and therefore protecting her cultivated feminine subjectivity.

4.6.2 Everyday dreams, nightmares with "nothing sinister", and "typical" trajectories

While Cindy and Kathy both recalled specific career aspirations, Valerie’s were tied to her desire to accrue economic capital to support patterns of consumption and social practices. She explained she was:

> *a typical girl…you know: 16, let's get out in the world, earn a bit of money so I can get my makeup and my clothes.*

Like Cindy, the importance of cultivating female subjectivity involved the cultivation of the female body. For Bourdieu, these cosmetic rituals relate to the position of women as objects to be traded in marriage:

> “women are forced continually to work to preserve their symbolic value by conforming to the male ideal of feminine virtue defined as chastity and candour, and by endowing themselves with all the bodily and cosmetic attributes liable to increase their physical value and attractiveness” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 173).

Make-up was important to both Cindy and Valerie, perhaps for furthering their matrimonial strategies or for its potential for “enhancing the body, transforming the self, and carving identity” (McCabe, de Waal Malefyt and Fabri, 2020, p. 662). Whilst the act of purchasing and using make-up can be seen as reflecting a capitalist version of female empowerment and agency, Bourdieu argues that such rituals follow a specific logic of practice that is “the actualisation of wishes, of desires…and, through them, of the social structures that have produced these” (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 384).

These “wishes” arguably related to Valerie’s desire to have fun socialising with her friends, but also to eventually find someone she liked enough to marry. Valerie’s observation that her prioritisation of make-up and fashion made her *“a typical girl”* suggest that it was conformity rather than distinctiveness that she pursued. Unlike Kathy and Cindy, Valerie was usually one member of a larger group of friends. When she was at school, this group included boys and girls, but as she got older it became exclusively female. Make-up and fashion rituals occupied the girls, but these themselves orbited the more significant ritual of the Saturday night out. Dancing in various nightspots across the city gave the young women the opportunity to meet men. As Mungham (1976) argues in his study of working-class dance hall culture:

> "the girls are responders rather than initiators…trapped in a structure which only allows her to accept or reject, the problem is one of deciding whether or not the latest offer they get is going to be the best one" (p.95).

They would arrange to meet one or more of these men for a date the following weekend to see if they liked them. Each girl *"used to arrange to see two or three boys on the same night at different times"* (Valerie).

Valerie explained how these subsequent meetings were themselves ritualised, with the girls knowing that they needed to *"have each other's backs".* Arguably, this enabled them to maintain their safety and perhaps even preserve their reputations in terms of sexual propriety, although potentially for:

> "expediency rather than a response to any moral promptings…The addition of a baby might well be destructive of fragile personal and family economies, if it meant someone having to give up work in order to look after it" (Mungham, 1976, p. 97).

Valerie recalled how:

> *because we were all girls together, we'd probably turn around and say, 'Well, you know, we don't know him'. So that's probably when we used to, you know, go into Leicester as like a foursome or something like that and say 'ooh…just give us the eye like if you want to nip toilet…' 'Hm, what do you think?' 'Well, he doesn't look too bad.' 'Just go out for a drink. We'll you know, we'll sit in here and if you want to see him again or go any further then we can go then', and we did it like that…so we weren't actually there on us own…we didn't think there were anything sinister, but that's how we used to do it.*

Whilst the Saturday nights out on the town allowed the girls to spend time choosing their boyfriends and prospective husbands, there was also a male-female interaction that was regularly inflicted upon them on their way home:

flashing. Lurking in a city centre park, men would open their coats and show their genitalia to the girls. Valerie reflected that:

> *they got their thrill from doing that as much as we had a bit of fun seeing them but there was nothing sinister from there. It's not as if they came out and grabbed us and tried to do anything to us because they didn't.*

Valerie equated the flasher's *"thrill"* at exposing his genitals with the girls' *"bit of fun"* from laughing about it afterwards. She used the word *"sinister"* again to describe what this was *not,* in her view, and then went on to elaborate as to the reasons why it was not *"sinister"*: because the girls were not physically touched or threatened. Whilst this could reflect a pragmatic disposition (Armstrong, 2010), whereby Valerie rationalised something she could not change in a way that caused minimal psychological damage, it could also be an example of misrecognition. Valerie could have misrecognised the flasher's action as equal to the girls' laughter to disguise her vulnerability as a woman from herself. According to psychoanalytical literature, in exposing his genitals:

> "the exhibitionist forcibly captures, and holds, the woman's attention by interacting with her in ways that violate the unspoken but generally understood rules of interpersonal engagement" (Tuch, 2008, p. 147).

Despite being placed in this position, Valerie did not see the flasher as a threat. With this in mind, it is possible to reappraise Valerie's earlier comments about the girls supervising one another's dates with men. The anecdote is complex in that safety seemed to be the reason behind the girls' dating ritual, yet Valerie was at pains to emphasise that *"we didn't think there were anything sinister"* going on. If this is reconsidered in light of potential misrecognition, then it could be argued that Valerie found it difficult to acknowledge her own vulnerability or the potential risk associated with some men as the pervasive, unquestionable nature of male domination had been internalised into her schemata of thought (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). To acknowledge risk or danger would be to acknowledge the inequality of gender relations as opposed to taking masculine domination for granted. The contradiction at the heart of the girls' dating rituals – in that they organised these for safety despite not accepting the possibility of any threat – arguably reveals the contradictions at the heart of gender relations. Whilst Skeggs (1997) does not consider misrecognition at length, she argues that working-class women's allegiances with working-class men meant that:

> "women invested in positive relationships with men do not recognise or identify with the unequal, oppressive and abusive relationships identified by feminism" (p.152).

Although Skeggs was interested in working-class women's (dis)identifications with the feminist movement, my focus is on how Cindy, Valerie, and Kathy formed their own distinct working-class, female subjectivities within their specific contexts. The idea that inherent contradictions – tied to misrecognition – could be at work within these subjectivities is important in that it supports Bourdieu's view that those inequalities that appear naturalised due to social reproduction, in turn, are internalised as a durable part of each social agent's habitus[24]. As such, gender can be seen as a sociocultural inheritance, inculcated through the very existence of these women in a gendered social world. It is not that they are directly oppressed by most men they interact with, but rather that the society in which they live reproduces male superiority and female inferiority. Within this context, they negotiate their own social relations with other women and men, with these in turn structuring and being structured by their habitus, yet they do not necessarily perceive this inequality.

Valerie related another anecdote that illustrated Bourdieu's point that the fit between habitus and field precludes social agents from perceiving taken-for-granted gender inequalities. In her first job, she worked in the offices of a factory. As one of a small minority of female employees, she used to purchase her lunch in the male-dominated canteen, where men would wolf-whistle and call out to her as she walked past. However, after some time:

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[24] As Bourdieu argues:

> "The effect of symbolic domination (whether ethnic, gender, cultural or linguistic, etc.) is exerted not in the pure logic of knowing consciousnesses but through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action that are constitutive of habitus and which, below the level of the decisions of consciousness and the controls of the will, set up a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure to itself" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 37).

> *blokes I really got to know 'd shout out 'Who are you wolf whistling at?...I thought you were wolf-whistling to me, thank you'. And they used to deflect it off me and they'd say 'eurgh, ignore him. He probably ain't seen a woman in ages and…he won't recognise one if he saw one.' … it was okay for - even for me at that age, you know what I mean? It didn't feel slimy or anything like that, you know what I mean?*

The men Valerie *"got to know"* deflected the wolf-whistles by insinuating that they reflected homosexual intent, embarrassing those who engaged in this behaviour. They attributed the behaviour to sexual inadequacies: *"he probably ain't seen a woman in ages."* This brief anecdote reflects how homosexuality and the failure to engage successfully in heterosexual courtship were viewed as markers of inadequacy. By contrast, it can be inferred that ideal masculinity was twinned – for these men – with a pragmatic form of heterosexuality, rejecting the wolf-whistling as a symptom of excessive masculinity that can undermine attempts at heterosexual courtship. As with her experiences with the flashers, Valerie emphasises that there was no malice in the behaviour of the wolf-whistlers and *"it was okay".*

It is important to recognise that, arguably, the three women were engaging in heterosexual courtship in a world where:

> "marriage and having children is – has to be – the primary objective of working class girls…the girls define their future almost entirely of when and whom to marry" (Mungham, 1976, p. 99).

Misrecognition could be seen as a prerequisite for continuing to pursue this "primary objective" in the face of sexism and sexual harassment. The latter served as manifestations of the *"sinister"* things that could happen to a young woman and thus had to be rationalised to embrace the social inheritance of marriage and motherhood. Mungham's study – although dated - contextualises the leisure and courtship activities of working-class youth in the 1960s and 1970s, when Valerie, Kathy, and Cindy were young women. Even if it only reflects the dispositions of the educated towards working-class girls, viewing them as committed to marriage and childrearing rather than education, this would still illuminate the accounts of teachers' practices set out in Chapter 3, reproducing the subjectivity of the working-class girl as a future wife and mother: a *"dumb blonde"* or a dancer at a dance hall on a Friday night rather than a student.

4.7 Marriage and family life: shifting subjectivities

Whilst social mobility is usually associated with education (Major and Machin, 2018), marriage gave Cindy the opportunity to embark on an upwardly mobile trajectory. Whereas Kathy and Valerie were arguably less socially mobile, the changing subjectivities of all three women demonstrate how social immobility should not be associated with stagnation. All three women experienced a shift in subjectivity as their objective conditions changed, with more responsibility for their husbands and children being key to this phase of their lives. Rather than resenting this, they relished the opportunity to maintain family respectability and to support their children in growing up. Arguably, this formation of working-class motherhood requires both aspiration and effort, even if it is not accompanied by or associated with upward social mobility.

4.7.1 Cindy

Whilst all three women married in their twenties, Cindy met her future husband at the Palitoy factory. Doug was a graduate working in the offices, whereas Cindy worked on the factory floor. She explained that:

> *he come from a council house, so in one way he were like me Uncle Howard, he were the one out the family that got on, you know, he went to university and he got on and because he'd travelled around a lot it made it that he spoke nice, you know, Queen's English…Doug reminded me of my old art teacher that I really, really liked. Because he was creative and he bothered about me and he was nice to me. And you know, and I looked for the same things.*

Cindy's connection between her uncle and her husband, both of whom had been *"the clever one"* in their working-class families, reflects her own mapping of the possible trajectories for working-class men and her sense that trajectories that *"were unheard of for somebody living in a council house"* could be achieved. Arguably, Cindy drew on this in aspiring for an unusual trajectory herself, with her dream of moving to London to become a beautician. Instead, marriage gave her the opportunity to develop further distinctiveness. Doug's gender enabled him to embark on his own upwardly mobile trajectory – like Cindy's uncle – through education, attending grammar school and university before moving to Coalville to work at Palitoy in a professional role. In marrying him, Cindy's trajectory began to move upwards too. Whereas those who had not grown up with a *"clever one"* in their own families may not have envisaged that an educated man could be a potential husband for a working-class woman, Cindy had recognised this when she first developed a *"crush"* on her educated art teacher, before finally marrying Doug, a working-class graduate who spoke *"Queen's English".*

In *Masculine Domination,* Bourdieu (2002) emphasised that the gendered binaries of subject and object are articulated in:

> "the matrimonial market…[where] women can only appear there as objects, or, more precisely, as symbols whose meaning is constituted outside of them and whose function is to contribute to the perpetuation or expansion of the symbolic capital held by men" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 43).

Perhaps Doug recognised that Cindy's *"highbrow"* interests and cultivation of feminine beauty harmonised with his own journey through social space, alongside her working-class background which was similar to his own. Cindy learned how to mix socially with Doug's middle-class colleagues, despite some initial reservations:

> *when we went out I used to feel a bit conscious because they all spoke nice and were like businessmen and I was just from the factory, so I felt a bit out of it in one way. But you know, I just got over it.*

In light of Bourdieu's view that "interacting individuals bring all their properties into the most circumstantial interactions, and their relative positions in the social structure (or in a specialised field) govern their positions in the interaction"

(Bourdieu, 1984, p. 579), the distance between Cindy's original social position and the social positions of Doug's colleagues must have felt vast. She later reflected that when any of the Managing Directors appeared in the factory, *"they were like the gods, you know, and we were the workers"*. Through her marriage, she associated her upward mobility with learning *"quite a few things"* as she engaged with fields in different ways due to her new social position. A key example of this was education.

Doug and Cindy engaged with their son's primary school heavily, despite this not being a characteristic of their own childhoods. Cindy explained that:

> *Doug used to be on the board of governors and I used to go around and put a couple of hours in doing things with the children once a week… We used to do fundraisers and that round at the school, you know, and help and do because when your child's at school that that's what you do, isn't it.*

This new field position, as the wife of a school governor, was distant from Cindy's previous field-position as a working-class, female underachiever. Her volunteering in the school arguably reflected her growing confidence as a woman who knew how to be respectable, how to support her own child, and how to support other children at the primary school.

Cindy suggested her symbolic capital increased through the marriage, recounting an anecdote about the reaction of one of her own former secondary school teachers when she and Doug attended parents' evening for their son. She remembered that the teacher who previously called her a *"dumb blonde"* was now impressed:

> *Because everybody else in my class, nothing much had come of 'em, but…I'd got my own house, Doug…you know, and everything was going well and I knew quite a lot of things…It was a lovely feeling because I wanted him to know that I wasn't this person that he thought I was*.

Although her glamorous female subjectivity was incongruent in the school setting, it was arguably important to Cindy making a socially advantageous marriage. A respectably feminine, revalued formation of gender and class emerged alongside her status as a wife.

4.7.2 Valerie

Whilst Cindy met her husband at work, Valerie met hers out one night in Leicester. He was a coalminer from Coalville, but regularly socialised in the city. Valerie explained that it was *"common at that age to get married normally by 21, you'd have been married and you'd have at least had one, probably two kids".* Valerie, by contrast, was in her mid-twenties by the time she married, whereas some of her friends had married and divorced by that time. She reflected on how she waited longer as she *"hadn't met the right one"*, reflecting the difficulties involved in women having to be "responders rather than initiators" (Mungham, 1976, p. 95).

Courtship rituals involved nights out and weekly dates. Arguably, the importance of these to the lives of young working-class people reflects the sense that they "are less concerned with the symbolic and political functions of a marriage than with its practical functions, attaching, for example, much more importance to the personal qualities of the spouses" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 213). This potentially ties to the rise of 'companionate marriage', in which "good communication, a shared interest in home and family, and mutual sexual pleasure became central planks of the post-war marital idea" (Langhamer, 2006, p. 90). Valerie spent time getting to know her husband before they married. Their decision to marry was pragmatic, as Valerie recalled:

> *There was no down on one knee or anything like, so we got engaged. And then the last 12 months, what we did then, which most people did in them days,… we used to put money in a kitty each week, me, my other half, my mum and dad, saved so much a week and then when we had enough in the pot then we'd organise a photographer or my mum would go with me into Leicester and get the dress and we'd do it that way.*

The economical approach to the wedding contrasts with Valerie's short-term focus on fashion and make-up when she first started working. The wedding preparations were a collective economic endeavour, with the time until the wedding being connected to the amount of money required. Arguably, the collective approach supported Valerie in developing the skills required to run a working-class household of her own, budgeting and managing money to make ends meet.

Valerie's subjectivity adjusted during this time. Whereas previously she wanted to be fashionable and attractive, her impending marriage foregrounded respectability. They arranged a church wedding as they:

> *couldn't have had anything else. I mean, I love my grandma and granddad to anything but [if] I'd have suggested a registry office, oh my God, that'd have been like putting the blinking cross up to Dracula…they weren't old fashioned, but from that point of view, the only people then that got married in registry offices were the people that had to…in other words, like years ago, you know if they were in the, in the expecting or whatever, if it was a shotgun wedding…a rush thing…and although we'd been going out for two years at this point, it was still the thing 'oh, she's up the blinking duff so she's got to have a quick registry office do'.*

Whereas Valerie experienced relative freedom as a single woman going out with her friends, her church wedding represented an obligation to her grandparents. Valerie presented two possible options for a working-class woman getting married: a church wedding, which was a source of celebration for her family, or a registry office wedding, perceived as *"a rush thing"* due to unplanned pregnancy. Whilst Valerie was not pregnant at the time of the wedding, she and her family would never have opted for a registry office wedding for fear of her being perceived as like those women who had *"got to have a quick registry office do"*. A *"shotgun wedding"* shrouded unplanned pregnancy in a tainted veil of respectability "to conceal anything which signifies…low status" (Sayer, 2005, p. 161). Valerie's distinction between herself and these women reflects the longstanding association between working-class women and "excessive sexuality" (Skeggs, 2004a, p. 100). Valerie elaborated on how they performed:

> *a show for the day:‘My granddaughter is purer than, purer than white’, which she wasn't but there you go! That was what you had, it's not like nowadays where you can get married anywhere. In those days, you couldn't, it was either registry office, which was definitely frowned upon, or church. I mean to me, you know, it wouldn't have bothered me where I'd got married - fair enough, it was, you know, I wore the white dress and everything and I had an absolutely lovely day and all the family enjoyed it, but it didn't bother me - the church, I mean, - you had to say all this stuff and I'm not saying that I didn't mean it, but I'm not religious, so…*

Like with Cindy, marriage involved a reshaping of subjectivity, with the previous emphasis on fashion and cosmetics shifting to responsible respectability. The performance of being *“purer than white”* was part of this process: Valerie was becoming a wife.

4.8 Evolving subjectivities: motherhood

All three women strived to protect and nurture their children. As well as working to provide financially for their families, they demonstrated an ethic of care that went beyond the provision of emotional support.

4.8.1 Kathy

Whereas Kathy recalled her own fears of punishment at school, her fierce mothering led her into conflict with the local school her children attended due to her concerns about bullying:

> *And I had to go up to the teacher, the headmistress and…I'd still get my home care uniform on and - because I'd had a phone call to say, 'you need to come up to the school…there's girls waiting for [your daughter] outside the school.’*
>
> *So I'd gone straight up and I said 'I need to talk to the headmistress.'*
>
> *And she said, 'I don't like your attitude'.*
>
> *I said, 'I don't care much for yours’… I said, 'I go to work…I tend to the elderly and the people that need help…and I trust my kids in your - to you, for you to look after my kids while they are here. And you're letting me down.'*

> *'What? What? What? I certainly don't like your attitude.'*
>
> *I said, 'well you're letting me down because they're not safe. I'm having to come up here to stop [them] hitting my daughter,' I said.*
>
> *'Well, well, we don't know.'*
>
> *And I said, 'well, it's your job to find out and if you can't do it, I'll keep it at home and I'll do it myself. And if you tell me the - if I find out the name of the child, I'll go and see their mum, because it doesn't look as if you're going to have any conversation with the parents to say this isn't allowed, it shouldn't, it should not happen'.*
>
> *And so I had a couple of run-ins with them but really nothing, nothing, other than that.*

Kathy's account depicts her jostling for power with the headmistress. Kathy asserted the importance of her caring disposition, emphasising that whilst she went to *"tend to the elderly"*, the school was not fulfilling its own responsibility to look after her child's welfare. Kathy's account is pervaded by this discourse of responsibility, respectability, and maternal emotion, in the face of the positional authority which she recalled the headmistress attempting to assert. However, in tackling the issue head-on and asserting her own authority as a parent, Kathy showed a level of fierceness that contrasted with her earlier compliance as a school pupil and in the face of her father's authority. Arguably, her emotional commitment to her children empowered her to reject the limitations placed upon her previously and to assert fierce mothering practices, despite her lower status within the field of education.

4.8.2 Valerie

Valerie's evolving subjectivity as a respectable wife and mother was exemplified when she met a woman who was her antithesis in hospital after giving birth to one of her children:

> *she says 'is that your first?' I went 'yeah', she says 'oh, that's nice, did you always want a girl?' I said 'well, to be honest, I weren't bothered as long as it was, as long as they're healthy and happy'. She says 'oh, right, when you go home then - have you got a career?' I says 'no, no I haven't, I'm just going*

home to be a wife and mother at the moment.' So I says 'what about you?' She says 'Oh no.'

Valerie's recollection of this conversation reflects how the maternity ward served as one of a number of "specific social settings that do not possess the high stakes of influencing broader societal doxa, but that still retain intense meaning for the individuals who pursue them, and are therefore of central importance to how humans live, struggle and relate" (Threadgold, 2020, p. 79). What the women have in common in this instance is their shared roles as mothers, but the conversation between them reveals the distinct positions they occupy in social space. First of all, Valerie reflects a pragmatic disposition towards the gender of her newborn baby when she responds to the other woman's question with her comment that she *"weren't bothered as long as it was…healthy and happy"*. In Valerie's account, it is the other new mother who asks the questions and these arguably give glimpses into her scheme of perceptions. Her use of the word *"career"* rather than job reflects at least a degree of distance from practical necessity, as well as potentially reflecting the expansion of professional work opportunities for middle-class women.

As the conversation between the two women progressed – in Valerie's account – the differences between them became more pronounced. The other new mother's subjectivity stood in stark contrast to Valerie's.

I remember her putting her makeup on, I can remember her putting her false eyelashes on…she had a hairdryer with, with a brush and she'd got a phone with her, that was it. She says 'when I go home, this is the only one I'm having,' she says, 'and I've done this really for my husband because he wanted kids; I weren't bothered. So when I go home' she says, 'I've got two nannies lined up: one for the day and one for the night.'…And that has always stuck with me and I often wonder now what her child has turned out like.

Whereas Valerie had become a respectable working-class wife, whose physical appearance should no longer deliberately prompt interest from men, this woman prioritised her physical appearance to the extent that her hair accessories and make-up were as important to her as the equipment required for her newborn baby. Valerie was also shocked by the woman's lack of interest in her own child, which she perceived as evident from her having *"two nannies lined up".* For Valerie, this was evidence of moral failings in the woman. She did not want the child she had, having *"done this really for my husband".* In contrast to Valerie, the other mother's subjectivity had not shifted to embrace her responsibility for another human being, whereas this was key to Valerie's perspective on motherhood. Valerie's final comment in this section reflected her perception that the wellbeing and moral character of a child are the result of the way the child is treated by their mother. For Valerie, the use of two nannies rather than caring for a child yourself rang alarm bells:

> *I says 'you're not serious?' she says 'yes…I'll be there for it, but I ain't getting up in the night, no way…have you got somebody coming in?' I said 'yeah, my other half'll be in' She says 'I've gotta make myself up first.' Her baby were just lying in the cot and there she was with the mirror doing her hair and everything, putting her full makeup on and everything like that.*

Whilst Valerie had previously prioritised make-up and fashion when working full-time and living at home with her parents as a young, single woman, she was appalled by this woman's focus on these at the expense of actively caring for her child. Valerie's responsible, respectable subjectivity prompted a strong emotional response to what she perceived as the woman's selfishness and negligence. In contrast to her own authentic, trusting relationship with her husband, the woman's decision to prioritise false eyelashes and a full face of make-up over her newborn baby could also have been perceived as duplicitous or inauthentic to Valerie, who had by then moved away from fashion and make-up as tools for making the self for romantic reasons.

Valerie's shifting subjectivity reflects findings from other studies, where "the space and time to act out femininity became more limited and trivialised in relation to their family responsibilities and economic worries and could rarely be justified" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 108). The importance of these family responsibilities can therefore be seen as key to the objective conditions faced by the working-class wife and mother, with Armstrong (2010) describing how experiences of marriage and mothering "fostered the emergence of a habitus characterised by pragmatism and care-giving…[where] looking after a newborn baby was not seen to entail significant sacrifice" (p.243). As Meah (2014) argues, "working-class women…have gained status, pleasure and power through producing 'good homes'" (p.681). Armstrong (2010) emphasises how this pragmatic and relational disposition can be seen as a strength, but is often read as deficiency in contrast to middle-class mobility, ambition, and future-focus (Taylor, 2012). Whilst women's caregiving subjectivities reflect the objective conditions in which these are formed, thus revealing systemic inequalities in terms of the division of labour, it is important that these dispositions and practices are not denigrated due to their association with dominated positions in social space. They are arbitrary and such practices can be commodified by more privileged women in the same way that "the negative value attribution of excessive sexuality to working-class women has also been re-evaluated and used to spice up fashion campaigns" (Skeggs, 2004a, p. 104).

In Valerie's example, the relative privileges of the other mother – in that she could afford two nannies – were perceived by Valerie as abhorrent and dangerous. She wondered *"what her child has turned out like"*, as she saw the mother's role in producing a child that is happy, healthy, and morally good as a fundamental responsibility. Despite the woman's privileges, Valerie revelled in what she perceived as her own morally superior classed position. With Valerie's child being born in the 1980s, the shift described at the beginning of this chapter was underway, with middle-class women's opportunities to accrue economic and symbolic capital through full-time professional work leading to a form of capitalist feminism. Rather than viewing herself as deficient in relation to the other mother's question about whether or not she had a career, Valerie contrasted her beliefs with those of women from more privileged backgrounds, demonstrating how women from different social classes occupy distinct areas of social space with their own dispositions and practices. The women's brief occupation of the hospital's maternity unit temporarily brought them together and their interaction brought their social backgrounds to bear on their current experiences, with each asking questions of the other's perceptions of and plans for motherhood.

In this part of the chapter, I have traced the chronological formation of Valerie, Cindy, and Kathy’s dispositions through childhood, school, marriage, and motherhood, in line with Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of habitus formation. In the following section, I draw on the broader set of theoretical tools outlined in the first part of this chapter to explore moments where the three women exercised agency and enacted refusals.

4.9 Exercising agency; refusing expectations

In the previous section, my analysis of how dispositions are shaped and reshaped over time could be perceived as somewhat deterministic, with the women undertaking ‘typical’ trajectories for their class and gender. However, there were also hints of the women’s potential to exercise agency and refuse the ‘typical’ at points. Valerie’s account of her morally superior position compared with the morally inferior position of the more privileged mother she met in the hospital represented a refusal to be judged by middle-class doxa and an advocation of her own values as a working-class mother. Kathy’s conflict with the local school also stakes a claim to a moral high ground in the face of the school’s perceived failure to keep her daughters safe from bullying. In this section, I step outside of the chronology offered previously and explore how two moments illuminate Cindy and Valerie’s agentic potential.

4.9.1 Cindy

As well as embracing responsibility and respectability as a wife and mother, Cindy associated her time as a single mother - following her divorce - with empowerment and agency. She explained that:

> *we'd got this big, detached house and I thought, you know, I were working - I got a care job to earn more money because we were split up. And I was working 24/7 really to give Matthew the lifestyle he were used to. And we were never short of money. I was on good money actually. And I felt proud because I felt empowered, because Doug didn't think I could pay the bills and do this and do that. But it was like, have you seen that Back to the Future film where he calls him yellow? And you know it makes him worse, don't it, it makes*

him want to prove it different, well, that's how I were, the more somebody said that, the more I fought against it. So I empowered myself, got another job earning good money, bought Matthew a car, there was nothing we didn't have really.

Whilst the divorce from Doug necessitated Cindy's re-entry into the world of work, she *"felt empowered"* by this in that she was still able to enact the practices associated with her responsible, respectable, and caregiving subjectivity even without his support. Although Cindy's social status arguably declined with the shift from being the stay-at-home mother and wife of a professional, educated man to a full-time single mother who worked in an entry-level position in social care, her ability to accrue economical capital for herself was viewed as a triumph even as her other capital holdings declined. Cindy can be seen as producing herself here, in response to the "dividing practices" (Foucault, 1983, p. 208) that separate the breadwinning husband from the economically dependent wife. She discursively rejects these, triumphantly overcoming her ex-husband's doubts about her capacity to fend for herself: *"the more somebody said that, the more I fought against it."*

In producing her own empowered subjectivity as an economically independent, working-class mother, Cindy also privileged her emotional connection with her son. This manifested in her willingness to inconvenience herself to ensure his safety. She reflected on his teenage years:

> *I didn't used to come in till 11 o'clock at night and then Matthew would ring me from [a nightclub] saying 'mum we've missed the taxi, can you come and pick me up?' I used to put me coat over me nightie, go and pick them up and then about six others went in me car as well and they hadn't got lifts…He says 'oh, don't bother then' one night, but I thought 'ooh, he's had a drink' - because you know they do, whether they tell you or not - and I thought there's no path there and he'll be walking on that dark road, swaggering from one side to another, and if a car comes around and he gets - I thought 'I'm not going to sleep anyway, I might as well just get up and fetch him'.*

Cindy’s emotional connection to her son meant that she would not have been able to sleep due to worrying about him, so she *“might as well”* get out of bed to fetch him in the middle of the night. She perhaps reflects a pragmatic disposition here, presenting the inconvenience as a product of her own tendency to worry about her son’s safety. However, her ability to be emotionally available whilst also providing economically could also represent the way in which she constructs her own subjectivity, synthesising key aspects of both the father's and the mother’s roles. In rescuing her son from potential harm in the middle of the night, Cindy was motivated by the same agentic refusal that underpinned her decision to work three jobs to provide for him financially.

4.9.2 Valerie

Like Cindy, there was a moment of agentic potential for Valerie which focused on refusing a man’s judgement of her. As a newlywed, Valerie learned to drive[25], supporting her independence and capacity to work further afield. Her anecdote about her driving test reflected a rejection of labels placed on her by others:

> *the three-point turn…I thought I'd done it wrong…me wheel had touched the curb. And I thought 'I've failed. I'm gonna show him' because he was one of these, he just sat there stone-faced, never never moved apart from like that when you had to do your stop and everything, his expression on his face never altered and I thought 'I've failed here, I know I can drive and I'm going to show him I can drive’. So I did the rest of me test. And he just asked me two or three questions on the highway code … and then he says congratulations, I'm pleased to tell you - and I was absolutely stunned in the car because I'd convinced myself I'd failed.*

Whilst Valerie had convinced herself of her failure, she still decided to *“show him”*, spurred on by the examiner’s coldness and her own fears. Elsewhere in this chapter, Valerie’s dispositions reflected a pragmatic acceptance of circumstances, such as in the face of sexual harassment, yet here she enacted a refusal, striving to succeed despite her misplaced sense that failure was already certain.

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[25] In Chapter 7, I will explore how driving served as a powerful motivator for another of the women, Ivy, who also worked at the Palitoy factory. Ivy was fifteen years older than Valerie and therefore her desire to learn to drive was much more unusual at the time. The percentage of women who held a driving license increased from 29% in 1975 (when Ivy was in her late thirties) to 41% by 1985 (when Valerie was in her early thirties) (Statista, 2020). Whilst driving was more common by the time that Valerie was having driving lessons, it still represented an opportunity for Valerie to gain independence.

Alongside Kathy’s fierce mothering, these examples demonstrate the agentic potential that all the women showed at points. Whilst the chronological formation of the habitus lends itself to a tight fit between habitus and field, all three women also exercised agency by refusing the ways others viewed their subjectivities and even by constructing their own, as in Cindy’s case. In a Foucauldian sense, the potential to discursively construct one’s own subjectivity is emphasised here. Whilst Bourdieu’s toolkit illuminates the workings of class and gender within the field and the habitus, the broader set of theories introduced in the first part of the chapter supports deeper understanding of the women’s agency.

4.9.3 The next generation

Having focused on Kathy, Cindy, and Valerie’s life histories, I will now explore the opportunities for social mobility offered to their descendants. Whilst I did not have the opportunity to interview their children, the three women described their educational and work trajectories within their own interviews, providing useful data relating to the social mobility of each family.

Despite their own lack of experience of university education, Valerie and her husband were supportive of their son’s decision to apply and drove him to a distant university campus:

> *he says, 'Well, I've got in, mum' so we took him up there and stopped overnight. And because he wasn't able to go to the open day [because of extreme weather conditions], we had the choice then there of seeing, and we met up with him the next day and he says, 'I don't think I'm going to like it here mum and dad, I don't think it's for me', and we said, 'that's fine'. So we brought him back home. And we just says 'well, you're gonna have to make a decision, obviously, you know, you're either gonna have to go on the dole, or redo your CV and see if you can sort out a job' and that's what he did.*

Valerie and her husband respected their son's decision and sketched a map of the possibles for him: the dole or a job. He found work rewarding and pursued a white-collar career without an undergraduate degree. Cindy's son had a similar response to university education, attending a nearby university for two years before realising it *"wasn't for him"* and finding a trade.

Valerie's analysis of her children's trajectories reflected the idea of social reproduction. She explained that her son was:

> *fully career motivated…my brother was career motivated, as well. Sometimes I look back and I think my son and daughter, to a point, seem to be following what me and my brother did. He was career minded where I never was. And yeah, my daughter never was either, you know, she just worked casual jobs…which is what I've done.*

Although she did not reflect on the gender differences involved in the different trajectories, she was aware that *"casual jobs"* worked around family responsibilities.

Kathy's son attended university after sixth form and embarked on a professional career. One daughter found professional employment and studied for a career on-the-job, whilst the other worked a variety of *"casual jobs"* before enrolling on a college course with a view to going to university to train for a professional role.

The sons of all three women had the opportunity to go to university, despite their parents' working-class backgrounds, although only one completed an undergraduate degree. The presence of university within their sons' maps of their own possible futures suggests a degree of upward social mobility was potentially achieved for these families, with this being very different from the trajectories of their mothers and fathers[26]. For their daughters, the challenge of balancing mothering with paid work was significant, with educational opportunities only being explored as the children became older or when made accessible through their current jobs.

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[26] Except for Cindy's husband and Matthew's father, Doug, who was university educated.

4.10 Conclusions

Chapter 4 demonstrates the flux that characterises habitus. These women were in a continual process of *becoming* working-class women across their life courses, with their perceptions of each interaction and experience (re)shaping the habitus. As their relationships with others changed, shifting from being daughters to wives and then mothers, their subjectivities, in turn, changed. The habitus, although durable, is still flexible. These women changed over time in response to their objective conditions. Whilst there were some similarities in their dispositions, these can be linked to the similarities between the objective conditions in which these were formed. Far from illustrating a homogenous habitus, this chapter demonstrates how working-class women negotiate their objective conditions and how their values – inculcated as part of the habitus – are key to their reflections on the past and crucial for their own sense of pride and self-respect.

Whilst matrimonial strategies amongst other social groups and in other cultures may well objectify women, these working-class women made active choices about who they would marry and experienced relative freedom over their romantic lives as young adults. As their social relationships – and subjectivities – shifted, all three negotiated doxa surrounding the roles of women, navigating the tension between respectability and social censure. The hope of a successful marriage was key to their aspirations, with this representing a mechanism for achieving social mobility – for a time – for Cindy.

All three women were sieved out of the education system through schooling. Yet the "small steps" of social mobility achieved by Cindy and – to a certain extent – Kathy, inform two arguments that are central to my thesis. First of all, these challenge the view of education as an engine for social mobility. The women's experiences of schooling (re)produced the role of housewife. Secondly, the "small steps" emphasise that working-class women actively navigate social space even if the smaller scale of their trajectories makes them appear immobile to middle-class schemes of perception. All three women strived to be good mothers and navigated changing objective conditions in doing so – from Cindy, Kathy, and Valerie’s sons attending university for the first time in their families’ histories to the breakdown of Cindy’s marriage.

I have suggested that these formations of working-class motherhood were, in some ways, empowering for the women. Whilst feminist discourse at the time critiqued the institution of the family as oppressive (Oakley, 1974), these women ascribed social value to their roles – and achievements – as wives and mothers. Although some of the educators in Chapter 3 saw girls’ aspirations for motherhood as unambitious and old-fashioned, I have demonstrated how some women experienced degrees of agency in these roles, with other options having been denied to them in education and elsewhere.

Whilst formal education was not a route available to these women and therefore did not offer them any opportunities to achieve social mobility, they supported their sons in considering university as an option later, although two of the three felt that they did not fit in with university life, perhaps due to their working-class origins (Mallman, 2017b). Their daughters’ trajectories, however, generally echoed their own. This chapter highlights the significance of gender to the achievement of upward social mobility in the former coalmining town and suggests that educational opportunities and their associated potential for upward mobility were – in the 1980s at least – mainly offered to working-class sons rather than daughters.

Having problematised the view that it is only education that can facilitate upward social mobility in this chapter, I will focus on opportunities for social mobility in the factory itself in the next, analysing how paid work figured in the lives – and social mobility trajectories - of working-class women in Coalville.

Chapter 5: Doll parts: women's work

5.1 Introduction

Shifts and reconfigurations in the economy are key to the lives of working-class people, whose relative lack of access to cultural and social capitals can limit both the positions they occupy and the employment trajectories they undertake. In this chapter, I explore the inequalities at the heart of women's work in the coalmining town. I trace how their educational opportunities (or lack thereof) produced a limited map of the possibles, but how habitus enabled these women to fit into these field-positions and develop a logic of practice fulfilling the rules of the game within the field of the factory. The fit between habitus and field contributed to degrees of social (im)mobility for women in Coalville. Although all the women who worked at Palitoy had been sieved out of the school system previously, the dispositions of some supported them in achieving relative degrees of upward social mobility within the factory itself. Work, rather than schooling, can contribute to upward mobility for some women.

This chapter focuses on eleven women who worked at the Palitoy factory (see Figure 9, p.135). Cindy, Valerie, and Kathy's accounts from Chapter 4 are drawn on again. Alongside them, I introduce four more women from Generation 1: Nicola, Ivy, Jeanette, and Alice. I also draw on data from two women from Generation 2: Evelyn, the daughter of Palitoy workers I was unable to interview, and Janet, the daughter of Ivy from Generation 1. The data relating to these nine women is from interviews I conducted with them and the narrative portraits I produced. Finally, I focus on Caroline Gimson and Ada Jenkins[27], who were described in detail by many of the women I interviewed. Whilst I was unable to interview them personally, I have drawn on the references to them across the full dataset to analyse their logics of practice within the field of the factory.

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[27] I have composed a pseudonymous first name and surname to refer to Caroline Gimson and Ada Jenkins, helping to distinguish them from the women I personally interviewed. I also wanted to reflect the way that the women referred to them, generally using their full names rather than just first names too.

Figure 9 shows the age ranges of the women whose data was used in this chapter. Age ranges are provided here to support understanding of the women's trajectories in relation to changing[28] field dynamics.

Figure 9: A table signposting the age ranges of women featured in this chapter

Generation 1 (born late 1930s to mid-1950s)	**Generation 2 (Late 1950s to late 1960s)**
Cindy (featured in Chapter 4)	Evelyn
Kathy (featured in Chapter 4)	
Valerie (featured in Chapter 4)	
Nicola	
Ivy	Janet (Ivy's daughter)
Jeanette	
Alice	
Palitoy employees who were discussed but not interviewed:	
Ada Jenkins (HR)	Caroline Gimson (Manager)

This chapter begins by considering valued capitals within the field, connecting these to funds of knowledge (González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005). From a Bourdieusian perspective, funds of knowledge represent those practices and capitals that are devalued within fields due to their association with the dominated, in this case, the manual, physical labour of the factory in contrast to the less visible and tangible work of the office. Exploring these funds of knowledge enables doxa to be challenged rather than reinscribed through this type of educational research. However, the complexity of this endeavour is highlighted in the way that Palitoy participants themselves often characterised the manual work of the factory floor as easy and straightforward.

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[28] As illustrated in Chapter 3, fields change over time. The field of education was radically reorganised in the 1960s with the shift from academic selection to comprehensive education. In Chapter 4, I highlighted how women's participation in the labour market increased in the second half of the 20th century.

My focus then shifts to logics of practice within the factory, arguing that working at Palitoy enabled working-class women to exchange economic capital for emotional capital. In the next section, I maintain my focus on emotions, exploring how the women misrecognised the relationship between factory and worker. Following this, I focus on the two women I was unable to interview. Ada Jenkins, a local woman, was Palitoy's HR manager for decades, dealing with the pastoral needs of the female factory workers. In contrast, Caroline Gimson was from a more privileged background and held a role at the same level as the male managers. I will analyse the way that their managerial positions enabled them to use a gendered form of emotional capital within the field of the factory. Their capacity to use and exchange this capital was mediated by gender and class. Whilst I demonstrate the importance of emotional capital to all of Palitoy's female workers, I also highlight unequal patterns of access, use, and exchange, which, in turn, limit or enhance women's social trajectories and their opportunities for social mobility.

5.2 Capitals and funds of knowledge

Whilst the women I focus on in this chapter did not play the game in the same ways, there is an underlying regularity to their practical sense that demonstrates the usefulness of Bourdieu's work for engaging with working-class lives. I build on my work in Chapter 4 to demonstrate that working-class women are capital-accruing agents in their own right, reflexively valuing and evaluating their own labour through schemes of perception tied to their social positions. Whilst these women are often read through capital deficits, this chapter highlights how working-class women have their own alternative symbolic economies. Funds of knowledge (González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005) describe the cultural resources:

> "generated through the social and labour history of families and communicated to others through the activities that constitute household life,

including through the formation of social networks that are central to any household's functioning within its particular environments." (p.18)

Whilst González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) draw on Vygotsky's sociocultural approach in their theorisation of funds of knowledge, compatibility with Bourdieu's methodology is also clear.

Whilst funds of knowledge facilitate my engagement with devalued capitals, Rose (2005) offers another frame that supports a revaluation of "unskilled" factory work. Rather than arbitrarily revaluing or valorising the physicality of this labour for its own sake, Rose (2005) theorises four domains of skill in physical work that are fruitful for this work: the cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and ethical. This frames work at the Palitoy factory without unconsciously reinscribing value judgements relating to the relative degrees of success or failure ascribed to my participants by the formal education system (Reay, 2017). Value judgments are central to individuals' schemes of perception in that:

> "feelings are basically the manifestation of a practical, unconscious, and learned process of self-evaluation …equipped with a distinct power to motivate further social practices typically reproducing social order" (Matthäus, 2017, p. 77).

Participants' value judgements – as well as my own – are intimately tied to the objective conditions of our social existence. Emotions provide a useful tool for revealing these objective conditions as they are rooted in our earliest experiences. Social agents feel through a scheme of perception that incorporates an external economy. Thus, emotions such as shame, guilt, and anger can reveal our internal conflicts relating to our inculcation and embodiment of these externalities, as well as bearing the hallmarks of these earlier values within the external economy at the time of our primary socialisation. These experiences shape the habitus but are also reified as bodily knowledge through emotions (Scheer, 2012). Whilst sedimented histories cannot be undone, they can be identified and neutralised through reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

The importance of emotions to women's social existence has been emphasised in feminist thought[29] (Griffiths, 1995; Adkins, 2004; Ahmed, 2014). Nowotny's interest in the distinction between the public sphere, in which men accrue social capital, and the private sphere, inhabited by women, led her to theorise the concept of emotional capital: "knowledge, contacts, and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets" (Nowotny, 1981, p. 148) that women are able to accrue within the private sphere. Whilst this binary opposition between public and private is problematic in obfuscating how fields are hierarchised in relation to the field of power, Nowotny highlights that emotional capital has different use and exchange values for different social agents in different fields. Whilst she argues that emotional capital – unlike other forms of capital – does not have a direct exchange-value in fields beyond the private sphere, I argue that it is the position occupied by the social agent within the field that dictates how capital can be used or exchanged. This adaptation of Nowotny's theorisation of emotional capital accounts for the use and exchange of emotional labour in the workplace (Hochschild, 2012), for example in teaching (Schutz and Zembylas, 2009). For Nowotny, emotional capital is "largely used for further family investments in children and especially upwardly mobile husbands" (Nowotny, 1981, p. 148). Reay (2000) explored how women from different class backgrounds accrue and utilise this emotional capital in relation to their children's schooling.

I draw a distinction between emotional practices and emotional capital (Cottingham, 2016). The former refers to the ways in which social agents experience and express emotions, whereas the latter reflects how these practices can, in particular fields, acquire a use-value and an exchange-value (Skeggs, 2004c). Cottingham (2016) defines emotional capital as:

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[29] Harding (1991) critiques the division between objective rationality and subjective emotion in Western traditions, arguing this limits our epistemological understandings of the social world. This division manifests in binary oppositions between masculine and feminine, including the idea that men occupy the public sphere in contrast to women, who occupy the private sphere (Nowotny, 1981). Analysis of this distinction in relation to the field of politics in Austria led Nowotny to theorise that increasing access to political roles for women were rooted in the capitals that they had been able to accrue *despite* their gender. For example, she traced how women who were born into families where family members already held privileged positions in the field of politics were able to accrue social capital that would otherwise have been inaccessible.

> "a tripartite concept composed of emotion-based knowledge, management skills, and capacities to feel that links self-processes and resources to group membership and social location" (p.452).

She contrasts this with emotional practice, which is situated and not transferable or accruable within or across fields. As with all forms of capital, the capacity of social agents to accrue emotional capital is directly linked to social inequalities such as class and gender. Whilst the exchange of emotional capital for other capitals across fields is limited, it is still possible. Women can convert "the economic capital that they gain in the labour market into emotional capital" (Nowotny, 1981, p. 148) and, dependent upon other intersecting social dimensions such as social class and ethnicity, can sometimes convert emotional capital into other forms of capital.

By drawing on these sets of ideas in my analysis of their logics of practice, I reach for a pragmatic, socially just, and socially conscious use of Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit, which demonstrates how the women who worked at the Palitoy factory were capital-accruing social agents, some of whom were able to achieve "small steps" of social mobility in the field of work even after they had been sieved out of the field of education.

5.3 Mapping the field of the factory

Whilst I mainly interviewed female factory workers, these represented just one group of employees at Palitoy. Alongside the women who worked on the factory floor, there were men who worked in the warehouse. Alongside them, men were responsible for designing the production lines and repairing machines. There were canteen staff and cleaners, as well as a few security guards.

There were also hierarchies – the female factory workers on the belts had female supervisors who would ensure they were productive. There was a time and motion man who would calculate average production rates. Away from the factory floor, in a separate building on the site, were the offices, where the factory owners and managers were based. Closer to the privileged than the female factory workers, the office staff and administrators benefitted a little from these profits of space (Bourdieu, 2018), basking in the glow of the managers who were *"like Gods"* (Cindy). Beneath the managers were the professional staff, based in design, marketing, and other departments – graduates who had moved to the area for work, rather than lifelong residents of Coalville. All these social agents were pursuing economic capital through paid work. In this regard, the managing director and the cleaner had the same goal, although the logics underpinning their practices differed considerably.

The meanings and readings of these various hierarchies have changed over time in relation to gender and social class. So too has the position of the factory within the field of work. As one of the key structural oppositions in determining symbolic value, a distinction can be drawn between the rare and the common (Bourdieu, 2000). When the women in this study were working at the Palitoy factory, they were mass-producing toys that were shipped globally. Factories were ubiquitous across industrial towns and cities in England. The toys that the Palitoy factory manufactured – and indeed the people who manufactured them - could be seen as commonplace. However, as time has passed – and the process of deindustrialisation has intensified in England – these objects have become rarer and more sought after, with many of them now representing economically and symbolically valuable collector's items (Boult and Barrie, 2015; Leicester Mercury, 2019).

There has also been a revaluing of the role of the factory worker. With much of this manufacturing work having moved overseas, a degree of smokestack nostalgia (Cowie and Heathcott, 2003) pervades popular discourse in the West. Researchers have been keen to explore the implications of this golden age of readily available, relatively highly-paid work for working-class people (Strangleman, 2019). Like the toys they made, my participants' positions and stories have been valued and revalued over time.

5.4 Logics of practice

Scheer (2012) extends Bourdieu's logic of practice to include emotions and feelings, arguing that these "habits of feeling" (Scheer, 2012, p. 216) are incorporated into the habitus. Scheer (2012) explains that:

"Emotion-as-practice is learned, meaning that feelings are transferred between people intergenerationally or through socializing processes between adults" (Scheer, 2012, p. 218).

In the interviews, clear logics of practice involving emotion emerged. These were patterned by the social positions of the women, with a crucial distinction arising between those who were single and those who were wives and mothers. For clarity, Figure 10 outlines the marital status of each participant when they worked at the Palitoy factory.

Figure 10: A table showing participants' marital status and the generation I assigned them

Single		Married	
Generation 1	**Generation 2**	**Generation 1**	**Generation 2**
Cindy	Evelyn	Nicola	
	Janet	Ivy	
		Jeanette	
		Kathy	
		Alice	
		Valerie	

First, the women were not working for intrinsic enjoyment but for economic remuneration. For many of them, this money supplemented the family income and was tied to their practices as wives and mothers, in line with Nowotny's (1981) view that economic capital can be converted into emotional capital. For those who worked at the factory whilst they were single, economic capital was often used to contribute to their parents' finances as well as for their own leisure purposes, such as Valerie's purchasing of *"my make-up and my clothes"*. Others worked at the factory to earn money to pursue other aspirations, such as Ivy, who was born in the late 1930s, and – unusually at the time, for a woman - wanted to learn to drive.

For some women, their practices were inextricably tied to long, familial histories of women engaging in paid work, reflecting the intergenerational and historical dimensions of logics of practice. Nicola, born in the early 1940s, remembered her aunts commuting by bus to Palitoy's original factory, Cascelloid, in Leicester. Jeanette, born in the early 1950s, proudly recalled her mother's *"posh cleaning"* in the large, detached houses that bordered the council estate where they lived. Cindy's grandmother had been in service in a wealthy household in Leicester. Ivy's grandmother ran a pub. Even when their mothers had stayed at home, like Cindy's and Nicola's, they too recognised domestic labour as a form of work.

Jeanette, born in Coalville in the early 1950s, provided the most succinct summary of the employment options available to working-class girls in Coalville: working in your auntie's hairdressing salon (she laughed and explained that it was always an auntie's), a factory, a shop or, if you were lucky, secretarial work.

5.5 Why work? Providing for the family: the pursuit of economic capital and objectified emotional capital

So far, I have argued that women worked for economic capital, with single women largely spending this on themselves and married women using this to supplement their husbands' incomes. However, I will also argue that their work at the toy factory gave them the opportunity to exchange this economic capital for emotional capital. For working mothers, paid work was simply another familial duty. As observed by Armstrong (2010), these women did not see paid work as in conflict with their mothering practices. It was a practical necessity and therefore complemented rather than compromised their sense of themselves as mothers (McCarthy, 2021).

As well as working for financial security, Ivy felt fulfilled by her work, reflecting "the notion that housewives were happier, 'fresher' and more contented when they had some kind of job outside the home" (McCarthy, 2021, p. 228). Families often supported one another with childcare to facilitate women's work. Nicola was able to coordinate this with her husband, brother, and sister-in-law, who also worked at the Palitoy factory. She laughed as she remembered how she and her husband would literally pass one another in the town centre on their way to and from work:

> *if my husband were nights, he'd got…a little motorbike, and I used to catch Barton's bus... And when they got to, you know where the council offices are now, there was a big chapel there, massive chapel. And he used to be standing on the corner. And as I went round on the bus he used to give me the thumbs up. Daniel 'd be about eight or nine then, and he used to go bed with all of the other three and then he used to get up when they were asleep. And all the doors were locked and everything, you know, we'd locked 'em in. And it was for the sake of what, half an hour, something like that.*

Her anecdote reflects the hard work that went into keeping a working-class family afloat. She considered this and described how it was hard for the women:

> *But they did it, d'you know what I mean? They were very versatile, they had to be versatile, the way it was then, you know, they…went for every little bit of work that they could.*

This idea of versatility ties to the logic underpinning participants' practices. The women turned their hands to any factory work, so long as it paid relatively well and fitted around family life. In factories, shifts were regular, enabling women workers to organise their daily routines around them.

Ivy's sister-in-law also worked at Palitoy. The two couples coordinated childcare, which was particularly important during the summer holidays when the children were off school. However, Ivy was unusual in that, although she started at Palitoy as a part-time member of staff to earn extra money for Christmas, she eventually chose to work full-time.

On the balance between domestic and paid work, Ivy described energy as key, in comparison to Nicola's emphasis on versatility. She explained that:

> *I was always energetic. I was really lucky that way.*

Ivy's suitability for long hours of paid work and domestic work was viewed as a matter of luck rather than fit between habitus and objective conditions.

The perspective of Ivy's daughter, Janet, who I also interviewed, illuminated Ivy's account. She noted her mother's work ethic and considered the possible motivations for her decision to work full-time:

> *I think it was monetarily really for her. She wanted her independence as well. She wanted to provide as well. But she used to work so hard. I mean, they both did, but my mum used to do all the things in the house as well. I don't know she managed it sometimes. It was so much.*

The words *"to provide"* stand out here as key to the logics underpinning the working practices of many of the women in this study. There is a deep striving in many of their narratives. For some, this striving was not towards individual success or upward mobility, but towards practical necessity (Bourdieu, 1984). However, McCarthy also identified "a link in the public mind between married women's work, aspirational consumption and personal fulfilment" (McCarthy, 2021, p. 221) in the post-war era. With higher rates of employment for men, women's work was viewed as a choice rather than a threat to male employment. As McCarthy (2021) argues:

> "the mother who earned in order to give her children the best of everything and herself a richer inner life became a figure to be admired rather than condemned" (McCarthy, 2021, p. 221).

Like Ivy, Kathy started working at Palitoy to earn extra money for Christmas. She perceived the benefits of this as twofold. First, she earned extra money, achieving a bigger budget for Christmas presents. Second, the staff shop at Palitoy enabled her to purchase desirable toys for her children at discounted prices:

> *it made you feel good because you were giving your kids stuff that you could never have because we didn't have the money… And Christmas morning*

was appalling…You couldn't see under the Christmas tree...But it made you feel good. And the kids enjoyed it.

Paid work enabled the working mothers to put more than just food on the table for their families, allowing them to purchase toys that were being advertised on television more cheaply than otherwise. This contrast between their own childhoods, when toys and gifts were few and far between, and the lavish gifts they were able to provide for their own children reflects "heightened expectations about domestic comfort and opportunities for leisure" (McCarthy, 2021, p. 225). The difference between participants' consumer behaviour and the limited luxuries that their own parents could afford could be perceived as representing a degree of upward mobility. However, rather than representing a meaningful change in family fortunes, the increased disposable income which facilitated this was due to the general increase in women's work (Weis, 2004). This represented a change in the economic field and allowed women to enter new field-positions, and wider patterns of increasing living standards (Roberts, 2012), which reflected changes in the field of power.

The purchase of toys and gifts was an emotional practice, reinforcing social connections between mother and children. In the field of the family (Atkinson, 2013), gift-giving supports the mother in accruing emotional capital – whereas fathers had incomes too, it was the mothers who were able to view the toys under the Christmas tree as a direct product of their own labours, by virtue of their work at the factory. Similar to the way in which cultural capital can be objectified (Bourdieu, 1986), the purchased toys served as objectified emotional capital. The workings of objectified emotional capital are homologous to objectified cultural capital due to the similarities between the mechanisms by which they are both appropriated, the way that their value is influenced by the relationship between scarcity and value, and the consequent profits that both objectified forms of capital can achieve (Bourdieu, 1986).

The toys given by mothers to their children in Coalville do not represent Bourdieu's (1977) large-scale conversion of economic wealth into symbolic forms that are socially recognised on a wider stage. In an age before social media, friends and colleagues would have been unlikely to see the vast quantities of presents beneath the factory workers' Christmas trees. On the smaller scale explored here, limited to the field of each individual family, gift-giving objectifies emotional capital, reifying it in physical form and reflecting its significance within family doxa. As with all capitals, emotional capital requires "a return or a 'profit'" (Santoro, 2010, p. 419). Arguably, for the women in this study[30], strengthened family connections were the desired result of their accrual of and investment in emotional capital within the field of the family (Nowotny, 1981).

The toys, as objectified emotional capital, represent maternal love in that the mother's time has been exchanged to purchase them. Reay (2004) explored how working-class and middle-class women were able to provide emotional capital to their children, with the latter achieving benefits from this within the field of education. Interpreting the toys as objectified emotional capital demonstrates how the mothers viewed mothering as being able *"to provide"* economically and emotionally, foregrounding the importance of Palitoy as a toy factory to the way in which the women perceived their work. It was a site where they were able to accrue economic capital within the field of work, which they could convert into objectified emotional capital which was highly valued within the fields of their individual families, if not within the field of work itself.

The way social agents occupy multiple, overlapping fields is emphasised in this account of the women's gift-giving (Thomson, 2012; Alanen and Sisiäinen, 2015). More privileged social agents benefit from a high level of transferability across fields due to their privileged positions within each of them and their ability to accrue a variety of relevant capitals which are, in turn, also valued within the overarching field of power. In contrast, the working-class women in this study accrued relatively small amounts of economic capital when compared to the professional workers at the factory and suffered from a harsher exchange rate due to their less privileged position within various fields. Yet they were able to exchange their economic capital for objectified emotional capital that was highly valued. Whilst the toys were valued by the mothers and children for a time, their temporal fixity to a particular age or childhood interest meant that some were disposed of, viewed as cheap, once-loved plastic toys. Others were kept and continued to serve as objects of emotional capital, like the dolls I photographed at Kathy's home.

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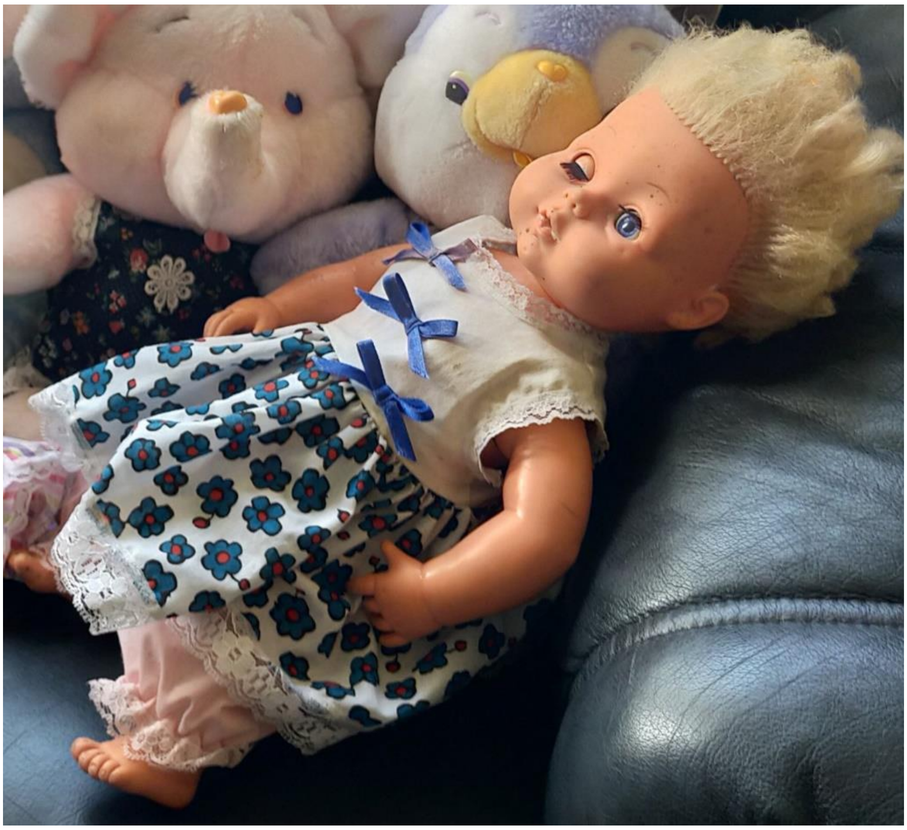
[30] Within the family network I interviewed, analysed in Chapter 6, the daughter and granddaughters expressed a deep love and gratitude towards their mothers and grandmother – this was not solely the result of generous gift-giving, but these childhood toys were remembered lovingly nonetheless.

Figure 11: A participant's Tiny Tears Doll (2020)



The accrual of objectified emotional capital highlights other inequalities, with these working women arguably less well-positioned for supporting their children educationally with their emotional capital (Reay, 2004a).

5.6 Misrecognising the world of the factory

Whilst all the participants were matter-of-fact about the work that they did at the factory – *"I won't say they were the simplest of jobs, but you hadn't got to wrack your brain to do 'em, no"* (Nicola) – their sentiments towards the company itself were more emotional. A case in point is the interrelationship between seasonal work at the factory and the spending patterns of mothers. With Ivy, Kathy, and others starting at Palitoy in the run-up to Christmas, the dual affordances of extra income and access to discounted products in the staff shop were viewed very positively.

Nicola recalled:

> *A lot of times, these reject bits…all the limbs and that, were made up and the workforce got 'em - they could buy 'em - all seconds - oh, they were brilliant for that.*

Nicola's gratitude for the discounted toys supersedes her knowledge that these were in fact made from reject parts that would otherwise have gone to landfill. The fact that the workers were allowed to assemble these and then purchase them also reflects how their spending power, as well as their labour, benefitted the company economically. The company not only had a keen, appreciative workforce but were also able to sell those reject parts that would otherwise be listed on a 'loss' rather than a 'profit' sheet to them, with the labour involved in assembly rendered invisible by rock-bottom prices. Nicola misrecognised economic opportunism for generosity and kindness.

Similarly, the seasonal nature of employment for many of these women reflected the demands of the company rather than the needs of the workers. In the run-up to Christmas, the factory increased production to meet seasonal demand, requiring additional workers temporarily. By employing mothers, Palitoy were able to recruit women who were grateful for paid work at a time of the year that placed additional strain on their day-to-day budgets. Ironically, the circularity of this production-consumption cycle highlights how the women engaged in paid work to purchase more products, in turn resulting in higher profits for various businesses, including Palitoy. Whilst many women viewed the ebb and flow of the labour demand as beneficial for them and their families, there were times when staff were made redundant, much to the workers' dismay (*Central News East: 01.05.1985: Palitoy Job Losses*, 1985).

The women emphasised the generosity of the Palitoy company. Ivy recalled how:

> *At the end of the day, money meant nothing, and occasionally they would say…could we help them pack a box for somebody who was having a charity garden fete or whatever. They would be massive boxes, the length of a two-seater settee and they would be packed solid with dolls, action men, anything you can name, games, they were really generous.*

The potential benefits of these donations for the company – as a marketing or public relations strategy – are viewed only as generosity. Whilst these could be viewed as mutual benefits afforded to employers and employees by a capitalist economy, it is important to consider how the generosity doxa was (re)produced.

Nicola gave two examples of misrecognition. First, she described the perks provided for those who worked the factory's ovens:

> *everybody laughed and enjoyed their selves, you know, they had salt tablets and a pint of milk a day, for working on these ovens…because it were that hot and they sweated that much…they provided all that for them.*

Although she later explained this was "*probably union rules*", she had already associated these provisions with Palitoy's generosity. Even compliance with health and safety legislation was viewed as magnanimous.

Nicola provided another fascinating example of misrecognition when she described the day trips and parties that were organised for the Palitoy staff:

> *And every year they took us on an outing - all paid for, never paid a penny. We went some really, really posh places. We went to Hampton Court, and we arrived and we had what they call brunch. Then we got on the bus - ooh, we went all round after that... And they had a raffle and the one person that won went in the posh car and then we landed up at the Hilton on Park Lane for a meal…And then after that we went to see Cats…one particular thing was we got on this boat at Runnymede and everything were free. All the food and all the booze. By the time they got off, the men had had it, and we got off Windsor, straight more or less into all the Queen's carriages…And then you got time on your own. We'd got a ticket to go into the castle. And then we'd got to meet at*

half past five - to this big hotel called Windsor hotel - and it was beautiful. Great big chandeliers…I was the eldest lady on the table, so I got to take the table decoration home. Ooh, and it were beautiful.

There is real irony in the way that these working-class factory workers were treated to a day out visiting places associated with wealth and privileged social positions[31] – a long way socially and geographically from Coalville – without travelling through social space. The figure of the day-tripper or heritage tourist looms large, allowed to visit but not to stay (Smith, 2006). In a study of the identity-work involved in tourist visits to country houses, Smith argues that visitors felt a "sense of privilege [that] not only includes the fact of the visit but extends to include a sense that people felt privileged that these houses had been preserved" (Smith, 2006, p. 134). Nicola's account reflects this sense of privilege, having been served *"what they call brunch"* with the opportunity to go *"in the posh car"* and visit famous, expensive hotels and West End theatres as well as Hampton Court and Windsor Castle. Smith (2006) also explains that visitors to country houses can gain "a sense of comfort…intertwined with a sense of deference – in which people took comfort in 'knowing their place'" (Smith, 2006, p. 139).

Nicola's description of the day trip as *"free"* is as noteworthy as its luxurious nature. Later, she clarified that *"the money all came out of - each week, they used to pay, I don't know, it weren't much"*. Nicola perceived the visits as further evidence of the company's generosity, despite the trip and its activity being at least partially paid for by deductions from employees' wages.

These examples of misrecognition reflect the logic of practice and doxa of the field of the factory. The working-class women employed by the factory had choices about where they worked (McCarthy, 2021) – *"if you wanted a job, you'd get a job"* (Kathy) – but *Palitoy "was the biggest employer of women especially"* (Nicola). The correspondence between the *"versatility"* of the women for shift work and the way the work was organised reflected her belief that this seemingly natural fit was a lucky coincidence. This perceived naturalness revealed the workings of doxa, which "misrecognises the logics of practice at work in the field, so that even when confronted with the field's social (re)productive purpose, agents are able to explain it away" (Thomson, 2012, p. 68). Whereas the female factory workers saw the set shifts that worked around their children as another example of Palitoy's generosity, the factory owners may have deliberately organised shift patterns this way for their own ends. For them, the working-class mothers they employed were both producers and consumers of the factory's toys. The women I spoke to had a graft ethic rather than a work ethic: a capacity to carry out extensive amounts of paid and unpaid work. Many of them also had an emotional connection to the other women in the factory and to the company itself. They purchased Palitoy's full-priced stock and their discounted stock, handing part of their wages straight back to the company. Despite the insecure, precarious nature of some of this seasonal work, women regularly came back – like Kathy and Alice.

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[31] Mandler (1997) argues that the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by an increased focus on country houses as key to the nation's heritage, associated with "emotional linkages to past grandeur and imperial and cultural achievements" (Smith, 2006, p. 121).

A quotation from the Festival of Britain brochure for 1951 helps to illuminate these doxic beliefs and the ways they were reproduced in the decades that followed:

> "Cascelloid[32] at Coalville has always been a happy and congenial place to work. There is a spirit of friendliness in the factory and members of the same family often sit side by side at the worktables. The brightness of the toys is only transcended by the bright and happy faces one sees throughout the works – the happy toymakers of Coalville spread a happy atmosphere everywhere" (May The Toys Be With You, 2018)[33].

Whilst the research participants worked at Palitoy between the 1960s and the 1990s when the factory closed (Leicester Mercury, 2015), the quote above harmonises with much of what I was told by participants who worked at the factory decades later, many of whom worked alongside their relatives and *"absolutely loved it"* at Palitoy (Alice).

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[32] The Palitoy company had previously been called Cascelloid and had moved from Leicester to Coalville in 1937 (Leicester Mercury, 2009).

[33] This quotation was reproduced in Coalville Heritage Society's 2018 exhibition.

A socio-genetic approach foregrounds the interconnections between family and work. The Palitoy factory's longstanding employment of women in Coalville across six decades allowed for the reproduction of workers within the field, although the positions of these workers – and the logics of practice that underpinned their entry to, trajectories through, and potential exits from the field – shifted over time. For example, whilst Nicola (born in the early 1940s) worked part-time in factories throughout her working life, Evelyn (born in the late 1960s) worked part-time at Palitoy as a teenager due to her own family's connection to the factory. Whereas Ivy (born in the late 1930s) had been unusual in choosing to work so that she could learn to drive, by the early 1980s Evelyn had similar motivations but these were far more commonplace. She explained that she started working at the Palitoy factory during the school holidays:

> *to get my driving lessons, or to get some money to put towards saving for a car when I was like 16… it was fun, but I wouldn't want to do that permanently…just because it was like on a belt all day, you know, like packing the same things all day long…And you know when you're thinking 'God, I can't do this for the rest of my life.' For six weeks, because the money was quite good at that time when you're young and you're not use to having a pay packet, it's like 'wow, this is good, but I wouldn't want to do it permanently'* (Evelyn).

Evelyn eventually worked in administration at another local company. Like constellations, the women occupied similar positions in social space through their work in the factory but were undertaking different trajectories through the field at different times. Their perceptions of factory work were tied not only to their positions in social space at the time but to their trajectories later. However, these were also influenced by potential family connections to the factory, which reinforced the familial and generosity doxa.

5.7 Logics of practice: women's work and identities

Work was key to both Ivy and Jeanette's identities. They described, at length, the intricate processes involved in the higher-status administrative jobs that they held after having worked at Palitoy (Sharpe, 1994). They were proud of their mastery of these tasks. Ivy's first role at the factory was in packing. She then moved from the main factory site to the Baker Street offices and shop. It was during this period that Caroline Gimson, a female manager, asked Ivy to type for her. Ivy explained:

> *I mean, there wasn't many that would have said 'go on, have a go at the typing, it doesn't matter, you know, do it for a couple of days and we'll see'. She did encourage me and from that, I really, really moved.*

Whilst Ivy's typing was slow initially, she explained that it was accurate, an important aspect of this work. As Ivy's administrative role became formalised, she became responsible for a variety of tasks, from returns and exports to covering the switchboard. Her disposition to work hard and to strive meant that her habitus was a close enough fit to enable her to secure her reputation as a good employee but also flexible enough to accommodate her change in status as she moved from an unskilled role to a skilled role, embarking on her own, relatively small-scale journey of upward mobility.

Ivy's position in the field enabled her to exchange the cultural capital accrued through a typing course for a higher-status role in the factory. Whereas Jeanette had moved into administrative work as soon as she left school in the 1960s, Ivy had gone into factory work. By accruing additional capital as an adult, she was able to move up from the factory floor to the office[34]. Ivy's story shows how Palitoy served as a site for upward mobility. Her experience was not unique, with Valerie also having made a move from the factory floor to the office, based on her prior experience in administrative roles before she married. As a site where capitals could be exchanged, Palitoy also served as a place associated with opportunity. This further reinforced its doxic association with generosity and family values.

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[34] The significance of this to other family members' social mobility trajectories will be explored in Chapter 6.

5.8 A gendered division of labour: emotional capital in the field of work

Whilst the underlying logic of practice in the field of work is the accumulation of economic capital, the specific labour conditions of the time - a buoyant jobs market – meant the Palitoy factory was compelled to offer more to its employees than a competitive wage.

Alongside the perks of the staff shop, trips, events, and charity, the management team also recruited a female personnel manager and, later, another female office manager. Whilst I was unable to interview these women during this project, they featured in numerous interviews with other female, former Palitoy employees.

The two women were very different from one another. Whilst Ada Jenkins was local, Caroline Gimson was from a more privileged social class background. Whilst the differences between them will be explored more fully later, I will initially consider their positions within the field of the factory and the functions that they arguably served in supporting the company's underlying logic of practice. Ada oversaw the female factory workers. She worked in an office on the factory site, marking her higher status than the women on the factory floor. However, she was also responsible for liaising with and supporting factory women, navigating the socio-spatial boundary between office and factory on a regular basis. There was a culture of women managing women at the factory, with female factory workers being supervised by female supervisors, who then reported to managerial staff. The supervisors were from similar social class backgrounds to the factory workers themselves, promoted from these ranks, based on their own mastery of the processes that took place on the assembly lines and in the packing department.

A professional, male, former Palitoy employee described how Ada's gender was important to her work:

> *And then, Ada Jenkins took over. And that was, I suppose mainly because there was women in the factory and they needed…women, you know, as a sort of role model, as a personnel director, or HR as it's called now* (Harry)

Jeanette was more candid about the ways in which Ada's work was gendered:

> *Ada Jenkins was the head of personnel and personnel usually was a woman in all offices. Because men didn't like to talk about periods and babies and things like this, sort of a taboo subject…But over them, though, it would always be a head that was always a man.*

Jeanette's tracing of this hierarchy demonstrates that, despite Ada's importance in participants' stories of Palitoy being a good employer, she was not technically a manager in the same sense as the others, but rather a conduit tasked with ensuring the welfare – and continued productivity – of the female workers. Ada was key to many women's positive memories of the factory. Nicola fondly remembered the way that Ada checked in with her about family illnesses and ensured union-funded sick pay was promptly organised.

For Alice, Ada was fundamental to her employment at Palitoy:

> *Ada Jenkins used to live up our street…and I'd gone, like they'd finished us the first summer and I went up the road and she - and her ma'am and dad lived up there and all, up our street - and I'm coming out of her street and I said 'have you started them off?'... for the winter like, or the season, at Palitoy, and she said 'yeah, come' and she told me what day to go and I went up and got my job back. And did it again 'til just before I found out they put me on the cleaning to keep me on permanent.*

Ada's role in the factory afforded her a degree of social capital in the wider community, which recognised her importance as a gatekeeper who could facilitate work at Palitoy. Her continued position within the local habitat, despite her relatively high status within the factory field, made her an approachable figure within the industrial town. When Alice described the way workers were "started…off" and "finished" based on the needs of the factory and its pursuit of economic capital, there was a real sense that the flexibility that some participants described positively was not necessarily a bonus for others.

Nicola was also effusive about Ada Jenkins and her kindness, she remembered that:

> *She was always wanting to know how everybody were, you know what I mean? My eldest grandson, he fell once and broke his elbow. Ooh, she rung us up here and asking how we were and everything…I won't say good at her job, she was brilliant at her job.*

Ada's position within the local community – and closer proximity to the female factory workers socio-spatially – exemplified a key distinction between her and Caroline Gimson, the female manager. As Jeanette explained:

> *Most heads of department were men - Caroline Gimson was the exception...Super lady. Really efficient. Wonderful woman… Immaculate dress. You'd never, you wouldn't see Caroline anything other than immaculate.*

Caroline Gimson was also an important figure for Ivy. She was pivotal to her perception of Palitoy as a generous company, having given Ivy the opportunity to develop her own administrative skills in the first place, as well as being responsible for charitable donations. Ivy gave an insight into Caroline's role in this process:

> *At the same time, I was dealing with prisoners…Caroline was very good with that. I remember one in particular, he would write and say 'I need something really challenging. There's a new game out.' And Caroline would say, 'oh, send him that and see what's in the factory shop. If we've got an excess of anything, send him a couple'…and they were very generous actually, with the charities.*

In this instance, it was a female manager who went beyond the scope of the prisoner's original request. Ivy engaged in a partial mapping of Caroline's social class background later:

> *she lived in a different world to us when we were there. She would be giving dinner parties and things, which was something we'd never ever done. But she was one of the girls really.*

Ivy's analysis reflects her simultaneous identification of Caroline's privileged background as well as her approval of her as *"one of the girls"*. Both gender and class figure in Ivy's mapping, but her identification with her suggests that, for Ivy at least, their shared gender was enough to overcome the social distance produced by class. The office was one of the few spaces in the factory where these social class boundaries partially collapsed, with them usually being (re)produced through the boundary between the offices and the factory floor. Whereas the workers on the factory floor saw the managers as *"like Gods"* (Cindy) or as *"top dogs"* (Nicola), Ivy was able to see Caroline, a female manager, as part of the all-female community within the office itself. Although arguably she misrecognised the workplace familiarity as being evidence of a more permanent social affinity, her perception highlights that intersectionality "offers us not a way to reduce difference to one or another concept but to elaborate it to a constellation" (Van Galen, Noblit and Apple, 2007, p. 344).

Ivy gave examples of the ways in which Caroline treated her and her colleagues:

> *one of the local butchers...he used to do his own faggots and we all liked them. And we used to go on a Monday, get a couple of loaves of bread, take them in the canteen and he would deliver a couple of trays of faggots and we'd have faggot sandwiches…and that's how Caroline was, you see, she was very lenient with us.*

There are two ways in which these two women supported the company's accumulation of economic capital. Both link to their gender and class positions. First, by providing emotional support to the company's workers – the factory workers in Ada's case and the office workers in Caroline's – they were able to support the retention of efficient, experienced workers and ensure their productivity. Ada, *"brilliant at her job"* because she was caring, and Caroline, admired because she was *"lenient with us"* compared to other managers, shared a caring disposition that can be linked to their gender. Second, they both contributed significantly to the reproduction of the generosity doxa, supporting the company's reputation with workers and consumers more broadly.

Whilst many of the women in this study engaged in emotional practices, their positions in social space and occupation of fields where emotional capital was not at stake limited their capacity to accrue it directly within the field of work. Instead, they exchanged their economic capital for objectified emotional capital within the field of the family, as outlined earlier. In contrast, the positions of Ada and Caroline within the field of work arguably meant that they were able to accrue and use emotional capital. Recognition of their emotional capital as female managers reflected their success in their roles.

The classed and gendered nature of emotional capital is reflected in the way that this emotional work has been traditionally associated with women's roles within families, "taking responsibility for maintaining the emotional aspects of family relationships, responding to others' emotional states and also acting to alleviate distress" (Reay, 2004a, p. 59). The working wives and mothers had to shoulder these emotional responsibilities alongside their paid work, which did not value a caregiving disposition. The mismatch between the domestic world and the world of work limited their ability to accrue emotional capitals within the field of work, whereas arguably Ada and Caroline were able to draw on this resonance to accrue emotional capital directly, at the same time as they accrued their differentiated quantities of economic capital.

Social class also cuts across these inequalities. As Ada's socio-spatial position was still distant from Caroline's, her role within the factory only increased her social capital within the context of her own working-class, coalmining community. In contrast, Caroline's status as a female manager made her stand out. Not only was she different from the male managers, but she was also different from the working-class female factory workers. It is likely that her accrual of emotional capital, and exchange of this for economic capital, was far more profitable than Ada's in terms of her continued journey through social space. This is hinted at by one participant's remark that they still saw Caroline occasionally, enjoying days out at a local country house that had become a heritage attraction.

Whereas Ada was described as kind, Caroline was *"smart".* As well as receiving credit for her kindness, this was viewed by the workers as a mark of her leadership skills, alongside her *"immaculate dress"*. She was a new form of manager: female, caring, and effective. In contrast, Ada was *"brilliant at her job"* as one of a number of female personnel managers and stayed in a relatively similar socio-spatial position to that which she originally occupied locally, although this was still more privileged than those positions occupied by the female factory workers.

5.9 Conclusions

I have demonstrated the importance of emotion to women's work in the Palitoy factory. The objective conditions of working-class life in Coalville meant that many married women and mothers worked. Whilst Coalville's industrial heritage is dominated by coalmining, this chapter has demonstrated the significance of the Palitoy factory as a field where women could accrue capitals that could be exchanged and used within their families. As *"versatile"* workers, the women embraced the working practices of the factory and viewed these positively, perceiving shift work and precarity as fitting around family life. The fit between family and work reinforced the women's misrecognition of the factory as family-orientated and generous.

The field of work was patterned by wider inequalities. Ada had more opportunity than the factory workers to accrue, use, and exchange capitals because of her role as Personnel Manager. In turn, Caroline had even greater opportunity than Ada due to her social class. Despite these intersecting inequalities, the field offered some opportunities for upward mobility to certain factory workers, with both Ivy and Valerie moving from the factory floor to the office in an upwardly mobile direction.

As formal education reproduces the cultural dominance of the privileged (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), it rarely acknowledges that trajectories resulting from academic failure can also lead to relative degrees of upward mobility for working-class women. Whilst Chapter 4 traced how Kathy, Valerie, and Cindy were sieved out of formal education, with only certain employment and social trajectories likely for them as a result, this chapter has highlighted that factory-working women were still capital-accruing agents. All the women interviewed for this chapter left school at the earliest opportunity. Many of them followed older female relatives into factory work. Although the myth of education as social mobility engine would suggest that these women should have stayed still, I have demonstrated their continued accrual, use, and exchange of capitals outside of the field of education for varying levels of reward.

Whilst Chapter 3 mapped the field of education in Coalville, Chapters 4 and 5 have illuminated features of family and working life for working-class women. I have demonstrated that education is not the only factor in social mobility, despite the significance of its sieving and sorting to the trajectories available to working-class women. In Chapter 6, I will examine how family, work, and education were significant to the social mobility trajectories of women from three generations of the same family in Coalville.

Chapter 6: How does education contribute to social (im)mobility in one family in the former coalmining town?

6.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together my focus on the field of education in Chapter 3 and my analysis of the capitals and dispositions valued in the field of work in Chapters 4 and 5. To evaluate how far education contributes to social mobility in Coalville, I analyse the mobility trajectories of four working-class women from three generations of the same family. I trace their educational experiences, demonstrating that education is not straightforwardly an "engine for social mobility" in the former coalmining town. Instead, I demonstrate that education is a field in which working-class women can accrue capitals and undertake trajectories, but that the sieving and sorting mechanisms at the heart of schooling often limit working-class women's access to upwardly mobile trajectories within the field. Slowly – in small steps that are sometimes undertaken by subsequent generations – the working-class women in this family were able to achieve degrees of upward mobility through capitals and dispositions associated with the field of work, which they were eventually able to exchange within the field of education by the third generation. Even this successful process of exchange was complex and, in many ways, painful for these women. It also necessitated their departure from the town of Coalville itself.

Whilst Bourdieu's critique of straightforward notions of 'family' has been revisited in recent years (Atkinson, 2011), his view of the family as an arbitrary construction did not mean he dismissed its importance. Although it is a state-endorsed organising structure that could be differently structured in different societies, the family is important to biological and social reproduction within many societies (Bourdieu, 1998). Concepts such as family habitus have been used by a number of researchers to describe how family members share particular dispositions which are relevant to the individual educational experiences of family members (Reay, 1998a; Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 2006; Archer *et al.*, 2012). Atkinson (2011, 2013) takes issue with this term, arguing that the family operates like a field and therefore family habitus should be known as the family spirit or doxa, utilising a different concept from Bourdieu's methodological-theoretical toolkit to avoid theoretical issues. Whilst Atkinson (2011) draws heavily on Bourdieu (1998), Burke, Emmerich, and Ingram (2013) argue that the conception of each family as a field lends itself to a macro level of analysis, rather than the median level of analysis that:

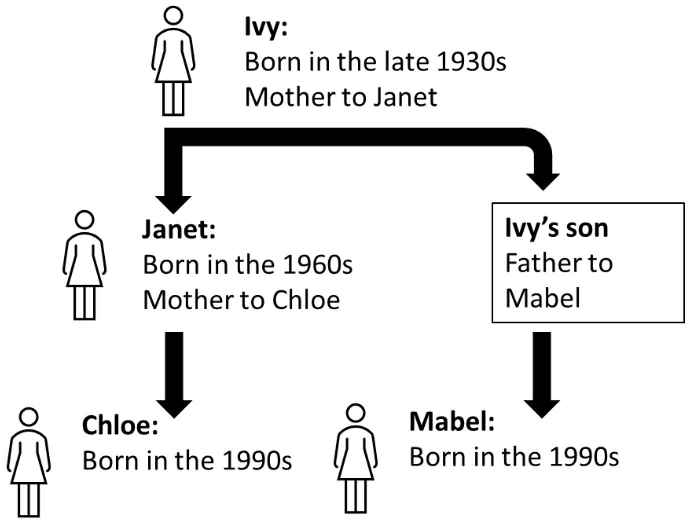
> "reveals the complex interplay of not simply the individual in their socio-cultural location, not simply of habitus and field, but of the collective and interrelated practices of multiple individuals within a particular field" (Burke, Emmerich, and Ingram, 2013, p. 166).

In this study, the potential disadvantages and affordances of both approaches have been considered. Instead of choosing one over the other, I have acknowledged the "well-founded" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 73) nature of the family as a social construction, but still considered each family member as an individual with their own individual habitus tied to their position within social fields and their capitals. In my data, there were many examples of commonality between the habitus of different family members, such as the disposition towards hard work which I will analyse shortly. These commonalities suggest the use of family habitus would be justified here. However, I have not used the term as I previously described the way that the women working in the Palitoy factory were able to exchange their economic capital for objectified emotional capital in Chapter 4, demonstrating the usefulness of viewing the family as a field in my study.

The importance of the family to Bourdieusian understandings of social inequality is clear. He explored matrimonial strategies (Bourdieu, 1990b, 2007b) and focused on the family as a context for individuals' trajectories (Bourdieu, 1999, 2007a), as well as emphasising its significance in the production of a child's habitus before formal schooling (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The family itself can be positioned within social space relative to the levels of domination or privilege associated with its dominant members (Bourdieu, 1998). Similarly, its members can adopt particular strategies to maintain or improve members' social positions. For example, middle-class childrearing practices have been a key focus in later research (Reay, 1998b; Lareau, 2003). In this chapter, the focus on female members of the same family- all of whom were positioned similarly in social space and geographic place – enables analysis of the ways in which schools can contribute to social (im)mobility over time, in the context of wider fields and the inequalities that pervade them.

Whilst there are commonalities across the educational life histories of many of the women I interviewed, these were particularly significant within this nested family group. At the top of the family tree was Ivy, mother to Janet and grandmother to Chloe and Mabel (see Figure 12). All four lived and learned in Coalville, with Ivy having been born in the 1930s, Janet in the 1960s, and Mabel and Chloe in the 1990s. In this chapter, I explore patterns in their educational experiences and social trajectories. These can be explained through Bourdieusian theories of social reproduction: tied to processes within the family, as well as rooted in the relative stability of family members' positions in social space – and place - across the generations, which in turn produces relative stability in the associated dispositions of social agents.

Figure 12: The family tree

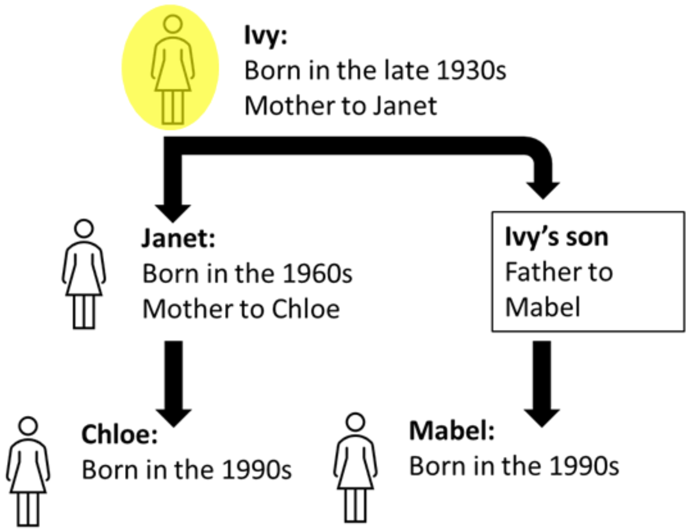


The messiness and complexity of social class, gender, place, education, and employment mean it is not easy to disentangle their individual effects. Whilst the lack of social mobility associated with working-class families is often attributed to their supposed deficiencies (Lareau, 2003; Social Mobility Commission, 2022), this chapter demonstrates how, even when working-class families have positive attitudes towards education, inequalities - mediated between and across places - can manifest in school-based practices which can act counterproductively to schools' aims for high aspirations and upward social mobility (Blair, 2001; Department for Education, 2010). Counterintuitively, these school-based practices can limit opportunity for those young people who would usually be seen as having the potential for upwardly mobile trajectories. This complicates the straightforward view of schools as sorting those with valued capitals from those without, reproducing privilege on solely class-based lines (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The pervasive patterning of inequality throughout social fields, hierarchising individuals, institutions, and the places where these are situated, can lead to practices that can run counter to – or even undermine - the logics of the field of education and its agents. However, a tendency towards misrecognition means that the effects of these inconsistencies are often read as personal or cultural failures of working-class individuals and their communities. The complexity of these trajectories – and of the misrecognition associated with them – is highlighted here by comparing Chloe and Mabel's educational experiences and subsequent trajectories.

Whilst I have organised the chapter with a focus on each of the four women's stories in turn for the sake of clarity, it is important to note that their social relations mean that their stories overlap with one another. This is particularly significant for Chloe and Mabel, who attended the same schools at the same time.

6.2 Ivy's story

Figure 13: Highlighted family tree: Ivy



During Ivy’s childhood, her age – as the eldest daughter – meant that significant domestic responsibilities were placed upon her as a child in the 1940s. Ivy recalled how her *“brother was encouraged”* in his schoolwork and eventually attended grammar school, but how, on the day of her 11-plus examination:

> *my dad said to me 'you needn't bother passing, you know, you're not going to Grammar School.’*

Ivy’s gender meant that her father could not see the relevance of an academic education to her future. His map of the possibles for his daughter most likely emphasised the typical working-class, female trajectory of unskilled work, marriage, and motherhood. However, his own employment in an engineering works in another town may have made him aware of some of the professional roles within the company that could be within the scope of his own son’s future if he were able to engage with his grammar school education.

This gender inequality represented an injustice for Ivy, who rejected the idea that a woman had to solely focus on domestic responsibilities at the expense of her career later in life. She reflected how, despite her father’s investment in her brother *“he hasn’t really done as much in life as I have”*, concluding that, in her family:

> *I think it's always been the girls in the family, who have been the workers and been more interested in life.*

Ivy was struck by the irony of her own work ethic compared to her brother’s, who *“would get one job in the morning and go get another one in the afternoon…just wouldn't settle at all.”* Although Ivy attributed her brother’s lack of social mobility to his own decisions, it is interesting to consider that, although he benefited from advantages that were not extended to Ivy in terms of the parental support for his education and his attendance of a different school, he still faced similar disadvantages to her in that they shared the same social backgrounds. Ivy commented that:

> *it was very expensive for a family like us to get the whites for cricket and things like that. That was the pullback with it.*

Whilst Ivy saw grammar school as a privilege that she had been denied, she did not necessarily consider the difficulties that her brother may have experienced as a grammar school student from a working-class background. She may have experienced these too if she had been able to attend (Plummer, 2000). For Ivy, her lack of access to grammar school – and the parental support that enabled it – represented a key moment in her life trajectory: a denial of one route within her map of the possibles, rather than a refusal (Bourdieu, 1996a). She reflected:

> *I wonder with a bit of encouragement early in life how far I could have got.*

The echo of *"encouraged"* alludes to her brother's formal schooling. Having 'got on' even after being refused access to institutionalised cultural capital, she wondered what else she may have been able to achieve with it. In her account, her father – not the examination itself – served as gatekeeper.

Ivy's account of her formal schooling reflected internal inconsistencies that can be found within educational logics of practice. Whilst Ivy was encouraged academically in some ways at the secondary modern school she subsequently attended, she was also informally taught gendered practices. She recounted having to make tea and coffee for teachers during break time. Again, the gendering of this extra-curricular responsibility reflected significant differences in the expectations of male and female pupils. In terms of social class, the working-class girls of the secondary modern served the more educated and socially privileged teachers in a way that fitted with possible expectations of their future employment opportunities. In contrast, Ivy also recalled being told:

> *I was always good at maths and English…if I was staying on then I could go in the 'A group', if I wasn't I was in the B or the C. No chance of staying on - I was the second eldest of 12.*

The idea that the sorting of the children was not just based on constructions of cognitive ability, but also on their intended trajectories, demonstrates one way in which Ivy's school contributed to social immobility (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The children's intended trajectories were even more intimately tied to the material conditions their family faced than constructions of their ability. Reproducing these further limited the likelihood of the children from the poorest families achieving academic success. Despite this reproductive mechanism, Ivy's achievements in the classroom may well have been celebrated by her teachers. She recalled one anecdote with some distress: being made to copy out one of Portia's speeches from *The Merchant of Venice* for no clear reason and then later having to read this aloud to the school's 600 pupils in assembly, whilst *"shaking like a leaf"*. Although Ivy's memory focused on her fear of public speaking, the public recognition of her good work – by whatever definition was being used – and the headteacher's praising of her self-correction after her oration suggest that Ivy misrecognised one of the school's mechanisms for sorting and sieving as a mystifying tool for humiliation rather than a way of marking her out as more academic than some of her peers. Whilst it is impossible to reconstruct exactly what Ivy's headteacher had in mind, it is reasonable to speculate that the intentions here were positive, but – for Ivy, as a working-class girl – the impact was negative.

In Chapter 5, I explained how Ivy undertook an upwardly mobile trajectory within the field of the Palitoy factory when she moved from the factory floor to an administrative role in the offices. I also described how her decision to work full-time rather than part-time in the 1970s was relatively unusual at the time. Here, I expand on her motivations for this.

Ivy's characterisation of her income from her work at Palitoy reflected the emotional relief that it provided:

> *that eight-pound fifty was such a piece of elastic to our family.*

As well as working for a degree of financial flexibility, Ivy also wanted a full-time job of her own so that she could learn to drive without spending her husband's wages:

> *I was determined that if I didn't pass, it wasn't my husband's money I'd wasted. I'd got to do it myself.*

Ivy put aside a pound a week to save up for driving lessons. She also remembered how this fund was used up on one occasion when her husband experienced a period of unemployment:

> *it was a very bad winter...and [my husband] was in the building trade…and he was off work for about six weeks…So it was really a lifesaver. But*

then I had to start saving again for my driving lessons. And I did pass and it's something - I still drive.

Ivy's aspiration to drive was difficult for her to explain. She felt that there was no logical reason for wanting to do it. However, she did emphasise that it was:

> *unusual for women to drive at that time, believe it or not…it was a man's world….in the 60s and 70s. And, yeah, there weren't so many women that I knew anyway who could actually drive.*

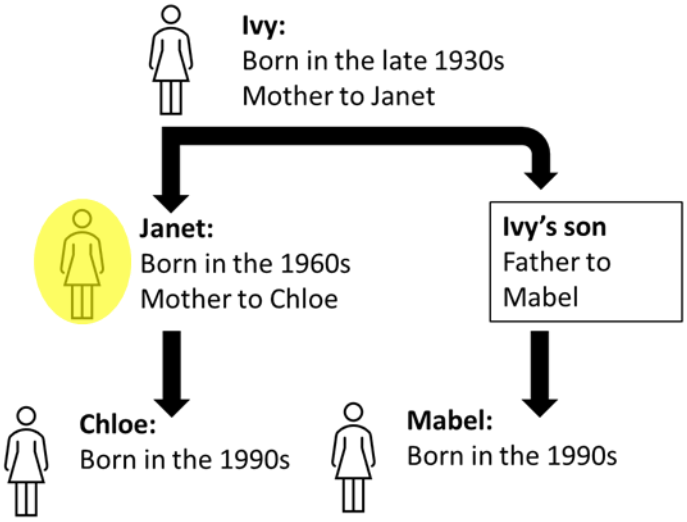
Ivy was emphatic that she had never planned anything and that she had assumed her life would follow a typical trajectory for a working-class woman locally:

> *I never, ever thought about the future - I'd got enough to think of that particular day. I had got no hopes and inspirations. I thought I'd work in a factory, get married, have children. That was my life.*

Despite the mysterious conception of this original ambition, her driving licence was key – alongside opportunities she was offered at Palitoy – to her upwardly mobile trajectory, ending her career in an administrative job she loved, which involved a considerable degree of responsibility.

6.3 Janet's story

Figure 14: Highlighted family tree: Janet


Ivy:
Born in the late 1930s
Mother to Janet
Janet:
Born in the 1960s
Mother to Chloe
Ivy's son
Father to
Mabel
Chloe:
Born in the 1990s
Mabel:
Born in the 1990s

Janet, Ivy’s daughter, spent a great deal of time with her father, who taught her the tricks of the building trade at home:

> *he'd just show me how he was doing it. And then he'd hand it over and say, 'let me see how you do it'…he was great at that and my mum wanted to teach me to cook but I was never interested in that. I was always following my dad around…he built hutches for my rabbits and runs and things. And that's what I wanted to learn. I didn't want to learn to cook, I wanted to do the DIY.*

At high school in Coalville, Janet was able to further her interests, with woodwork and chemistry being her favourite subjects. She explained that:

> *I didn't really think that women didn't really do woodwork at that time. I just thought 'I could do this'.*

Despite the practical skills she had developed with her father and at high school, she was not allowed to study woodwork or physics at the upper school:

> *They put the boys in first and there wasn't enough room for me.*

Whilst a number of the educators interviewed in Chapter 3 saw Coalville’s parents as having particularly gendered expectations of their children, with girls expected to have babies and supplement the family income with unskilled work, Janet’s recollection was that the upper school produced a gendered understanding of curriculum subjects and their associated employment opportunities.

Whilst school was a difficult time for her, Janet was inspired by her mother’s work, explaining that:

> *I think when my mum was working, there weren't a lot of other ladies working. Their mums didn't work - the other girls that I knew. I used to be really proud. You know, my mum worked. She did what she could - so I wanted to, so I did.*

The toys the work provided supported this positivity. In Chapter 5, I argued that toys served as forms of objectified emotional capital, supporting strong familial relationships between working mothers and their children despite the increased time away that paid work necessitated. Janet remembered feeling *“lucky”* at

Christmas due to the number of toys that she received as gifts. However, the giving of these toys also supported the reproduction of her mother's positive disposition towards hard work. Janet saved up pocket money to pay for other subsidised toys across the year:

> *It would take a long time. I remember there was Carrie and Christopher dolls…and I saved up for those and all the pieces of furniture. It took a few years to do it, cleaning cars and whatever.*

The world of work for Janet, as a child, was a positive one. She described the Palitoy factory as *"like Aladdin's cave"*. Whereas her mother had described the 1970s as *"a man's world",* Janet saw the world of her mother's work as a woman's world. She remembered visiting the factory on one occasion, recalling:

> *walking around it with my mum and seeing all the people working at their desks - all the ladies - I didn't really see a man. And they showed me round the factory shop, so I saw the toys there. It was really nice to have that experience, to see behind - what was going on.*

Janet's appreciation of her mother's skill in balancing work and homelife only increased as she began the balancing act as an adult:

> *I found it really difficult…at one point I worked Friday night, all day Saturday, and all day Sunday and I'd get home and I'd be shattered and then I'd have to make the Sunday dinner. I used to - used to really - but my husband was working two jobs himself. So it was difficult…and then he went back to college to get himself a better job.*

Janet's description of adult life demonstrates her and her husband's emphasis on hard work, a disposition shared with her mother. However, Ivy felt lucky to be so naturally *"energetic"*, whereas Janet admitted she was *"shattered"* by the experience. Whilst Ivy, Janet, Mabel, and Chloe all saw hard work as important, different objective conditions surrounded these dispositions. For Ivy, paid work offered a *"wonderful piece of elastic"* to the family budget, which relieved financial pressure. In comparison to single-wage families, Ivy's experienced a degree of financial comfort due to her efforts, in line with McCarthy's analysis that paid work in the mid-twentieth century offered working-class women "extras" (McCarthy, 2021, p. 228). However, by the time Janet and her husband were balancing paid work with raising their family, they were not doing so for “a superior lifestyle” (McCarthy, 2021, p. 228), but to avoid financial ruin. Janet explained that:

I was working part-time, and their dad was working two jobs so we could keep paying the mortgage because the interest rate was so high at the time.

Whilst Ivy and Janet expressed the same dispositions towards hard work, the rewards they received in exchange were very different. Despite this, Janet’s daughter, Chloe, also valued her mother and grandmother’s dispositions towards work and emulated these. She explained that her mother:

always worked and she loved to work. She's a really hard worker. And so is my grandma. My grandma loves to talk about her work… I think she's just so proud that - because she didn't really have much of an education because she was kind of made to look after her siblings and leave school early because she was the oldest daughter - I think she was just so proud that she kind of got to the level that she got without the education that she wanted.

Whereas Chloe viewed this as a longstanding family tradition which she also associated with her father, who *“drilled into”* her that work was important, Janet viewed her daughter’s ambitions as a reaction to their financial struggles. She suggested that her children:

moved on further than I did…I think they've heard how we struggled, so they wanted to do better.

Janet framed her children’s hard work as a reaction to their childhood circumstances rather than as a social inheritance that they willingly and proudly accepted (Bourdieu, 1999). However, Chloe echoed Janet’s admiration of her own mother, Ivy. She remembered her mother’s wardrobe as a source of inspiration when she:

started to do like secretarial admin work. And I always saw her like get dressed up in work clothes and I used to like feel really excited to think 'oh, one day I'll be able to wear work clothes'… that made me - I think I've always wanted to like be - have that kind of job, deep down.

Despite this, Chloe also expressed an unusual emotional response to the changes wrought in the field of work in Coalville. She explained that:

> *I remember feeling really jealous that the factories weren't a thing when I'd left school, because it almost gave everybody had kind of like a purpose. and like they knew that that was there for them when they got out of school. But when we all left school, it was like, 'Oh, my God', like we're pushed into academics so much.*

Although she had associated her mother's administrative work – and wardrobe – with success, she also valorised the other options that formed part of her mother and grandmother's space of the possibles, even that which had the lowest status: factory work.

Despite this contradiction, Janet's trajectory from factory work to administration followed that of her mother, Ivy, and inspired her daughter, Chloe, to want *"that kind of job, deep down."* The durable nature of the habitus is emphasised here, with these unconscious messages about desirable work trajectories being passed down from one generation to the next. However, neither Janet nor Ivy took the relative status of administrative work for granted. Both worked hard to enter these kinds of roles and recognised that there were benefits to this in comparison to other forms of female, working-class employment[35].

Like Ivy, Janet went into factory work immediately after leaving school. She threw herself into her roles and showed a strong work ethic:

> *I went into the factory. I did the training for every machine in the factory. So I could do any job in there: examining, packing, overlocking.*

Despite her initial enthusiasm, she later identified some drawbacks and pursued further education to open up alternative employment options. The necessity of further education to achieve this contrasts with the trajectory of her mother,

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[35] The status of administrative work within Coalville's working-class community was emphasised by another participant, Jeanette, who explained that her female, working-class relatives did not perceive administrative work as a real job. She recalled that this:

> *used to be quite a common perception: you work in an office, you don't actually work. You just sit there and write a little bit of paper out…and somebody else has to do the work for you.*

Ivy, who had been able to move from the factory floor to the office at Palitoy by enrolling on a typing course, asking to gain experience of typing, and expressing an interest to the company's only female manager. Arguably, Janet presented similar dispositions and practices to her mother but did not receive the same level of reward as a result. Bourdieu (1993) outlined how this can result in the coexistence of two states of the education system which can cause conflict within an individual workplace. Over time, university graduates took on employment roles that were still occupied to some extent by an older generation who had previously been appointed to these with far fewer qualifications. He linked this with diploma inflation, whereby the opening up of a range of educational institutions and qualifications to those from a wider range of social backgrounds was accompanied by the devaluing of these qualifications (Bourdieu, 1984). Those studying these previously elite qualifications expected the rewards that had previously been associated with them but did not receive these as they were less rare and therefore less valuable. Whilst Ivy's typing course and Janet's two years of secretarial studies were not elite qualifications, the increased workload and time involved in the latter compared to the former demonstrates the inflation mechanism that Bourdieu described, with Janet having to do more for less[36].This rupture in expectations did not cause conflict within the family. Instead, the sense that hard work mattered regardless of reward became ingrained.

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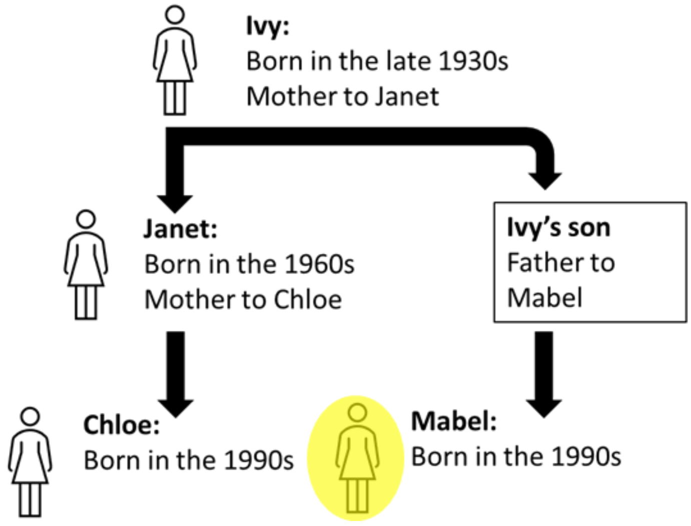
[36] This ties to other findings regarding the decreasing income mobility in the decades following the Second World War (Major and Machin, 2018).

6.4 Mabel's story

Figure 15: Highlighted family tree: Mabel



Ivy's other granddaughter, Mabel, was the daughter of her son. She felt connected to her primary school due to the family's longstanding roots in the local area. She remembered that she:

> *really liked school…I remember from the field, you could see my bedroom window.*

The physical proximity between home and school contributed to a sense of rootedness which was also reinforced by the cumulative effects of the family having resided in the same place for such a long period of time. There were even physical reminders of this enduring connection, with Mabel recalling that:

> *I know that my dad was sort of the first year group to actually go to the primary school in the building that it's currently in…and I remember as well, it was like one of the little parks and it had like concrete floor under all of the swings or like a roundabout or something and my dad had written his name in the concrete there as well… it was quite cool.*

Like her grandmother, Mabel experienced the sorting and sieving practices at work within schools. However, she was identified as 'gifted' in line with New Labour's gifted and talented agenda in the 1990s. Her educational life history gives an opportunity to consider this particular formation of class and gender in the ex-coalmining town, exploring the implications of this for social (im)mobility.

Whereas the other participants were generally sorted into lower sets or groupings of pupils at school, Mabel occupied top sets and stayed on for sixth form, undertaking a very different educational trajectory to her cousin, mother, aunt, and grandmother. Whilst it would be reasonable to expect that Mabel's experiences of formal schooling would be more positive as a result, the school's practices in response to her giftedness arguably increased the likelihood of social immobility at various points.

Whereas Janet and Chloe aspired to administrative roles, Mabel aspired to become a teacher, explaining that:

I probably always thought that I wanted to be a teacher. Like from as long as I can remember, like, as far back in primary school, I remember like writing out registers when I played like with my friends and always being the person that would read them off and things like that…there was something in me that sort of knew that I wanted to be a teacher.

It may be that Mabel's own positive experiences with her teachers inspired[37] her to pursue this career. Like Chloe, Mabel had watched her mother engage in further education, embarking on her own upwardly mobile trajectory through a series of hierarchised jobs.

Whilst Chloe and Ivy's fathers both closed down particular trajectories, Mabel's father encouraged her to attend a subject-specific extra-curricular club at primary school that was significant to her later career:

My dad really encouraged us to go to this club … I remember going and…really not liking it. I remember thinking it was a bit…still and boring for lunchtime.

Mabel eventually studied this subject and then trained to teach it. Although she did not directly link her subsequent trajectory to her father, his emphasis on this at primary school is arguably connected to her eventual career, with the high value placed on it being a mainstay of the family's attitude to education.

Mabel's experiences of being taught this subject at both of her secondary schools were problematic. At her high school (when aged 11-14), Mabel recalled boredom and frustration. By the time she attended the upper school, Mabel's label as a higher-ability student led to her being entered for a GCSE in this subject after just one year of study, instead of the traditional two years. In Year 11, Mabel was consequently taught as part of a group that was working on two different qualifications, with the majority having failed their early-entry examinations and therefore resitting their GCSE whilst she and a few others studied for their AS level in the subject. She explained that:

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[37] In Chapter 7, I will explore the significance of teaching's visibility as a possible career trajectory for other female, working-class students in Coalville.

> *I think in year 11, it was even more chaotic, because there was about five of us that passed the GCSE. I got a B, which ended up being my worst GCSE grade in the end of things. But then we sort of did the AS level the next year…like the five of us in a room where everybody else was redoing the GCSE that they were pissed off about, that they didn't want to take in the first place, that they were annoyed that they were having to retake it because they've already tried it once and they failed…so what's the point in doing it anyway?*

This example provides a fascinating insight into the logics of practice in the field of education in a Coalville secondary school in the 2000s. Mabel attended school at a time when pupils were being defined as gifted and talented as a result of New Labour's education policies (Department for Education and Employment, 1999), which advocated identification and specific strategies for children who were within the top "five or ten per cent of any school setting" (Lambert, 2015, p. 53). Early examination entry was identified as an appropriate strategy for gifted learners (Campbell *et al.*, 2005), but arguably Mabel's school had not considered how its higher achieving pupils may have required support[38] to fulfil their academic potential rather than merely challenge. For Mabel and her peers, the consequences were stark, with Mabel achieving a B grade at GCSE that would potentially preclude her access to a highly competitive university and other students failing the qualification and then being taught alongside others who had moved onto the AS level qualification. Despite this, Mabel was still placed under significant pressure to achieve highly by staff at the school:

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[38] Criticisms of the government's 'gifted and talented' policy have highlighted England's comparatively poorer results at the highest attainment levels in OECD tests in mathematics and writing in 2009, admitting that the "few high performing pupils in England come mostly from independent and some from grammar schools" (Lampl, 2012, p. 1).

> *we had this really weird meeting once where they sort of like got a lot of the high ability kids at the start of A-level and pulled us all into the [sixth form] centre and said, like 'you guys should get three As at the end of A-level and if you don't like you're failing yourself, and you should be looking at going to Oxford, and you should be looking at going to Cambridge, and we're going to do everything that we can to get you there. You need to do it for yourself'…I don't know whether that was like her, you know, coming in and trying to make us all hungry and 'fight for it' or...*

As with the early entry strategy, the meeting reflects the school's defensive rhetoric, which placed significant individual responsibility on the young people. Whilst this level of individual responsibility is usually a feature of high-stakes accountability systems, it cannot be overlooked that Mabel's experience of the upper school's practices so far had potentially already resulted in her underachieving in her early-entry subject compared to previous expectations. The rhetoric reflected in Mabel's account of the meeting suggests that this member of school staff was not prepared to consider the ways in which the school may have already contributed to students' social immobility.

However, Mabel's reaction reflected a pattern across the life histories of many of the women in Coalville: a disposition of rebellion[39] against the labels imposed by others that was introduced in Chapter 4. Mabel attributed her experiences of relative failure at the upper school to her subsequent successes. She explained that:

> *It was a failed experiment. Definitely. But I would say that if the experiment hadn't gone ahead. I think that was another one of the things where I sort of got like, encouraged by, by almost like failing. I didn't get the grade that I wanted in that AS, I got a D in that, and so the next year, I was like, I think I need to make it up to myself, I need to resit that, I need to redo that as one of my A-levels and prove that I can do it.*

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[39] Valerie embodied this disposition in relation to her fear that she had failed her driving test halfway through:
"I've failed here, [but] I know I can drive and I'm going to show him I can drive".
Cindy explained how she rebelled against her ex-husband's belief that she would have to sell the marital home following their divorce: *"the more somebody said that, the more I fought against it".*

Mabel had overcome other labels in the past. Having been told she had *"no musical talent"* at primary school and excluded from the school choir, she threw herself into music at secondary school and became a talented musician. Cultivated by her high school teacher, Mabel sat examinations in her instrument of choice and in musical theory. She also joined a local orchestra. However, in an amplification of the mechanism that meant that Janet's pre-existing practical skills related to wood and metalwork were not able to be exchanged, Mabel's accumulation of this form of cultural capital was also stunted by the upper school. Despite the aspirational rhetoric espoused by the A-level teacher in Mabel's earlier account, Mabel's GCSE options at the age of 14 narrowed her opportunities to pursue music in the ways usually associated with the elite. She explained that:

> *I signed up for GCSE music when I picked my options... And then when I got there, I wasn't actually doing GCSE music. I was doing a BTEC in performing arts, which was a lot more like - I wanted to learn about like the Baroque period of music and how instruments developed and all this stuff that I was really interested in and got there and they were like 'no, you're going to learn how to be like a shitty little band, like playing Mr. Tambourine Man' and doing like dance and things like that.*

Whilst Mabel had been able to accrue this particular form of dominant academic capital - otherwise known as elite knowledge (Stich, 2012) - at high school (11-14), she was not able to pursue a traditional academic qualification at the upper school (14-18). BTEC qualifications are part of a suite of vocational qualifications and are usually associated with FE colleges rather than secondary schools (Gartland and Smith, 2018). Although they are associated with progression to HE for disadvantaged learners (Gartland and Smith, 2018), they are not usually seen as appropriate options for learners who are able to access academic qualifications more traditionally associated with entry to elite universities[40]. The school's specialisation in vocational education was inextricably tied to its dominated position in the field of education, enacting a process of cultivation that is constrained by these challenges (Abrahams, 2018).

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[40] For instance, the University of Oxford states that "most Applied General qualifications (such as BTECs, Cambridge Technical Diplomas or UAL Diplomas) are unlikely to be suitable for making a competitive application" (University of Oxford, 2022).

Mabel also recalled a strained relationship with the music teacher:

> *because they realised, like I already knew a lot of what was already there, they put me in for the double award. So I did like four GCSEs, like the double BTEC in the space of that one GCSE, which, I mean, well, you can say wow, but it shows you what a piss-take it was. Like, he would turn up and then just be like, 'oh, I'm going to go downstairs and look after the sixth form with this hour, Mabel's going to tell you about this'…and like would flounce out and we'd just be there like, 'what do you want us to do for this hour?'*

The inconsistencies within the upper school's logics of practice are highlighted again. The school's reputation for inclusivity was rooted in the hierarchical relationship between the school and its nearest rival, Ashby School[41], and tied to the stigma[42] surrounding Coalville as a place. Whilst schools cultivate and attempt to capitalise on their respective positions within the field of education, the impact of the school's vocationally focused curriculum offer on Mabel is clear. It is crucial to emphasise the place-based nature of this inequality. The school's curriculum offer responded to its position in social space, which was, in turn, inextricably connected to its history as a Victorian boomtown (Duckworth, Baker, and Jacobs, 2013). Following deindustrialisation, Coalville was subject to stories of decline, deficit, and anachronism. As reified social space (Bourdieu, 2018), the two towns were (re)produced in light of this inequality. In turn, each school was (re)produced to serve the supposed needs of each catchment area. Whereas students at Ashby were read as capable, modern, and aspirational, students who remained in Coalville to attend the upper school were not.

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[41] In Chapter 3, former Coalville-based educator and Ashby School alumnus, Holly, reflected on the differences between the schools' approaches to performing arts, acknowledging that while students of all abilities were encouraged to get involved in Coalville, students in Ashby had to go through competitive auditions in order to participate.

[42] Despite the fact that both schools were formerly grammar schools, it was the upper school in Coalville that was associated with *"dumb"* students, as was signposted in Chapter 3 and will be revisited in Chapter 7, as well as with teenage pregnancy, as Helen also described in Chapter 3.

On the other hand, Coalville's upper school also advocated for pupils to be aspirational and to aim for elite trajectories[43], evident in the meeting that Mabel described at the start of her sixth-form studies. In Mabel's example, the representative of the school not only absolved the school's practices of any responsibility for gifted students' underachievement but also placed responsibility for wider structural barriers onto the students themselves. This teacher had overlaid, at best, a normative map of the possibles over the Coalville students and, at worst, an elite map, ignoring the many objective barriers that stood between them and the accomplishment of elite trajectories. Even just considering broad geographical trends across regions demonstrates that these students were less likely to go to Oxbridge than students living in other parts of the UK. For example, by 2018, only 0.7% of Oxbridge applicants from the East Midlands were accepted, compared to 1.6% in the South East (Sutton Trust, 2018). Moreover, particular schools were associated with higher rates of acceptance than others, demonstrating how constructions of ability and academic attainment at A-level are unequally patterned across particular geographic areas and particular institutions within these. The Sutton Trust reported that:

> "just eight top schools had as many Oxbridge acceptances as another 2894 schools and colleges put together" (Sutton Trust, 2018, p. 20).

At an even more local level, North West Leicestershire was grouped within the first quintile for POLAR 4, demonstrating low HE participation in terms of the number of 18-year-olds embarking on HE courses between 2009-10 and 2013-14 (Tableau, 2022). Another study using POLAR data found that only 2.4% of female students at the University of Cambridge were from a low-participation neighbourhood (National Education Opportunities Network, 2019). With Ashby School having consistently higher attainment than Coalville's upper school, it would be reasonable to argue that Coalville's students were less likely to realise elite trajectories than students at Ashby, who themselves were potentially less likely to realise these trajectories than students in the South East or those who attended independent schools. Whilst these structural barriers were arguably part of the objective conditions that Mabel and her gifted peers faced, the teacher's speech dismissed these and instead placed the young people and their aspiration and effort – or lack thereof – as responsible for their success or failure.

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[43] In Chapter 7, I will highlight how a lack of congruence between the objective space of the possibles and their map of the possibles – their perception of the trajectories available to them – can be problematic for working-class young people.

Two inconsistent logics of practice operated simultaneously. Firstly, the participation and progress of all students – on their own terms – were advocated for and promoted within an inclusive ethos at Coalville's upper school. Secondly, the highest achieving students in the school were challenged to achieve the same outcomes and fulfil the same trajectories as the highest achieving students in the country, yet they had already experienced barriers to this both in and out of school and would continue to do so. Whereas this representative of the school may have seen the early entry policy as one example of the school doing "*everything that we can to get you there*", it has been demonstrated here that this strategy disadvantaged Mabel, leaving her with a lower GCSE grade in her early-entry subject than a typically successful Oxbridge applicant. In contrast to the school's otherwise inclusive ethos, these gifted students were not seen as requiring support to achieve these trajectories, but rather as homogenously requiring academic challenge (Koshy and Pinheiro-Torres, 2013).

It is important to step back from this analysis and acknowledge that Mabel's account of this meeting mentions only one of the school's teachers and therefore does not necessarily reflect the dispositions of other teachers in the school. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, teachers can reproduce or resist dominant logics of practice within the field of education and within their own schools. It is also important to emphasise, once again, the market forces that underpin the inequalities between the upper school in Coalville and the school in Ashby. Mabel herself decided to attend the former rather than the latter, having been advised by teachers at her high school that the latter would be more appropriate for her. Mabel explained that:

> *Ashby was the alternative. And Ashby seemed to be a little bit demonised in the sense that it was known as like the posh school…But…there was that sort of like rivalry between the two schools between [Coalville] and Ashby. And it was really like if you went to Ashby, you were a snob and you thought that you were*

better than everybody else. If you went to [Coalville], you were a normal person. So I went to [Coalville].

Whilst I have highlighted some of the inadvertently negative impacts of the Coalville school's strategies which aimed at meeting the needs of its gifted children, it is also worth considering how Mabel had already chosen to attend the school to reinforce her identity as *"a normal person"* rather than as *"a snob."* In the context of Bourdieu's argument that the education system sorts and sieves to reproduce privilege (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), Mabel had already distanced herself from a privileged cultural identity, wanting to retain her ordinariness at the same time as satisfying her intellectual curiosity[44]. Arguably, the hierarchical relationship between Coalville and Ashby as places - manifested in the perceptions surrounding their upper schools in particular - meant that wanting to attend the upper school in Ashby would have entailed a rejection of aspects of Mabel's own identity, family, and community. In the first section of this chapter, I explained how both Chloe and Mabel demonstrated a deep-rooted connection to Coalville and its surrounding areas. In opting to stay rather than to leave, Mabel was rejecting the idealised geographically and socially mobile educational subject (Corbett, 2008; Taylor, 2012; Henderson, 2020).

For Mabel, her own identity as an intelligent, *"normal"* girl – one of the *"nerdy girls"* - served as a counterpoint to other local formations of class and gender, such as the *"plastics",* named after characters from a popular American comedy film (*Mean Girls*, 2004).

This formation of working-class femininity focused on materialism and social influence. Mabel explained that:

> *there was some girls particularly at King Ed who were very much like your plastics, like, super popular girls, loads of hair extensions, like, so much mascara on, and like, fake tan and stuff like that, but…I just thought they were just a little bit like, like, their humour and stuff was very, like shallow. I didn't like the fact that when they were like joking with one another, it'd always be at somebody else's expense… even like to one another…it'd be a joke to put the*

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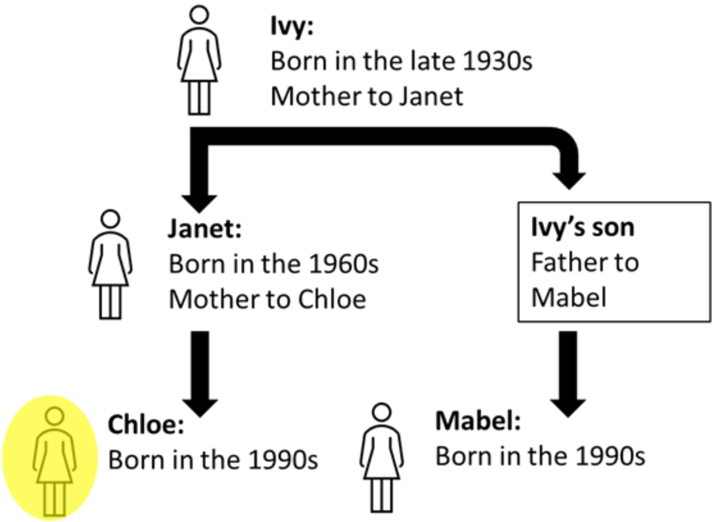
[44] Ingram (2011) has highlighted the challenges inherent in being working-class and academically able, but focused on boys who attended selective grammar schools rather than girls who attended comprehensive schools.

other person down. And I just, like, was never interested in that. Like, I don't think that your friend should make you feel like shit…I never wanted to be their friend. And I just sort of stayed clear of them. I think we probably went to some of the same parties and stuff - as we got a bit older it would be clubs - but again, wouldn't want anything to do with them while I was there.

6.5 Chloe's story

Figure 16: Highlighted family tree: Chloe


Ivy:
Born in the late 1930s
Mother to Janet
Janet:
Born in the 1960s
Mother to Chloe
Ivy's son
Father to
Mabel
Chloe:
Born in the 1990s
Mabel:
Born in the 1990s

Chloe enjoyed primary school but was troubled by a particularly authoritarian teacher at one stage. Having moved from primary to secondary school in the 2000s, Chloe emphasised the importance of the social aspect of school, describing how:

we had like a huge friendship group - all girls and boys. We weren't the ones that really cared about school if you know what I mean but like we got to that point where none of us really cared…I don't think King Ed at that time - I don't know if it's changed - but I don't think you would like feel they really cared about you as much as - they don't put like the time and effort in as much as other schools would. I don't know whether that's like bias because I didn't have a good time there.

Chloe remembered the importance of material possessions within her friendship and peer group. Whereas schools see their purpose as educational, it was clear from Chloe's account that the social aspect – with teenagers from across the

Coalville area being brought together - was viewed as more important by some students. She explained that:

> *Ugg boots were a massive thing…Motorola flip phones. They were huge. I remember when the first iPhone came out, that was massive. There were like, big puffy coats with hoods. They were a big thing. And then…there were these bags…So you buy clothes in Jane Norman, they give you the bag to go home with…they were like, so cool. If you didn't have one, you would just be such like an outcast*.

Both Chloe's and Mabel's accounts reflect the power of the peer group on teenage girls in Coalville, with the *"plastics"* jostling for dominant positions within their own social groups through cosmetic augmentations, fashion choices, and *"humour".* Alongside school, family background, social class, and place, peer group can be an important factor in the educational trajectories of working-class young people (Siraj and Mayo, 2014). The culture of the *"plastics"* did not align with the logics of practice within the field of education, reflecting a particular formation of working-class femininity which rejected the pedagogic authority of the school and disrupted the masculine emphasis of earlier studies of school-based resistance (Willis, 1993).

Like Valerie's teacher who let the girls spend Friday afternoons dancing, Chloe recalled a teacher who:

> *used to let me skive P.E. underneath tables. So I used to like love him, he was my absolute favourite…he was so relaxed, like all the girls loved him.*

In contrast to this teacher, Chloe remembered another occasion in a different subject when:

> *I remember dropping a bracelet on the floor, like it fell off my wrist and [the teacher] went crazy because it made a noise. She was just, yeah, she was - she - her lessons weren't the most fun.*

This emphasis on accruing local forms of social capital through friendships at school is reflected in the way that Chloe described some of the teachers' disciplinary practices as inadvertently supporting their accrual of social capital:

> *I can remember everyone probably got shouted by her at one point…you wouldn't take it like, 'Oh, God, like she's just shouted at me', it was that 'Oh, I've just been shouted out, haha'…It was like street cred.*

Chloe outlined the logic[45] underpinning the students' behaviour. By facing the teacher's discipline, in the form of shouting at them publicly, they bolstered their own popularity within the wider peer group. Evans (2006) found that working-class boys can "assert their presence to each other and to other children in ways that enable the reconstitution, on a daily basis, of the pecking order of their physical, as opposed to academic, dominance" (p.86). However, in Chloe's account, it was girls as well as boys that navigated the "pecking order of disruption" (p.86) for social gains as part of a school-based counter-culture (Willis, 1993).

Chloe's friendship group regularly removed themselves from the spaces of schooling (Davies, 1994; Darmody, Smyth, and McCoy, 2008). As well as truanting by leaving the school site, Chloe described:

> *a bush that people used to go behind. Like it was a well-known place. And I don't think the teachers really cared that much…it probably wasn't even a street cred thing. And it's just like, everybody does it. Like it's not it's not even a bad thing almost because everybody does it.*

Chloe described some teachers in lessons as going *"crazy"* and enacting *"a lot of discipline",* reflecting an association between a disorderly school climate and truancy in other studies (Darmody, Smyth, and McCoy, 2008). Her representation of truancy was that it did not bother teachers, perhaps reflecting her belief that they were more likely to be relieved at not having to tackle challenging behaviour in their lessons than frustrated by lower levels of attendance. Whereas being shouted at by a teacher in a lesson was visible - and therefore provided an opportunity to accrue *"street cred"* - Chloe felt that the lack of visibility of hiding behind the bush instead of attending lessons meant that this *"probably wasn't even a street cred thing"*. Whilst Chloe's friendship group had learned to value their public censure within the classroom as part of their counter-culture, she recognised that this alternative value system did not provide enough compensation to outweigh their discomfort in lessons. In emphasising that their truancy was not motivated by the pursuit of *"street cred"*, Chloe highlighted that the conflict involved in resistance was still viewed negatively even whilst it was simultaneously being pursued. Chloe and her friends mirrored the school's sorting practices by spatially separating themselves from their compliant peers.

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[45] Willis' (1993) seminal ethnography of adolescent, male, working-class subculture marked the moment when conversations about resistance became important in education. Whilst his work has been critiqued from a feminist perspective for ignoring the potential for working-class females to reject education and for focusing solely on how the "lads" behaved in public instead of in the home (McRobbie, 1991; Arnot, 2004), his description of the conscious rejection of school authority emphasises agency rather than "failure or victimhood" (Aronowitz, 2004, p. x).

Teachers also used spatial separation to sanction misbehaviour:

> *…maths and history, I used to get sent out of all the time…I just couldn't focus in those lessons…I'd do stupid things, like throw rubbers at the teacher. Or like, try, I don't know, try and try and distract everyone or talk…I'd get sent out and you'd be standing, like in the hallway…[The teacher would] come and speak to you. I can remember one day getting sent out of French and my French teacher, like, sitting me down and asking what was going on…she was a really nice teacher…actually showing genuine interest, whether I was okay, and why I was being so disruptive. I don't remember another teacher doing that.*

Chloe's account reinforces that teachers' practices are not homogenous within a school, despite staff behaviour being influenced by national, local, and school-specific policies. Whereas Chloe was often *"sent out"* to separate her from her more compliant peers as punishment for her behaviour, isolating her from the rest of her class (Evans, 2006), she remembered her French teacher using this as an opportunity to talk to her one-to-one and to show *"genuine interest"* in her welfare.

Chloe's alienation was arguably instigated through one of the school's other practices: the tracking and reporting of curriculum-based assessment data. Chloe described how the school's visual representation of students' assessment results shocked her and others:

> *we got put on these tracker things that were like telling us our predicted grades. And I'd never like thought of myself as thick. But like, I got this tracker, and it was really bad. Like, my grades were really low. And I just thought, 'Oh, well, if that's what they think then that must be like what it is - I might as well*

just not bother anymore…a lot of my friends actually remember that as well and had that experience… they were really important. I remember them being held in like real - like such high regard. We'd have to look at them in our tutor group every morning…we'd get them in like a little folder. I guess someone must have had to speak to us about it and tell us how to progress and stuff. But because it was like in black and white that you're doing bad, it's almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Chloe's own self-concept was threatened by the lower-than-expected grades that appeared on her tracker. Whereas Mabel, Cindy, and Valerie were all motivated to prove others' judgments of them wrong, Chloe and her friendship group accepted them, which she tied to *"a self-fulfilling prophecy"*. The use of tracking by ability – in the form of setting – has been linked to similar issues in other studies (Boaler, Wiliam, and Brown, 2000; Archer *et al.*, 2018), producing a cumulative effect as young people are tracked over time (Francis *et al.*, 2020). This catalyst for Chloe's resistance to school mirrors the wider paradox at the heart of the practices of Willis' (1993) disaffected "lads". Despite their rejection of the school system, their practices of resistance supported them in being allocated to working-class jobs, ironically ensuring the reproduction of the school system's logic. In the same way, the decision to truant taken by Chloe and her peers was arguably motivated by their feelings of exclusion, tied to the stringent attainment tracking. Their truancy ironically mirrored the punishments that they received for misbehaving, but also served to further separate them from those peers that had been labelled as more academic. In "opting out" (Darmody, Smyth, and McCoy, 2008, p. 359), Chloe and her peers were ironically reproducing the social position that they had originally resisted. Chloe's eventual underachievement in her GCSEs reflected the tendency for those who truant to "underperform academically" (Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, 2008, p. 370), tightening the reproductive cycle[46] by limiting possible future options. Later in this chapter, I will explore how Chloe subsequently disrupted her own trajectory of underachievement.

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[46] Willis (2018) himself regretted the way in which the lads in *Learning to Labour* became associated with class-based reproduction, arguing that he had wanted to highlight that "the autonomy of cultural experience…has to be grasped as a particularly human capacity, an ordinary activity, which involves real elements of creativity and unpredictability" (p.582).

Chloe’s example reinforces the inconsistencies within the school’s logics of practice that Mabel’s experiences also highlighted. Whilst the school strived to be inclusive and therefore did not discriminate by ability in performing arts and other subjects which were not taught in sets, as discussed previously, academic attainment was tightly measured and reported to students. Whilst these strategies alienate groups of learners and inflict symbolic violence on those from less privileged backgrounds, they are ubiquitous within the field of education, which constructs ability as natural (Archer *et al.*, 2018) and believes these strategies promote academic progress (McCallum and Sumner, 1999).

Chloe also described how social relations which stretched beyond the town contributed to her growing understanding of its negative reputation when, as a teenager, she and her friends started to go out in nearby towns rather than Coalville as the local nightlife was *“old men in pubs”.* Reflecting on her perceptions of Coalville, Chloe explained that:

> *I never really had like a horrible view of it until I like heard…people’s opinion of it. Like I had one friend that lived in Ashby and she had like a really strong opinion that Coalville was like where scumbags*[47] *were from. Like it was like a scummy place and then I guess I think that just says it’s got like a reputation for not being like the best area. I think that just – I think that just stuck in my head and maybe I started feeling differently about it, but I never had that thought myself.*

Chloe elaborated:

> *there were always jokes like that Coalville was like crap, you know, and like other words, but yeah, I mean, I always knew there wasn’t much to do there. Yeah. I mean, I just thought that that’s just how everyone else lived, you know?*

Again, the moral deficiencies associated with the area that were unpicked in Chapter 3 are foregrounded. The fact that Chloe was aware of her friend’s views despite living in Coalville herself suggests that these were shared freely, with Chloe perhaps being viewed as an exception to her friend’s *“strong opinion”*.

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[47] Chloe’s friend’s account harmonises with those of other female students who will be introduced in Chapter 7.

Chloe recounted how her father's advice closed down the possibility of work in the creative industries:

> *I really thought I'd stay like in that like, art thing. But I think when I got out of school, like reality hit me and my dad's quite realistic. And he told me like you, you won't make money doing this kind of like work if there's no money in that. And to just like, follow, follow something else.*

Far from being frustrated by this intervention, Chloe seemed grateful for this practical, pragmatic advice. Chloe's father reflects the "equation of science subjects with economic value and an undervaluing of the creative economy" (TALE, 2019, p. 25). More than this, his advice could be based on his mapping of her possible future trajectories, perhaps recognising that careers in the arts are far more common – and likely more financially rewarding - for those from privileged backgrounds than from working-class backgrounds (Friedman and Laurison, 2019).

6.6 Different positions in the field of education and their different potential trajectories: Chloe and Mabel

Despite being relatives who attended the same schools as one another, Mabel and Chloe were positioned differently within the field of education. Chloe described how she liked school until she began to be taught by a teacher in Year 3 who "*was just a lot sterner than the other teachers".* Although both of them enjoyed the social side of schooling, it was Mabel who reflected that she had:

> *always been a bit of a little boffin maybe, a bit of a, I don't know, teacher's pet maybe they'd probably call it now, but I really liked school.*

Whereas Chloe felt completely alienated by the time that she moved to Coalville's upper school, Mabel's position was at least valued by teachers, even when their own commitment to her learning fell short of typical expectations. As previously mentioned, Mabel's music teacher regularly left her in charge of KS4 lessons whilst he worked with KS5 students. Mabel considered the motivations behind this, explaining that:

> *I think he knew that I obviously had some musical knowledge about it, you know, like about different things. So when they were - and I think the other thing is, well, I think he could tell that I was pissed off with like, the behaviour in the classroom. And I think he could tell that I was pissed off with him like leaving and stuff. So I think he probably thought if he gave me like a leadership role, every now and then, that would you know, what's the word, entertain me, perhaps?*

Whilst Mabel's prior attainment meant that she was placed in top sets and given leadership roles in lessons, it did not stop her from feeling similar frustrations to her cousin, Chloe. She recalled one teacher who was:

> *the biggest airhead I think you've ever met. She was so clumsy and she used to talk like this and she'd come in and she'd by like 'Ahhh...hello girls' like that, that would be like, just the whole lesson in this big, like, airy fairy voice. And she used to call us her 'Girls Academy plus Daniel'… none of us could get our head around like the pastoral genre with Shakespeare, we were like 'what is that?' We couldn't…it was a new genre, we didn't understand it. And she was like, 'oh girls, you just need to go camping, you know'. And it was like 'what the fuck has that got to do with anything? Like, what is the genre? Why are you taking us camping?'*

Mabel's account can be read through the lens of social class, with the teacher's very different accent – her *"airy fairy voice"* – and more privileged cultural references – her *"Girls Academy"* – reflecting the differences between her own social class background and working-class norms in Coalville. The teacher and the students could barely understand one another. This incomprehension manifested in the teacher's confusion of a pedagogical issue – the students' lack of understanding of the features of the pastoral genre – with a cultural one, prescribing the leisure activity of camping as the solution, rather than addressing their misconceptions within a taught lesson. Working-class culture is often presented as deficient within the field of education (Reay, 2017), with headteacher and former Social Mobility Commissioner, Katherine Birbalsingh, describing how many working-class pupils have not been exposed to books prior to formal schooling (Turner, 2021). Similarly, working-class students are often disadvantaged in that the school curriculum valorises middle-class cultural values (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), with attainment therefore often reflecting pre-existing cultural capital. Even within this context, Mabel's teacher's attitude is particularly extreme.

Her diagnosis of the students as unfamiliar with the natural world is also inaccurate. Mabel spent a significant amount of leisure time as a child in the local woodlands:

we would walk quite a lot through the woods, as kids so we'd like get up on a Sunday, and go for a big long walk through the woods. And it would always end at grandma's house, and my dad would take me and my brother, and he'd always tell us little stories of you know, where he used to play out and how they used to take their bikes.

These green spaces were important to her grandmother too. In contrast to her own childhood, which never involved going anywhere, Ivy explained that, as a parent to her own children:

We did get out and about - okay, it might have been down the woods, it might have been Beacon Hill, you know, went swimming, things like that. Butlins for holidays. We were Butlins fans, yeah, nothing too exciting really, but we enjoyed it. I mean, we'd go up Beacon Hill and take a picnic, a little picnic table and just sit on the grass.

Mabel's lack of understanding of the pastoral genre was not rooted in a lack of familiarity with or appreciation of the natural world, despite her teacher's claims. However, this serves as another example of how stories of deficiency associated with Coalville influenced the perceptions of a teacher and arguably limited students' opportunities to succeed academically within the subject.

In contrast to her dissatisfaction with some of the teachers at the upper school, Mabel remembered her maths teacher fondly, who:

actually got us to do an A-level maths module in year 11. We did like the C1 maths module, which is just like algebra, essentially, like graphs and stuff. And we did that in year 11. A good handful of us… To be fair, we got good grades in that one. And I did A-level maths as well, like the following year. And again, that probably influenced that decision to do that. I don't know whether they were doing it to try and get you to stay on at A-level and do some of the *subjects or what. But it clearly worked because I ended up doing A-level maths and felt confident with it…I did really well in maths, I got an A* in the end of it. I enjoyed it. It was one of those things where you know, you would do papers, and there was me and a girl…would sit together and we'd both try and get 100% on every maths paper.*

This example of the early-entry strategy contrasts with Mabel's previous example. In this case, she was selected to study just one module of the AS level, to give a preview of what this might be like. Mabel recalled that the *"good handful"* of students who were selected *"got good grades in that one"* and *"felt confident with it"* afterwards. Mabel arguably benefited from the early-entry strategy in the context of an effective working relationship with her teacher and an integrated approach to the teaching of it, which did not result in any disruption to the usual curriculum. However, it is important to note that, despite the inclusive ethos for which the school was known, sorting practices were again in operation, with the majority of Mabel's class not having access to this opportunity. The sorting took place on a different scale, with a *"good handful"* of students selected for early entry here, in contrast with Mabel's whole class being entered early in the other subject.

As members of the same extended family, Chloe would likely have been aware of the different opportunities available to Mabel as a gifted and talented student. This may have exacerbated her feelings of alienation, which were tied to the schools' practices for sorting students by ability as well as to some of the disciplinary strategies. By the end of their time in compulsory education, Mabel had achieved *"good"* grades in her GCSEs, whereas Chloe failed most of these qualifications.

However, Mabel's A-level attainment still meant that she had to go through clearing to attend university as she had not fulfilled the grade requirements for the offers she received from her first and second choice of university. Again, Mabel recalled the same teacher who had thrown down the Oxbridge gauntlet at the start of KS5 having an opinion on this:

I remember her just being like, 'Well, you've under achieved and you're just gonna have to sort of deal with it.' She was like - because I was thinking *about maybe doing another year at school - and she was like, 'No, you can't do that. You need to go'.*

Whereas Mabel wanted to resit to achieve in line with previous expectations, her opportunity to do so was closed down by the teacher without discussion or justification. In contrast, Chloe was able to resit her GCSE qualifications following her academic failure at the Coalville upper school by attending a further education college in a nearby university town. This *"changed the trajectory of everything"* for Chloe, who explained that:

> *I'd just passed my driving test. So I was able to like drive myself there. Yeah, it was just brilliant and you're completely an adult there, you felt like completely an adult. You got to pick what you were doing…I had to obviously retake my GCSEs. And then I ended up doing A-levels there too.*

Like Mabel, Valerie, and Cindy, Chloe described how she was now ready to reject the labels attributed to her within the education system. She recalled that:

> *I knew I wanted to do well for myself and better than I had at that other school. I wanted to like, prove to myself that I wasn't stupid…we called our teachers by first names. I think that made a difference. They were like more human and more like, not like these alien people that ruled over you…I had this English teacher called Michelle for my GCSE English. And I think that's just what changed things really. Because…she really like put the effort into every single one of us in that group. And we all did really well in our GCSEs in the end.*

Whilst studying at the college, Chloe got a part-time job locally, explaining that her dad *"drilled it into us"* that it was important to work hard. After resitting her GCSEs and completing her A-levels, Chloe attended a local university and gained her undergraduate degree. Subsequently, both Mabel and Chloe undertook postgraduate studies and entered professional careers. Despite having been positioned differently within the field of education whilst at school, their outcomes were relatively similar in terms of level of education and type of employment.

In examining Chloe and Mabel's positions within the field of education in the early 2000s, it is also worth tracing the trajectories they attributed to other girls they went to school with. Both Mabel and Chloe referred to the aforementioned *"plastics".*

Mabel explained that these girls focused heavily on their social lives, arranging parties regularly. One girl:

> *had like a really fancy one there [at the rugby club] and was like, 'everybody must wear black and gold. And there's gonna be black Sambuca with like gold shimmer in it when you get there. There's gonna be bouncers on the door, so if you've not got an invite, you can't get in.' Like all that stupid shit - at the rugby club (laughs).*

The distinction between availability and scarcity explored in Chapter 4 is evoked here, with the idea that certain people may be socially excluded enhancing the symbolic value attached to attending the event.

A former teacher elaborated on this 'type' in Chapter 3:

> *there were those girls, you know that preened, spend lots of money or they - spend huge amounts of money, real work ethic: work, work, work…doing work outside of school, so that they'd got loads of money so that they could have the bling. You know, very materialistic.*

Whilst this trend was associated with teenage girls in Coalville in the 2000s, a former educator who worked in Coalville in the 1980s and 1990s described how Coalville girls aspired to motherhood then. Whilst mothering was viewed as incompatible with high-maintenance materialism by Valerie in Chapter 4, both were associated with this female 'type' by Mabel. For one *"girly girl"* of the 2000s:

> *she had a baby, sort of quite young… She's with…the boy that she was with when they were at school. And from my understanding she like sells like makeup and stuff on Facebook…it seems to be the sort of people that had babies quite young, that are now…babies are a little bit older, they can now sort of start working on a career again, or whatever. And they seem to be getting sucked into these schemes where it's like, buy a lot of this product and then sell it on Facebook. And they do like the videos of them washing their face…Personally, I think those schemes are just sucking in vulnerable people and making them spend their own money on selling shit that nobody really wants. And then you*

end up buying it as a favour to your friend as opposed to buying it because you want it…I don't think it's particularly good - or selling like make-up and…perfume as well and candles and wax melts.

Whilst Chapter 5 sketched the logics of practice of working-class, working mothers in the Palitoy factory from the 1950s to the 1980s, Mabel's account – alongside the comments from former educators – suggests that the figure of the working mother evolved in the 21st century. Whereas the women in Chapter 5 exchanged the economic capital they earned in the factory for objectified emotional capital, there is evidence here that objectified social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Behtoui, 2013) – limited in scope to locally rooted fields – was sought by teenage girls in the 2000s and was later exchanged for economic capital as they engaged in multi-level marketing – the direct selling of items through social networks, usually through online social media - to secure flexible paid work around their children. These women arguably reflect the same *"versatility"* that Nicola described as a characteristic of the working mother in Chapter 4, squeezing paid work into their daily lives alongside domestic responsibilities through "homework" (Lamoreaux, 2013, p. 25), as they are able to take on these roles without arranging childcare or transport. Whilst research into women's experiences of multi-level marketing (MLM) is in its infancy, researchers have signposted how this form of work provides opportunities for conspicuous consumption as well as assurances of income (Wrenn and Waller, 2021), propagating "imaginary promises that with enough hard work, one can obtain lucrative financial rewards and happiness" (Lamoreaux, 2013, p. 187) whilst balancing work and family responsibilities. MLM is associated with "boss babe" and "momtrepreneur" discourses (Wood, 2019): women promote and exaggerate their own successful lifestyles through social media to recruit other women to join their sales teams. This, in turn, enables them to earn commission on the sales made by their recruits, with the actual profits from directly selling the products usually being very low.

Mabel's analysis of the growing number of local women engaged in MLM resonated with my own experiences of living locally. Many of the women who I went to school with in Coalville engage in similar roles. I regularly scroll past their social media posts, which often celebrate their promotions within MLM companies and showcase free holidays or cars that are apparently perks of the role. Alongside these success stories, there are women who balance MLM with full-time jobs in retail and social care. Whilst I did not set out to explore this new formation of the working mother in Coalville initially, its relationship to the working mother who balanced her family commitments with work at the Palitoy factory in Chapter 5 is clear. This formation of working mother aligns neatly with the valued capitals that Mabel and former educators described young women in Coalville as pursuing in the 2000s, from a preoccupation with physical appearance to an emphasis on socialising and party planning. Whilst these capitals were not valued in the field of the Palitoy factory in the 20th century, MLM directly relates to and draws on these (Lamoreaux, 2013).

This analysis of the capitals, dispositions, and trajectories of *"the plastics"* traces other possible trajectories in the field that Chloe and Mabel navigated – and rejected - whilst at school.

6.7 Inculcating a disposition towards hard work outside of school

Both Mabel and Chloe became upwardly mobile despite the challenges that they faced in school. Both inherited a disposition towards hard work and displayed positive attitudes towards school – at least at first, for Chloe. They also came from families in which their parents had accrued institutionalised cultural capital in adulthood through further education and part-time higher education, with their fathers both having earned undergraduate degrees whilst working full-time.

Whilst discourses relating to social mobility often characterise working-class parenting as deficient in contrast to the education system's capacity to inculcate dispositions that support upward mobility, Ivy's disposition towards hard work was reproduced across the generations within her family, echoing through the stories of Janet, Mabel, and Chloe and reflecting findings from other qualitative studies of social mobility (Mallman, 2017a). Whilst this disposition had not previously been sufficient to enable Ivy and Janet to enter the field of higher education, it was arguably supportive of Mabel and Chloe's educational trajectories in the first decade of the 21st century, which were facilitated to an extent by diploma inflation and New Labour's intention to widen access to university (Cunningham and Samson, 2021).

Within this family, the role of fathers in mapping the possibles for their daughters was clear. This is not to say that mothers were not involved – far from it, in fact - but merely to emphasise that the role of fathers was discussed explicitly by Ivy, Janet, Mabel, and Chloe in relation to their future educational or employment options. Ivy's life history interview demonstrated the complex ways in which working-class girls could be denied equal access to educational opportunities by their fathers. In contrast, Janet's father – Ivy's husband – opened up other possible trajectories for her by sharing his skills as a builder[48], subverting gender norms for the 1970s and reflecting Bourdieu's theory that parents can offer a social inheritance to their children, which they may then choose to accept or reject (Bourdieu, 1999). Whilst Bourdieu described this conatus in purely masculine terms - a reproductive project visited on the son by the father - fathers can look to their daughters to transmit valued capitals. The fathers described here helped their daughters to map the possibles and encouraged or discouraged particular trajectories. Whilst Ivy's example reflects how gender norms can exclude particular formations of class and gender, the others demonstrate the roles parents can play in the aspirations of working-class girls. In all three, school was a complicating factor.

The disposition towards hard work was not associated with compliance. Chloe rejected school, connecting this to her own feeling of being judged and labelled negatively. For Mabel, the inadequacies and inconsistencies of school practices were clear, preventing her from fully accepting the authority of the institution, despite it labelling her as academically gifted. Both Mabel and Chloe were motivated by a desire to prove others wrong, rebelling against the negative labels placed upon them by others. Both girls showed a propensity to persevere, perhaps tied to the dispositions towards hard work that were inculcated within their extended family and tied to family members' own positions, trajectories, and accrual of capitals within the field of work. This supported Chloe and Mabel in entering the field of higher education in their teenage years - the first women in their families to do so - despite the complications both faced whilst attending secondary school in Coalville.

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[48] The ways in which school prohibited Janet from making use of this capital within the field of education will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

6.8 Learning to leave: the interconnectedness of social and geographical mobility

Place acts as a prism through which other social inequalities are refracted and mediated. In this chapter, the ways that the hierarchical relationship between Coalville and Ashby figured in the lives of Ivy, Janet, Mabel, and Chloe, are intimately tied to these local landscapes of social class and gender. For reasons of anonymity, I have not identified the exact place where the family lived, with Ivy, Mabel, and Chloe describing themselves as being from a Coalville village, rather than from the town itself.

Mabel shared an anecdote that revealed a similar social geography:

> *Even like, when I [was abroad], I met a girl who had been to school in Leicestershire…she was like, 'Oh so where? Oh, my God, are you from Leicester?' We had like that big chat. And she's like, 'Where are you from?' And I was like, 'Coalville' and she went 'Oh' (disappointed tone). And she went, 'What school did you go to?' I went: 'King Ed'. And she went 'Oh' (disappointed tone). I was like, I'm [abroad], and I'm getting judged*[49] *for going to King Ed right now.*

Mabel's reflection on her own decision-making process in terms of where she would study from the age of 14 – Coalville or Ashby – demonstrated the identity formations associated with each place. She explained that:

> *This sounds really bad, but…even though I know this is like some high school bullshit, like some school rivalry, I still think of people from Ashby as snobby. I still think that and I think they probably have gone on to, you know, achieve different things. The people that I know that have gone to Ashby school are more likely to be the ones that are living in London, and are more likely to*

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[49] Whilst Mabel did not reflect on the class background of the girl that she met, the conversation shares distinct echoes with former Coalville educator Alan's comment that middle-class people:

> *ask you a lot of questions, they're very direct, about who you are and where you're from, to establish your kind of class credentials, which working-class people don't do, and so, 'so, what did you work at?' and 'where did you live?' and 'where did you go to school?' and very direct questions to establish your social status and… I feel it's a deliberate thing by middle-class people to make you understand that they're a bit better than you*.

> *be the ones that have got these different jobs…I don't know whether that would have affected the way that I thought. I don't know if it's like something to do with, you know, the teaching mindset there, whether they've sort of like, instilled into their kids, you know, you deserve this...And it's kind of a different outlook, I suppose to sort of the [Coalville] 'you are the underdog, and you're going to have to scrap for whatever you need'.*

Contrasting a *"snobby"* disposition in Ashby with an *"underdog"* disposition in Coalville, Mabel's description inverted the moral judgements to which she had been subjected. Whilst wider social geographies usually associated Coalville with moral deficiency – teenage pregnancy, incest, unemployment – Mabel saw this reputation as a barrier that had to be overcome - *"you're going to have to scrap for whatever you need"* – and the cultivation of this reputation by those in Ashby as a symptom of their own *"snobby"* moral deficiencies.

Whilst negative perceptions of Coalville were clear in the data, neither Chloe nor Mabel shared these. In fact, Chloe highlighted a key issue with Coalville's upper school as being rooted in its desire to encourage students to leave. She recalled her impression that the school's ethos:

> *was like 'get a good job and get out of here' (laughs). But they didn't really make you want to do well…it was like the motivator, like 'you want to get out of this like town, don't you?' Like, 'this is what you need to do'…And I can definitely remember my form tutor saying that…Yeah, like 'you'll be stuck here.'…it's like brainwashing really*.

In the same way that Mabel actively chose to attend Coalville's upper school rather than Ashby's, so too did Chloe, who remembered that:

> *my mum really didn't want us to go to King Ed because she'd had like, really bad experiences there. Just like I think some of the things she saw. It had like a bad rep when she was there. So she really wanted us…to go to Ashby because my dad had gone to Ashby, but because my friends were going to [Coalville], I didn't want to go to Ashby like I really wanted to go to King Ed and follow them, so I ended up going to King Ed…She'd never like tried to scare us at that point but I know like since like, we've had conversations where she said, 'yeah, this is the reason why I wanted you to go to Ashby' just because I myself didn't have the best experience either.*

Chloe's impression of the upper school's ethos is suggestive of another inconsistency at the heart of the school's logic. In a market-based education system, the school needed students to choose to attend it, rather than to pursue places at Ashby. However, rather than situating itself within the town socially, the ethos that Chloe describes arguably represents an attempt to dissociate from the local context, instead presenting the school as a conduit for escape for those who achieved highly enough. In this way, the emphasis on learning to leave (Corbett, 2008) directly contradicts the decision to stay made by students who opted to study in the town rather than at Ashby. If these students had wanted to leave, they would have already chosen to do so at 14. Despite their choice, they received similar messages about their hometown in their local school to those allegedly being propagated at Ashby[50].

Chloe expressed a desire to return to Coalville, explaining that:

> *It's not nice to not be able to just pop down the road to see my mum…I think probably I'll end up there eventually... It's just there's no work…for what I do in Coalville now.*

However, her own social mobility involved geographic mobility, with her move to a college in a nearby university town at 16 enabling her to resit GCSEs, take A-levels, and then study at a university in a nearby city. Chloe then moved even further away, studying for a postgraduate degree in a different region of the UK, before returning to the Midlands for work. Whilst the upper school's ethos potentially stigmatised or provoked some of the students, it arguably reflected the wider space of the possibles in that the deindustrialised town did not offer a full range of employment options to local young people.

For Mabel, social mobility was also twinned with geographic mobility, but she decided to live in other working-class areas, which she felt were even more disadvantaged than Coalville. This was rooted in her aspirations as a teacher:

> *It sounds really bad. I don't want to go and work in some grammar school where all the kids are really, really posh, and they can all get on anyway.*

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[50] Again, this was discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to the experiences of former educators who had worked in Coalville.

Whilst Mabel did not reflect in our interview on the reasons behind her geographic mobility, her grandmother, Ivy, drew a connection between Mabel's globetrotting and her own outward-looking nature, explaining that:

> *One of my granddaughters, she goes all over the world…Anywhere, everywhere.*

Ivy's original motivation for beginning work at the Palitoy factory in the 1970s has already been discussed here. At various points, I have suggested that geographic mobility and social mobility are interconnected (Allen, Cochrane, and Massey, 1998; Bourdieu, 2018). Ivy found her ambition difficult to explain, but also tied it to her desire to move from the factory floor to office work:

> *I just wanted to do a thing as I did at Palitoy going to the different offices and seeing - it's just something I wanted to do. Not for any particular reason.*

For Ivy, the fulfilment of her aspiration to learn to drive – at a time when it was still unusual for women to do so – represented an expansion of her own map of the possibles. Like attending grammar school, driving was something associated with males rather than females. In breaking this taboo through her own hard work, Ivy was able to accrue capital and expand her opportunities within the field of employment. This also contrasted with Ivy's own childhood, where *"we never went outside the village… never went anywhere much at all".* In her administrative work at Palitoy, Ivy had relished the opportunity to be connected to far-off places, receiving and sending letters to America and stock *"returns to Hong Kong on the export side".* She later worked for a company that was even more internationally connected. Perhaps Mabel had internalised the importance of place and mobility to the opportunities available to her and her family members (Social Mobility Commission, 2020), despite their longstanding residence in the Coalville area.

6.9 Intergenerational mobility for other participants

Although I have focused on one family in this chapter as I was able to interview all four female family members, there were other examples of intergenerational upward mobility signposted in my interviews. Kathy's son attended university after sixth-form, before embarking on a professional career. Alice, former factory worker and cleaner at Palitoy, took an active and supportive role in the education of both of her children, with her daughter going to university and moving into a professional career. Even where an undergraduate degree was not received in the end, a number of sons of the first generation of women saw this as part of their map of the possibles, as discussed in Chapter 4. Whilst it would be inappropriate to specify the jobs that each descendant went into, for fear of making them identifiable, I want to emphasise that teaching dominated the occupational routes of the descendants, in line with suggestions that careers in education and nursing are typical routes to upward mobility for working-class young people (Corbett, 2008). The family I have focused on in Chapter 6 partly reflects this trend.

6.10 Conclusions

Although Coalville's upper school partly contributed to Mabel's social mobility, it also complicated this, wracked by challenges it faced as a stigmatised school in a stigmatised place. Its inconsistent logics of practice both contributed to and hindered the likelihood of her achieving an upwardly mobile trajectory.

Different educational institutions contribute to or hinder social mobility in different ways at different times. Whereas this family did not have a legacy of high achievement in compulsory education nor of progression to higher education at the age of 18, they had a legacy of balancing further and higher education with paid work and family life. It was this legacy that supported Chloe in achieving an upwardly mobile trajectory despite her experience of being sieved out of the education system at school.

Whilst both Chloe and Mabel gained university degrees and professional employment, their educational achievements were not as straightforward as might have been assumed. In large-scale quantitative research, qualifications are usually recorded and analysed statistically, making it unlikely that the complex relationship between education and social mobility would have been revealed. The imbrication of place, gender, and social class on Chloe and Mabel's trajectories and those of their parents and grandmother demonstrate how educational institutions do not straightforwardly contribute to the upward mobility of all their students, even those who outwardly appear to possess capitals and dispositions valued by the education system. Whereas the sorting and sieving mechanisms of schools are often viewed as sorting the middle-class from the working-class (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Willis, 1993), this chapter demonstrates how the hierarchies surrounding an ex-coalmining town like Coalville make these processes even more complex. The wider sorting mechanism of a market-based school choice system (Ball, Macrae, and Maguire, 1999; Ball, 2003a; Reay and Lucey, 2004) deepened the hierarchised, place-based inequalities between the historic market town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch and the ex-coalmining town of Coalville, stigmatising all students – regardless of social class background or constructions of academic ability – associated with the latter.

Capitals and dispositions associated with the field of work were important to upward mobility trajectories for working-class women. Ivy's upwardly mobile trajectory within the Palitoy factory inspired Janet's move from factory work to administrative work and, in turn, Chloe's professional aspirations. The disposition towards hard work inculcated within the field of work and reproduced within the field of the family supported Chloe and Mabel in achieving upward mobility despite the challenges they faced within the field of education. This demonstrates that education is not straightforwardly an engine for social mobility and that capitals associated with working-class trajectories can also support upward mobility. Reading working-class trajectories through a middle-class lens produces the dissonances Mabel described in her account of her A-level English literature teacher's attitude. In the case of this family, a middle-class lens may have overemphasised the significance of Mabel and Chloe's departure from Coalville as key to their upward mobility, facilitating distance from their working-class social origins. A middle-class lens could have viewed Janet and Ivy's lack of academic qualifications as deficiencies for Coalville's schools to overcome. In contrast, my approach has enabled me to identify the significance of working-class family members' capitals and dispositions to their subsequent upwardly mobile trajectories.

The intergenerational focus on one family in this chapter also demonstrates the effort and time involved in upward mobility for working-class women. Whereas the sons of some of the factory-working women from Generation 1 – described in Chapter 4 - had a degree of access to university education, Janet and many of her female peers did not. It took another generation for gender inequalities within social fields to shift enough for this to be a viable – if relatively unlikely – trajectory for Chloe and Mabel in the 2000s. This finding reflects those of other research projects which have identified the intergenerational hangover of poverty and social disadvantage (Goldthorpe, 2013), but emphasises the significance of gender.

Finally, this chapter highlights the complexity of geographical location – or habitat – for educational achievement and upward mobility. Chloe and Mabel both learned to leave, with their educational, social, and geographical journeys being inextricably intertwined. Whereas Mabel was happy to have left Coalville behind, Chloe was not. Chloe's journey as an undergraduate and postgraduate student had taken her away from the town and enabled her to access a different map of the possibles, but leaving was not necessarily what she wanted.

Chapter 7: Tracing the past and mapping the future: girls' aspirations in the coalfield in 2021

7.1 Introduction

Education – as one of many overlapping fields - is just one dimension of social mobility for working-class women in Coalville. Rather than staying still in social space, working-class women continue to undertake trajectories through fields *after* they have been sieved out of formal schooling. Chapter 5 demonstrated that their trajectories involve the accrual of capitals within the fields of work and family, which in turn provide the potential for upward mobility for some working-class women. However, Chapter 6 highlighted that working-class women are less likely to travel long distances from their starting points than their middle-class peers, with upwardly mobile trajectories involving small steps across the generations within one family. In this chapter, I return to my starting point in Coalville's schools to analyse how the aspirations of female, working-class secondary school students in Coalville are formed in the 21st century. In Chapter 4, I signposted how Kathy, Cindy, and Valerie's aspirations simultaneously shaped and were shaped by the map of possible trajectories available to them, based on their positions in social space and their associated capitals. In this chapter, I will show how the aspirations of working-class girls in Coalville link to the space of the possibles in the 21st century, signposting the significance of this for future social (im)mobility.

Educational opportunity and social mobility are often linked to aspiration (Murphy, 1990; Ingram, 2011; Grant, 2017), with researchers demonstrating that a significant proportion of young people go on to fulfil their aspirations (Croll, 2008), but with this being stratified by wider inequalities (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014). Policymakers view aspirations as key to young people fulfilling their potential. Disadvantaged young people are sometimes viewed as deficient for a perceived lack of aspiration and held personally responsible for their own social immobility as a result (Ingram, 2011).

Bourdieu's work illuminates the complex relationship between individual dispositions, aspirations, objective opportunities, and the probability of becoming socially mobile, arguing that agents fit their aspirations to the space of possibilities (Bourdieu, 1993b, 1996a). This chapter puts his argument to the test. Aspirations are understood as hopes and dreams for the future, including particular forms of employment, types of family relationship, and places of habitation. Aspirations are formed through the individual's "relationship with the wider social context, including fields of home and schooling" (Archer, DeWitt, and Wong, 2014, p. 59). Along with the objective conditions involved in their formation, aspirations contribute to potentially different life trajectories (Trice, 1991). Researchers have also suggested high aspirations can ameliorate some of the impact of poverty on working-class young people (Flouri and Panourgia, 2012).

This chapter problematises the homogeneity of earlier theories of how working-class boys get working-class jobs (Willis, 1993), drawing on Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody (2001) to highlight the patterned fragmentation of girls' trajectories from school to work. Whilst these routes are diverse and heterogenous, they are also tied inextricably to social class, gender, and race, highlighting how social mobility can happen for some working-class young women, but not others. Whilst comprehensive education is associated with increased social mobility and equity in doxa (Morris and Perry, 2017), the interviews presented in this chapter demonstrate how the aspirational discourse of late 20th and early 21st-century schooling encourages "a degree of disconnection of people's aspirations from their real chances" (Bourdieu, 1993a, p. 97). Thus, in a world that asserts that anyone can achieve anything, regardless of gender, race, or class, the degree to which aspirations are realised can be branded as the responsibility of the individual rather than of wider societal structures.

As part of the habitus[51], aspirations are inculcated in childhood and (re)shaped in response to objective conditions throughout the life course. Family, school, peer group, and the media can (re)shape the habitus and aspirations. The logics of practice in schools can arguably reinforce or challenge the young person's map of the possibles, particularly if there is significant congruence or discontinuity between home and school.

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[51] Bourdieu (2007) emphasised the importance of his own experiences of 'elite' education in producing a cleft habitus, or a state of sociological mutilation whereby he became aware of the arbitrary nature of his dispositions due to his degree of immersion into a particular social position having been compromised by this disruption. Others have developed this further by identifying habitus disruptions in the trajectories of academically able, working-class students (Byrom and Lightfoot, 2013) and different types of habitus linked to social class and schooling (Ingram, 2018).

Despite emphasising the importance of family in the initial formation of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), Bourdieu also highlights how the individual can choose to reject the social inheritance offered by their parents, describing the family as "a matrix of the contradictions and double binds" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 507) that can be brought about by the potential dissonance between the inheritance, the objective conditions faced by the inheritor, and the inheritor's habitus, which has been shaped by schooling, peer group, and media, as well as by family. Whilst there can be correspondence between this social inheritance and the future trajectory of the individual, such as in the case of a coal miner's son following in his father's footsteps to become a coal miner himself, this correspondence cannot be taken for granted. In the case of Coalville, the rampant deindustrialisation that took place over the 1980s brought about significant changes in the employment opportunities available locally, with serious implications for this degree of correspondence.

The space of the possibles, used in Chapters 4 and 6 to explore social mobility, is useful in analysing aspiration. Bourdieu (1996a) conceptualises this in terms of "choices" and the concomitant "refusals" (p. 88) that sit alongside these. For example, if the son of a coalminer chooses to work in a warehouse, the job of coalminer still forms part of his space of the possibles as a "refusal" rather than a "choice". These refusals are just as important as the agent's positive choices in mapping inequalities between social groups and in exploring social mobility as it is the navigation of this space – and the way in which opportunities are patterned within it – that facilitates or inhibits social mobility. The space of the possibles shifts in response to objective realities. For example, if the son of a coalminer chooses warehouse work because the job of coalminer is no longer available, then the latter was not part of his space of the possibles, but rather an example of hysteresis, when habitus and field become temporally misaligned. As a part of the field, the space of the possibles is tied to the social agent's gender, social class, family, schooling, and the places they have lived, as well as other social dimensions. The space of the possibles reflects the objective probabilities of particular aspirations.

The opportunities available to the social agent, as well as the social agent's understanding of and navigation of this space of the possibles culminate in this sliding scale of visibility[52], which can differ widely for different members of the same social groups. As signposted in Chapters 4 and 6, each social agent produces a map of the possibles, which reflects the opportunities they perceive within their space of the possibles. Whether an option is visible or thinkable influences whether or not it forms part of the social agent's map, even if it is part of their space of the possibles. Through the interaction between the habitus – represented here through the map of the possibles – and the objective possibilities available to social agents within the field – the space of the possibles – different trajectories are possible for different working-class girls.

Gale and Parker (2015) use Appadurai's (2004) notion of navigational capacity, applying the concepts of map and tour knowledge to the aspirations of Australian secondary school students. Map knowledge involves an understanding of "the bigger picture" (Gale and Parker, 2015, p. 90), with students being able to identify alternative routes to their end goals through their bird's-eye-view. In contrast, tour knowledge describes limited, contingent knowledge that is "subject to the limitations of the guide" (p.89). Whilst map knowledge facilitates flexibility, tour knowledge offers just one route to the desired goal and is associated with lower odds of success. In Gale and Parker's (2015) study, the "disconnection between stated career aspirations and what students understood to be needed to achieve them" (p.90) revealed when tour knowledge was being used. I draw on this distinction in this chapter, suggesting that the student's map of the possibles can be detailed or vague. All young people have a map of the possibles, but it is not necessarily the right map for their space of the possibles, and it does not necessarily show them all the steps required to reach each eventual destination.

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[52] Archer *et al.,* (2012) distinguish between careers which are "visible" (p.891) in contrast to those which are "unthinkable" (p.898).

Like social agents, schools as institutions hold particular positions within the field of education, based on the composition and quantities of their accrued capitals (Gamsu, 2016, 2018). In Chapters 3 and 6, I showed how the dominated field-position of Coalville's upper school had significant implications for the young people studying there. Differing field-positions result in different aspirations, for example, a fee-playing school that advocates students attending Russell Group institutions or Oxbridge for higher education (Davey, 2012). The expansion and massification of higher education in the United Kingdom (Blair, 2001), has meant that state secondary schools have increasingly been viewed as institutions that prepare young people for university study. With over 50% of young people entering higher education in 2017-2018 (BBC News, 2019), schools with sixth-form provision, as well as further education colleges, have increasingly promoted university as a logical step for more young people. However, the Conservative government has recently enacted a policy shift, increasing the cost of university education for students by replacing grants with loans, as well as criticising the idea that a university degree is the "only worthwhile marker of success" (Department for Education, 2021, p. 3) and advocating that "a college course or apprenticeship can offer better outcomes" (Department for Education, 2021, p. 3).

Social agents are also placed, occupying a particular physical location that is connected to their position in social space (Lipstadt, 2008; Bourdieu, 2018). The interplay between social space and place means that inequalities in social space are often mirrored in physical space and vice versa. By occupying privileged places, social agents can reap the profits of space. In contrast, ghettoisation can result in particular locales becoming associated with capital deficits. In a town like Coalville, certain jobs are more visible than others. Similarly, non-selective state schools in the United Kingdom are usually organised geographically, with particular catchment areas based on the distance to a school's campus. Whilst education policy has advocated a choice-based model in recent years, parents and pupils usually select from local schools, rather than having free choice from all schools within the field of education nationally. These selection processes reproduce social inequalities, with privileged parents using various strategies within the quasi-market of school choice to reproduce their own privileges for their children (Ball, 1993; Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 1995).

Because schools compete with one another both within the field of education and within the places where they are situated (Gamsu, 2018) certain schools become “demonised” (Reay and Lucey, 2000a, p. 89) within local areas, whilst others become desirable. The influence of schooling on identity is significant (Reay, 2010) and therefore the demonised/desired discourse, as well as the local contexts of schools, exercises significant influence on how young people see themselves and their possible futures. Thus, in the example of teacher Holly in Chapter 3, her occupation of the higher status town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, in contrast to Coalville, meant that her map of the possibles featured careers in performing arts, law, and teaching. Her proximity to the more privileged in physical space meant an increased visibility of higher-status careers. Holly was able to benefit from these profits of space in her own upwardly mobile trajectory. In contrast, the occupation of Coalville as a place arguably has implications for the map of the possibles, as well as the aspirations and trajectories, of girls and women who have lived, learned, and worked locally.

In this chapter, I outline how working-class young people engage in three navigational processes – with more or less support from family and school. Through the map-making process, young people identify possible destinations. Through the path-finding process, they scope the capitals required to fulfil these possibilities. Finally, through bridge-building, they accrue required capitals.

Drawing on these Bourdieuisan approaches to aspiration, I consider the imagined future trajectories of nine teenage girls at a secondary school in Coalville in 2021. In the first section of this chapter, I construct the space of the possibles, drawing connections between the imagined trajectories of these teenage girls and those trajectories of the former factory workers. Bourdieu was emphatic that social trajectories should be considered in relation to one another, as “families of intragenerational trajectories at the core of the field” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 259). By considering both datasets in concert, the implications of structural changes to associated fields are also revealed. From the economic restructuring wrought by deindustrialisation to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the inextricable connection between social agent and field - mediated through habitus, expressed here through aspiration - is emphasised.

In the next section, I trace influences on girls' aspirations, such as family, school, and social media. I posit that map-making, path-finding, and bridge-building are key processes that influence the development and fulfilment of aspirations. They are key to how some working-class girls aspire to upwardly mobile trajectories, whilst others do not.

Subsequently, I consider how the *places* where the girls aspire to live reveal more about their aspirations, with their imagined selves complementing or contrasting with their Coalville-based selves. Finally, I will discuss attitudes towards childrearing, with all the girls expressing their desire to have children in the future, but within a have-it-all discourse involving continued work opportunities and equally distributed domestic labour. These aspirations, in turn, reveal how likely social mobility seems for participants in the 21st century.

7.2 Career aspirations versus local pathways

All the girls interviewed had previously considered what jobs they might like to do in the future. Their preferred future roles are listed in the table overleaf (Figure 17), along with the key stage they were studying at that time. Alongside the use of pseudonyms, I have used key stage[53] rather than academic year group to reflect the broad age of participants, supporting their anonymity. Students in KS5 at the school mainly opted to study for A-level qualifications, usually seen as providing a bridge between compulsory schooling and university. I gained informed consent from the school's headteacher and each participant, as well as a parent or carer. To select the girls, I asked teachers to nominate disadvantaged students, who in turn invited friends to participate in the group interview. Whilst I was not aware which pupils were disadvantaged, this ensured each group interview involved at least one pupil from a working-class background. ‘Disadvantaged’ was equated with eligibility for the pupil premium[54] (Department for Education, 2010). Up to an hour was allocated for each group interview and these were recorded and transcribed.

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[53] Students in key stage 4 (KS4) are usually aged between 14-16 and are either in Year 10 or Year 11. Students in key stage 5 (KS5) are usually aged between 16-18 and are either in Year 12 or Year 13. Whilst the school leaving age was raised from 16 to 17 in 2013 and from 17 to 18 in 2015 (Children & Young People Now, 2008), many young people who want to pursue vocational study move to further education colleges.

Figure 17: Table showing pseudonyms, key stage, and career aspirations

Name	Career aspiration
Amy (KS5)	Journalist
Bridget (KS5)	History teacher
Rebecca (KS5)	Applying psychology to work with children/young people
Sam (KS5)	Social worker
Jade (KS4)	Dermatologist
Bella (KS4)	Police officer
Lexi (KS4)	Fashion model
Reana (KS4)	Businesswoman in fashion/make-up
Brooklyn (KS4)	English teacher
Mary (KS4)	Physiotherapist
Beth (KS4)	Air hostess

The girls had diverse employment aspirations, with seven of the nine requiring – or being associated with - undergraduate study. This diversity contrasts with the analysis of career options provided by one of the former Palitoy workers. Jeanette explained that girls leaving the secondary modern school could choose from four options: working in a hairdressing salon, a factory, a shop, or moving into secretarial work.

The four KS5 students, who had already opted to stay on at sixth form to study A-level qualifications rather than to move to a nearby college to study vocational courses at the age of 16, were more likely to aspire to jobs requiring a degree than the KS4 students, who had not yet moved into sixth form or college. Only three of six KS4 students aspired for roles associated with undergraduate study. The three other occupations were strongly gendered, with the girls hoping to become a fashion model, businesswoman in fashion or make-up, and an air hostess respectively.

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[54] Whilst this is only one dimension of social class, it is commonly understood in schools and ensured representation of students who are classed as ‘disadvantaged’ within schools in England.

As these aspirations were shared in our interviews, my own positionality may have encouraged the girls to share doxic aspirations, defined by Zipin *et al.,* (2015) as "expressions of intent to pursue upwardly mobile life chances by means of a meritocratic principle of hard work" (p.232). It is possible that participants told me - an adult in their school, wearing a staff badge and smart clothes - what they *thought* I – and the other members of their focus group – wanted to hear. However, many also shared their "Plan B" in some cases too. Lexi, who aspired to be a fashion model, explained that hairdressing was a potential back-up plan. Reana, who hoped to become an international businesswoman in fashion or make-up, considered that she could become a make-up artist or nail technician. Both girls reflect habituated aspirations here, the "possibilities-*within-limits* of given social–structural positions" (Zipin *et al.*, 2015, p. 234), whereby they adapt their aspirations to reflect probabilities of success. In contrast to Lexi and Reana's back-up plans, Sam resisted any discussion of these:

> *I really don't want to think of a plan B. Because I just don't want to admit defeat.*

When Sam revealed an alternative aspiration, it was what she would do if money were not a consideration:

> *I'd be a piercer. I think that's cool…But I don't really want to be my own boss, because COVID definitely changed that.*

With no university education required, Sam's recognition that her aspirations would be seen as lower if she were to choose a future trajectory without considering salary reflects doxic pressures on young people's aspirations. The careers they aspire to must be economically rewarding. If they are not, then that is their own fault for making poor choices. Whereas many of the former educators in Chapter 3 described entrepreneurialism as key to young people's aspirations in Coalville when they worked in the area (from the 1980s to the 2010s), Sam reevaluated this negatively in light of the pandemic. The girls' different attitudes towards *"Plan B"* highlight how the map and space of the possibles can be different. It is perfectly conceivable that a young person's map can focus on the most or least likely career opportunities. Over time, the map will likely adjust to the young person's potentially increased understanding of their objective conditions as they "'learn their place'" (Archer, DeWitt, and Wong, 2014, p. 73).

For Bella, who wanted to join the police and whose family was heavily involved in the Territorial Army, devising a back-up plan was difficult:

> *if I couldn't get into the police, there's no chance of getting into the military. And all my other opportunities - jobs I want - would mean more education or more time not having a job, which I don't really want… Because of my mum, really, because she's always struggled money-wise. It's kind of had its effect on me.*

Like Sam, Bella's aspirations were tightly rooted in the economic realities of the objective conditions she experienced in childhood. Whereas Sam had decided that a university education and a career in social work would provide economic stability, Bella dismissed university study completely, instead aiming for a secure salary as soon as possible by joining the police. Bella showed an acute understanding of the potential obstacles she could face in the future, with her insight into military and police recruitment demonstrating the seriousness with which she had considered possible career choices.

Both Lexi and Reana described nervousness about the future, but this concern co-existed with a belief in the importance of positivity. Reana explained that:

> *I'm a bit nervous about the future because like, it's just like, you don't know if you're actually going to be doing that job and you need more back-up*

plans. But then again, I do think you do need a positive mind. And you just need to think if I want it, then you can always try and succeed in it.

Brooklyn, who aspired to be a history teacher but also shared three alternative back-up plans (counselling, running a café, and musical theatre), expressed the same mixture of apprehension and "populist messages about dreams" (Zipin *et al.*, 2015, p. 234):

> *I've always kind of worried about the future a little bit, because I'm worried that things will go wrong, or I don't know stuff will come up in the way. But I don't know. I think that's always what - I'm not stopped myself from what I want to do. That's my dream, and I want to achieve it.*

Both girls revealed "the attitudes and aspirations necessary to become an entrepreneur of oneself" (Rose, 1999, p. 144), perceiving their own mindset as a causal factor in whether their dreams were likely to be fulfilled in the future. Whilst Brooklyn acknowledged that she worried *"things will go wrong…stuff will come up in the way,"* she reassured herself that *"I'm not stopped myself from what I want to do"*. This individualist perspective on future success encourages the girls to take responsibility for possible failures in the future, rather than recognising the social inequalities at play (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Zipin *et al.*, 2015). Their attitudes illuminate Sam's discomfort at considering a possible back-up plan as an alternative to her ambition to become a social worker. She reflects an almost mystical sense that in speaking of these less desirable alternatives she may dash her own chances and thereby *"admit defeat"*.

I asked participants about options available to a young person leaving school in Coalville. Their views of local possibilities contrasted with their aspirations, suggesting they selected the most desirable options from their map of the possibles, but were still aware that alternatives they refused could replace their desired choice in the future if their map of the possibles and space of the possibles were particularly incongruous. Mary sketched local job opportunities for people leaving school:

> *some people want to open new restaurants so there's businesses, working in the local shops, so Morrisons, Tesco's and all sorts, Asda even. And, obviously, Lloyds Bank, the banks, people work in banks and people have done nail shops, dentists, we all have a dentist and football managers or sports clubs managers around Coalville.*

These were tied to the physical landscape of the town's high street and surrounding areas. Their visibility, along with her knowledge of older students' trajectories, made them seem likely. Coalville's visible employment opportunities - as a town with no university – are varied but mainly focus on work in the service sector, in Mary's view. In contrast, 20.7% of working males in Coalville in 2011 were employed in manufacturing. For females, human health and social work activities were the most popular, with 19.3% of working females engaged in this field (Office for National Statistics, 2011b). Both these industries were invisible to Mary, perhaps due to the locations where this work takes place. Whilst Mary's sketch seemed to walk through the local high street and leisure destinations, manufacturing work is generally located in Coalville's large industrial estates on the outskirts of the town. In the same way, human health and social work activities take place generally in medical settings, care homes, and private homes. These occupations were not part of Mary's map of the possibles, even if arguably they were part of her space of the possibles. Mary's emphasis on retail is partly echoed in Coalville's employment figures, with 18.8% of females and 19% of males employed in the wholesale and retail trade or repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles (Office for National Statistics, 2011b). Mary's map of the possibles was limited by visibility, tied to her position in social space as well as her physical habitation of Coalville.

Bridget and Brooklyn aspired to become teachers, a profession which – like nursing – is more accessible to those from working-class backgrounds, as well as being female-dominated (Corbett, 2008). This occupation is also visible to working-class young people attending school. Education is a key industry for women's employment in Coalville, with 14.5% of working females employed within the field, in contrast to 4.3% of working males (Office for National Statistics, 2011b). Moreover, this career offered the potential for social mobility in the local area, with its visibility reinforcing its viability as an imagined future that involved higher education, living locally, and close relationships with family. For Brooklyn, her motivation was based on her positive relationship with a former teacher:

> *I've always just kind of been inspired to teach other people and to give them that kind of passion that I got from the previous teacher who made me want to teach.*

For Bridget, the motivation was her love of history:

> *History is my flame, it always has been my flame. And I just can't imagine myself doing anything else. I could choose - I've always like chosen things, but I've always come back to teaching every single time.*

Brooklyn and Bridget imagined future employment that was visible in their day-to-day lives. Their positive relationships with teachers inspired them to (re)produce the objective conditions that produced their inspiration in the first place. The reproductive tendency reflects how important social networks can be in the formation and realisation of aspirations for young people. Archer, DeWitt, and Wong (2014) found this was more common for young people from privileged backgrounds, navigating a range of future employment opportunities exemplified within their families' professional and privileged social networks. Bridget and Brooklyn arguably engaged with a similar process, although their social networks offered fewer professional options, and therefore teaching was selected as a viable, visible choice.

Particular careers were invisible within working-class communities. Jade's aspirations were highly unusual in Coalville. She explained that:

> *I've been told not many people around this area actually do medicine. I think I don't really know what the most popular career choice [is] here but I've been told that not many people do medicine.*

Place mediates the social here. Whereas other areas may offer secondary school students well-worn paths to future professional careers, Jade had been warned that this future pathway would be unprecedented as a young person in Coalville. Whereas teaching was visible as the girls saw teachers every day, developing insight into their practices, doctors were far less visible for Jade. In selecting medicine as an aspiration from her map of the possibles, Jade had already recognised the differences between her imagined future trajectory and the trajectories of others. Place-based differences in employment show that 21.5% of working adults in Ashby-de-la-Zouch work in professional occupations, in contrast to just 11.4% in Coalville (Office for National Statistics, 2011a, 2011b). Arguably, Jade's map of the possibles had to accommodate her high aspirations as well as her understanding that, for young people in Coalville, this route is less common than for young people elsewhere. Jade already understood that her imagined trajectory would make her an outlier and that she was going to have to navigate uncharted territory for herself, her family, her school, and her town to fulfil her dreams.

7.3 The formation of girls' aspirations

Whilst family and school are major influences on the aspirations of working-class young people (Archer, DeWitt, and Wong, 2014), place and new media were also important to participants. In this part of Chapter 7, I explore how family expanded or narrowed girls' maps of the possibles, before considering how schools did the same. Shifting focus, I then consider how television and social media figured in the girls' maps. Finally, I analyse how all these influences are mediated by – and grounded in – place.

7.3.1 Family influences

None of the girls reported that their parents had attended university, reflecting wider demographic trends in that only 16.2% of people in Coalville held level 4 qualifications or above in the 2011 census (Office for National Statistics, 2011b). Participants recognised this experience gap in the way their parents supported them with exploring university options. As Rebecca explained:

> *my dad thought that university was where you have like five lessons a day as if it was like in Year 11, because mum and dad have never - like no one in my family has been to university before. So it's like really, really unknown to them.*

Amy reflected on this gap too:

> *I feel like there are conversations at home like, trying like to support like looking at open days and stuff. They'll always like, support and stuff, like looking and researching, but like, because they didn't go to uni or anything, there's not much like they can give like, proper, like, detailed help with it, because they didn't have to go through it themselves.*

Despite her parents' support, Amy recognised that this was not necessarily *"detailed"*: the lack of knowledge of the field of higher education itself meant that her parents were doing their best with limited information, gleaned from outside of the field. This was like Sam's mum, a care worker, who advised Sam to go to Derby University as it was so close to home:

> *My mum recommended it to me. I went for the Open Day there and there is a big gym there which is nice. It's close enough to visit because if I go to Brighton train tickets are like 97 pounds for…a return, so obviously not going to see people so it'd be like a completely fresh start. Not sure if I'm ready for that yet.*

These unknown aspects of university life – and lack of knowledge of the processes of getting there in the first place – also played out in the way Rebecca's mum considered the implications of Rebecca's potential geographical move:

> *My mum wants me to stay at home and find a university close to here…I don't know why she doesn't like the thought of me moving out. Like, obviously, that is a parent thing. But I think she just…doesn't want…me to be worrying financially or something. But I, I kind of want to move away. But I'm not fussed either way if I move away or stay at home, it doesn't really bother me too much.*

Both Sam and Rebecca experienced pressure to stay local (Grant, 2017), in contrast to the mobile, idealised university student (Henderson, 2020).

Financial fears reflected one of the aspects of university education that Rebecca's parents did know about: the cost. Rebecca explained that:

> *I always get told 'Oh, yeah, that's like, it's really expensive. Like, you'd have to do this'. But I think it's just because they don't really know. They haven't really explored the options. I don't think my parents have actually, like, actively looked. Or like educated themselves if you know what I mean, so it's like, 'Yeah, I know, she wants to go to university, but let's let her do that'.*

The KS5 students were acutely aware of their parents' lack of cultural and social capital in relation to university study. In deciding whether to continue from KS5 to university, they were conscious that this involved moving to a social space their parents had never occupied. Regardless of geographical distance, it was a journey into the unknown.

Two of the girls described how their fathers suggested they consider their industries as possible careers. Lexi's father was an engineer, and she explained that:

> *He earns quite a lot from it. And he wants me to do the exact same thing... I don't think I have the qualifications to do it…But my dad's also trying to get my brother on to do engineering as well. But he doesn't really want to do it either, he wants to go off and do his own thing… [Dad's] saying you earn a lot of money and you can get a good house and actually keep a wealthy lifestyle from it.*

Despite engineering being traditionally male-dominated (GET, 2022), Lexi's father saw this as viable for her future, based on his own recognition of the advantages of the career for him. Whilst the educators in Chapter 3 described the feminised *"girly girl"* as a key figure within Coalville – and Lexi herself aspired to be a fashion model rather than an engineer – Lexi's father dismissed her gender in considering her future, focusing instead on financial security.

Arguably, her father's pragmatic disposition towards work as a source of economic capital – and his identification of the power of his own social capital – meant he dismissed the traditional gender discourses attributed to parents in Coalville by educators in Chapter 3.

Rebecca's father encouraged her to consider his male-dominated line of work as a potential future career too:

> *he was in the army, but then he came out and he was like a lorry driver…He's asked me if I want to do that, and I'm like 'no, I don't want to drive around all day.'*

Both girls' comments resonate with Janet's recollection of her childhood in the 1970s. As signposted in Chapter 6, she remembered how her own preference outside of school was for practical projects, based on skills she developed with her father. By the time she moved to the upper school at the age of 14, she was no longer allowed to study woodwork or chemistry. Janet accrued cultural resources at home that may have had a positive exchange-value if she had been male, but which, as a woman, went unacknowledged and undeveloped within the education system. In the same way, both Lexi and Reana's fathers suggest a broader space of possibles than they may otherwise have considered due to their gender. This challenges ideas of Coalville as a left-behind, regressive place where expectations of and opportunities for women are stuck in the past (Massey and McDowell, 1994), instead suggesting that a long history of women's paid work alongside traditional male industries resulted in more progressive[55] attitudes to women's career options.

7.3.2 School decisions

Janet's experiences of secondary school in the 1980s demonstrated how curriculum organisation influenced future career opportunities. Mary and Beth described how their GCSE options had been limited at secondary school in the early 2020s:

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[55] Obviously, in a small study, it is impossible to say whether this attitude towards gender is more widespread but the father as a potential agent for work-based gender equality is a potentially generative pattern across the diverse datasets collected together as part of this study.

> *I did want to go into sociology and psychology, but they took the option out - oh, business, business was one that I did want to get into because business can help you in understanding - and the school took our options that could have, they could have modified what I'd wanted to be (Mary).*

Beth agreed:

> *I was one would have took business, psychology and all that…and there's many people that either wanted to do - go into, like psychology or wanted to do criminology, like when they're older - but just being pushed to the side. Like, they can't do what they want to do because the school wasn't letting you do it. So it's kind of like that wall between what you want to do or what school provides you to do and what you have to do. And I feel like that's not good.*

Beth's image of the *"wall"* resonates with Helen's description of the Coalville *"wall"* in Chapter 3 – a geographical and social insularity preventing young people from engaging with work experience and other opportunities beyond the town, in line with other findings relating to the way that working-class young people's subjective geographies of aspiration are often locally-rooted rather than mobile (Grant, 2017). Whereas the educators in Chapter 3 saw Coalville as insular, Beth used the same image to reflect how her own imagined future had been blocked by the school's curriculum decisions (Abrahams, 2018). As with Janet in the 1980s, Beth had family members who had previously studied and found work within fields she was no longer able to study at school:

> *my aunt and my uncle, he like does psychology, and like he does stuff outside of work as well. And then my aunt is like, a psychologist, and her whole time is on solid psychology.*

The reorganisation of the school curriculum – removing psychology, sociology, and business studies from the KS4 options list after Mary and Beth's year group had already made their selection – reflects the wider policy shift represented by the introduction of the English baccalaureate as a performance measure for secondary schools, prioritising attainment in "English, mathematics, the sciences, a modern or ancient foreign language and a humanity such as history or geography" (Department for Education, 2010, p. 44). Whilst the school was most likely responding to this national agenda, this meant Beth was unable to utilise family members' cultural and social capital in navigating her space of the possibles.

Curriculum organisation can limit the aspirations of working-class young people, who are less likely to be enmeshed within vast networks of professionals within their families. The specific nature of their possessed capitals means that any narrowing of the curriculum arguably has a more detrimental impact on those from working-class backgrounds. Even when family members attempted to pass on their accrued capitals to their daughters, as in the example of Janet's father passing on his practical skills as a form of embodied cultural capital or Lexi's father signposting his own social capital within his field of employment, schools were not able to identify nor build on these. The school's capacity to do this was limited in two ways here. In the case of Janet, gendered doxa within the field of education were clearly at work. For Beth, the accountability agenda and the pressures of national policy meant the school narrowed its curriculum offer and discounted a subject at GCSE that was not classed as a facilitating subject at A-level (Camden, 2016).

7.3.3 TV and social media

Television and social media also influence some students' aspirations. I interviewed Jade alongside her friend, Bella, who did not aspire to go to university but wanted to become a police officer. Both spoke enthusiastically about their knowledge of policing and crime from TV programmes:

Me: *How do you see yourself doing that job? What do you think the job would involve?*
Bella: *I see myself going towards the detective like route of it. And just trying to solve cases and do my best*
Jade: *What type of division?*
Bella: *Division? Detective, you've got police and you've got like*
Jade: *White collar? Murders?*

Me: *Oh, wow, are there different types?*
Jade: *White collar, blue collar is like the BAU/FBI*
Me: *I do not know any of this*
Bella: *Behaviour analysis*
[…]
Me: *How do you know so much about all these different things in the police?*
Bella: *TV*
Me: *Okay. Any particular show?*
Jade: *Criminal Minds. White Collar.*
Me: *Is that a UK thing? An American thing?*
Bella: *An American show, it's like, Criminal Minds is the behaviour analysis. White Collar's more...*
Jade: *White Collar unit.*
Bella: *Yeah.*
Me: *Okay. What sort of stuff do they do?*
Jade: *White collar's like robberies.*

The girls utilised these forms of media to gain deeper insight into fields, as well as for entertainment. However, the validity of this information is a potential issue. As well as drawing on fictional sources, the cultural context of US TV programmes is distinct from the UK context the girls live in. They were seemingly unaware that the knowledge that they had acquired about this field was not necessarily mirrored within the field of policing in England. Bella and Jade developed tour knowledge through their shared passion for American TV shows, revealing some admittedly dramatised aspects of the field overseas. Their inability to consider the potential differences between these and the context in England – and outside of fictional television – reflects a lack of map knowledge.

As with Bella, TV was an important influence on Mary’s goal of becoming a physiotherapist:

> *I think I've always liked the idea of being a physiotherapist for athletes because I always watch athletes on TV and obviously, knowing that there is good physiotherapy, checking muscles when they're hurt, it's just an interesting thing. Obviously, I've done P.E. to get close to that goal.*

Similarly, Rebecca described how her dad used television to propose potential future jobs to her:

> *there'll be like a job on the TV that comes on and dad'll be like, 'Oh, you could do that. Don't you fancy that?' And I'm just like, 'No, that's not what I want to do. I've told you what I want to do.'*

There is already a body of work that explores the impact of television on career aspirations within the field of media studies. Signorielli emphasises that:

> "television characterisations, such as the portrayal of occupations, provide subtle and not-so-subtle role models. Viewers, particular children, often use these images to develop scripts or schemas about the different types of jobs that are available" (Signorielli, 2009, p. 334).

Others have argued that repeated exposure is key to this process:

> "media effects might affect the preference for occupations by presenting certain occupations as attractive, or they might function as an initiating stimulus, which is likely to be the case with frequently presented occupations" (Gehrau, Brüggemann and Handrup, 2016, p. 468).

The role of social media in the formation of aspirations is more recent and potentially less understood. Through social media, individuals cultivate a particular persona that may differ from the way that they are perceived by others through non-virtual social relations. As Battin argues, "mobile media usage permits the construction of self in terms of branding" (Battin, 2016, p. 134). This potential is reflected in Reana's aspiration to become an international businesswoman in fashion or make-up:

> *I was thinking about doing business as well. Just have like my own brand, my own companies.*

Reana's word choice is significant here – the focus on her own *"brand"* is key and reflects a discourse related to celebrity brands and social media influencers (Kennedy, Baxter, and Kulczynski, 2021). Reana elaborated, explaining that she would:

Probably [be] like selling my own clothing and like make-up.

Although doxa despairs of young people wanting to become footballers or pop stars (Killelea, 2014; Busby, 2017) due to the “myth…that working class teenagers are motivated by dreams of glamour, wealth and celebrity” (Brown, 2011, p. 20), a new generation may be influenced by the girlboss feminism (Arshad, 2022) of celebrity brand endorsements and businesses[56]. The MLM schemes Mabel referred to in Chapter 6 may well have figured in Reana’s space of the possibles. The “imaginary promises” (Lamoreaux, 2013, p. 187) of wealth and success associated with these forms of precarious work are inextricably bound to the aforementioned “boss babe” and “momtrepreneur” discourses (Wood, 2019) of which celebrities like Kylie Jenner are arguably the most successful emblems. Local women engaging in these forms of labour may well have influenced Reana – she or other females she knew may have purchased products from them or engaged in these schemes themselves, creating a tangible connection to a wider trend that alluringly but elusively promised success, status, and wealth to all.

7.3.4 The absence of careers advice

Bella’s insistence throughout the interview that university-study was not associated with a career in the police demonstrated her lack of map knowledge:

there's a place in Coventry that - a police academy, so I'd want to go there and then I'll come back and try and sign up for the police here. What I'll do is sign up for the police here because sometimes the police pay for your police academy... it's not a university, it's an actual place. You go there - I think it's for six months…you have to live in like rooms and they…physically train you and teach you about the law.

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[56] From the controversial claim that reality TV star, Kylie Jenner, became a self-made billionaire at the age of 21, partly due to her cosmetics brand (Forbes, 2019) to the proliferation of UK-based reality TV stars who amass vast wealth through endorsements and their own businesses (The Tab, 2022), the possible inspirations for Reana’s aspiration are clear.

It was likely that she was describing Ryton, a training centre where new police constables from across the Midlands used to go on a residential basis for a few months before beginning probation. She had no knowledge of the new police constable degree apprenticeship (PCDA), the range of universities offering professional policing degrees, or direct entry schemes for graduates introduced in recent years (UCAS, 2019; Leicestershire Police, 2022). Bella's tour knowledge mapped one out-of-date route into the police. She would have been able to flexibly accommodate challenges along the way with map knowledge. For example, if she were to explore entry requirements for a professional policing degree at a university, she could focus on meeting these at KS5 so that this could become Plan B to a PCDA as Plan A. This would then give her a second opportunity to apply to the police at the end of the degree, providing another opportunity to fulfil her aspiration.

Bella's detailed knowledge was clearly accrued outside of school, perhaps through her family's social network. However, it was not augmented by high-quality, up-to-date careers advice. Greenbank (2009) suggests that high-quality careers advice compensates for the issues working-class students face when "their family and friends have little or no knowledge of the graduate labour market" (p.166). However, changes to the funding and organisation of careers education have reduced the availability of careers advice for young people in England (SecEd, 2017) and widened the range of provision available across schools (Andrews, 2021).

Whilst most students recognised the importance of school in securing future employment opportunities, school had not provided them with any of the tools required to exchange the objectified cultural capital of their qualifications into higher positions within fields of employment. Whilst the connection between education and employment appears strong at first, the former does not necessarily adequately prepare students for the latter (Ofsted, 2016), despite this being used as a justification for the importance of schooling. Whilst school accountability measures mainly focus on academic achievement in English baccalaureate subjects at GCSE, these qualifications do not usually include career-related material. As schools are not measured on the career progression of their alumni, they are unlikely to attempt to track this and would likely find it challenging to collect such data. On a wider level, the nature of work is changing, with increased precarity and under-employment key aspects of employment in the 21st century (Galfalvi, Hooley, and Neary, 2020; Walsh and Gleeson, 2022).

With schools not necessarily supporting all students in their map-making, bridge-building, and path-finding strategies, participants used other sources of information.

7.3.5 Place

Having signposted how Jade's account foregrounded the relationship between place and possibility in the first section of this chapter, I will now analyse the complex ways that place mediated her aspirations. When I first asked Jade about her career aspirations, I was struck by her confident and specific response: *"I want to go on to university and go into dermatology."* She reflected an understanding of the field of science in her discussion of the reasons behind this:

> *I've always liked skincare and always wanted to do something with medicine. I was gonna do like, bio - biochemistry or something, micro - I keep forgetting what it's called when you work with bacteria and stuff, then all the COVID happened and it's just a bit like too much.*

However, her aspiration to go into medicine was also associated with uncertainty and fear:

> *So I want to go to university, but then it's a bit, a bit nerve-wracking being the first one to actually go. I don't know what I'll actually do when I get to university. I've looked at courses, but my, my job might, what I want to do might change when - once I get there. So I'll have to find something in the boundaries I've done in A-level.*

As previously signposted, Jade's high aspirations were accompanied by uncertainty because she understood this upwardly mobile trajectory was statistically unlikely for someone in Coalville. Jade dared to dream, but she was acutely aware her ambitions might never be realised. Her complex account reflected the structural barriers between her current position and her possible future, despite her seemingly high aspirations.

There were other ways in which this complexity manifested in relation to place. Jade's imagined future self was strikingly immobile. Although she was only in KS4 and therefore too young to have any experience of driving a car, she reflected on where she was likely to study in terms of this:

> *I think close by … I've looked at Leicester but that was really at De Montfort University, I've looked at. Yeah, I don't really see myself driving - I don't trust myself driving.*

Jade also drew on her knowledge of the local job landscape in imagining her life five years in the future. Whilst she saw herself being at university, she envisaged balancing this with *"a part-time job as well…probably working at Morrisons."* Coalville's largest local supermarket has been a longstanding employer of local teenagers: I worked there whilst studying A-levels in Coalville. Despite her clear desire to go to university, Jade did not imagine her future self as the idealised mobile student (Henderson, 2020). Whilst her aspirations necessitated her understanding herself as an outlier in aspiring to go into medicine, Jade simultaneously imagined herself occupying social space in a way that was familiar and visible locally.

As with the other students, Jade's knowledge of the field and of possible future trajectories was not necessarily developed through school. She explained that:

> *I think some of my teachers inspired me to take the path of science…I don't think I've actually had a conversation with them [about future options], it's just the way that they teach the subject that inspired me to take science.*

Although Jade's passion for the academic subject was key to her motivations, it was clear that she had received little support from teachers in terms of identifying what her passion for science could to lead to for future study and employment, in line with findings from other studies (Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014). Instead, Jade drew heavily on forms of media for this, specifically emphasising that *"it was mainly TV shows and YouTube videos"* that influenced her. She explained that she wanted to become a dermatologist:

> *mainly because of the stuff I watch on YouTube, which is a bit weird. I like watching educational videos - sometimes - but then also like watching like skincare videos and makeup videos as well.*

In this research, references to television and other forms of audiovisual media, such as YouTube, could be seen as expanding opportunities in Coalville. However, this would be naïve. Whilst the aspirations of these young women in 2021 are far more diverse and – from some perspectives – ambitious than those of other women in the study, social agents do not fulfil ambitions merely by aspiring to them - despite what participants told me about the importance of a positive mindset. Jade's example shows how social mobility and place-based mobility work in parallel, with the former requiring the latter for working-class girls in Coalville, exemplified by Chloe and Mabel's accounts in Chapter 6.

Jade's account also highlights how place pervades the formation of girls' aspirations, working through families and schools – which are themselves *placed* in habitats as well as in social space. Place also influences aspirations through the visibility of the trajectories of others, which are communicated through social networks but can also manifest within the local landscape, as in Mary and Beth's analysis of jobs available on the local high street. Whilst the increasing influence of television and social media is clear, the enduring significance of structural and place-based barriers demonstrated in Jade's account suggests their impact will be minimal. Although television and social media can influence a social agent's map of the possibles, they still face the objective reality of their space of the possibles and navigate this in place as well as social space.

7.4 Map-making, path-finding, and bridge-building – the role of school

In this part of the chapter, I broaden my focus from the girls at school in 2021, considering their aspirations alongside the aspirations and subsequent trajectories of previous generations of women in this study. Whilst I have already briefly mentioned the role of school in shaping aspirations in terms of Mary and Beth’s frustrations about certain KS4 options no longer being offered at a secondary school in Coalville in the early 2020s and Janet’s frustrations at the upper school in Coalville in the 1980s, the processes by which school contributes to the (re)production of girls’ aspirations are far more complex than this example shows.

One of the key ways in which education can be seen as tied to future employment is through the “correspondence principle” (Bowles and Gintis, 2011, p. x), whereby schools are viewed as being organised like workplaces to smooth the transition from the former to the latter. Helen, the former careers educator who worked in and grew up in Coalville attended the upper school in the 1980s and described how the strict banding by ability demarcated particular employment options:

> *’A band’ does stay on, ‘B banders’ all got signed up to the Technical College. Or, you know…girls: hairdressing, or administration if you're a bit clever, and you know, it was like the factories were there to mop up…it was kind of like these were your predestined paths. But you know…there was a bit of a comfort to that as well. And, you know, I kind of moved from like your ‘A band’ into a ‘G band’ profession…because, you know, my education didn't kind of pan out.*

Like Janet and Helen, Evelyn also went to secondary school in Coalville in the 1980s. She remembered the spatial organisation of the school, which separated[57] those seen as academic from those who were not:

> *When [the sixth formers] got free times, they'd go into their little house…they'd all congregate there…whereas we probably congregate, you know, in certain areas of the school.*

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[57] Research signposts the detrimental effect of setting on many working-class young people (Goudeau and Croizet, 2017; Reay, 2017; Archer *et al.*, 2018) and highlights that claims of potential benefits for other groups of pupils are not easily evidenced (Kutnick *et al.*, 2005).

Education’s sieving and sorting processes were physically mirrored in the organisation of the school buildings. Whilst allocating a particular building to a particular group of students has obvious practical benefits, it is interesting to consider how this social and spatial organisation (re)produces particular aspirations within social groups. Evelyn did not stay on for sixth form, instead leaving school at the earliest opportunity. On reflection as an adult, Evelyn told me that she thought that a job as a nutritionist or dietician would have suited her:

if I could reverse back…and I’d thought of that years ago when I was at school, the teachers would probably say ‘well, you need to do this subject, that subject, to follow that path…’ whereas we didn’t get any guidance like that really then, or any ideas different to probably ‘you either go in an office or in a factory.’

Evelyn’s reimagining of a different possible past features teachers engaging in path-finding with her: using their knowledge of her interests and proficiencies in conjunction with a wider knowledge of various relevant fields to plot a possible trajectory. However, Evelyn’s recollection of the past was quite different. She recalled how:

If you wanted to work, you worked. If you didn’t want to work then it was just like, well, left to it.

Whilst Evelyn recognised a lack of path-finding in her educational experiences *“then”*, the girls at secondary school in Coalville in 2021 did not see things as having changed much in the subsequent decades. Rebecca explained that, in terms of careers advice:

we're getting a little bit more help, because we are [KS5] like, just to, but not - I don't think it's enough. I think it's like you need somebody to, obviously they can't sit down every single one of you, but even if you just had like a little group, and then you explore different paths, like sort of more in-depth.

Rebecca’s criticism echoed the findings of an Ofsted study of girls’ aspirations, which found many school-based careers activities were “not personalised to job choices that were relevant” (Ofsted, 2011, p. 8) to individual students.
Even when schools attempted to introduce students to different careers, the format used meant these events were not necessarily popular. Students described an event at one of the Coalville high schools, which involved adults from outside of school being invited in to discuss their jobs. Bridget reflected that:

> *I didn't want to ask any questions because I was always too nervous to ask. Like when you're in Year 9 you're not going to ask a grown adult, like what they do for a living and like how much they get paid. No one was…comfortable asking those types of questions. And even then…they were only like, the typical careers like teaching, working for the police, go into the army, like there weren't any - like if someone wanted to do veterinary or whatever then there wasn't anything like that for them.*

Rebecca also identified ways in which this careers day could have been improved, explaining that:

> *it was just like a day of like, just different people coming from like all types of job, but they weren't bringing, they sort of just show you what they do, not really like, if you want to do this job, this is what it entails. It's sort of like, 'this is my job'.*

Rebecca identified that whilst the activity provided superficial exposure to different roles, it did not necessarily support the students in the path-finding activities that Evelyn also lacked in her experiences of secondary school.

Mary was also critical of the careers advice provided so far:

> *because obviously, a lot of people are still confused, they weren't really giving you much to help you with that confusion. Because that confusion can lead to anxiety - not knowing what you want to do, it can lead to…[feeling] helpless, you're doing all this work at school to not actually know what you want*

to do afterwards. As much as it's helpful to show us careers, helping students find what they actually want to do - that interest - is a lot more important because otherwise they're just showing us careers and people are just going to be more confused than actually realising what they want to do.

Like Rebecca, Mary used the verb *"show"* to describe the careers activities she had experienced so far. Both Rebecca and Mary seemed frustrated that, instead of supporting them with map-making relating to their own possible futures, the careers activities were more superficial. Metaphorically, the activity was like being shown a series of postcards from various holiday destinations with no information on how to reach them, prices, or even insight into the advantages and disadvantages of visiting them in the first place. Whilst path-finding was key to what the girls wanted from careers education, they also wanted to be involved in the map-making process itself. Rather than superficial information about various jobs, they wanted to understand how these potential jobs related to their own interests, skills, and identities. Engagement in this map-making process would perhaps have equipped them with tools to make their own decisions and *"find what they actually want to do"*.

The map-making process shares similarities with the evaluation phase of Hooley's (2022) radical reworking of Ali and Graham's counselling approach to career guidance. Both focus "on building [people's] critical consciousness…to better understand the systems that they are interacting with" (Hooley, 2022, p. 671). Path-finding can also be compared to Hooley's (2022) action planning phase, which is characterised by the development of a more "expansive vision of what the good life could and should be" (Hooley, 2022, p. 671), as well as a proactive identification of - and collaboration with - potential social contacts who have experienced similar structural disadvantages with a view to transforming the situation. However, the school-based focus of my model means that I have also theorised the importance of bridge-building for supporting working-class young people's navigation of the space of the possibles. This process is a shared endeavour, whereby the young person is supported to accrue relevant capitals that will be valuable for their aspired journey through social space. Family, friends, and school can support both with the accrual of these capitals, but also with the identification of what may be valuable in the future.

The importance – and difficulty - of bridge-building was clear for the girls I interviewed and would have counterbalanced their trepidation about whether they would fulfil their aspirations. Lexi explained:

> *I'm a bit worried about it, because it's just - you don't know where to start when you've finished college and it's just a bit worrying. Just don't know where to go or what you're gonna have to do.*

As an aspiring fashion model who was going to study business studies at a local college, Lexi had a particularly unclear path - she only chose to study business studies because there was no college course in modelling.

Her lack of insight into potential routes into the world of fashion reflected her lack of relevant social and cultural capital[58] in the field. Whilst Lexi did not know anyone in fashion, the trajectories of other UK models reveal a series of paths[59] that can potentially lead to a modelling career. A key aspect of the typical fashion model biography relates to being scouted at random. The mythic qualities of these stories of discovery do not provide a straightforward map but are united in that they involve social agents physically occupying habitats more privileged than Coalville[60]. These chance discoveries arguably tie to the role of the fashion model as "the personification of the consumer's dream" (Venkatesh

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[58] Access to privileged positions within the field is also associated with embodied capitals that are reflected in the body of the social agent: weight, style, "bodily demeanour and carriage" (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006, p. 746). Alongside this, objectified cultural capital in the form of designer clothes and institutionalised cultural capital in the form of "an academic title from an institution highly valued in the field" (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006, p. 746) are also crucial.

[59] For example, whilst model turned fashion designer Alexa Chung was scouted by a modelling agency as a teenager, she had still gained offers from "King's College London to read English and by Chelsea College of Art and Design to do an art foundation course" (British Vogue, 2023b).

[60] For example in the cases of Kate Moss (Grazia, 2015), who was discovered in an airport on her way back from a luxury holiday to the Bahamas, Agyness Deyn (Hello Magazine, 2023), who had moved to London from Lancashire and was spotted whilst shopping with her best friend and fashion designer Henry Holland (British Vogue, 2023a), and Suki Waterhouse (IMDb, 2023) who was scouted in London whilst shopping in a high-street fashion store (Stylectory, 2021).

et al., 2010, p. 466), but also demonstrate how they are structured by wider social inequalities governing access to privileged places and spaces.

Lexi's uncertainty echoed Mary's *"anxiety"*. Whilst Lexi's aspirations were not academic, Jade's were, yet she too had not been supported with bridge-building. Despite having carefully mapped the field of science in her own decision-making and having identified a career in dermatology as her future ambition, Jade's teachers had not been involved in any of this work. Outside of school, as a prospective first-generation student, Jade's family had attempted to engage in some bridge-building of their own by familiarising themselves with the built environment of local universities whilst shopping in a nearby city:

> *we went shopping in Leicester, you see quite a bit of the university blocks, like the law bit and I think it was the health and social bit.*

Rebecca had also been involved in an activity that could be described as bridge-building, although its lack of focus on a specific pathway other than broadly encouraging university study could be viewed as a limiting factor. She explained how:

> *because of the area that I live, there was this like pathway scheme that aimed for people who live like, not in a rundown area or not in like a really like, high-end area, but I did a week at [a fairly local] university. Obviously, it wasn't like a full-on university-like experience, but you got to go into the uni, see lecture theatres, like you sat in lectures. I think one was about marketing. I met the English teacher. And - but we did get a talk about like financial like options…you also got an opportunity to talk to previous, or like current students about their university life and what university life is like.*

In comparison to Rebecca's identification of the potential shortcomings of the careers day she had also experienced, the opportunity to visit the university space and meet people who occupy it was positive. Despite this experience, Rebecca's first words to me in the interview were:

> *I think I want to go to university, I'm still not like 100% sold on that. But I think I want to.*

Rebecca's slight reticence was potentially tied to her observation that school-approved trajectories were not necessarily tailored to individuals. She explained that:

> *university's always like the sole like option we're told to take. Like obviously, apprenticeships are now becoming more popular, but it's always felt like 'you need to go to uni, you need to do this, you need to do that. You need to do well in this subject, so you can go to uni'… And I feel like most people in the year like, maybe that wouldn't suit them. But they haven't really been told to explore other options. So they sort of just go to university, because that's the only option that they've been told about.*

Rebecca identified the "education gospel…[which aims to] persuade individuals to 'stay in school' and garner more human capital" (Hooley, 2021, p. 50). Whilst she had physically visited a university through the pathway scheme and clearly enjoyed the subjects she studied at sixth form, she was aware of the underlying game that the school played in encouraging students to go to university and the way this could potentially be damaging for some. She recognised how she had been sieved in joining sixth form as opposed to moving to college to study a vocational course. She reflected on how:

> *the people who, well, I used to speak to like on a daily basis, I don't really speak to anymore. I really don't know what they've gone on to do like what courses I mean, I think some have gone on to do like hair at college.*

Whilst Rebecca's reticence could be tied to her social class and linked to the vast emotion work involved in being working-class at university (Reay, 2001; Mallman, 2017b), it could also be rooted in her recognition of the arbitrariness of the school's logics of practice. Her suspicion that the advice given to students was not necessarily in their best interests suggests she understood some of the ways in which the field of education (re)produces itself, navigating the implications of these deeper insights as well as her own space of the possibles.

She was not yet *"sold"* despite having been *"told"* that university was the only option worth taking.

While many of the students I spoke to did not feel that their careers advice or guidance had been in any way personalised, particular forms of aspiration were still promoted in a generalised way. Bridge-building did go on in terms of encouraging students to go to university, but these bridges were not necessarily located on specific paths and the students themselves were uncertain about their relation to the wider maps they were constructing.

7.5 Bringing the map home – the importance of place

Having sketched the importance of map-making, path-finding, and bridge-building to the development of aspirations, it is important to consider the place-based identities of my participants. People and places are interconnected in that places are not only the physical sites where people rest, work, and play but also feature many of the same patterns of inequality that pervade other social fields. For this reason, places, people, and places can share characteristics[61]. Taylor's (2012) focus on embodied geographies, with girls navigating different formations of class and gender on a local level, mirrors the relationship between people and place in Coalville. All the girls were aware of the stigma attached to Coalville as a place. Bridget explained that:

> *no one ever speaks positively about Coalville ever. I've never heard one person that says something good...If you think Coalville, you think negative straight away, there's nothing positive that you think about…And that sounds really bad. But it's honestly true.*

Brooklyn described Coalville as a mixed place, but with a negative impression overall:

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[61] Taylor (2012), in her study of gender in working-class Byker and middle-class Jesmond, argues that:

> "Beautiful places were seen to contain, reflect and perpetuate the presence of 'beautiful people'" (p.143).

> *it's kind of small when you really think about it technically. And you know, there's a lot of crime. There's a lot of horrible stuff that goes on. And like, let's say, you know, in loads of time you want to bring up kids and I don't think a lot of people would want to bring up kids in Coalville. That's just my opinion though... It can be lovely. There's not a lot, you know, you've got loads of walks around that you can go on, the houses are really pretty…but then there's like the harsher bits of it.*

Sam echoed the idea of contrasting versions of Coalville coexisting:

> *There's like the normal kind of happy side like… And then there's the deeper sides where there's quite a bit of crime. There are quite a few people involved in drugs and violence…in this area, but you get there through association. I don't think that's the town itself.*

Sam felt that those who were socially unconnected to the *"deeper sides"* could have a different perspective on the town:

> *if you're not associated with anyone, you can definitely see through like rose-tinted glasses.*

Of all the participants, Jade and Bella were the least negative about Coalville, reflecting that *"there's not much here to do"* and highlighting a few areas that they felt had particularly bad reputations, but explaining that staying close to home in the future felt right. Jade's imagined geographical immobility - tied to her fears about driving a car - was reinforced in how she described the possibility of living further away:

> *I think I might move to Leicester. I don't know. I always wanted to move to a different country. But then it's the learning the language and then finding, like, visas like that. And getting like all your paperwork done, so I might just move like Leicester or another city. But somewhere close.*

Jade was acutely aware of some of the practical obstacles that faced those who move abroad. Her previous desire *"to move to a different country"* subsided in the face of an increased understanding of the logistical challenges involved, demonstrating how social agents tend "to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 110). Aware of the normative university student and the valorisation of "mobile (dis)positions" (Taylor, 2012, p. 9), Jade offered a smaller-scale vision of mobility.

In contrast to Jade's aspiration to stay closer to home, many of the girls imagined future lives in far-off places. Other cities in the UK, such as Brighton, were a popular choice. For some, living abroad appealed. Reana's entrepreneurial aspirations were intimately linked to her desire to live in California. Having moved to the UK from another European country, she described how:

I don't really like it round here. Not much shops and there's hardly any things to do. So I'm definitely not staying here.

However, her vision of her future residence was not particularly detailed. She did not know why she saw California as her future home but explained that *"I just, I just like it. It's just a really nice place to be."* Despite having never visited America before, she explained *"the views are really nice as well."* Whilst Reana did not mention celebrity occupants of California, this perhaps influenced her choice, with celebrities like Kylie Jenner living there and famous conurbations like Los Angeles and Hollywood looming large within the cultural imaginary.

Brooklyn also imagined life abroad, although she described this as a *"dream"*:

I'm obsessed with France, and I literally want to live there so badly. I love the way that they talk, how it sounds, music, food, everything about it. So I'd love to be teaching there in an English school and teaching English to them. That would just be like literally amazing. It makes me feel so happy when I talk about it. But I can definitely see myself like, I don't know, just a really nice English teacher living in France that just - a dream city… I'd love to be in Paris, the Eiffel

Tower in one of those little apartment buildings at the top… I have been once but I didn't get to actually go around Paris, I went to Disneyland.

The previous trip that Brooklyn referred to was taken with her family and reflects differences between working-class and middle-class holidays, with the former likely to focus on relaxation and entertainment, and the latter to involve "pursuing authenticity and exclusivity" (Prieto-Arranz and Casey, 2014, p. 75) in the wake of increasing competition for cultural capital amidst a wider struggle "between different classes for greater value to be given to their cultural meanings and experiences" (p.74). Whilst this imagined life in France was made more visible by having visited the country, it was still socially distant from Brooklyn's cultural background.

Lexi's imagined future residence was also tied to her family's practices outside of school. She aspired to live in London as a fashion model but acknowledged that international travel would be key to her work and envisaged herself moving around. She foresaw:

> *London, and then attending one of the London fashion shows…I've never really been to one but I have been to London. I like the houses around there a lot. I don't think I'm staying there for a long time. We'll probably move around to like other countries.*

Her experience of visiting London provided a sense of what this future could look like in terms of the type of house she could imagine living in. Her aspiration reflected how the occupation of relatively privileged places was key to being discovered by modelling agencies.

Bridget, too, had previously dreamed of moving to London but had changed her mind. She explained:

> *something put me off and I think it's because when you go to London just on like a day trip, it's more exciting than being there every day, having to go through like rush hour every day. But I don't know - I think I'll end up in a city*

somewhere, maybe countryside… it's about feeling comfortable, I think, and obviously wanting to be near family.

Like for Jade, the imagined practicalities of living elsewhere were part of what *"put…off"* Bridget. She wondered vaguely as to whether she would live in an urban or rural area, before concluding that the key factor was *"feeling comfortable"* and being *"near family."*

Bridget also described how connected she felt to the local area and particularly the school:

> *it's just the atmosphere, especially with the school…I love all the people, genuinely nice place…others probably wouldn't agree. But when you've been like, in a certain place for so long, you don't really want to leave.*

For Bridget, the longevity of her family connection to the local area served as a pull-factor. She explained her longstanding connections to local heritage:

> *I mean, personally, my granddad worked in the mines everywhere. So in that sense, he - he has that connection. And his great-something died in [the local] pit disaster.*

Others recognised that leaving Coalville was imperative for moving into higher education. Sam observed that:

> *I think a lot of people see Coalville as like a dead end, in terms of education. There haven't really been that many options to be fair. And it's like, if you want to go to higher education, you have to move outside of Coalville.*

The lack of a traditional higher education institution in Coalville was one of the reasons that the townspeople were not associated with intelligence or academic traits. Amy elaborated further on how people and place figured in the way that her friend, who lived in Coalville but went to school in Ashby, reflected on his experiences:

> *I know someone that goes to Ashby, who lives around here but travels to Ashby school. And he says there's a lot of people who negatively talk about the people from Coalville and he's found that he's like, had people talk to him about where he's from… just, you know, people from Coalville are dumb and yeah, like, lack of intelligence and stuff like that.*

Similar to the accounts of Helen, Holly, and Rachael in Chapter 3, Amy's comments reflect the stigmatisation of Coalville and its people by those who live or are educated in Ashby. The hierarchical relationship between the two places is (re)produced through these practices and their persistence across my dataset reflects the significance of these to how many people in Coalville see themselves and their space of the possibles. As Taylor (2012) argues, place-based narratives of regeneration contrast with place-based narratives of degeneration, positioning women in or outside of particular places based on various factors, such as their age and social class.

Whilst many of the girls imagined a future in places outside of Coalville, Amy's aspirations were most closely tied to the mobile, flexible, futuristic ideal (Taylor, 2012). After studying for an English degree, she envisaged:

> *living in a city…or like travelling, like travel journalism…would be really interesting, especially like early 20s, kind of, that age when you're not like tied to anything.*

Amy was also influenced by her part-time job in a local restaurant, where she worked alongside a local Cambridge graduate who also advised her on university study. As an aspirant graduate and professional, Amy clearly recognised the potential of becoming "an accumulative, mobile [and possibly] middle-class subject" (Taylor, 2012, p. 76), in contrast to the other girls who aspired to go to university, but who were less confident about moving further away.

The continued emphasis on relationships with family, which a geographical move was seen as potentially compromising, was arguably a key aspect of a feminine habitus (Evans, 2010) for some of the participants. For Mary, relatives in London meant that she could imagine attending a university there to become a physiotherapist as they provided an imagined failsafe. She explained that:

> *a busy university in London is definitely somewhere I would go because I have family there so I'd be able to stay there if I didn't feel comfortable staying at the university.*

Although Sam aspired to study and live in Brighton, her relationship with her sister was incredibly important:

> *I've got a little sister, so I think that gives me a sense of, I'm not sure if the word would be maternal, but…like no matter how far, even if I lived like down by the coast, I'd still visit a lot - my little sister - she'll be, she'll be 15 at that point. So I'll visit a lot, just to see her…*

Like Bridget, Rebecca, Bella, Jade, and Mary, proximity to family – and continued investment in these relationships – was key to how these girls considered where they might live in the future. Whilst there were not direct connections between the 21st-century girls and the Palitoy employees whose life histories were explored in Chapters 4 and 5, the emphasis on strong family ties echoed across the years. Although doxa links Coalville to educational underachievement and deficiency, this study suggests a deep commitment towards relatives has been reproduced across the generations. In the next section, I will explore how this emphasis on family life figured in the girls' attitudes towards starting their own families one day.

7.6 Beyond employment aspirations – imagining motherhood

All the participants expressed an interest in having children, but this was predicated on anticipated equality with their future partners, echoing the experiences of some of the factory workers such as Valerie and Nicola, who emphasised how their husbands cooked, cleaned, and took on childcare responsibilities to facilitate their engagement with paid work. Whilst the have-it-all discourse is usually associated with middle-class forms of feminist careerism (Aveling, 2002), it is possible that the girls in this study aspired towards more equal domestic responsibilities due to these pragmatic forms of motherhood existing within their working-class community. As Valerie explained, she and her husband *"did it between us to be quite fair"* in their approach to parenting and housework. In the 2021 focus group interviews, KS5 student Amy explained that:

> *I will probably have children because it's not as expected of the female to be fully like, like the full carer of the child. Now it's more kind of expected for the man to like, have an involvement in that. If it was like me having to fully be like, like a sacrificing mother and like give up a career for it I wouldn't. I wouldn't want to. I'm not selfless enough. But because it is more equally split between like the man, woman, or whoever it is, it's more kind of easier to achieve.*

Amy contrasted what she perceived to be a past formation of motherhood, represented by *"a sacrificing mother"*, with a more *"equally split"* formation of parenting that represented what she saw as common *"now"*.

These future relationships were described in heterosexual terms (Evans, 2010). Jade provided more detail about what this equal distribution of domestic labour might look like. She imagined how:

> *I'd probably make my husband or my significant other cook… I'll do the laundry, they can do the rest. I might hoover up a little bit, but they can do the rest.*

Bella described how a romantic relationship could support her in day-to-day life, considering how:

> *I tend to be quite quiet. So I'd like someone that I can get to do all the talkative things.*

The girls were almost unanimous in their preference for having children later in life. Bridget explained that:

> *it's the kind of thing that if you want and you, like, dream about, wishing for a long time, and I mean, some people can't see themselves doing anything else apart from having children, but obviously life comes first. So you experience everything, and then you go, 'Well, actually, it's time to settle down' and do that stage of your life.*

Only Rebecca gave a hint of the gendered aspirations that the educators had previously observed relating to young motherhood. She revealed that:

> *You could potentially have them whenever, like, at whatever point in your life, because you can always adopt, like, if you want like an older child, not necessarily a younger one. And because people do want to experience life first and then have children, the age like is getting later and later. I've always like, sort of wanted them quite early. But now I don't know if that's changed or not.*

Rebecca contrasted what other *"people do"* with her own wish to have children *"quite early".* She spoke in more detail about possible formations of motherhood:

> *I don't think I've ever thought of myself as being like a…stay-at-home mum, like, sitting there, looking after the kids all day, cooking a meal, I think it is just having a child, spend time with them for like, the first couple of years of their life, but then going to work. Even if you just worked part-time if your job allowed.*

Whereas other KS5 participants traced imagined future trajectories which saw higher education evolve into career success, in turn allowing for secure, egalitarian experiences of motherhood, Rebecca alluded to a trajectory more typical of the women who worked at the Palitoy factory. Her emphasis on focusing on the child for *"the first couple of years of their life"* reflected the working patterns of the factory-working women in Chapters 4 and 5, who often left their full-time jobs when they became pregnant and then focused on motherhood exclusively until their children were older or until financial necessity required them to seek part-time employment or insecure, seasonal work.

Rebecca's imagined reproduction of this trajectory reflected both her working-class background and her hesitancy about the suitability of higher education. In the same way that she was *"not like 100% sold on"* university study, she did not yet know whether her longstanding desire to have children early and embark on the trajectory outlined here had *"changed or not"* in response to the potential disruption offered by higher education. Rebecca's comments reflected the way in which working-class girls and women are formed and reformed over time. Like the factory working women whose early childhood experiences were analysed in Chapter 4, Rebecca had already developed a vision of herself as a young mother before she had been aware of higher education as a possible trajectory. In aspiring towards the latter, normative assumptions about the idealised university student meant that she would have to adapt the former, embracing a different formation of motherhood to that which she had previously aspired to.

Despite not aspiring towards university study, Lexi also reflected doxic beliefs around young motherhood, contrasting her own imagined trajectory with these as she described why she wanted children in the future:

> *the thought of bringing someone up to be like, probably better than I would be, is a nice feeling but I wouldn't have them at a young age, because I don't want to like waste my life. I want to do it when I'm older. I'll start a little family.*

Lexi's comments reflected a perception of young motherhood as a "*waste"* of a life, similarly to how this was framed in Chapter 3, with Helen describing how teenage pregnancy was *"looked down upon"* in the 2010s. She also recalled how the school's high rates of teenage pregnancy overshadowed their highest ever GCSE results when *"the front page of the local newspaper was teen parents collect GCSE results"*. Whilst negative attitudes towards young motherhood are intimately linked to the decline in teenage pregnancies nationally (Yardley, 2008; The Nuffield Trust, 2019), it is conceivable that the particular stigma associated with teenage motherhood in Coalville also influenced the girls' rejection of this possible future. Despite this, Lexi's detailed consideration of the emotional elements of motherhood reflected the importance of motherhood to her aspirations. Reana expressed similar ideas, explaining that children *"make* *you happy and, like, you want to put them in like a better environment and just like make them happy as well."* Her comments resonated with Helen's belief, articulated in Chapter 3, that children provided *"the motivation they need"* to some young mothers.

Like Reana, Brooklyn saw motherhood as providing a rewarding challenge:

> *I want to bring them up in such a lovely environment where they can, they can study well, and they can get good jobs and they can feel happy and do whatever they want to do. My mum had quite a difficult past life, which is why she tried her best to give me the life that she didn't have…It's kind of cool, because we're passing on stuff from each other to then our further children, and I've just kind of always wanted them I think…I just want them really badly. Obviously, until ages away, I'm not - I wouldn't want to have kids at a young age because I don't know, I just want to live my life first.*

As with Lexi, Brooklyn's enthusiasm for becoming a mother in the future was tempered by her understanding of social norms relating to teenage motherhood. Despite this, good parenting was an important aspiration. Whilst they foresaw themselves balancing parenting with paid work or moving from paid work to motherhood once they had achieved financial security, all of them presented motherhood as a responsibility to raise happy and successful children.

7.7 Conclusions

In tracing imagined future trajectories of teenage girls at school in Coalville in 2021, I have demonstrated the complexities of aspiration for young women in an ex-coalmining town. The visibility of possible future careers was key to the aspirations of most participants, although this took different forms. Whereas those who aspired to become teachers had highly visible role models within the school setting, some careers were only visible to students through media representations from television and video-sharing sites such as YouTube. All the KS5 students – except Rebecca who expressed some reservations - aspired to roles that required or were associated with university study. In contrast, only half of the KS4 students did.

Those students who did not aspire to university education did not lack aspiration *per se*, despite policymakers and key figures in England's education system claiming that working-class young people in deindustrialised areas "can lack the aspiration and drive seen in many migrant communities" (Ofsted, 2018). In fact, some of these students envisaged highly successful, glamorous lifestyles in the future. The fact remains that university education was not part of their map of the possibles, even if it could have increased the statistical likelihood of them entering their desired careers.

The girls' own aspirations were distinct from their mapping of local job opportunities and trajectories. The aspirations of some to achieve relatively improbable, high-status trajectories meant they invoked doxic beliefs relating to personal responsibility. They misrecognised structural barriers and inequalities in the field: any potential future failures were read as evidence of an underlying lack of self-belief or ambition that could thwart them at any time. This dissonance between their space of the possibles and map of the possibles meant that all felt personally responsible for their future success or failure, leading to anxiety and worry if they recognised that their longed-for trajectories were not statistically common nor visible in the field.

Three processes are important for navigating upwardly mobile aspirations, with varying degrees of support coming from family, friends, and school:

- Map-making processes enable students to understand how different careers and fields relate to one another and tie to their interests and strengths.

- Path-finding processes support students in understanding the different routes that could lead to the fulfilment of their aspirations.

- Bridge-building processes enable students to accrue capital relevant to future careers. Whereas all the students were studying for qualifications and therefore on track to accrue institutionalised cultural capital, many lacked the social capital that supports entry into certain careers.

None of the students were able to engage fully with these three processes. Whilst Bella engaged in map-making through family members and friends, her understanding of the field of policing was out-of-date, thus harming the efficacy of her path-finding processes. Whilst Amy mapped potential careers associated with the study of English and internalised the idealised mobile university student and professional as key to her future (Taylor, 2012; Henderson, 2020), her bridge-building processes only facilitated insight into university study, rather than the field of journalism itself. Even her university insights were mainly based on social connections outside of school, with her sister having been the first in her family to go to university a few years previously and a colleague from her part-time work having been a Cambridge graduate. Arguably, more privileged students would have had the "aerial vision [required to] understand the macro geographies of school knowledge and plot their best routes to success on the grids of knowledge/power" (Kenway and Hickey-Moody, 2011, p. 154). Becoming an actress would not be seen as a ridiculous aspiration for a privately educated student whose parents worked in theatre, television, or film (Friedman and Laurison, 2019), whereas, for a working-class student this ambition is often viewed with derision (Killelea, 2014; Busby, 2017).

These findings should not be read as deficits relating to the young people themselves. All the young people in this study were engaged in map-making, path-finding, and bridge-building processes, reflecting the same capacities as more privileged young people. However, the efficacy of these processes was constrained by structural factors, from the positions in social space of their family members to the position of their school within the field of education. Whilst their school in Coalville was clearly keen to build bridges to university study, the justification for this was not necessarily clear, instead reflecting a doxic belief in university education being synonymous with success. Students such as Rebecca were not yet convinced, recognising that a university education was a significant financial commitment and that its necessity to their future success had not yet been demonstrated.

Whilst there were clear contrasts between the aspirations of the young women in 2021 and those of the participants who worked at the Palitoy factory in the mid to late 20th century, there were some commonalities. Path-finding processes were constrained by curriculum organisation at school and by doxa, (re)produced or resisted by teachers within the field, as explored in Chapter 3. The association between working-class femininity and motherhood seemed to have evolved. Whereas educators in Chapter 3 felt that many girls and their families saw their primary roles as being domestic and maternal in the 1980s and 1990s, the participants I spoke to in Coalville in 2021 saw motherhood as desirable within a have-it-all discourse where delaying motherhood facilitated financial security. This reflects economic changes in society relating to the two-income household (Weis, 2004), as well as doxa relating to teenage motherhood, which many of the girls saw as a *"waste"* of a life. However, close links to family were still important for several girls, with some visible careers like teaching offering the opportunity to achieve upward mobility locally. In this way, some rejected school-based doxa that upward mobility could only be achieved by learning to leave. More than this, although they acknowledged the stigmatised identities associated with living and learning in Coalville, girls like Bridget rejected these in asserting their desire to both stay (or at least return) and succeed.

The proliferation of aspirations captured in this part of my study could be seen as reflecting the ambition and positivity of young girls who live in a levelling up (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022) coalmining town in the 21st century. However, the students' anxieties and fears surrounding these ambitions, alongside their frustration with the support their families and school could provide, reflect the complexity of aspiration. Far from being a lever for promoting social mobility, aspiration both shapes and is shaped by the objective realities of social conditions. As part of the habitus, aspiration represents a navigational capacity that inextricably ties individuals to wider societal structures.

Both the map and space of the possibles are inextricably bound to Coalville as a place. Several girls foresaw lives away from Coalville, reproducing and distancing themselves from the deficiency discourse surrounding the town. However, a minority aspired for academic success and professional careers in Coalville itself. In this sense, there were commonalities between Bridget, Rebecca, and Jade, who saw themselves living in or near Coalville in the future, similarly to Chloe in Chapter 6 who wished she could return home but was prevented from doing so by the need to live close to professional work.

Like the Palitoy workers in Chapters 4 and 5, girls at school in Coalville in 2021 were navigating fields, accruing capitals, and undertaking trajectories. They were aspirational, ambitious, and future-focused, misreading the significant structural disadvantages affecting their likelihood of success and viewing any potential future failures as evidence of their own personal deficiencies. Regardless of the chances of success, the girls viewed themselves as having more options than the Palitoy workers described. Whilst the narrowness of the Palitoy workers' ambitions could be written off as hindsight, it is more likely that the massification of Higher Education and the spread of global media have (re)shaped the habitus of working-class girls, contributing to a map of the possibles that is potentially further away from the objective space of the possibles than in previous generations. Evidence to support or refute this view does not yet exist but will be revealed as these girls undertake their own trajectories through social space as the previous generations of women in Coalville did before them. Their chances of success – in the midst of increasingly precarious fields of employment (Walsh and Gleeson, 2022) – remain to be seen.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This chapter mirrors the overarching structure of the thesis. I initially summarise the relationship between schooling and social mobility in Coalville, before moving beyond education to consider how working-class women have navigated other fields, and then summarising the relationship between social and geographical mobility for working-class women in the town. Following this, I outline the contributions of this study to academic knowledge and share the implications of these for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

8.2 How does education contribute to the social mobility of women from different generations in an ex-coalmining town in the Midlands?

In Chapter 1, I introduced my research question: how does education contribute to the social mobility of working-class women from different generations in Coalville? I have provided an answer which challenges straightforward perceptions of education as a direct route to upward mobility. In short, education can contribute to social mobility of women in Coalville. However, the town's schools had the capacity to open up or close down particular trajectories. This capacity was directly tied to each school's own symbolic status in the field of education, which was in turn connected to habitat or place. Policymakers have argued that the barrier to higher educational attainment and, by proxy, upward mobility is "unacceptable complacency" (Gibb, 2016) in schools and local education authorities, which can be addressed by academisation, a knowledge-based curriculum, and better teachers. However, my study has shown the implications of educational policy for social mobility at a granular level. The challenges faced by working-class students and the schools that serve them are rooted in complex webs of inequalities. Whilst these sometimes manifest in school policies that can be judged as ineffective, the overall effectiveness of any approach to improving educational attainment and rates of upward mobility will be limited by them, regardless of efficacy elsewhere.

Whilst my research has highlighted "small steps" (Weale and Adams, 2022) of social mobility for working-class women in Coalville, these must be understood

in relation to wider changes in the education system and in the world of work for women (McCarthy, 2021). The women who made the journey from factory floor to office at Palitoy did so at a time when these administrative roles were expanding and more accessible to those from less privileged backgrounds. The expansion of professional opportunities beyond a privileged elite following the second world war (Major and Machin, 2018) meant upwardly mobile trajectories were more visible across the country, although these were usually associated with educational achievement and grammar school (Moran, 2023).
For some women, marriage was a route to upward mobility. Feminine capitals - inculcated in childhood and censured in school – supported working-class dating rituals, which in turn enabled the formation of working-class respectability through marriage and – for most of the women – motherhood. The women from the first and second generations worked hard to support the practical and emotional needs of their families. The increasing disposable income of some working-class families during this period, as well as their work at the Palitoy factory, meant they were able to exchange economic capital for objectified emotional capital within the field of the family. By surfacing these logics of practice, I have shown that working-class women are not immobile even when they are sieved out of formal education but continue to accrue capitals and navigate fields, with the potential for upward mobility associated with some of these trajectories.

Place mediates opportunity at every turn. The specificities[62] of secondary schooling in Leicestershire replaced the hierarchical relationship between Coalville's secondary modern schools and its grammar school with a hierarchical relationship between the former grammar schools at both Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch. The sorting and sieving of young people on a larger geographical scale (re)produced working-class stigma as a property of Coalville and its people. This was rationalised, accepted, renegotiated, or rejected by various participants, influencing the perceived map of the possibles for young people living and learning in Coalville as recently as 2021.

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[62] Mason's dismantling of the tripartite education system in Leicestershire in the 1960s pre-dated the Labour government's acceleration of comprehensive education from 1976 (Watts, 1977; Jones, 1988).

As well as showing how schools occupy hierarchical positions in the field of education, I demonstrated that the trajectories of Coalville's working-class women - through this field and others - required navigation, even for those women who did not undertake upwardly mobile trajectories. Hard-working dispositions were inculcated within the town's working-class women, enabling them to balance paid work with domestic labour. This graft ethic was evident in the female descendants, enabling them to navigate the field of education and secure institutionalised cultural capital in the face of significant school-based challenges, in turn facilitating their own upward mobility.

8.3 Education is not an engine

Far from serving as an engine for social mobility in Coalville, formal schooling mediated the opportunities available to working-class women. Education closed down imagined future trajectories as well as opening them up. The first two generations of women in the study were sieved out of formal schooling through examinations and steered towards factory work. Even educational policies designed to help students could be detrimental due to the complex web of social relations in which schools operate. In Chapter 6, I showed how Labour's 'gifted and talented' agenda reduced Mabel's chance of achieving upward mobility. School assessment practices damaged Chloe's confidence. As graduates, these complexities would not necessarily have been surfaced through larger-scale, quantitative datasets. Their family histories, alongside the life histories of other women who have lived, learned, and worked in Coalville within the past 80 years, showed that education makes only a partial contribution to upward mobility. It was the field of work or marriage that offered some working-class women opportunities to 'get on' even after they were sieved out of the education system.

Whilst Coalville's schools provided some students with the opportunity to accrue institutionalised cultural capital through formal qualifications, they also prevented some working-class girls from building on pre-existing capitals. Whereas educators in Chapter 3 attributed maternal, feminine ambitions to working-class girls in Coalville, several students from across the generations experienced a narrowing of their own maps of the possibles through school

practices. I have shown that "turbocharging social mobility" (Department for Education, 2022, p. 11) was not a realistic aim for every student at school in Coalville. This narrowing of opportunity was not deliberate, but an example of constrained cultivation (Abrahams, 2018). Situated within the field of education, schools in Coalville navigated a market-based education system that reproduced existing inequalities between the town and Ashby-de-la-Zouch.
My research highlighted the heterogenous nature of teachers' dispositions and practices in a working-class town, demonstrating the potential for agency even when occupying particular positions within the field of education. Far from being "little prophets…of the state" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 20), some teachers, such as Alan, adopted resistant dispositions to the field's doxa and valued working-class communities. Despite this, a lack of understanding of the proficiencies and capitals of working-class learners, families, communities, and places is a feature of the education system in its broadest sense (Thomson, 2002; Thomson and Hall, 2008; Demie and Lewis, 2011; Reay, 2018). The position of the upper school within the field of education – represented locally through its hierarchical relationship with the upper school at Ashby-de-la-Zouch – mediated the practices of individual schools and teachers. The stigma associated with living and learning in Coalville had a clear influence on the educational experiences - and potential for social mobility – of the women in this study.

Educators beyond Coalville also created maps of the possibles for working-class women that did not necessarily match their own. Educators in Ashby-de-la-Zouch allegedly overemphasised teenage pregnancy as the likeliest trajectory for girls living and learning in Coalville, demonstrating how the stories that are told and retold about people and places contribute to the production of maps of possible trajectories and particular formations of gender and class. Even in 2021, the girls I interviewed referenced teenage pregnancy as a possible trajectory, but one which they emphatically rejected.

Whilst I recommend that schools support working-class young people with navigational processes, social mobility cannot be increased simply by overlaying higher status trajectories onto the map of the possibles of a working-class girl, as demonstrated in Mabel's story in Chapter 6. Instead, the terrain that the map describes must be altered: infrastructure must be built to reduce journey times from the farthest flung locations to the most desirable ones and so on. For schools to serve working-class young people's future trajectories through social fields, they need to recognise their pre-existing capitals and dispositions and consider how these can be enhanced and validated before being exchanged within the field of work in the future. In Chapters 6 and 7, the lack of recognition of girls' pre-existing capitals made the school's role more complex than would be expected. Even for Mabel, an academically gifted pupil, the school's practices failed to support the elite trajectory it identified within her map of the possibles. The complexity of school practices was tied to the complex relationship between place, social class, and education, but the lack of acknowledgement of the proficiencies of working-class young people at an institutional level arguably prevented the bridge-building activities that would have supported students in following those higher-status paths that were signposted for them.

8.4 From allocation to navigation

Whilst Bourdieu has been critiqued for deterministic tendencies, the affordances of his work for highlighting the sociological significance of individual trajectories to wider class-based patterns are exploited here (Harker, 1984). Far from arguing that working-class young people *always* get working-class jobs, Bourdieu's theory of practice enables researchers to conceptualise and analyse how individual social agents navigate their respective space of the possibles, with these trajectories being associated with social (im)mobility.

Even when girls experienced educational failure and were sieved out of the school system, they still entered and navigated the field of work, accruing capitals and moving from one position in social space to another. Too often, the navigational capacities of working-class young people are obfuscated as their map of the possibles is dismissed as narrow or unaspirational when read through dominant doxa. This study has highlighted the navigational capacities of working-class women, as well as the capitals that they aspired towards and accrued. The "*versatile*" (Nicola) dispositions adopted to balance insecure paid work with domestic responsibilities supported a high degree of 'fit' between habitus and field, but can also be valued positively in their own right, despite the pragmatic way in which working-class women perceive them (Armstrong, 2010). Long histories of women's work in Coalville can be connected in the present day to the have-it-all discourse pervading the aspirations of young women. Whilst stories of Coalville as left-behind are told and retold, this way of being a working-class woman is perfectly suited to the insecure forms of employment that characterise 21st-century work (Walsh and Gleeson, 2022). These older women balanced parental, domestic, and work-based responsibilities in ways that are arguably enviable to middle-class women doing the same in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Armstrong, 2010). Whilst the former are often read as unambitious through middle-class doxa, my study contributes to a growing body of research that highlights the proficiencies and capitals of working-class individuals, families, and communities by resisting doxic readings (González, Moll and Amanti, 2005; Rose, 2005; Armstrong, 2010; Mallman, 2017a; Jones, 2018).

The women's navigational capacities extended beyond their own trajectories when they passed on valuable capitals and dispositions to their daughters and granddaughters. Ivy's small steps of social mobility subsequently inspired her daughter to pursue employment as an administrator. Whilst this route stood in opposition to formal education for Janet, the reproduction of Ivy's graft ethic and her trajectory arguably contributed to Janet's trajectory as well as to her own daughter Chloe entering an occupation in Class 3 of the NS-SEC (Office for National Statistics, 2016), having achieved undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications at university. Chloe's story made it clear that it was her own dispositions, themselves tied to her family, that supported her in accruing institutionalised cultural capital through university study, whereas her experiences of education in Coalville echoed how the factory-working women were sieved out of school.

The space of the possibles available to each individual shifted in response to the dynamics of wider fields. In a town like Coalville, where deindustrialisation wrought significant economic and social changes in the 1980s, the fields which my research participants were navigating shifted too. As Grenfell (2014) argues, social agents are "engaged in an ongoing process of mutual orientation" (p. 178) within these fields, responding to changes in a way that is often unconscious and relies on habitus, the roots of which, in turn, lay in the past. I have highlighted instances of this here, from Chloe's sadness at factory jobs not being part of her own space of the possibles in the early 2000s to the consequences of diploma inflation affecting the rewards associated with vocational and academic qualifications for Janet.

Changing field-dynamics have also potentially affected the degree of fit between the map of the possibles and the space of the possibles. For the majority of the twentieth century, the women's maps of the possibles were often highly accurate and reflective of the space of the possibles. By the time I interviewed girls in Coalville in 2021, there was increasing disconnection between the space and the map. The proliferation of new forms of media and neoliberal ideas of the significance of personal responsibility to future success conspired to produce girls with far more diverse maps than those of the previous generations of women. The degree to which this diversity will be borne out in the eventual trajectories that these girls undertake remains to be seen.

In the field of education, the same relationship between individual trajectory and wider field dynamics is crucial. Whilst Chloe and Mabel's successes in becoming university educated provide examples of upwardly mobile trajectories, these must be considered in relation to wider trends, like the massification of higher education (Archer, Hutchings, and Ross, 2003). The importance of undergraduate study to the range of occupational aspirations in 2021 should also be taken in this context. Fields are not static. Therefore, social agents navigate them with socio-genetic legacies built into their own habitus as well as those around them. These socio-genetic legacies, in turn, reflect earlier structures of fields. These spectres of the past have been described as social haunting (Gordon, 2008; Morrin, 2016; Bright, 2018; Simpson and Simmons, 2021) and can be linked to the way that Coalville and its people were seen as stuck in the past. The *subjectified* histories of Coalville – inculcated within the habitus of its young people – increasingly accept education as a relevant pathway within the map of the possibles, even though this represents a relatively new addition to the space of the possibles for working-class women in the town.

8.5 Stuck in place?

As well as being viewed as left-behind, working-class women can also be seen as stuck in place. Whilst studies have highlighted that women from working-class communities are often more geographically and socially mobile than their male counterparts (Bourdieu, 2007b; Corbett, 2008), my study has shown that staying in one place still requires the navigation of various fields. Far from lacking aspiration or ambition, the working-class women in the first and second generations of this study navigated a space of the possibles that differed from those associated with middle-class opportunity. Despite this, many of them still made "small steps" of social mobility within the matrix of possibilities available to them. Yet the vast majority were geographically immobile, staying in the Coalville area for most of their lives.

Chloe and Mabel were both geographically and socially mobile. Their social mobility – through higher education – necessitated moving away, with Chloe commuting to a college in a nearby university town to re-sit her GCSEs and study for her A-levels, before moving to a nearby city to study for her degree. Chloe's geographical journey took her further when she enrolled on a postgraduate qualification at university in another region of England. However, she returned to the East Midlands for work and expressed a desire to live in Coalville in the future. Mabel studied at a university in another region of England after leaving sixth form and has worked in other parts of England since, with no plans to return to Coalville in the future. Both women lived and learned in the town, but Chloe has been prevented from working here due to a lack of local opportunities in her field and Mabel would not want to return. For both women, social mobility has been accompanied by geographical mobility, demonstrating the significance of place to socially mobile trajectories.

However, Chloe and Mabel had many friends who were less socially and geographically mobile, describing the trajectories of the *"plastics"*, a group of materialistic girls at school who stayed local and engaged in multi-level marketing for work. Similarly, many of the descendants of the first-generation women continued to live locally, enmeshed within Coalville's social relations. Although the participants in this study negotiated different understandings of what it meant to live, learn, and work in Coalville, few described themselves as stuck. Whilst policymakers and researchers map the hierarchies of places that define some as left-behind and others as progressive and desirable, the women in this study perceived this hierarchy through a local lens, tied to their own occupation of particular positions in social fields and their longstanding occupation of Coalville. Those women from the first generation, who had lived in Coalville through a time of high employment, still remembered its economic heyday with pride. This legacy shaped the perceptions that the younger women held of Coalville, such as Chloe and Mabel, who were aware of a time when the town was less stigmatised through their strong connections to older relatives. Cindy blamed the increasingly poor reputation of the area on an influx of social housing tenants moving into Coalville when a large development was built by a housing association in the late 20th century. For others, Coalville was a place like any other: no worse, no better. In the same way that they navigated their own space of the possibles as they undertook their trajectories through social space, the women rationalised, accepted, renegotiated, or rejected the stigma associated with Coalville based on their own dispositions.

8.6 Contributions to knowledge

My thesis makes several contributions to knowledge. I have contributed substantively to understandings of social mobility at a granular, place-based level, responding to a gap in the field (Lawler and Payne, 2017). My study challenges the dominance of large-scale, quantitative datasets within the field of social mobility studies, demonstrating that these – on their own – are insufficient for understanding the complex relationships between gender, class, education, place, and social mobility. By surfacing lived experiences of small steps of social mobility, I have traced trajectories that would not be visible at a larger scale. I have also analysed these across multiple generations, going beyond the paired incomes of fathers and sons (Blanden and Machin, 2007) and the longitudinal reach of birth cohort studies (Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2018).

I have also added to the body of knowledge surrounding the relationship between social class and education in places outside of London. Researchers and policymakers have increasingly highlighted the significant educational inequalities faced by the working-class in left-behind areas of England (Social Mobility Commission, 2020), but research in specific areas such as coastal towns (Passy and Ovenden-Hope, 2020) and former industrial areas (Bright, Manchester and Allendyke, 2013; Bright, 2018; Simpson and Simmons, 2021) is still relatively unusual. I have demonstrated how the past figures in the present in Coalville, with continual processes of (re)valuation accompanying the endlessly shifting dynamics of social fields.

I have also shown the usefulness of site-based, historical ethnography that reaches beyond the school gates. Drawing on a rich ethnographic tradition of studying social class and education in place (Willis, 1993; Weis, 2004; Mckenzie, 2015; Ingram, 2018), my thesis has traced inequalities in the field of education in Coalville over time. Whilst ethnographic revisits can illuminate changes and continuities between two time periods (Weis, 2004), my study's diverse datasets enable connections to be made between diverse fields across decades. The synergies between the educational life histories of the women who worked at the Palitoy factory, those of their descendants, the staff who worked in Coalville's schools, and the data from the focus group interviews with female students in 2021 are powerful reminders of the enduring significance of place to educational and employment opportunity, as well as social mobility.

My thesis identified the significance of emotions to the paid work of women, demonstrating that mothering practices go beyond the confines of the family home. I build on classed understandings of mothering (David, 1994; Reay, 1998b), refuting claims that working-class mothers are predisposed to a parenting style that facilitates "natural growth" (Lareau, 2003, p. 144) and instead showing how some working-class mothers actively (re)produce capitals and dispositions within their children that are relevant to the field-positions they occupy. Whilst these can look different from those cultivated by middle-class mothers, they are still actively cultivated.

Whilst it was not the focus of my study, there were also interesting suggestions that fathers played an important role in the (re)productive processes tied to future employment. Janet's father taught her various skills he had learned in the building trade. Lexi and Rebecca's fathers encouraged them to consider their own male-dominated work as viable options for the future. The fathers of Ivy, Chloe, and Mabel were all involved in their map-making processes. Beyond this, Valerie also described the parenting approach taken by her and her husband as equal. In light of the association between coalmining towns and traditional gender roles (Massey and McDowell, 1994), this could be an interesting focus for future research into formations of working-class fatherhood.

I have highlighted working-class women's proficiencies, emphasising their role as capital-accruing agents (Lovell, 2000) and showing that the cultural inheritance of working-class women can be as important for social mobility as institutionalised cultural capital. I have demonstrated that even women who – from a middle-class perspective – appear to stand still in social space, are navigating ever-changing fields. This emphasis on women addresses a significant gap in the field of social mobility research, rooted in its aforementioned emphasis on occupation and income indicators (Hoskins and Barker, 2020).

I have contributed to the Bourdieusian scholarly field in four clear ways. My research joins other studies in refuting accusations of Bourdieu's determinism (Ingram, 2018). It also roots Bourdieu's framework in a specific habitat, like other ethnographies (Mckenzie, 2015) and many of Bourdieu's place-based studies (Bourdieu, 1977, 1999, 2007b). Through this work, I have also extended (Reay, 2004a) emotional capital to include an objectified form, illustrating the logics of practice of the factory-working mothers at Palitoy. Most significantly, I have extended Bourdieu's toolkit to include the map of the possibles alongside the space of the possibles, surfacing potential ruptures between the social agent's reading of the opportunities available to them and the objective opportunities structured within the field. This theoretical addition is useful for research into educational opportunity, aspiration and social mobility, but also provides educators and policymakers with tools that can support careers guidance for young people.

8.7 Implications

Perhaps the clearest implication of my study is the need for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to adopt an attitude of healthy skepticism towards large, statistical datasets. Whilst these can give a sense of overarching inequalities, there are many aspects of the relationships between social class, gender, place, education, and social mobility that cannot be adequately explained solely through large-scale quantitative methodologies. My study has demonstrated the usefulness of qualitative research at a local level for both identifying and explaining educational inequalities and their implications for social mobility. Similar approaches would be useful in other places, from coastal towns to rural, agricultural settlements and beyond. Whilst place-based educational researchers have highlighted the issues faced by working-class students in particular places (Corbett, 2008; Henderson, 2020), a larger body of research is necessary to inform policy if the government is truly committed to levelling up geographical areas that have historically faced disadvantages.

Moreover, my study signposts the importance of nuanced understandings of social class, education, and social mobility. My relational ethnographic approach afforded insight into the workings of the fields of education, work, and family over time that would not have been visible otherwise. Again, I encourage others to consider how similar place-based methodological approaches can illuminate wider inequalities across multiple scales.

On a practical level, the map-making, path-finding, and bridge-building processes offer educators a starting point for exploring the opportunities available to young people in the communities they serve. Whilst this model cannot dismantle the social and educational inequalities that working-class school students face, it can support schools occupying less privileged field-positions with guiding working-class young people through relevant social fields. The model could also provide a framework for making difficult decisions about curriculum organisation, ensuring that this provides a workable compromise for as many working-class students as possible. This is not to assert that vocational education should be privileged over facilitating subjects but to advocate a thoughtful, nuanced decision-making process that considers the capitals that local students and their communities already possess and the potential relevance of these to future trajectories.

Beyond this, I encourage school leaders to engage with local context with curiosity. Too often, the stories that are told about places are reified in the practices of educators, (re)producing the inequalities that led to these in the first place. Curiosity about students' families, communities, and histories – seeking out proficiencies and valued capitals – can provide a starting point for socially-just school leadership in places perceived as disadvantaged.

8.8 Final thoughts

This study has demonstrated that working-class women are capital-accruing agents, navigating social space and undertaking distinct trajectories through social fields. It has highlighted that this working-class place – the ex-coalmining town of Coalville - is not characterised by *lack* or absence of capital, in contrast to some of Bourdieu's claims (Bourdieu, 2018), but rather is a network of social relations, which provides a physical locus for the occupation of particular positions in social fields. The interconnectedness of place and social class means that the social positions on offer to women living, learning, and working in Coalville are mediated by their positions in physical as well as social space. Thus, geographical and social inequalities are mutually reinforcing, affecting the trajectories of individuals through the space of the possibles, which they, in turn, navigate using the map of the possibles that they have inculcated within their habitus. In navigating the spaces, each woman exercises agency. However, social inequalities have already constrained the prospective pathways which are objectively likely for them and which *seem* relevant to them through the habitus. In this way, the inextricable bonds between place and social space echo those which tie habitus and field together. Mobility is both social and geographical. As such, as well as tackling social inequalities through policy, geographical inequalities should be explored and addressed at the same time. The mutually reinforcing relationship of social space and place means that efforts to alter each on their own will likely fall short of policymakers' aspirations.

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