

Title: *The Meaning of Success: Young Women and High Academic Achievement in Rapidly Developed Areas. A Comparative Study of Contemporary Rural Vermont, USA and Leinster, Ireland.*

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Summary of the thesis

This thesis is an in-depth, comparative international study on young women's high academic achievement in rural Leinster (Ireland) and Vermont (USA). The research analyses how academic achievement is conceptualised as a particular form of cultural and personal capital between the two geographic locations. It also explores how a particular relationship to education and the capital it facilitates one to accrue is systematically operationalised as a means for social and spatial mobility among an unexpected group, young women from blue-collar areas and family backgrounds. Delving into the effects globalisation, capitalism and rapid economic development have on rural young people and communities, this qualitative project attends to the contentious links between place, identity, status reproduction, out-migration, familial and peer socialising processes and conceptualisations of the role of particular kinds of knowledge and or skills within the wider economy. Ultimately I argue that blue-collar young women are reflexively mobilising particular forms of their cultural capital in strategic ways so as to enable both social and spatial mobility for themselves. By engaging with how various forms of work are understood by my participants and where these are thought to be available, I show how across locations, these young people are behaving in remarkably similar ways. Examining how future careers are viewed and how my participants relate to their education systems, this study has unearthed compelling findings which challenge the concerted cultivation thesis. Among those least expected to excel, this research has found a significant drive to achieve, formidable personal resilience and very active, conscious engagement in particular strategies geared towards academic prominence. This is set amidst what appears to be an innovative form of feminism, based on particular ideas about ideal femininity which are couched in individuality, self-sufficiency and a decidedly educated, skilful and resourceful form of womanhood. This womanhood is also understood to be spatially mobile and fundamentally able to be actualised only outside the remit of my participants' rural home communities.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my family, who have always believed in me, supported me and told me to follow my dreams. It is also especially dedicated to my Papa Guido who never got to see me finish. This is for you Pup, I anticipated.

Finally this research is dedicated to all the rural students that helped to create this work. Thank you for being willing to share your aspirations and inner thoughts, I deeply admire your courage, your candour and your hope.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This doctoral research seeks to illuminate possible links between high-achieving rural young women's constructions of self, relationships with their educational system and their home communities. It also links these processes with their future plans for out-migration and participation within the knowledge economy broadly speaking. It is important to note here that by "knowledge economy" I am referring very broadly to work which requires mainstream third level education and in many cases, graduate study. This research explores these matters using data collected in Vermont, USA and Leinster, Ireland, two culturally different areas which have experienced similar economic and social development in recent years. It does this qualitatively for several reasons, not least being an attempt to heed the exhortations for such research which will be discussed below.

The idea behind this research was to explore the ways in which rural young women from Vermont and Leinster were developing particular forms of identity, how they were relating to their educational environments and their communities and whether these relationships had significant bearing on what they planned for themselves in their futures, especially with relation to whether or not they planned to out-migrate from their home communities. Throughout this introduction, I will detail the reasoning behind my undertaking this research, my critical thinking about my sample population and research methods and will give an overview of each of the sample locations. I will also provide an outline of the chapters to follow.

Why do comparative qualitative research? – Research questions and situating the project within the international discourse

As a basic starting point, this endeavour was informed by the assumption that the social "world, or reality, is not the fixed, single agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in positivist, quantitative research" (Merriam 2002b:3). It was the

social world of high-achieving, rural young people, specifically young women that I wanted to explore. At the heart of this research, I wanted to examine internalisation processes. I wanted to do this with special attention to what degree (if at all) participants' personal identities and future life plans about migration were informed and shaped by their conceptions of educational achievement, the social/cultural benefits thereof, their ideas about what it means to be "successful", their relationships with their home communities and family or friendship networks. The decision to conduct international, comparative, qualitative research for this doctoral work "hinge[d] on the idea that the relationship between identity and place is dependent on the accumulation of experiences, including complex social interactions, both with and within places" (Leyshon 2002:180).

This research is qualitative first and foremost because who adolescents understand themselves to be and who they might be able to become are not only inextricably related (Oyserman et al. 2004), but they must also be explored via the personal articulations of the young people themselves. This is because in order to understand the negotiation, we must ask those who are in fact *negotiating* (Berg 2004:1-14). Further, there is considerable data which indicates that young people's self-concepts are in fact seriously influential in terms of their impact on academic attitudes and behaviours (Bornholt and Goodnow 1999). Thus, this approach took into account the main premise of post-reflexive choice (Matthew Adams 2006), which is that (young) people are simultaneously engaging in personal and social reflexivity while being influenced by the concurrent and situated social conditions they are surrounded with and which they engage with on a daily basis. This is of particular significance for this project because, according to Leyshon (2002), Cosaro's (1997) "alternative conceptualisation of childhood/youth by introducing the concept of 'interpretive reproduction' ...argues that young people are active agents in their own identity formation and decision-making with their own 'cultural lenses' and 'ways of seeing' and [are] not passive recipients of adult constructions" (Leyshon 2002:180). Ergo, in order to explore why talented young people are leaving their rural home communities, it is necessary to speak to talented rural young people themselves.

Further, the reflexive activities young people engage in while they are building and negotiating their concepts of self with the wider social world, show how important it is to recognise these adolescents as agentic. It is therefore those factors *around* why young

people are leaving that must be explored to see if there are similar trends across locations and cultural systems. Spatial situations (e.g. activities available for rural young people, young people's perceptions of available opportunities etc) play an important part in influencing how young rural people understand themselves, their plans for the future and indeed their roles within or outside of their home communities (Gabriel 2002; Amanda Davies 2008). This line of thought also calls for acknowledgment that young people are active and conscious in how they participate and navigate within the creation of particular selves as well as their relationships with and behaviours in and between various settings and social structures. Thus, it reinforces the necessity of the research being not just qualitative, but student-focused as well. It also forces recognition of the impact of globalisation and the existence of mainstream cultural pressures like credentialism as well as the local situatedness of these adolescents' experience.

With this in mind, this research also attends to the concerted exhortation to view class as something which is participated in and indeed, reflexively constructed:

The growing literature on class morality and class normativity (Reay, 2005; Sayer, 2005a, 2005b) opens up a potentially useful avenue for an investigation of educational processes that recognizes individual agency – through the formation of moral dispositions – within a context of social class. (Lehmann 2009:633)

This argument incites attention to be paid to the “psychic landscape of social class”, the ways that class is actively and actually lived, and it informs this research because it tells us that it is imperative to delve into the emotional and psychic responses to the mediation and negotiation of classed environments and selves (Lehmann 2009:633; Reay 2005). It was the systems of meaning surrounding class, gender, education and labour that I was trying to draw out. The focal points of this research were the ways of making sense of these elements that my respondents had and how they situated their understandings of these within their particular cultural milieus.

In order to explore the psychic landscapes of my respondents, the research required a “human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive” with the ability to “clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses” (Merriam 2002b:5). This

research adheres to a feminist methodological approach in its attention to the multifaceted and negotiated nature of class, gender and structures of power. Further, it recognises that in order to fully explore these elements, the respondent must play the central role in the research (Dorothy E. Smith 1988, 1992).

Because I was interested in how the young women in rural Vermont and Leinster were making sense of themselves and their social surroundings, I needed to be flexible, adaptable and able to listen to what they wanted to say. The rigidity of a quantitative study would never have been able to capture the richness, emotion and intricacies that coalesce in the creation of personal identities and the daily negotiation of the world by social actors (Merriam 2002a:18-33). Further to this, it was important to take this kind of biographical, qualitative approach (Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson 1998) because this research is particularly interested in how high-achieving young people understand their potential for movement or migration through the planning of a *future* self that is inherently either within/near the home community or has specifically left the home area. This kind of approach highlights both the social and structural “contexts” which influence a respondent’s propensity towards or experience of migration (Boyle et al. 1998). Thus, it works to account for both the personal and the social structural impeti, as in post-reflexive choice, which people experience and engage in with relation to their ideas about and behaviours surrounding migration. To explore this interaction it is therefore necessary to employ a qualitative strategy because we must attend to people’s thoughts about the “mundane” aspects of their lives in order to gain a better view of the ways in which they actively, and constantly, interact with and create the social world around them:

There is a growing realization of the necessity of studying people’s accounts of the form, content and context of their daily lives as the relationship between structure and agency is reassessed after the excesses of structuralism (for example, see Thrift, 1983; Giddens, 1984, 1986; Shotter, 1984)...The social world must be regarded as an ongoing accomplishment, not a taken-for-granted facticity...Lay discourses are thus not to be regarded as being rooted in a probable myth but should be seen as interpretive repertoires derived from a disembodied but none the less real social representation of the rural. (Halfacree 1993:31-32)

What is more, the ways and means with which people make sense of and derive meaning from particular spaces and places (and the sociocultural milieus thereof) necessarily informs their constructions of self and their social behaviours (Ní Laoire 2000, 2001, 2005). As such, one must ask the subjects themselves about their identity building and behavioural strategies because migration is a “multilayered process”, where there are “tendencies and struggles behind each” thought, imagining and decision about movement (Ní Laoire 2000:229). It is also necessary to recognise that these mediations occur both as part of “individual biographies as well as social structures” (Ní Laoire 2000:229). They operate in the same ways as identities, in that they are constructed, enacted and worked upon within and across particular social contexts. This also highlights how identities and possible selves are intimately linked to the ways one’s relationships with one’s social world are understood (Coover and Murphy 2000; Corbett 2004, 2007b). The congruence between these premises helps to further ground the research within this overall theoretical perspective. It functions as an important element which the comparative methodology of this study tries to take into account, namely the ways that young people from different geographic locations negotiate their social surroundings in conscious ways (Phelan, Davidson, and Cao 1991).

Contextualising the research

Corbett (2007b) argues that while there are real structural and economic factors at play in terms of the streaming of talented young people out of their rural home communities, there is also something much less visible than the lack of work or shoddy infrastructure. He argues that it is the discourse of leaving, the conditioning that young rural people experience regarding out-migration which is a not-so-silent actor. The “learning to leave” is what functions as one of the most powerful elements in young people’s understanding of their structure of opportunities and it mitigates their conceptualisation of embedded or disembedded selves (Corbett 2007b). Corbett (2007b) puts forward that this conditioned need for mobility, seen as imperative for survival in the modern economy, is a very real and active factor in why and how certain young people

construct future life plans as *away from* and separate from their rural home communities. This brings new light to the view of “uneven development” in that it:

... locates...sources of class power rather than in the immediacy of, say, a lack of jobs; and it points to the fact that the nature and not merely the degree, of uneven development can change over time....spatial form and geographical location are themselves significant in forming the character of particular social strata. Thus the very fact of social relations being ‘stretched out over space’ (or not), and taking particular spatial forms, influences the nature of the social relations themselves, the divisions of labour and the functions within them (‘Uneven development’). Social change and spatial change are integral to each other. (Massey 1994:22-23)

Similar conditions and relationships to what Corbett (2004, 2005, 2007b) discusses have also been noted in Australia¹, Wales², Scotland³, the US⁴ and Iceland⁵ to name a few, thus situating this research firmly within the international discourse. Moreover, because migration is now being recognised as both a cultural and a social “phenomenon that is bound up with issues of place, identity and subjectivity” this highlights Chambers’ (1994) argument that “the migrant exemplifies ambiguity and therefore disrupts the accepted wisdoms of western rational thought” (Ní Laoire 2000:232). As such, this calls directly for qualitative enquiry into these kinds of social trends because it fundamentally eschews the idea that these processes can be fully explored via quantitative research. Therefore, on a very basic level we are called to explore “local narratives of migration (Lawson 1999) through the use ethnographic approaches in migration research (Fielding, 1992)” (Ní Laoire 2000:232). I hope this thesis might help contribute towards answering this call because essentially, this research is about power and mobility, both social and spatial.

Young people’s plans and activities of spatial mobility are directly related to their understandings of and plans for social mobility (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). As such, it is assumed that geographic situatedness will influence systems of meaning and socio-cultural nuances etc. This was an important consideration in designing the research as comparative. In doing so, I was trying to discern the extent to which young people from

¹ See (Alston et al. 2001; Bryant and Pini 2009) among others

² See (Sally Baker and Brown 2008)

³ (Stockdale 2002a, 2002b) among others

⁴ (Bettie 2002) among others

⁵ (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006)

areas that are very different in terms of their cultural, political and social systems were enacting similar behaviours through the high-achievement of young women and relationship with out-migration from their rural places. This is because as adolescents learn about the world around them, they are also learning about how to reflect on that world, and themselves as well (Corsaro 2005). The comparative, qualitative nature of this research is what makes this work as engaging and provocative as it is. While there is considerable research comparing migration trends on a quantitative level internationally (Boyle et al. 1998; Boyle and Halfacree 1999), there is little that engages deeply and comparatively across areas internationally.

This is why I felt a comparative approach would hopefully serve as an interesting and engaging addition to the discourse, especially in terms of various arguments surrounding globalisation and the perennial global-local debates (Albers 2000; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Corbett 2007a, 2007b; Fagan 2002; Sorensen 2009). What is more, the leave-taking of young people in Vermont has become something of a worry to both communities as well as to Vermont's governing authorities:

...the total number of students who decided to attend out-of-state colleges grew by 11.8 percent between 1992 and 2003. (1992 was the last year a majority — 51.2 percent — chose in-state colleges.) VSAC [Vermont Student Assistance Corporation] says: "The shift from Vermont to out of state was seen mainly in the percent of graduates who planned to attend Vermont's independent (private) colleges, with a decrease from 1992 to 2003 of 8.2 percentage points. From 1992 to 2003, the number of graduates who planned to attend the University of Vermont or Vermont State Colleges decreased by 2.2 and 1.6 percentage points, respectively." (Huff 2006)

Many of these students who are planning out-of-state education will not return to settle in Vermont (Huff 2006). As such, the ways in which this kind of concerted emigration of young people come about are important areas of enquiry. During the course of this research I was unable to find any statistics for the Irish case to compare with these from Vermont⁶, however there is a culture of female departure from rural areas due to the

⁶ The Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) is a facilitator of student loans for education. I would argue that it may be the case that there are no similar statistics in Ireland due to the different natures of the US and Irish third level education systems. In Ireland, third level education costs very little due to the education system being nationalised. In the US, the third level education system is considerably more

patriarchal practices of land/farm transmission (Ní Laoire 2005). There is also evidence that as of 2001/2002, females often made up larger proportions of the population in Irish urban centres and “in all the major towns and cities across the island”, showing a particularly steep increase in the greater Dublin areas from 1991 to 2001/2002 (Gleeson et al. 2008:18-19). Further, while women outnumber men in the more urban locales, “in contrast, men outnumber women in a number of rural areas...which is probably the outcome of out-migration to the urban centres across several generations...likely the result of long term economic and social processes...shaping migration patterns that seemingly affected women more than men” (Gleeson et al. 2008:20-21). However, this does not tell much about the degree to which education may definitively be a facilitator of this leave-taking, despite concurrent rises in education among women in Ireland as I shall discuss below.

In relation to this, in the US it has been found that “Three-quarters of college graduates (77%) have changed communities at least once, compared with just over half (56%) of those with a high school diploma or less. College graduates also are more likely to have lived in multiple states” (Cohn and Morin 2008:2). In the case of Vermont in particular:

According to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau figures, published in the Department of Economic Development’s April 2007 report, [“Growing Vermont’s Next Generation Workforce.”](#) Vermont ranks *at the bottom* nationally for the percentage of its citizens between the ages of 25 and 29, and *at the top* in the percentage aged 50 to 54. The Green Mountain State now has the highest percentage of high school graduates who leave the state for college. And, despite the more than 20,000 young people who flock *into* Vermont each year to attend one of 24 institutions of higher learning, about 80 percent of those college grads move away within one year of graduation. (Picard 2008, emphasis in original)

In Ireland too there are concerns about rural areas experiencing decline which includes aging populations and youth leave-taking (McDonagh, Varley, and Shortall 2009) and this could be set against the evidence from Gleeson et al. (2008) that women have progressively increased in proportion throughout all the “major towns and cities”

expensive because it is not nationalised, as such, students (and their parents) must often borrow to finance their education whereas in Ireland this is still a relative rarity.

throughout the island of Ireland. This is particularly provocative when viewed against the rates at which women have outpaced men in third level education in Ireland which will be discussed more fully below, but again, this can only circumstantially link these elements. It also doesn't interrogate the ways in which education and globalisation may be impacting the ways women make decisions to out-migrate from rural areas, nor does it compare these to departure decisions made among young people elsewhere in the efforts to discern what could be global trends.

By trying to identify similarities and differences between the two cultural contexts, this project is trying to draw out the overarching influences on the nature and form of particular identities and systems of capital. It is also exploring their negotiation within the fields of education, socio-economics and identity formation. This impetus stems from ideas Massey (1994) presents surrounding "the emerging geography of social structure" (p. 22) in that:

..if classes were conceived as mutually constituted through their interrelationships ('Uneven development') then class relations too could be understood as having a spatial form. The geography of social structure is a geography of class *relations*, not just a map of social classes; just as the geography of the economy should be a map of *economic relations stretched over space*, and not just for instance, a map of different types of jobs. Most generally 'the spatial' is constituted by the interlocking of 'stretched-out' social relations. (p. 22, emphasis in original)

It is how particular groups of young people are building concepts of self and relating to their educational achievement and the ways this influences their future *place* within the wider economy that is the crux of this study. The word "place" is important to this research because predominantly those young people who are academic high-achievers have historically left their rural home communities. It is clear that there is a progressive toll that this leave-taking is having on rural areas in terms of sustainability, viability and indeed the very nature of social relations and networking (Andres and Licker 2005; Sally Baker and Brown 2008; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Bryant and Pini 2009; Corbett 2004, 2007, 2007b; Ní Laoire 2001, 2005; Stockdale 2002a). This trend presents serious implications for rural communities and remains a highlighted issue in local and regional

development and planning discussions (Albers 2000; Corbett 2005; Douglas 2002; Ní Laoire 2005; Redmond 2009; Stenger et al. 2006).

What is more, young women now make up the majority of out-migrants from rural areas in First World countries (Boyle and Halfacree 1999). This has increasingly affected nearly all aspects of rural living, from the weakening of community ties, overdependence on particular forms of labour, reproductive issues, to problems with alcoholism and antisocial behaviour as well as increases in teen pregnancies and or sexual abuse and assault (Bettie 2002; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Corbett 2005, 2007; Dahlström 1996; Ní Laoire 2005; Stockdale 2002a, 2002b).

These wide social trends have been explored throughout the globe in places like Australia⁷, Wales⁸, Scotland⁹, the US¹⁰, Iceland¹¹, and Canada¹² to name just a few. Thus this research is not just situated within an international discourse interested in exploring the leave-taking of rural areas by young women, but it is based on the wider empirical data that indicate young women are playing an increasing role in higher educational contexts. In the US for example, “[b]etween 1993–94 and 2006–07, the number and proportion of degrees awarded to women rose at all levels. In 2006–07, women earned the majority of associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees, and 50 percent of doctor’s and first-professional degrees” (Hussar and Bailey 2009:14). Specifically in Vermont, from 2000 to 2007 in every age cohort from 18 years and over except for those above the age of 65, females represented greater proportions of those attaining third level degrees or higher, outdistancing their male counterparts by sometimes up to nearly 7% (US Census Bureau 2007b).

In Ireland, whereas men outnumbered women in university enrolment during the 1980s, by the 1990s there was an even 50:50 ratio of women to men and “[b]etween 1990 and 2003 female enrolment has grown at a much faster rate than male enrolment. By 2003 women outnumbered men by more than 12,500 full-time students, and the ratio was 58 percent women to 42 percent men” (Muiris O’Connor, Statistics Section, Department of

⁷ See (Alston et al. 2001; Bryant and Pini 2009) among others

⁸ See (Sally Baker and Brown 2008)

⁹ (Stockdale 2002a, 2002b) among others

¹⁰ (Bettie 2002) among others

¹¹ (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006)

¹² (Corbett 2004, 2007a, 2007b)

Education and Science 2007:116). Considering these social changes, Harris' (2004) suggestion that "young women have taken on a special role in the production of the late modern social order and its values" (p. 6) is clearly to the fore in the case of rural women pursuing higher education.

Introducing "can-do" girlhood

Harris (2004) argues that young women today have "become a focus for the construction of an ideal late modern subject who is self-making, resilient, and flexible" (p. 6). She attests that this is the case for two main reasons, the first being that transformations in "economic and work conditions" coupled with the achievement of certain "goals" by feminism has essentially opened up many new opportunities and indeed "possibilities" for young women (Harris 2004:6). The second reason is that "new ideologies about individual responsibility and choices also dovetail with some broad feminist notions about opportunities for young women" which makes young women "the most likely candidates for performing a new kind of self-made subjectivity" (Harris 2004:6). This can be linked to the broader cultural spread of notions of individualisation which have been seen in post-World War II society at large (Frank and Meyer 2002).

This recognition however is coupled with a critical awareness that there has been a simultaneous metamorphosis in labour and work in today's increasingly globalised world. There has been a veritable decimation of full-time youth employment (Schneider and Stevenson 1999). Further, considerable development in communication and service sector employment and "the fragmentation of both workplaces and work trajectories" have coalesced to create a powerful impetus for young people to stay in education for longer periods of time and to "train for flexible, specialized work in a constantly changing labor market" (Harris 2004:7). This new relationship with the economy has been wrought by several simultaneous elements. These include advances that feminism has been able to achieve as well as changes in the economy at large, not least of which being the opening up of part-time work options for women (though this is not always completely beneficial as Harris (2004) notes). This has also been affected by shifts in men vacating some managerial and professional arenas "in favor of better-paying options in the new finance or

technology sectors of the global economy” (Harris 2004:7). While feminism has both fought for and indeed secured certain advances for young women, this particular sociocultural context has also been facilitated by a wider, and indeed global, “socioeconomic need for young women to take up places in the new economy” (Harris 2004:7).

What is more, being educated and employed are “becoming increasingly important to the standing of young women in terms of the class/gender structure of late modernity” (Harris 2004:7). Harris (2004) argues that this is particularly the case for middle-class young women because of the decreasing securities associated with marriage and the “family wage that was once paid to men on the assumption that they had wife and children to support has largely disappeared” (p. 7). This is coupled with the “job for life” no longer being a reality (Schneider and Stevenson 1999) as well as increases in consumer society (Bauman 2007), capitalism at large and “regulations and protections around pay rates” no longer being as prevalent (Harris 2004:7). In short, according to Harris (2004), these changes particularly affect middle-class young women because they “can no longer rely on marriage to secure their economic status or social standing” (p. 7). This means that these young women must therefore take on these economic and social responsibilities for themselves which necessitates performing well both within academics as well as the professional world (Harris 2004:7; Schneider and Stevenson 1999).

Changes have also occurred within legislation and governance as well as wider social shifts regarding issues around marriage, the family and sexuality. This is inextricably bound up in how feminism has functioned as a “program for change to allow women freedom of choice regarding their bodies, work, family, and relationships –and personal, autonomous responsibility for these choices” (Harris 2004:8). This means that women have become far freer to make such choices and to “pursue lifestyles independently of their families, the state, and men in general” (Harris 2004:8). It also means that young women today have grown up steeped in the idea that girls are able to “do anything” and that they are “powerful” people (Harris 2004; Budgeon 1998, 2001, 2003; Natalie Adams and Bettis 2003; Bettis and Adams 2005; Bettie 2002).

However, Harris (2004) and others (Budgeon 1998, 2001, 2003) present this new freedom and assumption of girls as “powerful” and able to “do anything” as not just a little

problematic. Harris (2004) argues that this “can-do” girlhood actually works to reinforce certain barriers and “shore-up” class and gender divisions in many ways. She assumes that Beck’s (1992) risk-society is inherently at work here and that young women are both enabled and challenged significantly by being understood to “embody the new flexible subjectivity” (Harris 2004:9). Is this really the case though? My research indicates both a “yes” and a “no” to this question and this is discussed throughout the analysis chapters.

These ideas as well as the larger patterns in female educational attainment and out-migration from rural areas were the impetus for this thesis research to explore what particularly was motivating young rural women not just to achieve so highly within the educational context but to do so with a view to leaving their home areas. While I recognise the merit of Harris’s (2004) argument regarding the changes that contemporary society has experienced and that these clearly have had serious impacts for young women, I was unsure about the ways that young women were engaging in being “self-inventing subjects”. This is because of the ways gender continues to mitigate social relationships and is influenced by space (Massey 1994) and the continued prevalence of patriarchy in our world order (Price and Evans 2009; Adams and Bettis 2003; Bettis and Adams 2005). I was also unsure about the degree of intense critique which Harris (2004) attaches to “can-do” girlhood. I wanted to explore what might be influencing the high-achievement of young women and deeply engage in what kinds of concepts of self they were negotiating in a more critical and dynamic way. This was also a considerable driver in the effort to make this work interdisciplinary, for I suspected that there were more intimate and personal negotiations which were at play in these trends and which might be best explored through a hybridised approach to this research. I did this by utilising ideas, evidence and theories across literature from several disciplines, including psychology, social psychology, human geography, education and, of course, sociology. In the next section I will flesh out more fully the particular contexts of my sample areas.

Vermont and Ireland – the Green Mountains and the Emerald Isle

In an effort towards increasing our understanding of social change and the effects of globalisation, it is critical to study young people who, despite being an ocean apart and

quite different culturally, are simultaneously engaging in like behaviours. To this end, this research explores the many different contributing influences on high educational achievement in young rural women in Ireland and Vermont today. Coupled with a smaller component sampling of young men in order to preserve a level of gender comparison, the study examines the identity development of the resident young people with respect to their relationships with education, community and future life plans. The research also explores the structural permutations, definition and accessibility of particular forms of selfhood and situated sociocultural systems of capital via educational environments and academic attainment. It attempts to use this understanding to unpick the relationships my respondents articulate with their communities as well as those with social and spatial mobility.

While I will give a detailed account of my sample area selection methods for this research in the Methodology chapter, I think a brief overview profiling these areas here will help to couch the current discussion and the overall research in a better understanding of the social and economic conditions in the rural areas selected in this study. In the past fifty years or so, Vermont and Ireland have experienced similar economic development. With growth in both locations initially predominantly based on various service industries surrounding different forms of tourism (Harrison 2005; Barbara O'Connor and Cronin 1993; Lin et al. 1999), this was quickly followed by periods of manufacturing development before large multinationals from burgeoning IT sectors began to arrive due not in small part to market and policy incentives (Allen 2009; Albers 2000; Fahey, Russell, and Whelan 2007; Klyza and Trombulak 1999; O Riain 2000). Since the 1990s, both areas have also witnessed concentrated, unsustainable property booms that currently have wrought serious problems for rural areas and communities (Cullen 2000; Curtis 2006; Halloway 2008; Martin 2007; O'Doherty 2008).

The State of Vermont as a whole is classified as a “rural” state because it has an aggregate population density of less than 1,000 people per square mile. While there are some urbanised areas around the larger cities of Burlington (pop. 38,897), the state capital Montpelier (pop. 7,760), Rutland (pop. 16,742) and Bennington (pop. 15,093) for example, the majority of Vermont is by and large sparsely populated. The overall population density was approximately 65.82 people per square mile in 2000 and was estimated to have

declined slightly to 64.61 people per square mile in 2008 (US Census Bureau 2000f, 2008d). In addition to this, each selected sample location which made up the catchment of the four selected schools in Vermont were also classified as rural areas because each locale and its “surrounding census blocks have an overall density” of less than 500 people per square mile (US Census Bureau 2009).

Population density figures for each of the sampled towns which made up the catchments of the four selected schools in Leinster were unavailable due to lacking census data in some of the smaller locations. However, they were classified as “rural” through the census categorising them as within the “Small Area Population Statistics” and also through their populations being under an aggregate of 11,000 people, most with populations under 3,000. They were also classified as being rural through their condition as a “Town” or “Village” and their location being at least fifteen miles outside of the greater Dublin area.

All four selected schools in Vermont were located roughly within the area known as “Central Vermont”. This is located in the heart of the state and is comprised of twenty-three municipalities in Washington, Addison and Orange Counties. According to the Central Vermont Community Profile (The Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce 2009), this area “represents roughly ten percent of the state in most demographic categories: land area, population, housing units, students, employment and labor force” (p. 24). This general area is approximately within a one hour commuting distance to either Burlington or the Montpelier/Barre areas which are large employment hubs. As of 2009, the labour market in Central Vermont was dominated by service provision or private businesses/self-employment. Other prominent industries included goods production, manufacturing, education and health services, as well as leisure and hospitality and State and local government employment (Vermont Department of Labor 2010a).

Vermont’s economy “depends on a diversified mix of manufacturing, health care, tourism and public sector employers. Agriculture remains an important component of the state’s economy and cultural image, but its relative impact is declining” (Ewen, Condon, and Vermont Department of Labor 2008:4). Population growth in Vermont has been small since 2000 and appears to be slowing with a statewide growth rate from 2000 to 2006 of just 2.5%, which is less than half of the national growth rate for the same period of time. There also appears to be a “flattening” in Vermont’s population growth “especially among

working age cohorts” (Ewen et al. 2008:4). Further, Vermont has a significantly aging population; in fact it has one of the oldest populations in the US. This factor, coupled with “an out-migration of young people will continue to challenge Vermont’s workforce and health care system” (Ewen et al. 2008:4). Unemployment in Central Vermont however has remained relatively low. It has hovered around 5% from 2002 to 2008 with a continued rise in “non-farm” employment since 2000 as well as boasting a rapidly increasing housing market, particularly in the past ten years (Ewen et al. 2008:24-25). This however, has been a casualty of the recent economic downturn and has wrought very serious impacts upon the rural communities there (Carlson 2008; The Real Estate Bloggers 2006; Belluck 2006).

In terms of Leinster, this province represents the largest concentration of population in the Republic of Ireland, largely due to it harbouring the capital of Dublin. It maintains a strong agricultural and rural persona however, through counties like Meath and Kildare which are both tourist destinations as well as prominent areas of country pursuits and agricultural environments (Meath Tourism 2010; Kildare Tourism 2010). These were the counties from which I drew my Leinster sample. Like Vermont, there has been relatively little unemployment in the Mid-East region from 2000 to 2008, with those who signed onto the Live Register (all those registered as “unemployed”, currently not working, or in limited or part-time work and so receiving state benefits from their local authorities) making up only 6.59% in 2000 and 8.85% in 2008 of the total number of those signing on in the entire country. The Mid-East therefore has been either the lowest or second lowest in numbers of people signed onto the Live Register of any area in Ireland during the same period of time (Central Statistics Office 2009b:37).

Population rates in my sample areas in Leinster however, unlike those in Vermont, have skyrocketed since 2002. Being roughly within a one hour commuting distance from the employment opportunities of Dublin, Counties Meath and Kildare have experienced population growth of 21.5% and 13.7% respectively between 2002 and 2006. This coincided with the massive growth in housing in these areas, largely in the form of sprawling housing developments supplied to meet the demand of increasing numbers of Dublin commuters seeking to get onto the property ladder during the building boom (McDonald and Sheridan 2009; Fuller 2010). The population of Ireland as a whole

however, is also aging, going from an average of 35.1 years in 2002 to 35.6 years in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2009b:1).

The economy in this Mid-East region has been dominated since 2002 by industries such as manufacturing, construction, wholesale and retail trade, service sectors, public administration and defence as well as health and social work. However, what is notable here is that the most considerable growth has occurred in the areas of manufacturing, construction, real estate and financial services/banking (Central Statistics Office 2003c, 2007g). This has been concurrent with a decline in agriculture, forestry and fishing, despite its continued prevalence in the popular imagery of rural Ireland (Ní Laoire 2007), much like what has happened in Vermont. Participation in the services industry related to tourism however, measured through employment in hotels and restaurants, has remained fairly stable in the Mid-East from 2002 to 2008. It has remained around just over 4% annually through 2008, indicating a steadier and more established presence in the Mid-East labour market (Central Statistics Office 2003c, 2007g).

These figures indicate two areas which are not astonishingly alike, but still similar in several ways. One particularly interesting likeness between Vermont and Ireland is in the nature of educational attainment in the two locations as I have introduced above. In Vermont, those who were enrolled in third level education rose from 24.6% in 2000 to an estimate of 29.9% in 2008, almost 4% higher than the national estimate for 2008 (US Census Bureau 2000c, 2007b). What is more, in the 2000 census, of the population who were 25 years and over, 29.4% had a bachelor's degree or higher with this number increasing to an estimated 33.1% by 2008 (US Census Bureau 2000c, 2007b). These figures too are above the national average of 24.4% in 2000 and an estimated 27.4% by 2008 for the US (US Census Bureau 2000b, 2008a).

Ireland as a whole also shows considerable increases in third level educational attainment. As of 2006 one in five people in Ireland possessed a third level qualification, a jump of 131,367 people up since 2000 (Central Statistics Office 2003a, 2007d, 2007f). Who exactly made up the majority of these increases however? In both locations, they were mostly women. In terms of the Mid-East specifically, the highest amount of growth from 2002 to 2006 among those with a third level education or higher was among females, moving from 49.87% to 51.78% (Central Statistics Office 2003a, 2007d). There were

similar increases in Vermont among females from 2000 to 2007. In fact, every age cohort from 18 years and over except for those above the age of 65, showed higher proportions among females attaining third level degrees or higher, as noted above (US Census Bureau 2007b). Thus, it is clear that there has been a concerted and undeniable escalation in the presence of women in higher education in these two areas. What is more, they appear to be not just increasing their attainment, but to be distinctly outnumbering their male cohorts. Education therefore seems to be playing an increasingly important role in the lives of women in both Leinster and Vermont.

What is more, the rates of participation in industries having to do with white-collar services like education, government, municipality or defence employment (i.e. civil service) and health care also remain both stable and relatively strong in both the Mid-East of Ireland and Vermont. Participation in public administration and defence, education and health and social work in the Mid-East region went from 20.22% in 2002 to 20.58% in 2006. A breakdown of these figures by gender could not be found for the Mid-East region in 2002 but in 2006, females engaged in these industries made up 67.84% of the total number of people employed in these sectors. They also made up 33.48% of the total women employed in all industries in the Mid-East region in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2003c, 2007g). In Vermont, educational services, health care, public and social services made up approximately 30.70% in 2000 and 30.90% in 2008 (US Census Bureau 2000d, 2008b). Of those employed in educational services, health care and social assistance, females made up 74.20% in 2008 and 50.50% of those employed in public administration (US Census Bureau 2008c).

While these industries are predominantly populated by women in general (Acker and Feuerverger 1996; Sevenhuijsen 1998), they represent a not inconsiderable proportion of the labour market in both the Mid-East Region and Vermont. In fact, in Vermont during 2007, women made up some 48.6% of the total labour force (US Census Bureau 2008c) while in the Mid-East Region, this proportion is smaller at 41.70% in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2007g). Thus, it is clear that Leinster and Vermont are similar but not the same in all respects. Indeed, they are different places in their culture, societies and politics. While both locations currently share a majority of Catholics, Vermont was founded as one of the original thirteen British colonies under Protestantism and retains a considerable

culture of the “Protestant Work Ethic” (Sherman 2000; Klyza and Trombulak 1999). Further, Vermont is a considerably liberal state boasting the only Socialist in the US Congress, Bernie Sanders. Ireland however, remains fairly conservative with restrictions on abortion, no form of gay marriage or partnership and limited recognition of non-married cohabitating couples (Dail Eireann 2010). Despite these differences, they do share some striking similarities, not least of which being the changes these places have experienced in the last decade with regard to their labour markets being influenced by transformations having to do with housing or homeownership. Further, they have both experienced a concurrent and concerted increase in women attaining formidable academic qualifications in the last decade. Thus these locations are therefore not just economies in flux, but also communities in flux.

I temper this however with a note that in rural places, female participation in education is not necessarily anything new (Ní Laoire 2000, 2005; Jacob 2002; Redmond 2009). Neither is the fact that young women have been generally out-performing their male classmates in recent years (AAUW Educational Foundation and the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women 1995; Mickelson 1989). However, it is the *degree* of educational attainment (third level or higher) and the particularly noticeable proportion of upper level education being made up of females in the last ten years or so that is engaging. Through its in-depth qualitative approach, my research will show that despite being different in many ways, the young women in these locations are behaving in remarkably similar fashions, providing evidence of the tenable impacts globalisation has on rural people and the distinctive hint of a particular discourse of rural gender relations, conceptualisations of education and ideas surrounding mobility. These are elements which I will discuss throughout the remainder of this thesis. The following section gives the layout of the chapters to follow.

Organisation of the chapters

Chapter Two introduces issues surrounding agency, education and mobility, illustrating how these are not just limited to those of class, but are influenced also by elements like particular divisions of labour and the culture surrounding certain types of

work. It gives a brief overview of reflexive modernisation thought and arguments surrounding the nature of our global world today. It outlines the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, which served as a general guide throughout this research. It also provides an account of how several arguments surrounding these elements are based on how class relations operate *in space* and how these are further mitigated by situated constructions of gender (Finnie, Lascelles, and Arthur Sweetman 2005; Easthope and Gabriel 2008; Hektner 1995). This chapter draws attention to the ways that certain influences have particular bearing upon young people's relationships with education and mobility and how both identity and education cannot be examined individually but must be viewed within their particular historical, cultural and geographical contexts. It argues that in order to gain a more holistic understanding of these elements, it is necessary to interpret the significant numbers of out-migrating, educated young women as a response to a very complex set of interrelated personal orientations, social catalysts, global forces, cultural pressures and familial relations.

Chapter Three builds upon these ideas by exploring the trends in female high-achievement in the academic realm and how different forms of knowledge relate to different spatial and cultural locations in rural areas. It discusses some of the research which explores the connections between education and gender and then unpacks the trend of female-led out-migration from rural areas, examining both the possible and probable influences of this kind of social trend.

Chapter Four outlines the main thinking surrounding identity from several angles. It explores the work of social psychologists, education researchers, psychologists and sociologists in an effort to engage in connecting various elements of these disciplines in order to get a better grasp on how identity works at the micro-level among young people. This chapter focuses on identity in such a way that it will enable recognition of particular individual-level processes which have a bearing on wider social behaviours. It examines how the individual negotiates between one's internal self and one's social worlds, like family, community and school. This chapter introduces Adams' (2006) thinking surrounding post-reflexive choice as an analytical umbrella for this research. I argue that Adams' (2006) approach is particularly useful to this thesis because it helps to bridge the thinking surrounding individual-level identity and social negotiations with a wider

understanding of social reproduction and structural forces which make up the mainstay of much of the research surrounding education, which is largely based on Bourdieu's (1974, 1977, 1984) theorisation. I argue that this conceptual framework also helps to examine how individuals' intricate interactions and conceptualisations of selves and social structures might work as vehicles for possible social changes as it affords a particularly apt means of analysing certain negotiations and relationships of self and social among my respondents, in particular with respect to how students worked upon their habituses within and across certain social fields. It delves more deeply into issues of agency and structure, particularly with reference to education and systems of capital and class. It introduces these elements as a means to examine how certain aspects of the self which, when engaged in particular ways, might indeed work upon the social, such as changes in the ways of engaging with masculinity and femininity. It explores the ways that place and space influence identity and relations of self. By discussing students as agents in their negotiation of selves and social worlds, this chapter shows that because identity is always fluid and changing, the current identities that young people express and the future identities they "hope for" matter.

Chapter Five explains the methodology used in this research. It details the reasoning behind undertaking this qualitative, international comparative study, the critical thinking regarding the sample populations in blue-collar and white collar areas in Vermont and Leinster and the conceptual work I did surrounding the formulation and implementation of appropriate research methods. It explores how I designed this research to be qualitative through in-depth interviews and component take-home questionnaires for selected high-achieving students and how I sought to triangulate with a complementary free-write activity which was disseminated more widely among the high-achievers' classmates. It describes how these methods produced a more well-rounded insight into the factors and influences which might be contributing to the high-achievers' behaviours and thoughts about themselves. It discusses the ways in which the methodology I designed was both successful and unsuccessful, outlines some of the ethical considerations and offers some critical reflections about how the research could be improved and where future researchers might develop work in this area.

Chapter Six begins the analysis and discussion of findings. It examines the different ways my respondents detailed and made sense of their processes of self formation and

engages with how gender further mitigates these processes. It introduces the two overarching orientations expressed by the in-depth respondents, which I have named “Planning” and “Dreaming”. Planning orientated respondents had clear ideas about their futures built on tangible, specific plans for further education. They understood their identities and what was possible for them as springing from their relationships with school, the education system, credentialist ideas and a moralistic commitment to performing and achieving particularly highly in their academics. Respondents who expressed this orientation were mostly blue-collar participants (72.72%) or respondents from blue-collar family backgrounds and attending white-collar schools. Dreaming orientated students were less sure of themselves in their thinking about the future, were more interested in an ambiguous sense of “being happy” and less likely to have concrete ideas about what they would like to do later in life or how they were going to go about being able to do it. This orientation related to third level education as something that could be engaged in if these students chose but was not understood as crucial to their identities or their possible futures. Most respondents who exhibited a Dreaming orientation were from white-collar schools (60%).

This chapter delves into the way that respondents with certain orientations related between their critical self-reflexive activities, their conceptualisations around ideas about their goals or ambitions, and how these were connected to the ways respondents thought about their future adult selves and lives. This chapter investigates the different ways that participants formulated the identities that make up who they are today and how they engaged in specific behaviours to sculpt themselves into particular selves in their futures. It also engages with Schneider and Stevenson’s (1999) concept of “aligned ambitions” and highlights how Planning orientated respondents internalised educationally-based ideas of success from their education systems, parents, community and teachers. This is then examined against the ways these young people conceptualised their futures as connected to the wider, mainstream global discourses surrounding relationships with education and social mobility.

Chapter Seven moves into exploring how my respondents related to their home communities and examines their relationships with and thoughts about space, place and mobility. It highlights the connections between this research and the literature which is

covered in Chapters Two and Three regarding gender, rurality, space and place. The main thrust of this chapter is in underscoring the different ways that Planning and Dreaming orientated respondents related with place and space and how these relationships were intimately linked with the ways they thought about their future social and spatial mobility. Planning orientated students expressed a “leave-taking” imperative while Dreaming orientated students discussed understanding themselves as “having the option” to remain in their home communities later in life.

This chapter illustrates the interrelated ways that participants understood their home areas, their ideas about themselves and how they formulated future possible selves through education or other avenues like personal interests. This chapter shows how social and spatial mobility is understood as a “must” for the Planning orientated and a “choice” for the Dreaming orientated. These relationships were inextricably bound up in who these young people understand it to be possible for them to “become” in their futures and where specifically they see it possible to become these people. This is contextualised in a discussion about the situated nature of both class and gender relations, bringing to the fore how certain understandings of self in these locations are fundamentally related with particular geographies of class, space, place and cultural relationships. It introduces the argument that Planning orientated young women may be performing a new kind of femininity through their concerted application to education and their commitment to knowledge-based work *outside* of their rural home communities.

Chapter Eight investigates the types of relationships my respondents had with their teachers and their parents. It examines how these relationships had a particularly deep impact on Planning orientated respondents’ ideas about who they are now, who they want to become later in life and how they understand it to be possible to become those people. These young people were educationally focused, seeking knowledge-based work and internalising discourses of meritocracy derived from their mainstream educations. This chapter shows similarities between my research and that of Lehmann’s (2009), Reay’s (2005) and Reay, Crozier and Clayton’s (2009) by exploring how there appears to be a “moral imperative” to achieve academically and to become a knowledge-working adult for some students, while this is markedly absent among others. It also takes a more in-depth look at the ways that the participants thought about being socially responsible adults which

appears to be evidence of a strong counternarrative to mainstream, credentialist/capitalist ideas of “success” and the normative life course shaped by the primacy these young people gave to having healthy relationships with others and with themselves.

Chapter Nine covers some of the main themes discerned from the free-write activity and sets the data from the high-achievers against this to show similarities and differences regarding ideas surrounding “success”. This chapter notes the limitations of the free-write data as well as how it affords a “snap-shot” of some of the wider ideas about success in the blue-collar participating schools. It suggests that this data presents further evidence to suggest that there is a rising counternarrative among these young people which rejects the atomistic and selfish version of the mainstream adolescent. On the contrary, these were thoughtful, socially concerned and highly conscientious adolescents who exhibited a touchingly prominent desire to “help” and care for others. I close the chapter with thoughts on how viewing the high-achievers’ responses alongside the free-writes helps to afford the research with a slightly more intuitive interpretation of the discussions shared by the high-achievers and the suggestion that this overview helps to provide some basis for trying to think about these issues in broader ways.

Chapter Ten concludes this thesis with an overview of the work and some final thoughts regarding the findings, discussion and the contribution to knowledge that this research makes. It gives a summary account of the ideas that this research generated and offers thoughts on where they might be expanded upon in the future. It discusses how this research has highlighted some of the many and varied factors which operate within and throughout the identity and gender work that my respondents showed. It illustrates how this research has attended closely to the relationships young people navigate and engage with between who they are and who they understand it is possible for them to become within their social and structural environments. It argues that by gaining a closer look at the identity work that these young people were doing and the ways that they were negotiating with the social and spatial structures and forces around them, it is possible to gain much keener insight into how the self appears to be working back upon the social (Ralph Turner 1988). It argues that the young women participants, particularly those who expressed Planning orientations show provocative hints at what might be a new discourse of femininity. It also presents the argument that the kind of awareness and critical

consciousness that my respondents show gives compelling insights into the wellsprings of and relationships with autonomy and agency in particular conditions, both social and spatial.

CHAPTER TWO

MOVING UP AND MOVING OUT: KNOWLEDGE, (DIS)EMBEDDEDNESS AND MOBILITY

Introduction

As established in the Introduction, this thesis is based on research in *rural* areas and as such, place and space play a very important role here. In order to gain a good understanding of how important this role is in this research, I will examine how these elements influence issues surrounding education, gender, agency and mobility in this chapter. I will show how probing these issues requires situating them within the particular spaces and places where they are being investigated. This chapter will also explore the intersection between the nuances of rural class relations and the accompanying constructions of gender (Finnie et al. 2005; Easthope and Gabriel 2008; Hektner 1995). I will do this by enquiring around the nature of geographical and cultural situatedness by broadly following the thinking of Bourdieu (1977, 1984) to understand how young people in these spaces and places make sense of what a “successful” life is, whether that has to do with mainstream education or not and how this relates to spatial and social mobility.

Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) thinking hinges on three key concepts, habitus, capital and social fields. I approached this research in this way because all of these elements are bound up in and mediated by the cultural milieus that adolescents come from and the internalisation processes that the young people engage in. In this I am recognising that meanings and messages are interpreted in different ways by young people through how they understand themselves to be agentic (or not) with relation to them. “Habitus” is made up of the various ways of understanding, perceiving or making sense of the world that individuals have via both ideas and behaviours. Habitus is embodied as well as performed, this means that it is a part of us, our appearance, our way of walking, talking etc as well as how we behave and what we hold to be the way the world works. While this is “thoroughly individualised” it nevertheless “reflects a shared cultural context” and remains an “unconscious formation” which is simply “done” by the individual without much

thought according to Bourdieu (1977). This means that structures and social orderings are reproduced continually via habitus because it functions as this “*unconscious* competence” (sic) (Adams 2006:514).

People develop their habitus through their engagement with the social world and social structures that they experience through various “social fields” (Bourdieu 1977). “Social fields” are essentially systems of meaning and settings which are accessed in various different ways by individuals to different degrees and with highly diverse levels and types of capital and habitus. Put more simply, fields are social realms where different people hold different levels of agency or authenticity or credibility etc depending upon the field that they are in, the capital they have and their habitus. Fields have social templates that require particular behaviours, contain certain power dynamics and hold paradigmatic assumptions, for example messages and understandings about what it means to be male or female. Basically, capital can be understood as skills, knowledge, networks, relationships, attitudes, and behaviours that are understood as favourable within a particular field.

These ways of knowing, engaging with and acting are situated within space and place (Massey 1994; Skeggs 2004; Halfacree 1993). They are elements that influence young people’s repertoires of experience, the ways in which they understand work and adult life to be related to the places that they have lived their young lives and how they understand themselves to be able to do and be certain people within their local areas or elsewhere. A more in-depth discussion of Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) thinking will take place later in Chapter Four but for this discussion, it is noteworthy because this thesis situates itself within broad discourses that stem from Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) general line of thought. I approached this research in this way because all of these elements are bound up in and mediated by the cultural milieus that adolescents come from and the internalisation processes that the young people engage in. In this I am recognising that various meanings and messages are interpreted in different ways by young people through how they understand themselves to be agentic (or not) with relation to them.

Therefore, this thesis is formed upon the idea that the ways young people are constructing notions of self, ideas about education, work and mobility are implicitly guided by the intangible, situated elements of cultural relations to work and family conceptualisations of education. However, instead of attending closely to socially

reproductive trends, I would argue that it is the instances of change that are the most provocative. There is evidence of particular relations to self and social conditions which enable change among groups of people, through concerted self-reflexive activity and habitus work (Reay 2005; Reay, Crozier, and John Clayton 2010; Shaw 1994; Schneider and Stevenson 1999). There is also evidence that suggests not only are women more sensitive to social change or shifting normative structures (Suitor, Minyard, and Carter 2001), but that young women are also more apt to change across generational gaps (Shaditalab and Mehrabi 2010). These are ideas which I will discuss later in the following chapters, but they make for a striking addition to discourses of social reproduction as well as intimations surrounding the effects of globalisation which have particular relevance to this chapter.

Linking these ideas to how this thesis explores social change, globalisation and reproduction, I will also draw upon Corbett's (2007b) argument that education and what constitutes as "good parenting are forced to conform to the logic of mobile modernity" (p. 789). These concepts are important because they afford this research with not just a cultural context intimately related to both the influences of globalisation and situatedness in space and place, but they provide a crucial link to other research surrounding social mobility and the actual, empirical practices of young people succeeding within the education system. These ideas provide this thesis with a tenable ligature to how adolescents around the world are engaging in active, reflexive work upon their habituses and identities in the efforts for educational attainment as well as social and spatial mobility. This has been seen in research by Reay (2005), Lehmann (2009), Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010), as well as that of Schneider and Stevenson (1999). This part of the thesis functions as an essential girder for the entire research and is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three. It is also explored with relation to self formation in Chapter Four and with respect to my findings surrounding the identity work my respondents were doing in each of the analysis chapters.

Fundamentally what this chapter will establish is that identity and education are not variables which can be viewed in isolation but rather which must be analysed within particular historical and cultural contexts. Thus the large numbers of out-migrating, educated young women that have been seen in many areas across the world (Corbett 2007a;

Gabriel 2002; Andres and Licker 2005; Bryant and Pini 2009) must be understood as a response to a highly complex interrelation of global forces, social impeti, cultural stimulants and familial relations. Corbett (2007b) argues that in the context of rural locales “where educational choice is limited, social-class advantage is played out primarily in differential spatial and mobility practices” (p. 789). As such, this chapter illustrates the discourse surrounding the social and economic conditions contributing to rural out-migration, particularly in the case of young women, and poses some questions for the current literature. It finishes by outlining the ways this thesis situates itself within these discussions and provides a lead into the following chapter on education and gender.

What kind of world do we live in today?

Reflexive modernisation thinking argues that contemporary society is reciprocally influenced by the hyper-mobility and time-space compression that today’s technologically and transportationally advanced social orders provide (Beck 1992; Lash and Friedman 1992; Giddens 1990, 1991; Bauman 1991, 1995, 2007a, 2007b). These theories discuss the shifting social mores of the last hundred years or so “in terms of the ways in which people think about themselves and their place in the world” (Easthope and Gabriel 2008:174). Overall, they chronicle a change from a world where people’s priorities were clear and interconnected with their “local communities and shared goals” to one where priorities now pivot around individual interests such as self-fulfilment, personal awareness and understanding as well as individual freedoms (Easthope and Gabriel 2008:174).

Frank and Meyer (2002) argue that our current cultural order has progressively highlighted and fostered autonomy and independent agency among its citizens. This is because of various changes in society which have been the so-called calling cards of “late modernity”¹³:

Paramount are expansive changes in communication technologies and structures (Heelas, 1996:5), increasing our exposure to others, and relativizing our established cultural and individual practices to the point where nothing can be taken for granted as simply ‘the way

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the many different thoughts surrounding modernity and post-modernity see (Lee 2006).

things are done' (Gergen, 1991:48-80). Increasing global flows of employment, finance, imagery and ideas and the mass-culture of consumption that accompany changes in communication only exacerbate the situation. The binding power of tradition and social structure has ebbed away – 'it is rather a *lack* of social structures which establishes itself as the basic feature of the social structure' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:51) – resulting in a post-traditional and individualizing society. (Matthew Adams 2006:512)

This “increased interconnectedness and interdependence of different societies around the world” was facilitated through “the irresistible trend of the twentieth century... for societies to develop deep dependencies on each other, with interlocking economies and social customs” (Andersen and Taylor 2006:634). This has been named in general as “globalisation”. This is a contested word and an idea that has had much theorisation around it (Bauman 1998, 1991; Aguilar and Cavada 2002; Castells 1997), but for the purposes of this thesis, “globalisation” is understood as the increasing interconnectivity of economies, media, societies and systems of production and consumption. As such this is inherently related to the development of similarities across and between cultures which could be conceptualised roughly as a mainstream, global cultural system which is largely based on broadly individualistic behaviours and attitudes. This does not mean that the world is homogenising, in fact, many argue that with the increased interaction and connection that today’s globalised society experiences, the differences between cultures and individuals are in effect amplified (Andersen and Taylor 2006:634; Aguilar and Cavada 2002; Harvey 1989). The spread of capitalist structures has however, facilitated the progressive development of a sociocultural system essentially based around the idea that the individual is a central figure of the social order (Giddens 1991; Lash and Friedman 1992). Frank et al (1995) discuss the rise and prevalence of this fluid individualism as a function of the liberal social model proliferating after the post-war period:

This has undoubtedly extended the legitimate public concern with the status and personhood of the individual everywhere, reflected in the emphases of world society and international organizations (both governmental, as in the UN system, and nongovernmental) on human rights and citizen rights. (p. 373)

Thus, the current era is a unique one in the level and degree of interconnection that our globe experiences (Lash and Urry 1994). Giddens (1991) argues that one of the main features of “modernity...is an increasing interconnection between the two ‘extremes’ of extensionality and intentionality: globalising influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other” (p. 1). In fact, Giddens (1991) even goes so far as to argue that beyond the self not being some kind of “passive entity, determined by external influences”, the self, “no matter how local” the particular “context of action”, actually “contribute[s] to and directly promote[s] social influences that are global in their consequences and implications” (p. 2). This is understood to be the case because the very nature of this kind of society is one which facilitates reflexivity on a grand scale.

While there are issues with this line of thinking which are discussed at length with relation to identity in Chapter Four, this idea of the interconnection that we experience today as being unique in history in both its prevalence as well as its concentration, is an important element to attend to. This is not to say that we now live within a world of free-floating meanings and messages entirely divorced from their situated, contextual conditions of experience (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002). Neither does it mean that our societies are undergoing global cultural elision to the point of uniformity. Rather, it is to say that the ways we engage with others, ourselves and spaces and places are tricky issues because of our current society being one which is now inherently global in numerous ways, not just on the grand scales of labour markets, politics and systems of production and consumption (Massey 1991; Harvey 1989). This means that how we understand places and spaces and the accompanying social contexts thereof are mitigated not just by the enduring cultural contexts of particular locales and geography, but also by how our societies, and indeed we ourselves, are able to regularly compress both time and space in our daily lives. This has bearing on both the processes of globalisation itself as well as place identity (Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine 2004:9). These time-space compressing activities extend to all manner of taken-for-granted things that we do in our lives including using telephones and the internet, deciding which books we read and the kinds of news we watch. We do this through simple acts like eating certain foods or listening to particular kinds of music or engaging in certain styles of dress.

All of this draws attention to the everyday ways that we go about making sense of both space and place and our relationships to these elements and mundane practices. It also incites this research to question the ways in which global forces work on local areas and how local elements can work back upon the global as well (Bauman 2004; Andres and Licker 2005; DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Because this research is about young people in rural areas, I would now like to discuss the ways in which the “rural” is made sense of and how this has an impact on this research. The following section delves into how meanings and messages surrounding the rural have developed over time. I will also discuss how these have bearing on the ways in which we make sense of, use and derive meaning from rural places and spaces.

Making sense of the “rural” – relationships with space and place

At a basic level, it is important to understand that the ways we socially relate to spaces and places are directly bound up with what we understand them to be and to represent (Slater 1993, 1998; Slater and Peillon 2000; Kincaid 2006). Perceptions structure not just our understandings of our environments but our use of, ordering, and relationships with them. Essentially, how we make sense of what a given place is and means both to the wider social structure and to us personally, has real material and social effects. This is an important influence which young people, whether consciously or unconsciously, contend with regularly and which has serious repercussions on how they understand who they are, their social worlds and what they construct as future life trajectories for themselves. This is an important starting point in developing a grasp of how the changing social and economic climates in Vermont and Ireland have influenced young rural people’s relationships with and thoughts about their home communities and places *elsewhere*. It is also important to get a grip on how rural people understand themselves *as rural dwellers* and how this affects and informs their current notions of self as well as impacts their future life plans. This is an important aspect of this thesis because it effectively situates the two study areas within the international context and sets the stage for this discussion to be elaborated upon with regard to the data this research has collected.

How we make sense of spaces and places is historically, socially, politically, and economically situated. Conceptualisations and relationships with places and spaces have been built and changed over time in the public mind out of factual historical conditions or events, idealised representations derived from the media, fiction, revisionist history, and also out of our own imaginations just to start (Hopkins 1998; Horton 2008; Bickford 2000). This means that places must be examined for how they are shaped or constructed by ideas of how they *should* “appear” and this in turn sheds light on how they will influence us (Francaviglia 1996:158). Sorenson (2009) argues that rural areas throughout the globe are frequently thought of as being impoverished, traditional sometimes to the point of backwardness and under the constant threat of the out-migration of their talented young people. He also tells us that rural areas are often thought to be possessed of poor public services, health care and telecommunications. All in all, rural places are often conceptualised as being distinctly disadvantaged compared to urban centres with respect to the conditions and operations of modern day capitalist globalisation and this represents at least an acknowledgeable public cultural narrative that is related to such spaces and places.

In direct relation to this, Jeffrey Hopkins (1998) suggests that the mainstream image engineering of “rural” has come to represent an *other* place. By this he means that the “rural” represents places and spaces understood as *not* urban, the time that is *not* now in the present, and as providing and eliciting experiences understood as “other than the norm” (Hopkins 1998:78). While this dualistic conceptualisation is likely to come under fire from thinkers who rightly challenge the dichotomous ordering of “global-local” or “rural-urban” (Nairn, Panelli, and McCormack 2003; Champion and Hugo 2004), I think that Hopkins’ (1998) observations regarding how the rural is commodified in the mainstream imagination as well as via advertising, the media etc are nonetheless noteworthy. Understanding the rural and the urban as dichotomous is arguably quite theoretically shaky (Champion and Hugo 2004). However, in terms of the actual, empirical conditions which have been observable in the social and economic development of Ireland and Vermont, specifically over the past twenty years or so, recognition of the ways and means rural areas have been systematically commodified, marketed and consumed *as rural places* is crucial. This is because the ways that these rural areas have been related to, used, and indeed understood inform how local young people now make sense of their communities and selves as well as

what they understand to be the socioeconomic and socio-spatial life options they have there.

How these rural young people are conceptualising and relating to their home communities as well as their future life plans is invariably bound up in considering socio-spatial factors like where to live and work in adulthood. These are intrinsically informed by and indeed shaped through how their home areas have been related to and developed in recent years. How much are they also informed by wider discourses surrounding what the rural is and means today though? As seen in the introduction, the nature of development in both rural Leinster and Vermont has largely been predicated upon ill-planned, consumer-based relationships with housing and service sectors related to the tourism industry, not sustainability-focused growth for communities (Fuller 2010; Sparks 2010; The Real Estate Bloggers 2006). This form of development or usage of an area is largely couched in understanding space and place as a commodity which can be consumed and is based on a particular conceptualisation of the rural.

For the purposes of understanding how rural areas are developed, changed and indeed lived in by those who inhabit them, I think Hopkins' (1998) insights offer a pragmatic take on what actual metamorphoses of rural areas have occurred in recent history. He argues that amidst popular cultural conceptions, “advertising sign vehicles of slogans and icons” ascribe and model the rural as a place with “mythical qualities” and as a “special place” differentiated from the city (Hopkins 1998:78). For Hopkins (1998), “rural” is therefore “imagined as a spatial and temporal retreat from the urban environs, a place close to nature, rich in community ties, where life is lived at a slower pace in settlements situated amidst idyllic, nostalgic settings” (p. 78).

This understanding is perpetuated and cemented within the wider social consciousness by both “place promoters and place consumers” using these idealised understandings and iconic images to “give meaning, identity and value to a particular brand of place—a rural place—and in doing so, help to recreate and sustain these dominant ideals while simultaneously excluding others” (Hopkins 1998:78; Slater 1993; Barbara O'Connor and Cronin 1993). Such conceptualisations and relationships with the rural are derived at least in part from the spread of capitalism—and hence individualism. This is because during industrialisation, the middle and upper classes progressively branded the

heterogeneous “outside” environment of the urban/public as negative and came to idealise the rural as an escape from it (Bickford 2000). Thus the view that emerged was that “the morally and physically healthful influences of rural living” were directly in opposition to city dwelling as the urban was a “sinful [place] and provid[ed] temptations that can lure individuals away from” proper, decorous living (Laura J. Miller 1995:396-397).¹⁴ Thus the rural was progressively understood as a good place to raise children or have a family because it is “safe” and “protected” from urban ills. However the pragmatic, logistical considerations of rural dwelling rarely come to the forefront of this milieu. This commodification of the landscape effectively distanciates the idealised, iconic countryside from the actual, material locale itself by ironically presenting and facilitating it for consumption as a commodity which is “untainted by commercialism, a place preserved from the present and unsullied” (Hopkins 1998:79; Barbara O'Connor and Cronin 1993; McMorran 2008; Ehrentraut 1996).

One can readily see this sort of conceptualisation and relationship promoted through advertisement in the tourist industry and by the advertisements doing so, it not only espouses but also works to promote and maintain the status quo (Barbara O'Connor and Cronin 1993; McMorran 2008; Ehrentraut 1996; Urry 2002; Eco 1986). Idealised conceptualisations of the past are systematically generated in such a way that the symbolic countryside is primarily a “commodified sign” (Hopkins 1998:79; Barbara O'Connor and Cronin 1993; McMorran 2008; Ehrentraut 1996; Slater 1998; Urry 2002). This commodified sign that the countryside comes to be known as is actively used to camouflage, deprecate, and avert attention (and oftentimes even acknowledgment) away from the actual structures and relations of production, material value and function of the landscape. It does not account for or indeed even recognise many of the mundane concerns of everyday life (Hopkins 1998; Fiona Smith and Barker 2001). It is the archetypal and image-laden myths of the rural which are ultimately marketed by developers, estate agents and tourism stakeholders. This is also effectively what is consumed, not the workaday aspects of production and the social, political, and economic local structures thereof.

This way of thinking pays little attention to the troubles these kinds of developmental relations present for existing rural socioeconomic structures which had historically been the

¹⁴ For a full discussion of the process of idealisation and exoticising the rural, see (Mingay 1989)

buttressing of local communities (e.g. large farms or other agricultural endeavours, local natural resource harvesting etc)¹⁵. Further, this type of development encourages the attitude of the *flaneur* while the critical thinker concerned with sustainable enterprise and community infrastructure is discouraged. This presents a fundamental stumbling block for anyone trying to build viable centres of living or to secure a place in the perpetually quickening pace of the global market. Because of its presence in mainstream culture, it also causes tension between how rural areas understand, relate to and maintain themselves as communities and economies. The vernacular is frequently dismissed as a legitimate social structure and systematically mythologized into exotic folk culture on display serving only the purpose of consumption, the appetites, fantasies, and requirements of an “urban-based leisure class” who are possessed of particular power in both the production and indeed the reproduction of the iconic, idealized countryside, and so, effectively the material countryside (Hopkins 1998:79).

Thus, when mainstream understandings are set against more locally based relations to an area, this can generate discord not just conceptually, but socially and materially as well through issues surrounding recreational space, the condition of the economy and more general notions of community wellbeing. For example, one problem that stretches beyond the material issues of changes in housing or community amenities is the disjuncture in understandings surrounding things like agriculture and the rural landscape. Areas where farming maintains an active presence in the social and economic setting often run into problems with second-homeowners or tourists who dislike the workaday aspects of maintaining agricultural practices, such as the smell of manure spreading, the moving of livestock which might hold up traffic etc. This was noted as a problem in Laliberte’s (2009) research, which was set within a rural town in Massachusetts, USA. Local residents and second-homeowners were reported to often be at loggerheads over the everyday elements that were required of the agricultural work that generated the rural landscapes the second-homeowners had originally bought property in the area to enjoy. It is the material and mundane elements required to maintain such landscapes for their consumption which ironically gave rise to complaints among second-homeowners (Laliberte 2009).

¹⁵ Corbett writes extensively on the decline of the fishing industry in rural areas of coastal Canada and how this has impacted the youth of these communities, see his publications (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2007b) among many others.

Issues like this can be seen within my research through the way economic pressure often pushes rural areas to be developed, regulated and marketed as the privileged urban-dwellers' playground, the second-homeowner's "getaway" or the "recreational amenity landscape" (Hopkins 1998:79; Hall and Müller 2004). This kind of marketing is regularly used by Vermont's place promoters (Vermont.com/WebMont, Inc. 2010; Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing 2010) and has contributed to the unsustainability of both its housing practices as well as tension in community relations in areas of heavy tourist activity. In Vermont vernacular, those who are not born-and-bred Vermonters but who have purchased second-homes and or use Vermont as their "getaway" are often termed distastefully as "Flatlanders", i.e. people who come from a place without any mountains (Vermont is known as "The Green Mountain State"). This intensely place-based identification and distinction between "us" and "them" is understood alongside what is often a begrudging admittance of the reliance upon tourist-derived income to local economies. This kind of relationship is also something that Laliberte (2009) discusses in her work. While local people acknowledged the community's economic dependency upon second-homeownership and wealthy vacationers, Laliberte (2009) reports that the rub lays in the fact that, as one local woman put it "It makes my bones sore to think of the work I do to make their views" (referring to wealthy second-homeowners who overlooked her farm) (Laliberte 2009:10).

The rhetoric of idyllic rurality and thus its commodification was also prevalent in the advertising media surrounding the housing market in Meath and Kildare during the 2000s (Donohoe 2008b, 2008a) and this consumerist relationship has proven problematic for communities in these areas as well. Lacking infrastructure and ill-planned developments quickly gave rise to situations where areas were burdened with populations they were never designed to be able to carry. Locals often took vociferous issue with the ways that these communities had been conceptualised, built and marketed due to the incongruence these elements frequently produced between what was peddled and what was material and social reality but this was frequently to little avail (Drogheda Independent 2000; Treacy Hogan 2003; Fuller 2010). Thus, it is clear that the rural is often understood as a "place to go" as opposed to a place that is "going places" and this plays out in real material and social

conditions surrounding the nature of local populations, economies, facilities, building practices and community relations.

As the rural is largely understood as a place which is decidedly un-cosmopolitan (Sorensen 2009), this often contributes to such “rock and hard place” scenarios as can be seen through the difficult relationships locals often have between their own understandings of their home areas and those of place promoters, second-homewoners and tourists. Consequently, the disembedded popular mind therefore imagines the small, rural town as exotic, as a preserve of tranquillity and stability, oftentimes a treasured memory from childhood standing in direct juxtaposition with the rapidly mutating and constantly restructuring societies which industrialisation and modernity have created and indeed fostered (Francaviglia 1996). Thus not only are areas like these understood in different ways according to people’s levels of embeddedness within their geocultural context, but they also contend with the double-burden of being conceptualised in the public consciousness as somewhat backward, declining and marginalised in terms of its mundane aspects while they are packaged for consumption as the idyllic bastion of yesteryear.

Thus, as different understandings of space and place collide, there are bound to be problems both within the community and between the reference points community members use to understand their social, spatial and personal worlds. None of these are clear-cut or mutually exclusive. However, with the continual compression of space and time that our contemporary technology and society engages in, it is the level and degree to which people identify with and fix themselves to different social and spatial mooring points that impacts the ways that place and space are related to and interacted with. This can also run along generational lines, not just spatial or classed ones.

As such, I would argue that it is not difficult to see a link between the ideological underpinnings of rural out-migration and notions of a normative life course among rural young people who actively participate in mainstream global culture through the utilisation and consumption of global media, fashion, communication technology and I would argue, increasingly standardised systems of education. This can be seen in how the idea of moving from an “old-fashioned” or declining rural safe haven to a more metro/cosmopolitan area in order to participate in the global marketplace or to “see the world” is often understood amidst a coming of age narrative for young rural out-migrants

(Stockdale 2002a, 2002b; Valentine 1997). This was frequently the case among my respondents as well, especially those for whom education played a more pronounced role in who they understood themselves to be and who they intended to become. These young people related to their home communities as undoubtedly wonderful places to grow up, but nonetheless, they were understood as places without space *for them*. This was often articulated as due to economic and social conditions being seen as essentially not harbouring any opportunities for these young people now or for the adult lives they planned for their futures. This is discussed throughout Chapter Eight.

Economies of embeddedness and education

While there is considerable discussion surrounding the arguable effectiveness or blundering depending on the stance, of Ireland's and Vermont's respective planning boards, the case remains that the property bubbles have not facilitated sustainable growth and have indeed presented very serious challenges for local rural communities. As such, they now face issues not least of which are aging populations, overdependence on particular labour market sectors including construction and service industries as well as increased youth out-migration (McDonald and Sheridan 2009; The Real Estate Bloggers 2006; Belluck 2006; Ewen et al. 2008). I would like to set these details alongside research from elsewhere in the world, which has established that education is often perceived to be a necessity, and indeed direct vehicle in many cases, for leaving rural communities but not for remaining within them (Gabriel 2002; Gibson 2008; Gibson and Argent 2008; Hektner 1995).

This can be linked to how particular relationships with education and valuations of certain forms of learning are both socially and spatially constructed (Mike Rose 2004; Corbett 2007d). As such, staying within the community is an option left open to few by virtue of the socioeconomic conditions, availability of jobs, housing, perceptions of a possible place for a given type of individual etc. As has also been seen however, predominantly the type of available work in rural areas tends to remain within blue-collar sectors like construction, manufacturing and the service industries. Thus, "the privilege of being able to choose to stay is fraught with uncertainty" even for those who are "well-

positioned” in terms of the community’s economic basis for the simple fact that the very basis itself is “understood as uncertain” compared to the wider marketplace (Corbett 2007d:773).

Thus, economic stability often effectively remains at a fickle premium if one stays within the rural home community. This leads to out-migration for those without an economic and social foothold which proves to be a considerable concern as rural areas continue to haemorrhage the educated young people who could prospectively have become tomorrow’s problem solvers, employers and advocates (Easthope and Gabriel 2008; M. Gabriel 2002; Gibson and Argent 2008; Jamieson 2000; Jones 2001). On a basic level, because adolescents often understand the transition to third level education as intrinsically bound up with leaving their home and going out into new and unfamiliar territory (Arnett 1998; Corbett 2007d), the ways that young people conceptualise space and place are very important to their relationship with education. This is because:

“Elsewhere,” the space into which education catapults successful students, is understood in different ways...If home is safe and the unknown geography beyond...is dangerous, it is plausible the sustained commitment to leaving and thus to higher education might be problematic...[especially] for those whose family connections and social capital were grounded locally...[while] for others whose privilege included social, economic, and cultural capital, formations that make out-migration and higher education inevitable, the emotional content of a move was much less problematic. (Corbett 2007d:776-777)

This underscores the argument that it is important to attend to who exactly is conceptualising and understanding a place as what and how they understand themselves to have a place within it (or not). Viewpoints themselves are necessarily derived and situated within one’s experience of class, gender, ethnicity, age etc. These elements of experience all serve to work on and inform how one engages with different spaces and places (Massey 1994) and indeed how these in turn work back upon various populations and individuals. Again, this point is important to this research because it affords an opportunity to explore how the cases of Vermont and rural Leinster stand within the international discourses on the relations of space and place, gender, young people, education and migration. It also offers an opportunity to utilise the in-depth qualitative data that this research has collected

as a spring-board from which to enter the discussions set within both a rural and an internationally comparative context. This research has unearthed provocative insights into the ways in which rural young women are mobilising certain resources and relations to place and space so as to reflexively generate particular forms of self in order to achieve highly within the educational arena. This makes it clear that the ways that young people relate to space and place and how this interconnects with their identities and future life plans are not just complex and dynamic processes, but integral elements in the ways that they understand themselves and who they conceptualise it possible to become later in life. This idea is a theme which runs the length of this thesis.

Pulls and pushes: rural living and rural leave-taking

Throughout many disparate rural locations across the globe, a surprisingly similar account is given in that the predominant conceptualisation of the rural home community is that it is a beautiful, safe and secure place to live (Corbett 2007b; Dahlström 1996; Easthope and Gabriel 2008; Gabriel 2002; Gibson and Argent 2008; Jamieson 2000; Stockdale 2002a). However, while these attributes are undoubtedly positive, the community itself is understood as “not a place that can sustain youth throughout a working life” (Corbett 2007d:770; Dahlström 1996; Gibson and Argent 2008). This means that in rural areas there is often an implicit discourse of leaving the locale among local young people, often set alongside a professed desire to see the “wider world”. It is easy to see from research like this that there is concerted exploration occurring and a need for further enquiry in general, and there is evidence of at least a little engagement with this in the Irish case (Pat O'Connor 2008a; Ní Laoire 2001, 2005). There is nothing of this tenor as yet delving into the nature of Vermont’s youth relationships with space and place however.

There has been work conducted in other areas of the US though, in particular in rural Appalachia (Howley, Harmon, and Leopold 1996). This research has indicated that certain understandings of place and space facilitate a greater likelihood of leave-taking among some and these appear to influence particular forms of identity development and orientations to education. There has also been work comparing the US state of Pennsylvania and Ireland with regard to linkages between particular levels of social

interaction and community agency (Brennan and Luloff 2007). These were found to be key indicators of community sustainability and viability. Levels of social interaction and identification with the community were topics which my respondents discussed at length. The degree to which my respondents understood themselves to be interconnected with their communities, to have positive social interactions there and to be afforded with a “place for them” played critical roles in their ideas about who they understood themselves to be at present as well as who it was possible for themselves to become later in life. This also was a powerful influence on their plans for out-migration.

Gendered out-migration from rural areas has been a concern for many locations for some time. The departure from rural areas of educated females brings with it myriad issues including social and physiological reproduction, instances of depression, domestic violence, economic sustainability and antisocial behaviour (Corbett 2007a; Andres and Licker 2005; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Dahlström 1996). However, Corbett (2007d) attests that beneath the considerable discourse surrounding concerns about rural out-migration, there are many students who will in fact choose to stay in their home communities and show “with their lives that leaving is harder than staying on” despite the socioeconomic difficulties many rural areas face (p. 789). Thus the way that mobility is made sense of and related to is not just based on a system of rational choice but a negotiation which is laced with the immaterial influences of social ties, ways of thinking about and relating to the home area and who one conceptualises it is possible or indeed agreeable to become later in life. What this illustrates is that:

...generic educational practice aimed at generating and privileging mobility capital may continue to miss those individuals who persist in rural communities and in other marginal places such as urban neighborhoods where the link between protracted education and life success is tenuous. Security, occasional work, and family support in a known place may be a better option for many rural youth than protracted education, employment prospects, and high urban living costs in unknown places. The moralistic coupling of education and leaving generates a discourse of schooled salvation that, as usual, elevates the already privileged. (Corbett 2007d:789)

This “moralistic” connotation arguably surrounding education is interesting because it carries with it an implicit notion of meritocracy and that it is “right” and “good” to be

both educated and mobile. Shaw (1994) discusses the relationship this has with Taiwan's "new" middle class. He argues that this "new" middle class is rooted within and, indeed hinges upon a discourse of credentialization. Shaw (1994) asserts that this process of increasingly elevating and legitimating systems of credentialization is a by-product of globalisation as Taiwan has increasingly engaged with the world economic and social stage through greater participation in international trade, travel, media, etc. Without education or academic credentials, Shaw (1994) asserts, Taiwanese young people have little chance of "access to opportunities in the 'modern' sector of the economy" (p. 417) due to lacking the qualifications to gain entry. This is a departure from the more socially based networks of opportunities and capital that Taiwanese culture has traditionally relied upon, namely "human capital derived from trust, dependability, and familiarity established in local relationships" (Shaw 1994:417). Instead, the "new" middle class turn to "invest[ing] in their children, who are socialized to draw primarily on 'inner' resources like determination, effort, ability, and self-discipline to succeed in school" (Shaw 1994:417-418).

This is important for the discussion here because it is remarkably similar to Corbett's (2005b, 2007d) depiction of his "space travellers" and their families. In his research based in Atlantic coastal rural Canada, Corbett found there to be two pronounced orientations among his respondents, the "investors" and the "space travellers". Investors were students with strong local ties to both family and friendship networks as well as socioeconomic structures of the community. They were predominantly working-class and also male, with a strong desire, and indeed likelihood, to stay in or near the home community. Space travellers however were those who had high levels of Corbett's (2004, 2007b, 2007d) "mobility capital". According to Corbett (2004, 2005a, 2007b, 2007d), mobility capital consists of the skills, knowledge, and experiences etc that are associated with spatial (and arguably social) mobility:

For most school-successful children in rural communities, leaving is a foregone conclusion. Mobile youth are prepared for leaving through family educational conversations, travel, or extended family linkages outside the immediate locale. These kinds of experiences represent "mobility capital" (Corbett, 2007) providing a crucial external perspective on the local. (Corbett 2007d:782)

Space travellers were young people who predominantly hailed from middle-class backgrounds and who had serious intentions of leaving the home community and eventually settling elsewhere later in their adult lives. Another difference is that Corbett's (2004, 2005a, 2007b, 2007d) investors continued to make use of the more traditional means of securing employment and thinking about their futures as part of the community through the use of social networks, human capital in the form of trust, established relationships and locally based systems of labour. Space travellers however drew upon their mobility capital as well as their social and cultural capital to systematically engineer exit strategies from the home community to gain entry into the more mainstream, credential-based global economy. Such similarities between rural Canada and Taiwan therefore provide a hint at the possibility of education functioning as a cross-cultural means of climbing what appears to be a progressively standardizing socioeconomic ladder within the global economy of international capitalism. However, much of the literature on education and mobility notes that this is often a very fraught and difficult process as the very real social and structural factors of constraint which operate within people's lives cannot be ignored or simply surmounted by some elevated sense of one's own autonomy (Castells 1997; Budgeon 2003; Bodovski and Farkas 2008; Lareau and Weininger 2003; Lareau 2002). Thus, it is widely understood that social mobility through education is something which doesn't actually happen with all that much frequency.

Corbett's (2007a, 2007b) and Shaw's (1994) studies imply that this "schooled salvation" is an influence which essentially preserves and supports the already privileged. However, when viewed against the rising tide of female participation in advanced education and the prevalence of talented rural young women continuing into upper-level studies and taking leave of their home areas, I feel that we must question these ideas that particular forms of schooling and learning are inherently working in a way of reproductive privileging. I would question these ideas not just along class lines but most especially with mindfulness to the degree to which certain forms of gender or particular cultural structures may be working upon this so-called maintenance of the already privileged. Instead, I would ask how it may indeed be facilitating change for some, especially when viewed alongside work done by Reay (2005), Bettie (2002), Lehmann (2009) and Reay, Crozier

and Clayton (2009) exploring the upward mobility of working-class students, which I will explore in the following chapters.

This is a key point because my research shows that there is considerable propensity for mobility, both social and spatial, among my female respondents, both Irish and Vermonter. Even more thought-provoking is that the majority of these respondents were not among the demographic that the bulk of education and mobility literature assert to be most agentic. They were not the privileged as Corbett (2007a, 2007b, 2007d) argues, nor were they those with long family histories of third level education or firmly situated within the social stability of middle- or upper-class lifestyles as Lareau (2002) asserts. Neither were they akin to Shaw's (1994) "new" middle-class. The respondents in my research who showed these kinds of orientations were far and away more often to be those with little family history, if any, of third level education, coming from homes where family traditions of blue-collar labour were prevalent, and who were often faced with considerable social, spatial and structural constraints. Nevertheless, they have developed remarkable coping mechanisms, personal and social orientations towards education and intensely strategic and conscientious understandings of their route to upper-level education and out-migration. These findings are discussed in detail throughout Chapters Six and Eight, and these behaviours and orientations can be linked to particular lived experiences of place, space, gender and class as we shall see in Chapter Seven.

Knowledge and work as vehicles or as vernacular – the embedded and the unfettered?

For the purposes of this discussion, it is necessary to explore these ideas about various different forms of knowledge and or skills and how they interact with the levels of embeddedness rural young people's identities have within particular spaces and places. Essentially I am viewing these elements as facets of one's habitus and or of the social fields one is engaged with. In this, I am recognising, and indeed bringing to the fore, that young people are not passive receptacles of adult influence, but that they are active agents and that they work upon the social world "as participant agents in social relations" (Mayall 2002:1). This is a basic assumption which underpins this thesis and which is discussed later in Chapter Four in more detail. What I mean therefore, when referring to young people's

embeddedness in space and place, is the degree to which adolescents understand their identities to be derived from their localities and their experiences with their home communities, local systems of knowledge and place-based relations. I include in this the ways in which they draw upon elements of themselves (their identities) that they understand to be derived from their experience *as rural people* from a *particular space and place*.

Admittedly, this is slippery terrain. The degrees to which young people will identify with and or feel attachment to a given place, space or sociocultural environment are multifaceted and mercurial. While some thinkers argue along “individualistic”, “post-subcultural” lines (e.g. Miles (2000) and Muggleton (2000) cited in Shildrick (2006)), it is questionable as to how applicable such premises are on a wider scale. In the context of Ireland, O’Connor (2008a) highlights the ways in which Irish young people understand and construct their identities within a rapidly changing social environment. She argues that while having some elements of a reflexive project, her respondents expressed continued embeddedness within various elements such as family, friends (i.e. social networks) and spatially situated reference points (e.g. various representations of home, local sporting clubs, nationality etc).

Discussing her findings regarding the mooring points of youth identity, self and social relations, O’Connor (2008a) asserts that her participants expressed feelings and relationships contradictory to reflexive modernists’ free-floating, unfettered social liaisons. What is more, her findings suggest that her participants did not find “‘the massive waves of global transformation...perturbing’ (Giddens, 1991:184)” (Pat O’Connor 2008a:156). However, O’Connor (2008a) also tells us that her findings do support much of what Giddens (1991) argued about modern identities and activities increasingly compressing both space and time, with elements of the global becoming intertwined with local activities and experiences:

...what seemed to be happening was that there was ‘an intrusion of distance into local activities’ so that ‘Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global’ (Giddens, 1991:187). Thus, for the young people in this study, supporting an international soccer team, using computer games, listening to an Australian pop singer or

watching US teen TV was no different from supporting their local football team or going for a cycle in their local area, or indeed simply admiring the view there as a tourist might. (p. 156)

O'Connor (2008a) brings attention to the fact that young people actively negotiate between mainstream, globalised messages and the more local and situated discourses they have been raised within. Fundamentally, for the sake of situating this evidence within the context of this thesis, I would put forward that this argument is discussing the intersections, divisions and repercussions of separate fields and disparate forms of habitus. I would also argue that by attending to recent developments in the global marketplace as well as remaining mindful of the nature of local area development, this standpoint could gain a sharper sociocultural lens by understanding these groups not as "middle-class" and "working-class" as Lareau (2002) and others do, but rather as "white-collar" and "blue-collar" respectively. I am viewing class this way because of the changing nature of the socioeconomic systems in my study areas, and arguably elsewhere throughout the globe are facilitating different types of lifestyles being available to different people than traditional definitions of "middle-class" and "working-class" might afford (Shaw 1994; Kirstein and Bandranaike 2004; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). I am also viewing it this way because I am most concerned with the ways in which work is understood, related to, and conceptualised to carry gendered connotations among my respondents.

My reasoning for this follows the "psychic landscape" argument noted above and which I will explore further in the following chapter. This was based on the fact that certain industries in Leinster and Vermont have dominated much of their economies during their respective building booms (roughly the 1990s-2008). These industries include the construction and housing sectors as well as those of goods and services. In the Irish economy, from the years 2000-2007, the proportion of people employed within the construction and building industry continued to grow from 9.94% to 12.76% (Central Statistics Office 2004, 2009b). From the years 2000-2007, Vermont's labour market dependency on construction steadily went from 5.05% to 5.66%, with higher rises in and the leisure and hospitality sector shooting from around 4% in 2000 to 11.07% in 2007. This corresponded with the spike in second-home ownership and thus increases in the already prevalent tourism industry in Vermont (Vermont Department of Labor 2008; US Census Bureau 2000h). What is more, a general downturn in the manufacturing sector ran

parallel to these increases, dropping from 16.51% in 2000 to 11.54% in 2007 in Vermont. This was mirrored by a similar contraction in Ireland going from 18.51% in 2002 down to 13.59% in 2006 participation in “other production industries” outside of agriculture, forestry and fishing (Central Statistics Office 2004, 2009b; Vermont Department of Labor 2000, 2007, 2008).

After the furore of building which lasted approximately a decade, in 2008 the construction industry accounted for over 11% of total employment in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2009b:21). This figure was only around 5.18% in Vermont in 2008 but this was balanced by the continued heavy reliance on leisure and hospitality (10.64%) as well as retail and trade (13.01%), again having to do with the increased second-homeownership that was buoyed by the wider trends in property speculation (Vermont Department of Labor 2008; US Census Bureau 2000b). Notable also, is that in both places, the dominance that these industries had played was beginning to decline by 2008 with the slow-down in the wider global economy. Considering the amount of growth and changes in labour market participation in these industries, Vermont and Ireland have experienced a unique kind of change in their social ordering. Further, they have increased their participation in the wider marketplace of the global economy with an undeniable rapidity. This has been facilitated through a number of channels including the arrival of large multinational companies, expanding broadband services as well as increases in educational participation rates (Fagan 2002; Redmond 2009; Fahey et al. 2007). Considering such mutations, I would argue that the lived experience of class (Reay 2005; Reay and Ball 1997; Lehmann 2009) too would have undergone change in these locations.

Thus while the material conditions experienced by those who engaged in these dominant sectors of the labour force may indeed have changed due to the prevalence of particular forms of work in these areas, the cultural narratives surrounding various types of work are less likely to have done so. I would suggest this because cultural change is notoriously slow when set against the rapidity that markets are capable of (Ní Laoire 2001, 2005, 2007). The genres of work that rose to prominence in Ireland and Vermont up until 2008 have traditionally been attributed with predominantly working-class status. However, as the majority of development in these economies was in these sectors, those who worked within them and their families would not necessarily have lived what would traditionally be

considered working-class lifestyles. Rather, those who were in the building and property industries during the boom in Ireland and those in the service and retail sectors in Vermont would more than likely have lived what could be considered middle-class lifestyles until the economic downturn took hold in 2007/2008. For example, from the years 2004 to 2008, the average weekly earnings of unskilled operatives in the construction industry went from €676.46 to €807.54 in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2009a:3). In Vermont from 2000 to 2009 average yearly earnings in the retail sector, while not as lucrative as those in construction (from \$31,356 to \$41,672), still went from \$19,804 to \$25,563 (Vermont Department of Labor 2010b). These are sizable jumps which are higher than the rate of inflation, suggesting greater levels of disposable income among those employed in these sectors during this time (CIA World Factbook 2010).

Thus, because it was the nature of and relationship with work and ideas about social and spatial mobility within these places that I felt I needed to focus on, I have used the terminology of “blue-collar” and “white-collar” throughout this research to discuss concepts of work and class. I was most interested in the cultural, contextual factors surrounding work that my respondents hailed from. I was interested in the social and cultural forms of capital surrounding particular types of work because of how different forms of capital or habitus can be employed to varying degrees across certain social fields to facilitate particular forms of agency in interaction for individuals as has been seen above using Corbett’s investors and space travellers as examples. It is the milieus within which these young people have been raised as well as their corresponding habituses which this research is focused upon because I wanted to explore how the social and psychic influences surrounding class played out in my respondents’ understandings of themselves, education and their possible future life trajectories. This understanding was a major conceptual starting point in the construction of my methodological approach and is discussed further in Chapter Five.

Moving forward from this, if the relationship with work and or what constitutes a “successful” life among the young people of these locales is to be understood, then the more traditional ways of thinking about working- and middle-class need to be readjusted for the kinds of changes these people and places have experienced. It is also the ways in which particular forms of work are understood to be either spatially and socially embedded

or not in a given location and context that was a point of interest for this research. I was curious as to whether certain types of work and the capital and social messages that were attached to them might be understood to be more or less favourable within particular geocultural contexts for particular types of people (e.g. male or female, rural or urban, young or old etc). I was also interested to see what kinds of work were understood to “belong” or be embedded in a particular context and which were understood to be inherently more mobile and engaged in the wider global economy. Further, I wanted to see how these were made sense of and attributed status among high achieving local young people.

As has been seen above, it is clear that Vermont and Ireland have experienced considerable change in recent years. These include changes in how the landscape is related to through the fluctuating housing market, to continued deindustrialisation via contraction in the manufacturing sectors and the declining number of people involved in agriculture. These developments also crucially encompass the general time-space compression that connection with and participation in our global society facilitates. As such, changes in identity are to be expected and indeed anticipated given such social and economic mutation (Harvey 1989), most especially among the young people growing up within such fluctuating times. One of the ways this kind of social transformation plays out, this thesis argues, is through female participation in education and the distinctive identity work that they engage in through doing so. I will explore this further throughout the following two chapters as well as in Chapter Six with relation to the highly dynamic and intensely focused systems of self that my respondents detailed to me.

Thus, the ways that young people relate to education, particular forms of work, ideas about gender and labour as well as how they interact with and understand their home communities or places that are “elsewhere” are all bound up in an intricate web of social and personal negotiation. This is done through their psychic landscapes of not just social class but also of gender and space. It is this web that this thesis seeks not so much to unravel, but to sketch and develop a better understanding of through the discussions and intimations my participants shared with me. Through the ways that my respondents detail their understandings of self, space and what they plan for their futures, I would argue that

we are afforded with unique insights into what tomorrow might look like and an opportunity to map both social and spatial change.

What is more, Lash and Urry (1994), argue that the most important structures which define “the basis for dividing a global population” are those of “information and communication” (p. 7). This means that the degree of access to information and knowledge-based resources influence one’s social status within the global economy more than has been seen in years prior. If viewed for example, along the lines of personal computer ownership and access to the internet, Vermont and Ireland have undergone some very serious transformations in recent years regarding the degree to which the average citizen has access to the cornucopia that is the World Wide Web. Between 2000 and 2007, the percentage of homes with a personal computer in Ireland rose from just 32.4% to 65% while broadband subscriptions went from 10,600 in 2000 to 891,346 in 2008 (International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 2009). The percentage of computers in homes has hovered around 80% in Vermont since 2000, however the proportion of homes with broadband service, like in Ireland, has skyrocketed from around 10% in 2000 to “almost 90 percent of Vermonters have access to at least one mass-market broadband service” (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:95).

Considering this along the lines of Corbett’s mobility capital, I would argue that these two locations have experienced a serious increase in access to this catalyst of social and spatial mobility through even this one element in their infrastructural development over the past ten years. The ways in which this connectivity might increase other facets of agency, such social and cultural capital, through exposure to various different forms of information/knowledge, music, art, social networks and intercultural communication is an exciting area for future research. For the purposes of this work however, these kinds of developments in Vermont’s and Ireland’s information infrastructure are understood as tangible ways which these areas have connected into global systems and so have impacts upon existing forms of status, hierarchy and social ordering.

Conclusions

Ultimately this work attends to the nature of the relationship between rural students, their selves, education and their communities, working to show the linkages between these elements and the students' future life plans, especially with regard to mobility both social and spatial. It is exploring connections between how adolescents' particular identities are negotiated and formulated by individuals within certain settings and the wider social trends of female-led educational attainment and out-migration from rural areas. It does this while remaining mindful of the progressive gendering of the pool of people who will increasingly make up the knowledge economy workforce, broadly speaking. These people are predominantly women as has been seen above in the numbers of females attaining upper level educational credentials. What is more, by exploring how those young women who might become migrants are "invest[ing] in work *per se* [sic] and not just see[ing] work as a route to survival (Sassen, 2003), we can expand the scope within which female migrant identities may be understood, and ensure that narratives of economic survival...do not constrain our analysis of female migration" (Raghuram 2008:51).

Further, by examining how young rural women might be mobilising their resources through education with a view to engaging in particular types of work, this research is joining literature like that of Larner and Molloy (2009) who assert that:

...the simplistic duality of third world factory worker and first world consuming subject occludes both the new forms of work in the first world and the ways in which women's movement into first world labour forces, and the simultaneous re-configuring of middle-class work, shape globalizing processes. Throughout the developed world more women are participating in tertiary education, moving into managerial positions formerly reserved for men, starting new businesses, creating new economic opportunities, earning more money, marrying less frequently, having fewer children, and enjoying larger disposable incomes than any previous generation. The fact that these trends coincide with globalization needs further investigation. Without these analyses we will not capture the full complexity of how globalization has been shaped by and is shaping gendered processes. (p. 51-52)

Essentially then, this thesis is addressing the need to explore how education functions as a vehicle for change through a focus on gender and space because our social

order is one which is increasingly both predicated and reliant upon a global capitalist system which connects and intersects our lives on micro- and macro-levels. Further, through recognising this, my research is able to begin engaging with the undeniable presence of a somewhat mainstream conception of valuable knowledge, what appears to be a progressively standardising education system and spreading messages surrounding credentialism which seem to be translating across languages, cultures and borders.

On balance, this doctoral research provides some qualitative insights and a few ideas about how the micro-level processes of identity formation might be affecting the macro-level trends of female rural out-migration and high educational attainment which have been seen in the literature reviewed here to be found throughout the globe. In exploring whether there are linkages between the ways in which young women relate to their rural home communities and how these might influence both their current and planned formations of self, this thesis goes beyond examining simply whether more women than men are out-migrating from rural locales. It questions whether this is a key facet of an intricate, gendered relationship to power which is set within a social order that appears to be progressively relating status and agency with one's ability to be employed within and take part of a largely knowledge-based global economic structure.

This research is essentially exploring the *hows* and *whys* around young women's mobility and enquiring into the ways that they go about making themselves mobile. In terms of what "mobile modernity" and its "logic" entails, this chapter has examined these ideas by delving into how our increasingly interconnected world influences particular people and places. This idea will also be taken up in the following chapter and expanded upon through an exploration of its relationship with education and gender. By examining how globalisation appears to be working upon other areas and young people around the world with regard to education and mobility, this research is situated firmly within a rich vein of global enquiry. Through the discursive contexts examined here, this thesis is also given sturdy conceptual footing in its exploration of the similarities and differences between the Vermont and Leinster cases and establishes a context for how this research contributes to these discussions.

Further, by asking questions surrounding the genesis of high-achieving young women's sentiments about their home communities and their relationships with education

and mobility, this research is digging into what may be shifts in the “cultural logic” of rural females’ educational and mobility practices. This was a major contributing factor in my decision to explore these facets through the lens of blue- and white-collar work. This is because it was the culture surrounding particular types of work and the statuses attributed to them and how my respondents had relationships with these that I am seeking to examine. All of these elements will be expanded upon later with relation to my findings, specifically regarding the very particular, conscientious and socially aware strategies and practices that many of my participants detailed in their efforts for educational excellence and both social and spatial mobility. Crucially, these were strikingly similar across geographic areas.

Overall, this chapter has introduced some of the main ideas that this work explores and couched the research in a better understanding of the two sample locations as rural areas. The role of space and place in this research cannot be underestimated and how gender and education are impacted by these elements is the subject of the following chapter, expanding upon the ideas introduced here and attending to them through focusing on gender, education, mobility and globalisation. I will then examine in detail the processes that identity formation engages in by exploring work from fields like psychology and social psychology in Chapter Four. In the two following chapters I will draw out the linkages between these analytic frameworks and those paradigms which work towards wider social explanations for such phenomena from fields like sociology and human geography. Ultimately, it is clear that in order to explore the ways that young rural women navigate their identity work, social engagement and relationships with education, their communities and the futures they plan for themselves, we must take into account the ways they negotiate with situated systems of gender, relations to education and ideas of both spatial and social mobility.

CHAPTER THREE

GENDER AND EDUCATION – IS THIS WHERE THE GIRLS ARE?

Introduction

So far it can be established that the role space and place play in this research is a considerable one. However, it is not the sole focus of this thesis but rather an integral part of the lens through which I am examining how gender and education play out in the lives of young rural people, especially those who intend to out-migrate. Extending the ideas I have introduced in the first chapter, here I will engage more deeply with those of education, gender, mobility and globalisation. In this chapter, I will draw out connections between the ways that young rural women navigate the work they do on their identities, social relations, understandings of education, their communities and the futures they are planning. From the standpoint that these are systems influenced by the space and place of rural areas which have experienced much change in recent years, I will draw upon ideas surrounding the theorisation of gender and education to link ways young people negotiate with situated systems of gender, relations to education and ideas of both spatial and social mobility.

I will also introduce some of the thinkers who have attempted to explain the social trend of female-led out-migration from rural areas and engage in exploring the possible influences contributing to this kind of behaviour. By examining the relationship between education and gender, and highlighting the recent trends in increasing female participation and academic excellence in higher education, I will present some of the discussions surrounding shifts in gender roles and emerging forms of femininity. A question that this thesis explores is what happens when—like the outstripping of male counterparts in the classroom—the female breadwinner, highly mobile and empowered “career woman” comes into the normative framework, or at least discourse, of life trajectories for young women? This is particularly interesting set against assertions that within the changing scapes of the global economy, the “ability to produce and disseminate education will increasingly determine [a] nation’s competitiveness as [it] shift[s] from an industrial to an information economy” (Carnevale and Desrochers 2002:1). Therefore, with so many women engaged

in upper-level education, what kind of future global economy might this be, given the undeniable prevalence patriarchal culture maintains worldwide? What kinds of selves are these women constructing and how are they doing it?

By examining this question from the viewpoint of young women living in rural areas—places where traditional gender roles and gendered structures of opportunities remain relatively strong—this research is attempting to attend to their negotiations, choice-making and future self-building. What is more, it does this amidst the backdrop of a place-based gender influence while remaining mindful of the time-space compression our institutions, like education and the school, and general contemporary lifestyles engage in. This dynamic relationship will be drawn out and engaged with later in Chapters Seven and Eight with regard to the ways in which my respondents made sense of their local contexts and how they understood themselves as either able to stay or compelled to leave. I will close this chapter by proffering some thoughts about the relationship between these elements and why this PhD research is needed in this discourse.

School and class – pun or paradigm?

As has been introduced already, Corbett (2007b) posits a double-sided facilitation of continued middle-class hegemony in rural schooling, bringing to bear the full weight of what Lareau (2002) calls “concerted cultivation”. He argues this through highlighting the elevation of mainstream, academic learning and a systematic delegitimation of local forms of knowledge. These thinkers argue that the child rearing practices which run parallel to the pedagogical practices of the formal schooling environment are mostly found among middle-class families regardless of race and ethnicity. Lareau (2002) asserts that these practices essentially work towards socialising children to produce and reproduce particular skill sets, orientations and relations and she calls this “concerted cultivation” (p. 772). This form of childrearing is fundamentally different to the approach Lareau (2002) names “natural growth” and which she argues is found among more working-class families.

According to Lareau (2002), “concerted cultivation” is made up of direct and conscious efforts to afford children with the ways and means of gaining as much mainstream cultural capital as possible in preparation for adult life. “Natural growth” on

the other hand, is more or less epitomised by the standpoint that young people develop on their own and do not require too much structured moulding or shaping from their parents or guardians. Their development is understood as a “natural” process through which they become individual adults. Lareau’s (2002) argument hinges on the ways in which the working-class parents in her study viewed their children’s development as an independently and almost individualistically unfolding narrative with little need for structured management. This is in direct juxtaposition to how the middle-class parents in her study understood the process of childrearing and children’s own roles in their growth and maturation.

Lareau (2002) discusses a “‘cultural logic’ of childrearing” in her address of the influence of class background on various familial practices surrounding the raising of children (p. 772). While her work took issues of race into account in sampling “white” children and “black” children, her findings indicate that by far, class is the predominant influence in terms of patterns of childrearing across her sampled families. In her study, middle-class families were shown to be engaging in concerted cultivation whereby “they made a deliberate and sustained effort to stimulate children’s development and to cultivate their cognitive and social skills” while working-class and/or “poor parents viewed children’s development as spontaneously unfolding, as long as they were provided with comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support” (pp. 772-773).

Ultimately, Lareau (2002) uses a Bourdieusian lens to highlight that differences in childrearing across social classes have sociocultural “long-term consequences” (p. 774). Essentially, Lareau (2002) argues that because middle-class children experienced their family members having empowered interactions with authority figures as well as “formal institutions”, they were much more able to “negotiate more valuable out-comes” for themselves with respect to these than were their less socioeconomically privileged cohorts (p. 774). Lareau (2002) argued that this meant “working-class and poor children were learning lessons in constraint while middle-class children were developing a sense of entitlement” (p. 774).

This element of her research is highly compelling, especially in terms of the study of social reproduction and the cycle of inequality, and has been essentially supported (often with critiques as well) by considerable subsequent research (Bodovski 2007; Vincent and

Ball 2007; Bodovski and Farkas 2008). However, in the area of identity development and the navigation of self and social roles, one of the fundamentally provocative points Lareau (2002) present is the difference in terms of constructed conceptions of self between middle-class and working-class/poor children. Lareau (2002) discusses the daily life patterns of middle- and working-class families and the important dynamics which these different patterns hold respectively (pp. 761-763). Within middle-class families, children “had developed a clear sense of their own talents and skills, and they differentiated themselves from siblings and friends” (p. 773) while working-class children hold considerably stronger ties to others, particularly kinship groups and extended family, in terms of how they make sense of themselves and their lived experience (pp. 758-759).

In other literature, it is even argued that “[t]o express one's view is a natural right for middle-class children, but something to be earned and defended for working-class children” when examining personal narratives as a means of identity formation and legitimation (Wiley et al. 1998:883). Overall, the differences found in the making of self-identity between middle- and working-class young people are in need of some considerable discussion (Skeggs 2002, 2004). Because much of what my respondents discussed regarding these elements is in such juxtaposition to what is presented by much of general discourse surrounding education and social reproduction I think this idea deserves revisiting, especially when viewed alongside the discussions about social structural awareness among parents and the perception of new emerging orders. I will discuss this at length later in Chapter Nine.

Bartel's (1971) work on the locus of control in relation to achievement and class among children, while being an older piece of work, still brings to bear some important questions about the fundamental processes of socialisation among middle- and working-class children. Admittedly, there are questions in terms of the relevance for today of some of Bartel's (1971) findings, including his citing the work of Litt (1963) which highlights the systematic usage of texts within middle-class schools which “stressed the political process as active occurrences involving confrontations between political actors and the use of political power” while those used for working-class schools “stressed passive obedience to laws and represented the political process as ‘the workings of an invisible hand of governmental institutions’ (Litt 1963, p. 72)” (Bartel 1971:1100).

Whether the use of such disparate and socially controlling texts is still the case or not is questionable. However, the basic idea that through various structural and social ways and means “lower-class children [acquire] a world view and self-concept in which the subject sees himself as a passive agent, unable to affect change in the events that govern his life, and unable to affect a contingency between events in his own life space and the rewards available in the social system” (Bartel 1971:1100) is a poignant and provocative question. This is somewhat similar to the “culture of poverty” argument presented by Wilson (1987) in that it essentially presents the idea that young people with particular forms of cultural capital or habituses are predisposed to marginalisation and disenfranchisement from the very beginning of their primary socialisation throughout their development into adulthood.

If, as Bartel (1971) suggests, “lower-class children are being trained in and rewarded for adopting a life style that is ultimately self-defeating” whether this be in the educational arena or the more intimate one of social ties (p. 1100), then I would argue that we must ask a very serious question of this line of thought. If this is really the case then we must fundamentally enquire around whether perhaps today, within certain environs, there might be any at least marginally generalisable explanation for those non middle-class or non white-collar children who do well within the educational system? This is one of the most intriguing areas in the study of education and is in serious need for further exploration. Thus, my work seeks to shed light on the nuances and behaviours of students who buck this trend, namely blue-collar young women who do particularly well in school. My findings on this issue will be discussed throughout the analysis chapters.

Such discourses as these incite the need for exploring how young rural women are relating to education, their communities and conceptualising future life plans. The idea that young women, and I would argue, particularly those from rural areas, might be turning towards education or up-skilling and thus greater geographic and social mobility as a strategy for sociocultural empowerment, opportunity and indeed—for economic survival, must be explored. An interesting note that Jacob (2002) makes and which my study also attends to, is that as “non-cognitive skills” are shown to significantly influence college/university enrolment, it would be beneficial to find out “whether certain school characteristics foster the development of such skills and if certain types of curriculum,

pedagogy or learning environments are more effective for one gender than the other” (p. 597). By “non-cognitive skills”, Jacob (2002) is referring to things like paying attention in class, organisation, time management and the completion of assignments on time. This is discussed later in this chapter in more depth but here it serves to help underscore that in terms of discerning particularly powerful impacts, it would behove research in this area to identify whether or not certain influences from teachers through mentoring, evaluating and indeed fostering various non-cognitive skills and orientations might be facets of some school agendas and environments more than others. Further it would provide important insights by exploring the extent to which these cultivate developmental individualisation or default individualisation (Côté 2002) writ small and more general practices of reflexive self and habitus work on a larger scale. These ideas are discussed in the following section to explore the idea that perhaps it is the case that the smaller, more intimate rural school environment might engender particularly educationally adept strategies among students. The idea merits questioning and such relationships require deep, concerted thought and empirical examination, elements central to my own work.

Education and rural areas – globalisation and individualism versus the local and communal?

The spread of mainstream credentialist attitudes appears to be progressively aligned with moving from embeddedness in the local to disembeddedness in the time-space compressed global through things like “institutional change[s] [which] include the supplanting of the old model of production with a new one, the elimination of old markets and the emergence of new ones” (Loomis and Rodriguez 2009:475). Loomis and Rodriguez (2009) argue that “as higher education around the world shifts from national markets to an integrated transnational market, and possibly toward a virtual market”, the disembeddedness of education facilitates new opportunities for particular forms of education to “redefine” themselves (p. 475). I would argue alongside this that these forces also open up new opportunities for people and places to redefine their relationships with education. Further, given the increasing prevalence of the requirement of third level educational credentials to enter high status work (Schneider and Stevenson 1999), this

relationship is increasingly playing a crucial role in the lives of young people in their transition to adulthood.

As such, I find Côté's (2002) discussion of individualisation helpful in encouraging a more nuanced approach to studying the manner in which young rural people are navigating their education, identity development and community relations. Côté (2002) argues that the identity capital model affords a more flexible approach to individualisation through its two basic types, namely *developmental* and *default*. The identity capital model asserts that "certain personal resources are crucially important for effective functioning within and between institutions" and that these resources can be differentially and consciously cultivated by individuals so as to gain entry to and or adjust into various different environs (e.g. third level education, work places, the adult world etc) (Côté 2002:119). I draw attention to this thinking because it is easily reconciled with notions of habitus and social fields and serves as a keener way of examining such elements. I will develop this thinking more fully in the following section and chapter but I mention it here in order to link the ideas of how place and space influence conceptions of education to how this plays out in individuals' lives.

To view this on the micro-level, the degree to which one constructs an "individualized life project", which seems to be an increasingly important prerequisite in contemporary society, can be understood as the degree to which one engages in "default" individualisation and "developmental" individualisation in Côté's (2002) thinking. To explain further, *default* individualisation is defined by the "passive acceptance of mass-marketed and mass-educational prepackaged identities, which can lead to a deferred membership in an adult community" while *developmental* individualisation is "the active, strategic approaches to personal growth and life-projects in...adult community(ies) (cf. Evans & Heinz (1994) and their concepts of 'passive' and 'active' individualization)" (Côté 2002:119). For example, default individualisation might be understood as the broad, loose assumption that one will need to go to third level education "one day" to "get a good job" later in life. A more developmental form of individualisation would be where a young person understands that he or she enjoys music and figuring out how sound works, therefore the idea that he or she wants to go to third level education in order to be a sound engineer becomes an element in this. In making a distinction between these two types, we

move closer towards walking a middle path between understanding “young people as self-determining, and youth culture as autonomous” and viewing the process of individualization as “an attempt to control young people through privatization of what should be collective activities” (Côté 2002:132).

Côté (2002) argues that it is important that adults (teachers, parents etc) try to advocate a healthy balance between these two forms of individualisation among young people so that they might become “self-determining agents, as opposed to passive consumers” through finding ways and means of showing the drawbacks of default individualization and supporting developmental forms instead (p. 132). He suggests that adults can do this through encouraging young people to “think in terms of long-range self-development strategies” and that they think critically about “who they are” before they must join the adult world, suggesting that agency, in this case, is directly related to how particular aspects of one’s personality “produce positive life-project outcomes” (Côté 2002:132). This idea is also supported through the work of Schneider and Stevenson (1999) on “aligned ambitions” which will be discussed more fully in the following chapters. This convergence is something that many of my respondents discussed as occurring in their lives and indeed in engaging in this kind of negotiating themselves. In discussing how they were navigating between the pressures they felt from “society” and how they mediated these with their own hopes and aspirations, my respondents detailed very complex ways in which they were making sense of not just wider social influences but also their own notions of self. This is discussed in depth later in Chapters Six and Eight.

This kind of evidence and argument further supports the call for more concerted action within the institutional arena of the education system in that it asks for more conscious attention from staff and faculty to the active self and future building of young people. Ultimately Côté (2002) suggests that if agency does appear to operate as the degree to which certain elements of one’s personality work to produce those “positive life-project outcomes” then further research will need to include these variables when considering what kinds of guidance and support adults need to give to young people so that they can “cope with the now compulsory individualization process of late modernity, whether it be in cultures of their own creation or adult-sponsored socialization contexts (cf. Côté & Allahar, 1996)” (Côté 2002:132).

By taking on board Côté's (2002) viewpoint, it becomes apparent that overall, work like the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Report (1995) elucidates some very important issues concerning the levels of opportunity for agency development or lack thereof within the US education system. While the statistical data itself is dated, the fundamental theoretical and conceptual discussion is still highly relevant. While young women have continued to outstrip young men on the playing field of overall academic achievement, this has been done against considerable odds, a matter which is of particular bearing to my study, for in this fact alone there are important indicators of a sociocultural movement among young women and girls. The AAUW Report discusses young women as facing formidable constraints ranging from greater demands on their time from domestic responsibilities like chores or looking after younger children, to the in-class assumption that the "girls are doing alright" and thus need less attention from teachers, support workers etc. Yet they continue to maintain higher overall academic achievement than their male counterparts. Thus, it is clear that one must then ask how specifically young women are achieving this excellence? More specifically with relation to this thesis, I question if women as a general social group are faced with such constraints, then how are young women from rural areas achieving so highly? This is an especially provocative question because these are areas where these constraints on young women are magnified through the persistence of traditional, patriarchal structures of labour and gender (Corbett 2007a; Bryant and Pini 2009; Saugeres 2002).

What is more, young rural women face gender challenges on several accounts through the male dominance of socially prominent labour industries like construction, agriculture etc as well as recreational activities like hunting, fishing or participation in local sports teams (Tucker and Matthews 2001; Corbett 2004, 2007a; Pat O'Connor 2007). Rural areas are thus not exactly "female friendly" in a number of respects. This is not to suggest that all rural areas harbour some kind of deep-seated misogyny but rather that the structural and cultural building blocks of these areas are often based on traditional conceptualisations of patriarchal gender norms and that these often play out through not just the culture of work in an area but also through the empirical availability of work, the nature of recreational opportunities and the condition of wider social relations.

Thus, it is clearly important to question whether or not it is these arguably doubly constrained young women who in turn perform most concerted the only positive roles they understand as available to them within their rural environs, i.e. that of the high academic achiever who will eventually leave the community. A major line of inquiry must therefore be whether ideal femininity—as constructed and related to by women themselves—is progressively and proportionately being based more upon the level of education/skills attainment one achieves and thus the high-status and intrinsically mobile career trajectories which follow. This is opposed to ideal femininity being understood as grounded in a dichotomous relation to maleness and a proclivity for traditional caring occupations within or outside of a situated home space. Thus I beg the question of whether these high-achieving rural young women are actually engaging in a new and innovative form of feminism, especially those high-achievers from blue-collar areas and who have little family history of education. My findings on this are engaging and I discuss this throughout the analysis chapters.

Gender, education, skills and space

In terms of how young people navigate through their different gendered and stratified worlds, it is important to also attend to the various forms of agency that young people are able to enact. The power dynamics operating within different social structural environments must remain at the forefront of this research. This is especially the case because this work is attending to people who, as adolescents, occupy somewhat marginal social space and positions given that they are transitioning from childhood to the adult world (Arnett 1998; Brannen and Nilsen 2002; Côté and Bynner 2008). In accepting this premise I am not understanding “transition” in a linear way as in transition as simply the progression from school to work, because this conceptualisation “limit[s] our understanding of the complexity of young people’s lives in a changing social world” (Stokes and Wyn 2007:496). Rather, I am recognising that transition is much more complex and multifaceted and should be “a more socially contexted concept... which acknowledges both the societal shift from industrial to post-industrial modes of learning

and earning and the role that young people play in forging new identities and approaches to career” (Stokes and Wyn 2007:496).

Further, using this word or referring to ideas about “youth transition as ‘becoming’”, I am not conceptualising youth and adulthood as a dichotomy, nor am I “advocating the binary of youth as becoming and adult as being” (Worth 2009:1050,1058). Instead, I am asserting that the idea of becoming or transition in this research is based on Worth’s (2009) notion of it, that it is focused on “the fluidity of personal identity and orientation toward the future” and therefore provides “space to include many kinds of difference” (p. 1058) which means that it recognises that young people “are moral agents, that they think they should, and do participate in constructing the social order...and [by attending to their views, we can formulate] a standpoint, through setting them within social analysis” (Mayall 2002:178). However, their place within these social systems is negotiated and structured by the ways in which they are able to exercise agency and autonomy. This means that:

...[young people] are structurally differentiated within societies and that, as such, they experience the exercise of power differently, and in particular in its institutionalized and legitimated forms. It is also taken as basic that such [young people] have their needs and rights variously ascribed and constricted according to the dominant paternalistic ideologies, albeit activated for ‘good’ and ‘caring’ reasons. (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998:211)

Thus, becoming or transition in this research is more about using this notion as a “first step in considering the ‘multiple becomings’ we encounter throughout the lifecourse [sic]” and that “by focusing on flexibility and futurity, the concept of becoming reflects that young people (and parents and policymakers) do feel there is a transition taking place, that important life choices are being made as young people look ahead to adulthood and anticipate the future (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007; Uprichard, 2008)” (Worth 2009:1058). This is important because adolescents and other groups—indeed populations—within society such as women, homosexuals, various ethnic minorities, elders etc do not necessarily have the efficacy, the agency or the access to self-name, self-determine and self-construct to the degree which Giddens (1991) and other reflexive modernisation thinkers have presented (e.g. Lash and Friedman (1992)).

So, when considering the diversity of sociocultural environs alongside the progressive standardisation of education, Corbett's (2007d) discussion of dominant definitions of the "educable child" (pp. 772-773) is noteworthy. The ascriptions young people, and in this case rural young people, often contend with due to the economic, social and spatial reordering that comes with development, present considerable contentions for students, their education systems and their communities. Corbett (2007d) argues that rural young people "who are integrated into local spaces have come to be systematically constructed outside the frame of educability" (p. 772) because they are conceptualised as fixed or "stuck" within a particular system of understanding and concept of knowledge, a place-based construction:

Popkewitz (1998) called the discursively constructed "urban/rural" child, who is inflexible, "stuck," and "deficient" compared to the "absent presence" of the "real," educable child who is essentially suburban and middle class. This "urban/rural" child is deficient by virtue of being in the wrong place and by being unable to escape. An important part of the identity configuration of the "educable child" is that this child is not "stuck" in place; rather she or he is active, calculating, mobile, and focused on abstract and increasingly virtual spaces opened up by education. The educable child is developing as a flexible proto-worker engaging in multiple forms of mobility in preparation for deployment in the emerging production and consumption spaces of contemporary capitalism. (Corbett 2007d:772-773)

Such ascriptions are problematic and Corbett (2007d) moves on to critique Giddens' (1991) atomistic, (post)modern individual by using Castells' (1997) argument that such an "individualized, mobile, 'reflexive project of the self'" (pp. 32-34 Corbett 2007b cites from the 2004 edition) is the preserve of the privileged" (Corbett 2007b:773). This argument asserts that reflexive modernists' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991) agentic and empowered individual are a rarity outside of the most powerful members of society, namely, those who aid in the construction and maintenance of the status quo most dominantly. However, one of the most compelling elements of my own work is in its exploration of this argument about the "educable child", and hence implicitly, young peoples' reflexive agency *to become particular types of people* through their educations, especially those from less advantageous socioeconomic backgrounds. Who are these educable children, given the changes in the gendering of upper level education and the continual out-migration from

rural areas of bright, educated young women? This is an idea which will be discussed further in relation to my own findings in Chapters Six and Seven.

Different skill sets, networks and capital are valued and salient to various degrees depending upon particular social, cultural, economic and political conditions. Thus, different forms of capital bear certain returns given their particular circumstances of enactment and or interplay (i.e. fields). This essentially means that young people facilitated with the means to gain and utilise meaningful capital within different institutions (like school) are effectively given an advantage in terms of entry into successive institutions and fields (like particular forms of work or social settings). These may be those of the hegemonic status quo (i.e. particular credentials gaining access to upper-level white-collar employment and the accompanying social fields) or they could be those of alternative frameworks (those possessing local knowledge and networks able to gain access to particular forms of recreation, employment and the social fields surrounding these etc) (Bourdieu 1974, 1984).

Different forms of knowledge and skills, like Rose's (2004) "working intelligence" and Lareau's (2002) "natural growth", are not schooled forms of knowledge but rather are "acquired through embodied practice or habitus" so they are largely disregarded or given little credence within the institutional educational environment (Corbett 2007d:788). These are often things like manual skills, being "streetwise" or "savvy" as well as knowledge or experience which will be conducive to manual or skilled manual labour present in the local economy. This also extends to knowledge which is embedded in particular locations or cultural contexts. An example of such knowledge might be the traditional practice of "Sugaring" in Vermont whereby sap is collected during spring and boiled down to make maple syrup, a local delicacy which is also marketed widely elsewhere and is a product which Vermont exports.

This kind of knowledge is highly place-specific and communal as it requires local geographic and topographical knowledge, understanding of Vermont's weather systems, forestry and a "feel" for the "right time to sugar". Sugaring spots are often passed down within families and the process is almost always a social one, whether during the "tapping" of the trees, to monitoring the "runs" of sap or attending to the process of boiling the sap into syrup. This also requires having access to a "Sugarhouse" in which to boil the sap,

maintaining careful attendance to the right temperature at which the sap should be boiled, often taking round-the-clock supervision. Sugaring therefore is not just a process of harvesting a natural resource for profit or personal consumption, but it is a tradition of Vermont culture through which the promise of spring after the long winter engenders community, renews social networks and affords a testament to one's knowledge of the land and seasons of Vermont and as such, is a reaffirmation of one's belonging to this place and space. Indeed, it is a practice in place-based identity construction (Corbett 2005b).

While this kind of knowledge is clearly both in-depth and indeed broad in what it requires of one to know and be able to do in order to achieve the goal of harvesting, processing and producing the delicacy, this is not knowledge which would be understood as specifically valuable in the institutional educational context. As such, this knowledge-dichotomy, if you will, poses problems for many students because it systematically marginalizes youth who make regular use of such knowledge and learning styles, further cementing the stratifying processes and indeed, structuration of formal education in today's globalized, capitalistic world:

Ironically these people ended up becoming the backbone of rural communities that continue to struggle for survival and for control of resources on land and sea. The game heats up as these resources and harvesting privileges become increasingly valuable in the context of globalization. (Corbett 2007d:788)

Thus, while mainstream schooling continues to devalue those forms of knowledge which local communities depend heavily upon for their social and economic stability, the entire viability of the community is therefore in many ways put at stake. This is because these forms of locally or skills-based knowledge are often delegitimated within the institutional educational environment in favour of more abstracted and standardised forms which are both disembedded in terms of the application (like calculus for example) and what they are required for (e.g. for entry into particular universities or courses of study).

It could be argued that, just as Corbett (2007d) notes above, those young people who will make up the basis of rural area populations in the future are being streamed educationally, culturally and economically back into particular geographic *and* socioeconomic areas of disempowerment or out of the rural community altogether. This

idea, while still in need of significant research and analysis, poses some very serious questions regarding local area development plans, community support initiatives and efforts for more sustainable rural localities and indeed systems of pedagogy. It also opens up deep and compelling questions about the *type* of population needed for sustainable rural places and spaces today, a serious issue that this thesis is trying to engage with. Essentially, what Corbett (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2007b) is suggesting is that more than different child-rearing practices, families in “different social and economic positions support different ways of seeing place and space” and therefore hold different frames of reference and understandings of social structure (Corbett 2007d:788), providing some very applicable examples below:

Some families spend surplus capital on large all-terrain vehicles that allow for intensive experiences in the immediate vicinity. Other families invest in multiple vehicles and internet connections that take them out of the physical community. And still others invest in plane tickets and virtual travel products (notably books) that take them to distant places. These different spatial practices have educational consequences for their children. (pp. 788-789)

This is a key aspect of his argument, which essentially platforms off of Massey’s (1994) assertion that the social and the spatial are inseparable because the social is spatially constructed and that this makes a difference to how various different societies work. Ultimately, it is this understanding of knowledge, capital, place, space and social structure which will enable or constrain many students’ future life plans, concepts of self and indeed their actual future life trajectories.

New numbers and old issues

Budgeon (2001) offers some thought-provoking assertions in her work on young women and emergent forms of micro-political practice in the United Kingdom, making special reference to the fact that a thorough out-stripping of male counterparts is prevalent across primary, secondary and tertiary education systems:

In Britain, young women are now outperforming young men at primary school, secondary school and in higher education as well. They are getting better results in both GCSEs and A-

levels and they are making great gains in entry to traditionally male-dominated fields (Roberts, 1995:47). As recently as 10 years ago, it was young men who held the advantage in educational attainment, but now young women are more likely than men to participate in further education (Walby, 1997:44). (Budgeon 2001:10)

Jacob (2002) found that 60% of university students are female in his research in the US. The most recent statistical datasets in Ireland and the US show a very similar picture. 59.6% of “new entrants” to Higher Education Authority institutions were female in 2007/2008 while 52.6% of “new entrants to all third level institutions were female” (Central Statistics Office 2009b:97). Further, of the proportion of the population receiving full-time education, females showed distinct increases between the years 2002/2003 to 2007/2008. Table 1 shows the increases among those aged 20 to 24, an age group likely to be engaged in third level education:

Table 1 – Change in Percentage of Female Population in Full-Time Education from 2002/2003 to 2007/2008

Age	As % of Population	
	2002/2003	2007/2008
20	51.6	56.0
21	37.5	46.4
22	22.5	25.3
23	11.9	14.3
24	8.2	10.5

(Central Statistics Office 2004:102, 2009b:104)¹⁶

Meanwhile, 57.4% of third level degrees are conferred to women in the US as of the academic year 2006-2007 with 60.6% of Master’s degrees also being conferred to females (National Center for Education Statistics 2009). In Vermont’s case, the proportion of women who have a Bachelor’s degree or higher has been consistently at least 5% and up to 7% greater than their male counterparts across all age cohorts up to 64 years of age from 2000 through 2007 (US Census Bureau 2007b).

Exploring the increasing ratio of female to male university students, Jacob (2002) asserts that one of the major contributing factors lies in the acquisition and implementation

¹⁶ There have also been increases among males participating in full-time education however females remain statistically in the majority overall as has been seen above.

of what he calls “non-cognitive skills” as I have introduced earlier. Non-cognitive skills are those that can be learned, acquired or cultivated conscientiously with a view to performing highly by utilising them. In short, they are both conscious and strategic elements of one’s performance within a particular arena. Non-cognitive skills therefore, are those which are not necessarily directly related to one’s intrinsic ability to do something, but rather to one’s ability to garner skills which will enable success within a particular environment, namely education. This means things like organisation, time-management, doing one’s homework on time, being able to deliver projects before deadlines, paying attention in class etc. In the case of education, I would argue they can be linked to both facets of one’s identity as well as elements of particular forms of habitus as shall be explored in the following chapter and throughout the analysis chapters to follow.

Jacob (2002) attributes higher female third level populations in part to older women returning to education but in terms of relevance to my own work, I am more interested in his discussion of the differential development and use of non-cognitive skills between young men and women. Drawing his statistics from various US national data sets, Jacob (2002) makes particular use of the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) which followed a nationally representative sample of eighth graders starting in 1988 with surveys being conducted every two years until 1994. This survey holds detailed data on aspects such as “family background, cognitive ability, school achievement and attitudes toward school as early as junior high” (Jacob 2002:591). It serves as an important resource in terms of examining the various indicators which may or may not be present among students exhibiting similar behaviours. Jacob (2002) offers some of these below:

Among the 12,585 students in the NELS 1988-94 sample (i.e., students with survey data for all four waves), 67.3 percent of women had some postsecondary education by 1994 in comparison to only 62.3 percent of men...18 percent of boys were retained in elementary school compared with 12 percent of girls. Forty percent of boys have demonstrated some type of behavior problem compared with only 20 percent of girls. Boys are disproportionately represented in remedial classes, get lower grades, and spend less time on homework than girls. These differences carry over into high school where girls have higher grades and are more likely to be in an academic track. There are also differences in the college premiums earned by young men and women. Young female college graduates earn roughly 55 percent more than female high

school graduates in contrast to male graduates who earn only 40 percent more than their less educated peers. (Jacob 2002:591-592)

Today, more recent data show that these trends appear to be continuing, with considerable increases in women's completion of degrees at all levels in the U.S.:

Between 1993–94 and 2006–07, the number and proportion of degrees awarded to women rose at all levels. In 2006–07, women earned the majority of associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees, and 50 percent of doctor's and first-professional degrees. (Hussar and Bailey 2009:14)

In reading these statistical increases, I would note a caveat that Karen (1991) offers. He argues that the political mobilisation of women and African Americans functioned as a linchpin in their respective in-roads into third level education. However, these “subordinate groups” made their increasing presence in the third level arena by and large through attendance at community colleges, state universities and less competitive institutions generally. This means that while the rising numbers of minorities (this includes women) attending third level institutions is indeed empirically evident, they have still “followed a pattern that could probably be best described as a ‘co-optation response’ of privileged groups to subordinate groups’ demands” (Karen 1991:227-228). This means that “despite mobilization, then, blacks and women continue to be found disproportionately in the sector of higher education that yields the smallest socioeconomic returns (Dogherty 1987; Brint and Karabel 1989)” (Karen 1991:228). This, Karen (1991) argues, is due to the pervasive and enduring constraints that women and ethnic minorities face within society and which can be seen through the persistence in wage inequality as well as the overrepresentation of women and minorities in lower status schools and work.

This situation shows that despite net increases in participation of so-called “subordinate groups” in higher education, issues of hegemony and *status quo* still come to the fore. Also, as Coover and Murphy (2000) discuss, such groups are particularly vulnerable to stereotyping within the dominant culture. As will be seen in the following chapter, this presents some problems for positive identity formation and social mobility because minority young people (in terms of ethnicity as well as gender) have to work extra hard in order to “achieve counterstereotypical identities within a context where many of

their peers are not only rejecting such identities but rejecting them on the basis of their membership within the stereotyped group (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Cross, 1995; Steinberg et al., 1992” (p. 128). This can prove to be an acutely difficult process due to the very ways in which we categorise and understand how memberships work. Fundamentally, we most often order our understandings of social groups along lines of those elements which are overtly observable, including macro categories like ethnicity or gender and stretching to micro-levels of observable lifestyle choice (e.g. groups like “preps”, “geeks” etc) discussed in Adams and Bettis’ work (2003). We do this because these groups “are perhaps the most accessible and therefore the most likely to influence social interactions compared with group memberships for which the defining dimension is relatively unobservable (Allport, 1954; Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Goffman, 1963)” like perhaps religion or even sexuality might be (Coover and Murphy 2000:129).

However, an important question that needs to be asked of this line of thought is what happens when those types of identities which might arguably be difficult for minority groups to enact and maintain (e.g. high academically performing selves or simply academically inclined selves in general) start to become wider social trends like what is perhaps happening among the women who are making up the considerable statistical increases seen above?

While there may be more positive activity towards empowered female roles among young women (Pini 2002; Budgeon 2001; Lisa Adkins 2003), the importance of considering gendered positions, hierarchic structures of power, and hegemony within the social structure cannot be ignored. Thus, this research is left with questions for, rather than overt rejections of, mainstream culture in “acting in the opposite” as Coover and Murphy (2000) argue in their analysis. Therefore, are young rural women enacting rejection of hegemonic femininity by more subtle and covert means? Might this be due to both the prevalence of a patriarchal, traditional social and economic condition in their home communities as well as the fact that these areas are experiencing a progressive escalation of elements related to globalisation? These are questions to consider as Budgeon (2001) makes a very compelling argument for something similar in her discussion of young women and emerging forms of micro-political feminism. Budgeon (2001) ultimately says that the identities she found her respondents to be working upon were enabling them to

“engage in a resistant fashion with the choices they have available at the micro-level of everyday life” (p. 7).

Young women of secondary school age (roughly 13-19 years old) are on the front line of the many and contentious depictions, conceptualisations and expectations of women in society during crucial years of gender identity development (Massoni 2004; Budgeon 1998, 2001; Leonard 2004)). Because adolescents are at the unique stage in life wherein they are transitioning from childhood to adulthood, future life plans and understandings of self play a crucially important role (Oyserman et al. 2004). The secondary school years are a critical time in the development of young people, especially in terms of their relation to self, education and other learning environments. During this time they are formulating future life plans and career trajectories as well as wrestling with the influences of “social feedback from peers, the media, parents, and other adults” all the while contending with institutional discourses like those found in the educational context (Oyserman et al. 2004:132). This is an especially challenging time for young women because they face the added scrutiny and regulation of their bodies and sexuality by the patriarchal structures of our society:

Early adolescence is a significant transition period for both sexes, but research reveals it to be a particularly difficult time for girls. Moving from “young girl” to “young woman” involves meeting unique demands in a culture that both idealizes and exploits the sexuality of young women while assigning them roles that are clearly less valued than male roles...On average, the pubertal period is ending for girls just as it is beginning for boys...A nationwide survey commissioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in 1990 found that on average 69 percent of elementary school boys and 60 percent of elementary school girls reported that they were “happy the way I am”; among high school students the percentages were 46 percent for boys and only 29 percent for girls. (AAUW Educational Foundation and the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women 1995:18-19)

Thus, the adolescent years appear to be a uniquely challenging process for young women, one wherein they face a barrage of pressures from those surrounding ideas about work and what it means to be a “successful” person to the ways they *as women* are incited to engage with these ideas. This is an important point for this thesis because if viewed alongside Budgeon’s (2001) argument for attending more closely to the micro-level

identity and gender work young women are engaging in today, it opens up new ideas about how to explore this work. It also brings to bear that question of whether some of these forms of alternative and empowered identity formation among young women are more or less conspicuous or employ a more negotiated form of resistance to traditional, patriarchal structures and pressures. I would contend that we must ask the question of whether we are beginning to see this kind of negotiated resistance through strategic efforts for high performance in school with a view to an empowering career tempered with strong, positive social relationships. There is substantial evidence which indicates that this may indeed be the case among my participants and this is a theme which spans each of the analysis chapters. In fact, the young women who participated in this research showed a consistent and compelling sense of selfhood and agency which showed definitive elements of a very conscientiously constructed form of not just resistance, but indeed active rejection of hegemonic, traditional femininity in a number of ways, from fierce devotion to being financially independent to very vocal plans for rejecting marriage and or delaying motherhood.

Working on gender – tinkering or transforming?

Adams and Bettis' (2003) work underscores how various structures and relational discourses shape the ways and means that adolescent girls “negotiate a gendered identity within a patriarchal society that continues to define ideal girlhood very narrowly” (p. 88). They highlight the solidity of patriarchal structures within society, reminding us that whatever the transforming “landscape for normative masculinity and femininity”, there still remain very durable, hegemonic constructions that must be contended with in formulating a gendered self (Natalie Adams and Bettis 2003:88; Massoni 2004; Gilligan 1993).

The main thrust of Adams and Bettis' (2003) argument is that contemporary society is full of contradictory discourses and a dubious rhetoric of equality which attests to gender neutrality while continuing to foster serious inequity. This is ultimately a point of debate, as arguably various aspects of contemporary femininity are being renegotiated within wider avenues for expression in an increasingly globalized world (Pat O'Connor 2007; Harris 2004). Many suggest that the role of gender itself in identity construction is diminishing in

significance against late modernity's plethora of consumable elements of self ranging anywhere from religion to fashion accessories (Bauman 1991; Lash and Friedman 1992). This, I would contend is a slightly simplistic view as femininity within the current hegemonic structure remains to a large degree defined by and embedded within a juxtapositional relationship with normative masculinity as opposed to a more integrated and egalitarian continuum of genders (Valentine 1993; Clark and Paechter 2007).

Evidence of this can be seen in the work of many thinkers including that of Cleary (2005) on the links between hegemonic masculinity and the instance of male suicide, Evaldsson's (2003) research on gendered behaviour on the playground, Paechter's (2007) work on "tomboy" identities and the performance of a hyper-femininity through participation in cheerleading as explored by Adams and Bettis (2003). As such, it appears that much if not all current "new" avenues for feminine expression and or embodiment remain situated within an overarching system of patriarchal hierarchy. Essentially this means that meanings and messages surrounding gender continue to be defined and negotiated with reference to hegemonic conceptions of masculinity however increasingly fluid and changing (Bronwyn Davies 1989; Weedon 1987) they are becoming. Put simply, despite new forms of gender arising, these still play out within a paradigm which continues to define notions of ideal femininity (and masculinity) in quite rigid ways (Nielsen 2004).

This being said, one cannot completely dismiss that the ways gender is constructed and enacted have and are undergoing change; and because gender ideals are modifying in various ways, today's young women meet with difficulty in negotiating how they display different aspects of femininity and masculinity. Further they must discern when different gendered selves are appropriate to display and to what extent they are displayable (Reay 2001; Natalie Adams, Schmitke, and Franklin 2005). With all the many advances twenty-first century women have gained, there are many major gender stumbling blocks that still remain. This is especially visible in that "we still do not exactly know what to do with women who box, women bodybuilders, and women who want to play professional football and ice hockey" (Natalie Adams and Bettis 2003:88). We also struggle with "what to do" about male nurses, carers or dancers in many cases I would argue.

Ultimately, when women engage in elements of "masculine discourse and assume masculine signifiers" and vice versa for men, the ontological underpinnings of patriarchy

are shaken and thus so is mainstream culture. This foundation-shaking contributes to individuals or groups who challenge hegemonic gender discourse often being named as deviants (Natalie Adams 1999; Inness 1998). What happens however when this proverbial foundation shaking takes the form of a female holding the breadwinning role or a “high-powered career” position as these are high status roles in mainstream society? What happens when something which may have been perceived as deviant not so very long ago (like female high performance in education) now has arguably become the norm?

Because the ways and means young women are conscientiously choosing particular gendered roles, attitudes and behaviours are restricted by the range of selection, it is important to examine what, where and how that selection is situated and thus negotiated. It is also important to attend to how young women understand what they perceive as their own range of choice as well as their choice-making. Thus as has been seen above, while much current research suggests that young women are increasingly active in their selection of gendered behaviours, roles and identities, this selection refrains from ultimately crossing any of the fundamental social lines delineating hegemonic masculinity and femininity. As such, young women, and young men as well, remain fundamentally on the receiving end of social ascriptions, prescriptions and at risk for the stereotype vulnerability that Coover and Murphy (2000) detail.

One of the most thought-provoking elements this discussion leaves this research with is the question of how agentic young women are in terms of how they negotiate their choice of self and future life trajectories amidst particular gender discourses. How indeed do they go about this negotiation and how do they endeavour to build and relate with their own agency? This is especially interesting with regard to the emergent educated, career-woman active and present within today’s knowledge economy and the discourses surrounding it (Harris 2004). Who then are the young women who plan to become these adults? Where do they come from and how do they understand that to be their life trajectory? These are all questions I will attempt to answer later throughout the analysis chapters.

Changing roles and changing settings?

Returning to Jacob's (2002) discussion of the gender imbalance in third level enrolment, I would like to bring the focus again to the sociocultural dynamics of gender roles, behaviours and conceptualisations in the institutional realm of education. Jacob (2002) points out that "among low-income and minority students, young women are 25 percent more likely than young men to enroll [sic] in some form of postsecondary education" (p. 589). This brings important attention to the fact that while women have made significant advances into the "white-collar" job sector, there has been very little female participation historically and few advances for women's participation within the "blue-collar" occupational market (Jacob 2002:590). This is arguably a facet of women's higher levels of formal education (England and Farkas 1986; Reskin and Roos 1990) and I would suggest along with others that this can also be linked to traditional gender discourses surrounding work (Corbett 2007a; Pini 2002; Bryant and Pini 2009). Jacob (2002) also notes that while generally most boys' and girls' scores on cognitive tests are around the same, "boys generally receive lower grades, have more disciplinary problems, are more likely to be retained in grade and placed in special education, report lower school enjoyment and attachment and believe their teachers are less likely to encourage them" (Jacob 2002:590).

Shortcomings like these are frequently understood as being due to boys lacking in "non-cognitive skills" like being able to pay attention in class, work in a group, be organised with things like assignments, course materials and due dates as well as the ability to ask for help (Jacob 2002:590). Jacob (2002) argues that low levels of these "non-cognitive skills" can seriously impact the likelihood of young men finishing second-level schooling well or at all and thus function as an indirect influence on third level attendance rates because these difficulties might lessen "the chance of being accepted to college or receiving financial aid" among young men (Jacob 2002:590). Further, by having poor non-cognitive skills, the "psychic" toll of third level attendance might be greater and therefore reduce young men's probability of enrolling in tertiary education (Jacob 2002:590).

This is an interesting note because it may have to do with the very underpinnings of identity development in addition to the management of various normative gender roles. As

Suitor et al (2001) discuss, because young women are more sensitive “to social comparison and social interaction, they may also have a greater ability to recognize” normative structures (p. 439). This is particularly engaging because while women continue to out-perform men in terms of overall educational achievement, there remain serious questions regarding how this might operate as empowerment within what are, on balance, still narrow definitions of gender. Could the increasing proportions of women in the university context be “feminising” the university? This is somewhat of a stretch given the fact that most upper level academic positions are still dominated by male-heavy administrations (Pat O'Connor 2008b), but the question is still an engaging one. Especially given recent work which asserts that the type of education and skills that are required to be successful within the knowledge economy include things like “general reasoning, problem-solving, and behavioral skills as well as a positive cognitive style...to supplement the narrow cognitive and occupational skills sought in a more directed work environment” (Carnevale and Desrochers 2002:1). What is more, it is the “complementarities between these soft skills, general education beyond high school, occupational preparation, and the resultant access to learning and technology on the job” which heavily determine one’s access to higher status employment and “earnings” according to Carnevale and Desrochers (2002). These are all elements which Jacob (2002) outlines as falling within the gamut of those non-cognitive skills young women seem to master so much more consistently than their young male counterparts. These ideas are provocative and so is the claim in Shaditalab and Mehrabi’s (2010) research that across generational lines, it is among young women where social change appears to be both occurring and promoted.

Based on research in rural Iran surrounding “the differences between generations (those born and raised before and after the Islamic Revolution) in patriarchal values in the family”, Shaditalab and Mehrabi (2010) found that despite being in a very rural location “where new events are scarce and changes are residual and very slow” a “new generation” has developed. It is a generation which is decidedly more egalitarian between the sexes and also one wherein young women are “demand[ing] a right for decision making within the family and expect[ing] their voice[s] to be heard by their counterpart[s]” (p. 109). Recognising that there were two main factors contributing to the kind of social change they found, namely the processes of modernisation and the Islamic Revolution, Shaditalab and

Mehrabi's (2010) research showed that overall, it was the young rural women who were "striving for changes in patriarchal values in the family" and that they were different along generational lines from their mothers in this and also different from their male counterparts. This led Shaditalab and Mehrabi (2010) to argue that "therefore rural girls like the girls in the large cities are the source of cultural change in the future", even in areas of such intense patriarchal paradigmatic structure as a rural Islamic village in the west of Iran (p. 110).

Enquiring around the processes of modernisation which Shaditalab and Mehrabi (2010) attribute so much weight in producing such change-making Iranian young women, Budgeon (2001) claims that the many and varied "processes of individualization and detraditionalization mean that not only are a wide range of options available" to young women with regard to the ways in which they define themselves, but also that there is "an active negotiation of positions which are potentially intersecting and contradictory" (p. 10). This includes things such as the impetus to be an educational high-achiever and career-woman with the cultural narrative of the woman as homemaker and mother (Eckersley, Wierenga, and Wyn 2006). This is important to note because it highlights how there is indeed room for innovation, negotiation and creativity with regard to identity development and behaviours, despite the contradictions this might carry with it. This runs an easy parallel with how non-cognitive skills can be used in strategic ways to succeed within the educational environment because these skills function as identifiable ways in which young women can work upon themselves in order to gain entry into other social realms like university and high status work later in life which may not have traditionally been open to them in the past. This leaves some important question then including that if young women have such higher rates of these non-cognitive skills, to what degree are they using these skills consciously or unconsciously to perform well with view to working towards particular possible selves and future life trajectories? Have these skills perhaps become understood as normative for female students in a way that they simply have not for male students?

Moving forward from these ideas and echoing Shaditalab and Mehrabi (2010), Sutor et al (2001) note that in terms of the ways in which gender roles have undergone change, there are considerable differences between men's and women's attitudes towards these changes:

In particular, it appears that women's attitudes have become less traditional at a much more rapid rate than have men's (Correll and Bourg 1999; McBroom 1987; Twenge 1998), resulting in substantial gender differences in attitudes (Haddock and Zanna 1994; Mroinaga, Frieze, and Ferliogoj 1993; Pratto 1996; Pratto, Stallworth, and Sidanius 1997; Riggs 1997). (pp. 439-440)

These differences in attitude are readily witnessed in Suitor et al's (2001) note of work conducted by McGhee and Dickman (1997) wherein when the participants were shown images of "women engaging in nontraditional [sic] occupations, the majority of the men believed that they saw men in the pictures, while women correctly identified the gender of the characters" (Suitor et al. 2001:440). This kind of evidence opens up the discussion to ask if it is perhaps the case then that young women are increasingly becoming more aware of new ways of *doing* female as being specifically about the opening up for participation in new arenas for employment? With such focus on how one is expected to take responsibility for accruing one's own security and status as has been seen to occur in contemporary society (Harris 2004), I think it is highly plausible to see a greater level of attention to forms of paid work among young women, especially those who may be seeking social and or spatial mobility as this may be perceived as the route through which such mobility may be fundamentally achieved. Taking into account the influence that changing social conditions and economic markets experience with increasing globalisation, the spread of credentialist messages and the continuing association with hegemonic masculinity that traditional blue-collar employment retains, it is perhaps the case that these new avenues for female employment would possibly be understood as lying in the areas broadly falling within the knowledge economy.

On a broader, more structural level, this kind of conditioning is hinted at by Jacob (2002) in his address of gendered work environments and the levels of opportunity for women within geographic areas based around traditionally male-dominated economic activities. He notes that as blue-collar industries like construction and manufacturing are still dominated by men, it is logical to assume that the value attached to these industries for local economic structures means more "economic opportunities for low-skilled men than low-skilled women" (Jacob 2002:595). This is an important consideration in understanding how young women conceptualise their geographically situated structure of

opportunities and begin to conceive of their future life options in secondary school with regard to possible third level education attendance, especially in terms of the ways young women relate to the skill flexibility and mobility demands required for high status knowledge economy work (Raghuram 2008; Lerner and Molloy 2009):

If we believe that opportunity costs play an important role in the college attendance decision, we might expect the gender gap to be larger in states with a strong construction or manufacturing base. Similarly, the gender gap may be larger in rural areas where agricultural or other “male” jobs are more common. Consistent with this view, the point estimates for living in a rural area or in a state with a larger construction base are larger for boys than girls. (Jacob 2002:595-596).

Evidence from across the globe supports these conjectures, including work from both coasts of Canada, Iceland and Australia (Andres and Licker 2005; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Bryant and Pini 2009; Corbett 2005). It is widely known that most rural areas retain at least somewhat traditional gender constructions and economic bases and that this may be a major influence on the increasing numbers of women who are out-migrating due to the scarcity of high status, or indeed even viable employment opportunities, as well as the paucity of empowered female roles available in such a context (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Bryant and Pini 2009; Coldwell 2006; Coy 2009; Dahlström 1996). Constructions of normative femininity and what is perceived as “ideal femininity” have considerable bearing on the identity development, self-concepts and thus, constructions of ideal self and plans for future selves, lifestyles and career trajectories of young women, and indeed young men, the world over. These relationships and interconnections form the basis that this research springs from in exploring the nature of how high-achieving rural young women are making sense of their identities, education, communities and future life plans.

While young women are active agents in creating, changing and maintaining various aspects of their gendered selves, this idea is tempered with the point that young women are not able to construct any gender identity that they wish in an atomistic and all-powerful manner (Natalie Adams and Bettis 2003; Nielsen 2004; Natalie Adams et al. 2005). Existing structures and discourses of gender remain very powerful in personal and social

gender construction despite individuals playing an active role in negotiating and managing such constructions. Thus, this doctoral work explores whether it might be more a case of young women becoming increasingly agentic in mitigating avenues for gender construction via discourses available to them within particular “geographies of gender” (Ní Laoire 2005) rather than autonomously creating entirely new forms of femininity divorced from previously existing and newly emerging normative structures.

If we take Bourdieu’s (1974, 1977, 1984) stance that educational systems are unique elements in society whereby structures of power can either be actively solidified and reproduced or perhaps can be challenged and changed, then I would ask whether it is within the educational systems that we should begin to attempt to address the issues of problematic constructions of gender, structures of opportunities, local community sustainability and social change. This was a formative element in the decision to collect my data within the schools themselves. This is discussed in detail in the Methodology chapter where it is explored in terms of the ways that education influences particular performances of gender.

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed how young women have become an increasing presence within higher education. It has also noted the ways in which gender is formed, negotiated and structured both socially and spatially. So far it has been illustrated that the ways that young people understand themselves are inextricably connected to the wider societal structures that inform things like gender, class and place. It has been established that certain kinds of non-formal learning have traditionally been valued very highly among working-class or blue-collar environments (Corbett 2004, 2005b, 2007a, 2007b), but that these forms of learning are progressively being devalued by increasing deindustrialisation, globalisation and standardisation of education systems which are intrinsically linked to overarching normative structures surrounding today’s liberalism. This discourse prompts my research to question how then these elements might be impacted when areas formerly based on blue-collar labour experience rapid economic and social change? This is not just about how such changes influence parental understandings of legitimate or favourable

forms of work and thus their childrearing practices, but it is also about the spatial impact that labour markets in rural places experience with regard to this relationship between learning and work. This is something that is engaged with in the following chapter and later again in Chapter Eight with reference to my own findings surrounding how my respondents understood what work would mean for them later in life and how they planned for it.

The ways that young rural people are relating to education are set within their operation in the local areas. However, these relationships are also heavily influenced by how these young people view education to function as a vehicle for particular forms of work in adult life. The ways that particular places and spaces relate to certain types of learning, whether they be locally based or non-formal systems as Rose (2004) and Corbett (2004, 2005, 2007b, 2007d) have discussed or if they are formal, mainstream conceptions of credentialed education and skills for knowledge-based work are important and telling facets of the relationships young people have with these elements. As young women continue to increase their presence in educational arenas in the third level and above while simultaneous trends in female-led outmigration persist, I would argue that it is important to dig concertededly into how gender and place influence relationships between education, identity and future life plans.

Because much of the literature reviewed here has concentrated on one variable (such as gender or class) without attending much to how this might be mitigated by another (again, such as gender and class or the culture surrounding work one has grown up within), this research endeavours to engage with a number of these variables, including gender, and cultural background while situating these within the specific spatial context of rurality. The literature discussed in this chapter illustrates a continuing condition of overarching patriarchal structures which inform and regulate our daily lives. However, the ways in which this might be mediated through different mobility practices remains largely undiscussed. Further, the ways in which geographies of gender might be engaged with and internalised by different young people remains a powerful question as well. In today's time-space compressed society which arguably incites reflexivity from its citizens, I would beg the question of how young people, and young women in particular, might be engaging in practices surrounding mobility as a means for accruing agency when their current spatial

and social context leaves little room for them? This chapter has shown some of the linkages between these elements to provide a backdrop for exploring these relationships more deeply with the data this research has collected. In the following chapter, I will discuss more minutely how these relationship play out within the process of identity construction and enactment.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCOURSES ON THE CONTEMPORARY SELF

Introduction

So far it has become clear that meaning is generated and derived from the complex relationships between the self and society and this is a slippery matter. As such, it is important to acknowledge that these processes and relations are formulated within particular times, spaces and places. As such, identities are therefore constructed and socially negotiated within particular spaces and places as well (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Corbett 2007; Easthope 2009). This premise has resonance with this research because in rural areas there are often serious tensions between traditional social structures and identities and the contemporary influences of modern, mainstream society through things like gender norms, divisions of labour etc (Ní Laoire 2005; Coldwell 2006; Dahlström 1996).

The situatedness of identity also critically engages this research with questions surrounding the agency and self-efficacy of young people from different social backgrounds and spatial locations and it calls for the exploration of the nature and processes of their choice-making today. This is because young people are often not in positions of authority or power and so are required to engage in various forms of negotiation due to how the adult world actively shapes many of the structures, institutions and conditions of young people's lives (Thorne 1987; Mayall 2002). Further, there is evidence to suggest that in the "majority culture of American society", the most prominent role transitions in adolescence with a view to entering into adulthood are individualistic ones (Arnett 1998:295), and this conceptualisation may be spreading via the global networks of mainstream, capitalist society.

As has been seen in Chapter Two, Frank and Meyer (2002) argue that our current social order has essentially underscored and encouraged individualism and neoliberal attitudes surrounding self-efficacy. Thus, as we currently live within a sociocultural system

arguably constructed upon the premise that the individual is a pivot point of the social system (Giddens 1991; Lash and Friedman 1992), identity is therefore an important element in exploring social change (Richard Jenkins 1996). What is more, as Arnett (1998) has argued through his secondary analysis of several American studies on adolescence, the major criteria marking the transition to adulthood among young Americans has been shown to be contingent upon one's ability to be "independent from others (especially from parents) and learning to stand alone as a self-sufficient individual" (p. 296). Arnett (1998) notes that his work focuses on "the American majority culture, i.e., the largely White and broadly middle-class majority in American society that sets most of the norms and standards and holds most of the position of political, economic, and intellectual power" (p. 296). He recognises that American society is much more varied and multifaceted than this single viewpoint but also that little was known at the time on the viewpoints regarding the transition to adulthood among minority students, and therefore this was a very exciting and promising area of future research (Arnett 1998:296). I would argue that some of these minority groups could be White, blue-collar young people from rural areas.

Thus, Arnett's (1998) work serves this research in that it is a good summary of the wide views of mainstream US young people and that it focuses on the majority culture. In doing this it provides this research with some basic elements which can be conceived of as a general, wider trend among adolescents in the US and which could arguably be found elsewhere due to the factors surrounding globalisation and contemporary society discussed above. The three concepts which most frequently were discussed among American young people when talking about what the transition into adulthood meant to them were "accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and financial independence" (Arnett 1998:296). If these ideas are found to be prominent in other areas outside of the US, then this may be direct evidence of the extent of certain elements of globalisation and the primacy of contemporary society's individual-centred order.

Speaking about the broad elements of today's social condition, Bauman (1996) notes that "if the *modern* [sic] 'problem of identity'¹⁷ was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* [sic] 'problem of identity' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open" (p. 18). This brings increasingly diverse forms and

¹⁷ By "problem of identity" Bauman (1996) means that it is "something one needs to do something about – as a task" (p. 19).

methods of self-construction coupled with dynamic ways of mediating between individualistic behaviour and social relations. Therefore it is important to explore how individuals, and especially adolescents, negotiate between the self and the social. It is also important to investigate the ways in which embeddedness in particular systems of knowledge or indeed geographic cultural contexts continue to influence the identity development of people within contemporary society. Some argue that this is directly related to the extent to which an individual finds a place or role within various different areas which is in congruence with their concepts of self. This is argued to be connected with one's ability to exercise and access different repositories of capital which are valued within particular social situations, groups and structures (Stets and Harrod 2004).

The general shift in focus toward the individual and the heightened emphasis on autonomy and agency are necessarily accompanied by changing notions of status, hierarchy, achievement and what is constructed as a normative life course. Under such premises, one must then attend to the manner in which these basic paradigmatic assumptions are inculcated across generations. This is because even among the privileged echelons of a given society there are still particular embedding agents in operation, such as social discourses on gender, religion, the life course etc (Brantlinger 1994; Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, and Guskin 1996).

It is also widely argued that such intense individualisation is both socially and personally destructive (Budgeon 2001, 2003; Brantlinger 1990, 1994). Indeed, Bauman (1996) warns about the effects saying that:

Identity entered the modern mind and practice dressed from the start as an individual task. It was up to the individual to find escape from uncertainty. Not for the first and not for the last time, socially created problems were to be resolved by individual efforts, and collective maladies healed with private medicine...The 'disembedded' identity simultaneously ushered in the individual's freedom of choice and the individual's dependency on expert guidance. (p. 19)

While Bauman (1996) makes reference to such "experts" as being life coaches, psychologists, personal trainers etc, I suggest drawing attention closer to home, to those influences coming from family and the education system as these are the elements which generally play the strongest roles in the lives of young people (James, Jenks, and Prout

1998:41-47 and 169-191). Further, as these institutions have been often discussed as direct means of social reproduction (Bourdieu 1974, 1977, 1984; Lareau 2000, 2002; Corbett 2004, 2007b), I would ask then what kinds of roles they might play in social change.

In asking this, I am trying to engage with the ways in which reflexivity and particular social structural elements impact on the ways that young people formulate concepts of self and possible future selves (Oyserman et al. 2004). This idea about the individualisation of our society is also a fulcrum in this work because, as Côté (2002) argues, there are varying levels and types of individualisation. It is therefore the difference between these that must be examined in terms of discerning the relationship between young people and the selves they construct as possible future trajectories which are situated within the temporal and spatial conditions of contemporary society. This means that at its most simple level, this research calls for moving forward from Bourdieu's (1977) general approach to understanding the self to a framework which encompasses not just the meaning making activities and relations that Butler (2007) and Budgeon (2003) discuss, but also the critical self and social awareness that reflexivity carries with it. This is a departure from the preoccupation with the "negative moment of subjection" that much of identity theorisation based on Foucault (1977) in recent years has put forward (McNay 2000). Instead it is an adoption of the standpoint that the subject is active (Mayall 2002; Harding 1991), and that in being active and reflexive, these standpoints offer important information regarding "disjunctions, flaws, injustices and gaps in conceptual schemes and dominant institutions" (Mayall 2002:176).

In this chapter I will discuss theories regarding self formation in today's globalised world. Undeniably this is a multifarious, difficult and ongoing task and it draws attention to systems of power, processes of negotiation and the particular contextual influences that may be present for certain individuals at given points in time. I will explore how the self is an ongoing project set within particular contexts, that it is mitigated, reflected on and worked upon both internally and externally. I will discuss Adams' (2006) concept of post-reflexive choice, a new perspective which smelts the reflexive modernity thesis and Bourdieu's (1977) ideas about the habitus. I will argue that it affords this research with the ability to follow simultaneously those internal debates about the self while setting this against the social, contextual milieu that my respondents were situated in.

Identity and contemporary society – laying the groundwork

Much of the recent discussion on identity and modernity is based around the reflexive modernisation theoretical approaches of Bauman (1995, 2001), Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991). To elaborate on what has been established in earlier chapters, this line of thought is roughly based around the idea that reflexivity comes to the fore in today's society, especially in terms of the many and varied processes of identity construction "once it comes into contact with the 'posttraditional' settings which emerge from modernity's dynamism" (Matthew Adams 2003:221). This means that as the former bulwarks of society, like religion for example, have given way to a more nuanced and miscegenated social, political and economic condition, people are better able to reflect upon the world and themselves, and to make decisions regarding their identity, behaviour, attitudes, etc. As such, this "reflexive self-awareness" gives individuals the chance to build their own self-identity "without the shackles of tradition and culture" that formerly generated somewhat stiff "boundaries to the options for one's self-understanding" (Matthew Adams 2003:221-222).

There are others that critique the general ideas of reflexive modernisation thought, some taking issue with the way this thinking situates the relationship between this "modern reflexivity" and the wider cultural environment (Matthew Adams 2003, 2006, 2007; Nielsen 2004). Still others argue that not everyone has the agency to be the hyper-mobile, self-empowered personal engineer of their identities (Adkins 2002; Budgeon 2003). One such critic, Castells (1997) finds reflexive modernists' empowered, self-authoring self too ham-fisted to account for the nuances and inequalities found in the empirical social world. He does however retain the metanarrative of increasingly pastiche organisations of self upon which much of late modernity and post-modern thinking is based (Habermas and Ben-Habib 1981; Giddens 1991, 1990; Lash and Friedman 1992).

Castells (1997) offers a more critical account than Giddens (1991, 1990) and a more empirically couched approach than Bauman (1991, 2007), when he writes on the increasing "power of identity" as being capable of serving as a means and site of resistance to "the centralization and concentration of power in grand narratives and corporate concentration"

(Corbett 2005b:2). However, Castells (1997) cautions us to understand identity as necessarily couched within material bases, and that these bases such as class, gender and ethnicity, experience very real constraints and structural pressures. I would argue also, that geography plays a role here due to the constraints and enabling factors that mobility and access to various spaces and places have on people as has been illustrated Chapter Two. Massey's (1994) view is that space connotes that there is "a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism" (p. 3). This is because people experience and interpret the "social relations of space" in different ways depending upon their different "positions as part of it" (Massey 1994:3).

Who people understand themselves to be, the power they have in a given context and the degree to which they are, or perceive themselves to be, agentic, are not mitigated only by social conditions but must also be viewed with relation to spatial ones as well, because fundamentally, the spatial is social (Massey 1994) as has been established in Chapter Two. This is why the idea of time-space compression that globalisation brings with it is an important part of this research. How time and space are negotiated and related to by people who live in rural areas is an important element in how they interact with both their local communities as well as the wider communities that technology and travel enable them to encounter (Corbett 2007d). Identities therefore, are not free-floating personal constructions imagined by autonomous individuals but rather they are particular formations of self which are inherently informed by the social and structural elements from which they emerge.

Further, there are other pitfalls which the reflexive modernisation thesis has and which Budgeon (2003) succinctly outlines below:

Giddens's self-constituting, reflexive subject; his reliance on binary thinking; his neglect of the relation of difference and identity; and his under-theorization of the multiple embeddedness of the subject in the social—an issue that is apparent in the extent to which he constructs processes as internally referential... fails to come to terms with the other implications of differentiation—namely, that it is characterized by and reproduces hierarchies and inequalities within social relations. (pp. 47, 39)

Therefore, the primary stumbling block for Giddens (1990, 1991) and other reflexive modernisation thinkers, lies in the formative assumption that individuals are all equally empowered in their ability to choose and embody particular identities or selves, that they are hyper-mobile and that they are inherently disembedded in their paradigmatic assumptions and systems of meaning. One of the major flaws in this standpoint can be found in the inherent implication that society has somehow become a level, homogeneous playing field. It assumes that people in society today are equal in terms of the ascription and prescription of roles and selves as well as in one's ability to agentially influence one's conditions of living to the degree where one might have the luxury to choose one's occupation, lifestyle and living situation *ad infinitum* (Bauman 1998; Castells 1997). At the same time however, we should still bear in mind the reality of capitalist sociocultural pressures and globalising forces which permeate much of today's society through everyday practices and encounters from where we grocery shop to how we dress and where we get our news to what we learn in our classrooms and talk about around our dinner tables.

Some wider examples of these pressures and impacts can be found in much of the literature on globalisation, economics and the polarising effects capitalism has had across the world. These include the continuing issue of the disparity in living conditions between the First and Third worlds (Castells 1997) and the marginalisation that rapid economic development exacerbates (Kirby 2004). On a less grand scale, there are serious gender inequalities that continue to occur throughout our institutions and social relations (Steele 1997; Skeggs 2002) even as feminism has gained ground (Bronwyn Davies 1989; Schilt 2003). These empirically-based discourses highlight the very real structures of oppression and the limiting of life chances which remain present in our era. They juxtapose themselves against the reflexive modernist rhetoric of self-efficacy and the implicit free-hand drawing of any identity one chooses.

Further, these arguments draw attention to the many and varied systems of meaning different groups or populations experience within different contextual situations, despite sharing in the hierarchically ordered paradigm of capitalism and the many processes of wider globalisation. At their simplest, these arguments call for attending to the situatedness of experience within complex social and institutional structures while taking in their relationships with the broader trends of increased global connectivity, interdependence and

dominance by capitalism. They call us to acknowledge that particular individuals in particular settings are imparted with more agency and indeed autonomy, than others and that this plays out in different, situated ways within a larger narrative of global interconnection.

Therefore, Butler (2007) argues, we must view identity as necessarily situated within the social context from whence it develops, with particular attention to the ways that gender is performed and regulated. It is the *process* which is the key element in identity formation according to Butler (2007), the constant fluidity and changeable nature, relating and interacting with social structures and conditions that must be recognised:

My argument is that there need not be a “doer behind the deed,” but that the “doer” is variably constructed in and through the deed. This is not a return to an existential theory of the self as constituted through its acts, for the existential theory maintains a prediscursive structure for both the self and its acts. It is precisely the discursively variable construction of each in and through the other that has interested me here. (Butler 2007:195)

This is similar to how Budgeon (2003) understands the self as a “genealogical question” (p. 46). In using the term “genealogical”, Budgeon (2003) is arguing that the self is situated within particular constructions of reality, various orderings of meaning and specific environmental conditions very much embedded within the individual’s surroundings (geographic, economic, ethnic etc). Thus, she points out that “meanings attached to being are embedded in specific practices through which individuals come to know themselves as particular sorts of human beings” (Budgeon 2003:46). Therefore, the ways in which an individual understands her/himself as a “rural” or “urban” person or the degree to which one identifies with a particular community or locality have serious implications with regard to how a person relates to other elements of her/his surrounding social structure and particular other aspects of her/his identity (Murray 2007). This means that the self, while being a social construction, is also made and negotiated by the way that an individual behaves in relation to the practices that he or she engages in. The self is therefore something that an individual *does* not just what he or she *is*. Bauman (1996) argues this point colourfully when he writes:

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence...Hence 'identity', though ostensibly a noun, behaves like a verb, albeit a strange one to be sure: it appears only in the future tense. Though all too often hypostasized as an attribute of a material entity, identity has the ontological status of a project and a postulate. (p. 19)

While this appears as a somewhat tacit recognition of individuals' agency, I think to get a better grasp of the mechanisms and processes of self-social relations, we need to be able to both "zoom out" to see the wider social picture of contributing factors generating particular types of selves as well as the ability to "zoom in" on how individuals are enacting particular selves as social actors. While this is perhaps quite similar to Goffman's (1959) overarching assertions about the dramaturgical self, I would argue that Budgeon's (2003) ideas attend closer to how the individual negotiations between self formation and particular social conditions are mediated. This is through the various different reflexive practices that people engage in with regard to their social and structural constraints. This is not to say that individuals are acutely aware of all of the social and structural constraints which they face. Indeed, often they negate these as many of Budgeon's (2003) young female participants denied the persistence of gender inequality in many ways, despite the empirical fact that these inequalities do still exist and were working actively upon the very individuals who were negating them.

This was also often the case among my respondents. The verbal denial of gender inequality was frequently underwritten by a narrative of place-based patriarchy. This was understood as effectively evicting them from their home communities through their experience and perception of their local areas as places which simply could not support their dreams and ambitions either socially or practically in terms of their understanding of the gendered division of labour and job availability. This is discussed in detail throughout Chapter Seven. I mention it here to highlight that young people are very much able to reflect on their own position as well as the changes in and conditions of wider society around them. This is a point that needs to be recognised because it is through this that young people are not only fundamentally understood to be active agents, but that they are

therefore capable of working upon the social structures around them through their attitudes, their social relations and their behaviours (Mayall 2002:138).

Thus, instead of assuming a hyper-awareness of social structure, I would argue that Budgeon's (2003) view helps to move the primacy of focus from the idea that identity is a performance to the ways individuals reflexively negotiate between the social expectations of what Goffman (1959) calls "frames" and the internal necessity to construct authentic selves *as a process of self performance*. By "frames", Goffman (1959) meant the ways in which people organise their experiences in order to inform or guide their behaviours. This can be either on the individual or on the wider social level. Frames therefore, essentially help to contextualise experience and to provide information regarding what the appropriate behaviour is for a given context. Thus, while I am not entirely departing from Goffman's (1959) ideas about the nature of the self being one which is performative and contextualised, I would argue that it is fundamentally necessary to take better account of the increases in individualisation in modern society (Frank, Meyer, and Miyahara 1995) and to recognise that this has bearing on how the self is formulated and negotiated with the world today. I would also call for the greater appreciation for reflexivity and agency among young people that thinkers on childhood and adolescence provide (Mayall 2002; James et al. 1998; Corsaro 2005).

Why reflexivity and habitus are important

Because this research recognises that young people are agents and that they are able to work upon social relations, it is afforded with some helpful ideas by Turner (1988) surrounding how particular individual behaviours (or those of minority groups like young people and women) may work upon the wider social structure and produce change. Turner (1988) discusses the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the social as:

...the impact of individual behavior on large social structures usually is mediated through smaller structures within which the individual participates directly. I assume that the relationship between smaller and larger social systems is two-way, so that the individual's influence on the structures with which he or she is in closest contact is limited by the shaping

effect of larger systems on these intervening structures. Finally, every encounter with the intervening structures exerts a socializing feedback effect on personality. (p. 2)

Therefore, Turner (1988) argues socializing processes are “transformed rapidly as the child’s orientation to the world is mediated increasingly by frameworks for assigning meanings to experience” (p. 8). He asserts that a “much-circumscribed functionalism offers some advantages as a starting point in developing an improved integrative model for personality as an intervening variable” (p. 8). I would argue that a symbolic interactionist slant on this standpoint would afford an even more multifaceted rendition of these basic ideas as it further highlights the mediated nature of individual experience within social environments and structures. This includes how these are influenced by particular spaces and places. It also affords room for individuals’ agency as a product of reflexive practices. This means that it recognises that individuals are able to engage in agency through their ability to be reflexive about themselves and their social surroundings. This of course, is tempered by the very real social and structural constraints that individuals experience. It does not mean that reflexivity suddenly makes individuals omnipotent and self-determining. Rather, it means that there is some possibility for change through individuals being able to reflect upon themselves, their surrounding social and structural conditions and how they might be able to engage in change for themselves through mobilising the resources they have available to them.

Thus, it is the very processes of reflexivity and choice which this doctoral research explores. The propensity for creativity, reflexion, change and negotiation are the basic points of inquiry—it is the choosing and critical reflection about identity building and enactment which this work hinges upon. Serpe (1987) highlights this interplay by discussing the nuanced relationship between the social and the individual through a focus on choice-making. Serpe (1987) argues that identities carry with them “a set of expectations which structure the development of interactional patterns with others” (p. 53). This is not to say that they have a priori characteristics but that they do have particular sets of internalised, learned elements which are based on expected social interactional cues and patterns and could be argued to be a more multifaceted version of Bourdieu’s (1977) “habitus”.

It could also be argued that these might be micro-level elements of what Foucault (1977) understands as the means with which individuals and others police themselves within social structures. However, I would contest that Foucault (1977) leaves too little room for the kind of creativity and propensity for reflexion, innovation and change that many identity thinkers suggest is apparent when viewing identity and agency on this micro-level. For example, McNay (2000) has shown that Foucault's (1977) line of thinking only facilitates a "partial account of agency because it remains within an essentially negative understanding of subject formation" (McNay 2000:2). As such, this theorisation understands the process of subjectification as a polemic of "freedom and constraint" because "the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in more autonomous ways, through practices of liberation, of liberty" (Foucault 1988:50 cited in McNay 2000:2). This conceptualisation therefore bestows the majority of "theoretical privilege" on the "negative moment of subjection" (McNay 2000:2). Thus, the premise that the "individual emerges from constraint does not offer a broad enough understanding of the dynamics of subjectification and, as a consequence, offers an etiolated understanding of agency" (McNay 2000:3).

It is the way that a particular relationship with and conceptualisation of a given self is generated through a nexus of each of these elements and the social relationships individuals enter into with others who occupy these social realms which makes up the core of this research. This hinges on the ways that agency is a creative process and that this is an integral part of social change, because:

...social agency, which is always informed (and sometimes explicitly driven) by values, ideals and social goals, regularly changes society to the effect that what used to be an impossibility becomes a possibility. The (largely imaginary) status of a goal or value might change from impossible to possible, from 'utopian' via feasible to matter of fact. Without the agency of the human subjects that form society, this change in the social imagination and the order of meanings and values would never happen. (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002:326-327)

Therefore, Bourdieu's (1977) thinking essentially is left with serious shortcomings too, through reflexivity being something he understands as being not very common. This is because fields and habitus, according to Bourdieu (1977), constrain our behaviours and our understandings of social settings, interactions and indeed our very selves within them. This

too provides an “etiolated understanding of agency” to borrow McNay’s (2000) terminology. Serpe (1987) argues that the ways particular identities carry elements which influence interaction with others is something which fundamentally the individual is able to work upon through interaction with particular social settings, cues or patterns. This means that they can influence the development of the self-structure through organising the particular sets of identities that make it up, i.e. essentially organising and informing one’s repertoire of selves and or one’s habitus.

However, this is mitigated by external social structures as well (i.e. things like gender, class and ethnicity). This effectively renders individuals able to “choose” only to the “extent that it is possible in the social structural context” (Serpe 1987:53), much like how we have seen gender to be regulated by the overarching system of patriarchy throughout the previous chapter. This means that particular social settings require particular forms of certain identities to be enacted just as particular social and material conditions work upon individuals in powerful ways (e.g. being a student and listening closely in a lecture or being a caregiver when a loved one needs one) (Castells 1997; Skeggs 2002). At base level however, there is an implicit recognition of the ability of individuals to interact with these social influences, to negotiate with them at least to certain degrees and to perform self work in order to engage with them in meaningful ways.

By “choosing” to engage particular forms of identity, the individual increases the chance of engaging a particular identity across various different situations and this “raises the salience of the identity in the [identity] hierarchy” (Serpe 1987:53). To put this simply, this makes the “chosen” identity more powerful, dominant or “salient” relative to the other identities the individual might have (e.g. as a mother, as a wife, as an accountant etc). Thus choice only operates in so far as it is reflexively and socially understood to exist for oneself within material reality, and particular identities are more salient than others. This means that the many different ways which individuals may position, comprehend, be positioned, behave and indeed enact, their various selves must be fundamentally recognised as personally legitimate and situated. The self is therefore not a self-empowered, self-creator as in much of reflexive modernisation thought, but rather it is an integral part of a relationship which is constantly renegotiated across many social fields and with many other social actors.

Therefore, while Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) thinking, is clearly useful to this research in many ways, he stumbles in his neglect of reflexivity and also with his lack of any recognition for feminist theory. His thinking provides no mechanism to explain the change that can happen both in the personal or the social realms (Dumais 2002). Habitus and concepts of self change can be worked upon by individuals with respect to particular fields they engage in (Reay 2005; Reay and Ball 1997; Lehmann 2009), at least in so far as they understand that they have the ability to choose a particular self, set of behaviours etc (Serpe 1987). This is why I would argue along with Reay (2005) and Sayers (2005) that these social fields and relations of capital can be expanded upon through a deeper recognition of individuals' reflexivity by essentially attending to the psychic landscape of social class in examining the enactment of various forms of selfhood. I would also argue that there is a psychic landscape of gender which goes along with this and which must be explored in tandem.

For Adkins (2002), the interrelationship of reflexivity and habitus is played out in power relations and "the maintenance of privileged positions...arguing that women [are often]... denied the positions of reflexive authority and mobility" (Matthew Adams 2006:514). Adams (2006) finds some problems with this, arguing that reflexivity cannot be understood only as an activity solely monopolised by the privileged, especially when examining other contexts beyond gender. To support this contention, Adams (2006) provides several notes on research in the fields of "work, welfare and governance environments, [where reflexivity is] becoming a management tool of self-regulation and surveillance involving both men and women (Bryman, 2004:103-30; Cremin, 2003; Du Gay, 1997; Sennett, 1998)" (Adams 2006:514).

Sweetman (2003) follows McNay (1999) and Adkins (2002) in acknowledging that Bourdieu "allows for the *possibility* of reflexivity" especially in so-called "crises" situations but argues that particular types of habitus might in fact be "*inherently* reflexive, and that the flexible or *reflexive* [sic] habitus may be both increasingly common and increasingly significant due to various social and cultural shifts' (Sweetman, 2003:529)" (Adams 2006:514). This argument tries to account for the ability to change and the stance that Sweetman (2003) puts forward argues that through the various instabilities of later modernity, the capability for reflexivity is "becoming a normative state pervading more and

more areas of life including our sense of identity” (Matthew Adams 2006:520). This argument says it is the disconnectedness between field and habitus that has become normative as opposed to the “relatively stable social conditions” (Sweetman 2003:541) that form the basis for the “non-reflexive” habitus Bourdieu puts forward. Therefore, habitus and capital should not be understood as field-specific in today’s society, but rather as elements which can be negotiated and utilised across different fields by the reflexive social actor.

Reflexivity and habitus, the making of a hybrid

Overall, Adams (2006) shows that works like McNay’s (1999), Adkins’ (2002) and Sweetman’s (2003) provide a more nuanced approach to investigating the juggernauts of agency and structure:

[These discussions provide]... a more complex portrayal of an embedded, embodied and contradictory reflexivity which is not naively envisaged as either some kind of internalized meta-reflection or simplistic liberatory potential against a backdrop of retreating social structure. A notion of habitus tempered by an ambiguous, complex, contradictory reflexivity suggests how social categorizations can be reproduced but also challenged, overturned in uneven, ‘piecemeal’ ways. It is *not* [sic] clear, however, that changes afoot in gender relations and identifications, however patchy, are also happening in terms of class. (Matthew Adams 2006:521)

The last sentence is particularly noteworthy in that my work does suggest that the “changes afoot in gender relations” are indeed affected by class and these elements present a dynamic point of intersection in my research. This is discussed throughout the analysis chapters. “Post-reflexive choice” (Matthew Adams 2006) therefore, accounts for individuals being able to be reflexive whatever forms of habitus they carry and engender. Adams (2006) uses Lash and Urry’s (1994) ideas about “reflexivity winners and losers” in an effort towards assessing the degree to which “the resourcing of reflexive agency is structurally ordered” (p. 523). Adams (2006) clarifies that, as he understands it, Lash and Urry (1994) don’t necessarily think that those disadvantaged in society are *without* the ability to be reflexive, but rather that “they ‘lose’ in relation to reflexivity because they are

marginalized by a social structure which empowers reflexivity in others” (p. 523). Lash and Urry (1994) argue that it is the degree to which people can access and utilise information and communication systems and structures which enables them to be agentically empowered with regard to meaningful choices that they can make for their constructions of self, interactions with others and indeed, understanding of what is possible for them in the future. Thus, according to Lash and Urry (1994), the most important structures which form the “the basis for dividing a global population” are those of “information and communication” (p. 7):

‘What sort of reflexivity for those effectively excluded from access to the globalized, yet spatially concentrated information and communication structure?’ (1994:143). A suitable answer would be that it is a reflexivity that is separated from meaningful choices, potentially avoiding two problematic claims: that pseudo-reflexivity or lack of reflexivity somehow marks out the most marginalized; or that reflexivity is necessarily socially or personally transformative. (Lash and Urry 1994 cited in Adams 2006:523)

Adams (2006) cites Mitchell and Green (2002) to illustrate how one’s “reflexive and creative” capacities are deeply intertwined with “broader inequalities” to show how despite high levels of reflexivity, one’s immediate structural constraints continue to play a considerable role. Mitchell and Green’s (2002) study of young, working-class mothers helps to show how one’s reflexivity does not predestine one’s ability to enact empowered choice-making behaviours irrespective of external, socioeconomic constraints:

The prevalence of reflexivity did not, however, equate with the choice to move beyond the parameters set by these externalities; there was no inevitable freedom to construct individualized biographies. (Matthew Adams 2006:524)

This is fundamentally because in order to make life-style choices, one must necessarily have access to financial and other “socioeconomic resources and opportunities” to do so (Matthew Adams 2006:524). This indicates that reflexive capabilities are not as McNay (1999), Adkins (2002) and Sweetman (2003) suggest; reflexivity isn’t “a capability of the fortunate (or the sociologically inclined), a regulatory form of self-preservation or a transformative process of identification” (Matthew Adams 2006:524). Fundamentally

then, if understanding and contextualising levels of reflexivity with regard to habitus, it is important to keep in mind that a key element of this relationship is one's ability to translate one's "reflexions" into "meaningful realities" (Matthew Adams 2006:524). Ultimately, however, sometimes many of these "reflexions" are simply materially or socially out of many peoples' reach (Matthew Adams 2006:524). Burke's (2004) work supports this assertion, saying:

Granted that all of the mechanisms and processes of identity verification take place within the individual, the content of the identities that are being verified is most often provided by the culture in the context of the individual's social structural positions. Further, the resources and means for verifying identities are provided by one's location in the social structure. And finally, identity verification is the process by which the social structure itself is produced and reproduced (Serpe and Stryker 1987). Verifying a role identity helps to sustain the role and the counterroles to which it is attached. Verifying a group identity helps to sustain the group and to maintain the divisions between in-group and out-group [and power relations]. (p. 13)

Another apt example of how power is negotiated in identity work can also be seen in how Budgeon's (2003) more disadvantaged participants hint at their identities being developed as a function of one's empowerment within the various spheres within which one operates (pp. 103-130). For example, while nearly all of her participants discussed their freedom in many aspects of identity development, there were also significant acknowledgements of the "limits they experienced [which] gave some indication of how they were positioned by others and how they positioned themselves within relations of inequality" through their technologies of self (Budgeon 2003:112). How young people understand themselves to be situated within the relations of power that they are embedded in is an important facet in exploring who they understand themselves as and who they think it is possible for them to become in the future. It also informs why and how they go about trying to achieve particular forms of selfhood through certain behaviours and relations (Mayall 2002:112-139). With this in mind, I would argue that adolescent identity development requires analysis with awareness of such genealogies, technologies—and I would argue geographies both spatial and social—of self via *their own voices and awareness*.

Overall therefore, Adams' (2006, 2007) argument for post-reflexive choice as a third element of the co-existing reflexivity and habitus, provides more analytic awareness of structural constraints while simultaneously recognising how opportunities may indeed be “available to transform embodied, partial, reflexive awareness into an opening out of choices for a relational and autonomous self-identity” (Matthew Adams 2006:524). However, this should be tempered by an appreciation for the ways that opportunities, as well as the lack thereof, occur more or less frequently depending upon one's social grouping (Matthew Adams 2006:524). Given Adams' (2006, 2007) argument, I think these elements should be explored so as to gain a better account of how the individual works back upon the social as well as how the social and structural works upon the individual as Turner (1988) has tried to acknowledge. This could be through the ways in which young people understand who they are and how this impacts on their mobility, and in turn, what their mobility does to their communities and to them as people.

At the centre of this research lies the exploration of ways that young people engage in creative, transformational efforts towards particular forms of selfhood and planned for adult selfhood. This is influenced by numerous social and institutional factors like school, family and community (Corsaro 2005; Mayall 2002; James et al. 1998). The regulation of young people's particular actions in the now does not make up the entirety of the research focus however. Indeed, I am not so much interested in how students are *regulating* themselves in terms of their mindfulness of particular structural requirements. Rather I am exploring how particular internalisation processes are mediated and mitigated conscientiously in order to produce particular selfhoods, behaviours and actions agentially in such a way as to work towards a self which is inherently *not here* and *not now* but rather which is one that is mobile and in the future. What is more, I am accepting the standpoint which Mayall (2002) puts forward that this is something that young people do within the educational context. In the school environment, young people are able to account for “both being and becoming during their daily interactions” (Mayall 2002:138). This is because:

...young people present themselves as people (beings), active in the structuring of their lives, and they regard some present-day activities as valuable for the future and some for the present. Thus they link together the present and the future...Through paying attention to them, we may

consider the degree of 'fit' between the social order and their experiences and understandings.
(Mayall 2002:138)

Thus, through young people's own articulations of self, their relationships with social institutions like education and community and their discussions about their future life plans, we are able to see the connective tissues between micro-level processes of self creation and macro-level trends in labour markets, communities, systems of gender etc. Through attending to how young people are generating who they understand themselves to be and in turn planning who they want to become, we are afforded an opportunity to glimpse how identity work influences planned action and in turn is quite possibly indicative of trends apparent in wider society if indeed those actions are carried out. For example, if young people in a particular place struggle with ideas of their own embeddedness within the culture and social structure of the given area, as Bjarnason and Thorlinson (2006) found in their study of Icelandic fishing villages and Gabirel (2002) saw in rural Australia, then the ways in which they go about working on their identities, changing them into ones more ready for mobility as a way of preparing themselves for leaving, are important points of investigation. This is especially the case if rural areas are on the decline due to youth out-migration. Through this identity work we are given a very tenable way of examining the decision-making and identity development processes of young people which affect wider societies and communities through their leave taking.

Using post-reflexive choice: selves and change

By adopting the premise of post-reflexive choice it is clear that I am not agreeing with reflexive modernist's hyper-empowered self-authoring self. It is also clear that I am arguing it is necessary to recognise that while there are sociostructural elements which definitively work upon individuals in terms of their actualisation of particular identities, individuals do have the ability to work upon the self (Snarey and Vaillant 1985; Stets and Harrod 2004). They are able to cultivate particular forms of capital and negotiate between and across fields and social conditions (Bettie 2002; Walkerdine 2003; Reay 2005).

I would also argue that it is possible that such fields are bounded in different ways; they intersect, interact and or create dissonance with other fields to varying degrees

according to one's situation within and in relation to particular sets of fields. I would suggest as Sweetman (2003) did, that it is possible that particular sets of capital are not exclusive to the fields wherein they are predominantly generated. They can be reflexively employed through particular elements of certain identities. I would put forward that taking into account the arguments discussed so far, it is through the reflexive identity work that individuals engage in that social (and spatial) mobility becomes understood as possible and meaningful. This can be seen through the ways in which my respondents carefully negotiated between their understanding of who they were, their educational experience and who they hoped to become. In particular, in the ways that they actively engaged in certain behaviours and understandings of self that were couched in a blue-collar narrative (Lehmann 2009) of "hard work" and "diligence" so as to enable their hoped for social and spatial mobility. This is discussed throughout the following analysis chapters and is tied to my recognition that today's society conveys messages of individualisation and that these messages have significant impacts upon young people (Arnett 1998).

This in turn draws attention to issues surrounding how meaning is generated within particular local, sociocultural and historical conditions and how it influences behaviours and selves. I would argue that it is through this ability to be reflexive that meaning can perhaps change for particular groups of people who experience the social world in a certain way. This is similar to what Butler (1997) argues regarding the social experience of femininity as a constantly reflected upon process and which she herself recognises as possible to be linked to habitus. This thesis adds to this discussion in its engagement with the ways in which rural young women in Leinster and Vermont are reflexively negotiating particular forms of selfhood and femininity which are consciously geared towards their social and spatial mobility upward and out of their rural home communities in adult life. By deriving meaning and operationalising or translating certain forms of capital, one enacts, verifies or engages with various identities and systems of power. Coover and Murphy (2000) support this line of thought in saying that:

Some theorists indicate that the greater the repertoire of distinct selves one can bring to a given social situation or relationship, the more complex and differentiated the self-schema (Goffman, 1959; Markus & Wurf, 1987)...Individuals who have more complex self-concepts are both able

to think of themselves in different ways and are oriented toward a greater number of situations in their self-representations. (p. 131)

In short, those with dynamic and flexible forms of selfhood seem to fare better in situations which are uncertain for them, whether socially, economically, politically etc or within times of systemic, wider social change:

A complex self-schema may be beneficial from both a psychological and a physiological standpoint. Linville (1987), for example, demonstrated that individuals whose self-concept was differentiated into a greater number of specific domains tended to survive stressful life events [like the transition from secondary to tertiary education, moving from the home community etc] better than those who had a more limited range of identities. Linville concluded that keeping various self-domains relatively isolated from one another may provide a buffering effect. Specifically, she argued that if different identities or domains are fairly independent of each other, then failure in any single domain should remain relatively contained and not spill over into other domains or generalize to an overall feeling of failure. (Coover and Murphy 2000:131)

This suggests that those who have a more multifaceted and variable set of self-identities as opposed to fewer couched within similar frameworks/roles etc might be better equipped to handle difficult or challenging life situations such as changes in environment, social networks, social groups, transitions in the life course etc. I would argue that the transformations that Leinster and Vermont have experienced in recent years regarding their social, economic and political development have created just such a “stressful” or “uncertain” environment within which my respondents have come of age. As we have seen throughout the previous two chapters, Vermont and Leinster have both engaged in considerable growth in particular labour markets including construction, housing and the service sectors as well as simultaneously seeing serious increases in female participation in higher education. Politically and socially, the past twenty years have also witnessed Vermont legalise Civil Partnership for gay couples, Ireland’s decriminalisation of homosexuality and legalisation of divorce as well as the recent passing of the Civil Partnership bill which recognises cohabitating couples (Dail Eireann 2010). There have also been concurrent changes in gender, sexuality, the family and labour norms. Therefore,

these are societies which have experienced serious change in a relatively short period of time as has been seen throughout Chapter Two.

This is important because the way individuals might feel “that they are ‘real’ or *authentic* when their...identities are verified” in positive ways (Stets and Burke 2000:234) shows how power influences the nature and relationship of various different forms of identity and understandings of self within particular social environs (i.e. social fields). As the particular social environs of Vermont and Ireland have and continue to experience such change, it is important that research enquire into how exactly particular forms of selfhood find salience and consistency and how structures of power influence these processes. What is more, if identities that are more “flexible” or malleable in terms of one’s ability to work reflexively on them when presented with uncertain conditions, then what kinds of identities are Vermont and Leinster facilitating among their young people? In addition to this, attention also needs to be paid to the ways in which identities are constructed and enacted when they are not necessarily the most positive within particular environments. For example, how individuals with identities geared towards high academic achievement with intentions to work within the knowledge economy operate within a cultural context where blue-collar labour carries a formidable social currency.

Parents, school and mobility

To explore this idea further, I would suggest focusing on intimate relationships which have considerable bearing upon one’s various formations of identity (O’Connor, Haynes, and Kane 2004; O’Connor 2008). The family is a particularly powerful influence and functions as a significant site of social reproduction and or change. Identities also might come into contradiction with intimate social networks such as the family, especially during adolescence (Steinberg 2001). Interestingly, Archer (1982) notes that “identity achievement and diffusion correlated with parents’ educational and vocational levels, although in opposite directions” along with the paramount importance of the development of a definitive sex-role (p. 1556). According to her findings, Archer (1982) suggests that it might be the case that parents with a third level education “convey greater flexibility in time and choice of life-goal decisions” in that their children might be comfortable with

considering many different options while making only “tentative commitments” concerning their identity construction processes (p. 1556). This could be linked to the ways in which having a flexible and multifaceted form of selfhood is argued to be an advantage in times of change as we have seen above (Coover and Murphy 2000). How this impacts young people’s future life trajectories was not within the remit of Archer’s (1982) discussion but it remains a point I think needs attention. As such, this is a theme which will be examined further below and throughout the analysis chapters, especially with respect to the relationships my respondents detailed with their own families as specifically supportive of particular educational behaviours and career trajectories.

Turner (1988) acknowledges the influence of Kohn’s work (1969 and 1983 are cited in Turner 1988) in showing that parents attempt to train their children for work in fields about which they themselves have knowledge. This is echoed in work by Corbett (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2007b), Ni Laoire (2000, 2005) and Lareau (2000, 2002; Lareau and Weininger 2006), all of whom detail at least somewhat socially reproductive tendencies of parent-child relations in that parents showed a proclivity towards career paths and life trajectories which they themselves were familiar with or could identify readily with. Corbett (2007a) discusses how the families with more working-class backgrounds who participated in his research understood particular elements of the education system as being inherently difficult for them to identify with due to their sociocultural repertoire regarding education, skills and what were understood as viable career options. He reports that the abstraction of upper level academic courses was often seen as superfluous to the qualifications needed to attain jobs that were familiar and that these families could readily identify with.

Comparing this to work by thinkers such as Lareau (2002) and Bodovski and Farkas (2008), it appears that so far, middle-class young people might be better equipped to navigate the vacillating waters of contemporary society, wherein malleability of self, skills and knowledge are arguably at a premium due to the changing system of labour, credentialisation and increases in global connectedness of industries and therefore systems of privilege (Harris 2004; Shaw 1994). However, Archer (1982) notes that there is a great need for further research into this relationship and limits her speculation on the matter, summing with:

Verbal consent to a curriculum track of college major, first job, or religious or political affiliation may not be evidence of a genuine personal investment in these areas. This lack of investment may be revealed through subsequent negligible activity and lack of knowledge about the content areas. Prematurely foreclosed commitments may prove inappropriate as they may be more expressive of the psychologist or parent advocating them than the adolescent. Perhaps adolescents should be allowed their own timing, opportunities for exploration, and self-defined relevant areas in order to develop uniquely individual and productive identities. (p. 1556)

The ways in which adolescents “invest” in particular aspects of their identity is a crucial element of exploration that this research engages with and Archer’s (1982) work draws our attention to parental influences, reasoning processes, adolescent choice-making and self construction as all sites of primary importance. Turner (1988) also suggests that during times of social and or economic change—or increased competition I might argue—parents make efforts to bring their children up to find a place within the “order they see as emerging” (p. 8), which is therefore not necessarily what they would find familiar. This is a phenomenon which was also discussed by Shaw (1994) in his work with the “new” middle class Taiwanese youth. Shaw (1994) argues that as parents are mindful (reflexively so I would argue) of the changing nature of the socioeconomic world through development and continued globalisation, they are planning for futures wherein their children will need fundamentally different skill sets than they themselves may have.

Allatt’s (1993) research showed this kind of thinking among parents as well, wherein they actively sought upward mobility for their children by anticipating the career opportunities of tomorrow and understanding them as fundamentally different to what they themselves had available. Even more recently, this is something which Tamis-LeMonda et al (2008) have also commented on in their discussion of parents’ goals for their children across cultures. Lareau (2002) notes something slightly similar in her comparative work on childrearing practices, however, her argument is not so much based on parents seeking upward mobility for their children, but rather that middle-class parents seek to cultivate their children to be prepared for white-collar work and adult lifestyles. Lareau’s (2002) research sheds light on the differential childrearing practices between working-class and middle-class families in an effort to explore where and how social reproduction occurs in

the earliest stages of childhood. While her argument is not in alignment with what I am exploring here in Turner (1988), Allatt (1993) and Shaw's (1994) research, it is still noteworthy in the ways that Lareau (2002) details how parents strategically think about the skill sets, knowledge and personal attributes that they want their children to possess in order to achieve highly and have favourable future life chances. However, this is something that other work has shown is not exclusive to middle-class parents (Allatt 1993; Hanafin and Lynch 2002; Mark Davies and Kandel 1981; Lueptow 1975; Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack 2007).

From what has been established so far then, taking a closer, more geographically-orientated look, I would posit that the degree to which one has access to or is engaged in locally embedded axes of knowledge is reciprocally related to the extent to which one's identity and primary socialisation is embedded within such discourses. It is also influenced by the degree to which one has accrued or has access to various fields of culturally situated capital. In rural areas for example this might have to do with skills or knowledge related to the local landscape or the socially dominant systems of work. This has been shown to be the case through research like Corbett's (2007b, 2007d) as has been seen in Chapter Two. This idea means that the level of social reproduction in terms of skills, knowledge and basic paradigmatic orientations being transmitted from parent to children operates for those who accrue capital within different fields as effectively affording an early advantage for their children within these same fields. This should be tempered by acknowledging changing systems of meaning, economics and the time-space compression which new information and communications systems are influencing as I have noted above (Lash and Urry 1994). Thus the discussion is brought again back to the idea that, especially during times of acute social change, parents influence their children towards fields of work, skills and knowledge they themselves have no history of due to their perception of particular social and economic transformations (Shaw 1994; Pomerantz et al. 2007; Allatt 1993).

These ideas essentially bring up questions about mobility, both social and spatial. To explore this, I would like to recall Corbett's (2004, 2007b, 2007d) notion of "mobility capital", as discussed in Chapter Two, as facilitating the crucial development of "an external perspective on the local" (Corbett 2007d:782). Mobility capital is a direct indicator of the proclivity for out-migration according to Corbett (2004, 2007b, 2007d).

Therefore, as rural areas usually lack viable socioeconomic, and arguably sociocultural, opportunities, it may be the case that for those whose identities and indeed knowledge and skills are formulated upon conceptions of personal agency and efficacy within the social and economic structures of wider modern society, then such individuals might prove ill-fitting life-long citizens (Alston et al. 2001; Andres and Licker 2005; Baker and Brown 2008; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). Since these local realms are at least relatively socially and economically “closed” to those with more disembedded identities and relations, this presents some challenges for these individuals. In terms of gaining capital, the development and enactment of a self more congruent with those constructed as viable and suited to the individualism inherent of global capitalism, is then perhaps also translated into active searching for structures of opportunities and life trajectories elsewhere, socially and or spatially.

I would argue that this understanding of space helps to highlight systems of capital and our social negotiations of self in relation to various sociospatially related forms of it. Thus, as this research understands the self not just as *situated* but also as *situating* and so capable of conscious perception, relation, evaluation and change as Adams (2006, 2007) argues, then it also accepts that fields of capital often operate within various different spaces and places. This means then that the self one activates in relation to a particular place and field is a reflexive project making reference to one’s capital and position within that space relative to others and with reference to one’s capital in other spaces and fields.

For example, groups like Corbett’s (2005b) “investors” have relatively little agency within the global marketplace of capitalist social order as they mostly come from working-class origins and therefore have less overall capital with which to utilise and trade upon within such a framework than might middle-class or upper-class young people. However, as Corbett (2005) implies, within their particular sociocultural system, and perhaps within other areas of rural or working class status, they might be considered to possess large amounts of various, alternative forms of capital which, while not necessarily affording them with agency within the mainstream social marketplace, might facilitate them with formidable or empowered positions within the environments of more rural or working-class settings. I would argue that this operates somewhat like Bourdieu’s (1974, 1984) fields,

however, with a more dynamic and mediated tenor via the intrinsic linkage between identity, place, and the regulation of particular socioeconomic markets and settings.

This idea is of paramount importance in terms of analysing rural identities in particular. Due to the insularity of many areas, definitive constructions of self are often couched to varying degrees within particular systems of sociocultural meaning that are embedded within certain geographic locations and or are deeply influenced by place (Burnell 2003; Corbett 2004, 2005b, 2007b, 2007d; Easthope 2009; Easthope and Gabriel 2008; Alston et al. 2001; Stockdale 2002a; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). Thus, the degree to which one understands oneself to belong to a particular community, group, or place, is a crucial element in many aspects of one's identity development and actualisation (Ravanera, Rajulton, and Turcotte 2003). Further, belonging within particular communities is a topic discussed at length by Ravanera, Rajulton and Turcotte (2003), especially in terms of the propensity for youths to out-migrate from rural communities. I would suggest that this too could be extended and read as within systems of capital and fields, or put short, within particular psychic landscapes. I will address this question in my results later in Chapter Seven with special attention to the ways in which particular systems of labour set within their rural contexts were viewed by my respondents and how these impacted their ideas about themselves and who they wanted to become later in life.

Parents, change and new possibilities

The negotiations that individuals engage in throughout their everyday encounters are integral elements which inform their psychic landscapes. Oyserman, Brickman and Rhodes (2007) assert that “succeeding in school is a central life task of adolescence, and school failure can seriously limit future possibilities (Morrison, Bachman, & Connor, 2005; Orfield, 2004)” (p. 479). This could be argued to be a somewhat simplistic assertion and, like reflexive modernity in many ways, doesn't take into account the many and multifaceted ideas about success, capital and various other sociocultural dynamics that young people might have depending upon any number of variables, like ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender etc. Nonetheless, school plays a considerable role in the lives of most young people as it is the place where they spend most of their time and which

structures the majority of their daily, lived experience (Jones 2008). Indeed, it could be argued that school is one of the only major, overarching institutional similarities that First World young people in general around the globe might collectively experience.

Perhaps it is better to argue that for those who identify with and internalise conceptions valued within the sphere of mainstream institutional education, it is an easier task to develop and cultivate an understanding of this particular “language” or paradigm. For those with different, dominant frames of reference, for example, more geoculturally situated in their surrounding sociospatial context, it might prove more awkward to operate positively within this paradigm. Thus such students might find it difficult to mediate or translate much of what is valued and extolled within the academically-centred environment as it may not align with their dominant frame of reference. Simply put, if they don’t derive the same types of messages or internalise the same kinds of values held to be normative in that particular environment or system of meaning, then difficulties operating and capitalising on opportunities and constructions of self within this particular system are bound to occur.

This highlights how particular relationships with and influences from parents can help to cultivate certain relationships to, strategies around and ways of thinking about skills, knowledge and future selves in their children. This research therefore provides a possible site for the exploration of these processes with relation to social change, not just social reproduction as Lareau (2002) and others conceive of it. Thus this research begs the question of whether parents’ awareness of societal change, especially in areas where change has occurred rapidly, could be argued to incite such awareness and particular coping strategies in their children. It is important to note that this may not be understood by all parents as overtly strategic and oftentimes may take the form of simply “wanting better” for their children than they themselves had. This is similar to evidence that suggests parents understand childhood “as a social status characterized by the need for protection, and by parental duty to supply it...[and that] Parents identify changes in how parental protection was understood in the past and is understood now” (Mayall 2002:60). Whatever its form, there is evidence to suggest that parental standpoints present an influence on what children understand is, and should, be possible for themselves (Bornholt and Goodnow 1999). I would argue that this kind of influence may actually function as a fundamental

difference in terms of what young people conceive of as attainable future life trajectories or put simply, of what is possible for themselves in their futures on the level of identity development.

This idea therefore was a primary element of exploration in this research and my results on it are discussed later in detail in Chapter Eight through the ways in which my respondents detailed the influence of their parents on their own academic performance and constructions of possible future selves. Because this research is young person-centred, it is the way that my respondents made sense of their parents' influences which was the focus. One of the most important and primary levels of early identity development as we know, is found within the home and family relations. Further, the potential challenges to an academically high-achieving self which a young person of a non-middle-class or non-white-collar background might experience are key factors to consider. This is why a better understanding of the nature of young people's reflexive self constructions is crucial to this doctoral research. When particular forms of selves, work and behaviours are unfamiliar within the family context, it is important to investigate how they are successfully enacted and maintained among young people.

Despite some of this reasoning being derived from social-psychological perspectives, it serves to augment the sociological discussion of how identity is developed via both micro- and macro-level relations and to further draw attention to the dynamic interaction between the social structures, fields and the contextual embeddedness of individuals. Goffman (1959) argued that the self that one performs is likely to be a socially positive or accepted one. Ironically, the selves that academically high-achieving young people are enacting can sometimes come directly in opposition to what is considered positive in their adolescent or wider cultural context and so can be a difficult identity to enact and perform consistently (Coover and Murphy 2000). How this is occurring among Vermont and Leinster young women is a question at the heart of this research.

The possible self – window of opportunity or window into your life?

Burke (2004) asserts that people will seek to verify their identities with groups that positively reinforce particular identities that are viable within certain social and structural

conditions, i.e. identities that are understood as viable, positive, desirable or “good” within the social context. In more “open” societies where higher levels of choice are available, individuals select “those roles and social identities that share meanings with the person identity” or the identity which the individual understands as most salient to her/him (Burke 2004:11). By doing this, “from a societal point of view, the person identity is a sorting mechanism that operates to allocate persons to roles and groups in keeping with their skills and inclinations” (Burke 2004:11)

Stets and Burke (2000) point out that “social categories precede individuals; individuals are born into an already structured society. Once in society, people derive their identity or sense of self largely from the social categories to which they belong” (p. 225). Within a society that is more rigid, or less “open”, there is less choice available for the individual in terms of the groups or roles they themselves can choose from. This means that the person identity is then moulded by the group meanings and the role identities which “they come to possess” because the person identity cannot be verified in an environment where the groups’ meanings or roles do not align with the individual’s person identity (Burke 2004:11). In short, when one does not receive positive social feedback, or “verification” of the particular identity she/he enacts, then it is less likely that the identity will remain salient to the individual who is enacting it. To clarify, in general a more “closed” society might be a traditional, rural community while a more “open” society might be somewhere more cosmopolitan where numerous, diverse individuals with different systems of meaning exist together in a shared location. The “closedness” or “openness” of a society, according to Burke (2004), is about the degree to which different ways of understanding the world and different forms of roles are prevalent or not and the extent to which individuals can negotiate and mediate between the groups and roles they are ascribed and those they themselves choose to engage in. Essentially, Burke (2004) argues that individuals will change their identities over time in order to achieve acceptance or congruence between group meanings and their own person identities.

However, I might contest that this acquiescing to the group and role identities afforded to one within more closed societies as Burke (2004) suggests, may not always be the case in today’s time-spaced compressed world. Especially for those individuals or groups who have high levels of mobility capital and who have access, however vicariously,

to wider social structures, networks and systems of meaning through things like books, multimedia, travel, the internet and other telecommunication systems. The eliding of the self that Burke (2004) suggests therefore, might be called into question when more communities, groups, fora and general social avenues are opened to individuals while remaining spatially in one place as these elements enable people to widen their sociocultural horizons (Pat O'Connor 2008a; Corbett 2007b, 2007d; Heelas 1996). I would also suggest that education facilitates this opening up of the topography within which one is able to explore and develop one's psychic landscape. When viewed against the capacity for parents to influence their children towards systems of work and capital which are not traditional or embedded within known contexts through their perception of the "up and coming" order, the question of mobility then I would argue is doubly reasserted.

If particular identities cannot be verified in the home community (or particular forms of habitus within certain sociocultural fields) but are perceived to be able to be verified elsewhere, then the "choice" generated by this psychic—and perhaps suggestion of social—mobility comes into the picture. This is especially possible I would argue, if it converges with the parental impetus towards innovative self-cultivation for a future within a changing social and economic world. The question of establishing one's identity and future self then perhaps rests more on the levels of one's situatedness and mobility than has been previously thought. This is much like how one might reflexively work upon one's habitus in order to cultivate particular forms of capital for entry and performance within and across certain fields (Reay 2005; Sayer 2005; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2010).

Leary, Wheeler and Jenkins (1986) explain that "as people enter social situations they define the situation, others who are in it and themselves, then use these definitions to organize and guide their own behaviour (Stryker and Serpe, 1982)" (p. 11). This means that the ways in which people define themselves are inextricably intertwined with "their preferences for certain roles and courses of action" within particular social structures (Leary et al. 1986:11). Previous work shows how university students "choose occupations that are congruent with their views of their personal characteristics, and women choose marital roles (i.e., wife-and-mother, partner, companion) that are compatible with their self-concepts" (Leary et al. 1986:11). Data like this, while somewhat out of date, does nevertheless indicate that the matter of ideal identities and ideal selves is of fundamental

importance when considering the ways that young people conceptualise and work towards particular life trajectories and integrate these within various self-identities and behaviours.

Along these lines Coover and Murphy (2000) discuss the relations between positive academic self-representations and one's minority status. In their study of minority young people who performed well in the academic setting, Coover and Murphy (2000) argued that a special kind of identity work was what helped their respondents engage in and perform "counterstereotypical" identities. I would argue that this can be applied to gender as well given that the premise of the work focuses on the "minority" status. The identity work that Coover and Murphy (2000) detail was an active, reflexive and continual negotiation between current self, social surroundings, and possible future self, namely a future self which was not in line with negative stereotypical expectations of the group the students belonged to whether it be an ethnic or gender minority. They argue that strong links between students' academic achievement and their ethnic and gender identities might be more prevalent than not as was introduced in the previous chapter:

It is possible that rather than keep their core identities as scholars separate and distinct from other core, social identities, the students who achieved success in a counterstereotypical domain linked their identity as scholar to their ethnic and gender identities. Strong ethnic identification for minority adolescents is predictive of academic success (Rotheram-Borus, 1990), helps minority youths "make sense" of their group membership (Oyserman et al., 1995), and can operate as a functional defence against racism (Cross, 1995). Nonetheless, the experience of ethnic identity and its relationship to achieving counterstereotypical identities is contingent on a number of factors, including whether one has an awareness of racism (Oyserman et al., 1995) and whether one's academic environment recreates racial or gender hierarchies (Markus & Oyserman, 1989. Oliver et al., 1985). (Coover and Murphy 2000:144)

Further, social enhancement strategies cannot be ignored in this context, as they are more than likely to be moulded by the varying "degree[s] to which an individual depends on certain, distinct social identities relative to others in the overall self-schema" (Coover and Murphy 2000:130). Essentially, this means that group memberships that are ascribed (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc) "are more likely to become core identities relative to other group identities" (Coover and Murphy 2000:130) whether they provide higher social statuses or not (Ethier and Deaux 1994). Thus, identities which have

to do with one's gender, one's class, one's sexual orientation etc are shown to hold more weight within the general identity hierarchy. Put simply, they tend to be more powerful elements in the ways that people understand who they are.

This is particularly the case for groups that are understood as deviant or rejecting various forms of hegemony (e.g. homosexuals compared to heterosexuals, women compared to men and ethnic minorities compared to Whites). Thus, the primary issue therefore becomes “not so much whether individuals identify with their particular groups [but rather] how this particular group membership ‘fits’ with [individuals’] other identities (Cox and Gallois, 1996; Cross, 1995; Ethier and Deaux, 1994)” (Coover and Murphy 2000:130). This again focuses the attention on power and “fitting” or belonging in particular social groups or settings. Coover and Murphy (2000) argue that the self is a communicated construction and as such, is constantly relational given the context and environment surrounding an individual at any given time and so is “experienced at both the personal and the group level” (p. 129). This is something which Jenkins (2000) also discusses and calls “the *internal* and the *external moments of the dialectic of identification*” (sic) (p. 7). “Personal identities are based on idiosyncratic life experiences” which make each person fundamentally different from all other people, while social identities are those identities which “categorize the individual as a group member” (Coover and Murphy 2000:129). It is the interaction of these two types of identity that enables the individual to maintain a positive social identity because they provide individuals with “a combined sense of belonging and uniqueness, or optimal distinctiveness” (Brewer 1991 cited in Coover and Murphy 2000:129). This interplay also essentially informs how we identify ourselves and how others in turn identify us (Richard Jenkins 2000:7).

While there are many facets and different forms of the personal and social identities an individual develops, the age at which various stages of identity construction take place is an important consideration, especially in terms of viewing the academic setting as a testing ground and preparation for adult life. What is more, the particular goals and opportunities one aims for and how one strives to achieve them are integral parts of one's identity (Natalie Adams and Bettis 2003; Budgeon 2001; De Ruyter and Conroy 2002). Oyserman, Brickman and Rhodes (2007) assert that, to use Jacob's (2002) term, *non-cognitive skills* or “daily behaviors (e.g., doing homework, paying attention in class)

become imbued with meaning when they are linked to the future, especially self-relevant goals for the future, such as graduating from high school or going to college” (p. 479). These are practical, identifiable and strategic activities that young people utilise to attempt to *become* their ideal self or future self. While one’s ideal self is a shifting, mutable construction which one will never entirely become (hence the use of “ideal”), future selves and “possible selves” are distinctly more tenable (Curry et al. 1994). Indeed, these identities hold considerable power as I shall explore below.

A young person’s “possible self” is an amalgamation of one’s future life goals and one’s self-concept or identity. Put simply, it is a crystallisation of both who one understands oneself to be *now* as well as who one understands it possible to become *in the future* through particular actions in pursuit of certain goals (Curry et al. 1994). These goals can be made up of both positive and negative images of the future self (e.g. the “intelligent” self who gets good marks in school or the “out of control self” who uses drugs and alcohol or becomes pregnant) (Oyserman et al. 2007:479). So, possible selves “personalize goals and connect current behaviors to future states” as well as bolster adolescents’ “self-regulation capacity (Cross & Markus, 1994; Oyserman & Markus 1990a, 1990b; Oyerman, Terry & Bybee, 2002)” (Oyserman et al. 2007:479). They also make one’s current situation feel meaningful (Cross & Markus, 1991)” by giving tangible “positive *expected* and negative *to-be-avoided* future images” (sic) (Oyserman et al. 2007:479).

This means that possible selves, or ideal selves, are important aspects of adolescents’ identity as well as indicators of their relationships with various social surroundings and sources of different behaviours. They are catalysts and legitimators of not just reasoning, but planning and behaviours. Viewed from Burke’s (2004) identity control theory perspective, these possible or ideal selves function essentially as barometers of the negotiations young people engage with between the sociocultural/structural influences around them and the facets of individual agency they develop and employ:

A person identity therefore consists of the meanings and expectations that constitute not only the person’s essence or core, but also all meaning that define who the person is as a person; such meanings are controlled and verified through interaction with others...[and] are made available by the culture in which [one is] embedded, and therefore are understood,

communicated, and shared with others in the culture. Indeed, identity verification could not occur without this. (Burke 2004:9)

Thus it is clear that the degree to which possible selves are critically reflected upon and engaged with in meaningful ways so as to work towards the possible self are important elements in terms of the likelihood of adolescents achieving their future goals. Essentially therefore, I would argue that possible selves are highly sophisticated and continually reflexively managed forms of habitus. They function as a window into the reflexive practices that young people are engaging in and they illuminate the sources from which these forms of future self and current behaviours are derived. Schneider and Stevenson (1999) use a similar idea in their concept of “aligned ambitions”, which “reflect an adolescent’s knowledge of the world of work and the educational pathways to different occupations” (p. 79). Schneider and Stevenson (1999) found that the extent to which a young person is critically aware of the steps which they will have to take in order to achieve their occupational goals (including educational credentials etc) are a strong indicator of whether or not that adolescent will actually achieve those goals. Aligned ambitions help indicate the level of “investment” in particular forms of selfhood and certain strategies for self actualisation to use Archer’s (1982) terminology. Thus, I would like to posit that young people’s ideal identities, possible selves and future life plans are intrinsically linked to these more tangible elements that Schneider and Stevenson (1999) discuss. I would argue from these premises that the more concrete, critically reflexive and forward thinking the individual, then the more likely they are to achieve the future life plans they set out for themselves.

This in itself may seem somewhat simplistic. However, I would argue that it is the nature and degree of salience that the ideal or possible self has and that “aligned ambitions” display, which could be indicative of wider social trends among young people. I would argue this because through the degree to which young people have “committed” to these particular selves gives at least a little insight into the social and structural messages that these young people have internalised. It is the nature of this link however which is most compelling. Is it perhaps the case that a unique form of self and future life plan is more likely to be generated by a particular group of people from spaces and places which before

now have traditionally been thought to be lagging behind the rest of society in the modernity stakes?

Further, deep embeddedness within a relatively small number of self-identities, as may be the case for those with greater degrees of particular situatedness, might prove to be a factor in lower levels of mainstream agency and mobility capital, again like Corbett's (2005a, 2005b) "investors". Thus, I might argue that the refinement of adolescents' identity development is a direct function of their levels of mobility capital. Further, the commitment level to which they are engaged to future or possible selves serves to highlight the degree to which these identities are not only salient to young people, but the likelihood of them being actualised and achieved in the future.

What this means then is that in order to gain a fuller, more encompassing analysis of identity, attention must shift to the manner in which identities are formed, not so much on the specific aspects of the identity itself because "the differences in the specific nature of...self-concepts may obscure the fact that [particular] identities [can be] formed of the same classes of characteristics" (Leary et al. 1986:17). In short, it is more the mechanisms constructing particular forms of selfhood which should be the focus, not the minutia of individual idiosyncrasies. This suggests that focusing on the ways and degrees to which particular characteristics are internalised, made salient and then projected might prove more insightful. It is the processes by which similar kinds of selves are being generated which is key here. For example, how are young rural women performing identity work geared towards high educational attainment?

Negotiating different kinds of identities

Work like Leary, Wheeler and Jenkins' (1986) supports the idea that individuals "prefer to engage in behaviors that provide outcomes consistent with the salient aspect of their identities" (p. 17). This indicates that people actively work at managing their identities through their choice-making surrounding activities, actions and attitudes "and the situations in which those behaviours are played out (Sampson, 1978; Snyder, 1981; Swann and Read, 1981)" (Leary et al. 1986:17). This line of argument supports my assertion that

there are higher levels of reflexive and strategic thought operating within identity formation and the ordering of possible selves among young people than have previously been thought.

Phelan et al (1991) argue that adolescents' primary social and institutional "worlds" are school, family and peers. They attest that there are various degrees to which students are able to move between these worlds as well as the extent to which students can reconcile differing meanings and messages among them, much like a somewhat more generalised, delineated version of Bourdieu's fields and habitus. Phelan et al (1991) put together a model for conceptualising the relationships adolescents have with and between all three worlds and offer a four-tiered typology to demonstrate how students engage with, mediate amongst and adapt to these different worlds.

Ultimately, Phelan et al (1991) argue that their "Multiple World" model has the potential to seriously benefit schools, educators and learning environments in general because it conceptualises students in an innovative and holistic way. I think this is an important work to note in terms of theoretical reference because it attends to the many, varied ways that young people negotiate between spatial and social conditions, enacting different identities and employing diverse forms of capital. This work helps to show how these negotiations need to be recognised within the educational field in real, practical ways in order for students to maximise their potential and strengthen future life chances. It gives an empirical field of reference which educators and their institutions might be able to focus on in the future.

Further, perhaps it is better to understand the ways in which young people translate, transfer and transport themselves between different fields and systems of habitus and capital as a multifarious negotiation and engagement with post-reflexive choice and identity work. This accounts for the young person's various levels of agency and engagement within each field. It also therefore, recognises that young people critically reflect upon systems of power and capital within different social and institutional realms and how these work upon the ways that they make sense of who they are. They conscientiously engage certain identities, attitudes and behaviours in an effort to achieve positive relationships within a field or a *future field* as well as accrue positive capital when possible. Thus, there are many levels of negotiation which operate within various fields of

different sociocultural paradigmatic structures and which influence young people in different ways relative to their capital therein.

From such a perspective, the development of different identities is situated within different social groups, fields and frameworks both structurally and agentially to different degrees, coupled with the individual's ability to reflexively edit and mediate these influences to certain extents. Bettie's (2002) work on upwardly mobile white and Mexican-American young women is a good example of this. Her participants show high levels of social structural awareness and derive most of their mainstream cultural capital from the school environment via college preparatory courses, extracurricular activities and/or that of their close friends. Simultaneously however, they are able to maintain differentiated identities within different spaces and actualise diverse structures of cultural capital and habitus within particular settings.

This shows active assessment of social situations, engagement of particular forms of capital and certain identities, through discerning the shades between particular fields coupled with a "selective application of the accentuation effect [of likeness or difference to a certain group, behaviour or attitude], primarily to those dimensions that will result in self-enhancing outcomes for the self" (Stets and Burke 2000:225). These ideas are important to this research because they show the propensity for strategic thinking and self construction across different social circumstances. They show evidence of post-reflexive choice. Bettie's (2002) study participants exhibited social structural awareness and developed various coping mechanisms for different socially classed environs.

Fundamentally, it is evident that different systems of meaning intersect, overlap, and collide at various points according to their relations with various places, spaces, socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions. Thus, the degree to which one finds meaning, engages in reflexive identity/self work, accrues capital and exercises agency within one field may be operating on fundamentally different axes as another individual operating within another field. For example, the degree to which a middle class highly educated young woman finds identity salience within systems of formal credentialisation might be fundamentally juxtaposed and indeed meaningless when situated within the fields that a working class, manually skilled young man finds salience of identity. Further, it is when we see young people with different sociocultural backgrounds and psychic landscapes

performing in ways which might be expected of students with certain reservoirs of capital and particular forms of habitus that we must give pause and indeed, be compelled to investigate.

Conclusions

What can be established thus far therefore, is that identity functions as various forms of *being* and *doing*, a primary, active link between the internal personal and the external social, even when this is not necessarily a completely positive self in every social context (e.g. among peers). The identity works within the social world just as the social world works back upon the identity in informing its construction while being mitigated by the reflexive practices of the individual agent. Fundamentally, identity is a process, never finished or fixed, but fluid and constantly developing which an individual works upon both reflexively and non-reflexively, consciously and non-consciously and which is shaped by social and structural contexts. It is therefore both a social performance as well as a means of reflexively constructing and working upon the self within the social world (Budgeon 2003). It is activity performed, mediated and shaped both externally and internally across and between forms of habitus and social fields.

Thus it is better to view young people's identity building, future-self construction and relations with their social world as a continuous, reflexive negotiation between self and social rather than a black and white assertion of either functionalist's role-fillers or reflexive modernists' free-autonomous-agents. Perhaps in this way we might gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the identities and future life plans of young people from different socioeconomic and indeed cultural backgrounds with a view to unpicking wider social trends among youth. This might give us a better understanding of the ways in which various factors related to globalisation play out in local contexts and thus give some insight into wider social change in today's society.

By adopting the idea of post-reflexive choice (Matthew Adams 2006), this research is afforded with a uniquely sharp lens for analysing these processes because this understanding attends to the conscious relation an individual has to the fields and social structures around her/him. It accounts for how this is directly related to the embeddedness

one has within such structures, the roles available—both ascribed and prescribed—and the degree to which one is able to derive a positive identity within such conditions and fields. This in itself seems obvious, but the point of attending to such a relationship is that it changes within different contexts, and thus, so does the conception and enactment of particular roles or selves (Budgeon 2003:42-45; Matthew Adams 2006). Thus while attending to the roots of behaviour by exploring the development of particular selves and future selves, we might gain a better glimpse at the wider trends we find in patterns of social change. For example, by attending to how young women understand themselves *as women*, then we might gain a better understanding of how wider trends in shifting gender norms are happening.

Through attending to both possible and current selves of young people, this research gains insight into how selves are negotiated and reflexively engaged with in the effort to create an identity that is temporally and spatially situated *elsewhere* in the future as well as in space and place. This is identity work that is occurring with regard to the goal of a future self that does not occupy the fields which the current self does. This draws our attention to the local sociocultural environment wherein one constructs various selves with respect to the systems of capital and avenues for agency one comes into contact with there. Social change does not have to be the product of mass radicalised movements. It can be the product of shifts in the minute ways of making sense of particular settings and ideas about oneself. I am arguing that these inklings of social change can be glimpsed through particular developments of self in certain areas because “identity verification requires the cooperation and coordination of other persons—role partners or other group members—who share the same symbols and meanings” (Burke 2004:13). As a number of people share these “symbols and meanings”, it becomes very hard for any singular person among them to alter any of these without “a breakdown in the process” (Burke 2004:13). Thus, as identities change, so does the social structure that is founded on them (and vice versa).

Amidst these discussions, how young people both navigate around and mitigate between many of these forces of constraint and agency is an issue in serious need of attention. This is the crux of my PhD work. This research contributes to these literatures by exploring the ways in which talented young people understand their identities, relationships and future plans to give important insights into how these are related to their

perceptions and actualisations of empowerment within the institutional context of the educational system and their future adult working worlds.

By examining young people's current and future selves, the way they understand where these selves have come from and how they plan to *become* them, this research provides insights into the nature of the social relations these young people are engaging in and how they envisage themselves taking part in these worlds in the future. These issues are discussed later in the results of my research, especially with attention to the similarities across the Leinster and Vermont participants. This in turn, coupled with attention to wider demographic shifts, may provide us with a powerful tool for influencing the educational, community and socioeconomic environments of young people so as to enable them to envisage and attain the most positive future selves they can and thus affect long-term structural change from the ground up, or the inside out if you will. The following chapter details the methodology employed in this research, discussing how it was successful and unsuccessful and offering some suggestions for future researchers in this area.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Thus far, this thesis has argued that by paying attention to both the current and the possible selves that young rural people are developing, this research gains important insights into how these identities are generated within particular spatial and social relations. The literature reviewed here has suggested that there are similarities in behaviours among young people, and particularly among young women, from rural areas in many places throughout the globe. As such, it is important to explore whether young people are behaving in like manners despite being situated within different contexts because the ways in which they are behaving similarly could provide information on the nature of particular forces which affect both (or many) locations, including things like globalisation, deindustrialisation, rapid development, changes in gender roles or perceptions of gender as well as matters surrounding rural decline. This idea was an important impetus in my undertaking this research.

Therefore, it is the ways that young people negotiate such changes that this research examines, specifically through the ways they develop both who they are and who they hope to become later in life. By attending to this and remaining mindful of wider shifts in demographics and labour markets including aging populations and instability in formerly dominant sectors, this research is afforded with an innovative way of examining the influence of education, socioeconomic elements and community conditions on the selves of young people in place and space and how these particular selves might be working back upon the environment from which they emerge.

This research employed a feminist methodology of participant-focused, qualitative research because it was the voices of those this research was engaging with that were understood as the most important (Dorothy E. Smith 1988, 1992). Because the respondents were viewed as active agents and social actors, this research operated primarily through dramaturgical interviews, that is through active, creative interviewing wherein “creating an

appropriate climate for informational exchanges and for mutual disclosures” was a key consideration (Berg 2004:77). This means that the interview by its very nature was not “arbitrary or one-sided” but rather it “is viewed as a meaning-making occasion in which the actual circumstance of the meaning construction is important” (Berg 2004:78).

The basic premise behind conducting this research was that I wanted to explore how high achieving, young rural women from Vermont and Leinster were engineering their identities, how they were understanding and relating to their communities and their education systems, and whether these relationships worked upon who they wanted to be when they were older, and where they wanted to be these people. This chapter discusses how I selected and drew my sample groups and critically thought about my research methods. It provides a commentary on how the methodology I designed was both successful and unsuccessful and offers some critical thoughts about how this research could have been changed and bettered, as well as some suggestions for future researchers in this area.

My ontological position is that we can fundamentally know the social world and the elements we are trying to explore as social scientists by asking social subjects about their lived experiences (Merriam and Associates 2002). My position recognises that “environments and non-human materialities” (Mason and Dale 2011:12) are a part of my ontology because the relationships that my respondents had with their local environs and their schooling were key parts of how they understood themselves and how this impacted on their attitudes, behaviours and other relationships (e.g. with education, with their ideas about their futures etc). Therefore, while the focus is not so much “more upon the situations, connections and relations where these are brought into play with human and social concerns than upon the notion of the individual at the ontological centre” (Mason and Dale 2011:12), nevertheless, these were important parts which I took into consideration. The primary focus however, was on the interpretations and sense-making practices that my respondents shared with me surrounding how they understood themselves currently and how they were going about constructing particular selves for who they envisaged becoming in the future.

Essentially, in order to understand the social world and various aspects that I was interested in, I accepted that it was imperative to ask those who are participating in this

social world themselves and to recognise that their perceptions, thoughts and feelings about their lived experience have legitimacy. Indeed, these are the things which they utilise to create and derive meaning and with which they engaged in their social world as actors. As Merriam (2002) notes “qualitative research is a powerful tool for learning more about our lives and the sociohistorical context in which we live” (p. xv). In order to do this type of research, it inherently means “understanding a phenomenon from the participants’ perspectives – the meanings people derive from a situation or understanding a process” (Merriam and Associates 2002:xv). Thus, this research was grounded in a symbolic interactionist perspective and takes a feminist stance in that it is most concerned with the ways in which young women understand themselves as gendered and how they actualise various different aspects of their identities through their perception of what is possible for them through their understanding of their gendered selves and social surroundings.

Thus, I employed an interpretivist, feminist methodological approach of focusing on my participants’ voices, thoughts about themselves, their educations, future life plans and communities. In order to find out about the meanings and messages that the young people were both generating and deriving from these elements, I needed to ask them directly about how they were experiencing and engaging with these facets themselves (Smith 1988, 1992). This is because I recognize that my participants were not just passive receptacles of structural influence, but that they were active agents in their negotiation of both external structural and internal reflexive factors which shaped their decision making, their senses of self and indeed, their ideas about *what* was possible for them and *where* it was possible for them to achieve this future selfhood. Meaning “is not discovered but constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it...meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty 1998:42-43).

This was a crucial factor in making the primary research method cross-sectional, semi-structured, approximately sixty minute in-depth qualitative interviews combined with short, self-administered questionnaires structured around themes on which I wanted participants to reflect. These themes included students’ relationships with school, future plans, feelings about their home community and ideas about migration (Appendix E). This data was used to flesh out the lives of the participants more clearly and to contextualise

their in-depth interview responses. I was interested in this element as a means with which to glimpse into both the “subjective psychosocial experience[s]” of my respondents and to examine the interactive nature of these relationships as well (Mason and Dale 2011:29).

Using these two component methods among the high-achievers was geared towards encouraging participants’ reflexivity regarding their internalisation of different messages surrounding academic achievement, relationships with and feelings about their home communities and the actual application of these values and concepts for their future life trajectories. I used the questionnaire to incite the in-depth respondents to think reflexively about the themes in advance of their interviews. This approach is often used in migration studies (Ní Laoire 2000:235) based on the argument that migration decision making occurs in the mundane, everyday thought processes as well as in the conscious area of life planning (Ní Laoire 2000:235). Often, the everyday reasoning is overlooked and so it is crucial, when examining migration decision making, that we attend to all the angles *around* the decision itself and not just the moment of movement (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993:338).

Thus, in my research, this two-pronged approach was focused on teasing out the multitude of varied and more seemingly marginal elements which hovered around migration in an effort to show how these decision making strategies are actually inextricably linked with all different parts of one’s life and selfhood. This was geared towards highlighting the fact that each migration decision is a multilayered and reflexive engagement (Ní Laoire 2000:235). I endeavoured to discuss the reflexive thoughts and processes that the participants detailed during the in-depth interviews so as to gain multifaceted and nuanced appreciation for their manoeuvrings around their concepts of identity, relationships with education, community and future life trajectories.

Questionnaires are good tools for gaining an overall sense of the data they collect (Schutt 2006:233-285), and would afford me with a “bird’s eye view” of the general ideas, inclinations and feelings my participants had. The deeper, richer and more explicit elements having to do with the themes I wanted to focus on would be drawn out during the subsequent interviews. Thus, this approach offered not just a point of departure for the interviews, but also gave respondents an opportunity to go deeper into some of their thoughts and feelings in a more relaxed and intimate way. These two methods were supplemented with a short, reflective free-write activity.

The free-write essay title was distributed during a time of the schools' discretion wherein the selected high-achieving students' whole class would participate by writing a ten-minute response if they chose to do so. The title was "What does it mean to you to be 'successful'? How, when and where do you plan to try to be successful in your future?" (Appendix F). This was to gain clues as to whether or not the relationships, hopes and wellsprings of behaviour and activity among the high-achievers were different in any way from their classmates'. I also wanted to find out how "success" was understood in a more general way among the students of each of the participating schools. Further, this was somewhat of a litmus test for the effect that particular school cultural environments might be having on students in an effort towards discovering if wider, more global forces might be at work.

This was also important because I wanted this element of the research not to be too rigidly construction around any formal notions of "migration", "education" or indeed "success" but rather for it to be wide enough to allow for "new and unexpected ideas to emerge, without the constraint of preconceived assumptions or definitions" (Mason and Dale 2011:29). This, I hoped, would also allow for a better gauge as to whether or not certain behaviours and attitudes might be particular to certain locations, or again, if something wider might be a play. This stance was also an integral part of why this research functioned primarily through in-depth interviews, because the interview was designed as a place for the participants to articulate *themselves* in their own voices. It was this articulation that was the key point of this research. The interview itself was an occasion where the participants were making and deriving meaning and indeed, it was meaning which was the thing being explored in this work and the power of particular forms of meaning to impact on wider trends in the behaviour of young people from rural areas. As such, this research falls within the remit of a symbolic interactionist stance and provides a contribution to knowledge in its careful engagement with the innovative meaning-making practices of the young people involved in the study.

This being said, my sampling method was very systematic. From my interpretivist standpoint, I selected students from very specific locations and used a comparative approach so as to dig deeply into the ways in which students from areas on different sides of the Atlantic were making sense of space, place and selfhood within their respective

communities. While these locations had indeed experienced similar, rapid development during their recent histories, I wanted for this research to enquire concertedly into the degree to which the contexts that these young people understood themselves to be situated within impacted what they conceptualised as possible for them to achieve in their futures. By selecting two such distant locations who were experiencing similar forms of development largely as a result of their increasing participation within the global sphere, and by choosing those students who in many rural areas in the world have been shown to be leave-takers from such locations, this research was not selecting for an easily accessible sample. Rather it was attempting to capture the very transitions and personal negotiations that were contributing to the transformation of these places and to shifts in the wider global knowledge-based workforce. Further, it was inherently asking whether something much larger than a uniquely occurring place-based relationship to education or mobility might be at play. In my sampling strategy I was fundamentally trying to see whether something much greater, wider and more globally significant was at work through the ways in which students from these two locations were going about understanding themselves, their educations, their communities and the futures that they planned.

By selecting students also along class lines (blue-collar and white collar respectively), this research was geared towards unpicking the changing nature of classed experience as both a spatially contexted condition as well as an unfettered system of meaning produced by an increasingly disembedded, mainstream educational system and economy. By using education as a primary locus of study augmented by delving into students' conceptualizations of and relationships with work, I felt that I could uncover some of the finer elements of how students were or were not internalising particular discourses of self, social status and what constitutes as meaningful labour. Further, I knew I would gain important insights into the ways that mobility is understood and negotiated by these young people along both social and spatial lines written against the context of today's globalized economy. This was a key element of the research because through uncovering the remarkably similar understandings of identity, possible self and conceptualisations of meaningful work and future plans that these students had, there are significant signs of an internalised global narrative of "success", a gendered understanding of fulfilling work and life trajectories, particular ideas about positive selfhood, and a deep, heartfelt conviction

surrounding what being both personally and socially responsible means to these young people.

The basic premise behind conducting this research was that I wanted to examine place and space with respect to reflexive identity work and so needed to design this project as a comparative work which recognized space and place as important elements in the production, negotiation and creation of meaning and selfhood for the participants. I gave considerable thought to my sampling strategy, which will be discussed below, in my efforts to access the specific voices which I felt were the most crucial to examine, namely high achieving blue- and white-collar rural young people, and mainly young women. Three different but linked data collection methods are incorporated into the design. Overall the methods manage to nicely combine a systematic comparative approach with an attempt to let students' voices drive the themes and concerns in the analysis.

Population and sample

For my Irish sample, I chose study areas within Leinster because the most considerable building, urbanisation and deindustrialisation of previously semi-rural and rural areas occurred there due in large part to demand for housing in the Dublin commuter belt to facilitate employees travelling to work in the capital (Gleeson et al. 2008:68-72). In Vermont, I selected from Addison, Washington and Orange Counties as the most concerted development and deindustrialisation occurred in this area as well, being roughly within a one hour radius of either the state's capital city, Montpelier and or largest city, Burlington, both large employment hubs (The Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce 2009; US Census Bureau 2000e, 2008e). Both of these areas also retained a strong presence of both blue- and white-collar labour, facilitating easy selection of specific study locations within the catchment areas.

To select specific towns and schools in Leinster I drew on 2006 Census data regarding principal socioeconomic status in the home (Central Statistics Office 2007b, 2007c). I used the Small Area Population data and calculated the percentage of non-manual and manual socioeconomic groups in areas and towns within rural Leinster. Socioeconomic groups were defined by the Irish census as "A. Employers and managers,

B. Higher professional, C. Lower professional, D. Non-manual, E. Manual skilled, F. Semi-skilled, G. Unskilled, H. Own account workers, I. Farmers, J. Agricultural workers, Z. All others gainfully occupied and unknown” (Central Statistics Office 2003c, 2007a). If the area had a higher percentage of non-manual employment (Groups A, B, C, and D) then it was classified as “white-collar”, correspondingly if the percentage was higher among manual employment (groups E, F, G, H, I, J and Z), then the area was “blue collar”.

To select towns/schools in Vermont, I used the same strategy of identifying areas as “white-collar” or “blue-collar” through Census data and data from Vermont’s Center for Rural Research on socioeconomic status (US Census Bureau 2000g, 2007a; Center for Rural Studies and Vermont Center for Geographic Information 2006). Socioeconomic groups were determined by industry of occupation in the Vermont Census as 1 Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining, 2 Construction, 3 Manufacturing, 4 Wholesale trade, 5 Retail trade, 6 Transportation, warehousing and utilities, 7 Information, 8 Finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing, 9 Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management, 10 Educational services, healthcare and social assistance, 11 Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services, 12 Other services, except public administration, and 13 Public administration (US Census Bureau 2008b). Areas having higher proportions of Groups 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 12 were understood as “blue-collar” while areas with higher proportions of groups 7, 8, 9, 10, and 13 were “white-collar”. Group 11 “Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services” was thought to be too ambiguous as it contained too many different forms of occupation and so was not used to categorise sample areas. Rates of participation in Group 11 were noted however as these were often indicative of the prevalence of tourism in local areas’ economies.

Thus the delineation I used between blue-collar work and white-collar work looked like this:

Table 2 – Work categorised as blue-collar and white-collar from Vermont and Leinster

Blue-collar Work	White-collar Work
E. Manual skilled	A. Employers and managers
F. Semi-skilled	B. Higher professional
G. Unskilled	C. Lower professional
H. Own account workers	D. Non-manual
I. Farmers	7. Information
J. Agricultural workers	8 Finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing
Z. All others gainfully employed and unknown	9. Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management
1. Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining	10. Educational services, healthcare and social assistance,
2. Construction	
3. Manufacturing	
4. Wholesale trade	
5. Retail trade	
6. Transportation, warehousing and utilities	
12 Other services, except public administration	

Doing comparative work brings its problems. One of which was not having entirely comparable datasets in terms of statistical measures. However, given the ways in which I have tried to categorise from the data that were available, I have attempted to draw samples with socioeconomic traits that were as similar as could be determined. Again, the focus was around the culture of work in the areas, whether this was work traditionally associated with blue-collar labour surrounding industries like construction, manufacturing or skilled trades or if an area had a predominantly white-collar tenor based on the prevalence of work requiring mainstream third level educational credentials (e.g. management, professionals, finance, education etc). By shifting my lens in this way, the research worked towards a more socio-psychically sensitive categorisation in the endeavour for developing a sharper tool for my analysis, one which encompasses the personal understandings of identity, the lived experience of social class and the reflexive engagement that my participants experience with their socioeconomic backgrounds and their relationships with ideas about work. Because it was these young people’s thoughts and feelings on these subjects, their ideas about the genesis of these sentiments, and their future plans and strategies to achieve

their goals surrounding particular types of labour and mobility that I was aiming to collect, I needed to delve more deeply for the roots of this self and social work.

In addition to this heightened awareness of social and psychic influences, I think this delineation also helps to underscore and account for challenges to the dominant discourse surrounding education and social reproduction, like the case of blue-collar young people excelling academically (Bettie 2002; Corbett 2007a; Dumais 2002; Shaw 1994). This is why I drew from schools I had identified in areas of both blue- and white-collar statuses respectively to explore each group's conceptualisation of self and their relationships with their identities, educational achievement and views of their future place within the wider economy. The reflexive activities adolescents engage in while constructing their concepts of self underscore the importance of acknowledging their agency and recognising them as actively and consciously participating in the creation of particular identities and behaviours within various social fields, settings and indeed institutions (David Hogan and Donovan 2005; Schwartz, Côté, and Arnett 2005).

After identifying eight areas in total, four in Vermont and four in Ireland, two white- and two blue-collar respectively, I located their component public, mixed-sex schools. I selected only public, mixed-sex schools for several reasons. Firstly, these schools represent the most readily accessible means of state-funded schooling which do not require any special measures for students to attend. These schools do not charge fees, they are not sex-segregated, they are not residential schools or institutes of specialist training (i.e. schools for the gifted or with an athletic focus or specifically geared for vocational study etc). This means that it is likely that no extra or special measures were being taken for students to attend these schools. Thus, the students would predominantly be those from local families who resided in the area and who were not travelling far from their home communities to attend the school.

I also chose public, mixed-sex schools of at least 150 pupils or larger because I wanted to sample only students who were learning within a state-standardised, mixed-sex environment, not one that is exclusively male or female students or one which is gated in that it requires access to the financial means to pay entry fees. Further, this was the most comparable school setting between Ireland and Vermont as while Ireland does offer some public single-sex schooling, single-sex schooling in Vermont falls largely within the remit

of private, fee-paying institutions. Thus, in order to have comparable data, I needed to conduct research in comparable institutions. What is more, these students represent the majority of young people within the public schooling system and so I felt would provide a sample more likely to be at least somewhat indicative of what might possibly be larger trends in the wider schooling environment. I have renamed each school in Leinster with a type of plant and then the native Irish word “scoil” which translates to “school” in English. I have renamed each school in Vermont with the name of a tree species and then the English word “school”. I did this to facilitate easy delineation between schools from either location. I have detailed the sizes and gender breakdowns of the schools below in Table 3:

Table 3 – School demographics and location

School Name	Blue-collar	White-collar	Number of pupils	Number (%) of female	Number (%) of male
Leinster School 1 “Clover Scoil”	X		162*	61 (37.65%)	101 (62.34%)
Leinster School 2 “Moss Scoil”	X		426	186 (43.66%)	240 (56.33%)
Leinster School 3 “Barley Scoil”		X	760	377 (49.60%)	383 (50.39%)
Leinster School 4 “Ivy Soil”		X	820	397 (48.41%)	423 (51.58%)
Vermont School 1 “Maple School”	X		470**	230 (48.93%)	240 (51.06%)
Vermont School 2 “Birch School”	X		424	210 (49.52%)	214 (50.47%)
Vermont School 3 “Pine School”		X	645	292 (45.27%)	353 (54.72%)
Vermont School 4*** “Willow School”		X	387	176 (45.47%)	211 (54.52%)

*All numbers of pupils attending Leinster schools were accurate at of August 2008 (Schooldays.ie 2008).

**All numbers of pupils attending Vermont schools were accurate as of October 2008 (Vermont Department of Education 2008).

*** This school withdrew from participating at such a late stage that no alternate school could be secured and so four schools from Ireland and three from Vermont make up the dataset.

Once I had identified a number of schools based on these selection criteria, I then began to contact school principals about participating in the project. I sent out an initial, formal letter introducing myself and the project and outlining my affiliations with the Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP), the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) and the National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM). I provided in these letters both my contact details and the web address where the school principals, officials, students and parents could look at my webpage on the NIRSA website if they wished to reassure themselves of my legitimacy as a Doctoral candidate and funded researcher. (Appendix A)

I felt that this was important on several levels, not least of which being the need to establish the transparency of the project via both the written letter explaining the research and then through the media of the website where they could peruse my academic profile and see that, for lack of a better turn of phrase, I was indeed who I said that I was. This initial letter was followed by both telephone and email correspondence.

I began contacting the schools in August of 2008, planning to conduct the Irish half of the fieldwork between the months of September 2008 and January 2009. I planned then to fly to Vermont between the months of February 2009 and May 2009 depending upon when the Vermont schools felt would be most convenient for me to be there. I scheduled my fieldwork in this way because the Irish academic system holds their state exams during spring terms while the Vermont system conducts theirs during the autumnal terms.

Considering this exam timetable, I wanted to not only be as unobtrusive and non-disruptive as possible to the students but I also wanted the research to be something that would be easy for the schools to participate in and therefore make prospective schools more likely to agree to join the project. Being conscious of the differences in the Vermont and Irish school systems, I wanted to make contact with the Vermont schools at the same time I was contacting the Irish schools in order to give them enough time to possibly discuss participating at their respective school board meetings if they felt necessary and then respond to me in good time so I could plan my international travel well in advance. This also served as an opportunity to reach out in a more tangible and manageable way to the schools in Vermont as due to the five hour time difference and constraints on the access to international calling during the early stages of data collection, I was not as readily able to

make personal contact with them as I was with the Irish schools due to my residing in Ireland at the time of study.

I felt that the ability to make myself more accessible to the Vermont schools via the medium of the internet served as an important way for principals and school boards to gauge my professional status, correspond with me and thus decide whether they and their school would participate in the project or not. This was especially important for this PhD research because I could not easily schedule initial face-to-face meetings with principals, groups of parents etc in the Vermont schools before full agreement to participate was reached, something that I could in the Irish schools due to my being based in Ireland at the time of study. I offered to be available for such meetings when I arrived in Vermont but many schools decided this was not necessary.

Once agreement to participate was reached, I asked the schools themselves to select their two top performing young women and their single top performing young man from fourth year/transition year (tenth grade in the US), fifth year (eleventh grade), and sixth year (twelfth grade). I did this to respect the schools' confidentiality regarding academic performance records etc.¹⁸ I asked the schools to select the top performers because these were the students who had performed best in their class and who were showing considerable academic promise, exactly the demographic that has been shown in studies across the globe to be most likely to depart from their rural home communities as has already been established in Chapters Two and Three. As such, these were the people I was most interested in. Thus, this sampling method was not random and it is not generalisable because of its purposive nature.

I chose the final three years of secondary education because these are the years wherein students are beginning to think concertedly about their futures after school, plan ahead for further education or work opportunities and to be studying for and taking state examinations as well as preparing applications for further education etc. Because there is considerable focus on the decision-making and preparation for adult life during these years, I wanted to speak to the students who were experiencing and preparing for this transition.

¹⁸ I also didn't want to be too intrusive and felt that the less contact or presence I would have within the schools themselves then the less they would feel they had to do in order to participate and so would be more willing to do so. This generally worked well in terms of gaining access.

Conducting the research

The primary research method was cross-sectional, semi-structured, approximately sixty minute in-depth qualitative interviews in conjunction with short, self-administered questionnaires based on themes which I wanted participants to reflect on. These themes included students' favourite school subjects, hobbies/interests, their enjoyment of school, future plans, details about their feelings regarding their home community, perceptions about the opportunities available to them in their home community and whether they planned to return there to live at any stage of their lives. They were also asked to note their parents' highest level of education (e.g. secondary school, university degree etc), the highest educational qualification they themselves were planning to attain, their thoughts about their "ideal self" ("i.e. the person that you'd like to be/try to be") and how they tried to become this person (Appendix E). This information was used to sketch the participants in more detail but without being able to identify them. This was to contextualise their responses during the in-depth interviews and to set their discussions within the wider canvas of their lives. These elements are discussed throughout the following analysis chapters with respect to the narratives my respondents shared.

Using these two component methods among the high-achievers was aimed at both inciting and examining participants' conscious reflection on their internalisation of various messages surrounding academic achievement, relationships with and feelings about their home communities and the practical application of said values and concepts for future life trajectories, whether this included ideas about migration or not.

In terms of the reasoning behind utilising these particular data collection methods, I used the questionnaire to stimulate the in-depth respondents to think about the themes I wanted them to reflect on before they came in for their interviews. This kind of catalyst for deliberate reflexive activity has often been employed in migration studies (Ní Laoire 2000:235). It is argued that decisions about migration happen "in the realm of practical consciousness which refers to the 'taken-for-granted' and seemingly automatic actions of daily life, as well as in the realm of discursive consciousness, that which is actively thought about" (Ní Laoire 2000:235). However, the practical element has a tendency to sometimes be glossed over and "therefore, it is necessary to 'enquire "around" the subject, building a

picture of the migration decision from a variety of angles' (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993:338)" (Ní Laoire 2000:235).

Thus, in my research, this kind of questioning, in questionnaire form initially and then followed by in-depth interview, was geared toward bringing out many of the more peripheral elements surrounding migration because it attends to how it is bound up in all manner of other parts of life which helps to shed light on the "multilayered nature of each migration decision" (Ní Laoire 2000:235). Further, as Boyle et al. (1998) note:

First, migration has to be seen as an action in time, whereby the reasons for moving are not to be understood just at the instant prior to the move, as a result for example, of comparing place utilities. Instead these reasons also relate in some way to the migrants' past and anticipated future. The reasons for moving are seen as being part of the migrant's whole life – their biography – and thus are unlikely to be appreciated fully just by asking blunt questions such as : 'Why did you move?' Instead, there is a need for in-depth qualitative work, enquiring around the subject and building-up a picture of the migration decision from a variety of angles, demonstrating how and where it fits into a person's life (Stubbs 1984; Vandsemb 1995). (pp. 80-81)

I drew out these reflexive thoughts and processes during the in-depth interviews in order to gain rich and deep discussions from respondents surrounding their ideas about identity, relationships with education, community and future life trajectories. Because questionnaires are good tools for trying to get a general sense about the data they collect (Schutt 2006:233-285), I felt that they would afford me with a quick "snapshot" of the general attitudes of my participants *on paper*. The deeper, more articulate and nuanced elements surrounding the themes would be discussed during the component interviews, thus offering not just a starting point for the conversational tone of the interview, but affording the respondents a chance to elaborate or explain their thoughts and feelings further in a more relaxed environment. These two methods were coupled with a short, reflective free-write activity.

The free-write essay title was distributed during a class period of the schools' discretion wherein the high-achieving students' entire class would engage in writing a ten-minute response if they so chose. The title was "What does it mean to you to be 'successful'? How, when and where do you plan to try to be successful in your future?"

(Appendix F). This was designed to help bring insights into whether or not the aspirations and motivations of the selected high-achieving students are in any way anomalous and to shed at least a little light on how “success” is understood by the general student body at the participating schools. Essentially, this was to provide a backdrop for the in-depth interview data and provide a platform from which more general ideas about education and success in rural schools could be extrapolated. Participation in this was optional in that the students in the class did not have to participate in and therefore did not require parental consent. It was administered within the school environment and so could possibly be seen to be at least a little similar to “solicited diaries” (Linda Bell 1998) or an “externally required text (Stanley, 2000)” which are both methods that are often used in youth research (Pat O'Connor 2008a:22).

These three methods were employed to try to triangulate with the data because “by combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements” (Berg 2004:5). I planned to be in each school for no longer than four days and where interviews could be scheduled back-to-back, I could conduct these and collect the questionnaires within a two-day period. I was more flexible about the ten-minute free-write activity, in many cases leaving these with the schools to administer at their convenience so as to minimise my presence within the school. The free-write pieces could then be posted to me or I could collect these when the school had them ready. I let the schools themselves decide how to implement this in order to best accommodate them and worked around their individual preferences. This proved to be agreeable to the participating schools as it was not only minimally disruptive to them but the effort required for them to participate in the project was small. This did however present some problems in terms of the completion of this element of the fieldwork, which I will discuss later.

Table 4 – School responses

Schools	In-depth Interviews		Take-home questionnaires		Free-write activities		Total Responses	
	Target	Result	Target	Result	Target	Result	Target	Result
Leinster Blue-collar School 1 “Clover Scoil”	9	6	9	6	20	55	38	67
Leinster Blue-collar School 2 “Moss Scoil”	9	9	9	9	20	55	38	73
Leinster White-collar School 3 “Barley Scoil”	9	6	9	5	20	0	38	11
Leinster White-collar School 4 “Ivy Scoil”	9	6	9	6	20	0	38	12
Vermont Blue-collar School 1 “Maple School”	9	9	9	9	20	28	38	46
Vermont Blue-collar School 2 “Birch School”	9	6	9	1	20	0	38	7
Vermont White-collar School 3 “Pine School”	9	6	9	3	20	0	38	9
Vermont White-collar School 4* “Willow School”	9	0	9	0	20	0	38	0
Total	72	48	72	39	160	138	304	225

* This school withdrew from participating at such a late stage that no alternate school could be secured and so four schools from Ireland and three from Vermont make up the dataset.

At the start of my fieldwork it was my aim to collect a total of 72 in-depth interviews, 9 from each of the 8 targeted schools, in conjunction with 72 take-home questionnaires, one from each participant. I hoped to collect at least 20 free-write activities from each school, aiming for a target of 160 free-write texts in total. At the end of my fieldwork I had collected some 48 interviews and 39 take-home questionnaires from the 7 schools who did participate. I was also able to collect 138 useable free-write activities, but all from blue-collar schools, two in Leinster and one in Vermont.

School Participation

Of the target eight schools I was able to initially secure participation from I was able to collect data in seven of these. This was due to one white-collar school in Vermont deciding to withdraw from participation at such a late stage in my data collection visit to

Vermont that I could not secure participation from an alternate school before I had to fly back to Ireland.

In-depth Interviews

I was able to collect the full nine interviews from two blue-collar schools, one in Leinster and one in Vermont. I was able to collect six interviews each in the remaining five schools. Despite detailing to and agreeing with school principals that I aimed to collect the in-depth data from the top two performing young women and single top performing young man from their fourth or transition year (tenth grade), fifth (eleventh grade) and sixth (twelfth grade) year classes, this did not always occur. The reasons for this were roughly the same for four of these schools. In each of the two similar cases in Leinster, the schools could not arrange for students from transition year to be available to meet me during the time they allotted for me to be on premises in their school. This was also the case for those students who were unavailable in two of the Vermont schools. One white-collar school in Leinster experienced a sudden tragedy and so data from fifth years in that school could not be ethically collected and I will comment upon this later in this chapter. There were varying reasons for the students being unavailable between the other schools such as field trips, tests or special festivals a particular year or group of students would be attending etc but the end result was that I could only interview the available six students in the time the schools were willing to have me there. All of these issues will be discussed further below in the Ethical Considerations section. Overall, the response rate for in-depth interviews was 66.66% (48 completed out of 72 planned) of what I had originally designed for the research to collect.

One unanticipated element of the fieldwork actually turned out to be one of the most positive and helpful parts of the research process. Often, due to issues of space, I would be put into a school's Chaplaincy Office (in the Irish case) or Guidance office (in the Vermont case) or some other small, informal space. When the interviews were conducted in these smaller, more comfortable settings, the students opened up much more readily, relaxed and shared intimate details about their personal reflections, reasoning and aspirations for their futures. Where the spaces were more formal, students took longer to

relax and I found I had to verbally put them at ease, oftentimes shifting the seating to a more informal arrangement (e.g. removing a table from between myself and the respondent, moving my chair from behind a desk to a more informal position across from the respondent's seat etc). While the setting remained one situated within the school with the reminders of school bells often ringing during the interviews, the relaxed space the students felt they had entered went a long way in helping them to feel comfortable with sharing their thoughts, perceptions and feelings during the interview. I would argue that this helped to increase the validity of my findings through the ways in which this facilitated the students to be more candid during the interviews, often revealing deep, intimate reflections about themselves, their families, their motivations and relationships regarding school and their future hopes and aspirations.

While I wanted to conduct the interviews within the school setting as I mentioned earlier, the comfort of the students was something that I was very concerned with and these small, informal spaces proved to be an important element in making the young people feel at ease with the research process. This is something that is highlighted by Jones (2008) in her work on the space and place of data collection about children's geographies and also by Leyshon (2002), underscoring the need to both afford respondents with an environment they feel comfortable to speak in as well as the awareness that space influences behaviour and social relationships (Massey 1994).

I used a digital recording device so that I could capture the exact words, including pauses, laughter, word use and the tone that the respondents used. This was a vital element of the research because it enabled me to have instant recall of the exact phrases and statements that the students used as well as the ways in which they were articulated such as whether there was nervous laughter or a long, thoughtful pause or when something was said with a smile etc. Evidence of this can be seen in the excerpts used throughout the following chapters and I feel that this was an important part of the research process because it also enabled me to stay as true as possible to what was actually voiced and expressed by the participants. As such, I have tried to stay as close to what was originally said in these interviews as possible in my discussion of these throughout the following chapters.

Take-home Questionnaires

I was able to collect 39 out of the planned for 72 take-home questionnaires. This gave a response rate of 54.16%. The reasons for this are similar to those above regarding the access to students for in-depth interviews. Students were asked to complete the take-home questionnaires before they came for their interviews. This was very successful in the schools where I could arrange to have an initial meeting between myself, the principal, parents and the participating students (Leinster Blue-collar School 2 “Moss Scoil” and Vermont Blue-collar School 1 “Maple School”). However, where these initial meetings could not be scheduled with schools there was more difficulty in collecting this data. Where these meetings could not be scheduled I forwarded all details to the principal of the school and asked for these to be distributed to the participating high-achievers along with their consent forms. I asked the principals to instruct the respondents to complete this take-home questionnaire and bring it with them to their interviews. Because I could not schedule these meeting with each of the schools this removed me from the research somewhat and I feel that because this part of the research was not under my control but rather under that of my gatekeeper principals, this heavily influenced the successfulness of this part of the data collection. I also provided each school with a stamped, self-addressed large envelope to forward on any questionnaires which were submitted after my departure and also offered to collect this by hand if schools could contact me to do so. I will comment upon this further later in this chapter.

Free-write Activities

Of the total target 160 free-write activities I aimed to collect I was able to gather 138 of these. However, this data is limited as it came from only certain participating schools. This part of the data collection was largely out of my control because I asked for these activities to be administered during a class time each school found convenient for itself and for it to be completed by the students of that entire class period. I left the decision regarding which class time this might be up to the individual schools so as to facilitate this being an easy and convenient task for them to complete and so minimise the

effort required of the school to participate. I provided each school with another self-addressed, stamped, large envelope with which to collect these texts in and to either forward to me or to contact me for personal collection when completed as was the case with any take-home questionnaires not submitted at the time of interview. In my effort to not be too intrusive with schools by leaving these activities up to their discretion through my gatekeeper principals, I was unable to secure the targeted response in three out of four out of the participating seven schools.

Further, because the administration of the free-write activity was as informal as it was and the young people were given the express choice to participate only if they wished to do so, some of these small pieces of writing were not usable. A total of 12 of these texts were unusable. 7 of these texts were unusable due to the answers being unsuitable. This means that there was either scribbling on the page, doodles or no meaningful writing. The other 5 unusable texts have been categorised as such because there was no demographic information filled in by the respondents, i.e. no gender, no year and no geographic location. This ultimately resulted in the total number of usable texts being 138 with 57 (41.30%) being written by females and 81 (58.69%) written by males.

Of the respondents, Leinster students were the majority, making up 79.71% of the usable texts (110 out of 138). 67 (60.9%) of the Leinster respondents were male and 43 (39.1%) were female. The Vermont response was smaller with 14 (50%) males and 14 (50%) females.

Table 5 – Free-write response by gender and location

	Males	Females	TOTAL
Leinster	67 (60.9%)	43 (39.1%)	110 (79.71%)
Vermont	14 (50%)	14 (50%)	28 (20.28%)
TOTAL (N = 138)	81 (58.69%)	57 (41.30%)	138 (100%)

Free-write activities could only be collected from blue-collar schools as the white-collar schools did not complete this part of the data collection. There was no reason given by these schools for not completing this element of the fieldwork and despite subsequent

contact including emails and phone calls to the principals of these schools regarding this part of the research, I did not receive a positive response, especially from Vermont schools. Because of this, and because I began to become anxious about the risk of creating a difficult atmosphere between these schools and possible future researchers, I did not attempt to collect this element of the research from these schools after a five week period subsequent to my agreed and completed data collection visit(s).

No research is without problems and I find this a telling element of the fieldwork. Throughout the whole research process, it was blue-collar schools that were the most open and amenable to participating in the research despite some of the difficulties I have listed above and which I will discuss in the following sections. Blue-collar schools across both locations were the most helpful and happy to be a part of the study. However, it was the Irish schools which were the most willing to engage in all facets of the research. I would argue that this may be due in part to the nature of how schools are managed across these locations and the ways that the role of the Principal was different between Ireland and Vermont. I would also suggest that this was due to the level of personal contact I was able to have with most of the Irish schools. I discuss this later in this chapter.

Limitations

Overall, in formulating my methodology and in considering what sociological research methods would be most appropriate, I had little trouble situating myself within a particular theoretical standpoint. As mentioned above, the work on education and identity development is extensive and linking the theoretical premises with that on rural gender relations, out-migration and development proved rather conceptually elegant. Where the education/identity literature derived from a largely Bourdieusian framework, the work on rural and migration studies presented a compelling biographical approach which was not difficult to reconcile with what the education/identity work presented (Boyle and Halfacree 1999; Halfacree 1993; Ní Laoire 2000; Stockdale 2002a, 2002b). The most definitive standpoint across these two conceptual scaffoldings was that the data must be situated within the everyday experiences of the people whom I wished to study. This had to be a

“ground-up” research design attentive to the voices of the respondents, the power relations, hierarchies and social interactions of the sample and so I took my lead from there.

While every effort was made to collect the full target dataset, the resulting data are limited in certain respects. One of these limitations is the non-participation of the final white-collar Vermont school leaving me with participation from the full four targeted Irish schools and only three out of the four targeted Vermont schools. It also includes the lack of full response to the take-home questionnaires from each of the in-depth interview respondents. Further, there is the lacking in full comparability of the free-write data because white-collar schools did not participate coupled with the fact that Leinster schools were overrepresented in that part of the dataset.

Due to the final white-collar school in Vermont deciding not to participate in the study at the last minute and no other alternate being able to be secured within the funding and time constraints of the research, there is an over-representation of blue-collar schools and Leinster schools in this dataset. While this was a major disappointment, due to the time and financial constraints that I was facing as my return flight to Ireland was already booked, I was left with little choice than to work with the data that I was able to collect. An excerpt from Bloom’s (2002) discussion of power and narrative enquiry rang particularly true to me when I was reflecting on this set-back in my research:

...maintain humility...[this] means not taking ourselves or our research so seriously that we forget that those we research have other, more important things going on in their lives. While we as researchers often put our work at the center of our lives, as we struggle with deadlines and career goals, the research must be secondary to the positive relationships we build in our fieldwork, and our desires to get data should never jeopardize these relationships. We should always be gracious and grateful to those we research. (p. 313)

While I was intensely disappointed by the final Vermont school withdrawing from the project and the reluctance of some schools to complete all elements of the data collection, I was also mindful that the fieldwork I had already been able to conduct had been very insightful, rich in breadth and scope, and that the schools who had participated had been giving of their time, their facilities and their good will. The students who had participated had also been wonderful to work with, sharing their personal thoughts, reflections, feelings and hopes for the future with me and I was careful to remain

appreciative and conscious of the very positive experiences and fruitful fieldwork that had happened. Ultimately, the smaller pool of white-collar school data was a problem which could not be remedied within the time and funding constraints of this research but which, if future research could be done, should be attended to in order to avoid this kind of overrepresentation.

Also, as mentioned earlier, there is an over-representation of females. However, as these were the target voices of the research this serves as an element of the purposive sample and not as a fundamental shortcoming of the methodology. However, if future work were to focus on the gender differences more unilaterally, an equal sampling from males and females would be an important consideration.

The lack of a full complimentary set of take-home questionnaires is also something which despite my best attempts, could not be alleviated. It also leaves this dataset overrepresented among blue-collar and Leinster schools. Despite subsequent contact with my gatekeeper principals regarding missing take-home questionnaires, I was unable to secure those outstanding and felt that if I continued to ask for this to be “chased up”, I risked damaging the experience that these schools had with allowing research to take place in their institutions. I will discuss this further in the following section.

In terms of the limitation of the free-write activities that I was able to collect, I would argue that because I was able to collect a much larger dataset as a whole from blue-collar schools than I had planned, this was indeed helpful in fleshing out the analysis process of the in-depth interviews from the high-achievers I interviewed from these schools. I think that it also may be illustrative of the way that these blue-collar schools viewed my status as a doctoral candidate and my connection with the university arena and education. It ultimately afforded a much deeper understanding of the particular social environments that these selected high-achieving students were situated within and helped me to triangulate with the data around these responses. Nevertheless, this data has no comparable white-collar set and also is only based on those schools who did participate. However, as will be seen later in this chapter and throughout the analysis chapters to follow, the similarities across geographic locations were striking and in fact, most of this work highlights how there were indeed few differences between Vermont and Leinster respondents. Thus, while this part of the dataset is ultimately incomplete and only shows

these brief, unprepared responses from some of the student body of three of the seven participating schools, it is still interesting and deserves attention in this thesis. This is tempered with the acknowledgement that due to these limitations, these texts are used for illustrative purposes only in the analysis and not for the comparative purposes which I first envisaged them.

However, I offer this optimism with the recognition that it is also impossible to discern whether or not the thoughts, feelings and plans contained in the free-write texts were representative of normative ideas about the “appropriateness of particular kinds of identities”, ideas about “success” or future life plans (Pat O'Connor 2008a:25). However, as I have noted above, I would also like to counter this with noting that they might at least in some way be indicative of a general picture of how the students in that particular school might relate to those topics and this was indeed the express purpose of their collection. Thus I would ultimately argue that they do at least in some ways fulfil the purpose for which they were designed and intended. Again, this was done in an effort to “enquire around” (Halfacree and Boyle 1993:338; Ní Laoire 2000:235) the decision and sense-making processes that the respondents were experiencing and in an effort to triangulate with the overall dataset (Berg 2004:4-6).

Another possible limitation of this study is that because I specifically wanted to carry out the research within the school setting there is always the risk of “collective planning” (Pat O'Connor 2008a:24). However, I felt that the nature of the research, in that it was enquiring about the individual students' thoughts, feelings and future life plans, would help to prevent this kind of skewing. Further, the take-home questionnaires were followed by the one-to-one interviews and so if any kind of collective planning had taken place, I felt confident that the individual-focused character of the fieldwork would effectively be able to sieve out any collective planning that may or may not have occurred.

What is more, students spend most of their time in school. In fact, both Vermont and Irish young people spend more than six hours each day during the academic year within the school environment and sometimes up to twelve hours or more in a day if they are involved in extracurricular activities which take place within the school or on school grounds. This was another important consideration for me in deciding to conduct the interviews on school grounds. This was the space in which students spent most of their daily lives.

Further, as Reay (2005) and Lehmann (2009) attest, the educational environment is a perfect place for delving into “the psycho-social and emotional dimensions of classed identities, as schools have been variously discussed as both the hope for equalization and the basis for perpetuated inequality” (Lehmann 2009:633). This was an important influence in my choice to hold the interviews within the students’ schools instead of in an informal space outside of school. While the school is not an uncommon place in research that is “attempt[ing] to centre the focus on children and their experiences (James and Prout, 1990)” (Pat O’Connor 2008a:24), I specifically wanted to examine how the element of institutional education impacted on the adolescents in my sample areas. This was because I was especially interested in how their psychic landscape of social class interacted with and played out in their relationships with education, ideas about “success”, their communities and indeed their conceptions of self and who they wanted to become as adults.

What is more, as Jones (2008) notes in her work on methodologies surrounding children’s geographies, the school presents a very pragmatic setting for conducting youth research (p. 328). The practical considerations of time and financial constraints, the volume of data I wanted to collect and the methods I wanted to use to collect it were all serious considerations in my decision to conduct the research within the school environment. However it is important to acknowledge that the school context is also “a place imbued with significant adult/child power relations, and therefore has important implications when carrying out research” because adults “are afforded natural positions of authority through repeated performances and interactions” in this setting (Katie Jones 2008:328). Jones (2008) illustrates this by saying:

In schools the balance of power is heavily skewed towards adults, and children are least able to exercise participation rights. Adults control children’s use of time, occupation of space, choice of clothing, times of eating – even their modes of social interaction. (Robinson and Kellet 2004:91 in Katie Jones 2008:328)

Jones (2008) argues that standing juxtaposed to the “the adult controlled formal world of official structures, time tables and spatial segregation by age – the ‘world of the institution’, Valentine (2000) suggests there also exists the ‘informal world’ of the students themselves – of social networks and peer group cultures” (p. 328). I would assert that my

research is similar to hers in this recognition because “it was somewhere between these two worlds that the research sought to locate itself, in order to present a credible research project to school staff, whilst also engaging with teenage students about their practices and activities” (Katie Jones 2008:328). However, I was also interested in how these students related to the school environment itself, understood themselves as positive achievers there and how they viewed it as an integral part of their life trajectories. Thus, I felt that the school environment was indeed the necessary place to carry out the fieldwork because it was students’ relationship with this place and what happened there which played key roles in the research as a whole.

Another point I would like to acknowledge is that this research was cross-sectional. It was a one-time gathering of data and so is limited to these particular environments during these particular times, namely Leinster in the autumn of 2008 and Vermont in the spring of 2009. A longitudinal study would afford much more data and a chance to chart the decisions, activities, behaviours and feelings that the respondents had over time. It would also afford an opportunity to see if those students who planned to move or out-migrate altogether actually did so, and to revisit their feelings about space and place over time and through their movements and decision-making experiences. It would give an opportunity to see how students’ life goals changed over time and to delve into their self-reflections about these changes. However, this was all outside the remit of the research and would require considerable funding and time in order to achieve. Nonetheless, it is exciting to think about the possibilities for future research along these lines of enquiry.

Finally, across each of these methods, these were adolescents’ expressions and articulations and while the focus of this research is indeed on the ideas, identities, feelings and thoughts of these adolescents, they are being analysed from an adult perspective. With this in mind I would highlight again that I have striven to remain true to the words and sentiments expressed to me in the in-depth interviews, take-home questionnaires and free-write activities. As I have mentioned above, it was very important to me that I capture the voices, the tones, articulations and the sentiments expressed as completely as I could. This is why I used a digital recording device, took notes during interviews and subsequently annotated my transcriptions heavily. I have endeavoured to stay as accurate as possible to

the exact words (and grammar) used by my participants in the effort to present the data as clearly and forthrightly as possible in the way that it was given to me by the respondents.

Ethical considerations

Ethical conduction of the research was something that I was deeply committed to and which I think is imperative to sound social science study. The following excerpt from a research methods text offers some excellent advice which I have endeavoured to remain faithful to and mindful of throughout the course of my doctoral work:

...research requires us to act in ethical ways. Ethics begins with the conception of the research project and ends with how we represent and share with others what we have learned. In between, ethics should drive our fieldwork conduct, our theory choices for interpretation, and our conscientious attention to self-reflexivity. While qualitative researchers have general guidelines for ethical conduct, it is still the responsibility of each researcher to be continually aware of specific ethical problems that arise in each project and to respond not simply in ethical ways but in ethically situated ways. (Bloom 2002:313)

Because many of the young people that would make up my sample would be minors below the age of eighteen and I would be using a digital recording device to record the interviews, I knew that I would need parental consent in addition to the consent of the respondents themselves. I expressly wanted to include the respondents in the consent process in order to not just recognise them as agentic people in this endeavour, but to convey this to them clearly and in a contractual agreement between them and me. I felt it was important for the student not just to agree to participation but to recognise that I was asking *them* and not just their parents. I felt that a formal agreement stating this was an important part of overtly acknowledging and conveying my recognition of their agency and autonomy. I had already applied for and received Ethical Approval from the NUIM Ethical Approval Committee on this condition and so had prepared an informative letter which was to be circulated to the parents of the selected students before the fieldwork could begin. This was accompanied by a consent form which needed to be signed by both the parent and the student before they would be able to participate. Where students were eighteen years old and so legally recognised as adults, the informative letter and consent form was still

sent to them and their parents with the option for parents to sign as well as the legally adult student. In all cases this was what occurred, signifying agreement both from the parents and of the legally adult student respondent. (Appendix C)

In the two cases, one Leinster and one Vermont blue-collar school respectively, (“Moss Scoil” and “Maple School”) where an initial meeting was held with the parents, principal and students of the school, I was able to explain this face-to-face to the parents and students, and they were able to read and sign the consent forms there and then. If requested, I provided photocopies of the signed consent forms. The informative letters were for the parents and students to keep for their own records. Where meetings were not held, I emailed the informative letter and the consent form to the principals who distributed this to the selected students and who collected the signed consent forms prior to my site visit. I was able to then collect the signed forms before I started the fieldwork in that school. All materials were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in my office at the National University of Ireland Maynooth to protect and ensure confidentiality. Further, I underwent an FBI background check, including fingerprinting in order to gain access to the schools in Vermont.

In terms of maintaining the ethical merit of the work throughout the course of the project, there were occasions where I had to make crucial decisions regarding the extent to which schools would be able to completely participate in the project. One occasion this happened was during a time that I was conducting my fieldwork in one white-collar Irish school. I had completed the interviews and collected the questionnaires from the students in Transition Year and Sixth Year. I was scheduled to return two days later to complete the interviews with the Fifth Year respondents and collect the free-write activities as these were scheduled to be conducted in the school over the intervening two days. During the two-day interval, a Fifth Year student of the school (not a participant) committed suicide.

Under the circumstances I felt that it would be unethical to continue my presence in the school and especially for the Fifth Year respondents to participate in the research. As such, I contacted the Principal, offered my condolences and respectfully suggested to conclude the fieldwork with only the data from the interviews and questionnaires completed by the Transition Year and Sixth Year students. He was very grateful for my

understanding of the difficult circumstances and we both agreed that it would be best to conclude my work with that school as I proposed.

Another ethical consideration I had to make while conducting this fieldwork was the degree to which I could try to collect elements of the dataset from schools where they had agreed to participate but did not complete all elements of the data collection process. This included my having to reflect on appropriate behaviour in the event of schools' reluctance to reschedule additional site visits so I could interview students who weren't available during the time a school had allowed for me to be there or to interview alternate students in the place of those unavailable during my time in a school. It also involved deciding the best course of action when a school did not administer the free-write activity as agreed and or failed to forward missing take-home questionnaires from students who did not submit them at the time of interview.

In these cases I had to be respectful of the fact that these schools had agreed to participate at all and I had to weigh this against how I hoped to collect as much of the planned dataset as possible and so maintain the integrity and quality of the study itself. In these cases, I continued to maintain contact with the principals of these schools for up to five weeks after my agreed data collection visits. I did this through phone calls and emails. In each case I offered to visit again if this could be arranged to complete interviews with the students who were not available beforehand or with alternate students who would be available. I also provided self-addressed, stamped large envelopes for questionnaires submitted late and free-write activities to be forwarded to me. I even offered to collect these in person if this was more convenient for the schools as has been noted above.

In the end, when I was met with reluctance, and indeed in some cases silence, I had to be conscious of not creating an awkward atmosphere between these schools and future researchers who might hope to work with them and so had to preserve a feeling of good relations at the expense of some of the dataset I had aimed to collect. Time constraints also played a role in this decision. Here again, I was reminded of Bloom's (2002) assertion that as a researcher I had to respond in an "ethically situated way" and so had to refrain from pressurising these schools in an effort to gain the entire dataset I had initially set out in pursuit of. I was also reminded to be humble and respectful of boundaries in my pursuit of my dataset and this will be discussed below in the following section.

Finally, I was committed to treating the information obtained from the respondents with the utmost respect, confidentiality and consideration. I made any and all information pertaining to respective participants available to them at their discretion. I have maintained the anonymity of the respondents by giving each student a pseudonym and either omitting or changing any and all identifiable names, place names, pet names, street names etc. I made this clear in both the informative letter that went out to the parents and students, at any meetings with principals, parents and students and again to each respondent before we proceeded with her or his interview. I also offered to provide each participating school with a copy of the thesis after completion as a way of giving back to the institutions that made this research possible.

Problem solving and reflections

Reflecting on this process, the most considerable problems I had conducting this international comparative research was in making contact and carrying out dialogue with the Vermont schools. As I have mentioned above, I initially contacted all prospective schools with a formal letter, a copy of which can be found in Appendix A. The small response I received from this letter was two agreements to participate, one from a blue-collar Vermont school and one from a blue-collar Irish school. I kept a contact log and recorded all correspondence and contact that I had with schools in an Excel spreadsheet. I colour-coded and annotated this contact log with dates, times, persons spoken to, the nature of the contact/conversation and the outcome of the contact. This proved to be a crucial tool for organising and maintaining up-to-date information on my correspondence with each school. The ability to remember personal names and details of each conversation was an important way that I developed a rapport and relationship with each school.

Following this initial introductory letter I both telephoned and emailed the principals of each school to follow up about the project and to personally introduce myself. This is where the contact log became particularly important as I often had to leave messages or speak to administrative personnel as principals were frequently unable to take my calls. Follow-up emails and phone calls were made after two days if I had not received word back from principals/schools. Many principals responded best via email as I could

forward attachments to them including consent forms, a brief bio about myself and my work, the questionnaires and list of interview questions etc. Email proved to be an invaluable means of organising school visits, meetings with principals and parents and in scheduling the actual fieldwork visits to the school.

This however was often difficult in the Vermont case as emails had a tendency to “get lost” in principals’ “flooded” inboxes and I had to often resend information. This is somewhat understandable given the considerable administrative and executive responsibilities that principals in Vermont bear, however, the ease with which an email can be avoided was also something that I recognised may have been at play here. Also, the fact that I was limited in my ability to make international calls and so to make personal voice-to-voice contact was a stumbling block in developing a rapport with the Vermont schools. This was not just due to the costs involved but because of the five hour time difference between Ireland and Vermont.

Voice-to-voice contact was a very important means of developing a working relationship with principals and schools in Ireland and the difficulty I had in establishing this with Vermont schools made that half of the fieldwork much more fraught. I tried to remedy this by setting up specific times to call when a given principal said via email or through an administrative assistant that he or she would be available to speak with me on the phone. However, this was also often problematic as when I would call at the agreed time, the principal was often unable to take the scheduled call.

The level of difficulty I experienced in gaining access to Vermont schools compared to the relative ease with which I was granted entry to Irish schools is noteworthy. Also telling is the degree to which I was challenged in obtaining full participation in all data collection elements in Vermont schools juxtaposed against the comparative ease with which Irish schools endeavoured to participate fully. I think that these were both questions of power dynamics and the nature of school management in the two different areas. What is more, because I had contacted principals in Ireland in order to gain access, I took this route for Vermont schools as well. In hindsight, this was by and large a mistake. Throughout formulating my research strategy, I was very conscious of Leyshon’s (2002) note that it is important to remember that while doing research, one must always be aware

of the social dynamics one is not only trying to discover, but indeed, which one is participating in:

I deliberately emphasise research *with* young people to indicate that research is a shared process of knowledge creation between those participating in the project in whatever capacity. This recognises that the research process is imbued with power-relations, particularly the adult-youth relationship, but an attempt has been made here to collaborate with young people, not exploit them. (Leyshon 2002:179)

While I worked hard to maintain conscientious attention to this regarding my interactions with the participating students, I should have been much more conscious of this from my own standpoint *as PhD researcher*, not just *interviewer*. Fundamentally I should have attended more closely to the decision-makers and stakeholders of the Vermont schooling system. In focusing so much on accessing the voice of my target young people, I did not attend closely enough to the nature of power relations among my Vermont gatekeepers.

In Vermont as well as Ireland, the Principal of a school is largely an administrator. She or he oversees the running of the school and the day-to-day needs of the institution, its faculty, staff, students and parents. However, in Ireland, this official appears to have far more decision-making and organisational power than in Vermont as nearly all dialogue, access negotiation and organisation regarding data collection was carried out directly with the Irish principals I contacted. As I have already mentioned above, with many of the Vermont principals my emails and phone calls often went unacknowledged. It is noteworthy that it was only when I contacted the School Boards who presided over the non-responsive principals that I was able to engage in any kind of meaningful discussion about participation. One school where this was the case ended up actually being very helpful once I had engaged with the School Board. The non-response was merely an issue of the principal being overworked and understaffed.

Thus, in hindsight, I cannot help but wonder if these shortcomings might have been avoided if I had made contact with School Boards in the first instance. I am inclined to think that perhaps contacting Schools Boards from the outset might have been a better practice because School Boards in Vermont (and in most US states) have the most power

regarding decision making and the structural ordering of their respective school systems (Vermont Department of Education 2009). School Boards are groups of elected and voluntary individuals (often parents with children in the schooling system) who meet regularly to oversee the school budgeting and expenditure, hiring decisions, disciplinary issues (regarding faculty, staff, administration and, in exceptional cases, students), curriculum discussions, etc (Vermont Department of Education 2009). They are often appointed by the town voters and therefore can roughly be considered to represent the sentiments and interests of the townspeople and parents of the student body.

In reflecting on the way I managed my dialogue with principals and their schools during this project, I think that in the Vermont case, School Boards were the people I should have contacted first and foremost as these were the people with the power to either admit me or not and to ensure participation most readily. I should have attended more closely to the variations in institutional management across my two locations and acted accordingly. In focusing so intently on being mindful of the power relations between myself, the research and my respondents, I should have been more conscious in situating not just myself but the systems of power and school governing authorities within their own particular contexts. If I had been more mindful of the ways in which the two different schooling systems operated in terms of institutional and bureaucratic structures, I think my work would have been more effectively and efficiently carried out.

Thinking back on this process, I would also have insisted on having an initial meeting with the Principal, parents and selected students of each participating school. Because I was so conscious of the need to minimise the requirements for schools to participate in an effort to make participation something schools would be amenable to, I allowed the decision regarding whether they felt an initial meeting was needed to be up to the principals of the schools. Some principals did feel that this meeting was necessary, in order for me to meet the parents, the students and to answer any questions that they might have and to handle the administrative business of getting consent forms signed and distributing the take-home questionnaires to the students myself. These meetings took place in the two blue-collar schools where I was ultimately able to collect all nine planned interviews, take-home questionnaires and component free-write activities.

When these meetings took place, the organisation of the consent forms, the questionnaires and the scheduling of interviews was very efficient and the interviews ran very smoothly on their scheduled days and times. Free-write activities were also completed in a timely manner and returned to me. Where these initial meetings did not take place in the remaining five schools, the fieldwork was much less organised and I often had difficulties collecting questionnaires that students turned in to school administrative staff as opposed to me during their interview time. This was also the case for the free-write activities which were designed to be delivered at a convenient time (within reason) by the schools themselves. If I were able to start this research over again I would have made the initial meeting a crucial part of the research process in order to ensure clarity, responsiveness and higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

Data analysis

Throughout my analysis I have used the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO8. This has proved a very useful tool and brings to the fore the intricacy and dexterity which can be afforded to a researcher while processing considerable amounts of qualitative data. While I have been hesitant to use some of the more advanced functions of the software because I felt that this would remove me too far from my data, the basic functions of building cases and coding the data have been extremely helpful. I used the transcription function, the coding and the case building functions to organise and analyse my dataset. This was a very helpful tool and was an excellent way of saving time and energy in storing, processing and having easy access to my data.

Also, I would argue that using such a tool enabled me to become more efficient and acquainted with my data in a much shorter amount of time than might have been the case if I had tried to code each interview transcript by hand and organise the data that way. By using this software tool I was able to scroll through my transcripts quickly and to annotate directly into the transcripts, sometimes at great length. This could be printed off and used as a hardcopy for my own records or to take with me while I was away from my desk so I could review it further, make more comments on the hard copy and then enter these comments into the software when I could return to my computer. This was crucially

helpful throughout the analysis process because I was able to cut and paste my thoughts from my annotations into Word documents where I could expand upon them, link them to other thoughts and situate them within other existing chapters.

This way of working with my data allowed me speed and accuracy in terms of moving excerpts from my transcripts, annotations etc as well as helped me to be able to work very closely with it, reviewing, connecting and extrapolating information through and across several transcripts, texts and “chapters in progress” all at the same time. However, by refraining from using the more complicated analysis tools that the software had to offer, I remained intimately connected with my data whereas if I had used some of these I was wary that I might become somewhat divorced from the evidence. While this may or may not have been an ill-founded sentiment, I was more confident in the merit of my analysis by doing this work myself and using the software as more of an organisational and storage tool.

Conclusions

In reflecting on the research process, while I met difficulties regarding communication, access and organisation in conducting the fieldwork, I recognise that I was nonetheless able to compile a dataset of 48 in-depth interviews, 39 component take-come questionnaires and over one hundred usable pieces of free-writing. This is a considerable dataset which I anticipate I will be mining for some time to come.

I admit I should have paid more attention to the hierarchy and power structures of the two different schooling systems as I have mentioned earlier, however one of the major difficulties associated with conducting international comparative research is fundamentally that you cannot be in two places at once. The task is more about improving the quality and the quantity of communication. In terms of how I would conduct this research if I had it to do over, I would possibly extend the dataset in order to accommodate for problems in the fieldwork such as the ethical ones I encountered in one white-collar Irish school, the last-minute withdrawal of participation from the white-collar Vermont school and the difficulties in completing the entire data collection in some of the schools in both locations. I would have perhaps used six schools in each place, three blue-collar and three white-

collar to broaden the dataset and I would also have planned to stay longer in Vermont. Due to open-return tickets not being an option for travel to and from the US, I would have perhaps booked my flights with a three month window for fieldwork instead of just two. This would also have provided me with more time in case problems arose with scheduling or other fieldwork glitches.

When thinking back on my methods and my approach to conducting this research I think that overall, a particularly dynamic element of my research is found in the way that I categorised and drew my sample groups. By selecting my sample areas the way that I did, I think that I afforded myself with a unique perspective, taking into account the dramatic changes in the Irish and Vermont economies and societies. I think that by using this categorisation method I was especially attentive to how these changes may have influenced the young people I was trying to study, especially in terms of their own psychic landscapes of social class. It is the way that I have tried to take account of the subtler elements contributing to young people's understandings of self, social and their future adult lives that makes this work a contribution to knowledge. It would be interesting to see in the future, if other researchers used this categorisation, what kind of data they would collect and if it would challenge traditional discourse surrounding ideas about the differences and similarities between "working-class" and "middle-class".

These elements are hardly new topics in social science discourse. However, what I think makes this project compelling is that it is not just qualitative in its research strategy, but it is both comparative and international as well. It engages with young people from two countries situated an ocean apart in an attempt to discern not just how they are behaving in similar or dissimilar ways, but whether their identity formation, relationships with education and thoughts about mobility are akin to what has been discovered elsewhere around the globe. Further, the way that I have tried to attend to, derive sample groups with, and learn about how the culture surrounding different forms of work and education have influenced behaviour and identity formation within particular contexts provides new avenues for discussing the intimate workings of both class and gender relations.

By offering a slightly different lens, I hope that this work will help to illuminate some of the different, subtle and multifaceted elements of what is happening amongst these young people. Their responses are discussed in the following chapters. Chapter Six focuses

on the in-depth interview data to delve into how the high-achieving students formulated their identities and relationships with education. Chapter Seven shows the similarities and differences between the high-achievers' take-home questionnaires and their interview responses in terms of their interactions with and conceptualisations around space, place and mobility. It does this through special focus on their relationships with their home communities. Chapter Eight takes a deep look at the in-depth interviews again, drawing out how the high-achievers related to teachers and parents in negotiating their identities and interactions with education. Chapter Nine works with the free-write data and uses it as a backdrop to the responses of the high-achievers, discerning trends which might be explored more broadly. Chapter Ten concludes this thesis with some final ideas and thoughts for further research.

CHAPTER SIX

BUILDING A SELF, ALIGNED AMBITIONS AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction

As has been illustrated in earlier chapters, rural areas are places where there are few economically empowered positions available to women largely due to the prevalence of both traditional gender discourses and the dominance, and simultaneous retrenchment in many cases, of so-called “working-class” labour markets. These are conditions found in Vermont as well as in Ireland and, in fact, are relatively common across most rural locales as we have seen earlier. As such, I have raised questions surrounding how young women from rural areas were achieving such academic excellence when they were presented with the considerable constraints of patriarchal structures of labour, gender and culture. I have also asked about how blue-collar young people might be succeeding within the largely white-collar environment of the education system when so much research points towards this being not just unlikely, but indeed, systematically and structurally quite difficult (Bodovski and Farkas 2008; Lareau 2002). Further, I am curious about what kinds of strategies young rural women might be employing in order to do well in the academic environment.

In this chapter I will begin the data analysis by exploring how my respondents related their processes of identity formation to specific forms of self work which were largely based in their relationships with their education. By this I mean that I will discuss the relationship between my respondents’ critical self-reflexive activities, their ideas about their goals or ambitions, and how these related to the ways in which they thought about their future adult lives and selves. I will begin by exploring the particular conceptualisations of self that respondents understood themselves to be today and how they enacted specific behaviours in order to become particular selves in the future (i.e. how they worked to become their “possible selves”) through activities like “studying hard” or doing homework on time, getting good marks etc. I will then delve into the concept of aligned ambitions (Schneider and Stevenson 1999), address the ways that participants internalised

messages about success and finally examine how this relates to respondents' ideas about the future. I will also relate these findings to the wider literature on social mobility and relationships with education.

Lareau (2000, 2002) argues that it is the middle-class young people in her study who engaged in the most definitive, empowered and self-reflexive identity/self work. During the course of my research, it was in fact within my blue-collar groups where these qualities were seen, both in Ireland and in Vermont. It was among the blue-collar young people that I found articulate, detailed thoughts about self, the social world and future life. This finding is something which brings challenging questions to the “concerted cultivation” argument.

Building a self

Drawing on Chapter Four, post-reflexive choice enables us to see the ways in which structural forces influence the personal, such as being a blue-collar individual in a largely white-collar environment like the realm of institutional education. It simultaneously affords us with the recognition that the self is also able to do reflexive work in relation to these influences such as taking on traits which are conducive to the environment like doing one's homework on time or being prepared for class. If we also remain mindful of how the self is performative (Butler 2007) and of technologies and genealogies of self (Budgeon 2003) with a slightly more attentive eye to the ways reflexivity is occurring, I think we are afforded with a viewpoint that is able to take into account not just the sociocultural impetus which an individual experiences, but also the ways in which one negotiates one's identity and how this might in turn possibly work back upon the social. I think that this research can take a uniquely critical stance in exploring how aligned ambitions (Schneider and Stevenson 1999) were operationalised among my respondents. It does this by attending to the structural, mainstream or “mass marketed” elements internalised through “default individualism” (Côté 2002) while also remaining mindful of the ways that my respondents creatively and innovatively negotiated their own “optimal distinctiveness” in their identity work by “active, strategic approaches to personal growth and life-projects in...adult community(ies)” (Côté 2002:119).

Schneider and Stevenson (1999) argue that:

Ambitions are an important part of the lives of adolescents. Whether realistic or not, they help teenagers make sense of their lives and their futures. They can use their ambitions like a compass to help chart a life course and to provide direction for spending time and energy. Ambitions can increase the chances that adolescents will take schoolwork seriously, gain admission to the college of their choice, and view their success as a product of hard work. Ambitions developed during adolescence also have lifelong significance; they influence career choices and future earning. Decades of research demonstrate that one of the most important early predictors of social mobility is how much schooling an adolescent expects to obtain. (p. 4)

An early finding of this work was that respondents could be easily grouped into two overarching categories, those with Planning orientations and those who exhibited Dreaming orientations. Of these two ways of thinking, those with Planning orientations had definitive ideas about their futures based upon concrete plans for further education. Planning organised their understandings of self and what was possible for them around their relationships with school, the education system, credentialist ideas and a moralistic commitment to performing and achieving particularly well academically. This moral element of their self concepts and their academic behaviours will be discussed further in Chapter Eight. Students who expressed this orientation were predominantly blue-collar participants (72.72%) or respondents who were from blue-collar family backgrounds but were attending white-collar schools. Having blue-collar “backgrounds” meant that these students had little if any family history of third level education and their parents and families were usually engaged in what I have categorised as blue-collar labour such as “Quarry Surveyor”, “Building Contractor” or “Farmer”. They were also most likely to be female (72.72%).

What is more, students who expressed Planning orientations proved to be the most critically self-reflexive, affirmed in and aware of their talents, strengths and weaknesses and with the most detailed, well-planned and conscientiously thought-out life plans. This group showed an interesting amalgam between default and developmental individualism. While they had indeed internalised credentialist messages about “needing education to get anywhere in life”, they negotiated these messages in dynamic and intensely personal ways. They often drew on familial contexts or detailed relationships with mentor-like figures as

particularly influential in their own personal drive to achieve. This will be explored further in Chapters Eight and Nine. For my purposes here, it serves to note that in this context they showed considerable amounts of reflexively engineered “optimal distinctiveness” (Brewer 1991 cited in Coover and Murphy 2000:129).

This meant they showed signs of internalising the messages of the wider credentialist, globalised order and belonging to the “group” of mainstream society, while they continually understood and negotiated these sentiments in highly personal and individual ways, critically reflecting back upon their life histories and their socioeconomic backgrounds. While this might be stretching Brewer’s (Brewer 1991 cited in Coover and Murphy 2000:129) optimal distinctiveness a bit in terms of the idea of “belonging” to mainstream society being taken to be like belonging to a particular social group, I think nonetheless, it helps us to appreciate the unique ways in which these young people were making sense of their commitment to education. I think it also highlights the ways they interacted with the particular local geocultural systems they were within while showing an intense engagement with wider, mainstream society. They did this through participation in local sporting clubs or organisations and forms of traditional recreation like hiking in Vermont or Irish dance in Leinster while regularly engaging in wider networks like the Green Movement through advocating recycling in their schools or having a particular interest in travel, fashion, mainstream films or pop music. This is something similar to the ways that mobility capital was understood and utilised among Corbett’s (2004, 2007a, 2007b) “space travellers” and which I think shows like behaviours occurring across rural geographical locations. Those with a Planning orientation were also the group that exhibited behaviours and thinking similar to aligned ambitions, which require high levels of reflexivity, strategic thinking and awareness of the route to particular careers.

According to Schneider and Stevenson (1999), at their simplest, a student can be described as having aligned ambitions when she or he knows “what type of job they want and how much education is needed for it” (p. 79). Misaligned ambitions however, are a marked lacking in understanding of how to actualise one’s future life goals through educational and training pathways. Schneider and Stevenson’s (1999) work is based on data collected in the Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development which was carried out in the US during the 1990s. At the time Schneider and Stevenson (1999) were

writing, it was the most “detailed and comprehensive national study of adolescents in the 1990s” (p. 9). One of the most compelling findings of their study was that whether a young person had aligned or misaligned ambitions was found to be an important indicator as to whether or not that adolescent would achieve their particular educational goals and enter into the career paths they aspired towards. They argue that it is this marked lack of strategic reasoning, understanding and behaviours that inhibits adolescents with misaligned ambitions from achieving those goals.

The second main group among my respondents were those expressing a Dreaming orientation. These respondents were less sure of themselves in terms of thinking about the future, more interested in an amorphous sense of “being happy” and less likely to have any firm ideas about what they would like to do later in life let alone how they would go about doing it. Like those with Planning orientations, they detailed diverse interests but did not overtly associate these interests with cultivating or preparing themselves for further study or for any particular course in adult life. Instead, these were simply things which were important to them and which made up their identity in terms of attributes or creative capabilities.

Respondents with a Dreaming orientation understood themselves somewhat as “free spirits” just “floating along” in life endeavouring to enjoy themselves until they had to make any “real decisions”. They viewed third level education as something that they “could do” if they wanted to but fundamentally not something that was essential to do what they “wanted to do” later in life, despite having few clear-cut ideas about what this might be. These elements are strikingly similar to Schneider and Stevenson’s (1999) “misaligned ambitions”. 60% of Dreaming orientated respondents were from white-collar areas or were respondents from white-collar backgrounds who were attending blue-collar area schools. While Dreaming orientated respondents were also most often female (53.33%), they did not proportionately dominate this orientation to the same degree as they did the Planning orientation. Males made up 46.6% of the Dreaming orientated respondents. The dominance of female respondents in both orientations is due to the oversampling of females that this project engaged in overall. This was because it was predominantly the female perspective which I was interested in. As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, future

research might sample more equally so as to provide a more focused comparative study of gender.

Because this study was cross-sectional, there is no way to tell how durable these orientations are. It is entirely possible that if I had returned six months later that many of these students' orientations might have changed or been entirely different to what they discussed with me initially. However, when viewed alongside the evidence from Chapters Three and Four regarding the ways in which the expression of aligned ambitions and particular constructions of possible selves are likely to produce the planned-for outcomes among the young people expressing them, it is at least quite plausible that my respondents who described orientations most similar to these conceptual elements would follow through on their aspirations and ambitions. Again, the only way to test this would be to conduct longitudinal research and this is out of the remit of this thesis. The possibility it raises however is exciting and merits further inquiry. In the following section I will detail how those with Planning orientations and Dreaming orientations were different from one another. Again, as noted in the methodology, all respondents have been given pseudonyms and all identifying elements of their transcripts such as names etc have been either changed or omitted.

Who am I? The “hardworking” and “driven” self

When respondents were asked to talk about their identities, they were asked about this in several different ways throughout the interview so as to gain as much information as possible on the different elements that young people might understand themselves as, but mightn't necessarily categorise as being a specific part of their identity. Participants were asked to “describe” themselves or “explain” themselves to a stranger so that that the stranger could identify and understand who they were. This was to focus on aspects of their character and not their physical appearance. This was at the start of the interviews and proved somewhat difficult for many, especially for the Irish participants. The list of questions from the in-depth interviews can be found in Appendix D.

Students mostly responded to this line of questioning with references to what type of friend they were or what type of student. This is perhaps to be expected in that friendship

networks and academic performance largely dominate adolescents' life experience (Pat O'Connor 2008a). The ways respondents conceptualised their relationships with others will be covered in the following chapter, but for the purposes of the discussion at hand, some themes arose regarding participants' understandings of self that are worth deeper discussion.

Being “driven”, “hardworking” and “competitive” were often words used by participants in Vermont. While these words were not often used among Leinster respondents, it was frequently the case that these sentiments were expressed by using other words or phrases. In particular, the Planning orientated young women from both locations prided themselves on being hardworking students who were committed to their studies, activities and working towards their future life goals:

Sarah: ...if I have to do something I just do it, I don't have to think about it, I just do it. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female– Planning orientation)

Louisa: [I am] diligent, I'm a hard worker. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Potter: ...I guess I would really want them to know that I'm tough...I'm also very emotionally able to take on anything. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female - Planning)

Rose: um...I'm driven. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Georgina...for stronger characteristics [that I have], I'd say hardworking. (17 year old, twelfth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

This is not to say that references to being a “hard worker” were absent from the young male respondents in this study. To the contrary, many young men used these expressions or cited “knowing the value of hard work”. However, these assertions were also often discussed among the male respondents in conjunction with being “competitive” or that they worked hard *at their studies*, these were often set against a context of sportsmanship, paid employment, comparing themselves to other male classmates or voiced in discussion about their study habits. The ways the young men, blue-collar and white-

collar alike, understood themselves as “hardworking”, “driven”, “competitive” or “diligent” etc were different from the blue-collar females in that the young men used these descriptors to talk about things that they *did* as opposed to things that they *are* as people. These references to being competitive among the young men were also usually made with respect to their athleticism and sporting activities, this is discussed later in Chapter Nine set against responses from the free-write activity in relation to what students understood it to mean for them to be successful. I would argue that this is evidence of residual hegemonic masculinity, something which inherently works against academic achievement through its valorization of resistance to authority figures like teachers, structure like assessments through homework, quizzes and tests as well as its incitement to disorderly behaviour which is not conducive to a productive classroom experience (Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman 2002; Jacob 2002; Obie Clayton, Hewitt, and Gaffney 2004).

Essentially, “hard working” tended to function for the young male participants in this study as an adverb while for the young women, in particular the Planning orientated young women, this tended to function more as adjectival noun. More simply, the Planning orientated young women understood and articulated these ideas as specifically related to *who they were*. I would argue that this is due to a deeper internalization of the need to be responsible for one’s self which is put forward by Arnett (1998) as a harbinger of being an adult according to mainstream young people. Arnett (1998) argues that young people’s ideas were more than just individualistic, they were bound up in how young people understood *who they were*:

...the capacities for accepting responsibility for one’s self and for making independent decisions are *qualities of character*. [sic] By this I mean that they are qualities that are part of the individual’s psychological and moral identity, so that they manifest themselves in a wide variety of situations. The term character [sic] has a moral connotation and these qualities are regarded in a distinctly moral light, as the *right* way for an adult to be and to behave. (p. 296)

Thus, the ways in which my respondents with a Planning orientation internalised their understandings of themselves as hard working *people* are in line with what Arnett (1998) argues about mainstream American adolescents’ conceptions of *becoming* an adult. For my respondents with Planning orientations, it was clear that the ways in which they

understood themselves to be “diligent” and responsible for themselves are remarkably similar to the main ways mainstream US adolescents have discussed the transition to adulthood. I would argue that this serves as some compelling evidence of the influence of particular ways of understanding the transition to adulthood across national borders and therefore hints at a wider, more global mainstream culture among certain young people in their thinking about themselves and what it means to become an adult.

What is more, I would argue that it indicates a deeper internalisation of these messages among the young women with Planning orientations. This is because it was predominantly the Planning orientated young women who discussed attributes related to being “driven” or “hard working” as specifically relating to themselves, who they were and how they understood their personalities. Along these lines, some interesting trends can be seen when looking at blue-collar and white-collar responses to the questionnaires. Question 31 asks “Please rate from 1 to 10 (1 being the least and 10 being the most) how much you feel that becoming educated/skilled influences your identity”. Among all blue-collar respondents 76% reported a 7 or higher to this question with 85.71% of all white-collar respondents saying the same. However, when asked during interview how important education was to their identity, white-collar respondents by and large did not respond this way while blue-collar respondents did so consistently. It should be noted here again that while students with Planning orientations and those with Dreaming orientations were not completely homogeneous groups, blue-collar participants made up 72.72% of the Planning orientated group while white-collar respondents made up 60% of the Dreaming orientated group.

Students with Planning orientations also made reference to these personal characteristics when talking about their educational performance, future educational trajectories and their strategic thinking regarding gaining access to the career paths they aspired towards. Often, they discussed how they understood themselves as being in direct relation to who they were *as students* and how their performance mediated their possible future selves. This functioned in several different ways however. For some education was a credential which gained them access to other places, higher status work etc while for others it was a source of pride and confidence or as a resource on which they could draw in order to strategically situate themselves in more favourable social and economic conditions

later in life. Still others understood education as uniquely part of who they were, a defining characteristic that would make them different to other people.

Below Rose epitomizes those who understood education as a credential, a proverbial “key” to another place and self. Often students conceptualized the university route as something which was taken for granted in the foreseen narrative of their life. University was understood not just as something which they “expected” to do, but indeed, which they did not imagine “not doing”:

Rose: um well, I like school a lot. Like it's not that I [just] like enjoying it, I also care a lot about how I do in school so it's one of my main focuses because I know that it's going to affect like the future. Because everyone's always talking about how colleges don't accept people unless they have like above perfect scores. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Catherine's response illustrates best how often education was a source of personal confidence, pride and as something which made the uncertain future something less “scary” through her consistently higher performance than her peers. Thus education often worked as something “solid” that these students could “hold on to” as they moved forward in their young lives. It acted as not just a stabilizing force, but also something which inherently and consistently reasserted that not only were they doing well in school, they were doing the “right” thing by being so engaged with it:

Catherine:...I do feel confident enough because I know I'm doing better than a lot of people and I know that's not a great way to compare yourself to people around you but I'm not worried about going [to university], I'm definitely, I know I'm definitely going to university, I'm not worried about getting the points to go... (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Melissa discusses how education operates like a resource to be strategically amassed and utilized in order to secure favourable outcomes in the future. For many students this kind of thinking was often written against a context of seeing an older family member or friend “make mistakes” or “fail” in the pursuit of an educational goal, something which is not just distasteful, but decidedly “not an option” for those with a Planning orientation:

Melissa: ...With school I look over notes and all that, I try to listen in class, I do revision, especially when tests are coming up because I really do want to get as much as I can and some people don't get these kinds of opportunities so why waste this. I would always have my homework done and coming up to a test I would look over my notes and make sure I knew what was going to come up and that I was prepared. I've chosen German as a foreign language because I hope it'll open doors for me, because I've learned from my brother, he didn't choose a language and it was his biggest mistake. And I chose subjects I liked because at the end of the day it's all about points so if you're not going to be interested you're not going to get the points, so I did two subjects I was interested in and that would benefit me when I go to choose my college course. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster – Planning orientation)

Finally, Potter's articulation of third level education as the defining element in her life effectively illuminates the ways in which many respondents understood education as the very thing which made them, and *would make them* who they were. It functioned as an intrinsic element in how they conceptualized themselves and they described it as something which would define them throughout the rest of their lives:

Potter: ...I feel like that's going to be my foundation for the rest of my life, is college, I feel like how successful I am in college will define what I do and how well I do it so I mean that's the biggest piece of it I feel, is college. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

These high-achieving rural adolescents talk about conscientious, strategic efforts that they engage in so that they might one day achieve the adult lives that they are planning for. This is interesting with respect to how my Planning orientated respondents, particularly the young women, often expressed contradictory discourses of the relativity of happiness and success. This contradiction was expressed within their interviews and could be seen especially well when comparing their written questionnaires with what they often revealed during the later stages of their interviews. For example, Annie, a sixteen year old tenth grader from a blue-collar school in Vermont who expressed a Planning orientation, writes that:

“Success is not a generic “one size fits all” word. Living in this diverse world, we all approach success differently. For some, success is gaining millions of dollars and a posh new mansion.

For some, a “C” on a Geometry [sic] test or completing a marathon is success. The power that he or she gains to overcome a deed that may seem impossible to that person is success.” –
Writing from take-home questionnaire

In her interview however, Annie is clear and decisive about what success means to her, she gives concrete examples of the career paths that interest her, namely teaching English as a foreign language or cross-cultural studies. She details careful strategies to work towards her ambitions for later in life and shares a nuanced approach to understanding her own motivations. She discusses success for her as being very much bound up in her educational aspirations:

Annie: ...For me, I don't think it's not so much about the achievements that you get, it's about the journey to get you there, the hard work that you put into it. If you can put a lot of hard work into, like your honest best then that's succeeding...for, [I would need] definitely my college degrees as high as I can go, I was thinking a Master's probably not a PhD, I was thinking of a PhD but that takes so much schooling...but you never know, the more I can get, the more education and the more learning, because successful to me is to keep going, never to say that “I have enough” because I'll never have enough education, I'll never have enough of stuff I can learn.

Annie also discusses how she tries to become her “ideal self” in a similar way in her take-home questionnaire. Question 26 asks “Please list at least five characteristics of your ‘ideal self’? (i.e. the person that you'd like to be/try to be)” and Annie lists elements which are specific to the career path in teaching English as a foreign language or cross-cultural studies which she discusses wanting to pursue:

- natural ease for languages
- better communicator
- all A.P. classes [A.P. stands for “Advanced Placement”]¹⁹
- better understanding of cultures
- someone who can connect with people well

¹⁹ “Advanced Placement” classes are accelerated courses which are geared towards preparation for university level study. They are very strenuous and carry with them a significant connotation that students who take them are exceedingly bright and promising as well as ambitious and noteworthy. Students who enrol in “all A.P. classes” are therefore “one's to watch”.

What is more, Question 27 asks “Please list and/or describe how you try to work towards being your “ideal self”. In response to this, Annie writes:

“In order to become my ideal person, there must be incessant motivation and drive on my part...only a determination to succeed will be the key to becoming the person I want to be...if I can work at something with all my motivational drive, my ideal characteristics will become more in reach.” – Q27 – take-home questionnaire

Thus, Annie epitomises the Planning orientation in the ways that her “ideal self” is bound up in what she understands as “success” which is coupled with her relationship to education being one which she conceptualises as something which is intimately related to both who she understands herself to be right now as well as who she wants to *become* in the future. Her understanding of success is inextricably connected to what she plans for her career. This understanding influences behaviours which are not just activities that she does but elements that make up who she is. They are traits that she will work upon until she *is* those things (e.g. motivated, resilient, diligent etc). She does this through her desire to “get” more learning and also through her ability to “keep going” which are reciprocally supported by her “motivational drive”. Thus, when first asked “what does success mean to you?”, Annie presents a loosely, relativist standpoint likely informed by her desire to be more culturally aware as can be seen in her aspirations to enter into “cross-cultural studies”. However, when given room to elaborate, Annie’s understanding of “success” and her ideal self are clearly bound up in a discourse of hard work, achievement and deep, enduring motivation to excel both educationally and in the knowledge-working career she envisions for herself.

This is somewhat similar to what Louisa, who also expressed a Planning orientation, has to say in her take-home questionnaire. Louisa is a sixteen year old sixth year from Clover Scoil which is in a blue-collar area in Leinster. The area around Clover Scoil experienced considerable development during the boom-time building and was hit particularly hard by the slow-down of the housing industry when this research was taking place (late 2008). With a population that the village’s infrastructure could never have dreamt of having to support, the local school had not been refurbished since the early

1980s. As such, the now swollen student population was forced into prefabricated buildings erected behind the school itself to conduct many of the students' classes. Louisa's mother was the breadwinner of the family, managing a floral business while her father was a stay-at-home dad. Like Annie, Louisa too expresses an ambiguous, relativistic idea about success as anything that you want to make of it when she says in her take-home questionnaire that:

“Success is being happy with where we are in life, not caring about what others have and what others achieve, just being content that we have gotten everything we wanted in life.” – Writing from take-home questionnaire

However, when Louisa talks about success in her in-depth interview, she firmly relates it with achieving particular sets of goals, namely earning a degree, working in a well-paid knowledge-related field and delaying having a family until later in life. Also, Louisa notes that she's interested in meteorology, astronomy and accounting, three fields which are traditionally male dominated due to the need for advanced mathematics and science training, areas which have seen few sizable in-roads for young women (Jacobs et al. 1998):

Louisa: ehm (pause) that'd be eh sorta the same as my goals like if I achieved them, that I'd be successful then. Like if I got my degree and if I got a really good job and I was happy in my job and then I'd settle down and be happy in my life, that'd be success.

Thus for Louisa too, while success was at first set within a somewhat amorphous rhetoric of being “anything you want it to be”, when allowed room to discuss herself, she detailed specific ways in which she planned both the achievement of particular goals as well as the delay of “settling” until those goals were achieved. While Louisa first writes that “success” is being happy “where we are in life”, for her, it is specifically after the completion of her degree, entry into the form of work that she desires and being satisfied in her employment, *then* she will “be happy”. *After* education and career she will “settle down” and “be happy” with her life. This prioritisation of the “goals” of education and career over family formation and as a route to being “happy” with one's life is explored in much more detail later in Chapters Eight and Nine, but it serves the discussion here to note

this because the ways in which these two young women articulated themselves offers an interesting insight into ideas about power and normative constructions of success within the academic (and social) environment. While my participants often expressed high levels of relativity in what they perceived to be a successful life “in general,” when they shared what they considered essential for themselves to feel successful, these particular themes clearly developed among the Planning orientated.

Anita Harris (2004) discusses how young women are expected to be both highly flexible as well as “self-actualizing” in today’s society (p. 16). It is perhaps the case that moving from Harris’ (2004) “can-do girl” we can see that a particular relationship with education is emerging, one which understands and relates to education not so much as a credential but a skill set. This means not so much that it is something that one does, but that it is something which one *is*. Among the Planning orientated, the entire experience of education is largely understood as one which inherently prepares the individual in a better, fuller way to work in a challenging and satisfying field. This is a sentiment which is explored in its relation to philanthropic discussions my respondents conveyed to me and will be covered later in Chapters Eight and Nine, but for my purposes here it highlights the way that education appears to be viewed among the Planning orientated young women nearly as a muscle to develop and to work out strenuously in order to function as a better modern world inhabitant.

Below are excerpts which detail a few different ways in which this skill of education and condition of *being educated* played out in who the Planning orientated young women understood themselves to be and to *be able to* be. Claire’s response stands as an excellent example of how education was understood as something which makes one “better” or “more equipped” to take on the challenges that the world has in store. It is a signifier of her durability, resilience and her aptitude to face and conquer adversity:

Claire: ...education teaches you to choose things that you like and work hard at things that you like, and it teaches you to socialise and it teaches you more than English, Irish and Maths and it is really important...It's important to me because it feels like it's part of who you are and if you had to write down on paper, like you asked me to do, I'd write down "I got this, this, and this in these subjects or I like these subjects" and it's important for me to be able to say in a few years time say if I had a PhD or something then I'd be able to say that I *did* this and I did it on my

own and I'm capable of doing anything you ask me to do. (17 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Potter's response represents the ways in which education was also conceptualized as something which made one special, unique and gifted through the transformative effects it imparted. These were elements which conferred a decidedly moralistic advantage through one's ability to appreciate the developmental power that education bestows:

Potter: Education is very important to me because I feel like that's where I learn my skills but also about the country that I come from and about things that have already happened um and I think that it's really important and I think that some people take it for granted and then other people don't cherish it enough and that's really sad to me because I really love to learn and I feel like it's, I don't know, I just I feel like it's really a big part of who I am and I just feel like a lot of people are missing out on it. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Melissa's narration draws this out even further in the way that she describes education as being a contingent element in a precious singular life that one must "make the most of". She discusses how it will smooth the way ahead through an inevitably "difficult" life and help one to ensure security through particular forms of work based upon one's studies. This in turn, again like Louisa, is understood as a prerequisite to family formation:

Melissa: [Education] means what you're going to get out of life cause you only have one life so get the most you can out of school so that it won't be as difficult, life will always be difficult but it won't be as difficult if you get a secure job, if you work hard at your studies. And if you then have children and a family you can give your all to your children and your family. (sixteen year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Thus it is clear to see that as well as having a very linear progression from education to knowledge-based employment to (possible) future family formation, this kind of deep-seated dedication to performing highly carried a distinctly moral connotation. It carried with it the clear conviction that it was right and good that these young women should achieve this way. This was evident throughout most Planning orientated respondents' interviews and is delved into in much more detail later in Chapter Nine as

well. However, again for this line of the discussion, I'd like to show how different these ideas about one's identity were to those belonging to respondents who expressed a Dreaming orientation.

Dreaming of doing – understanding one's self as flexible and able to “choose”

Respondents with Dreaming orientations most often discussed who they were as being much more related to their individual interests and creative experiences than as seated in their educational endeavours or future career trajectories. Their discussions about who they understood themselves to be contained many more references to who they were *now* and carried the message of their focus on being *in the now* as opposed to how the Planning orientated talked about who they were *now* with the implicit adage of *who this would make them later*. Brennan and Nilsen (2002) note something similar and call this being in an “extended present”. This was also something that O'Connor (2008a) has drawn attention to in her study of Irish young people's written and drawn texts in the Write Now project.

While nearly all my respondents made reference to personal characteristics which would be positive in their relationships with friends and family, the Dreaming oriented young women discussed their identities as predominantly based on their hobbies, opinions and relational characteristics. They often mirrored traditional feminine ascriptions surrounding caring for others and being socially sensitive (Sevenhuijsen 1998). Often these were intensely socially-situated with high levels of consideration, thoughtfulness and appreciation for both the standpoints and the troubles of others. Susan, a sixteen year old white-collar eleventh grader from Vermont discusses who she is as someone who essentially wants to care for other people. Both of Susan's parents had undergraduate degrees and her mother had a Master's degree. Both of her parents also worked broadly in architecture. Susan conveys a lot of confusion about who she understands herself to be and this was a common theme among students with a Dreaming orientation. They rarely had definitive mooring points which they could articulate succinctly about their identities. This is possibly evidence of how Archer (1982) discussed children of parents with a third level education as being less “committed” to particular identities as has been seen in Chapter

Four. However, as Susan describes herself to be “a little bit mixed up”, the facet she discusses as most salient is her consideration for other people and desire to “help” others:

Susan: I am a person who likes to help people, that's something that I'm dedicated to somehow being, being helpful, doing something good for somebody even if it's just a little thing.

Sometimes I don't have much use for school cause I feel like a lot of stuff is really just not going to advance the world or my place in the world but I guess overall I think of myself as a really big contradiction cause I'm always thinking stuff and then going back on that and I can never really find I guess what my real opinion is and then when I think sometimes something is good then I'll think half is good and half is bad so I guess I'm just trying to get balance, so I'm a little bit mixed up I guess. (16 year old, eleventh grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Sephra illustrates the other main form which discussing identity took among the Dreaming orientated. Sephra is a sixteen year old tenth grader from a white-collar school in Vermont. Her parents too both had undergraduate degrees, with her mother attaining postgraduate completion in the sciences. Here, Sephra talks about facets of her behaviour towards others as being “too” much in some cases. She notes her talent for music and the ways in which she is good at writing. Her discussion of herself does not however, extend to intimate facets of her character and while she offers that she’s “smart, sometimes” she doesn’t speak about her education or learning as elements which she particularly identifies with or understands as informing who she is. In fact, she doesn’t make mention of them here at all. This was a common trend among the Dreaming orientated:

Sephra: [Characteristics that I feel I need to work on are that] I'm a little too wild and a little too honest (laughs), not as compassionate as I could be and sometimes I'm withdrawn but that's not that much. And for good...I'm smart, sometimes...I hate talking about myself...musical, that's a good thing, I can relate to people easily and I can express myself in writing and people can get that a lot better than when I'm speaking. (16 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Thus it is clear that while the Planning orientated detail selves that are uniquely focused on achieving particular forms of educational and life course objectives, the Dreaming orientated are more inclined to be situating their identity work within personal

interests and philosophical ideas about what it means to “live a good life”. This may arguably be due to a number of factors, including parental educational levels, curriculum content or various life experiences. Again, returning to Archer (1982) here, she suggested that young people whose parents had third level educations were afforded with greater “flexibility in time and choice of life-goal decisions” (p. 1556). This meant that it would therefore be likely that their children would be more at ease with entertaining many different possible options while making only hesitant commitments regarding their identity construction processes (p. 1556). The ways that Dreaming oriented respondents discussed only tentative ideas about possible future selves, occupations and interests might be evidence of what Archer (1982) suggests about this. However, this also provides an interesting twist in the logic of Lareau’s (2000, 2002) concerted cultivation thesis in that the Dreaming orientated were predominantly young people from white-collar areas, with parents who had attained third level education and beyond and were engaged in white-collar work. These young people however, unlike what the concerted cultivation thesis presents, exhibited little motivation and expressed little parental influence to cultivate themselves in particular ways in the effort for future life opportunities. The following two excerpts express this best:

Lyra: ...And you know when I was like “what if I didn’t go to college” my parents were like “yeah we’ll be supportive of that too” so I don’t think it was like *they*, for them I had to go to college. (16 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation
*white-collar family background)

Frederica: It's not like my parents ever forced it on me, they're pretty much fine with anything I do. (15 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

To give this a little more context, Lyra attends a blue-collar school in Vermont but has a family history of third level education prior to her own parents who both earned undergraduate degrees and her father went on to complete his Master’s. Her mother is a teacher and her father works in the sciences. Frederica’s parents also had undergraduate degrees and her mother too worked as a teacher while her father was in upper level management at a substantially sized company in the tourism sector. These two young

women essentially represent the demographic of the Dreaming orientated student. They had family histories of third level education and parents engaged in white-collar work. I would like to note here however that it was not the case that all respondents with Dreaming orientations said that they did not want to go to third level education. Rather, it was the case that third level education held considerably less significance in the grand scheme of their identity work, possible self construction and future life plans compared to their Planning orientated counterparts. The “option” of not going to third level education was distinctly present within articulations of possible future life trajectories among the Dreaming oriented while it was markedly absent among those with Planning orientations. I would like to argue that this is due to the ways in which third level education was understood among the Planning orientated as something that they would have to work very hard to achieve while those with Dreaming orientations conceptualised it as either something that they “didn’t have to do” or something which was taken for granted that they could do later in life if they “chose”.

Thus, along with asserting that further study needs to be conducted on these issues, I would put forward that perhaps it might also be the case that the particular types of selves that the Planning and Dreaming orientated are working on and towards are indicators of the shifts in material and socioeconomic conditions that their home communities and families have experienced over the past twenty years. In Ireland this included unprecedented levels of disposable income, massive immigration, huge changes in the material and social landscape and considerable advances in technology (Fahey et al. 2007). For Vermont too this has meant increases in disposable income and in the “General Progress Indicator” which is a “comprehensive measure of economic progress” through “adjust[ing] for income distribution effects, the value of household and volunteer work, costs of mobility and pollution, and the depletion of social and natural capital” (Costanza et al. 2004:139). In fact, it was found that by 2000, Vermont scored at more than twice the national average of the United States (Costanza et al. 2004:139). Both places have also rapidly developed their information technology infrastructures through the availability of broadband services as noted in an earlier chapter.

Again, this draws attention to the contextual nature of identity development and highlights my reasoning behind categorising and selecting areas via blue-collar and white-

collar status because it is the culture of work within which my respondents were situated that I am interested in. It is the ways in which these young people understand it to be possible for them to work within particular industries, the status they attach to certain forms of work and how they perceive different types of work to be gendered which I would argue play a considerable role in who they envision it possible for themselves to become as adults. I would also suggest that this view gives a more textured account of the ways in which status is negotiated both culturally and internally by my respondents. This is because of the particular labour markets their home areas have experienced as well as the cultural context these markets engender in the geographical locations. Perhaps it is the case that the young women with Planning orientations understand themselves, cultivate particular forms of selfhood and view certain life trajectories as uniquely desirable due in part to the material and social changes their socio-geographic environments have experienced in recent years. To illustrate this idea further through attention to ideas surrounding particular forms of self-cultivation and educational pathways, I would like to discuss the concept of aligned ambitions further below.

Aligned ambitions, misaligned ambitions and concepts of self

As established earlier, aligned ambitions are indicative of a young person's knowledge and understanding of the "world of work and the educational pathways to different occupations" (Schneider and Stevenson 1999:79). This kind of knowledge facilitates young people's ability to maintain high motivational levels and to engage in strategic decision-making regarding how they manage their time and efforts. This is similar to what Adams (2006) discussed regarding the ability of an individual to engage in "meaningful actions" through the negotiation and activation of one's "reflexions" (p. 524) because it is not so much the consistency of ambitions towards particular career paths that aligned ambitions facilitate, but rather, it is the ability to know and understand the particular "educational pathways to their desired occupation" which they provide (Schneider and Stevenson 1999:79).

This kind of knowledge operates on a number of levels to give students with this kind of understanding considerable advantages over other students in the educational and career

pathway stakes, not least of which, the engagement of particular skill sets in order to achieve access to the pathways they understand to be necessary to fulfil their future goals, much like Jacob's (2002) non-cognitive skills. I would argue that we can see this kind of conceptualisation and actualisation through not just the reasoning that Planning orientated respondents discussed, but their utilisation of non-cognitive skills in order to increase their academic performance in strategic bids to gain entry into the educational trajectories they perceived as pathways to their possible selves and future life goals. The excerpts below were taken from discussions in the in-depth interviews wherein Planning orientated students were detailing their strategic thinking and efforts to achieve their goals and gain entry into third level educational institutions:

Catherine: [discussing how she is actively preparing herself for university study] well if I do well and a teacher gives me good remarks or on a test or something and the teacher says "oh you'll do well in the leaving cert" but sometimes I think that it's not as good to eh, you know when they say "oh that's brilliant, you should be alright" I think that if you get top marks on something like an essay say, then that means that you can't really improve and obviously you can because you're only in secondary school and there's a lot more you can do so sometimes I think that I'd rather them be like "oh you could have done this and this" and getting loads of ideas to improve. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Georgina: um I think I'm in a pretty good place [in terms of my preparation for university]...I feel like I memorise stuff really easily so usually tests aren't too hard cause usually I can get material, I can learn material and I can sort of just absorb a lot just from what the teacher says... I think I'm good at focusing down on things and saying "ok this is what I need to get done now" and tuning everything else out. (17 year old twelfth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Here it is clear from Catherine's and Georgina's discussions about how they systematically think about their preparatory work for third level education that these are meaningful activities which they engage in and that they understand to be a direct means of facilitating their mobility. Catherine notes how she would prefer her teachers to be more critical of her so that she might improve herself for what she perceives will be the rigours of third level schooling. She consciously asserts that she sees her educational endeavours at this moment in time as a route to a more strenuous academic environment in the future

which she can reach through a continual reassessment of her performance and reapplication of her efforts directed by those with more expertise.

Georgina notes that she is skilful in her approach to learning and that she feels confident about her abilities. She says that she feels she is “in a good place” regarding her preparation for higher education because of the ways she goes about assimilating required material. What is more, she makes specific reference to her ability to “absorb” information from her teachers in class, which is indicative of paying careful attention in her classes, an element of significant importance in the scheme of non-cognitive skills. She sees herself as being able to “focus down” on a task at hand and “tune” everything else “out”, also illustrative of the ability to apply oneself to a task as noted in Jacob’s (2002) description. Further, what is special about Catherine’s and Georgina’s thinking is that they illustrate how the Planning orientated understand these university preparatory activities as things that they are not just engaging in but that they are able to do through the merit of who they are as hard working, focused and diligent young women.

Building on this, I would argue that it is a particular construction and understanding of self that further facilitates the development of aligned ambitions among particular adolescents. The crux of my argument lies in trying to explore the ways academically talented young women make sense of their selves, relationships and future life trajectories while attending to how these are bound up in their perceptions and actualisations of empowerment. I would also like to suggest that this is possibly influenced by spatial factors and relationships, conditions and experiences with the rural home community. These could be factors such as the inculcation of the value of diligence or honourable toil as being linked to histories of blue-collar (mostly agricultural) labour in the area (Ní Laoire 2005), or the culture of resilience that is often a social narrative among Vermonters due to the harshness of the climate and the length of the winters there (Sherman 2000). I will return to this idea later in this chapter and engage more deeply with it in the one following.

Throughout their discussions during interview and also in their written questionnaires, Planning orientated respondents detailed their future success as being contingent upon realising their goals, most of which were predominantly based upon academic achievement and future knowledge-based work in places away from home communities. They were actively and strategically managing both their conceptualisations

of self as well as their day-to-day activities vis á vis their educational accrual and participation in training for empowered, mobile, knowledge-based careers.

Perhaps the following two extended excerpts illustrate this best. Claire discusses how she thinks about achieving her goals with regards to education as an inherent testament to her social standing as a member of society, as in mainstream ideas about credentialism or default individualism but also as a fundamentally enabling force for her own individual self-determination as in developmental individualism. Claire mediates between the structural forces she understands to be present within the adult working world such as salary scales, prestige and the status of particular forms of labour and her own internal desire to “achieve” an educationally advanced condition. Meanwhile, Lilly understands her commitment to her studies not just in relation to her perception of the difficulty in being accepted to a high ranking university but as a testament to her personal, reflexive self engineering for such a possible future self and eventual life path:

Claire: The purpose is, well it just means that you know that you've done that and you push yourself to your absolute limit and you got something saying that you put years and years of effort in and it actually paid off, it's not just like years of effort and then oh you're a housewife for the rest of your life or anything, it pays off, it's not just for nothing, you're not going to go to university for years and get a Master's and work in Londis [an Irish convenience store chain]. It's a qualification, it's a big qualification, it will affect your salary and how you're seen in society. That's what it means for me, it gives me a higher place in society, well not like that, just I don't know, a place I don't know how to describe it. It's a credential. Well, how you're seen and not that I want to be seen as being higher than everybody else but just so that people know that you're determined and that you have skills you know how to use them and you've done well. (17year old fifth year, blue-collar, Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Lilly: CP [college preparatory] is just, it's the type of class that really does things and teaches you things that relate to college like taking CP Chemistry, you have the labs and if you want to get into chemistry in college you have to have lab opportunities before so you know what you're doing and you're not just the one who's left out and doesn't know how to write up a lab report. And also because I'm taking CP Chemistry I can now take CP Physics which is the most important thing for being an engineer, you've got to know how to make things stand up and if I want to be an engineer then it's one of those classes that it's nice to have pre-college, the preparatory knowledge for that class. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar, Vermont female – Planning orientation)

This understanding of the self, relationship to education and active cultivation of one's self as an educationally orientated young person was sometimes a fraught process and many respondents discussed how they struggled with negativity, difficult social situations or being categorised by their peers as “brown nosers”, “suck ups”, “teacher's pets”, “swots” etc:

Anne: ...sometimes it's negative [the social environment of school for her] but I just like, there's no point in being negative in school cause everybody has to go to school so you might as well just enjoy it while you can. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Bella: I'm a swot in that I like to know, I like to understand. Not that I make it a big deal that I do know because a real swot is someone who wants people to know that they know so that they can be better than everyone else. (16 year old, transition year, white-collar Leinster – Planning orientation *blue-collar family background)

Lilly: With teachers, teachers respect me, it's kind of obvious that they respect me or they wouldn't have sat me down in here (referring to being selected for the study) cause I wouldn't say things that were inappropriate (laughs). I think that teachers really respect me for my hard work so it's kind of a back and forth relationship in that way. But my peers, well the girls kind of see me as the shy one that just isn't going to just be out there doing whatever she wants to do, or the quiet one and the guys are just like "she's just intimidating, let's not talk to her". (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

It is this kind of contention between peer influences (which can sometimes regard this academically high achieving identity in a somewhat negative light) with their own, internal references to their scholastic achievement as positive that affords what I would argue is direct evidence of how these young people are enacting selves which are not necessarily the most positive in their adolescent social world (Coover and Murphy 2000), but which they reflexively understand to be important for positive adult life trajectories.

This is interesting because by taking a closer look at the backgrounds these young women came from, the ways in which they are conceptualising their educational behaviour is something uniquely positive in the “grand scheme of things” is particularly noteworthy. Anne goes to school at “Clover Scoil”, the same school as Louisa. Her parents received

only a primary level education. Her mother is at home full-time at present while her father continues to work in the service sector. Bella too has no family history of third level education, her mother finishing secondary school and her father leaving secondary school after two years. Her mother too is a “homemaker” and her father works in the building industry. Lilly also has no family history of third level education. Her parents both finished secondary school and she answered Questions 15 and 16 as follows:

Question 15. What is your mother’s occupation?

“Mom/part time worker”

Question 16. What is your father’s occupation?

“Computer aided Drafter”

Thus, while her father worked in the building industry with computers, a skilled job requiring training, she too had a mother whose occupation was listed as primarily within the home. All three of these young women discussed the ways in which they negotiated the negative social experiences they had with relation to their educational endeavours as something that was simply to be endured and that they “put up with”. They do not see it as something which would dissuade them from their educational proclivities and indeed, both Bella and Lilly exhibit something of a pride in their status as “different” because of their orientation.

Bella says that she is not a “real swot” because it is only in that she “likes to know” and “understand” that she could be considered thus and in order to be a “real swot” she would have to then seek to elevate herself above others through her intellect which is something that she does not do. However, she clearly asserts that she enjoys cultivating this intellect and conspiratorially discloses an appetite for reading that was more than impressive. Bella reads for fun not just several times a day, but she loves to read so much that she is forced to “ration” her reading so that she doesn’t “get through books too fast” because she wants to prolong her enjoyment of them. And in terms of her genres of interest, Bella attests to “loving everything” and that she “just love[s] books” so much that she will “read anything, everything, it doesn’t matter”. This was a sentiment often expressed among the Planning orientated and also frequently among the female Dreaming

orientated but less so among the male's with Dreaming orientations. This may be due again to the residual presence of hegemonic masculinity which often understands less physical pursuits like reading as being somewhat effeminate (Obie Clayton et al. 2004).

Later in her interview, Bella referred back to how she was often seen as a "swot" again when she was talking about her "ideal self" and she animatedly appropriated this term by discussing how she wanted to be "savagely intelligent" in her ideal self and to become this woman, she went about "feeding" her mind as much as possible. She reflected back on those people who made her "uncomfortable" saying that actually, they "really didn't matter because what do they actually mean in my life? Nothing, they're not my friends, I don't even like them." Thus I would argue that it is less a case of these young women being victims of bullying or on the receiving end of adolescent clique culture, but more a case of them understanding themselves as and accepting the fact that they are different from their peers in their educational prowess and orientation and that this is not something they are ashamed of. It is actually a resource of resistance to the negativity they experience from their peers through their pride in and reaffirmation of the particular kinds of selves they are enacting and working upon.

Further, because they derived positive relationships with others, like teachers for example and their parents, through this kind of selfhood, there was an interesting sort of trade-off for these young women made. It was one wherein they accepted that they were not necessarily popular among their peers, but they were "respected" and supported by figures of authority and expertise. They received praise and reinforcement for particular orientations and behaviours and they understood these to be evidence of their successfulness in making a promising transition into these adult realms. I will return to this relationship later in Chapter Eight, but I would like to start highlighting it now because it worked in a particularly positive way for these young women. An excellent example of this is how Lilly too conveys a sort of quiet stoicism and undercurrent of remarkable self-possession through juxtaposing her positive relationships with her teachers against the somewhat difficult relationships she experiences with her peers. Crucially, while Bella is from rural Leinster and Lilly is from Central Vermont, these young women show strikingly similar ways of not just understanding themselves, but how they mediate their relationships with their peers, derive meaning from other contexts like their relationships with teachers

and go about reaffirming concepts of selfhood which are geared towards work in knowledge-based fields despite having no family history of this. Lilly wants to become an Engineer and Bella wants to study medicine to be either a Pharmacist or a Midwife.

This is also similar to evidence found by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) in their research exploring working-class students at elite universities. This is where and how I think the “large print” of post-reflexive choice as well as the “small-print” of default and developmental individualism and why they are important concepts for this research can be seen. While these young women are aware of the mainstream, youth-based social forces which they experience with their peers, so too are they acutely perceptive of their own uniqueness and perhaps ill-fit with relation to these. Thus they recognise the differences in their realms of experience (or habitus) and the ways in which they have particular forms of capital (or not) with respect to these. They also go about making specific choices about the types of selves they are, who they want to become and how they derive and exercise the capital to do so. Thus, they are not passive consumers of the mainstream cultural environments immediately surrounding them and which work upon them through their peers assessing them as “swots”, “brown nosers” and “teacher’s pets”. Rather, they engage in developmental individualism by understanding themselves as inherently different and inclined to alternative interests, endeavours and future orientations specifically outside of the realms their peers engage in.

Thus, I would argue, it is important to transfer the primary focus from the premise that identity is a performance (Butler 2007) to the idea that it is a performance of the ways and means with which individuals reflexively bargain between the social structural influences they experience and their internal, arguably contemporary necessity to create Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness. Through these discussions about how Planning oriented young women are extrapolating meaning from the social circumstances and institutional educational environments where they spend the majority of their time, I would suggest that these narratives of self creation show that there is a concerted need to account for the similarities found between young women born and raised an ocean apart. Interestingly, these are young women with no family history of education and whose mothers were primarily homemakers.

Such likenesses in mediation as have been seen above invariably draw attention to the systems of meaning ascribed to different groups or populations within the hierarchically ordered capitalistic paradigm and the concurrent processes of globalisation. The ways that identities are constructed and socially negotiated within rural areas among young people are often now in contention with traditional forms of identity development and sociocultural structures. This can be seen for example in the ways that many Planning orientated young women's mothers were homemakers while they themselves firmly rejected such a life trajectory (Ní Laoire 2005; Coldwell 2006; Dahlström 1996). This is something which is explored further with respect to my findings in Chapter Seven. However, for the discussion here, this is an important note as it scaffolds the analysis of what is constructed as a positive self and what are possible selves for these young women within such contexts. Further, it opens the question of what is understood as a successful self by these high-achieving young rural women, the essential point of enquiry this doctoral work is based upon.

Questioning “can-do” girlhood

Another element that I think is indicative of the struggle between the idea of hyper self-determination and the very real structural constraints that can be found in society today, was that my participants had difficulties with the conception that one's future is fundamentally within one's own hands. Simultaneously however, they wrestled with influences from various sociocultural messages surrounding ideas about the normative life course being fundamentally one that is self-authored while also noting similar hallmarks of what constituted a “successful person”. This was very like what Harris (2004) discusses as an essential element of contention that contemporary young women today are forced to engage with. She argues that:

...young women are often perceived as beneficiaries of the new world of work and training but that this picture changes radically when a diverse range of young women's experiences is taken into account. I demonstrate the enormous expectations placed upon them to seize all the opportunities offered by deindustrialized and globalized labor markets, and how only a small minority of young women are structurally located in ways that make this possible. The

economic shifts that characterize late modernity have had deeply divisive effects on young women, particularly in the world of work. This stratification has enormous benefits for the new economy, as it has enabled differently advantaged young women to take up positions that must be filled at opposite ends of the labor market. At the same time the accompanying narratives about choice, self-invention and, opportunity ensure that stratification and disadvantage become reconfigured as merely individual limitations of effort or vision, to be addressed through personal strategies alone. (Harris 2004:10)

While Harris (2004) offers a cogent argument, I found a counternarrative to this among my Planning orientated respondents. These students openly recognised the structural constraints they faced through their lacking of family histories of education as well as the financial capital to facilitate easy access to high status universities. Thus, Planning orientated young women understood their social contexts as milieus within which they would have to mobilise particular elements of their blue-collar habitus in order to gain entry into the white-collar realms they understood as vital to their successful metamorphosis into their planned for possible selves. This counternarrative was one that is decidedly in opposition to much of what Harris' (2004) contests and which draws much needed attention to the spatial and geocultural facets that are arguably at work here through the types of habitus and forms of capital that these young women are reflexively negotiating, internalising and mobilising in order to work towards achieving their goals.

Harris (2004) puts forward that the discourse surrounding young women as the uniquely capable risk-society citizens does not account for the structural constraints that young women from varying socioeconomic backgrounds experience. She also argues that the template for this modern day young woman simultaneously puts unattainable expectations upon today's young females while discounting those who cannot or do not achieve particular notions of success as individually problematic as opposed to encountering social and structural obstacles. Again it is clear here that the argument takes issue with the individualised notions of today's society surrounding "success" and "failure", namely that they are predominantly determined by one's own personal commitment, drive, hard work or the lack thereof.

It is not so much that I disagree fundamentally with what Harris (2004) argues here, but rather that I think it is possible that something different is occurring among my respondents which may be indicative of possible wider trends in rural areas considering the

similarities present among their discussions and what has been found in other studies on female-led rural out-migration (Corbett 2007a; Gabriel 2002; Andres and Licker 2005; Bryant and Pini 2009; Stockdale 2002a). While I am not claiming that my respondents are showing exactly the same kinds of reasoning and behaviours surrounding their ideas about their adult spatial mobility, I would contest that the similarities in their plans for third level education and eventual knowledge-based work are in line with what is occurring in other rural areas globally as has been detailed throughout Chapters Two, Three and Four. Further, what my respondents shared during this research is a relationship with self, space/place and “success” which is uniquely provocative and which may provide deeper qualitative insights into the decision-making strategies that young rural women employ when considering their relationships with education, community and the future adult lives they plan to lead. These points will be drawn out below and also through the following chapters.

Returning to Harris (2004), her argument essentially centres on the idea that “a normative image of the girl of our times both relies on and shores up class and race stratifications that persist despite the discourse of meritocracy” (p. 10). It is possible that this may indeed be the case, but representative and generalisable samples and further longitudinal study would be required in order to fully test this thesis and this is out of both the remit and scope of my doctoral work. However, I would contend that particular temporal, social and contextual influences which my respondents experienced, both in Leinster and in Vermont, have perhaps yielded a condition whereby blue-collar young women appear to be uniquely able to actualise and achieve Harris’s (2004) “can-do” femininity in strikingly potent ways. Set against some of the research noted in earlier chapters conducted around the globe, I would suggest that this evidence is an incitement to further internationally comparative research.

Successful Selves

There were active acknowledgements of the structural constraints facing the young women I interviewed regarding the competitiveness (and cost) of third level education. Planning orientated respondents related to these constraints via internal reflexive processes

of identity work so as to self-cultivate into formidable third level students and eventual adult knowledge workers. They did this through intense commitments to educational pathways, deep-seated and meaningful attachments to the practices they employed to be good students and the positive reinforcement they gleaned from adult figures like teachers and family as explored above and which will continue to be elaborated upon. Thus, I would argue that the Planning orientated provide the hint of a real shift in how ideal femininity is conceptualised in rural areas and the ways and means with which young women are endeavouring to become these ideal selves. I think that this can be seen through how they talk about what they want to do later in life and how they plan on preparing themselves in order to be able to do these things and become these selves. Put more simply, I think this is evident through how they make sense of what it will mean for them to become a “successful” self. This is not found always in outright statements but rather in the implicit connotations that respondents understood certain life trajectories to hold for them.

The complete devotion to third level educational achievement, the internalisation of certain messages surrounding meritocracy and the strategic planning regarding how to gain footholds on their journey towards particularly high-status careers combine to show Planning orientated respondents as having definitive ideas about what it means to be successful even when they countered this with discussions of the relativity of “success” when asked outright about this as has been illustrated above. Below, Melissa’s description of how she understands her success as hinging on definitive ideas about positive life trajectories for herself are specifically about achieving highly through concerted efforts and making the most of “opportunities”. Crucially, what Melissa shares here also highlights the way that her perception of her own agency plays out in her understanding of whether or not she is successful through being able to “speak for” herself:

Melissa: I would need to be the person I want to be, feeling happy with myself every day, feeling I hadn't wasted opportunities and that I always did my best. Being able to speak for myself. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Melissa’s understanding of what it means to be successful therefore is deeply seated not just in her achievement within her academic studies, but also the degree to which she

sees herself as being both independent and empowered. Again, I would argue that this mirrors much of what Arnett (1998) claims about mainstream young people's understanding of the transition into adulthood as fundamentally being bound up in an intensely individualistic and individualising process. Here Melissa exhibits her desire to be able to stand alone through her assertion that success means she will be able to speak for herself. To explore this further I would draw attention to how Harris (2004) takes issue with many of the current initiatives surrounding "youth voice and youth involvement" as "becom[ing] strategies for the regulation of young women" (pp. 11, 125-150), and I would counter this with a return to the discussion of Frank et al's (1995) argument from Chapters Three and Four.

As established earlier, Frank et al (1995) assert that in today's society, "the construction and rationalization of social elements, such as the individual, [is understood] as a rather direct consequence of the operation of modern liberal society seen as a cultural model" (p. 373). Put simply, this means that via the pervading normativity of individualism there comes to be a "taken for granted" assumption that this is simply a part of society. Essentially it is understood as a part of our culture. Further, Frank et al (1995) argue that contemporary society is "organized around institutionalized and rationalized cultural theories managed in reality by scientists, lawyers, and other professionals" (p. 361), and these people are essentially the "norm producers" if you will. Today, it is largely those people who are credentialed and mobile that play a more empowered role and who often internalise and represent the autonomous, self-scripting modern social actor. These are mostly people who could be roughly said to be "knowledge workers".

It appears to be the case that the young women who expressed Planning orientations are internalising what Harris (2004) deems to be a problematic discourse surrounding self-actualisation, and indeed enacting this form of self in an effort to join the increasing numbers of women with third level education and professional degrees. Considering this, I would suggest that this evidence is an indication of who many of these norm-producing (or at least influencing) knowledge workers might be in the future, namely a cohort of young women who do not just tout the "can-do" philosophy, but who have actively internalised it and worked to make it an advantageous and powerful form of selfhood.

I would like to explore this idea further below, following how my respondents understood what “success” was *for them* specifically and how they were going to achieve this in their own lives and possible future selves. Here is where some of the practical logic discussed by Planning orientated respondents can be seen at work. When reflexively considering themselves, the future selves they wanted to be and how they were trying to become these people it is clear that they held serious convictions and commitments and that they viewed these future outcomes as the fruits of very specific educational processes. This is particularly evident in the following excerpts:

Catherine: Well I suppose to really feel like I was successful I'd want to continue, if I do something in college then to do well and to go on and continue to do well. But it's kind of with friends and family and stuff like that as well...I do want to qualify in college, it is important to me to do well, get a good qualification, get a really good job. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Claire: I want to have a career, I don't want to have a job, I want to have a career and I definitely don't want to be a housewife like my mum is, I want to have a career, like a really good career...you have to just [study or prepare] yourself and know what you have to get done in a certain amount of time and even if it takes you longer to do it than anybody else, as long as you get it done before your exam then I think you're ok, you just have to do it. So self-motivation is what you need. (17 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Potter: Yes, I definitely want to go to college and I want to get my degree...I want to finish college... (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

These young women each expressed the concerted desire for third level educational qualifications, often specifically followed by work. The preoccupation with earning one's degree and then having a “career” or definite work in a credential-based field is important here because it was among the Planning orientated where this relationship was most prevalent. Among the Dreaming orientated however, when referring to adult work or possible avenues for their employment later in life, they often discussed this as “doing something” and sometimes noted that they would be happy in future employment that might not specifically require qualifications at all. Often, respondents who showed a

Dreaming orientation admitted that they did not have any idea about what they would like to do later in life and shared this amidst laughter. Again, it is impossible to tell from these cross-sectional data whether the respondents who showed a Dreaming orientation would not in the coming months develop more of a Planning orientation. However, from the narratives that the respondents shared in this research, those with Dreaming orientations were especially different to those with Planning orientations in the ways that they understand their life trajectories to be “drifting” or “floating” and that they are passengers, or at least, not active in the ways that Planning oriented respondents understand themselves to be critically so:

Susan: I really can see myself just as much doing fine art or writing or math or science or any of those (laughs), I guess my one requirement is that in some way it's got to be making somebody's life a little bit easier, a little bit happier or a little bit better so I guess I would like to do something on a larger scale, I don't know. (16 year old, eleventh grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Frank: I can't really see myself in like a desk job all day and I really don't see myself doing like a specialised like mechanics field or anything like that, or like engineering or something like that...so I think that I'm just going to sorta go to school for liberal arts and hope for the best (laughs). (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Dreaming orientation)

Jenny: That's actually, like, people always have ideas like “oh yeah I want to be a teacher, I want to be a garda [Irish police officer]” and I haven't got a clue...I'm probably a very strange person, I've no ambition like, (laughs) I don't know, I'm kinda like, sure let life throw, let life come at you and take what it gives you type of thing, I can't like, I don't know, like I suppose if I had a sport, I'd love to say “oh in two years I'd love to be on a M---- team” or something like that but sure I don't do any sports. (15 year old, Transition Year, blue-collar Leinster female – Dreaming orientation *white-collar family background)

Peter: not really [I don't have a plan]...I'm planning to go to college and ah...I don't' know I guess I'd like ah the social studies classes and English classes here maybe more than science and math but I don't really have a problem with any of them so I guess I might be more likely to go into a field that had something more to do with those...I could see myself I guess maybe as an English teacher somewhere, that's something that I like but it's not like I really have a plan to do anything like that, I guess I'll just sort of figure it out as I go along. (15 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Dreaming orientation *white-collar family)

background)

Thus I would put forward that there is a definitive difference between how Planning orientated and Dreaming orientated respondents relate to education. I would argue also that this is a telling facet of how different their identities are as well as their identity work and self projects. I would like to suggest that this is evidence of marked contrasts in reasoning processes which Archer (1982) attests as being pivotal in both adolescent choice-making and self construction and which Serpe (1987) recognised as being dependent upon their sociocultural repertoire and perception of choice being possible and meaningful for the individual within the socio-structural context. This draws attention to the particular sociocultural and geocultural milieus that these young people were situated within and how they may be influencing these adolescents. It calls for attention to what kinds of social forces are working upon rural young women to prompt particular behaviours and future life plans. It also calls for attending to when, how and where these young people understand themselves to be agentic.

This is a point of serious note as my participants showed that those with the most concerted ideas about future life plans and possible selves were those with little family history of education. Further, they were the ones with the most measured and considered evidence of self-reflection and intense reflexive activities, all elements which Archer (1982) argued were evidence of highly developed and nuanced identities and which Côté (2002) suggests is evidence of developmental individualism, the most beneficial to agentic self building among adolescents. Planning orientated respondents appear to be working to become agentic people by virtue of the strength, complexity and durability of their concepts of self and future self, but what is more, they plan to critically cultivate this agency and other types of agency into their futures.

Further, the possible selves of those with Planning orientations are a very important element of this entire thesis. This is because, as seen in Chapter Four in the work of Oyserman et al (2004) and others (Oyserman, Terry, and Bybee 2002; Oyserman et al. 2007), the nature of possible selves and the conceptual work that adolescents do around them are crucial factors in the likelihood that young people will actually achieve their future life plans. This can be directly linked to what Schneider and Stevenson (1999) argue regarding aligned ambitions and I would suggest that by augmenting this understanding

with attention to adolescents' possible selves, i.e. who they understand it to be possible for them to become and who they are indeed working *to become*, then we are able to account for not just the conceptual and reflexive activities that young people engage in but also to see the connection between this and the concrete activities that they practice subject to this identity work.

From this thinking I would suggest that the more the young person appears to be enacting post-reflexive choice, critically engaging with his or her various selves and forms of capital, then the more that young person is able to knowledgably construct attainable possible selves and indeed, reach his or her aligned ambitions through particular forms of concerted self cultivation and non-cognitive skills. This is because of the ways in which young women with this kind of orientation are able to assess the social fields around them, reflexively gauge their capital within and across these various social fields (e.g. the local economy, the educational environment etc) and systematically work upon themselves (their identities and habitus) (Reay 2005; Reay et al. 2009) to mobilise their resources to achieve particular ends. Research investigating female rural out-migration throughout the globe has shown that patriarchal cultural structures and negative perceptions of the local socioeconomy within their home communities function as serious impeti promoting young rural women to leave as was discussed in earlier chapters. I would put forward that the processes which are observable among my Planning oriented respondents may be an insight into the genesis of the wider trends discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

Ultimately I would argue that this might be an important bridging point between the self and the social, the micro level of identity and the macro level of behavioural trends and normative change. The Planning oriented respondents mostly came from blue-collar family environments and were witness to their local areas experiencing social and economic shifts. There was little family history of education and often only one parent was in paid (blue-collar) employment. This kind of social vulnerability coupled with the rapid effects of Vermont's and Ireland's modernisation processes appear to be creating certain kinds of possible selves across geographic cases. Put more simply, by attending to the roots we might get a better picture of how the tree grows. This is the idea this PhD work rests upon, that the small, idiosyncratic elements which make up rural high-achieving young women's

concepts of self and future life plans are potentially able to be connected to wider social trends of out-migration and the gendering of the knowledge economy.

Discussion and Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, I have illustrated several of the connections between how my respondents negotiated their self concepts and their relationships with education, possible future selves and life trajectories. I take the first steps in drawing out how these micro level processes may be linked with the macro level trends of female high educational attainment, the gendering of the future knowledge economy workforce and the issue of female-led rural out-migration. While this is admittedly a considerable conceptual leap, I would argue alongside others (Halfacree 1993; Ní Laoire 2000) that it is in the qualitative attention to personal, mundane biographies that we will find the data to inform us about the larger social processes in motion. In short, I would argue that we will be able to see some of the most strenuous gender, self and social negotiation among the young women who are walking these lines and who conscientiously are intending, indeed *planning*, to walk them in the future.

The ways that young women understand who they are, what opportunities are available to them in their home communities and how they negotiate their future life plans are all intrinsically linked to the ways that gender *works* within their locality and within mainstream society. This is something which plays a considerable role within this research and I stress “works” here because the double entendre it carries is at the heart of this study. How young women are ordering their identities, relationships with education and their communities are all bound up in what roles they understand are both socially normative and indeed, structurally available to them there spatially. This is important to this research because it establishes that these relationships and interactions in turn shape the roles young women plan for themselves to be and do in the future, influence their levels of actual and planned mobility, and thus highlight how gender operates in the locality as not just a personal negotiation of social normativity but also a structural element of what kind of employment and career paths exist for them in the local gendered structure of opportunities.

Thus, while I do not necessarily disagree with Harris's (2004) argument regarding the fact that young women today are put under extreme pressure to achieve possibly unattainable amounts of agency and empowerment, I would call for a closer inspection of the types of selves and the degree to which young women are actively engaging in their own reflexive capitalisation in an effort to be able to *become* decision-makers (for themselves and possibly for others) and knowledge wielders.

I am not suggesting that we discount the argument that femininity today continues to be defined along narrow lines in relation to an overarching paradigm based on patriarchy as we have also clearly seen in earlier chapters. Rather, I am suggesting that it is perhaps through engaging in developmental individualisation and critical awareness of normative changes in their late modern societies via post-reflexive choice in a number of ways, that young rural women today might be creating relatively agentic selves in the effort of entering the knowledge economy in higher numbers.

Thus, perhaps it is the case that young women have become the high-achievers relative to their male counterparts due to a perceived normative shift in the construction of ideal femininity in rural places and spaces. However, these women as a social group have reaped the benefits of higher education and increased life chances through higher levels of mobility, rural young women may have begun to internalise this behaviour in a more critical and systematic fashion due to their unique experience of place-based economic and future life chances within their home communities being largely undesirable or unsustainable. Perhaps the educated, empowered rural female is coming to be inherently one who departs her home community. Perhaps she is understood as being quintessentially mobile, both socially and spatially. Hence, it could possibly be the case that young rural women may now be collectively beginning to express a specific set of behaviours which are predicated upon strategically thinking about future life trajectories (Oyserman et al. 2004) academic achievement and accruing high levels of what Corbett (2005, 2005, 2007, 2007a, 2007b) describes as "mobility capital". Further, if what Frank et al (1995) argue about who the norm producers in contemporary society are is found to be more or less correct, and if women come to dominate this professional, knowledge class (which at present they don't), then this brings serious questions about possible normative shifts in the future and raises important issues regarding gender relations and power along social as well

as spatial lines. The following chapter engages with the ways that social ties, spatial relations and mobility factor into this discussion to explore these ideas. By examining the ways that my respondents related to their home communities and had ideas about what was possible for them within and outside of their home communities, the following chapter continues to engage in the ways that the Planning and Dreaming orientated had fundamentally different notions of self, possible future selves and ideas about how they intended to become these people *in place*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EVICTION NOTICES OR OPTIONAL TENANCY? THE LEAVE-TAKING IMPERATIVE AND THE PERCEPTION OF “CHOICE”

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings that have to do with my respondents' gendered ideas about belonging, their relationships with and ideas about their home community and their conceptions of mobility. I will show the linkages between my own work and the current literature which has been covered in Chapters Two and Three having to do with gender, space, place and rurality. The main focus in this chapter is on illustrating the ways in which my respondents related to space and place and to see how this was connected to their gender, their ideas about future mobility, where and how they understand their future selves to be located and the nature of their relationship with the home community. I am interested in how normative ideas about gender, education and the life course are influenced by their geocultural situatedness and how these impact on certain young people. Essentially I want to explore how certain geocultural influences affect the perceptions of agency and self-efficacy of adolescents from different social backgrounds and spatial locations and how it might work upon their choice-making processes, concepts of self, future self and life trajectories.

This chapter shows the interconnection between how my respondents related to their home communities and how this relationship has bearing on who they understand themselves to be currently as well as who they construct as their possible future selves. I intend to show how mobility is understood as an “imperative” for some while it is related to as an “option” for others. I will also show how this is bound up in ideas about one's future possible self and life trajectories. I will couch this within a discussion regarding the situated nature of both gender and class relations and endeavour to show how particular conceptualisations of self are intrinsically linked with certain relationships with space, place and cultural milieus.

Finding a (positive) place

Recalling the discussion begun in the previous chapter, here I would like to explore how my respondents' possible selves and future life plans are influenced by place and space. As seen earlier, even among the privileged groups, there remain certain overarching and embedding social narratives surrounding ideas about gender, the life course, etc (Brantlinger 1994; Brantlinger et al. 1996). These might include ideas about work, parenthood or ideal forms of gender and these are all negotiated and mitigated in particular ways across various spaces and places. This is because the home community is understood as an area where many respondents will not have access to sustainable modes of employment, namely within the knowledge economy careers they understand to be in their futures. This is interesting because despite Vermont's and Leinster's local economies being dominated by the construction and building industry, service provision and retail and trade as has been seen in earlier chapters, there are not insignificant numbers of people who do engage in knowledge-based work like education, healthcare, social work, public administration and banking and finance. While these opportunities might require commuting and would be understandably less plentiful given the smaller nature of these areas' economies than would be found in larger urban hubs, there is still evidence of knowledge-based work among the populations in these areas.

In Ireland's Mid-East region in 2006 for example, persons 15 years and over at work in the broad industrial groups of education, social work, banking and finance, and public administration and defence made up an approximate combined 25% of all persons at work by broad industry group (Central Statistics Office 2007g). What is more, 66.19% of these were women. In Vermont in 2008, people employed in financial activities, professional, scientific and technical areas, education and health services and by the government (both State and local) combined to make up approximately 45% of all those employed (Vermont Department of Labor 2008). While a gendered breakdown of this statistic was unavailable, in 2007 the proportion of women in employment in financial activities was 68.9%, in professional, scientific and technical areas was 49.7%, in education and health was 74.2% and in public administration (government) was 50.5% (US Census Bureau 2008c).

This kind of statistical data suggests that while these areas have been dominated by blue-collar industries, there is evidence of people employed in white-collar and knowledge-based fields. Further, the majority of these people appear to be women. Thus, I would argue that it is not so much that white-collar or knowledge-based work is not available *at all*, in these areas, but rather that it is *understood* to be extra scarce by some. That is to say, the prevailing culture of work in these two places influences the cultural contexts and the perceptions of the young people who made up my respondents so much so that unless they were socially close to the forms of work they aspired towards, they perceive there to be very few opportunities for them in existence at all in their home areas. Despite there being statistical evidence that people in their areas do indeed work in knowledge-based fields, this appears to be ephemeral to my respondents, and in many cases, outright invisible. Admittedly work in these fields would more than likely necessitate commuting to a larger metro-urban area as mentioned above, but nevertheless, there appears to be evidence that these types of work are indeed present in both the Mid-East Region and in Vermont. It appears to be more a case that their presence is felt by some and not by others.

Following this line of thought, one of the most compelling findings in this research was that the ways in which talented young people understood their identities, relationships and future plans were inextricably linked to their perceptions and actualisations of empowerment within their geocultural context. This meant that the perceptions these young people had of whether there would be viable employment opportunities available to them later in adulthood had considerable bearing upon whether they felt that they could or would stay in or near their home areas. Again, there were stark differences between those with Planning orientations and those with Dreaming orientations surrounding this and which will be discussed throughout the length of this chapter.

To start this discussion however, I would like to highlight the ways in which my respondents understood their identities to be influenced by their home areas and the cultural contexts therein. For those who exhibited a Planning orientation, this context contains deeply embedded elements of “home”, “family” and “friends”, all situated within a discourse of belonging but needing to depart. Those with Dreaming orientations also made frequent reference to “home”, “family” and social networks, but this was through a much more negotiated relationship with the implicit option to leave *or* to stay for them. Here,

both Planning orientated and Dreaming orientated respondents illustrate how their home communities have influenced who they understand themselves to be:

Susan: I think it's a really, well I love Vermont and I love the people here and I'm definitely going to [settle here], I don't want to just leave and be like one of those people who is like "I used to live in Vermont way back when" not that there's anything wrong with that, but I'd feel like I abandoned my Vermonteness, so I think I definitely want to live here for at least some part of my life. (16 year old, eleventh grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Melissa: My family, we're country people, culchies [Irish slang word somewhat similar to the American slang word "hillbilly"] (laughs), [and that influences] how I get along with people, the things I do... (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Jenny: Probably like living here has a lot to do with it [who I understand myself to be], cause probably if I lived in Dublin I'd be a completely different person so yeah, probably living out here would definitely have a lot to do with it and even just like I love, I do love like being out like in, working outside, nature, all that sort of stuff so I suppose if I lived up in Dublin I wouldn't have that, wouldn't enjoy that as much, even just going for a walk, I just love that especially now with all the leaves falling off the trees all colourful and pretty (laughs) I love that, whereas that probably has a lot to do with it, living in the middle of nowhere type of thing. (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Dreaming orientation *white-collar family background)

Madeline: ...having goals has been a big thing for me, having dreams and planning my future and knowing the steps that I need to take in order to get there. I think that Vermont especially is important. Growing up here, I mean, it's just such a good place to grow up because I mean 30 miles away there's a place that's kind of like a city but then here we can go hiking or fishing or whatever we want. I think Vermont's a really good place to grow up. I think it's been a big part of who I am, I think it's been important in making me down to earth, like I don't really like to wear make-up and jeans are just fine and I don't really feel the need to wear high heels but I think if I lived in the city and that was expected of me then I'd be more likely to do that. (18 year old, twelfth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Here we can see how Susan, both of whose parents had undergraduate degrees and whose mother had a Master's, relates to Vermont as something which inherently defines who she is as a person and sets her distinctly apart from others. Interestingly, among the

Vermont respondents, there is a clear identification specifically with the State of Vermont. Susan even alludes to her “Vermonterness” as a primary facet of her identity. This is echoed by both Madeline above in her reference to how “Vermont especially is important” and plays a “big part of who I am”. What is more, Madeline’s description of her home area reflects discourses of the rural idyll surrounding the way that she thinks Vermont is a “good place to grow up”, how she mentions the relative proximity of an urban locale while noting the availability of outdoor recreation. Jenny and Melissa, respondents from Leinster, also make more mention of the fact that they are not urban people, Jenny too bringing up rural idyllic references like “being close to nature” as she notes in her comments about the beauty of her home area. Melissa focuses more on how the culture of rurality has influenced who she is and how she behaves with others. As such, these two young women assert that their identities were influenced by the fact that they were raised in the country and they understand this to be an important distinction, especially from living in Dublin as Jenny notes. Thus place clearly plays a significant role in who these young women understand themselves to be and also who they understand themselves *not* to be.

Sephra’s assertion below that she would rather be understood as a Vermonter than as an American citizen is telling of the degree to which this relationship with a particular space and cultural orientation is conceptualized as definitively different from the mainstream American. This could be an expression of the independence and vociferousness that this small state often asserts against the majority of culture and politics more prevalent in the mainline United States. This “distinguishing from the rest” can be seen in the way that the border Vermont shares with Quebec is largely porous facilitating a special kind of relationship with French-Canadian culture. There are also other elements which solidify this distinction like the fact that Vermont was the last state in the U.S. to allow Wal-Mart to open within its borders, it is the only state in the union with a Socialist representative in Congress and has recently been congratulated on being the “greenest” state in the U.S. for its energy and ecology practices. As such, the active claiming of the title of “Vermonger” carries with it a distinctive flavor of being other than the “American”.

When asked to discuss her identity, Sephra claims that who she is first and foremost, is a Vermonter. This is seconded by Marshall, a young man who exhibited a Planning orientation and who came from a blue-collar school. His mother had a third level degree

and worked in the healthcare profession and his father had completed a two-year third level qualification and worked in the building sector. He likens his description of the culture of tolerance that he associates with his home State as akin to the “Golden Rule”:

Sephra: Well the Vermonter thing, I'd rather be considered a Vermonter than a citizen from the United States, like when I went to France I said that I was from Vermont, and we're right next to Canada, not that we were a part of the United States (laughs) during a bad Bush section... (16 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Marshall: I'd say that being raised in Vermont has had a big part in who I am, to accept different people and really not to judge because someone's different than you. I've been raised in my family to always follow the golden rule, treat other people the way you want to be treated. To treat people fairly. (18 year old, twelfth grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

The prevalence among both Planning orientated and Dreaming orientated respondents of narratives of identifying with the space and place of their home communities are especially interesting when viewed against what was shared in general throughout the take-home questionnaires. Question 30 asks “Please rate from 1 to 10 (1 being the least and 10 being the most) how much you feel that belonging to your hometown/community influences your identity”. Overall, most respondents did in fact list a 7 or higher for Question 30.

Along orientation lines, 55.17% of all Planning orientated students responded with a 7 or higher to Question 30, with 60% of Dreaming orientated students responded this way as well. Looking deeper, students who exhibited Planning orientations responded in slightly different ways across gendered lines. Vermont males who exhibited a Planning orientation were evenly distributed in their answers to Question 30 and so appear to be divided equally in their opinions about the degree to which they feel their identities are influenced by their belonging to their home community. Leinster males with Planning orientations were very different however. They appear to understand their identities as being much more embedded in their home communities, as 75% of this group answered Question 30 with a 7 or higher.

Because no Vermont Dreaming orientated males returned their component questionnaires I cannot comment on likenesses or differences to Leinster males with Dreaming orientations. However, because 60% of Dreaming orientated male respondents from Leinster selected a less than 7 answer to Question 30, I think it is possible that the rural Irish narrative of embeddedness in the land and locality may be working more strongly upon the Planning orientated young men, most of whom came from blue-collar areas and backgrounds. I will expand upon this later but would now like to turn to the similar trend found among the female questionnaire responses.

62.5% of Vermont females with Planning orientations selected an answer below 7 to Question 30 while just 38.46% of Leinster females exhibiting a Planning orientation selected the same. Here too I think these questionnaire data suggest that the Leinster respondents understand their identities as being significantly influenced by their home community while this is less so among Vermonters. Interestingly, the only Vermont female with a Dreaming orientation who returned her take-home questionnaire reported a 7 or higher answer to this question while 75% of the Leinster Dreaming orientated young women responded likewise.

Throughout the questionnaire responses, it was much more often the case that Dreaming orientated females from Vermont and females with Dreaming orientations from Leinster reported that the influence of belonging to their home communities on their personal identity was attributed with an answer of 7 or greater on a scale of one to ten. I think that this is evidence of different understandings and relationships with space and place along gendered, orientational and geographic lines. When viewed overall, the most definitive difference is again between Planning and Dreaming orientations. Along gendered lines, Planning orientated young women attribute less weight to the embeddedness of their identities in their home communities than do Dreaming orientated young women regardless of location. Planning orientated young women understand themselves as less embedded than do their male counterparts and finally, Planning orientated Leinster young men attribute more salience to place than do their Vermont counterparts.

These findings indicate serious differences between Vermont and Leinster participants' understandings of their identities as being anchored within the space and place

of their home communities. It is possible that this might be due to the cultural history Ireland has of deep-rootedness in relationships with the land and the continuing presence of this discourse in rural areas, especially for those with farming backgrounds (Ní Laoire 2001; Peillon and Slater 1998). The differences in the degree to which these young people reported their identities being influenced by belonging to their home communities is something which will be explored further with regard to possible shifts in gender roles in rural areas later in Chapter Nine. However, for my purposes here, it serves to highlight the utility of this study as a comparative work set within particular cultural contexts.

I would argue that this opens up questions regarding the extent to which Planning orientated identities are embedded or disembedded within localities and that this offers some challenges to the concerted cultivation thesis from a somewhat oblique angle. I would suggest this because it draws attention to how rural, blue-collar young people, and young women in particular, are conceptualising possible future selves and future mobility, both socially *and* spatially.

It is possible that the continued discourse surrounding land and embeddedness in Ireland (Ní Laoire 2001, 2005; Peillon and Slater 1998) may be at play here as well among the Planning orientated young men. I think this is a strong possibility because they were selected from areas where there was still noteworthy agricultural presence. In fact, the County Meath Development Plan 2007-2013 asserts that:

County Meath is renowned for its rich pasturelands that [sic] has supported a wide variety of farming types. Agriculture has traditionally been the most important contributor to the rural economy of Co. Meath. While it is now providing less employment, it still remains important as a significant source of income and employment in rural areas. (Meath Local Authorities 2007:228)

Agricultural employment in County Meath accounted for 5.9% of employment in 2006 and so was considered as “still an important and beneficial economic sector in the county” (Meath Local Authorities 2007:228). This is echoed by the Kildare County Council Development Board in their ambitious plans to support and facilitate continued growth and viability of the agricultural sector in that county:

By 2012, Kildare will be a county in which farming is a sustainable, profitable sector of the economy. Revitalised agriculture and new alternative rural enterprises will result in revitalised rural communities which are safe, integrated, and inclusive and where respect for the environment is key.... Well known for its bloodstock industry, County Kildare has the largest concentration of stud farms in the country, with 27% of all horses in training and 16% of all thoroughbred stallions in the country based in Kildare. Ancillary services supporting the equine industry in Kildare are estimated to generate revenue of € 7.3 million into the local economy each year. Part-time farming, off-farm and alternative enterprises as well as the development of niche markets, in particular horticulture which generates an estimated € 12.7 million each year from the activities of an estimated 35 nurseries in the county, are necessary to enable farming to remain a viable part of the county's economy. Forestry is also an under-exploited activity in Kildare as only 2.5% of the landmass of the county is under forest. In line with this farm families need to be supported in making the transition from full to part time farming. Skills, retraining and alternative employment are crucial. (Kildare County Council Development Board 2006)

As such it is clear that while experiencing aggregate decline, agriculture in Meath and Kildare where my respondents hailed from, was still not just an important cultural element, but one which was being directly facilitated by the governing bodies to remain an integral part of these counties' economies. Several of the male Leinster respondents who exhibited a Planning orientation came from farming families themselves or from families where farming had been influential in their lives through family tradition. For example, a respondent's uncle might live on and run the family farm while the respondent's family lived nearby and his father worked in a different industry. These were unanimously small, family farms which generated little income and which were always supplemented by off-farm salaries earned either by another member of the family (usually the respondents' mothers) or which were run as part-time endeavours supplemented by off-farm incomes generated by both parents. One respondents' father and brother worked on a farm belonging to someone else in the community, but in this case, the young man's family still maintained their own much smaller holding as well.

Thus, I would argue that the high proportions of self-reported place-based identity among the Planning orientated male respondents from Leinster was influenced by the prevalence of the cultural narrative of agriculture as well as its contribution to both counties' economies and the personal proximity to farming culture that these young men

often experienced themselves. This is set against the paucity of agricultural activity among the Vermont male Planning orientated respondents. In fact, only one male in the entire Vermont sample, Andre, a Planning orientated young man, noted any contact with farming and this was through his uncle who had inherited the small family farm. Andre is a fifteen year old tenth grader who came from a blue-collar area. His father worked in retail management and his mother was an educator. Incidentally, Andre reported a 6 to Question 30. In trying to discern wider social trends it is important to understand the roots of possible patterns within particular social and cultural contexts. This is why when there are similarities, they are then all the more compelling. I will explore the differences discerned here throughout the rest of this chapter.

Future selves: “choosing” to stay and being “evicted”

“Brain drain” or talented youth out-migration has been an issue of concern for Vermont for some time as has been discussed in earlier chapters. With “the number of 20- to 34-year-olds in Vermont [having] shrunk by almost 20% since 1990” which some discursively call Vermont’s “lost generation” (Baruth 2010), this trend is causing so much concern that there is now a scholarship scheme called the Vermont Promise scholarship which has been instituted by the current Governor, Jim Douglas. This programme promises to “provide Vermont high school graduates more than 1,000 awards per year for up to 50 percent of the cost of tuition – over 12,000 scholarships during the life of the program – to attend one of the state’s institutions of higher education” (Casey 2006). In return, graduates are asked to begin their lives in Vermont upon completion of their education and “if they do, the state will forgive the full award” whereas “if they choose to chart their course elsewhere, the state will treat a portion of the scholarship as a no interest loan” (Casey 2006).

The phrase “starting their lives” means recipients committing to living and working in Vermont for five years after the completion of their studies. This initiative has only been in place for about the last two years and so it is yet to be seen how this state effort might influence young people’s future plans or facilitate measuring the impeti of decisions around of leave-taking more accurately than age profiling does. Such a structural intervention

alone shows that there is a concerted culture of leave-taking among Vermont young people and this too may contribute to the relatively lower levels of identified embeddedness among my respondents. Taking this into consideration, I think that the evidence already discussed above among my participants serves to give at least a little credence to Vermont's structural response to this problem. Further, I think we are afforded with an opportunity here to see how the micro-level appears indeed to be playing out at the macro-level as well. As my respondents understood their home communities to be places where there simply was no option for them to remain, it is clear that this has become a wide enough social issue for the political structure of Vermont to take notice. Hence, this too represents another, if somewhat indirect call for this kind of research and a further bolstering of the idea that these micro-level processes do indeed have macro-level significance and connections.

With my participants making many references to the cost of education the Vermont Promise scholarship may prove to be a key effort in helping encourage in-state settlement patterns of talented youth like my respondents. However, cost of education in Ireland is not the same as in Vermont. In fact, third level education in Ireland to undergraduate degree completion (duration between three and four years depending upon subject of study) totals less than €5,000 in tuition on average (Sheng 2010) while in Vermont, tuition averages at \$9,000 *per year* for a public university but can jump up to anywhere around or above \$35,000 per year at private institutions (The College Board 2010).

Thus while cost does undeniably play a factor for Vermont young people, I would suggest that in order to affect a more fundamental and general shift towards *wanting* to stay in rural areas or it being understood that it is *viable* to stay as opposed to *choosing* to stay out of convenience or in fulfillment of the Vermont Promise scholarship for example, there needs to be more attention to the ways young people are constructing their ideas about future possible selves and life trajectories as fundamentally being possible within their home community. The question needs to be asked about why they don't want, or understand it to be viable, to stay or return in the first place. Again however, it will be interesting to see how the Vermont Promise scholarship unfolds in the coming years as to whether or not this is a truly viable means for retaining more educated young people within

the state of Vermont or if they will simply “do their time” and then move out of state anyway due in no little part to economic and infrastructural pressures.

Mindful of this, when viewed together, it is clear from the questionnaire responses and those given during interview that for respondent with Planning orientations, there is a decided determination to leave the constraints they perceived in their home communities behind while simultaneously utilising the best elements of modern day technology and transportation to remain a part of their networks at home. This appears to operate not just as a comfort to these young people as they look ahead to their possible futures, but also as a direct and active source of strength as well as social and cultural capital which they draw upon in their planning for highly mobile and career-oriented future life trajectories:

Louisa: well during college I'd probably say that I will live here but after that I'd prefer to move away even just for change nearby. There's nothing really here that'd keep me here so I'd probably travel for that...No, [I wouldn't settle in my home community] I'd say that, well maybe ehm, I'd say that I will settle further away but like I'd always have my roots here and I'd always come back and I like it here but I would settle further away. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Lilly: I really like the area (of my home community) and how open it is and how many places there are and where you can buy homes where they're not cramped together but I know there are other places in the country that have open spaces (smiles)...I think because I have family up here, once I get to the point of actually settling down, get myself into a good job position, then I'd like that to be in the New England area, I think that would be nice, cause then it's not like a crazy, horrible experience trying to visit your family members, with plane rides and taking the train or crazy long car rides. So yeah, I have family that like to be with family and I don't really want to have to run away from that just to have to pack up and go back every couple of months. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

This is similar to what is noted by Howley, Harmon and Leopold (1996) in their study of rural out-migration from Appalachia in the US. Below, they situate their own findings amidst other work carried out in the US context, over all they assert that:

College-bound high school seniors in rural America may aspire to live their adult life in a rural place, but many believe that inadequate job opportunities will require them to work elsewhere. The conflict, however, manifests itself in a hoped-for compromise: rural youth often express the

desire to live in a rural place within commuting distance of an urban workforce (Karaim, 1995). (Howley et al. 1996:151)

This sentiment regarding the desire to remain within at least semi-rural surroundings if not within proximity to their home communities was a common theme among many of my respondents as can be seen above in Louisa and Lilly's comments. Interestingly though, the most asserted desires to actually stay within the home community were articulated by Dreaming orientated respondents:

Jenny: I'd love to stay here, I would...I suppose I would see myself living here in my hometown type of thing, cause I wouldn't like to live abroad at all, so it would be either like here or somewhere else in Ireland but I suppose I would be here, you know, I can't see myself leaving here (laughs). Da says I'm a home bird (laughs). (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Dreaming orientation *white-collar family background)

Frederica: I actually really would like to stay in Vermont, I know that I'm pretty much alone with that sentiment (laughs) but I really love Vermont, I love the community and I really don't want to go too far away and if I did it would probably just be to another part of Vermont. I certainly am interested in travel but I think that it would only be temporary and at the very longest like a year spent abroad or something like that. (15 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Tom: I suppose in a good job, high pay (laughs) [W: (laughs)] I don't know, I suppose I'd want to be around this area still but ehm, I think you'd still have to go to Dublin to work so I suppose I'd be commuting to work (pause) I think that's it. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Dreaming orientation)

While respondents with Dreaming orientations attested to wanting to travel and “live life to the full”, they also conveyed distinctive discourses about home, belonging and wanting to stay in their area. Planning orientated students also frequently talked about feelings of belonging but more often amidst discussing how this clashed with the imperative they felt to leave. When sharing their deep-seated need for third level qualifications and relating their plans for their knowledge-based futures, respondents with Planning orientations often set these assertions within the context of an implicit understanding that in terms of infrastructure and viable opportunities for them in the

careers they understood to be possible, “there was nothing for them” in their home communities.

There were too many quotations surrounding this theme to include all of them here, so I have chosen three which encompass the main arguments presented throughout the discussions. Planning orientated respondents detailed regarding the structural impedi of their leave-taking. Melissa asserts that “the opportunities just aren’t available here” while Rose muses about where she would have to go to work as a naturalist and reintroduce animals to the wild while Anne makes specific reference to places where she perceives to “have opportunities” for her to achieve what she aims for.

Melissa: yeah, I probably will end up leaving but I do feel very comfortable here, I've lived here my whole life and I just feel like this is the place I'm meant to be. I have a strong connection but I'll probably have to move because the opportunities just aren't available here. I'll probably have to leave. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Rose: Um, like I think my parents, at least my dad, he has, he grew up in Vermont and he wants to like settle down and pretty much live the whole rest of his life in Vermont so I would definitely come back here to visit him and I think that if I ever did settle down in one place and I was working somewhere then I would probably choose somewhere near here maybe. But it depends because the only place I can think of that I would actually not be moving around at all is if I worked at a zoo and there's not really many zoos around here but I don't really know if I want to work at a zoo because that's not, that's more caged animals and if I was actually reintroducing animals then that's probably somewhere much closer to their natural habitat and that's not really anywhere around here, unless it was like bald eagles and they seem to be doing pretty good so...(16 year, old tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Anne: I know myself I won't live here...I know I wont, even if I didn't go to America, I wouldn't live here, I'd move to Dublin, I think there's more job opportunities up there. Like for what I want to be I can't achieve that here because like there's no colleges obviously and just no job opportunities I think so definitely Dublin. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Here Melissa's argument that despite her “strong connection” she felt that she would be forced to leave through the structural constraint of there being simply no career

opportunities for her. At the time of interview, Melissa wanted to become either a teacher or a vet, not terribly niche occupations. This pushes the idea of perception again to the fore.

Following this, Rose's narration seconds this perception of being "pushed out" through her understanding that in order to work in the field she hopes to, namely in animal rehabilitation and reintroduction to the wild, she will fundamentally have to leave Vermont. This line of thinking is particularly interesting because she does not mention how this might happen in Vermont, which has a rich and diverse ecosystem harbouring many forms of wildlife (Klyza and Trombulak 1999). Further, despite there being employment opportunities within the forestry service as well as a strong, concerted presence of State-run and non-governmental organisations involved with studying, documenting and working with Vermont's ecology, anamalia and overall environmental sustainability (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:49-63.), Rose understands her planned for career trajectory as inherently elsewhere. I would argue that this doubly underscores the role of perception in this spatial relationship.

Turning to Anne, she expresses the idea that there are no opportunities for her within her home area whereas there specifically are in a particular place elsewhere, namely Dublin. This too was a frequent element in Planning orientated students' discussions, the notion that there were not opportunities in their home areas but there were opportunities in specific other places, most often understood as large urban hubs like Dublin, Galway, London, New York, LA and Boston. Thus, I would argue that the ways in which Planning orientated young women relate to their home areas are based on a twofold relationship. One which conveys connection to it through references to bucolic rural imagery as well as the draw of family which is conceptualised as remaining within place, while simultaneously engaging with a specific kind of leave-taking logic. This includes the preconception that A) there are no opportunities for her in the home area/State and B) what she hopes to do later in life just isn't happening in Vermont/rural Leinster.

This too is strikingly similar to the discourses Corbett (2004, 2007a, 2007b) has explored through his work in rural, coastal Canadian contexts as seen in earlier chapters regarding the discourse of leave-taking. With relation to this, O'Connor (2008a) argues that in her work, Irish young people's identities showed both elements of reflexivity as well

as consistent, salient points in their relationships with friends, family and spatially situated systems of meaning (e.g. the GAA, local histories and activities etc). Something very similar was expressed by most of my Planning orientated respondents. However, again this is tempered alongside a discourse of leave-taking, of the perceived compulsion to transcend local spaces while remaining tied to their networks. In an age of increasing compression of space and time through telecommunications of which these young people were regular users, the embeddedness of identities in local spaces is something which all of my participants wrestled with.

Compressing time and space – using the internet as a connective and “travel” practice

By “telecommunications” I am referring to computer and internet usage due to the disparity between the prevalence of mobile phone usage in Ireland²⁰ and Vermont’s relative scarcity of usage in comparison due to patchy network coverage impacted by the mountainous topography (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:95). In the take-home questionnaire, Questions 19-21 dealt with computer and internet usage (see Appendix E).

Every respondent that filled in a questionnaire (39 completed questionnaires out of 48 participants) reported that they had access to the internet at home, indicating the ubiquity of this facility among the samples in both locations. Twenty one (80.76%) Irish respondents indicated that they would use the internet more often than once a week, eleven of whom reporting that they would do so “at least once a day”. Just five respondents reported that they would use the internet less often than once a week. Four of these were female. Every Vermont questionnaire respondent (a total of thirteen) reported that they would use the internet more than once a week, the majority (eight) indicating they would use it “at least once a day”.

While every questionnaire respondent noted that they had internet access at home, I think that the difference in responses regarding the frequency of usage between Vermont and Leinster respondents indicate that internet access for Vermonters might be something

²⁰ Ireland reached “100%” mobile phone penetration back in 2005 gauged by the number of mobile phones in use in the country against total population (RTÉ.ie 2005), while just “57 percent of Vermont’s population uses mobile phones” as of 2009 (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:95-96).

fundamentally more prevalent and used as a more integral part of everyday life. For the Leinster respondents, of those who reported using the internet more than once a week, there was an almost evenly divided among those who said they used it “at least once a day” (eleven) and those who reported using the internet “more than once a week but not once a day” (ten). I would argue that this is illustrative of how broadband access is still relatively new in Ireland and something which is continuing to be worked upon, especially in rural areas to improve service provision (Forfas 2010). I would also argue this because “According to the Vermont Department of Public Service, ‘growth in high speed computer access has kept pace with national trends and does not appear likely to slow’” (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:95) while Ireland “has 21.4 subscribers per 100 inhabitants compared to the OECD average of 22.4 (excluding mobile broadband as defined by the OECD for international comparisons)” (Forfas 2010:3).

Students most frequently circled several answers to Question 21 regarding the main purposes of their usage, almost always including “connecting with friends (e.g. Bebo, MySpace, instant messaging, Skype etc.)” and “looking up information”, showing that these young people make use of the internet not just as a means for finding information but as an important tool for connecting with others. While this research is not specifically geared towards exploring the nuances in use practices of technology among young people, I think that these findings raise interesting questions surrounding how rural young people make use of the internet in order to connect with other people when they are spatially challenged to do so in the material world. My respondents were relatively spatially disempowered through lacking good public transport systems in their rural areas and so were largely dependent upon older people with access to vehicles in order to move around. In Vermont, because the legal driving licence age is sixteen, some of my respondents had access to their own cars in order to facilitate some level of spatial mobility, though usually this was limited to the local level and was also curtailed by their ability to fund this movement (e.g. money for fuel, insurance, registration costs etc surrounding their vehicles). As such, nearly every respondent discussed in her or his interview, whether they had access to a private car or not, that public transport was an area their communities needed serious improvement in, and they did this amidst a discourse of wanting to participate in “outside”

aspects of what they understood were things young people liked to do, such as shopping, meeting up with friends or going to the cinema.

It would be very interesting to see if the friends my respondents were using the internet to connect to were people from their local friendship and school networks or if they were others from further away. This is beyond the remit of this research but nevertheless I think it raises some very interesting questions about how young people are making use of technology to gain access to information and to connect with other people when their geographic locations might otherwise preclude them from doing so.

Further, when talking with Planning orientated students, several mentioned in their interviews that they used the internet to “check out” prospective universities that they were considering for their undergraduate study. While this was often mentioned as a passing remark when discussing how they were planning for their futures, I would nevertheless argue that it suggests that this connective tool was serving the practical purpose of providing crucial, decision-influencing information about the institutions where these young people were considering attending for study. They were utilising it to “sift” out which schools were suitable by finding out if institutions offered the course of study they were interested in, what kinds of entry requirements they had, whether institutions were within particular price ranges or were located in desirable places etc. It appears that Planning orientated respondents were making use of the internet as a means of narrowing down their list of possible choices for future study through the expressed practice of gathering and profiling their prospective future alma maters. I would argue that, regardless of location, often Planning orientated students went about the specific practice of “visiting” these places without leaving their home areas with the conscious objective to discern whether or not these were viable locations of study and future university-lives for them.

In the case of Vermont students, this was often done as a means with which to shorten their list of places they wanted to visit before making their college decisions, a routine practice for the college-bound and their families in the US (Sallie Mae Corporation 2010). This was often done as a means to “save time and money” because “college trips” were costly for their families because of the need to pay for accommodation, food and travel when visiting these prospective educational destinations. Often, these students also reported using the internet to peruse the areas around these schools to see if they felt they

would “fit” and “feel comfortable” there before deciding on which schools made the list for an actual, physical visit.

This relationship was slightly different for Leinster respondents because the element of choice in third level destination is not so much to the fore in the Irish educational system. Third level educational institutions are essentially assigned to students dependent upon their performance in the Leaving Certificate, a standardised test which is administered to all students in Ireland for completion of their secondary-level educations and which is used as a determiner for entry into particular courses of study in particular institutions. However, Leinster Planning orientated students still made use of the internet in the effort to discern course availability, entry requirements and information about prospective life in the area of a given institution though this was not so much geared towards a “college visit” as it was in the Vermont case.

Arguably this is also due to the high rate of commuting among Irish third level students who live at home and commute to their institution (Central Statistics Office 2007e). This is juxtaposed with how student residence “on-campus” among universities in the US is often a requirement for at least part of their course of study. Thus, the degree of leave-taking from the home required of US students is often considerably greater than it would be for Irish ones. Therefore the extended investigation of institutions and their surrounding areas as prospective places of study, for Vermont students, was much more a case of a prospective “new home” environment (at least during term) than it would be for many Irish students who might have the option to remain living at home while attending a relatively nearby university for study.

Dreaming orientated students too noted collecting some information about prospective universities by “checking out websites” and finding out entry requirements, but this behaviour was described in a way that conveyed far less organisation surrounding it than what was articulated among the Planning orientated. For Dreaming orientated students, there was little mention of any kind of serious research, often referred to as “homework”, being done on which schools they were thinking about attending. They were much more likely to talk to their parents about their future educational destinations and this played out in a much less directed and consciously constructed way than did the strategies employed by the Planning orientated. Those students who expressed a Dreaming

orientation were much more likely to draw on their parents' knowledge and resources (or capital) in considering their college choices than were Planning orientated students and I would argue that this was so due to the fact that Planning orientated students had little family history of third level education to draw upon in the first place, thus their strategies for gaining information about various institutions, pathways, etc necessarily had to be along different lines. This is explored in much greater detail in the following chapter, but it serves the discussion here because it highlights the ways that the internet served as a means with this Planning orientated respondents tried to negotiate their spatial and social mobility.

Therefore, I would argue that considering their responses the Questions 19-21, my respondents on the whole were able to use the internet to gather information, learn about places outside of their home areas and access cultural elements from spatially disembodied sources which they would not have been able to do without access to the internet. Planning orientated students showed a particular tendency to use the internet as a spatially unfettered means of reconnaissance in gathering information regarding the institutions and places where they were considering attending for third level education. Dreaming orientated students too made use of the internet for social networking and data gathering in general, much like their Planning orientated counterparts, however, when it came to applying this to forward thinking regarding their futures or how this worked in relation to their plans for further education, Dreaming orientated respondents were much more likely to turn directly to their parents regarding these matters than to go about exploring them online.

I would argue that these relationships and behaviours around the internet are facets of these young people's mobility capital (Corbett 2007b, 2007d). While almost all respondents appeared to understand the internet as a means with which they could connect with others and gather information in general, Planning orientated students were quick to note how they used this tool as a means with which they were preparing for their futures in third level education. They were also often assertive about their use of the internet as a means for them to explore information, places, ideas etc which they might not normally have access to. Thus I would argue that this is tenable evidence of the ways in which the Planning orientated young people were going about exercising their existing mobility capital in efforts for accruing still more of it upon their entry into third level education. While Dreaming orientated young people were more likely to access their parents' cultural

and social capital in order to facilitate their own accrual and operationalisation of capital through thinking about third level education, Planning orientated young people sought this via the internet. They also did this in other ways with relation to their teachers and also, in different ways with their parents as well. These relationships are discussed throughout the following chapter.

Should I stay or should I go? Perceptions of pushes and pulls

For students who expressed a Planning orientation, trying to negotiate between their ties to family, friends and a sense of belonging came up against feelings of “there is no place for me here”. This was often a disconcerting sentiment and was shared across cases and genders among my Planning orientated respondents. Throughout the questionnaires, nearly all respondents discussed their home communities as having good aesthetic qualities, some of which has been seen in a few of the excerpts above. Question 28 asks “What are some of the reasons you think young people might want to leave your hometown/community?”. Question 29 then asks “What are some of the reasons you think young people might want to stay in your hometown/community?”. Responses to these questions were sometimes in list form but other times were written in essay format. I think that here too a difference can be seen between the leave-taking imperative expressed by students with Planning orientations and the tendency towards conceptualising the home community as a place one could (and perhaps would) choose to settle in later in life when examining the responses to these two questions. One Planning orientated young woman from a white-collar school in Vermont answered questions 28 and 29 as follows:

Q28: Few jobs, very high taxes, not varied jobs, few opportunities for advancement. (18 year old, twelfth grader, white-collar Vermont – Planning orientation)

Q29: Loving community, very safe, nice pool & [sic] parks, great schools and teachers, stay near family. (18 year old, twelfth grader, white-collar Vermont – Planning orientation)

When we set this against the following answers to questions 28 and 29, written by a young woman who expressed a Dreaming orientation and who was also from a white-collar

school in Vermont, I think we can see the basic difference in the nature of the relationship these two young women have with their home communities:

Q28: The lack of diversity, jobs, and proximity to cities would be the main reason people might leave. Also, it's fairly easy to get bored of where you are after a while, and people might just want to get out and SEE [sic] the world before they settle. (15 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont – Dreaming orientation)

Q29: It's really lovely landscape-wise. Living in a place like this can just make you happy by looking outside. Having a community and people (including family) who you know is a reassuring aspect, too. (15 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont – Dreaming orientation)

I think what can be seen here is a telling aspect in the difference between the Planning orientated young woman above noting “jobs” twice in her answer to question 28 while the Dreaming orientated young woman goes on to discuss the *quality* of life in her home community and the element of desiring life experience as a prompt for leaving. While there are indeed some similarities here, I think that the sticking point regarding the nature of the relationships these two young women have with their home community is in the focus on the *type* of life that one is afforded within the home community for the respondent with a Dreaming orientation while the Planning orientated participant is more concerned with the *nature* of work and opportunity. Fundamentally the young woman who exhibited a Dreaming orientation appears to view life in the home community as a possibility while the young woman with a Planning orientation sees structural constraints as essentially inhibiting this. I think that this is made particularly clear through her reference to “few opportunities for advancement” as a catalyst for out-migration. Below I'd like to juxtapose a few of these answers from other questionnaires to illustrate this trend throughout the entire sample across both locations:

Planning Orientation

Q. 28: “What are some of the reasons you think young people might want to leave your hometown/community?”

I believe this [why young people would want to leave] as the things which a typical teenager looking to further their education will need to leave as there is not a college or job opportunities in my hometown.

(Annie, 16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

Too small

Stagnant jobs

Some bad people in area (scary)

Weather (too cold)

(Lilly, 16 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female)

- There are not many jobs available in the area
- There is a lack of young people in the area to socialise with

(Edward, 16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male) [bullets are similar to those written by Edward on his questionnaire]

Q29: "What are some of the reasons you think young people might want to stay in your hometown/community?"

Original connection

Local/familiar

(Alexander, 16 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont male)

Because there [sic] family maybe [sic] here. And maybe they have a job here and could be happy the way they are.

(Molly, 16 year old, transition year, blue-collar Leinster female)

They like the smallness

Close community

Good schools + medical care [sic]

Family is here

(Erin, 17 year old, twelfth grader, blue-collar Vermont female)

As can be seen here, the trend of understanding the home community as a place with little space for them or the opportunities that they seek is prevalent among students with Planning orientations from both locations and among males and females alike. However, when compared to the ideas expressed by Dreaming orientated students, I think

we get a better look at how the quality of life is the focus for the Dreaming orientated while the pragmatics of job opportunities lay at the epicentre of Planning orientated respondents' relationships with space and place:

Dreaming Orientation

Q. 28: "What are some of the reasons you think young people might want to leave your hometown/community?"

- 1.) Not much for young people to do here
- 2.) Want work experience somewhere else
- 3.) Want to experience life in another area
- 4.) Want to travel
- 5.) Want a livlier [sic] atmosphere
- 6.) Want to try out new things elsewhere

(Katie, 16 year old, fifth year, white-collar Leinster female) [number resemble those written by Katie in her questionnaire]

- To see the world
- To experience a different culture
- For education
- For love
- For work

(Lucius, 17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male) [bullets are similar to those written by Lucius in his questionnaire]

To explore

To travel and work

To be independent

(Declan, 15 year old, transition year, blue-collar Leinster male)

Q29: "What are some of the reasons you think young people might want to stay in your hometown/community?" – Dreaming orientation

It is a nice community without too many social problems. There are jobs available and easy access to Dublin.

(Patrick, 18 year old, sixth year, white-collar Leinster male)

Because it's close to Dublin yet far enough away from the big, populated area.
(Aisling, 17 year old, sixth year, white-collar Leinster female)

Stay close to family, they are happy in their environment, it is close enough to Dublin
to allow commuting [sic]. (Name) college is close by.
(Mary, 17 year old, fifth year, white-collar Leinster female)

While here too there is some attention to the proximity of work opportunities among Dreaming orientated respondents, there appears to be considerably less preoccupation with “opportunities” and “advancement” than was seen among Planning orientated students with regard to their ideas about leaving the home community. It is clear to see that Dreaming orientated respondents discuss the social atmosphere and the quality of the community before they make reference to employment or “opportunities” if they do so at all. I think that we can see this in much more detail through some of the discussions in the in-depth interviews. I would note here that the leaving-taking imperative was not the only discourse respondents with Planning orientations asserted however. Some Planning orientated students detailed specific ideas about how they could—and indeed some hoped—to remain within their home communities as adults through commuting. This was similar to what is detailed in the work of Howley, Harmon and Leopold (1996) above and which we have also seen in some of the Dreaming orientated students’ questionnaire responses above regarding proximity to Dublin for work as facilitating one being able to stay within the home community. This prospect, while a bright hope for some and treated as an “obvious” possibility for others, was often viewed by counterparts distastefully or verbalised in an “I suppose I could” manner. More frequently however among the Planning orientated students, is the discourse of not wanting to have to move too far away from family and “where I’m from” for their desired careers which carried with it unspoken elements and mooring points of these young people’s concepts of self:

Madeline: ...I'm applying for a scholarship that I'm hopefully going to get which is about eight thousand dollars a year and then I'm required to practice in Vermont for two years after I graduate, which isn't a problem because I always planned on staying in Vermont, I think that it's a good place to be raised, the crime levels are low and the community is great, and I love W (names home town) but I'm not sure if there will be a lot of work there for me unless I commute

but I definitely want to stay in Vermont and probably in central Vermont. (18 year old, twelfth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Aine: I don't know, I wouldn't mind living somewhere else, but a lot my relatives live around here like all my Mam's family live here and my Dad's family live here so I probably will end up back here at some stage to be close to home. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Potter: I think at some point in my life I will come back um because all of my family is here and family is really important to me so I almost feel obligated to come back (laughs) but yeah, I would like to, I would love to raise my family here because even though it's small and there's not a lot to do at times I feel like it's definitely a part of who I am and I would want my kids to have those same values that I have been brought up with. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Here too I would argue hints of the rural idyll are apparent in the ways that these respondents discuss their home communities as being a “good place” to grow up and also that they would like to “raise my family here” so as to afford their children with the same “values as I have been brought up with.” I would suggest that these elements are not just the evidence of young people being nostalgic about their home areas, but rather that they indicate at least some internalization of the cultural narrative surrounding the rural that has been discussed in Chapter Two. By exhibiting these similarities, I would argue that it is evident these young people have internalized discourse surrounding what is understood in mainstream terms as the “rural” and the “urban” as well as having their own more culturally specific narratives including their notions of “Vermonterness” and being “culchies” or “country people” and not “Dublin people”. This, I would suggest, is much like the ways that O'Connor's (2008a) young people navigated smoothly between the more global elements of their identities (e.g. through patronage of international football teams, fashion, music, media etc) as well as their more locally situated understandings of self (e.g. through participation in local sports, cultural activities like dance or particular forms of recreation, food preferences etc). And what is more, just like O'Connor's (2008a) respondents, these students do not show difficulties in mediating between these two elements of self.

Returning to the discourse of leave-taking among Planning orientated respondents,

some articulated ideas about how they *could* possibly stay or ideally *would like to stay*, it was still most often the case that Planning orientated respondents understood the home community to be a space where they simply *would not be able* to find a place for themselves as adults due to the structural constraints that they perceived. Again, I would note that there were indeed a sizable number of people, and most of them women, working in white-collar sectors in both the Mid-East Region as well as in Vermont as noted in an earlier section of this chapter. 25% of the Mid-East Region's employed population in 2006 worked in one of the following broad groups: education, social work, banking and finance, and public administration and defence (Central Statistics Office 2007g) with nearly two thirds of these being women. In 2008 in Vermont some 45% of all those employed were working in financial activities, professional, scientific and technical areas, education and health services or were employed by the government (both State and local) (Vermont Department of Labor 2008). Again, as noted earlier, these industries too were proportionately dominated (save for professional, scientific and technical which was 49.7% female) (US Census Bureau 2008c).

Therefore, I am again prompted to question whether it is only structural forces which are forcing these young people out? Given the ways my respondents discuss how they make sense of themselves, their communities and the lives they are planning in the future, I wonder whether this kind of behaviour might actually be an amalgam of a particular kind of relationship to work and certain psychic experiences of class and gender coupled with geographically influenced labour-market conditions. I would extend this line of thinking by detailing how the leave-taking imperative was elaborated upon further by Planning orientated respondents. The sense that "there is no place for me here" was often tinged with more than a little sadness as can be seen above, however it was also frequently tempered with optimism about forging lives for themselves in careers which would be rewarding in numerous ways:

Anne: I just believe that if you want to be an actress then the best place to go is over to America like. So I believe that if I go to college like if I get good Leaving Cert results and apply for colleges over there and then I do acting as well, I'd go to an acting school over there then there's a chance that I'd get something over there, but then I'd have something to fall back on like a degree or something like that but I want to travel the world as well. (16 year old, fifth

year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Potter: I would probably tell them that I really want to change the world I guess, I really want to travel and I want to work in an orphanage, like volunteer my time so I'm definitely like ready to give back to my community and I would want people to know that. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Jim: [I think education helps you to be] able to relate to like the surrounding world I think is very important, if you, if you're sort of oblivious or ignorant to the world around you it's not really a good thing is it, you're sort of left behind... if you're doing an apprenticeship then you live in the same area and you have to be up early the next morning and you're sort of worn out so at least in college you can enjoy yourself sort of, it's a time and place to remember really. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

Annie: I definitely want to go to college for as high a degree as I can get but after I don't think that I'll be living in America when I get older, just because as I've said, I love other cultures so I think I want to either do teaching English as a foreign language or cross cultural studies. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Thus, as opposed to the nearly maverick-esque individualised self of reflexive modernisation thinkers, I would suggest that we can see how Planning orientated students seem to be constructing possible selves with considerable humanitarian and or socially conscious attributes. They are distinctly aware of not just their own social connections and relationships with their homes but also of the wider social worlds they are citizens of. Dreaming orientated students also detailed the importance of being “positive” people in their future lives and this is something which will be discussed more deeply in the next chapter. For this discussion however, I mention these similarities because I think Shildrick’s (2006) argument relating to subcultural theory is a useful one. While she details that though many elements of subcultural theory are in need of serious redress, those parts of it which underscore how “some youth cultural groups may form as a part of wider locally-based class cultural factions – might have some broader resonance” for the study of wider youth practices and behaviours (p. 72). Thus, with regard to my own work, the case of particular youth relations to mobility and education in two different rural areas, Shildrick’s (2006) argument is a very applicable one. While these two locations remain

very different in many ways, there are particular behaviours, relations and conceptualisations among my participants which are incredibly similar, and thus require theorisation *across* these (sub)cultures in order to gain a more holistic analysis. I would argue that it also hints at what might be wider social trends. As we have seen above, there are definite differences between the Planning and Dreaming orientated across locations, one of the most poignant of which is the Planning orientated expression of an understanding that one *must* leave the home community while the Dreaming orientated appear to conceptualise this as an opportunity for one to *choose* to leave.

Discussion and Conclusions

From what we can garner from the discussions above, Planning orientated young people and particularly the young women, understand their future lives as fundamentally removed from their home communities. They do not construct this so much as a choice that they are making with regard to their spatial mobility but as a necessity due to their perception of their home areas being fundamentally unable to support the types of future selves and careers they understand to be possible for themselves and indeed which they plan to live out. Further, Dreaming orientated respondents show an embeddedness within their home communities which is of a slightly different hue. They understand these places and spaces as “home” with clear notions of belonging and the understanding that it is within their power to *choose* to remain there later in life through a much more pronounced sense of agency and autonomy with regard to this.

What is more, this discourse of it being possible to stay is also often interspersed with references to feeling that one could raise a family in their home community. This is also often referred to by respondents who exhibited Planning orientations in that they envision their home communities as wonderful places to raise families of their own, often making reference to elements prominent in the rural idyll schema. This is a notable point because it also brings up questions surrounding ideas about marriage and the family. This is something which will be discussed in depth in Chapter Nine with respect to the themes that arose from the free-write activities, however for our purposes here, it serves to note this in so much as it textures Dreaming orientated students’ understandings of the life course not

just in terms of their agency to choose to remain and settle within their home communities but it shows their proclivity towards family formation in their home places.

This relationship with space and place is therefore fundamentally about structures of opportunity, power and perceptions of the ability to actualise one's agency within that particular space and place. This draws out the definitive articulation among the Planning orientated, especially the young women, that the career must come first and the family perhaps later in life. Motherhood and family formation for Planning orientated young women is clearly understood as a fundamental step in the decrease of one's personal agency and autonomy. This can be linked to the ways in which they appear to understand motherhood and family formation as inherently curtailing their mobility. As we have seen above, this is clearly understood as simply not a viable option for these young women through their emphatic assertion that they are going to be mobile, career-orientated women in their futures. They articulate this with an implicit individualism and nearly fetishised concept of self-reliance. This is similar to what Harris (2004) asserts as an intrinsic element of "can-do girlhood", however, I think that the spatial factors which surround Planning orientated young women's understanding of the imperative for a mobile self mitigate this somewhat. This is also a theme which is picked up later in Chapter Nine with respect to ideas about changing gender roles.

Planning orientated young women understand their communities as their "homes", but they do not see "home" as having a place for them as adults whereas Dreaming orientated young women do. Dreaming orientated female respondents in particular understand it to be within their power to *choose to stay* while their Planning orientated counterparts show a taken-for-granted realisation that they will *have to leave*. Planning orientated young women seem to understand themselves in concrete ways as future evictees, the leave-taking from home communities being a foregone conclusion. Again, I would note that Planning orientated respondents were most often blue-collar young women or young women from blue-collar backgrounds attending white-collar schools. I would argue therefore that we can see some elements here of the particular aspects of this certain kind of psychic landscape.

While it is touching to read the above accounts that Dreaming orientated respondents share regarding their hopes of living in their home communities later in life, I cannot help

but question how these young people might do so given that they show little entrepreneurial drive, by and large have misaligned ambitions and express little critical awareness of the structural and economic constraints that their home areas carry. I think it is possible that these sentiments are largely based upon the psychic experience of these young people as somewhat privileged within these localities, both in mainstream as well as geocultural terms. Because they understand themselves to be fundamentally more agentic *already*, these young people see little urgency to concerted cultivation and do not experience the implicit necessity of out-migration as a prerequisite for social mobility. Instead, they understand themselves as agentic people already and therefore both read and experience their relationships with education, space and place quite differently from the Planners. This, I would argue is one of the fundamental points of difference between these two groups.

In considering this idea, I would argue that in-depth, longitudinal, qualitative research should be carried out in rural areas exploring these issues. Research of this nature would provide planners, policy makers, communities and schools with empirically-based suggestions geared towards generating measures for working towards rural community sustainability and affording talented local young people with the *option* of being lifelong residents. The similarities we can see in this research across cultures show a need for further in-depth qualitative study of the educational and migration conceptualisation and decision-making practices of academically high-achieving rural young people. As has been seen in Chapters Two and Three, talented rural out-migration is an issue which many areas across the globe have indicated as a concern. Further, this out-migration has been shown to be generally female-led, which has proved to present numerous issues for rural areas. As we can see from gathering the many and varied arguments regarding young women, education and rural out-migration together in this research²¹, I would suggest that there are some strong indicators that the high levels of academic excellence may be a result of a shift in the normative construction of femininity and the conceptualisation of a particular kind of female self as has been introduced in the previous chapter. Perhaps it is the case that ideal femininity, or indeed the ideal life course, for rural (blue-collar) women is becoming increasingly constructed around the ability to achieve highly within academic and skills

²¹ See in particular from Chapters Two and Three: (Corbett 2007a, 2007b; Bryant and Pini 2009; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Dahlström 1996).

training contexts and thus, subsequently within the wider world of specialised and knowledge-based fields of work. This is fundamentally predicated upon the assumption that one will be leaving the home community, something which is more than evident in my work as well as that carried out in Canada (Corbett 2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b), Scotland (Stockdale 2002a, 2002b), Australia (Bryant and Pini 2009; Easthope 2009; Gabriel 2002; Gibson 2008) and Iceland (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006).

Further, such education and thus geographic and occupational mobility effectively bolster young women's chances for upward socioeconomic movement and thus wider life chances and trajectories being made available to them than would be in their home communities due to various social and structural constraints such as patriarchal gender and economic orderings or the prevalence or lack of a particular industry or work. Perhaps it is the case then that the sheer lack of positive future female selves and life chances within rural communities offers both a push out of the community and towards upward mobility for rural young women, resulting not just in the leave-taking imperative that we have seen among Planners but also in the ways that normative femininity in rural areas is possibly being worked upon. I would argue that we might be able to see this at play by examining these elements within Planners' discussions and setting them against the increasing numbers of rural young women leaving their home communities for educational pathways as we have seen throughout the work of Corbett (2004, 2007a, 2007b), Stockdale (2002a, 2002b), Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) and Gabriel (2006).

Further, the leave-taking imperative presents a challenge to rural communities because a skilled, knowledgeable and resourceful populace is a key driver of sustainability in myriad ways (Williamson 2007; Volkoff 2009). This is why I would argue that while the fields, situatedness and conceptualisations of self individuals engage in with their social interactions are multifarious and highly dynamic, they must also be analysed with reference not just to wide, mainstream paradigms but also to the more particularistic and nuanced systems of meaning found within specific geocultural and socioeconomic conditions. These relatively smaller contexts might give us a better glimpse of how it is possible for the self to work on the social as Turner (1988) argues. Thus, if there is a "learning to leave" culture present in rural schools or among rural students, it would be beneficial for all

concerned to attend to how “learning to stay”, a phrase also coined by Corbett (2007c), might help communities, students and local infrastructure.

In this chapter some specific ways in which Planning and Dreaming orientated respondents are making sense of their social and spatial relationships have come to light. How these young people understand themselves is situated in different ways hinging on the degree to which they understand themselves to be agentic within their particular spaces and places. This perception influences who they are today and who they hope to become in adult life and where they intend to do this. The relationship to space and place is considerably different along the lines of both embeddedness as well as the perceived opportunities for future life between Planning orientated and Dreaming orientated respondents. While respondents with Dreaming orientations discussed becoming free-spirited somewhat philosophical and philanthropic adults who would take up residence in their home communities if they so chose, fundamentally, Planning orientated students’ future selves were situated outside of the home community. Respondents who exhibited a Planning orientation understood these possible selves as highly mobile and implicitly belonging to a different social group than that of their families by virtue of entering specifically and decidedly into the realm of knowledge work which they understood as not available in their home areas. It is through Planning orientated students’ aligned ambitions and their reflexive practices geared towards goal achievement and being the ideal self or in the case of young women, the “high-achieving woman” that they construct and enact a positive self that is also “optimally distinctive”.

I would argue that it is possible that this becomes writ large in the trend of female high-achievement in rural areas and results in out-migration to areas where they can become positive selves within the adult institutions of the working world. This is something that is fundamentally out of their reach if they stay within their home communities due to lacking infrastructures and a paucity of positive working roles for women being the norm. I think what has become apparent here in terms of the ways in which these young people relate to space and place are important elements in not just how they understand themselves but also in what they understand to be possible for them. In the next chapter I will delve further into the ways in which these young people conceptualise their future possible selves and life trajectories with respect to their social relationships and

I will explore the idea of there being a moral imperative to achieve among Planning orientated young women.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, STRATEGIC THINKING AND THE MORAL IMPERATIVE TO ACHIEVE

Introduction

Thus far it is clear that the kind of self formation that Planning orientated respondents are engaging with is intrinsically linked to ideas about educational achievement and a form of future self that is both socially and spatially mobile. It is also clear that the possible life trajectories that these young people are aiming for are distinctly bound up in the idea that they will be knowledge workers in their adult lives, a complete departure in most cases from the type of work that their families have done before them. It appears that Dreaming orientated respondents lack the kind of identity commitments that Planning orientated respondents have definitively made and that students with Dreaming orientations conceptualise their future selves to be able to choose regarding their spatial mobility in a way that those with Planning orientations understand as fundamentally out of their reach. It is possible that this may be due to the fact that Dreaming orientated students most often had family histories of third level education, which Archer (1982) has suggested may contribute to only tentative identity commitments during adolescence.

In this chapter, I will be examining the types of relationships that my respondents have with their teachers and their parents. I will be exploring how these relationships influence participants' constructions of present self, possible future self and their future life trajectories. I will begin by attending to the relationships with teachers first, exploring how respondents thought about the strategies they were using to cultivate themselves in preparation for university study and their knowledge-based careers. I will move then to how their relationships with their parents and families operate with respect to this. Finally, I will show linkages between my research and past research (Lehmann 2009; Reay 2005; Reay et al. 2010), in discussing the idea of Planning orientated respondents' "moral imperative" to excel academically and to be engaged with knowledge work as an adult. I will also be taking a closer look at the philanthropic and philosophical sentiments that all

my respondents shared, regardless of gender, location and orientation. I will draw attention to the acute social awareness that these young people exhibited and argue that this is evidence of an alternative discourse surrounding mainstream ideas of “success” and or the normative life course as well as an alternative narrative for meaningful living in today’s “consumer society” (Bauman 2007).

Mentors and the Planning orientated

Here I would like to engage with the different ways that my respondents discussed how relationships with others were influential to their notions of identity and their formulation of future possible selves. I would like to focus first on my respondents’ articulations about their relationships with school and teachers as these were not just the most prominent throughout their narratives, but they were also the ones that respondents were most conscious of. I would argue that Planning orientated respondents do hefty conceptual work to maintain congruence between their possible future selves/future life plans and their current selves through reflexively managing meaningful linkages with their social networks and relationships with their home community set within the implicit understanding that *they will be leaving* the home area as has been seen from Chapter Seven. Whether from Leinster or Vermont, Planning orientated respondents detailed these connections as being very important to them and as having fundamentally formative impacts upon their possible future selves and life trajectories.

This kind of discourse was often fraught. Planning orientated young women’s narratives detail young women who appear to be wrangling with an embedded sense of social cohesion, which they have experienced through their blue-collar sociocultural backgrounds, and their understanding of having to and wanting to participate in a disembedded socioeconomic space in order to attain an empowered position within the mainstream working world. This also played out in their narrative of “having to leave” as we have seen already.

This is a careful and sometimes tricky negotiation, one which they attest to “pulling” them home while they feel the “need to leave” in order to participate in the knowledge-based careers they plan for themselves. As has become apparent in the previous chapters,

Planning orientated respondents understand themselves in terms of their home communities being challenging places for them. The added understanding that their parents and or guardians had little opportunity and where they have “wanted better” for their children is something which thoroughly colours the discussions of respondents who exhibited Planning orientations. This is something which is engaged with in detail later in this chapter but serves the argument here in that it shows once more how this group of young people negotiate who they are with reference to a specific idea about *who they should be* as well as *who they should become*.

As has been seen throughout the previous two chapters, Dreaming orientated respondents discuss much looser ideas about who they would like to become and seem to situate themselves firmly within Brennan and Nilsen’s (2002) “extended present”²². They do not want to think too concretely about the future, they want to live “in the moment” and “decide later”. Dreaming orientated respondents describe themselves as creative people on the whole but also with the explicit self-knowledge that they do not know how, where or in what way they would harness their characteristics with respect to *creating* particular future life trajectories. They seem content to “just be” and “experience” and “see what happens”, sentiments in direct juxtaposition to what Planning orientated respondents articulate.

Teachers and parents were frequently discussed among Planning orientated students as “supportive” or “inspirational” people who have encouraged them towards particular ideas of what is possible for them in mentor-like capacities. For Dreaming orientated students, teachers and parents were most often viewed more as “positive” people who were also encouraging but that this encouragement was seated in cultivating one’s own particular talent simply as a facet or characteristic that one has as opposed to as a means for creating particular avenues for oneself in order to achieve certain future life goals or possible future selves. For Dreaming orientated respondents, these people were “supportive” in that they encouraged them to “be themselves” and develop their own interests and skills. Well-read and curious young people, Dreaming orientated participants nearly unanimously lack focus and relate to school in a more social rather than operational manner. What I mean by this is that students who expressed Dreaming orientations attest to “liking” school for the people and the social encounters they experience, or the activities they engage in there:

²² See also O’Connor (2008a) for further discussion on the “extended present”.

Sephra: I like my school, I really like the music department and I like its size and how everybody knows each other and how we are concerned about the environment and local foods and stuff, it's really good. I like learning and being challenged and it's easy to be challenged in school. (16 year old, tenth graders, white-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Declan: yeah, it's good, I don't mind it, I like the days off in soccer (laughs), I don't mind it, the day flies by because you're having fun with your friends and that as well, you're not sitting there half asleep all the time, you're there with someone you enjoy being around. (15 year old, transition year, blue-collar Leinster male – Dreaming orientation)

Lyra: ok, um I think I like school yeah, (pause) I think a lot of it has to do with the social aspect of school you know that's something I like about it. (16 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female– Dreaming orientation*white-collar family background)

Planning orientated students too note that they like the social aspect, but predominantly they discuss enjoying school for the way that it feeds their minds and thoughts about what is possible for them, preparing them for the future:

Claire: I like school, I like it as much as anyone can like school, cause it's school, but I like coming in and seeing my friends and stuff, it's good. I like our subjects, I do physics and I really, really like it. I think it's cause of the teacher I have, I get along with her, she teaches us in a way that's not just from the book, like we do experiments and stuff and in a way that relates to you so I really like that, it's good. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Marshall: I've had a pretty good experience here, I know there are a lot of kids that haven't and then there are kids that have. I feel like in most cases I've been pretty well prepared for the next step. (17 year old, twelfth grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

Madeline: I really do like my school, I heard a lot of talk when I was coming here that it wasn't a good school but now that I'm here I think that it's what you make of it. So I think that's the case with any school, I've had a lot of really good teachers [here] and I'm lucky, like in Chemistry and English, I've had teachers that make the subjects that I couldn't understand at first, they've made them into things that I really like. I really like to learn so I do like school, sometimes I don't want to come (laughs) but I enjoy most of my classes. (18 year old, twelfth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Here it is clear how Dreaming orientated respondents understand school somewhat more in terms of what it means to them *now* while Planning orientated students seem to relate to this as a space which directly influences their *future* life chances. The discussion of influential people in respondents' lives sounds very different across Planning and Dreaming orientation lines. This is an important element in this discussion because Schneider and Stevenson (1999) argue that teachers play a considerable role in the development of aligned ambitions:

While each adolescent's ambitions are personal with unique features, they are shaped by the social worlds in which teenagers live. They reflect changes in the labor market and the opportunities available for females and males. They are also shaped by the actions of adolescents and of their parents and teachers...By encouraging students to think about their college choices and the kinds of courses that are needed for college admission, high schools can help them navigate through the curricular maze of high school. (pp. 259-260)

Thus it appears that teachers function as gatekeepers not just to the knowledge required in order to complete secondary school, pass entrance exams or formulate university applications, but they also operate as individuals who work to impart the skills, abilities and orientations which will enable one to perform well *within* the university level context. This can be linked back to how, in Chapter Seven, Dreaming orientated respondents discussed being more likely to consult their parents about decisions surrounding where they would attend university in the future, while Planning orientated students made special note of how they did research surrounding their potential school choices via the internet. Many Planning orientated respondents discussed having close, personal relationships with their teachers in that they felt that their teachers had seriously influenced their ideas about attending third level education. They also stressed how these particular teachers had worked in their lives in terms of how they felt they would be prepared to perform in that academic environment:

Annie: I had an English teacher at my old school that was, he was really experienced, he was older and he really inspired me to get into English because I used to hate it, I dreaded it with the grammar and all that stuff but something about how wise he was and the way that he taught, it really inspired me to want to learn more about English and learn about how he was so

experienced and everything, so he was one of my biggest influences for getting into English more. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Edward: well my History and Geography teacher, she's really supportive and if you need any advice on any careers even, even though she isn't a Careers teacher, she'd still do her best to find it out for you. And just she gets on so well with the class you know, some of them worry a lot about discipline and everything but she just gets on with the class and everyone gets on well with her so. And it's just whatever characteristic she has, she just has it, you know what I mean, you can't explain it, she's just class (laughs) and that's why I'd like to be like her because you know you can have the fun but the class don't take over you know that way. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

Potter: and I also feel like I get a lot of support from Ms. W, she's a teacher here, she's very inspirational and she supports you in whatever you do and I have a really good relationship with her. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Through these excerpts we can see that Planning orientated respondents attribute considerable amounts of their “inspiration” and the means of actualising their academic and future life course ambitions to the support that they receive from their teachers. Students who exhibited Planning orientations reflexively understood their relationships with these supportive and encouraging mentors as directly buttressing their future life goals with regard to their educational ambitions and their planned-for eventual knowledge work. As we have seen in Schneider and Stevenson's (1999) research and which is supported by many other thinkers in education studies (Brantlinger 1994; Renehan 2006; Corbett 2007a), teachers play a considerable role in the development of young people's relations with school and self as well as future life trajectories and aligned ambitions. Here I would argue they fill a much more crucial role for Planning orientated students than they seem to do for Dreaming orientated ones.

The narrative of implicit utility and reflexive self-cultivation of one's talents or skills as being influenced by teachers is markedly absent among Dreaming orientated students whereas among the Planning orientated, this quite often comes to the fore as we have seen above. This subtext was also set within discussions of mentor figures “opening up” the possibilities ahead for Planning orientated students. Thus, I would suggest that for respondents who expressed this kind of orientation, teachers function as key informants not

just regarding the knowledge needed for third level study and academic achievement but also as pedagogical stewards of social and spatial mobility. I would like to suggest that teachers influence Planning orientated students' constructions of identity as well as possible future selves and life trajectories as mediators between the psychic landscape of social class which my respondents were experiencing, and the social and spatial landscapes of mobility becoming understood as possible for them in their futures. Below are some examples of how this played out in these students' interviews:

Jim: well there's been a few of them that helped and definitely recommended colleges and said "it's brilliant, it's the best time of your life", like geography, he always says "college is the best time of your life" and he really prepares you, he prepares great leaving cert notes for us to try to get the best marks to get the points enough to get into college. And he always says that it's the best time of your life, the best thing that you can do. So that would probably be the main influence to go to college, the teachers. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

Sophie: [I feel that my teachers] just that they think that we're important and that they care about us, they don't just go "whatever" you know, cause some of the teachers are like...well I'm not naming names but we have certain teachers that just don't seem to care at all like "if you're not going to do anything then I'm not going to do anything, like if you don't understand it the first time then that's tough" and that's not right. (15 year old, transition year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Madeline: I've had a lot of teachers who've really been helpful, like Ms. S, Ms. C and Ms. A, they've helped me to learn subjects like Calculus and Chemistry that I've had a lot of trouble with and then I've ended up really liking them. And then there's Ms. B, she's just a really, really sweet lady, so I'd like to be like her when I grow up I guess. (18 year old, twelfth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

What is more, how these relationships were discussed with regard to an implied or intended social mobility was also very different. Indeed, the conception of social mobility was not something which Dreaming orientated students spoke much about if at all. It is possible that this may be because students with Dreaming orientations most often had parents who were educated to third level and beyond and who also worked in white-collar industries while Planning orientated respondents frequently discussed their mostly blue-

collar industry employed and secondary-level educated parents as “wanting better for them than they had growing up”. This was a sentiment significant in its absence from Dreaming orientated respondents’ articulations. What is more, for students with a Planning orientation, social mobility went hand in hand with the spatial mobility we have seen them discuss earlier. I would like to suggest that it may be due in part because of the social and economic changes which have occurred in Leinster and Vermont.

While considerably problematic as can be seen today with the impact of the recession on both areas, the development of a financially empowered “manual working” class during the building boom necessarily brought changes to social structure and the possibility of upward social mobility for many that might never have experienced this otherwise (Collier 2004; Holmes 1999; Fahey et al. 2007; Duncan 2001; Costanza et al. 2004). I would argue that these considerable social fluctuations may have played a part in prompting the theme of social mobility being a hallmark of Planning orientated students’ discussions in general due to the instability of these labour markets. However, given the similarities that can be seen here to Lehmann (2009), Reay (2005) and Reay, Crozier and Clayton’s (2009) work, I think that it is also possible that this is evidence of what might be a larger trend among the changing relationship to education and mobility among blue-collar people. I would also like to suggest that it is possible that the mentor relationships Planning orientated students detail with their teachers serve a dual purpose in this respect.

White-collar parents of Dreaming orientated students would have been able to pass on to their children important tacit knowledge regarding third level education and this is something that Dreaming orientated respondents discussed as being one of the primary sources of information surrounding their consideration of third level education as was discussed in Chapter Seven. Students with Planning orientations however, had parents who were by and large blue-collar and most often were without such information and experience. This means that because students with Planning orientations often lacked access to knowledge about university entry requirements, white-collar work and had little or no family histories of college education, it appears that teachers came to fill the roles that the Dreaming orientated students’ white-collar parents would have done. Thus, while the parents of Planning orientated respondents served as crucial supporters of their children’s dreams and functioned as consistent wells of particular types of capital, enabling

and buoying certain academic behaviours among these respondents as shall be seen in the next section, teachers seem to have come to represent not just imparters of knowledge, but people in Planning orientated students' lives who knew what university and knowledge work required of one and who believed that these students had what it took to achieve highly in both arenas. Thus, they appear not only to have been those who facilitated learning but who also helped students with Planning orientations to cultivate specific selves, skills and relations that fundamentally influenced who these young people understood it to be possible to become. Effectively, it appears to be the case that teachers function as the people who not only help Planning orientated students accrue, but who also help them to exercise, their mobility capital via cultural capital they might not otherwise have access to.

Strategic thinking – the personal inculcation of calculation

It became quite evident that a considerable amount of strategic thinking went on for Planning orientated respondents regarding how they were preparing themselves for university study. There were frequent discussions of deliberate course selection despite not having interest in the subject matter simply to “pad” or “fill out” one’s academic transcript among Planning orientated students from Vermont while those from Leinster were candid about choosing several university-required subjects which would enable them entry into their top choice schools. Dreaming orientated students had a tendency to take courses which they found interesting or which they “had a passion” for. The thought of university entry requirements seemed secondary to one’s own personal interests. This is not to say that Dreaming orientated students were negligent of requirements or were void of thinking ahead regarding what it would take for them to gain entry into a university they were considering. Rather, it was the primacy with which this kind of strategic thinking was given where we find the crucial difference between those who were Planning orientated and those who were Dreaming orientated.

I think that this difference is of particular importance to this discussion because, as Schneider and Stevenson (1999) argue, adolescence is a time when young people are “trying out different roles and imagining different futures”, however, “it is also when

students begin to accept responsibility for making decisions about how to spend time, how much effort to expend, and what steps to take” with regard to their current and future goals, and I would argue, conceptions of current and possible selves (p. 106). This is a crucial element in where those with aligned ambitions differ from those with misaligned ambitions.

Students who exhibited Planning orientations spoke about course selection, test-taking, completion of homework and study habits as all conscientious efforts towards a singular goal. Dreaming orientated respondents related to these in a much more nonchalant manner, taking them to be given elements of their adolescent school experience which they simply “did”, much like their attitude to university being an element of the life course. It was not a coveted destination, but merely something one could “do” or not “do” if one chose. This is important because it reflects motivational levels and provides an insight into what has been internalised as important or even crucial and what has not for these young people. It also keenly reflects young people’s understanding of themselves as agents within particular social and institutional structures.

I think this is particularly interesting because it mirrors much of what Bettie (2002) found among her upwardly mobile white and Mexican-American young women. This same level of intense awareness of social structural elements and the active derivation of most of their mainstream cultural capital from the school environment through their dedication to their studies, diligence in school and relationship to education can be seen between my Planning orientated young women and Bettie’s (2002) upwardly mobile young women. Here too it is evident that my Planning orientated respondents were simultaneously able to maintain differentiated identities across different spaces and both engage in and actualise diverse and varied structures of capital, identity and habitus within particular settings so as to maximise their potential and the likelihood of moving closer to their future possible selves. Again, this is strikingly similar to what Bettie (2002) found among her respondents through Planning orientated students’ active, reflexive assessment of social situations, their engagement of certain types of capital and particular identities, through reading the shades of grey between various fields in conjunction with a “selective application of the accentuation effect [of likeness or difference to a certain group, behaviour or attitude], primarily to those dimensions that will result in self-enhancing

outcomes for the self” (Stets and Burke 2000:225). This finding is crucial to this research because it shows not just the propensity for strategic thinking and reflexive self work across and within different social circumstances, but it also shows evidence of post-reflexive choice and the active development of problem solving and transformational strategies in the effort to work towards becoming a particular form of possible self amidst differentially classed social and psychic environs.

Schneider and Stevenson (1999) assert that a prominent characteristic of students who have “aligned ambitions is that they are more likely to sustain high levels of motivation throughout their high school careers” (p. 107). They argue that students with aligned ambitions are crucially different from those with misaligned ambitions in the ways that they “seek out challenges, create solutions, and mobilize resources” (Schneider and Stevenson 1999:106). One of the ideas regarding why expressions of these elements are understood to be a point of critical difference between those with aligned and those with misaligned ambitions is discussed below:

One reason is because adolescents with aligned ambitions are more capable of identifying their own strengths and weaknesses and of creating their own internal standards of performance. When faced with problems, they are better able to diagnose the nature of the problem and to seek appropriate remedies. (Schneider and Stevenson 1999:107)

With this in mind, I must be clear that I am not suggesting that students with Dreaming orientations were unaware of when they faced problems or if they required extra help with a subject or even that there were structural difficulties one might face if one did not choose to enter third level education. Indeed, this theme of university as the entry way to high status work was rife throughout most all respondents’ discussions. However, it was the perception of the absolute and unequivocal personal motivation for and necessity of attending university and the single-minded, reflexive work towards this goal that was not present among Dreaming orientated students’ articulations whereas these were contingent elements among those of the Planning orientated.

Below, I will give a few examples of the ways in which Planning orientated students thought about how they were working towards their goals of university entry, exhibiting the kinds of “seeking challenge” and “creating solutions” that Schneider and

Stevenson (1999) speak of. Molly and Madeline discuss the strategies they have employed with respect to their goals for attending university. They detail specific thought processes and conscious reasoning regarding their preparation for university entrance requirements through certain choices and practices that they are making and engaging in now:

Molly: So I thought, ok if I do TY [transition year]²³ then I can go back over everything that I did in the JR Cert and kind of progress in them, and then I can go into fifth year knowing more than I did if I didn't do TY so I said, I do want to go to college so if I do TY [transition year] it'll help me progress in my subjects and then so I'll go into fifth year and then finally go into sixth year and then see what happens from there and then I know if I need to get more points then I'll repeat sixth year. (16 year old, transition year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Madeline: I've been really specific [about what I wanted to do and how I would get to do it] since like middle school, I knew I needed to get good SAT scores and get into a good school so I need to get straight A's as much as I can. (18 year old, twelfth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Below, Sophie discusses how she goes about her study habits with the specific intention of gaining entry to university so that she can become a History teacher. She talks about the “experience” of university as something which will prepare her for other routes in life if she should not become a teacher or if she should want to “go back and do something else”. She is specific about her study practices and asserts that she will ask for help if she does not understand something in her reading:

Sophie: yeah (I have been thinking strategically about attending university so that I can pursue the career path of my choice) Well because I want to be a history teacher, college is part of that, I always planned on going to college, even if I don't get to be a teacher, at least I will have that experience, and if I want to go back and do something else it will be easier that I've gone

²³ “Transition Year” is an optional year of schooling in Ireland which comes between the state examined (Junior Certificate) year of Third Year and the Leaving Certificate (final state examination which will determine not just university entrance but also course of study) preparation in Fifth year. The Leaving Certificate is undertaken during Sixth Year. Transition Year is a year of schooling which engages with different types of learning and wherein students can gain work experience and are afforded with the opportunity to engage in non-exam focused study. It is generally understood as a less intensive year of study and also as one wherein students can develop their own interests, mature more and prepare more fully for their Leaving Certificate exams.

through college...so I highlight stuff, quotes and stuff that you have to learn I would highlight them, or if you don't understand something then I'd underline it and ask the teacher the next day. (15 year old, transitions year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Here too in Bella's description of the ways that she is going about preparing herself for further study, I think something interesting crops up again with regard to the use of the internet. Bella was not the only Planning orientated student who discussed this kind of behavior, but Bella was the most articulate and her excerpt below encompasses this behavior best so I will use her narration to represent this pattern among Planning orientated young women. Bella asserts that she uses the internet as a means for extending her knowledge outside of what is taught in school. She describes school as a "starting point" from which her own further learning stems. I would argue that Bella's critical usage of the internet is a provocative insight into the ways that rural young women are going about not just learning about the places they are considering to study in, but also for actively preparing themselves to do so:

Bella: In school, like to an extent it's given me that thirst for knowledge, but say we're talking about something in school, like a disease or something, just in passing, I'd probably go home and look it up on the internet and figure out how to know more about it. School is kind of a starting point and if I want to take it further I use the internet for that. (16 year old, transition year, white-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation *blue-collar family background)

I think here it is evident from Molly's overall approach to systematically preparing herself for the Leaving Certificate through Transition Year to Bella's personal search for information on the internet if she wants to be knowledgeable on a topic, that these are young women who understand their learning as a strategic process which they are highly motivated to engage with. They are using technology to open up the world to them in ways that they might not otherwise be able to. They see their accrual of educational experience as working towards the goal of achieving third level entry and eventual knowledge work in professional fields like nursing as Madeline discussed above. Further, work within knowledge-based fields often requires technological proficiency, a skill that these young women are generating and fostering quite actively through their regular internet and computer usage. The careful employ of Jacob's (2002) non-cognitive skills is readily

apparent in the note-taking, highlighting and organisation of information that these young women are performing as well as the logical, ordered thinking that they are doing with regard to the steps they must take in order to reach their goals. They problem solve by asking teachers for help and doing extra out-of-hours research at home in order to gain in-depth understanding.

Very few young men discussed such critical thinking and systematic awareness of how to perform well within one institutional environment in the effort of gaining entry into another at third level. While there were references to “always doing” homework or “making sure to get things in on time”, by and large, the young men who participated in this study understood their educational work in much less critically reflexive fashions. Here I think major differences in how the young men and women are apparent through how they “seek challenge, create solutions, and mobilize resources” (Schneider and Stevenson 1999:106). Lilly’s (a Planning orientated young woman) thoughts below sum up this kind of thinking quite well:

Lilly: I think that I am (preparing well for university), especially with the classes I picked, I picked a lot of CP (college preparatory) classes. So in what I choose for my studies I think really reflects that I want to be able to get into a college, a really competitive college because I work hard and because I make those choices to be in harder classes and still be able to do well in them. CP means "college prep" but I think it really means choosing to take a class and take the harder version of a class and so it's kind of like taking classes that are above your grade level because you know that you can do it and you're smart enough or talented enough. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

It is apparent here, that Lilly understands her course selection as not just indicative of her intelligence and thirst for knowledge but also of her commitment to learning and the general content of her character. This is very similar to the ways that Arnett (1998) argues particular harbingers of adulthood are understood by mainstream young people as has been discussed in an earlier chapter. Recalling this, Arnett (1998) argues that these facets which indicate one is making the transition to adulthood are essentially internalized elements of one’s character, not just activities which one engages in. I think that this is where it becomes particularly clear how the aligned ambitions thesis, while undeniably very useful in this analysis, ultimately lacks nuance. This is where my work might afford some more

in-depth and critically analytic insights. In Lilly's first sentence she says that she understands her selection of college preparatory courses as a deliberately reflected upon and chosen behaviour. This was not just conscious but a *conscientious* action which "reflects" her drive and ambition. This level of self-reflexive awareness, and indeed cultivation, in terms of how one's character or personal understanding of self can be situated, adds new insight to Schneider and Stevenson's (1999) arguments surrounding aligned ambitions. The way that Lilly worked upon and shaped herself and her strategic behaviours so as to be conducive to a particularly challenging academic pathway is something which she understands as also making her a good person.

Further, Harris (2004) offers a concerted critique of the aligned ambitions thesis on the premise that it over individualises the processes of academic achievement and takes little account of structural and social constraints faced by students. However, she misses the avenues and behaviours for positive and sustainable self and future self building that I would argue my respondents are showing through many of the behaviours which are conducive to the aligned ambitions thesis. I think that this is an important point for this research because rather than completely espousing the individualist narrative of academic achievement or eschewing it entirely as problematic, we should explore whether some of these forms of identity among young women might be more covert or overt or perhaps even negotiated forms of resistance in their ways of doing femininity. While I have touched on this earlier in my discussion of what could possibly be signs of new forms of ideal rural femininity, I would suggest that through what my respondents show here, we might be seeing some kind of negotiated resistance to traditional forms of femininity. Through their conscious and strategic efforts to empower themselves academically and through knowledge work later in life coupled with conscientiously working on having strong, positive social relationships, I would suggest that these young women are providing us with a glimpse of reflexive self-cultivation towards particular future possible selves and life trajectories.

Again, I am not attempting to entirely contradict Harris's (2004) argument regarding problematic elements of contemporary "can-do girl" femininity or to say that "women can indeed have it all today". Rather, I would temper her critique with the very positive and self-affirming, healthy and hopeful selves that my Planning orientated young

women shared throughout this research. Further, I would assert that these types of relationships with school and aligned ambitions have been shown to indeed be indicative of whether or not young people will actually achieve what they dream across large scale, longitudinal, quantitative and qualitative research (Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Oyserman et al. 2002; Oyserman et al. 2004; Oyserman et al. 2007). I would suggest that this is, at least in some ways, a good thing for young women because they appear to be achieving their goals and taking up more empowered places within the wider economy and society. Doubtless there are still serious structural and social constraints upon women today as we have seen throughout Chapters Two and Three, but I would suggest that it is possible that we are seeing some positive steps for young women in creating agency for themselves and planning to continue doing so in their futures.

The ways in which students “mobilize resources” according to Schneider and Stevenson (1999) is another element that I would like to explore. The genesis of Lilly’s reference to the quality of her study being a representation of her character is a very important element to attend to because the ways in which she understands herself to be this type of person and what is then possible for her to achieve are crucial elements in the impetus for her to enact particular behaviours. Recalling some more details about Lilly, her mother worked part-time and her father worked in a computer-aided element of the building industry. Neither of her parents had a third level education. As such, she is a good general representative of the majority of Planning orientated young women in this research.

Lilly’s relationship with and understanding of herself as a hard worker, a dedicated and ambitious student are pivotal points here because they show not just her focus and personal awareness, elements I have examined earlier, but they also bring up the notion that for her *it is right and good* that she be this way both now and with respect to who she hopes to become in the future. They show the degree of the internalisation of this discourse and why post-reflexive choice and my slightly structural form of symbolic interactionism coupled with awareness of default and developmental individualism are appropriate for this research. This is because it is not just the self of *now* that these young people are working on. Through a mindfulness of the sociocultural repertoire that they have come from and a critical awareness of the social and structural constraints and opportunities they face, these

young women are working on the self *of the future* as well.

In order to explore further where these kinds of relationships and understandings might come from, I think it is important to attend more deeply in the future to the two major loci of socialisation in adolescents' lives, namely school and the family. As I have examined the special role I argue that teachers play in this form of self construction and reflexive behaviour for Planning orientated respondents, I would like to draw out how the family influences these young people, especially in terms of how Planning orientated young women understand their self construction and possible self conceptualisation with relation to education in a somewhat moralistic light. I would like to argue that this can be linked to what Schneider and Stevenson (1999) discuss as "drawing on" or "mobilizing" resources. In the following section I will delve into these concepts and explore what I argue is one of the major influences on this kind of relationship and understanding of self and possible future self, namely the family.

Believing and becoming – families and forward thinking

One of the clearest differences between the relationships with parents that Planning orientated students discussed and those which were detailed by Dreaming orientated respondents, was that for the Planning orientated, they understood their parents as having been decidedly less advantaged as young people than they themselves were today. In particular, Planning orientated young women often made references to not wanting to be "house wives", a role which frequently, their mothers were engaged in. There was a critical awareness of class and the social and structural constraints that it imparts upon and within people which was significant in its absence within Dreaming orientated respondents' discourses.

Schneider and Stevenson (1999) attest that supportive and highly communicative families were a key determiner in whether young people would have aligned ambitions or not (pp. 141-169). The role of the parent in young people's relationships with school, achievement and social mobility has received much attention, in particular with respect to the concerted cultivation thesis (Lareau 2002; Bodovski and Farkas 2008; Bodovski 2007). While all of my respondents detailed loving, supportive and happy home lives, it is the

differences in Planning and Dreaming orientated respondents' discussions about the role their parents play which is most interesting.

Students with Dreaming orientates discuss their parents as being “supportive” of them and their decision-making as has been noted earlier. They discuss how they turn to their parents in their decision-making processes regarding thinking about higher education. They talk about homes full of communication and often family activities. But what they do not talk about is any kind of impetus to excel. Their parents are “fine” with “whatever” they want to do. Below are a few extracts from how Dreaming orientated respondents discuss the role of their parents in how they think about their futures and relationships with education:

Jenny: well, I was even talking to me Da about this yesterday cause like some parents like, push their kids into things, like they kinda push them into sports or to go to college or something like that, and my dad always says “as long as you're happy I'm happy” and kinda, like that's good because like you don't fell pressure to do anything, like sit at home “and I'm happy so you're happy” (laughs). (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Dreaming orientation *white-collar family background)

Susan: I just like the way they present themselves and they're definitely supportive of just whatever, they haven't pressured me at all to think about doing stuff or to do any kind of career and I think that's just been very good to know, that whatever I'm going to do they'll be fine with that. (16 year old, eleventh grader, white-collar Vermont – Dreaming orientation)

Lyra: And my mom's always been really supportive of my brother and I taking a gap year, taking a year off between college and high school and my brother did that and I'm going to do that. And you know when I was like “what if I didn't go to college” my parents were like “yeah we'll be supportive of that too”. (16 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation *white-collar family background)

Here, students who exhibited Dreaming orientations understand their parents as being loving, supportive people who understand and encourage them to engage with their interests and who do not “pressure” them into any sort of behaviours regarding school or future life plans or even current activities. These high-achievers talk about parents who will “be happy” if they “are happy”. It is not so much that I am critiquing this form of

parenting in any way here, rather, I am drawing attention to the different ways that my respondents understood their relationships with their parents and how this influenced their ideas about education, who they were, who they wanted to become and how they were trying to become those people. Again here I think this is empirical evidence of Dreaming orientated respondents having a proclivity to understand themselves as situated within the “extended present” (Brannen and Nilsen 2002; Pat O'Connor 2008a), avoiding decision-making and showing an affinity for creative, but crucially not concerted, self development.

Respondents with Planning orientations however show some interesting differences. They view themselves as privileged products of their parents’ of families’ hard work and earlier disadvantage. They note their parents and families as having little opportunity and that they themselves are aware that their care givers “want better” for them than they had for themselves. I have included several excerpts below to illustrate the frequency of this discourse among these young women:

Sarah: My dad [who was the first in the family to have third level training encourages me a lot], he's always been telling me that I'm going to be a doctor and stuff and that I'd be going to university, he'd always be like that, that he thinks I'm smart anyway (laughs), (it makes me feel) kinda happy, yeah that he really did believe in me and that I could do anything. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Anne: Like me ma and da never had a proper education but they still like brought me up right and brought me sisters and me brother and all up right so like, but to me it's very important because I want to be able to make me ma and da proud of me and make me family and all proud of me, so I believe that education is real important to me. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Potter: (pause) I've always kind of talked about it with my parents, they've always been like 'you know you should go to college, get a good education, get a good job' but I think that for me when it really set in was um, on one side of my family um there are a bunch of boys and there's only two girls and I watched my older cousin go to college and she didn't finish and when I saw what she went through and how difficult it was for her not to finish and how difficult it was for her to get a job after that, I was like “I want to go to college, I want to be the first girl in my family to go to college and *finish*” [said emphatically] so that was kind of like motivation for me and that was when I was really like “*I'm going to college*” [said emphatically] that was really significant for me. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar

Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Catherine: And then in school, my parents (neither of whom have any third level training) are always very encouraging and if you don't do your homework, well I was always made to sit down and do my homework, especially in primary school but in secondary school they don't really, well they just tell me to go upstairs and do it but I used to always have to do it at the table and straight away after school but as you grow older they sort of lost that sort of thing (laughs) well they didn't lose it but I became more independent so that really helped their control, but yeah I was always encouraged to do well and teachers as well you know, if I was doing well in school, there was always like good marks and stars and stuff like that (17 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

For the young women with Planning orientations, the fact that they most often represent the familial genesis of third level education through their prospective attendance plays a considerable role in their relationship with their parents as well as in their identity work. These young women detail parents who encourage them almost single-mindedly towards upper-level education, while they themselves speak about wanting to bring pride to their families through their efforts. While Potter makes special reference to a female family member who did not finish university as a situation to be avoided, Catherine is careful to note that while her parents were very structured with her in terms of her study habits when she was younger, she is mature and responsible enough to continue these practices on her own now. She articulates this alongside a narrative of positive reinforcement and cultivation coming from both within her home as well as the school environment.

I would argue that this is evidence of how Planning orientated young women understand their parents (or families) to have faced serious structural and social constraints which they now do not want their children, the young women themselves, to experience. This is similar to what was explored in earlier chapters regarding the ways that parents have been seen to be influential in terms of imparting to their children the need to engage in learning, knowledge and work which they themselves fundamentally have no history of. This is done through their perception of and anticipation regarding future social and economic shifts (Shaw 1994; Allatt 1993; Mark Davies and Kandel 1981; Pomerantz et al. 2007; Ralph Turner 1988). This in itself is a challenge to the concerted cultivation thesis

and it is in this awareness and understanding that Planning orientated young women appear to have what seems to be a morally derived impetus to achieve highly. I think that we can see this through how these young people convey their thoughts about the constraints their predecessors had faced and how their loved ones do not want them to have to face these themselves. I think this also offers some interesting challenges to the concerted cultivation thesis as the parents and families these young women are discussing are mostly blue-collar. Here I would argue we can catch a glimpse of the feelings of responsibility and indeed pride that these young women carry with them. The collective hopes and dreams for social and spatial mobility that their parents and forebears could never actualise are now not just “resting on the shoulders” of these talented young people, they are indeed making a considerable contribution to what fuels particular behaviours, relationships and concepts of self and future self.

Understanding one’s family history or cultural repertoire as one wherein individual “hard work”, “diligence” and “earning” one’s achievements are understood to be a discourse thoroughly situated within the psyches of “working-class” or blue-collar people (Lehmann 2009; Sayer 2005; Reay et al. 2009), even though the individualised narrative is one which is quite prevalent throughout contemporary society at large as we have seen throughout this work. This is an important point because of not just the frequency that we can see these ideas in Planning orientated students’ narratives, but also because I would argue that these traits effectively have come to act as formidable resources which they draw upon in order to derive their sense of self, to legitimate and reinforce their behaviours with respect to their academic performance, and to *drive* themselves towards certain types of possible selves and future life trajectories. This is somewhat similar to what Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) discuss among their working-class respondents who were attending an elite university when they detail their participants showing evidence of “almost superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination” (p. 1115).

In short, the discourses which are understood to belong to those who have traditionally made up the more constrained of the social world are now, I would suggest, key elements in these high-achievers’ constructions of self and understandings of their agency not just now, but also in their futures. Further, I would argue that this is evidence of how Planning orientated young women are drawing on their blue-collar repertoires in

order to perform particularly highly within institutional environments which are “generally characterized as essentially middle-class” (Lehmann 2009:634; Reay et al. 2009) or white-collar as I would discuss it. This can be seen to operate in their references to their relationships with their parents and teachers as well as their understandings of what is required of them in order to achieve what they understand to be possible for themselves in the future. I think that Lehmann (2009) does an excellent job of explaining the premise on which this idea is based when he says that:

Social class (or habitus) is implied in our lay normative responses to the social interactions, processes, and institutions we encounter, which also determine how we value ourselves and others, and ultimately, how we form dispositions for agency. (p. 634)

Lehmann’s (2009) work, as well as that of Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009), centres upon university students and focuses on the ways in which working-class students negotiate their educational experience by drawing on their class habitus. Lehmann (2009) argues that his respondents understood themselves to be at an advantage to many of their middle-class peers in their ability to draw upon working class moral capital, i.e. “work ethic”, notions of “hard work”, “perseverance” and “real life experience”. Reay, Crozier and Clayton’s (2009) evidence from a smaller case study of nine working class students at an elite British university also suggests something similar. They argue that their student respondents did considerable reflexive work in order to generate highly successful academic selves. This work was largely based upon engaging with particular elements of these students’ working-class socio-cultural backgrounds:

Resilience and coping with adversity are all qualities that are far more associated with working rather than middle classness but in working-class contexts are taken for granted and often read as stoicism, ‘making the best of a bad situation’. However, such qualities of resilience and coping with adversity become productive resources for the working-class students in the middle-class contexts they have moved into, [sic] - they help in dealing with the strange and unfamiliar. (Reay et al. 2009:1107)

Lehmann’s (2009) research suggests that “these constructions of moral advantages were seen as individualistic, rather than collective” (p. 643). This is something that can be

clearly seen among and across all of my Planning orientated participants regardless of location or gender. I would note here that respondents who expressed Dreaming orientations did make reference to one's future being something which oneself had to eventually "decide" about or "choose" to do things in, however, the critical awareness of one's "success" or lack thereof being an individual project was something most often found among those with Planning orientations. Further, there was a marked absence of any kind of moral imperative to achieve or moral advantages which one might possess among Dreaming orientated respondents. Students who exhibited Dreaming orientations understood their futures to be lying out before them in such a way that one could "choose" third level education so as to develop oneself and then decide which way they would like to "wander" forward through their lives. Third level education was understood as a pass to higher status work, but it was not related to one's own construction of self in as much that education or one's educational behaviours had nothing to do with the condition of one's character. Education was something for Dreaming orientated students which could be chosen and indeed, where one might perform well, but there was no intrinsic need to do so, no ethical obligation implied.

Driving for status

Lehmann (2009) argues that it is via these particular "moral advantages" that his working-class respondents were concertedly trying to "enter the ranks of the middle class" because they "described their reasons for attending university mostly in terms of social mobility...The very source for their moral advantages, financial struggle and hard physical labour, is precisely what they wish to escape" (Lehmann 2009:643). This point is similar to what my Planning orientated students describe. Lehmann (2009) says that in using the moral advantage they perceived themselves to have over their middle-class counterparts, his working-class respondents were seeking to relocate themselves within the sociocultural sphere of middle-class mores and social advantage. Thus, it is not so much that these young people were using these moral advantages to "distance" themselves from the middle-class but rather as their vehicle for their own transportation into it.

What is more, work by Reay (2005) suggests that one's habitus can be changed

“deliberately, at least in part, by repeated practice aimed at the embodiment of new dispositions” (p. 30; also cited in Lehmann 2009:643). For this research, Reay’s (2005) argument means that through intense self-reflexive activities mindful of the social and institutional constraints that one is situated within, as in post-reflexive choice, one can effectively, strategically alter one’s habitus in such a way as to not just generate agency, but to engineer social, and I would argue, spatial mobility. This is explored further through her collaboration with Crozier and Clayton wherein they present compelling evidence as we have seen above (Reay et al. 2009). This does not nullify the class barriers and influences that these young people’s psychic landscapes are inherently shaped by however. Rather, it develops them into wells of powerful resources and means with which to traverse these landscapes and those social landscapes they are situated within in much more dynamic and agentic ways.

While Lehmann’s (2009) work is highly relevant and I would say, in some ways very similar to my own, a crucial difference between my research and his was in that my research, Planning orientated respondents did not compare themselves to their white-collar counterparts. This is also the difference between my work and that of Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009). In fact, the only participants in my research who did compare themselves to other students in terms of class were respondents who expressed Dreaming orientations. Further, when students with Dreaming orientations did make comparisons between themselves and other students in terms of class—which was never articulated as such—this was usually done within an expression of a sort of cultural hierarchy. Those who were understood by Dreaming orientated respondents as more “closed minded” tended to be students from blue-collar backgrounds who were less likely to be engaged in the mainstream educational environment. Those who were understood to be more “open-minded” or accepting of social change or “diversity” were largely perceived as those who had more intellectual inclinations. Interestingly, Dreaming orientated respondents ubiquitously understood themselves to be “tolerant”, “accepting” and “open-minded”.

While these students did not align themselves to particularly concerted development of their educational trajectories, nevertheless they tended to associate themselves with the cultural hierarchy of middle-class normativity. This is interesting in that it is possibly indicative of what Finch (1993) argues about how the “working class” as a particular

“category came into effect through middle-class conceptualizations” (Skeggs 2002:4). Further, this conceptualization was “produced from anxiety about social order and through attempts by the middle class to consolidate *their* identity and power by distancing themselves from definable ‘others’” (Skeggs 2002:4). Because Planning orientated respondents are not conceptualizing themselves as different to their peers in this way, I think this opens up further serious questions about the nature of how class relations operate within rural areas.

Because Planning orientated respondents harboured repertoires of experience which were in line with the residual cultures prevalent in these areas (namely mostly blue-collar and traditionally based), these respondents didn’t necessarily understand there to be differences between themselves and others in the same way that the mostly white-collar Dreaming orientated respondents did. Instead of situating themselves within a cultural hierarchy like the Dreaming orientated, those with Planning orientations seemed to understand these facets as simply elements which were rooted in these places and spaces and which they would leave in favour of other cultural and structural formations, namely more urban ones and more “open” ones (Burke 2004). Thus, Planning orientated respondents appeared to understand these differences as aspects of the social and psychic landscape of rurality which they would move outside of (literally) when they took the next steps in their educational, and general life, trajectories. Dreaming orientated students however, appeared to have a keener understanding of these cultural differences as not so much being embedded within place, but rather as a derivative of particular social relationships and conditions. Thus, for the Planning orientated, these differences pivoted around spatial and geoculturally situated factors, while for those with Dreaming orientations, they understood these differences as being rooted within social structure on a much wider level.

Returning to the moral element I am exploring here, Planning orientated respondents understood their achievement and educational trajectories more as obligations to their family history of disadvantage and the vistas of possible social mobility they understood to be available to them now as built upon the hard work and sacrifices of their predecessors. They often made reference to observing the difficulties experienced by other family members who had no third level qualifications and reflected upon specifically not

wanting to be this way, some evidence of which we have seen above. They often discussed being committed to not “wasting opportunities” and wanting to make their families “proud” of them. Respondents with Planning orientations understood themselves to be the privileged and uniquely able products of their blue-collar family histories, drawing upon not just the hopes and support that their families had for them, but directly employing this as a means for and source of motivation for their own academic performance, concepts of self and understandings of future possible selves. Students who expressed Planning orientations reflexively understood themselves not just to be able to engineer their own social and spatial mobility via education through their cultural repertoires based on hard work, diligence and self application, but indeed, they felt charged with a responsibility to do so as special people given unique opportunities they understood to be unavailable to others they had intimate relationships with. These feelings of responsibility often bled into the voluntary work they did in their communities, their social awareness of global issues and their often touchingly concerted desire to be socially responsible people who engaged in “helpful” careers and adult lives.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that this is not just Lehmann’s (2009) “moral advantage” or Reay, Crozier and Clayton’s (2009) continual reference to middle-class atmospheres as a generator of reflexive self-refashioning which is at work here among the Planning orientated. Rather, I would like to suggest that it is both a keen social awareness and in-depth self-reflexive capability intimately tied to social relationships which my respondents show. I think that we can also see how this is not just employed as a means for personal development and agency building with respect to understanding oneself as a “fish out of water” as Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) suggest. Instead, it is something which my respondents used to understand the world around them as someplace they wanted to work back upon both for themselves as well as for others, not as something which made them different to their white-collar peers or which was based exclusively within the educational context. I think that we can see evidence of this in both the absence of self-comparison to others among the Planning orientated as well as in the ways that they all unanimously conveyed desires to “leave the world a better place” than they had found it. Respondents with Dreaming orientations too often noted desires for benevolent and ameliorative future selves and some even made reference to wanting to “help” others or be

“helpful people”. Crucially however, it was the Planning orientated who understood this to be a direct function of the degree to which they were able to achieve within educational environments and their future possible selves.

Philanthropy and philosophy – Education and “becoming a better person”

Something which is quite thought-provoking is that many of my Planning orientated participants, and indeed some who were Dreaming orientated too, understood education as a skill; it was not simply a credential or a qualification but rather an ability to think, to be adaptable, to gather new skills and to enable oneself to “live better”, as a fuller and more well-developed person. Education was understood as an inherently ameliorative process which would enable them to live “better lives”. This ethical element is uncannily similar to Baker’s (1989) study of how rural people in the developing world perceive education as a positive, transformational power.

Baker (1989) attends to the manner in which education is conceptualised as inherently ameliorative by the participants in her study, rural Sri Lankan parents. Her work details how some of the most disadvantaged people in the world understand education as something which reaches far beyond the credential and fundamentally shapes their children into better human beings more equipped to lead positive lives. While Baker (1989) does attest that her participants did indeed want better material and social conditions for their children, she also highlights that there was something distinctly abstract about the parents’ underlying assumptions of what an education would actually be providing their children with.

Baker’s (1989) work questions the efficacy of relevance education programmes (programmes with an almost exclusively vocational focus) in her study area, noting that such programmes disregard “what parents want from education, namely, a means to climb the social ladder and escape the hardships of rural existence” (p. 509). While Baker’s (1989) work attends to areas in the developing world and my own focus is on developed nations, there still is merit in examining her insights into the structure of formal education within rural environs and its integral place within structures of social hierarchy and issues of mobility:

Many empirical studies point out that a primary motivation of parents for sending their children to school is an economic one. An aspect of this economic motivation includes the desire of parents to seek increased social prestige for their children through education. (p. 510)

While Corbett (2007a, 2007b) notes that there is a decided focus on relevance among his “investor” group, those who do well in school but hope to gain blue-collar vocational training afterwards and plan to stay within the home community, a very interesting element here lies in the questions surrounding the nature of development and the economic structures of an area and how these might influence what parents desire for their children in terms of education. While Corbett’s (2004, 2007b) working-class “investor” parents emphasised practicality and indeed, favoured more vocational training, those interviewed in Baker’s (1989) work, parents coming from intensely deprived rural settings in Sri Lanka, have a decidedly different desire for their children. As Corbett’s (2004, 2007b) “investor” parents sought familiar forms of blue-collar employment and proximal living areas for their sons and daughters, the parents studied by Baker (1989), wanted a much more abstract and intellectual form of study for their children coupled with out-migration. This is strikingly similar to what my Planning orientated respondents conveyed about themselves. Baker (1989) details how her participants shared these sentiments and understood education as capable of making their children “better” people:

Most parents spoke of the humanizing influence of education and the need to be able to read and write...in the eyes of many, preparing children to deal with the world is a more salient function of schooling than qualifying them for modern-sector employment...Indeed, modern-sector jobs were considered less important than good manners or the general usefulness of education in daily life. The majority of parents who wanted their children to continue schooling did not link this with increasing their children’s qualifications but, rather, with the idea that general success is related to further scholastic progress. (pp. 514-515)

These ideas about the ways that education can “make you a better person” are exhibited by many Planning orientated participants, though interestingly these are set within many contradictions simultaneously calling on and denying both moral and structural advantages and disadvantages, much like Lehmann’s (2009) working-class first-generation university students. Arguably this might be a result of the normativity of

ideologies of meritocracy or in turn a reluctance among my respondents to verbalise any definitive statements judging the value of particular forms of labour or ideas about the life course. However, on the whole, Planning orientated students often wrestled with ideas and sentiments similar to those expressed by Baker's (1989) Sri Lankan parents, simultaneously implying that education not only better prepared them for the adult working world, but it enabled them to be fundamentally better people due to their widened perspectives and increased tolerance and engagement with diversity.

They also understood this to make them more “flexible” and “adaptable” people and this was understood as distinctly positive. This was sometimes an implicit narrative when talking about the antisocial behaviours of other students in their school who did not have academic orientations or other times this was carried in the subtext of discussions about the home community being one where little education was common among the populace, or indeed where the only avenues for employment were among blue-collar sectors. While Dreaming orientated respondents often distinguished between themselves and others along implicit class lines, they did so in terms of how they disliked the “close-mindedness” of others as opposed to how Planning orientated students understood their more tolerant orientations to be based upon their educational experiences. Fundamentally for the Planning orientated, education was making them more socially appreciative and aware. It is the awareness of one's learning which acts as the fulcrum here because while this was not often vocalised out-right, it was a strong undercurrent in Planning orientated narratives:

Rose: ...for me, I know that education is really important because I know that I could go further...so I definitely want to get the highest education I can and I also think that like when you have a higher education, you have more expertise and you can *help* more, like what I want to do is to help endangered animals so if I became like more specialised then I would be able to do more for them. So it's very important. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Catherine: I do want to qualify in college, it is important to me to do well, get a good qualification, get a really good job and that but I think it's always like people who I don't know, I think they're involved in your being successful, you don't want to be great and qualified and have everyone hate you (laughs), that's not successful. So to do it in a good way as well, to

make a difference I think that's one of the most important things. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Edward: success...ehm...well success to me would be making something of my life and just to make an influence and make a difference to other people's lives then, be it through teaching, still it would be success to me, because the fact that I think that I can actually share what I have to other people and you know influence their lives or hopefully get them a good job when they grow older, you're not being selfish, you know you're returning the favour that was passed on to you really so that's, I think success would be seeing people succeed in life but eh, you know getting on in life and getting on well and I like the idea that they'd be actually taught by me and that sort of way and I'd be proud, I'd be proud of the fact that I had sorta made a difference. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

While this discussion is based in ideas about what “success” is to these young people, I would argue that it is easy to see the philanthropy-education relationship here. I would suggest that this is apparent in how these young people appear to understand their education as not just constructed around qualifying oneself so as to become an *agentic*, working adult, one who is *able* to do things and to *be* things, but also to be an adult who is socially conscientious and responsible. This is as much about agency and power as it is about “being a good person”. Education appears to be understood as a catalyst for *becoming* this empowered, implicitly philanthropic, mobile person.

This is interesting when set against Leary, Wheeler and Jenkins' (1986) argument about when an individual's identity is understood to be more heavily couched within the personal component side of identity formation, then one is less susceptible to outside (social) influences, behaviours and opinions. Thus, such people likely “pursue activities that provide personally-relevant outcomes, such as self-improvement, feelings of personal accomplishment and the validation of their personal values” (pp. 12-14). Leary, Wheeler and Jenkins (1986) argue that individuals try to create and maintain “a sense of continuity and stability to their identity by managing areas of their lives that are relevant to central aspects of identity” (Leary et al. 1986:12). When one's identity weighs more heavily on the personal component side, then one is less susceptible to outside (social) influences, behaviours and opinions, and would “pursue activities that provide personally-relevant outcomes, such as self-improvement, feelings of personal accomplishment and the

validation of their personal values” (pp. 12-14). Such individuals would thus engage with work, activities, interest etc which would give more personal satisfaction or rewards while those with more emphasis on social elements would probably derive more meaning from work, interests etc which yield “recognition from others, social contacts and friendship” (Leary et al. 1986:12-14).

Those with this kind of orientation, more like respondents with Dreaming orientations I would argue, therefore are more likely to be interested in and or engage in work, hobbies, activities etc that would give them more personal rewards or satisfactions. This is something I would argue that can be seen quite clearly throughout the last two chapters as well as in the current discussion. However, individuals with more socially-couched and derived systems of identity, like the way the Planning orientated draw so heavily on their psychic landscapes of social class, gender and references to family, teachers and social relationships, these people would more likely derive greater meaning from interest, hobbies, work etc which gains “recognition from others, social contacts and friendship[s]” (Leary et al. 1986:12-14).

This is very interesting as most Planning orientated respondents detailed being involved in some kind of charity or volunteer work and nearly all discussed wanting to give back to their community or to a conceptualisation of the “wider good”. Below are just a few examples of the ways that these young people talked about being and doing both their social mobility as well as what they understood as “living a good life”:

Potter: I would probably tell them [someone asking you what you wanted to do with your life] that I really want to change the world I guess, I really want to travel and I want to work in an orphanage, like volunteer my time so I’m definitely like ready to give back to my community and I would want people to know that. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Izzie: I think I'm overall a person who wants to do good in the world and I think that by talking with people and meeting people and exploring new things [through my education and through my volunteer work] I can become a person that is more focused on that as opposed to something else. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Marshall: I really love helping people. I have a lot of issues if people around me are having

issues, like if people are fighting around me I feel the need to try to help them out and be the peace maker, the mediator... and I really want to get into the media because it's become, for lack of a better word, corrupt, it's not unbiased despite what they say, everyone has their own angle and I know that it's part of human nature, putting your own spin on things but I want to get in there and just try to give it to people straight because I don't like it when people are hiding facts or spinning it for the ratings I think that the media should just be an outlet for the news, not a way to try to enhance yourself, so I'm hoping that while I'm at (school name) and doing journalism that I can get into NPR or one of the TV stations up in Burlington and start working from there. (17 year old, twelfth grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

Thus, while many of my participants, both males and females detailed these kinds of sentiments and plans, I would like to attend more critically to what this might mean for the young female respondents in the study. Harris (2004) argues that young women are uniquely targeted and funnelled into adopting a perceived “personal responsibility or the inherent risk factors within a girl’s personal biography” which are “mobilized to obscure” the structural elements exhorting them to take up pride of place in the neo-liberal capitalist market (p. 38). I would argue however, that my participants show a more nuanced and interactionally based foundation for their high-achieving behaviour, as in what Leary, Wheeler and Jenkins (1986) detail.

While I recognise the strength of Harris’ (2004) argument about the structural “investments of global capitalism in the maintenance of systematic inequality”, I think that my participants are showing something altogether more integrated, dynamic and deeply, personally seated. This can be seen not just in their discussions about their families and the personal, moral impetus they feel to achieve, but in that this achievement is inherently self transformative in a positive way. Further, this kind of empowerment is not understood in a singularly self-focused way but rather as a facet of their character or indeed personhood which will facilitate their becoming better members of the communities of tomorrow.

Discussion and Conclusions

Thus far, we have seen that there are many elements and different forms of the personal and social identities that a given individual constructs. However, I would suggest

that those which adolescents are developing, especially in terms of school, are arguably the most important to attend to, especially because the school functions as the proverbial dress rehearsal for the adult world. This is where I think we are afforded the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the connecting fibres between the identities that my respondents are formulating, the behaviours and relations they are enacting and what these could possibly mean in a larger social context.

Because Planning orientated respondents' personal identities were couched within rural, blue-collar social backgrounds, they appear to have come to understand their teachers as guides between their own psychic landscape of experienced class and the social landscape of what is possible for them in their futures through the enactment of particular selves and behaviours within the academic setting and eventually within the adult working world as members of the knowledge economy. This is perhaps also where we can see how these shifts in how my respondents understood who they were, who they were *trying to become* and *where* they understood they could become these people might be working back upon the social structure they came from. I would suggest this because I think we can see here one of Turner's (1988) "situational encounters" wherein it is possible that Planning orientated students are engineering possible selves and future life trajectories which may operate as "an intervening variable in the maintenance, modification, or disruption of society" (p. 1). If these students' behaviour becomes understood as the norm, as female higher academic performance is arguably becoming (Mickelson 2003; Corbett 2007a; Heath 1999), then this raises serious questions for rural areas in retaining their talented youth, an issue which has been raised already with considerable concern in many areas across the globe (Scott 2002; Gabriel 2002; Andres and Licker 2005; Handy 2006; Belluck 2006). It also brings issues to the fore regarding who exactly is going to populate the knowledge economy of tomorrow.

Across all samples, these young people discuss their strategic drive for excellence as something which is, whether explicitly identified or implicitly suggested, inextricably bound up in understanding education to be an ameliorative force. Planning orientated students draw on their moral capital in similar ways to Lehmann's (2009) and Reay, Crozier and Clayton's (2009) respondents in order to create their understanding and relationships with academic success and their ideal and present day selves as something

which is dutiful, which they do on the backs of their families' sacrifices and because these avenues they are traversing, were decidedly out of reach for their forebears. These young people discuss diligence, pride and opportunity as the bulwark of their motivation and as the foundation for their self concepts, relationships with education and ideas about who they will become in the future.

Further, they situate this within a discourse of "giving back" to others. This is not a selfish undertaking despite the intensive self work that is taking place. Put simply, this is neither the hyper-individualised reflexive modernists' self nor is it an entirely sociostructurally uncritical sense of personal responsibility for one's success or failure. I would argue that this is a sensitive, spatially and socially situated awareness of not just one's sociocultural history but also of what is possible for one to have as a sociocultural future. I would also argue that this is not a completely disembodied swallowing of the hypocritical capitalist narrative surrounding meritocracy but rather a critical awareness of the social, structural and geographically situated structures of opportunity and constraint that these young people are not just conscious of, but are analytically thinking about.

The similarities and differences between my work and that of Baker's (1989) and Corbett's (2004, 2007b) as discussed above, are equally interesting. Baker's (1989) findings represent a somewhat juxtaposed ethos to that of the more developed world. It is ironic that if Bourdieu (1974, 1984) and Bauman (1999, 2007) are to be taken into account, it is by and large those of the most privileged social echelons who benefit from impractical (i.e. immaterial or abstract) education and or knowledge as it is the very non-necessity of said knowledge which gives it pride of place within the social hierarchy i.e. a thing for its own sake, though really for the social meaning, messages, and signifiers it carries with it. Here, Baker (1989) shows us that among the most disenfranchised of the developing world, we see an epistemological standpoint found most often among the most privileged of the developed nations.

This relationship with power is the epicentre of my work and it is why Baker's (1989) research is important here. In Corbett's (2004, 2005b, 2007b) research, his "investor" group are those with established families in their areas. They have social networks and viable blue-collar employment opportunities available to them later in life. Indeed, they are involved with the school system and make up the mainstays of the local communities. I

would argue therefore that they have considerable wells of capital and thus powerful resources to draw on in their home rural areas. Put simply, I would argue, that geoculturally speaking, these are the powerful, privileged people within their home communities in terms of many different forms of capital, not exclusively financially either though sometimes this can play a role as well. As such, I would therefore argue, these “investor” young people are afforded with at least a somewhat empowered and positive future life trajectory if they stay within the home community or home area engaging in blue-collar labour, utilising their social networks and support structures to achieve a sustainable adult life. This means that they understand themselves to have positive future life trajectories and possible selves within the rural, blue-collar sociocultural environment they are embedded within through recognisable trajectories to work, recreation and participation in the local culture in positive, self-affirming ways. Thus they actualise and derive meaning from resources and sociocultural structures (Coover and Murphy 2000) which will enable them to achieve these positive future life trajectories and selves.

Here is where we see the importance of situatedness come again to the fore within this thesis. This is because this kind of geocultural power and possible life trajectory is fundamentally something which is unavailable to the Planning orientated young women and arguably which is becoming so for the Planning orientated young men as blue-collar employment structures have continued to fail in both areas due to the economic downturn (Vermont Department of Labor 2009; Central Statistics Office 2010) as well as to the general decline of rural economic structures and systems of work writ large as has been noted by many rural researchers throughout the globe (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Corbett 2007b; Ní Laoire 2000, 2001, 2005; Bryant and Pini 2009; Coldwell 2006; Amanda Davies 2008; Gabriel 2002).

However, the sociostructural constraints which the Planning orientated young women would be subject to with regard to the gendered structure of labour in blue-collar work would effectively render staying within their locality a virtual impossibility on many more levels for them than for their male counterparts as has been explored earlier. Further, because they have few relationships with or tangible connections to the white-collar employment which is indeed in operation within these home areas due to their socioeconomic experiences being largely based within the remit of the blue-collar, I would

argue that these potential opportunities on their doorsteps are virtually invisible to them. Fundamentally, these are not invisible to the Dreaming orientated. This is because by and large, these students come from families with third level educations and who are at work in knowledge-based fields *already within their home areas*. Thus these young people understand that there is indeed a possibility for them to choose *to stay* because there exists within the remit of their experience viable job opportunities which they perceive to be attainable if they so desire.

It is the power and or the proximity to power which these young people understand themselves to either have or not have within this geocultural context and indeed, within these forms of skills and knowledge, which is crucial here. It is the ability to either be embedded within their communities in positive, sustainable adult life trajectories and selves or not which I believe acts as a critically disembedding agent, and which further propels these young people not just into the formal educational system but which elevates their understanding of the value of abstract, academic and intellectual forms of knowledge over against what Rose (2004) would call “working intelligence”. This in turn is then bound up in how and what they understand education to be able to do for them *as people* (selves) and then what they will be able to do *with it* as these people (selves).

Thus, I would argue that Planning orientated young women deserve attention because of the ways that they are strategically negotiating the institutional environment of the school and academics (a generally white-collar environment), by utilising and drawing upon definitively blue-collar moral elements in a concerted drive to achieve particular future possible (female) selves and life trajectories. Further I would suggest it is in this awareness of the nature of the geocultural condition that these young women are situated in which gives us this particular level of insight. It is with this mindfulness that we are able to see how these young women are negotiating systems of power, agency and mobility they understand for themselves and doing considerable mental and social work so as to achieve these positive selves and future life plans. It is only when we are able to get a grasp on the internal, micro-level processes that we can try to glean a better understanding of the external macro-level social trends. It is here that I would argue that we can begin to see what might be elements in the genesis of young rural women achieving highly in the academic context and leading rural out-migration.

CHAPTER NINE

“SUCCESS” IN RURAL SCHOOLS – HIGH ACHIEVERS IN CONTEXT

Introduction

So far I have focused on the in-depth data from the selected high-achievers in this study. This chapter situates this within the wider discourses surrounding “success” in the schools where these young people came from. In order to take a broader look at what it means to be “successful” among students of the rural, public schools where I conducted my fieldwork, I asked the participating schools to administer a “free-write” activity within a convenient class time wherein all the students in the class would participate if they so chose. As has been noted in the methodology chapter, this was to get a wider look at how “success” was understood by the general student body of the participating schools. This chapter engages with these texts and uses them to develop a backdrop against which to view the blue-collar qualitative data collected during the in-depth interviews in the context and to link it to what could be wider social trends surrounding individualisation, the extolling of education among females and an alternative discourse surrounding what it means to be successful.

As explained in the methodology chapter, the free-write texts were returned from only three of the seven participating schools. They were also only returned from blue-collar schools. This means that the free-write texts are most valuable as a context in which to understand the blue-collar in-depth data. Also, since fewer free-write texts were returned from Vermont schools than were returned from Leinster schools, this affects the comparisons that I am able to make. It is also important to bear in mind that these scripts were written informally, were very brief, and were written without time for significant thought or preparation. This data therefore serves as a rough barometer only. It is for illustrative purposes and helps to give texture to the in-depth blue-collar data by giving a snapshot and complementary information to the interviews. It is thought-provoking data and deserves attention, especially in the ways that it is similar and different to what emerged from the in-depth high-achiever data.

I will begin by introducing the main themes derived from these free-write texts and discuss these throughout the chapter in terms of how they develop our understanding of the general sentiments surrounding success in the schools I sampled from as well as to build a quick sketch of the main ideas the responding student body had about success. I will use this as a comparative tool for delving more deeply into the in-depth data gathered from the selected high achievers. I will close the chapter with thoughts on how situating the in-depth respondents within this broader context enables the research to gain more insights into the narratives shared during the interviews as well as to provide some scaffolding from which to think more broadly about the ways that young women are relating to education in rural areas.

Main themes

On the whole, the main themes that developed throughout the 138 free-writes centred around:

- 1.) Specific references to education, “hard work”, “diligence” and “goal achievement”
(57 texts, 41.30%)
- 2.) References to specific concrete goals and conditions (15 texts, 10.86%)
- 3.) References to material wealth or financial wellbeing (27 texts, 19.56%) and
- 4.) References to having a “fulfilling life”, “being good at what you do” and having positive relationships with others (39 texts, 28.26%)

These four main themes made up the general assertions about what “success” might mean to young people from the three schools which provided this part of the dataset. They also came exclusively from blue-collar schools. Interestingly, discussions along these lines were present in the narratives shared by nearly all the high-achieving interview respondents, regardless of location, gender or school category. However, this was to varying degrees which appear to be at least roughly delineated along Planning and Dreaming orientation and male, female lines. The main purpose of collecting this data was to gain a broader understanding of the discourses surrounding what it meant to be

“successful” within the general school environment wherein the high-achievers were experiencing their education.

Because these texts could only be collected in three blue-collar schools, two of which were in Leinster, there are considerable limitations to how I am able to analytically view them. However, through this collection of thoughts and assertions about personal and general ideas surrounding “success” among these blue-collar schools, I think that they afford some insight into the reasoning that the young people from these schools engaged in regarding ideas about their future. There are also interesting hints at what the overall narrative of “success” might be within these school environments. As there have been undeniable similarities across locations so far, this data, while being recognisably limited, is still interesting to explore in terms of similarities and differences it has with the high-achiever data over all. It also suggests that perhaps the origins of these narratives are seated in the psychic landscapes of these young peoples’ gender and class as opposed to being derived from their particular cultural and national contexts.

In terms of how this chapter goes about analysing this data, a few guidelines are needed. It was often the case that students would make reference to a few of the five main themes throughout their texts. However, in order to get a closer look at the weight any one of these themes was given by the free-write participants, I have divided them up into groups by the level of focus on a particular theme that the students discussed. Therefore, while students frequently listed a few or even several of the main themes, it is those which they wrote the majority about or which they expressed success being particularly contingent upon that make up the categorisation of the students’ writing. Overall, there was a response rate of 138 usable texts, with 110 of these coming from Leinster (67 male and 43 female) and 28 of these coming from Vermont (14 male and 14 female). A total of 81 (58.69%) texts were written by males and 57 (41.30%) were written by females.

1.) Specific references to education, “hard work”, “diligence” and “goal achievement”

Throughout the texts from both locations there was a consistent discourse of achieving within the educational arena as being a fundamental basis for one becoming a

successful person in life. This was one of the two strongest themes throughout the free write texts, making up 57 (41.30%) of the total 138 total responses. There were 26 (45.61%) male responses and 31 (54.38%) female responses in this theme. Further, this was proportionately the most popular theme among all the free-writes written by young women (31 responses out of 57 total female written texts for a proportion of 54.38%).

Mindful of the limitations that these data carry with them, I find this theme interesting in that it offers an opportunity to question how the recent changes surrounding Irish and Vermont socioeconomic structures may have influenced how these young people understood success. The rapid increases in female education rates that have been noted in previous chapters coupled with continued deindustrialisation in the decline of manufacturing sectors and the continual development of global economic connections may be playing out in the ways that these young people view education at large. Further, I think this might be particularly interesting if viewing these ideas about success within the context of the areas' housing booms as this would have been the period of time wherein these adolescents were growing up. With the recent busts that they and their families would have been experiencing during the time of study, I think that this is perhaps an opportunity to explore why and how these young people understood academic qualifications to enable one to be successful. This is especially because they are situated within sociocultural systems that have long relied upon blue-collar, male-dominated employment. This will be explored later in this chapter.

Returning to the discussion at hand, I think that this free-write theme draws attention to the ways in which globalisation, mainstream ideas about credentialism and indeed the burgeoning knowledge economy in a broad sense are spread and internalised or at least reflexively understood as having bearing upon these young people's lives. I would like to supplement this idea with some excerpts from this group of texts which are listed below:

I plan on being successful by doing well in my leaving certificate in June so that I can get the points I need to be able to get into the college I want to go to and study the career that I wish to do when I leave school. To achieve this I am planning on studying really hard for my exams in June so that I will get the necessary points that I will need to follow through in doing the course I want to do in college. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

It means a lot to me to [be] successful. I try to be successful in everything that I do, if it's a test and I want a good grade, or if it is a sports game that I put my best effort into. Everything that I do, there is a purpose to it. So I try to be successful in everything...I will always put in my best effort and try to succeed in everything that I do. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female)

Success involves paying attention in school and try [sic] to get the best education you can. Only you can make your own success, nobody else is going to do the work for you... (17 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

The first step is to go to college. My definition of success is to (hopefully) achieve a Phd [sic] in Geography one day and be able to acquire [sic] a career in which I will not have to worry about my future economically...(16 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont male)

These short examples show some evidence of credentialist values among these young people and I think they also hint at the internalisation of discourses surrounding individualism, especially in the reference above which says that “Only you can make your own success, nobody else is going to do the work for you.” There appear to be elements of default individualism in that these young people understand success for themselves as based upon mainstream goals and status achievements related to institutional education. I think that this could be tempered however by noting the fact that in today's economy, it is indeed empirically evident that entry into high status work, or increasingly even non-manual work, requires one to hold some form of third level credential (Karen 2002; Brynin 2002; Labaree 1997). I would suggest that this has become an element of “our culture” in the way that Frank et al. (1995) describe. It is in the tacit recognition of empirical trends which essentially influences the internalisation and acceptance of particular elements of “our culture” and produces systematic (or perhaps even eventually hegemonic) behaviours and attitudes. I think that here we can see the ways that these adolescents understand not just the social but the structural necessity for a third level education for the futures they want for themselves. This appears to be a strong influence in why and how they understand this to be so crucial in becoming a “successful” person.

In this way, these young people seem to be situating themselves within mainstream discourses about the normative life course whereby third level education is an implicit

necessity for future social and material stability. While these respondents sometimes did make reference to credentials or education as being one's "pass" to financial fitness, this was more often than not a subtext of the discussion, something that was rather more implied than it was written outright. If we attend more closely to the different ways that this education and "hard work" were interpreted and made sense of between the genders here, we gain a better appreciation for how this was operating differently for young women and young men.

What about the boys?

Within this theme there were differences between how young men made reference to education and how young women did so. The young men appeared to be relating to mainstream messages about the normative life course and the ways in which they are consciously making plans regarding their futures with respect to it through acquiring educational credentials. Young women however, once again brought a distinctive discourse of "hard work", "studying hard", and "working to achieve" one's goals.

In examining the young men first, while I would indeed argue that there is evidence of the internalisation of credentialist message, I also think that there are clearly some distinct examples of how these messages are at least somewhat mediated by personal attachments, commitments and ideas about what this path might mean for them as individuals. I would suggest that this is evident in how often these texts show linear thought processes and a situating of the university experience within an understanding of the normative life course while simultaneously qualifying these sentiments with ideas about wanting to acquire a career which they will feel "happy with":

To accomplish the goals that one set out to do is what I'd consider the meaning of being successful. For me, my goals are getting into the Coast Guard Academy and becoming a Coast Guard Officer. If I do this then in my mind I'm successful. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont male)

To be successful to me means to be happy with what you have achieved or are in the process of achieving. I hope to keep a high standard in my grades and achieve something in my life that I can be proud of, i.e. go to college... (17 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

Levels of critical awareness surrounding the motivation for or genesis of these trajectories is somewhat missing in the texts however. Admittedly this may be due to the brevity of the activity or indeed to its spontaneous administration so students had to write “off the cuff”. However, I would suggest that if there were concerted critical thoughts regarding the deconstruction and *reflexion* upon one’s motivations for such activities, I believe this would have been a bit more evident as it is so clear among the in-depth respondents. Overall though, while those writing texts were confined to only ten to fifteen minutes to give their responses, they do still appear largely in line with what was discussed among the in-depth interview respondents. For example, Marshall’s discussion about wanting to become a journalist due to the way that he has experienced the media himself shows clear, logical thought. He comments on his interest in studying this as derived from how he is intrigued by the way that knowledge is produced and disseminated, albeit not in so many words:

Marshall: I'm going to (school name) and I'm going to study journalism and mass communication, I want to get into the media. When I was watching our presidential election this past year in the media, well I don't actually have TV at home which most people ask me how I can live like that, but I don't really get the same exposure that other people get but I kept track of it online, in the paper and on the internet and everything and on the radio and whenever people were talking about it and I was really intrigued by the fact that no one seemed to have the same story. (17 year old, twelfth grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

Below, Jim talks about his intentions for third level education being seating in a desire for security which he perceives as lacking in the industry which his father works (construction) and which is something that he has been witness to, lending support to my suggestion above regarding the idea that Planning orientated students’ relationships with education are at least in part influenced by their understanding of the relative stability or vulnerability of particular industries:

Jim: And I'd like to be sort of like what my dad [who is a tradesman in the building industry] is but I'm not, like career wise but like personally...I'd be thinking of whether to go on to higher studies, like to do a PhD or something like that. I've been thinking like that because the higher education then the more secure, the better you have it... (pause) I'd hopefully see now after I finish college. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

Further, Andre discusses wanting to be a knowledgeable person through “being informed”. Andre’s mother had recently finished her third level education at the time of interview and she was now working in education herself while his father was secondary-level educated and worked as a manager in a retail establishment. Interestingly, Andre discusses his mother as being a major source of support in his educational efforts, and while he never actually articulated this out-right within his interview, his discussion was laced throughout with references to his older sister, who was currently at university studying sound engineering and who was performing to an exceptionally high standard. He was very proud of his sister and often enthused that he wanted to do things “like her” but never mentioned her out-right as a role model. Andre also made frequent reference to other members of his extended family, most of whom had not attended third level education (his mother and sister were the first in their family to do so) in a narrative of “to-be avoided” behavior and selfhood. He discussed at length how he “didn’t want” the economic vulnerability that his extended family experienced through their dependency on local systems of blue-collar labour and that he was geared towards education as a specific way of going about “making a better life” for himself.

What is more, his sister’s ability to craft intelligent and sound arguments, which Andre mentioned as something he particularly admired about her, is mirrored in his discussion of what education means to him. He also talks about third level education as a natural step in his development towards adulthood. Considering this, I would argue that Andre’s blue-collar family background and his sister’s and mother’s performance in third level education played considerable forces in his own educational life and sense of self. This remains in line with what I am arguing overall, that rural women, particularly those from blue-collar areas, are playing an increasingly powerful role within the third level educational environment and that their relationships with education are playing out in important ways within their home communities:

Andre: it [education] means a lot to me, I think education's really important I mean you want to be informed about what's going on around you, as opposed to just sitting back and complaining with no reason. If I'm going to complain then I'm going to have a well-balanced argument and be ready to share it in a respectful yet powerful way. I mean education pretty much is a key to

success because you don't get a good job if you don't have a good education, without a job you don't get a car, a house, or anything like that, so I'm not trying to say that success is in material goods, but success is being able to support yourself with the necessitates and maybe having a little extra to spare. (15 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

Along the lines of education playing an important part in the lifecourse of these young men, Edward discusses his education as an integral part of his youth and preparing him to be an adult. He understands it as a place where he will be able to mature and achieve important knowledge and training which will help him in adult life. Edward came from a family where his father worked as farm labourer at a holding near their home. His father had completed a primary-level education while his mother had completed secondary-level. Edward describes his mother as a “housewife” and discusses his relationship with education as something which differentiates himself from the rest of his family, who are all employed in other blue-collar sectors (e.g. the building industry, manufacturing etc). Below, Edward details how his time at university will provide important years in his development as an adult, affording him with an opportunity to prepare as much as he can as a young man with view to what this will provide him with later in life:

Edward: ehm, just to actually achieve being a secondary school teacher would please me. I'd like to get a Masters in something like History and just you know the fact that you have [the degree], for the sake of an extra year or two...you might as well just go and do it for the sake of it cause you're too young in my opinion when you leave secondary school cause I'll be seventeen when I leave secondary school. You know legally I'll only have my Provisional Licence, [I won't be able to] drive yet you know what I mean so eh that's why I think you might as well make the most of your college years, you know even if you spent five years in college you're still only 23 or 22 so you're still young you know what I mean so, that's my take on it anyway (laughs). (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

These Planning orientated young men detail spending time thinking about what is possible for them in the future, whether in terms of career or quality of life, and they understand this to be definitively through achieving educational credentials. I would argue that these findings bring questions regarding the ways in which young men are problematised within the educational system. If young men understand third level education to be a necessity of the life course then is it really the case that they are as

unskilled as Jacob's (2002) research suggests or is it perhaps that young men understand educational qualifications more as proverbial boxes to be ticked instead of seeking out various different intrinsic values of the educational experience? Considering the in-depth responses discussed throughout previous chapters as well as those above, I would be hesitant to suggest that young men relate to the educational system in an exclusively perfunctory manner.

While the in-depth interviews do show heartfelt and meaningful commitments to education, these sentiments are not entirely lost in the free-write activities as has been seen above and which will continue to be explored throughout the rest of this chapter. Further, if this is viewed as a goal, especially in terms of something which they will be able to be "proud" of as one young man asserts above in his free-write, are these young men really as detached from educational trajectories as many researchers argue (Jacob 2002; Corbett 2007a; Burke 1989)? Could it possibly be a case of their relationship with education being one that is more covert and therefore less obviously tangible or identifiable when compared to the ways that young women might conform in the classroom or through particular behaviours? I think this data offers a glimpse at the prioritisation of third level education that young men are indeed engaging in, even if it is only so that one might have a pass to higher status employment. I think that this is a point which deserves further research especially when viewed against the ways that their female classmates understood success and educational achievement to hinge upon their "hard work" and "commitment" as shall now be discussed.

Here come the girls

This theme was understood differently among young women. Overwhelmingly, their discussions in this theme were dominated by ideas of one's "hard work" and being focused on achieving goals as indicative of one's success. Again, of the total responses in this theme, young women did make up the majority overall (54.38%). I think that this is interesting because it seems to be further evidence that at least tangentially supports research surrounding the different ways young men and women attribute their performance to their possessing skills or intelligence in a certain area which helps them to achieve. In most cases, young men are more likely to refer to their academic achievements as being

derivatives of their personal skills or knowledge within a subject, while young women are more likely to attribute their successes to things like “applying” themselves, “studying” and “hard work” (Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht 2003; Steele 1997; Thomas Ewin Smith 1992). This presents an inherently hierarchical ordering and conceptualisation of achievement and or skills/knowledge along gendered lines because males appear to understand this as something which they simply have ability to do while females understand themselves to be required to “work hard” for this (Bornholt and Möller 2003; Marsh 1984).

What is more, the discourse of “hard work” which has traditionally been associated with “working-class” sociocultural milieus and psychic landscapes (Lehmann 2009; Reay 2005; Sayer 2005) as we have discussed in earlier chapters, appears to be present here. Below I have selected a few excerpts, both from the females who dominated this line of discussion as well as some from the young men who described success this way as well. These free-writes illustrate the ways in which “hard work” and “goal achievement” are understood to be prerequisites of being a successful person. I would like to also highlight the ways that these young people understand that having goals is an important part of one’s life in general.

This is interesting as this theme too shows signs of at least some elements of credentialist discourse in the references to particular forms of goals like educational qualifications or careers. However, I think that one of the more thought-provoking elements to be found among these texts is in the ways that commitment to a purpose is the ultimate metanarrative that runs throughout, not *acquiring* things through reaching one’s goals. Further, it was frequently the case that these young people did not understand goal achievement along credentialist lines, as will be illustrated below. Rather, this was often explicitly related to personal endeavours and indeed, sometimes even to relationships. It was the intrinsic merit of “working hard” or “earning” something one aspired for where the true value of one’s goal work was found. I think that this is particularly interesting because there appears to be a suggestion that this kind of orientation is somehow of deeper intrinsic value:

For me being successful would mean earning something which would make me feel successful myself. (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

To follow your dreams out to the end. (and accomplish them). (17 year old, year not included, blue-collar Vermont male)

...being successful means to me to be able to set goals and targets and even when people say there [sic] impossible I'll still work hard to achieve them to the best of my ability. You have to know what you want, and be able to work for it. To be successful a person needs determination and good motivation skills This is because when we are working to succeed we are also working to compete against those who are the best, succeeding is being the best, not just doing your best. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

I think to be successful is to earn something you worked for. You could be successful in sport or Business [sic]. To be successful you have to work very hard and in some cases do well in school... (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

Being successful to me is when you have worked very very [sic] hard for what you want putting most of your time and effort into something that you wanted. Eventually after all your hard work, time and effort what you were [sic] working for turns out and works really well for you and starts giving you a lot more back than what you ever thought and makes you happy in what ever has made you successful...(17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

Successful means that you achieve what you want. Success has nothing to do with money, cars or friends. Success to me will be when I get my dream job as a business owner/dog trainer...Happiness is the only success, and everyone has their own way of being happy. (16 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female)

In attending to the way that the discourse around educational credentials was something more often discussed by males while goal achievement with respect to this coupled with “hard work” was a female trend, I think that some marked differences can be seen in the ways that young men and young women describe what they understand as being successful. However, I think that across both these female and male ways of understanding success, the implicit and overt idea that one’s “success” is essentially an individualised project is much like what Harris (2004) argues regarding the dominant cultural framework of today. This appears to be especially the case among the free-write responses written by young women. This is an important point because it highlights the individualist normative discourse that contemporary young people are arguably situated within. But further, I think

that it serves to note this here because it affords a background within which to see why the self-projects and future life trajectory work that the high-achieving respondents in this research are engaging in deserves systematic and focused attention.

I think this helps to highlight how these young women are particularly interesting, because they are unlikely achievers. They are rural, mostly blue-collar young women with little or no family history of third level education and who are faced with serious social and structural constraints, some which are empirically evident as in the male dominance of blue-collar labour markets prevalent in their home areas and some which I would argue are perceived, such as the degree to which white-collar employment is invisible to them through their social distance from it. Despite these elements, they are the young people who are doing exceptionally well within their educational arenas.

Further, the discourse of “hard work” and “earning” one’s goals is quite similar to that of the in-depth interviews as has been explored in detail earlier. However, it is the different ways in which these young people understand how to go about this that I think is important. The free-write activities seem to be firmly situated within a discourse of self-reliance and individualised understandings of success and failure which Harris (2004) argues is the bedrock of mainstream contemporary understandings of life chances in Beck’s (1992) risk society. However, the in-depth interviews show that among Planning orientated young women, there is an acute understanding of the social and structural constraints they face in working to become the possible selves they aspire towards. Crucially, support structures such as family positivity and strong relationships with teachers and the mobilisation of particular resources like the blue-collar social narrative of diligence and hard work generate powerful motivation among these young women to problem solve and to be uncommonly resilient. They strategically negotiate recognised challenges such as little or no family history of third level education, limited access to cultural and financial resources and the constrained ability to explore the third level world they intend to enter through dynamic and diverse means including using the internet, engaging in particularly concerted study practices and spending extra time studying or working with teachers on their educationally-related endeavours as has been illustrated in earlier chapters.

Hard work is understood among the free-write activities as something which comes only from one’s individual self and personal motivation whereas can be readily see

throughout Planning orientated young women's interviews that the formulation of particular goals and selves is consciously understood to be derived from and reflexively worked upon through their references to their relationships with others, including teachers and parents as has also been seen in the two previous chapters. The crucial element here, I would argue is that Planning orientated young women fundamentally differ from their classmates in their levels of critical social awareness. They are conscious of different realms of capital and psychic landscapes of social class. This is why their relationships with teachers are both poignant and pivotal, because they simultaneously influence their concepts of self, possible future self and indeed the concrete behaviours these young people engage in so as to become the people they understand it to be possible for them to grow into. Planning orientated young women engage in reflexive self work through the ideas of "hard work", "diligence" and "commitment" which they derive from their social milieus and they consciously capitalise upon this in an effort to enable them to traverse new psychic landscapes of social class influenced by their relationships with those who already possess these psychic geographies.

I think the dominance of this theme might at least in some ways be related to the adolescents and their families being subject to economic tides in a vulnerable way if they were dependent upon blue-collar labour. This is likely given the sampling method as detailed in Chapter Five, especially if these students' families were in any way connected to the building industry as it was experiencing serious problems during the time of research (Mahon 2007; Irish Examiner 2009; Martin 2007). Further, I think that this could possibly hint at the general tenor in rural areas with respect to the way that blue-collar work has experienced decline in a more general way. This is not just the case for Vermont and Ireland but a trend which has been noted in many rural areas throughout the globe (Corbett 2007a; Gabriel 2002; Whitener and McGranahan 2003).

While I have shown that Vermont and Ireland's economic markets have recently been dominated by blue-collar labour in general ways through dependencies on the building industry, some elements of manufacturing and the service industries surrounding tourism in earlier chapters, I have also shown that both Vermont and Ireland have increased their broadband services exponentially and also harbour not insignificant proportions of white-collar labour both in the Mid-East Region and in Vermont as a whole. Further, I have also

shown how the majority of those in employment in what I have categorised as white-collar labour are women.

Changes in Vermont included manufacturing employment falling “from 18.4 percent to 12 percent of the jobs in the state between 1988 and 2006, representing the loss of 10,000 jobs” (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:72). During this same time, jobs in health care “rose from 8.9 percent to 14.1 percent of the total, and employment at Fletcher Allen Health Care, the second largest private employer in Vermont, grew by 47 percent over the twelve-year period to 5,384 employees in 2008” (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:72). What is more, employment with Vermont’s government made up “the largest employment sector...and it grew continuously during this period” as well (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:72). However, this growth was tempered by the fact that:

Many of the other employment growth sectors in the state’s economy over the past 20 years are in occupations and industries that pay lower than average state wages. This is often cited as a significant cause of the affordability gap confronting working Vermonters and their families today. (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:72)

Similar trends are noted in Ireland, but because categories changed in the census after 2002, I will make these comparisons from the years 2002 to 2006 for the Mid-East Region in Ireland. During this period, persons aged 15 years and over in employment in health and social work went from 7.6% to 8.63% (Central Statistics Office 2003c, 2007g), in line with the national increase from 9.57% to 10.45% (Central Statistics Office 2009b:30). Those working in manufacturing fell from 15.49% in 2002 to 13.04% in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2003c, 2007g), also in line with the national decline from 15.88% in 2004 to 13.59% in 2008 (Central Statistics Office 2009b:30). Simultaneously Ireland has also seen an increase in the disparity between the rich and poor as well as rates of social exclusion that have climbed throughout the “Celtic Tiger” years (Jacobson, Kirby, and O Broin 2006). While this is a shorter interval of time over which to measure these statistics, these are nonetheless increases to attend to.

As such changes have taken place, it logically follows that those industries which have experienced decline or vulnerability would become less attractive, while those which

have gained ground would appear more so. I would argue the exception to this thinking might be found in the case of the agricultural sector with the strong cultural narrative it carries with it that encompasses powerful social and psychic elements about belonging, rootedness and place-based identity as has been discussed in Chapter Seven. I will expand upon this idea later in this chapter as well but in recognising the wider social and economic shifts that these two areas have experienced as they have opened up to greater participation in the global economy (The Council on the Future of Vermont 2009:71-79; Jacobson et al. 2006:23-44), I think this raises the distinct possibility that these young people are understanding their relationship with education in this way due to forces which are both related to their home communities as well as which extend far wider than their boundaries.

Again, the free-write activities were brief and so this may be a contributing factor in the depth to which these young people were able to explore their thoughts and feelings about the matters they raised in their writing. These elements could be explored further through more qualitative research focused on the express comparison between high-achievers and those with more average performance. However for the purposes that these texts serve in this research, I think that they do give good insight into the general ideas regarding success in these schools and that they work well as a means with which to both situate within and compare the in-depth interview data to in search of similarities and differences. The following section discusses those texts which made specific reference to particular types of goals or careers as being successful if one achieves them.

2.) References to specific concrete goals and conditions

This is the smallest theme (10.86% of all free-write texts) and somewhat the “odd man out”. This is because the texts that make up this theme are so specific in their references to particular types of personal goals and careers that the respondents understand themselves as potentially being successful through. Thus, there is relatively little that can be generalised about this group along gender or locational lines. However, the very ways in which these students are so particular is something of interest in itself. While there was not any remarkable gender or locational difference in this theme, however, there were some interesting differences or sub-themes which I would like to explore. Many of these texts

made specific reference to school work, organisational behaviours or passing classes. This was grouped differently from those texts discussed above because of the level of specificity with which these respondents wrote about school. I think that this is a good example of how school dominates young people's lives in very quantifiable ways:

I also think to be successful is to do your work and do as well as you can so you can pass all of your classes. (14 year old, ninth grader, blue-collar Vermont female)

I would like to be successful in my leaving cert. I would like to get the amount of points that I need for my course in collage [sic]. I would like to go to collage [sic] in (names university in Leinster) to study business. I would like to do this as soon as I finish school. (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

In school I try to get a good grade as I can cause it means I know a lot [sic] on that topic and that I'm able to say that I know that topic pretty well and can move on. It also means that I can be successful in my exams... (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

Successful is when you ask about a homework assinment [sic] and they said that you could have extra time to hand it in! OR [sic] you can [sic] you can ask to do some thing and they all Ready [sic] had something pland [sic] and they let you go the place you want. (16 year old, year not included, blue-collar Vermont female)

I think that being successful is getting your homework done on time and don't procrastinate. Also being successful is to be on time and do a good job. (17 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont male)

These young people understood themselves to be successful in so much as they were able to enact particular behaviours or achieve certain outcomes with relation the school environment. This shows the degree to which school and certain educational requirements like doing homework, passing classes and being on time, stand foremost in these young people's minds as key elements of a positive or "successful" self. I find this interesting that it was more females (3) than males (2) who answered in this way and could perhaps link this, at least tenuously to Jacob's (2002) argument about non-cognitive skills as being an area where young women perform better than young men. Perhaps it is the case that because they are more conscious of these behaviours being indicative of "successful"

selves, these young women are then better able to perform within the academic environment as Jacob (2002) argues. However, this data does not indicate these students' academic performance and is also far too small to try to assert this with any kind of real strength. Nonetheless I find this an interesting element of the findings as it seems to at least obliquely support some of Jacob's (2002) gendered non-cognitive skills argument. It is also interesting because it echoes what has been seen among Planning orientated females in Chapters Six and Eight in terms of specific references to identifiable educational strategies, thinking, practices and behaviours which they use to achieve highly and through which they understand themselves as working towards being both "successful" and becoming certain types of possible selves.

Further, set against the ways in which Planning orientated young women understood it to be imperative to meet educational requirements, it also helps to illustrate the idea that normative femininity might be becoming increasingly bound up in performing well within the academic environment. Considering the degree to which the Planning orientated young women in this research have been devoted to their studies, thinking strategically about them with specific view to engaging in knowledge-based work later in life, I think it is entirely plausible that the kind of femininity that these young women are working to embody is definitively not traditional. As has been noted in an earlier chapter, these young women are adamant that they do not want to be a "house wife", that they have intentions of delaying motherhood and that they want particular forms of high status credentials so that they can follow on to particular forms of high status work which are specifically associated with areas "elsewhere" which are more "open" or cosmopolitan and arguably progressive in the way that gender is ordered and enacted.

The two excerpts below from in-depth interviews are particularly illustrative of the lengths to which these Planning orientated young women are going in order to prepare themselves for a very specific kind of future:

Catherine: And my homework, I always do my homework, most of the time, only Irish I have a problem with (laughs). Yeah, I do, I make sure I do, sixth year I've become a bit better, I do after school study which is two hours where I get my homework done, so if I can finish that then at home...I was listening to the French CDs just to get it drummed into my head how to pronounce stuff. And I studied for my tests over the last few weeks and I've seen an

improvement in my marks so that's good. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Izzie: I think I am, I don't procrastinate, I get really worried and nervous and I feel like I'm going to miss a deadline so I do all my work as soon as I get it. I've learned to go to teachers to ask for help if I need something and my parents help me with stuff. But, I think that I am preparing myself well by paying attention in class, not falling asleep or whatever, and taking good notes and learning to like use the resources that the teachers give you because usually if they give you something then you're supposed to know it so... (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

I will return to this discussion with more evidence to support it later, but to return to the sub-themes that I found among this group of texts, I would like to turn to the specific references to being successful as contingent upon performing well in a particular activity that one engages in. In this case, the activities were most often sports. The three texts that discuss this are noted below:

I would like to achieve my black belt in Tae Kwon do when I am about 18 years old and continue to train and teach the sport. (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

What it means to be successful to me is to try and do my best and be as successful as I can in every sport that I play. I would like to keep my place on the (names county) Minor Hurling²⁴ team for next year and do as well as we can in the Leinster and the All-Ireland. When I am past minor try get [sic] my place on the County Under 21 team and then hopefully the senior team. With my Club I think it would be a success if we won the Minor "A" Championship and if we get up to Senior Hurling [sic] and win the senior championship over the next few years. I think that would be a success. (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

It [success] means a lot [sic] as I like to play sports and want to win. I have reached a lot [sic] of finals over the years and have been very unsuccessful so each year I try even harder to win. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

²⁴ "Hurling" is a Gaelic Game in Ireland. It is a national sport that is imbued with a particular cultural narrative of "Irishness" through its being unique to Ireland. It is a very fast-paced and dangerous sport played with a large, flat ended stick called a "Hurley" and a ball called a "sliotar". For more information, see www.gaa.ie

While these were not the only texts which made a reference to success having at least a little to do with sporting prowess, these were the ones that identified this as something which would be a primary indicator of one's success. Interestingly, these were mostly young men and all texts came from Leinster students. This may be a result of the way that sport plays a considerable role in local activities in Ireland and also might be an indicator of how O'Connor (2007, 2008a) argues that young Irish men's identities are often wrapped up in sport as both a means of deriving and expressing their masculinity.

This is interesting in that students in in-depth interviews often noted their participation in sports whereas only a small number of free-write activities focus on this. Further, it was often blue-collar Vermont females and males from both locations who discussed their athletic activities as important elements in their concepts of self and indeed which they derived meaning from and drew upon as means with which to draw upon and actualise particular types of positive selves. Often, athleticism was understood as not just an indicator of one's ability to commit to a course of action but also as indicative of one's ability to succeed in an endeavour and also as a testament to the quality of one's character. I think that Izzie, Molly and Potter's feelings below are good overall representations of how many Planning orientated young women expressed similar sentiments:

Izzie: I think that now the important thing for me is to keep swimming, not to stop swimming, swimming is where I think best, it's like running, you like think best then, it's not boring to me because I'm thinking constantly about what I'm doing. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont – Planning orientation)

Molly: If you study something so hard and you want to succeed in it and you did succeed in it then there's your success, if you do it the way you planned, the way it came out in the right end of it, like if I wanted to find out if I could go on with my singing and I found out and I'm singing, then there I am, I think that I'm successful or if I went out to play a match and I said "oh today I'll just lay back and see what happens" that's not successful, but if I went out and I said "I'm going to score three goals and two points today" and you do it then there's your success. So it depends, if you put your mind to it and you succeed then that's success. If you do what you put your mind to then that its, but if you give up halfway then that's not success, if you say you want to do something and then you say "oh it's too hard I had to give up" then that means that you only got halfway, that means that it was a waste of time...well not a waste of time but that it's not worth your while if you're just going to do that, if you really wanted

something so bad then you'd go and do it, you'd put your 100% mind into it, you'd let everything else go, you'd do it properly, you'd get it, that's successful. (16 year old, transition year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Potter: I play three sports, I play soccer, basketball and softball (smiles proudly)... I'm very athletic (laughs) and I also ski in the winter and um I really like to swim on my own time... I'm very athletic (laughs) and I also ski in the winter and um I really like to swim on my own time... And I guess I would really want them to know that I'm tough, I come from a very athletic background so I have a very high pain tolerance [with reference to her being able to take on challenges]. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

This kind of assertion of being formidably resilient is clear in Potter's self-assessment that she is "tough" from her athleticism and therefore she is "emotionally able to take on anything" which is also discussed in an earlier chapter with reference to her understanding her identity as intimately related to ideas about work ethic and relationships to "hard work" and commitment. I think it serves the discussion well to highlight this here in terms of how she understands this quality of her character as something she has developed through her athletic activities. Molly's extended excerpt shows us that she understands success to be the degree to which she sets out to do things and actually is able to do them in the way that she envisions. She relates this to her singing as well as to her performance on the football pitch, something which she is very proud of and discusses as making her a credit to her family. Izzie details her swimming as a means for her to "clear her mind" and "focus" herself on her academic work. She talks about swimming as an "outlet" for her to prepare herself for concerted work as well as a means with which to "de-stress" if she feels under pressure. These ways of thinking about athletics in one's life and as an influence on one's character and general behaviour were common amongst many of the Planning orientated young women's discussions.

In the case of the high-achieving young men, their references usually included associations between their sporting activities and their competitiveness or their "drive" to win or to "be the best". This is again similar to what was discussed in Chapter Six with respect to how these young men understood themselves to work hard. This was often bound up in their understandings of themselves as athletes and or active young people and

there were several mentions of viewing their participation in sports or physical activities as a means with which to organise their time, to make themselves better at time management and that this was something that helped them with school. Two which capture this general sentiment are detailed below:

Edward: When I come home from school I generally just, I get a cuppa' tea and just relax for an hour or so, get the dinner then at around a quarter past five or half five and then I do me homework then after dinner, maybe around six o'clock I'd go up and do me homework. It could take an hour and a half and then after that, generally after that I have somewhere to go whether it's to drama or to dancing or something like that but generally I'd always have me homework done before I had to go and if I didn't have it done you know I might go late or I'd just leave a little bit depending on what subjects I had tomorrow I could leave, say I didn't have English then I could leave the English 'til the following night you know that sort of way, I'd get what I need to do done. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

Harrison: I really care about school. I sort of have this, I have to do the best at everything or just, I don't know, it's this mental thing where I can't be satisfied unless I'm doing the best which is hard sometimes but it's also rewarding so...(16 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

There were also several references to specific careers within this theme. Of the three main sub-themes, this is the one which encompassed the most responses, making up 46.66% of the total responses in this theme. These included a wide range of professions that the participants aspired towards; however it was not the professions themselves which were of interest but rather the extent to which these young people had planned out how they might achieve these goals. However, whether these young people actually maintained these courses or not is questionable as it is beyond the scope of this research. However, the ways these respondents had specific ideas and plans with which they understood to be able to help them reach their career pathways is nonetheless interesting. One young man who wanted to teach History noted that success to him had to do with being “happy with yourself” but he quickly followed this with a referral to what this would be for him:

I hope to complete college and achieve a BA degree in education and history. I hope to achieve a job as a teacher in secondary school. If I achieve this I will be successful in life up to that

point. (17 year old, year not included, blue-collar Leinster male)

The one young woman who also focused on this sub-theme discussed very specific plans to become a *mangaka*, a Japanese *Manga* artist and live her life in Japan. Another young man discussed wanting to return to his hometown after university and become the principal of his school, working to make it a better school than it is now. Another wrote about wanting to be a musician. It is interesting to see the concrete ways that these young people understood their goals to be achievable, most of which would necessitate third level education. I think that this too gives insight into the way that these blue-collar young people understood their future pathways to be situated within what I am broadly referring to as knowledge work in that they logically conceptualised their future selves to be definitively university educated.

Comparing this to the planning strategies that the in-depth respondents discussed I think there is a trend of “forward thinking” among most blue-collar students in this study. It is the degree to which these plans are acted upon and reflexively worked at that I would argue makes the most difference between the high achievers and their other classmates. It think it serves to note here that Schneider and Stevenson (1999) assert that while the young people of the US during their time of study could be described as incredibly ambitious, without aligned ambitions, these adolescents were much less likely to actually achieve what they aspired towards.

The ways in which the Planning orientated high achievers operationalised their preparation towards future life goals by drawing upon their social relationships while supporting their self concepts through their sociocultural situatedness *as blue-collar people* is a key element in why I think these young women are particularly interesting. While I would agree with much of Schneider and Stevenson’s (1999) argument regarding the aligned ambitions thesis, I think that my research shows that there is more at work within the social surroundings of these young people and in the ways that they negotiate their social worlds than Schneider and Stevenson (1999) take into account. I would describe this as an acute social and structural awareness that is coupled with a nuanced and highly active propensity for self-reflexivity. This is different because of the ways that these young women critically recognize the constraints that they face and then go about problem solving and mobilizing resources so as to try to get around them. I will continue to flesh this idea

out throughout the following sections.

3.) *References to material wealth and financial wellbeing*

Specific references to material wealth and financial fitness were expressed in 19.56% of the free-write activities as a direct indication of one's success. This might be said to be at least somewhat indicative of the internalisation of the mainstream capitalistic ideas surrounding consumption which Bauman (2007) warns of. However while I would not completely negate this, I would suggest a closer look at how these young people understand material elements to work within their lives to enable *certain types of relationships*. This includes relationships with one's own mental or emotional wellbeing, with others and with the wider economy. Interestingly, just 44.44% of these responses were written by young women while 55.55% were by young men. Overall, those who understood success most definitively as via material stability asserted that financial fitness was something which would eliminate "stress" or "worries" and enable one to live a "happy life" or have "enough" or "what I want". This was apparent in the cases of both young men and young women.

The following excerpts express specifically that "success" is related to "supporting" a "happy family". I think that far from being "pie-in-the-sky" assertions about not needing financial capital in order to facilitate what they understand as a "good" life, these young people are starkly practical. They overtly convey their understanding of needing financial stability in order to live the kinds of lives that they want. I would argue that this may be due to the fact that free-writes were all derived from blue-collar area schools and so these students might very likely have experienced financial instability and vulnerability in their lives and they have reflected upon this with regard to the adulthoods they would like for themselves:

To be successful is to be happy with whatever you choose to be in life, it is when you have the money to support and keep your family happy. They say money can't buy happiness and this is true but the money you earn helps put smiles on people's faces, problem is the smile over money only comes to those with money, leaving those without money a frown and a horrible thought of falling behind on bills. My meaning of success is not being rich and having a big

house, nice cars, a yacht...no the meaning to me is having a job that pays enough to feed hungry mouths, pay bills, shelter heads and just that bit more to give the kids something to be happy about eg playstation [sic]. That spells out successful to me!!! [sic] (17 year old, no year included, blue-collar Leinster male)

To me being successful means to have a house, a car, a good job and plenty of money. To be successful in my future I am going to go to college to be a psychologist and once I get a job after I graduate from college I hope to be very successful. I want to own my own home, have at least one car and be able to buy what I want to buy. Being successful is one thing that everyone should try to do...(14 year old, year not included, blue-collar Vermont female)

I guess for me, being succesful [sic] means owning your own house and car. They don't be the nices [sic] things, but there [sic] still yours. I think being succesful [sic] also means being able to afford feeding yourself, and being able to pay your bills on time. (15 year old, ninth grader, blue-collar Vermont female)

To be "successful" to me would be having a good job, with an income that can allow me to live a good life. Being able to buy a nice house and car, and have the money to pay whatever bills I need to pay. (18 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

Being successful is achieving what you want out of life. It is being able to have a job in the future. Being successful can involve earning a lot of money but it can mean getting satisfaction out of your job. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

It means that you have a good job, maybe your own boss and when you have a wife and kid that is when you are successful most. (17 "nearly 18" year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

Clearly these young people understand material wealth as a means with which they will be able to live "better" or as they "want". This seems to be somewhat less about the ability to consume but rather about the ability to care for oneself and for others in positive ways. I think that the first text noted above, written by a 17 year old male from Leinster is quite representative of these feelings and orientations. For these adolescents, material wellbeing is clearly connected to the condition of one's ability to care for others and the degree to which one understands oneself to be healthily and happily engaged in meaningful work and relationships. In terms of similarities between free-write texts and what was expressed in the in-depth interviews, overall however, the high-achieving female

participants eschewed the notion that monetary wealth was an indicator of one's success. Despite this, references to material *stability* were often threaded through both Planning and Dreaming orientated females' responses and indeed through those of their young male counterparts.

Something interesting about this was that Dreaming orientated respondents in general tended to note the need for financial capital in a matter-of-fact fashion, as an assumed condition that later in life they would do a job to support themselves in a lifestyle where they could "be happy" and "not worry all the time", somewhat similar to the free-write responses. Students with Dreaming orientations responded differently from the free-writes however in that they did not discuss the implicit condition of this material wellbeing as an enabling factor for positive relationships with others. Rather it was a somewhat more individualised aspect of one's ability to live the life one "wanted to" or which one would "enjoy". For Dreaming orientated respondents, the connection between material circumstances and one's own positive feelings about one's life appear to be present along with a subtext of financial capital conceptualised as being able to facilitate choice:

Sephra: I want to live comfortably so I don't want to be impoverished or anything and I need to be happy doing what I'm doing with people I love where I love, in a good location, I need to have overcome challenges also, that's really the most important part for me. Just knowing that I could do something. (16 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Jenny: well I suppose like, sure if I had a job like cause I had a job, if I had money I'd feel successful cause I had money (laughs) but...I suppose the same if you had a family you'd feel successful cause you had a family type of thing but (pause) I suppose it's probably a job, cause like you need it, income, you need money to do anything in life, so I suppose it's probably a job you need. (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Dreaming orientation *white-collar family background)

Susan: so for me I think that would be success because I would be happy in that situation and although I'm sure that it will become something that I need to be aware of with finances and that sort of thing, that's how you stay in a place where you're comfortable and not constantly worrying about that sort of thing. So while I know that that is not at all the basis of success is I think it's easier to have a job where you can support a family and that sort of thing so it definitely doesn't have anything to do with money, but when you have a job that you're happy

with, and that's really important to me because my dad really hates his job and I can see what that can lead to, I think that it's good to have something that you're happy and comfortable with. (16 year old, eleventh grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Peter: you know success usually has something to do with money and I try not to think of that as the most important thing but definitely, without deluding myself, is something that you need for a lot of different reasons. (15 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Dreaming orientation)

For those with Planning orientations, however issues of monetary nature were usually related to feelings of needing to be “independent” and not “to need anyone” to support them. Planning orientated respondents seemed to understand financial stability as a fundamental element of maintaining an autonomous and empowered personhood, in particular as a *working* adult. This was especially the case for the young women. Interestingly though, the young men’s relationships with material matters often coupled these sentiments with the expression of desiring to be able to “support a family” and to “raise children” in a somewhat more care-focused form of a male breadwinner role. I would argue that this is similar to what Jenny and Susan, two Dreaming orientated young women, note above, that with financial stability one can support one’s family. Thus, while Dreaming orientated young women didn’t appear to understand financial stability as a means with which to remain separate from others or as part of being unfettered from family, they understood it as a means with which they could care for their families *themselves*, specifically with no mention of a male partner.

This stands at a slightly different angle to how Planning orientated young women understood being financially sound because those who were Planning orientated interpreted it as a direct requirement of becoming an “independent woman” specifically without (or before) a family. The way that financial stability functions here differently across genders and orientations is thought-provoking, especially in terms of how the in-depth male respondents and Dreaming orientated young women discussed similar sentiments regarding caring for others through one’s career or material wealth. The Planning orientated young women however, understood financial wellbeing as a direct means for autonomy whereas among the Dreaming orientated this seemed to function more as a facilitator of agency (if somewhat indirectly).

Put more simply, while the young men and Dreaming orientated young women understood financial fitness as a means with which they could go about caring better for their families, the Planning orientated young women viewed this as a means of remaining independent from others. The young men and Dreaming orientated young women made specific references to “looking after”, “supporting” and “taking care of” the families they envisioned themselves as having in their futures while the Planning orientated young women made reference to this as a means of remaining on “on my own”, “independent”, “not needing anyone” and being “able to look after myself”. I find this point pivotal in the general discussion regarding changing structures of gender in the rural context.

What is more, this is still more evidence of similarities between Vermont and Leinster young people, as it mirrors much of what Arnett (1998) discusses as the various “modifications of the individualistic theme” found among mainstream American adolescents’ ideas about the transition to adulthood. Arnett (1998) argues that considerable research in the US has yielded evidence which indicates that:

Egocentrism and selfishness are character qualities [young people] see as part of adolescence, and becoming an adult means overcoming these tendencies and learning to take other people’s interests and needs into account. Modifications of the individualistic theme fell into three general areas: Consideration for others, avoiding reckless behavior, and becoming a parent. (p. 309)

Thus I would argue that many of the young male respondents and the Dreaming orientated females in my study are effectively epitomising Arnett’s (1998) non-ego-centric individualism as a harbinger of adulthood because they articulate the elements of a successful adult life as being fundamentally wrapped up in caring and providing for others. This effectively shows that across locations, despite the transition to adulthood being undeniably understood as an individualistic process, it is “not necessarily a selfish individualism. On the contrary, their individualism is often tempered in a number of ways that reflect sensitivity to and concern for the rights and needs of others. They are not egoists, but social individuals (Jensen, 1998)” (Arnett 1998:310).

In this it is clear again how similar these young people were across international lines. However, Arnett (1998) argues that gender had little “relevance to the transition to

adulthood” due to the ways that “learning to provide for and protect a family, care for children, and run a household were all viewed as quite important criteria in the transition to adulthood, but for males and females equally, not as gender-linked criteria” (p. 310). This was not exactly the case among my respondents. There were clear gender divides between the ways that the young male participants thought about family and their role as carers and how the Planning orientated females understood family as a direct means of curtailing their planned for adult lives. Interestingly, those young females with Dreaming orientations understood family formation as much less of a dichotomy between their actualisation of their future selves and the constraining of these selves through the demands of family life. Indeed, they discussed supporting their families themselves as Jenny and Susan detailed above.

Thus, the nature of power and self-actualisation is again brought to the fore here. If Planning orientated young women understood family formation as a direct form of inhibiting their plans for upper level education and eventual knowledge work, whereas those with Dreaming orientations did not, the question of how these young women are indeed making sense of who they are, what options are available to them under which conditions and how they will go about making use of them is reasserted. I would argue again, that this is a question that is answered through the ways in which these young women strategise, are socially critically aware and go about mobilising particular sets of resources to both avoid and to engage in particular behaviours and forms of selfhood (e.g. the self who fails her classes versus the self who gets top marks or the self who becomes pregnant and doesn’t finish school versus the self who delays family formation until after university study and career establishment).

What is more, I would set this argument not just within the discourse of the in-depth interviews but also with reference to the specific understanding of material stability as a direct means for one to care and have positive relationships with others as was expressed by the male respondents in the free-writes discussed above. I would also like to suggest it is possible that these sentiments might be influenced by these adolescents’ experience as blue-collar young people who may have seen their parents’ and families negotiate the unstable economic world. While recent history has seen significant growth in blue-collar sectors associated with the property booms that occurred in both locations, at the time of

data collection in 2008-2009, the property bubbles in both areas had been thoroughly burst, plunging all those with jobs related to this sector into significant financial uncertainty. Thus, it is possible that seeing these economic pressure so “close-to-home”, these young people had a different relationship with financial issues than might young people with white-collar backgrounds.

Further, I think that the free-write activities hint at ways that the young men in this research may be reordering their understanding of future goals for adult life in terms of their role *as men*. There has been research into the ways that traditional, patriarchal gender roles in rural settings, especially agrarian ones, have been challenged in recent years due to the ways in which they are proving simply unsustainable in contemporary societies and economies (Ní Laoire 2001; Price and Evans 2009). I think that the continued presence of farming in both the wider social as well as the personal backgrounds of the male Leinster participants might therefore situate their texts within the discourse of challenging traditional rural maleness and the perceived roles of rural men. This is ultimately too small a dataset geared too much towards exploring other issues to definitively suggest that these findings are indeed indicative of gender change in rural areas in this way. However, I think that it is at least possible that these responses might be related to the influences of changing economic conditions in rural areas and how this has played out within agriculturally influenced social settings with regard to gender (Ní Laoire 2001; Price and Evans 2009).

4.) References to having a “fulfilling life”, “being good at what you do” and having positive social relationships

The other strong theme that became apparent in the free-write texts was that success was contingent upon one leading a life which one felt was “good” or wherein one was “good at what you do” and had positive social relationships. This theme made up 28.26% of all the free-write texts. While there were some interesting articulations about the relativity of “success” and some varied examples, throughout it is easy to see that the young people who focused on this theme as an indicator of success shared a metanarrative which hinged on being a “good person” and this often entailed being emotionally healthy and in happy relationships. There was an implicit element of morality within these texts.

Males made up the majority of this response with 79.48% (31 responses out of 39 total responses) of the texts in this theme. This was clearly a common way of understanding oneself to be a successful person among the young men in this part of the research. I think that this offers further evidence to bolster what I have suggested in the previous section. The young rural men in this study are offering some challenges to both traditional conceptions of normative masculine life courses and roles as well as to credentialist and individualist ideologies through the primacy to which they are giving caring for others and having positive social relationships in their schema of what it means to be “successful”.

For both young men and young women, “success” was understood as being “a good person” or “having a good life” in these texts. This is somewhat ambiguous and was usually couched within other references to material wealth or finding a career which would make one “happy”. Most often there were references to material wealth coupled with a subsequent contradiction that despite having just noted that material wealth meant one was successful, what “actually, really mattered” was that one had positive relationships with others:

To be successful to me means having a happy fulfilling life with no undue stress or worries. To be financially secure and to hopefully have a happy family. Ideally [sic] I’d love to have a job where I help people either personally or professionally. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

I think that being successful is when someone fulfils their life long dream...Success means many different things to every other person...(14 year old, year not included, blue-collar Vermont female)

After school I will try to be successful by getting a good job that I enjoy and just live a good life. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont male)

Having loads of money, living in a nice house, to maintain friendship, to get a good education, to get married, have children. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female)

Again, I offer this with the acknowledgement that it could be the case that these texts focus on this topic so singularly due to the short time-span afforded for completing the

free-write activity. Students were only asked to write for ten to fifteen minutes. It is perhaps the case that these young men simply ran out of time to discuss anything else in their writing. However, I would like to think that something more is at play here due to the depth and clarity of these texts. I would not say that these are cursorily written but rather that they show conscious thought and are oftentimes touchingly sincere.

All respondents detailed different ways that one could “have a good life” or “be happy in what I’m doing”. The overall message in these texts was that it was important to be an emotionally and mentally healthy person and that one have positive relationships with others. This was an almost entirely relationally-oriented discourse:

To be success means to enjoy what I’m at in life wheather [sic] it’s work, school or family life. Being successful means doing the best that I can at any job/task I do and feeling good about it. (17 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

Successful = person that is where they want to be at that time. In there [sic] career. (14 year old, year not included, blue-collar Vermont male)

It’s [being successful] when everything you do is good, maybe not great because it’s not real that everything is great at the same time. When you’re successful in your carrer [sic] family, hobbies, when you express yourself as an individual, when you’re healthy and have the job what you like, when they’re people that you love and that love you. I think then you’re successful. If you enjoy the process of what you love to do then the result should get success. “No matter what we do and where we are we should always succed [sic] if we do this with love” if I’ll feel happy in every day’s routine and little things I do, if I’ll enjoy the life that will be a success. (17 year old, year not included, blue-collar Leinster female)

Being successful doesn’t mean being rich or famous. You don’t have to be like Bono or Bob Geldof. You don’t have to be a millionaire or invent something. Being successful means living life to the fullest. If you life your life the way you want then you are successful...It doesn’t matter if you are poor, rich, small or tall anyone can be successful. Success is a way of thinking not being. If you believe you are successful or will be successful then you will be...to be successful in the future I would hope to be happy, have a good family and not to be burdened with mundane feelings of guilt or sorrow or wonder what would have been. (16 year old, year not included, blue-collar Leinster male)

I think that this last text is particularly insightful in that it encompasses most of the emotions and ideas expressed in this theme: a thirst for experience, contentment, positive relationships with others and a sense of fulfilment that one is not seeking or wishing for something other than what one has. This text essentially asserts that being successful is about being emotionally, mentally and socially healthy. This text carries with it the sentiment that success is when one has *experienced* life and where one is a grateful and mindful person. This kind of nearly moral message was something which I found particularly striking especially when viewed in relation to most of the work on gender which has shown that young women tend to understand their social and personal relationships as having more salience than do young men (Pat O'Connor 2006, 2007). Further, I would suggest that it offers some challenges to the overarching concepts of masculinity we have today coupled with opening up still more questions about the degree to which mainstream messages of credentialism and contemporary capitalism are being internalised by young men.

The following excerpts are included so as to show the numerous young men who also detailed “success” as having a family, being a healthy or happy person, experiencing happy home lives and engaging in work which would be emotionally fulfilling to them. I included several here so as to show not just a good example of the frequency of this discourse among the young men in this study but to also highlight the many and varied ways that young men articulated wanting to have these elements in their lives. The following excerpts detail how having a happy family life was the most important indicator of being a successful person. These young men note that this also means having a healthy relationships with one’s self:

To be successful is a goal to which many people like to be in life. Only a few people achieve this goal but may not be “successful” in their family life. Being “successful” is mainly a business term to describe a successful entrepreneur. Not everybody’s [sic] dream is to work in a firm. Being successful to me means to firstly have a nice family life, achieve your goals in life and to be happy at what you do... (16 year old, year not included, blue-collar Leinster male)

...I want to have a family and most of all be healthy... (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

To be successful means to be happy with yourself. (17 year old, year not included, blue-collar Vermont male)

I hope to be successful in the future in a few ways by having a healthy live [sic]...I would also like to have a healthy live [sic] and have a family...also to live in the country with my family in a big house. (15 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

The following young men discuss something along these lines but slightly different in the focus that they give to friends and work coupled with having a happy family. They too mention the need to have a positive internal relationship with one's self through one's life going "the way I was hoping" and also through working in a meaningful and fulfilling vocation, like teaching:

Successful [sic] to me means my life is at least vaguely going the way I was hoping. If I still have my friends and family then I am successful [sic]. (17 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont male)

I plan to be a teacher of Geography and History...To be a teacher would mean more to me than money, I want to be a teacher. I don't want to be a teacher for money, but because I would get great pay from seeing younger people get on in life because of me...Having a two story [sic] house with a family and pets would be a great success. To let my children enjoy the life I had, growing up with dogs and cats and maybe other animals. These are the thing [sic] that I would consider [sic] a successful life. Not just to make money to make me happy but because they just make me happy. (16 year old, year not included, blue-collar Leinster male)

I think success is having loads of friends and a good family. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male)

These young men do not understand success in primarily monetary terms. They base their evaluation of successfulness in the degree to which they have good relationships with others, that they enjoy their work and that they are mentally healthy, balanced people. I think that these data are augmented when viewed alongside some selections from Planning orientated young men's discussions about how family lives and caring for a family was bound up in what they too understand to be "successful". This was something which was

touched on above and the general sentiment of which I think is captured well here in Jim's and Harrison's thoughts below:

Jim: To me success is like having a secure job, it's only part of it really, like you hear people saying "oh he's really successful in life, he's a millionaire" but is he really successful if he has no family life, to me he's successful if he's got a real, good secure job and that he also has a family to come home to, to not feel alone cause if you have this great job and then you sit in your house alone, I don't think that's successful, that's just having a good job, success to me is having a good job but then coming home and having a good family life, success is having a good future for your kids and with your wife, so that would be success, having the best of both worlds you know, not just success in your career, I think you need both of them, I feel that's very important. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

Harrison: I don't know what I would do without a loving and supportive family... I think that successful would be, I think it would have to be a combination of things, I would have to be in a position at work that I felt that I deserved and earned and... to have a family that I love and to just have a family and a wife and kids and to have a job where I feel safe and I can support that family. And to be satisfied with my job, because I don't want to be making money and have a shitty job. (16 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

Young men dominated this theme as we have seen above and I think that this is interesting in how this kind of a moral need or orientation to a particular kind of living is disclosed. This kind of relationship with success was buttressed by references to emotions or emotional discussions about what one hoped for oneself. I think that this can be linked quite readily to the ways that young people understood success to be related to having positive personal relationships and good emotional health which were the mainstays of the last theme. I think it is also engaging in that it shows clear elements of intense, personal disclosure among the young men and that having a healthy mental, emotional and social life was an ultimate concern. Data like this offers at least a little positive response to Cleary's (2005) call for the opening up of discursive atmospheres for young men in the effort of facilitating more stable, happy and healthy selves.

While clearly it is not possible to generalise from these data, I would still suggest that what can be seen here is a change in the ways in which *these* young people understand the roles of caring in the home and how they relate to this in what they perceive to be their

future lives. I would also suggest that as this was common across two very distinct cultural and geographic locations, that it is something which deserves further attention and exploration as it might possibly hint at what could be wider trends. These rural young men afforded considerable weight to their social relationships. The free-write activities and the in-depth interviews have facilitated a much deeper understanding of the meanings these young men derive from their relationships with others. They have provided a glimpse into how the future selves these young men are building are based around the fundamental understanding that they want to have these kinds of caring and loving relationships in the future.

Discussion and Conclusions

The kinds of sentiments the high achieving young women expressed regarding the way that material stability was understood are similar in a key way across both the Planning and Dreaming orientated. For young women with Planning orientations this was understood as a direct means of maintaining one's autonomy and independence from others. For the Dreaming orientated it stood as a means for "supporting" one's family (without mention of a partner) and so as a facilitator of agency (at least obliquely). Considering this, I would argue that these conceptualisations are possibly an empirical representation of young women internalising what Harris (2004) argues is a primary building block of contemporary ideal femininity. Harris (2004) asserts that today, society peddles the notion that the truly "successful" or "ideal" woman is one who is autonomous, financially empowered, sexually free and uniquely able to capitalise and actualise herself within Beck's "risk society" (pp. 13-36). Further, she argues that this is inherently problematic as we have discussed earlier, because it proffers notions of ideal selfhood and femininity which simultaneously rest upon and bolsters "class and race stratifications that persist despite the discourse of meritocracy" (Harris 2004:10).

While again, I would not completely disagree with what Harris (2004) asserts about this, I would ask whether or not certain aspects of this modern day ideal femininity are inherently negative for young women, especially those from areas and backgrounds where there has been little opportunity for personal development and social mobility through the

cultural and labour market dominance that blue-collar, male-centred labour has historically dominated in their rural areas. Further, I would like to also posit that perhaps with this kind of intensely individualistic and independent ideal female coming to the fore in gender discourse, this might be enabling young men to engage in deeper and more reflexive gender work. I think this is possible as we can see the prevalence of young men understanding monetary earning power as a direct means to go about *caring* for a family later in life. Some might suggest that there is little difference in this sentiment than what might have been expressed decades ago and that it still is firmly entrenched within the notion of being a male “breadwinner”. However, I think that we’re seeing something slightly different here which is fundamentally geared towards a more care-centred and relationally-based form of maleness.

Further, I would suggest not dismissing what Harris (2004) calls the “can-do” girl out of hand but rather to take a deeper look at how notions of personal autonomy, agency and self-efficacy function for certain young women. Below are a selection of excerpts from Planning orientated young women who are detailing intensely confident, self-possessed, independent notions of self:

Sarah: I would like to be able to support myself though and not be dependent on other people, for me I think it'd be better to support yourself. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Lilly: I think that if I could be perfect then I'd probably want to be the strong, independent woman in a crowd and I don't want to have to cling to people to survive. And really [be] the independent one. So I think that by getting a good career it really shows that I want to be independent because there are some women that think they need first of all to get married so they can have a husband to support them, but I don't want to be like that, I want to be the independent one in the crowd. I don't want to have to *need* people. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Anne: I don't want to depend on anybody, like me own car and everything, I just hate the thought of depending on anybody so...I never want to get married or have to depend on anyone else, because I just, I just I don't know, I'm so independent that I wouldn't want to need anyone else. (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

The concerted and reflexive need for independence is quite prevalent throughout Planning orientated females' discussions of who they want to be later in life. While I am not arguing that discourses about wanting a family were absent from female Planning orientated respondents' free-write texts, I am noting that it was predominantly among the young men who made up this group of texts where the positive social and personal relationships took pride of place over other considerations. Young women with Planning orientations did indeed discuss wanting to have families and to have caring and positive relationships with others and that these were elements of a successful life. However, for them, marriage and family came secondary to personal pursuits or after having a career. There was a definite discourse of delayed motherhood, something which they discuss as "wanting later in life" but which is decidedly on the "back burner". I think that this is empirical evidence of the way that Harris (2004) argues young women today understand motherhood to be only *after* "the career" and "independence" of the "can-do girl" (pp. 13-36). What is more, through this increased internalisation of independence from others among my female respondents from both Leinster and Vermont, it is again clear that this is more evidence of Arnett's (1998) mainstream notions of the transition to adulthood as not being exclusive to US adolescents.

Arnett (1998) argues that marriage has decreased in its role as a marker or determiner of adulthood in the US while more "indefinite and ambiguous" markers have increased, these being "principally based on intangible qualities of character" such as "*accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and financial independence [sic]*" (pp. 296, 301). The three main thematic elements that Arnett (1998) reports above "emphasize the capacity of the individual to stand alone as a self-sufficient person, without relying upon anyone else" (p. 302). Crucially, the "accepting responsibility for one's self and making independent decisions are character qualities rather than specific events" (Arnett 1998:302). This evidence suggests that the most important markers of one's transition to adulthood increasingly are not derived from socially recognised indicators like one's marital status, but rather by more individualised conceptualisations which are predicated upon particular conditions of one's *character*.

As my respondents equated much of their understanding of self with being hard working, diligent, or a good student with view to gaining particular forms of employment

as we have seen in earlier chapters, it is clear that Arnett's (1998) individualised character trait-determined transition to adulthood also sequentially plays out in my Planning orientated participants' narratives of work and ideas about the delay of family formation. While this was not expressed in so many words by female free-write respondents, it was usually the case that having a family came after working in a "good job" or developing the career they hoped for. This is much more clearly discussed in the in-depth interviews.

Molly: So I'd rather have my career coming about and then after a few years then I'd like to have kids and a husband and I can't believe I'm saying that! A husband! Kids and a house and a family! but I'd definitely love to have a family and kids and a husband but I want to focus, not that I wouldn't want to, because I do but first of all I'd love to figure out who I am and where I'm going with my music and with my...my...talents that I have... (16 year old, transition year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Lilly: I think that after I've gone through college, I'm pretty sure I'll end up going for my master's degree so pretty much after I've gotten done with that I will most likely be working under someone, like with someone, not the really important person in a job, I'll be in a position like that (lower down) but one of the more important things is that I'd like to have a family some day. I don't really think that getting an engineering job is going to be one of those jobs that's like being an astronaut that it's going to completely mess up your ideas about having a family so that's one of the important things that went into deciding whether I really wanted to be an engineer or an architect. (smiles) (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

Claire: I do want to have a family but I don't want to have a family too early cause I think once you do that you're tied to your family, which you are cause if you decided to have a family then it's your responsibility to look after your family and I do want to have one but I want to go to university and I want to have my career and I want to reach a status kind of and then think about settling down and having a family cause you have loads of time and with college, and university and working that's when you enjoy yourself but once you have a family, everything you do is for your family, the work you do is for money for your family, when you go out you have to get a babysitter for your family, so I want to work and get a career as long as I can and then maybe in my 30s start thinking about having a family. (17 year old fifth year, blue-collar Leinster female – Planning orientation)

Rose: well I know that I'm going to go to college and probably for a long time but it depends if

plans change then I don't know I might only be in college for like five years I'm not sure. And I know that I want to travel around a lot but I know that conflicts with like I definitely want to have a family some time but then again when I think about that, I probably won't be able to choose when that happens necessarily, and if I had a kid when I wasn't ready for a kid then that would affect my plans a lot because I probably wouldn't be able to travel as much so I'm just, I'm just focusing on that I probably want to go ahead and get college done and not have a family yet and just like work for a while. Yeah it's kind of conflict for me because I'm not really sure which is more important and if I'd be able to have a family and do the travelling job and reintroducing animals. (16 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Planning orientation)

While young women with Planning orientations discuss the delay of family formation in an express effort of cultivating themselves through travel and their planned-for careers, Dreaming orientated young women talk about this somewhat differently. Dreaming orientated respondents articulate themselves with less emphasis on self-preservation or self-development than do the Planning orientated young women regarding this. In fact, most Dreaming orientated young women discussed having families later in life as a direct trajectory for them and as a means for which they would deliberately return to their home communities, this was especially the case for Dreaming orientated young women from Vermont:

Sephra: yeah, definitely, I think I want to have kids, then I'll probably come back here, but I haven't gone anywhere, well I've been to France and the Caribbean, so I want to go see what's out here. I'd raise a family here. It's really a good place to grow up. (16 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation)

Lyra: um I think that if I came back it would be to have a family because I feel like Vermont is incredibly safe, I've always felt very, very safe growing up here...but um, I think if I was feeling like I had a job that I could transfer to Vermont really easily and want to have kids then I might move back to Vermont. (16 year old, eleventh grader, blue-collar Vermont female – Dreaming orientation* white-collar family background)

These Dreaming orientated young women's responses, which are bound up in ideas about their home communities are especially interesting in the way that they seem to view it as something which would be a positive and essential element in their "journey through

life” and even as part of what would draw them “home”. While Planning orientated young women understand motherhood as a curtailment to their mobility, both socially and spatially, those with Dreaming orientations appear to view family formation as a part of what would connect and facilitate their continued embeddedness and positive relationships with their home communities. I would argue that this is because Dreaming orientated young women envision viable lives for themselves *throughout* their lifecourse as being fundamentally possible, and indeed attractive to many, while Planning orientated young women do not.

Because those with Dreaming orientations essentially understand themselves as being agentic enough to be able to choose to stay in their home communities through their perception of possible, and viable, future adult working opportunities, they have this fundamentally different relationship with their home communities. These are places that they not only feel that they belong, but that they feel provide a space for them to do so throughout their lives and into the lives of their future children, whether they engage in knowledge-based work or not. These young women, on a very basic level understand there to be more options available to them than do their Planning orientated counterparts. Dreaming orientated young women perceive themselves to be able to “choose” to attend university or not, to choose to stay in their home areas or not, and to work in any number of fields that they are interested in or have a “passion” for. Fundamentally, this is something which Planning orientated young women simply do not see as existing for themselves. I would argue again, that this is a function of the degree to which positive female role models who are engaged in meaningful, fulfilling and knowledge-based work are visible to these young women or not. While Planning orientated young women find these role models in their teachers in many cases, Dreaming orientated young women seem to be aware of them much closer to their home communities. This is an integral part of the crux in how their relationships with their home communities differ. In terms of their understanding of the possibility for viable future lives existing within or outside of the home community, Planning orientated and Dreaming orientated women understand their structure of opportunities to be very different animals.

It is interesting to view the different tone between the Planning and Dreaming orientated young women’s views of delaying family formation as they are clearly cut from

different cloth. The pushing back of motherhood that the Planning orientated seem to assert is something that Harris (2004) deals with in detail, especially with regard to how unplanned pregnancies among younger women are viewed in society. Harris (2004) is critical of the way that “can-do girl” femininity’s negative view of family formation and extolling of the “career woman” regulates young women’s bodies and sexuality but I would argue that it cannot be viewed as entirely negative for young women to delay motherhood when it has been proven that unplanned and single motherhood is one of the most seriously inhibiting factors to goal achievement (Schneider and Stevenson 1999) social stability, let alone social mobility (Robson and Pevalin 2007; Judge and Livingston 2008). I think that given the context of the Planning orientated way of understanding the necessity for spatial mobility and the way in which this can be set against the discourse of “choosing to stay” that the Dreaming orientated shared, Harris’ (2004) critique of delayed motherhood is somewhat myopic in this case.

Harris (2004) argues that the way that “can-do girlhood” imparts distinct encouragement to delay family formation until “after the career” is a problematic way in which this discourse regulates young women’s bodies and relationships with work. She argues that “motherhood has been repackaged as a profitable and attractive choice for the career woman in her mid-thirties” but that this is highly classed through government schemes and incentives like paid maternity leave and “baby bonuses that favour the professional and already privileged” (Harris 2004:24). She highlights the “classed nature of these opportunities” through the fact that such institutional schemes can only be facilitated through “workplaces that are regulated by industrial law and where one has enough power to negotiate” (Harris 2004:24). Indeed, she notes that in “Australia a baby bonus has been instituted to compensate only the highest-earning women for lost income during maternity leave” (Harris 2004:24).

However, I would argue that this critique should be tempered by recognising that it is not necessarily a bad thing for young women to be encouraged to view future life trajectories for themselves as being capable of existing definitively outside the remit of being a wife and mother. I must be clear here that I am not in any way asserting any form of negative view regarding the many roles of wives and mothers, and indeed recognise the invisibility of much of the labour and social work that women do when they engage in

these roles. I am however suggesting that Harris (2004) is again taking an overly pessimistic view of this element. This is because I would argue that the opening up of concrete and achievable life trajectories which focus on young women being able to become selves which are not directly associated with their ability to reproduce or to care for others is an important step for young women today and the adult women of tomorrow. Indeed, I would put forward that feminism as a “programme for change” (Harris 2004) might be at work here in more ways that Harris (2004) is allowing for. This is because, as has been seen among the female Planning orientated, these are young women from backgrounds with little history of education and a sociocultural milieu steeped in blue-collar labour. These are both social and structural realms where there are often few empowered places and or possible selves for young women, in particular if they are from rural areas.

Thus, I would argue that the ways Planning orientated young women are negotiating their sociocultural capital by drawing upon particular psychic landscapes of class and gender in their efforts towards achieving certain social ends are exceptionally nuanced. They are critically aware of the structural forces that they face (and perceive to face) in their attempts at social and spatial mobility. They problem solve regarding these by implementing carefully thought-out strategies of study, self-cultivation and planning practices surrounding their future areas of study, university entry requirements and costs. Set amidst the strenuousness of these practices, motherhood is understood as something which will concretely inhibit these young women’s ability to achieve the possible selves and future life trajectories which they envision right now. The way that early family formation mitigates young people’s abilities to be social mobile is already noted in other work as has been seen above. These are real social and structural forces that these young women are critically aware of, problem solving around and utilising resources in relation to so as to facilitate the best possible outcomes for themselves. They are not just elements of a cultural discourse that is seeking to exploit the mainstream labour of women through an inverted version of the way that society already does so with the unregulated economy, labour within the home and the general structure of gendered relations to labour at large.

By fundamentally being able to conceptualise certain selves and life trajectories as possible for them, Planning orientated young women are endeavouring to become socially

empowered, socially mobile and in control of their lives as opposed to being on the receiving end of social structures and cultural conditions which do not afford them with many opportunities or indeed options. Delaying motherhood and maintaining a high level of self-reliance are effectively ways in which these young women appear to be critically socially and self-reflexively aware of their structure of opportunities. This relationship is empirical evidence of how they are engaging in social problem solving, mobilising the resources available to them like relationships with their teachers, access to the internet and strong cultural indoctrination in the moral worth of “hard work” so as to endeavour towards selves and lives where they are able to choose for and govern themselves.

I would like to set the female discourse of independence against the Planning orientated young men’s understanding of material stability and notions of “success” as they seem to relate to these elements to their means of supporting a *family* and not just oneself as I have noted earlier. Here I’d like to share some direct examples from the in-depth interviews to illustrate this more fully:

Harrison: I would have to make enough that I don't need to worry about paying the bills, that I can live comfortably, I'm not going to say luxuriously but enough that I feel safe with how much I make and to have a family that I love and to just have a family and a wife and kids and to have a job where I feel safe and I can support that family. (16 year old, tenth grader, white-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

Edward: [In five years or ten years I would like to be], just really the relationship end, getting into a relationship then hopefully by the time I'm maybe, just in a steady job and you know getting on in life and having a good time and then maybe think about being married then and starting a family but I wouldn't before I had a steady job and you know I could actually support them, a family so...ehm, then, yeah I wouldn't like to you know I'd like to have all my travelling and everything done before that and then hopefully just grow old together (laughs) and see how it goes! (laughing) (16 year old, fifth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

Andre: I need to get a good education so I can get a solid job so I can support myself and others hopefully in the future without worry. (15 year old, tenth grader, blue-collar Vermont male – Planning orientation)

Jim: Mainly a family life [is more important to me], more sort of I'd prefer that like than

money, cause money can't buy everything really. So...but then I would have to have a secure job to support them you know? So to me "successful" would be having that job and then having a great family, to me, that's what I'd aim for anyway, I think that's really one goal, one dream really. (16 year old, sixth year, blue-collar Leinster male – Planning orientation)

The ways that Planning orientated young men articulated that they felt that they wanted to be able to *care for* and “look after” their future families is thought-provoking and begs questions regarding what might be changing elements of contemporary masculinity, shifting towards a more open and engaged relationship with feelings and needs to give and receive care. These sentiments are echoed among many of the free-write texts from their classmates and so I think bring legitimate questions to the fore regarding how young men today are conceptualising their adult roles within the home. I think it also brings important questions regarding how young men understand the role of third level education in their lives and what this means to normative masculinity. Further, I think that this shows the ways in which Planning orientated young women have internalised a discourse of independence as crucial to their “success”. This is important because it shows evidence of Harris’s (2004) “can-do girlhood” while simultaneously highlighting the special negotiating and mediating practices that these young women engage in throughout and across their social relationships with teachers and parents as has been seen in previous chapters. Because the young men presented such definitive references to caring for others in both their texts and their interviews, the following section continues exploring this idea through what was found in the free-write activity.

The free-write data I have examined here admittedly have serious limitations. Coming from only three of the final seven participating schools, exclusively from blue-collar areas and with an overrepresentation of Leinster responses, there is only so much I can infer from it. However, it is nonetheless very interesting to see the similarities and differences between what is discussed within the free-write texts and what was detailed in the in-depth data. By recognising that there are significant limitations to the free-write data this research is still able to appreciate what nuance and texture the free-write data afford to the analysis of the in-depth data.

Overall, it has become clear that there have been a number of similarities between the high-achievers and their other school mates, both in Ireland and Vermont. By comparing

the free-write activities with the specific, deep discussions with the high achievers, I have been able to highlight several different ways that certain social influences and relationships work on how these young people understand what it means to be successful as well as how they draw upon these in their endeavours to indeed *be successful* as evidenced in their high academic performance to date. While Bauman (1996) argues that much of our social and cultural world is governed by “experts” such as life coaches, psychologists, personal trainers etc, I would argue that closer attention should be paid to the social relationships and ties that young people experience in order to try to discern the genesis of particular selves and behaviours. As has been illustrated throughout the last three chapters, the most salient relationships are those within the family and educational contexts. These are also the most prominent and salient social relationships and foci to which all respondents, free-write and in-depth alike, made reference to. They also function as powerful sites of social reproduction and change.

Further, I would again recall how the self is both a situated as well as a situating subject through the adoption of the post-reflexive choice thesis. I would argue that what can be seen among my respondents is not a passive regurgitation of exclusively credentialist messages as might be found in adolescents with high levels of default individualism (Côté 2002), but rather, these are critically thinking young people wrestling with messages of individualisation while they are simultaneously working to create stable, positive concepts of self in and across their current social worlds and into their possible futures. I think this is evident in the ways that different students negotiated the main themes I drew from the free-write activities as well as in the highly nuanced reasoning and thought processes the high-achievers shared during their in-depth interviews.

The prevalence of a discourse surrounding education and “hard work” among young women in the free-write activities runs parallel to what has been seen among the female Planning orientated respondents in the in-depth interviews and take-home questionnaires. More appreciative and focused relationships with education have also become evident among the male respondents than has been noted in other work. These are engaging insights into the ideas about success that young, blue-collar rural men and women are having. Further, the ways in which these young people related to ideas about material wealth and financial stability offer some challenges to the mainstream capitalist narrative of

consumer culture. It is clear that these young people attribute considerable significance to the degree to which they have positive relationships with others and indeed, healthy relationships with themselves.

An unanticipated element of this study was the interesting findings that the young men brought to the research. There has been much work on the emotional, educational and social difficulties faced by young rural men (Ní Laoire 2001, 2005) and which presents a very difficult condition of intense patriarchy coupled with social marginalisation, poverty and isolation. The discussions this research has presented offer an opportunity to explore how rural gender relations may be changing in the future and how these young men might be challenging the normative structure of traditional gender roles through their assertion of the concerted desire to care for and have loving relationships with others. I think it also begs the question of what kinds of young men are rural places producing today and if this form of maleness is a possible contributor to out-migration from rural areas by young men? Is it a possible indication of wider changes in gender roles and perhaps a healthier form of masculinity in general? These are issues worth further study but ultimately which are beyond the scope of this thesis research. Suffice it to say that these young men bring very interesting ideas about what “success” meant to them to this work and opened up more questions for further research in changing structures of gender within rural contexts. While this PhD research focused primarily on the experiences of high-achieving rural young women, I think that the level of intimate, deep reflection that many of these young men engaged in deserves further study, especially with reference to possible shifts in gender normativity (Nielsen 2004; Natalie Adams and Bettis 2003). Thus, I think the evidence reviewed here shows that it is clearly not just rural femininity which is shifting but that gender relations in general appear to be experiencing transformation.

Further, it shows how the high achievers in this research are similar to their peers as well as how they are crucially different. Important distinctions are also clear in how Planning and Dreaming orientated young people relate to education, material wealth, thoughts on a “good life” and social relationships all coalesce to establish more definitively the ways in which these high achievers are not just noteworthy, but fascinatingly nuanced and socially engaged. In particular, the Planning orientated young women offer evidence that is provocative in its reference to classed, gendered and spatially situated notions of self

and social relations. Because these young women understand their spatial (and social) mobility as an imperative in their effort to become their future possible selves, the rootedness that family formation carries with it is understood as quite simply not a viable option. This is because there are few positive future life trajectories within the home community which they see as open to them, let alone if they were to engage in becoming mothers and carers *for others*. This is also because mobility is inherently constructed within the Planning orientated psychic landscape as prerequisite for a successful self as we have seen throughout the previous chapters.

The pragmatic social and structural consciousness here is a crucial element in their distinction from their Dreaming orientated counterparts. Young women who expressed Dreaming orientations understand themselves as being capable of choosing to stay and indeed whom we have seen to feel that they would quite happily form families of their own in their home communities, have a fundamentally different understanding of both their social and spatial options. Further these different views bring questions about how young people are conceptualising their life course in terms of when and how they envision themselves to *be able to* have families later in life. I think it would be interesting to explore the ways in which young men are envisioning their futures as carers and family-focused men while young women like those with Planning orientations detail specific trajectories which delay family formation for as long as possible under the premise that to be successful, they must be utterly independent. I add to Harris' (2004) argument about today's "can-do girlhood" by widening and deepening the gaze considering the provocative nature of the findings this research has uncovered.

With notions of success among Planning oriented young women appearing to be derived from more mainstream conceptualisations of the "career woman" in today's globalised world, I would argue that they are making use of their relationships with both their own psychic landscapes as well as those of their teachers in the effort for becoming knowledge economy workers broadly speaking. They actively conceptualise logical plans surrounding how to gain entry into third level education, critically and self-reflexively generate specific practices for high-achievement through their study habits and operationalise these with a specific view to gaining entry into systems of work and spatial

locations they might not otherwise have access to. In the following chapter I will offer some concluding thoughts and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This thesis shows the linkages between how high-achieving rural young women are formulating particular conceptions of self, relationships with education, their communities, psychic landscapes and the broader social landscapes of class. It illuminates some of the impacts that structural elements like socioeconomic background, community conditions and particular understandings of gender have on students as well as showing some of the key ways they themselves as agents go about doing self and social work. It links these elements to the wider backdrop of talented female out-migration from rural areas and entry into work in knowledge-based fields broadly speaking. This research has explored the nexus between the ways my participants constructed, mediated and enacted particular selves in a complex system of reflexive self work relating to their experiences with education, their home communities, possible future selves and life trajectories. I have tried to discern how the micro-level processes of identity development among particular groups of rural young people from Vermont and Leinster might bring insights into the macro-level processes of female high educational attainment, the gendering of the knowledge economy and the issue of female-led rural out-migration. In doing this, I would like to suggest that intricate, nuanced and sensitive negotiations of self-identity, gender, place and class among my respondents have become apparent.

Ultimately this chapter sums up some of the many ideas this thesis has offered and considers where they might be expanded upon in the future. I show succinctly that the way this research has attended to the mitigating factors of space and place within and throughout young people's gender and identity work has afforded the research with some unique insights. By examining the relationship between how young people make sense of who they are and who it is possible for them to become with respect to the social and structural environments they are situated within, I would argue that we might get a better grasp of Turner's (1988) reciprocal relationship between the self and the social. I would

also suggest that this kind of awareness will tell us at least a little about the genesis of agency and autonomy within particular conditions both social and spatial.

Identities, achievement and mobility

Throughout this work I have often challenged Harris's (2004) critical account of "can-do girlhood". I would agree with her assertion that "'Making it' in the new economy and prevailing as a successful subject have largely become understood as a question of personal resolve and self-invention" (Harris 2004:184). This is because the rapid changes that contemporary society has experienced have forced all manner of social changes and required former taken-for-granted elements of society and culture to be "rethought" (Harris 2004:184). These range from the speeding up of our communication and travel systems, to shifting divisions of labour, new systems of production and consumption and the rapidly expanding reach of global media. However, I think that the lack of attention to geocultural situatedness in Harris's (2004) thinking is a fundamental stumbling block. This is because it inhibits appreciation of the dynamic and self-reflexive nature of certain young women's experience and self-construction through their critical awareness of particular systems of opportunity and constraint in their immediate areas. These factors deeply influence what they understand to be possible for themselves and indeed, where this might be possible for them in the first place (Chapters Six and Seven). It prevents her from viewing the gender and self work that some young women appear to be doing with enough appreciation for the critical social awareness and intense self-reflexivity that they are engaging in with respect to the very real social and structural constraints that they face *as situated subjects*. I would therefore argue that at least some elements of "can-do girlhood" are not necessarily wholly problematic or even negative in many ways when viewed in addition to this.

To explain this idea further, I would draw attention to how Harris (2004) argues in her own conclusions that while late modernity does impose the problematic dichotomy of "can-do girlhood" set against "at-risk girlhood" in a discourse of implicit, responsible individualism, she does recognise that it simultaneously affords young women with a condition of freedom heretofore unknown. This is how she argues that they are now engaging in and performing innovative means of resistance through what she calls "future-

girl politics” because “new modes of resistance have developed in response to new modes of governmentality” (Harris 2004:183).

I would highlight this acknowledgement of the increased freedom young women are experiencing today coupled with the continued presence of an all-too-real patriarchal and capitalistic/individualistic system of constraint. But then, I would assert that how and why young women are conceptualising particular identities, relationships with education and their home communities are inextricably connected to what they understand to be both socially and structurally possible for them *in space and place*. My research shows that these situated perceptions, relationships and interactions fundamentally influence the selves and roles these young women understand to be possible for them both now and in their planned for futures. It is not just the mainstream credentialised portrayals of capitalism’s risk-society individuals which play significant roles in these processes for young women. This is evident in the ways that the young people in my study understand themselves and who it is possible for them to become are bound up in how they understand the gendered and economic structures of opportunity and constraint for them in their locality. They constantly reflexively work upon themselves (Chapter Six), are mindful of their situatedness within their geocultural context while simultaneously deriving meaning from mainstream messages as well in ways that appear similar to elements of developmental individualism. What is more, the nature of this reflexive situating appears to operate as a key indicator in the proclivity for both social and spatial mobility among these young people and it appears to work differently along roughly gendered and classed (blue-collar and white-collar) lines (Chapter Seven).

Thus, the ways in which these young people understand themselves to be agentic within these contexts, or to be working towards what they understand as agency later in life, is an important consideration. It is in attending to this that we can see how particular elements of “can-do girlhood” are operating in ways that I would argue should be viewed slightly less pessimistically than Harris (2004) might suggest. Not least among these “can-do girl” elements is the idea of and strategic propensity for concerted cultivating oneself with skills, knowledge and credentials which will equip one with fundamentally more social and spatial agency. While this doesn’t assume that this kind of self work removes the serious issues that contemporary femininity does indeed carry with it, or the constraints

that it imparts either, I would suggest that it does in fact go at least in the direction of an empowering, sociostructurally aware form of selfhood and engagement with a more agentic and critically *self*-aware condition for young women (Chapters Six and Eight). It is this kind of self, social and structural awareness that I think could not be said to be entirely negative. Indeed, it hints at a critical consciousness that many feminist thinkers highlight as a means to real social change (Budgeon 2001; Deveaux 1994; McNay 2000).

To follow this further, in this research, Planning and Dreaming orientated respondents understand both their social and their spatial relationships in ways quite distinct from each other. They situate themselves within certain spaces and places differently because they understand themselves to be able or required to do so in fundamentally contrasting fashions. Planning orientated respondents view themselves as needing to *become* agentic through specific processes while Dreaming orientated students understand themselves more or less to be this way *already* even if somewhat unconsciously. While those with Planning orientations conceptualise themselves to be working *towards* the ability to choose in different ways through particular elements of their social and internal lives, Dreaming orientated respondents tend to implicitly understand themselves as already being able to do this without the need for any further truly concerted self development. I would argue that this is a particularly apt example of how the extended present (Brannen and Nilsen 2002) functions for the Dreaming orientated (Chapter Six).

This can be seen through both the somewhat nonchalant attitude towards third level credentials as well as the ideas that they will be able to “choose to stay” in their localities that the Dreaming orientated expressed. It is also clear that this plays out in who they think it possible for themselves to become later in life. While the Dreaming orientated understood themselves as being able to be somewhat free-spirited, philosophical and empowered in terms of their ability to select and negotiate social and spatial locations, Planning orientated students viewed themselves very much on the receiving end of both social and economic forces. It was the sense of having no options within a certain kind of social and spatial place and economy (i.e. the blue-collar home community) that provided a considerable impetus for Planners to so concertedly self-cultivate towards a particular conception of knowledge-based agency and concurrently intend to become migrants to more metropolitan or cosmopolitan areas (Chapter Seven).

This was intensely influenced by the ways in which my respondents related to their psychic landscapes of social class. It was provocative to see the degree to which being “hard workers” or “diligent” or committed to their studies directly reflected the socioeconomic backgrounds from which my respondents came. For those with this understanding of self, these facets of their identity were also elements that they drew heavily upon in terms of their conscious strategising regarding their future goals and possible selves. Academic achievement was not only understood as a direct means for both the social and spatial mobility that the Planning orientated sought, but also as a means with which to actualise the dreams and hopes they perceived their families to have pinned upon them. By understanding themselves as products of their families’ sacrifices or constrained conditions, Planning orientated student conceptualised themselves as the “first,” best hopes of their families. They made sense of themselves as the privileged products of their families’ labour, hardship and disadvantage and this carried with it both a responsibility as well as an honour in being able to “make my family proud”. The intense positivity that this possible self presented worked as both a “carrot” and a “stick” if you will. I argue this because Planning orientated students detailed both formidable drive as well as considerable capacities to draw upon reserves of their moral capital in order to achieve the goals they set out for themselves, similar to Lehmann’s (2009) and Reay, Crozier and Clayton’s (2009) working class first-generation university students (Chapter Eight).

My work was similar to these studies in that my Planning orientated respondents articulated socially derived hopes and dreams which were understood to belong to them in unique, personally reflexive ways and to be achievable through particular forms of selfhood and concerted behaviours. However, they were not understood as elements which comparatively enabled these students over-against their white-collar peers as Lehmann’s (2009) did and they did not understand the educational environment as a place where they were “fish out of water” (Reay et al. 2009). These elements were made sense of as fundamental characteristics of self predicated upon their particular sociocultural milieu and which enabled them to achieve in ways that their parents and forebears had not had the opportunity to do because of their mothers facing more solidified constraints of patriarchal social structures and the condition of local economies being based upon male-dominated blue-collar labour. It was therefore not so much a lateral thinking of comparability

between differently classed and habitused peers, but rather a temporally situated social understanding of constraint, opportunity and the possibility for agentic change (Chapter Eight).

What is more, the moral connotation surrounding their relationships with and feelings about education is interesting because it also brings attention back to the nature of socioeconomic and developmental change in the two sample areas. Through declining agriculture and manufacturing sectors, followed by unsustainable property bubbles and rising proportions of knowledge-based labour in industries like health care and education, Vermont and Ireland have transformed their participation in the global marketplace in significant ways. Remembering Shaw's (1994) work on the "new" middle class in Taiwan, he asserted this "new" class of people hinged on credentialism as a by-product of globalisation. He argued that without academic credentials, there was little chance of his respondents gaining access to the new kinds of employment and opportunities that were generated in the "modern" economy (Shaw 1994:417). Thus, a schism began to form because the older cultural traditions of accessing opportunities were becoming seen as obsolete. They relied on social networks and "human capital derived from trust, dependability, and familiarity established in local relationships", while the "new" middle class increasingly "invested in their children, who are socialized to draw primarily on 'inner' resources like determination, effort, ability, and self-discipline to succeed in school (Stevenson and Lee, 1990)" (pp. 417-418).

This has proven remarkably similar to the differences Corbett (2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007) notes among his working-class and middle-class respondents in rural, coastal Canada as well as to what occurred with my participants, not just among the in-depth interviews but also which is evident in the free-write texts drawn from the blue-collar student body. I think that this is possibly one of the most fruitful elements of the comparative work in that it affords compelling evidence of a shift in the social fabric of rural class relations within this particular time in Ireland and Vermont (Chapters Eight and Nine). It is also clear how similar this is to work done in other places throughout the globe, hinting at the possibility of wider trends in need of exploration. This is also an important note because it serves to situate the strategic thinking that my respondents did regarding their futures within not just

their current socioeconomic context but also with reference to the sociocultural background of their parents, a crucial element of the concerted cultivation thesis (Lareau 2002).

While from this data it could not be said that the parents of Planning orientated respondents pushed or “concertedly cultivated” them in the way that Lareau (2002) understands this, I would argue that the implicit “wanting better” for their children that my Planning orientated students describe of their parents would have indeed helped to facilitate the heightened social awareness and internal drive to achieve that my respondents showed. Further I think that it may have impacted on their consciousness of socioeconomic factors and structures of social and economic opportunity which they would understand to both influence and enable them in turn. This recognition of their parents “wanting better” for them that my respondents relay as well as their own wanting to “make my family proud” that they discuss, have played considerable parts in the development and formulation of particular kinds of possible selves and future life trajectories among my respondents who exhibited Planning orientations, especially the young women (Chapter Eight).

The point here is that the Planning orientated young people, in particular the young women, were expressing markedly similar sentiments to Shaw’s (1994) “new” middle-class Taiwanese, Corbett’s (2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007) Canadian “space travellers” and “investors”, as well as Lehmann’s (2009) and Reay, Crozier and Clayton’s (2009) working-class first-generation university students from the United Kingdom. Further, I would suggest that it is the moralistic connotation of education which is most interesting and from which we can draw parallels to Baker’s (1989) Sri Lankan research. What I find particularly engaging about this is the way that it is viewed among my respondents with Planning orientations as the pivotal and indeed, quintessential means with which to not just gain access to the “modern” economy but to indeed engage in meaningful, positive selfhood.

I would argue that it is this evidence which formatively hints at a wider social shift among rural blue-collar young women. It is here that I think we can see an element of what I would argue is indeed the germination of social change through shifting understandings of normative femininity and relations of social and spatial mobility through particular conceptualisations of education. Considering this, I think there are ways this research might sit within what could be wider, global trends surrounding gender, migration and

relationships with education. By paying close attention to how my respondents drew on their psychic landscapes, particular identities and relationships with space, place and certain fields of capital, I think the creativity, the propensity for change, adaptation, negotiation and awareness that they exhibited comes to the fore.

Moral imperatives and social consciousness – how relationships play a role

Continuing along these lines, because Planning orientated respondents' personal identities were predominantly situated within rural, blue-collar backgrounds, they understood their current and possible selves to be built upon the sociocultural and actual labour that their families were situated within, spatially and socially. Thus, they realised that they were aspiring towards selves which fundamentally occupied different sociocultural and geographic space to that which they and their families had done, again much like Shaw's (1994), Lehmann's (2009) and Reay, Crozier and Clayton's (2009) respondents. Without gatekeepers to these other social, institutional and cultural contexts, Planning orientated respondents seemed to have systematically looked to their teachers as guides between their own psychic landscapes of social class and those landscapes which were becoming possibilities for them to traverse in their futures as particular kinds of people with certain types of selfhood (Chapter Eight). This was conceptualised as achievable through the direct and applied enactment of certain types of selves and behaviours *now* within educational settings in an effort to become certain particular selves *in the future* within the knowledge economy.

It is through their ambitions and self-reflexive praxis that Planning orientated participants "worked" towards attaining their educational and life trajectory goals as well as towards their future possible selves. For Planning orientated young women, these selves were definitively independent, spatially unfettered and specifically engaged in credentialed fields of work. The fulcrum of my argument therefore is based on not necessarily disagreeing with Harris's (2004) assertion surrounding the unique pressures young women experience today to achieve within the "risk society", but rather that a different kind of lens is needed to recognise particular elements in some of these behaviours and formations of self. Instead, I would ask this way of thinking to attend closer to the kinds of selves and the

degree to which adolescent women are actively engaging in conscientious, or reflexive, self-cultivation with the express design to be able to *become* agentic (for themselves and possibly for others) and knowledge-oriented people.

I suggest this because throughout all of my data, the Planning orientated young people, and in particular the young women, talk about their motivation for excellence and their drive to achieve as something which is inherently and specifically related to how they conceptualise education as an ameliorative process (Chapter Eight). Again, Planning orientated respondents understood their moral capital as a resource from which they drew strength, relied upon to fuel their endurance and which guided them in their efforts towards excellence both now and in their futures. Again however, this was not set in a discourse of difference from their peers or from the future vistas they intended to enter. It was set within an understanding of the gestating possibilities which lay before them and which were predicated upon what genealogically (Budgeon 2003) had brought them to this point. Their awareness of their own psychic landscapes *as blue-collar young women* was an element which they actively used and drew upon through practices like exercising their resilience, problem solving around perceived, and experienced, constraints and engaging in deeply committed study practices to prepare themselves as fully as possible in order to perform well within realms which would be generally considered white-collar or “middle-class” in an effort to gain entry into similar realms in adulthood.

What is more, this also had a moral tenor because the Planning orientated situated the results of their achievement as enabling them to “give back” to others or to “make my family proud” as mentioned above. Dreaming orientated respondents too asserted ideas about “success” being something which is fundamentally philanthropic and as such, challenges the degree to which the high-achieving participants were internalising mainstream messages about success within our capitalist social paradigm. These students were not self-centred, egotistical or short-sighted as adolescents are often perceived in mainstream discourses (Arnett 1998). My respondents were thoughtful, conscientious, politically aware and above all, understood themselves as being socially responsible and wanting to help others.

My Planning orientated respondents, again especially the young women, articulated selves which were not the excessively individualised reflexive modernist auto-agents, nor

were they the hyper-responsible and somewhat socially hoodwinked “can-do girls” internalising their own successes and personalising their failures. Rather, they were sensitive, highly reflexive and critically aware not just of their own sociocultural backgrounds, but also of the social and structural constraints that they faced as situated within particular spaces, places and temporal conditions of gender and economic structures (Chapters Eight and Nine). They were aware that their parents do not have the repertoires of experience to guide them in all aspects of decision-making surrounding their future educational choices and as such they sought these resources elsewhere in their teachers. They are also even more definitively adamant that they do not want to experience the kind of vulnerability that their mostly blue-collar employed families have felt. They see the dependency that they understand the traditional role of the housewife to represent as anathema and they relate to their reproductive futures as something which should occur only *after* they have achieved both educational and career accomplishment, otherwise it will curtail them in ways they see as simply not to be borne.

Thus I would argue that while it is clear that some elements of the contemporary narrative of individualisation are indeed present among my respondents, not all of these selves, orientations and behaviours could be said to be socially or personally negative. Indeed, these high-achieving young people show a remarkable social conscience across both Planning and Dreaming orientational lines. The fundamental difference however is that Planning orientated respondents understand themselves capable of ameliorative social action *via* their educational accrual and entry into knowledge-reliant fields of work.

Conclusion – some final considerations

One of the most definitive contributions to knowledge that this work makes is that through its conscientious methodology and active focus on students’ meaning making, it affords a much deeper look at the social and cultural influences that coalesce to produce particular forms of selfhood, habitus and social relationships for young people. It is through this lens and an interdisciplinary approach that we can see how the micro-level findings might be at least somewhat indicative of macro-level social trends like the gendering of the knowledge economy and possible shifts in normative constructions of

femininity within particular social and geocultural contexts. Ultimately, this research opens up important questions about the influence of particular elements of globalisation, given the likenesses across my sample areas having far out-weighed the differences. These were two quite different areas whose young people exhibited very similar cultural strategies. The similarities across locations in this research were far greater than I could have ever anticipated. Further, the parallels between this and other work from many areas across the globe is undeniable, hinting at the presence of wider shifts in the ways that rural young women understand who they are, who they can become and where they will be able to become those women.

This research adds to debates on the global and the local as my respondents were enacting similar behaviours, expressing similar sentiments and thinking in similar ways to young people from many different countries through their understandings of the paucity of high status labour market opportunities, gendered structures of constraint and a ubiquitous narrative of the home community as a lovely place to grow up but fundamentally not somewhere that could sustain one throughout the lifecourse. Through these elements, my participants showed likenesses to evidence from research conducted elsewhere in the globe such as Australia²⁵, Wales²⁶, Scotland²⁷, the US²⁸, Iceland²⁹, and Canada³⁰. Simultaneously however, there was a strong sub-textual narrative of being conscious of oneself as a product of a particular space and place as seen through references to one's "Vermonterness" and being "not from Dublin". I think that on balance, this shows the very real need for further qualitative research into this area to discern whether these might be definitive examples of spreading global culture or perhaps indicators of the kinds of behaviours and selves that particular types of development or challenges in rural areas elicit within educational, social and cultural contexts.

I would suggest that young women have become high-achievers, out-stripping their male counterparts, due at least in part to changes in their understanding of ideal or even normative femininity in their rural areas. Indeed, perhaps rural gender relations are

²⁵ See (Alston et al. 2001; Bryant and Pini 2009) among others

²⁶ See (Sally Baker and Brown 2008)

²⁷ (Stockdale 2002a, 2002b) among others

²⁸ (Bettie 2002) among others

²⁹ (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006)

³⁰ (Corbett 2004, 2007a, 2007b)

experiencing change in general if the insights gained from the male participants in this study could be discerned to be more wide spread through further research. Perhaps it could be the case that these changes are particularly visible among those from blue-collar backgrounds as well, especially in areas where there has been rapid economic development. I realise it is beyond the scope of this research to definitively suggest any of this in general. However, I would like to note that as women at large have indeed benefited from higher education, better life chances via greater levels of mobility and social openness, it may be the case that rural young women, especially those from blue-collar backgrounds and from areas that have experienced rapid development, may have begun to internalise these behaviours in more critical and systematic ways due to their heightened sensitivity to changes in social norms *as women* (Suitor et al. 2001; Shaditalab and Mehrabi 2010). Further, given the cultural milieus of these areas being set within poor economic and social prospects for those blue-collar young women who stay, it might be the case that the educated, empowered rural female has come to be understood as fundamentally one who is mobile and who leaves the home community. Therefore, she is inherently mobile in both social and spatial ways.

If it is indeed the case that normative rural gender relations are shifting towards these kinds of conceptualisations of ideal femininity, then there are important questions that we are left to explore regarding the particular types of identities this creates as well as the pressures and enabling factors that young rural women experience with regard to this. It also begs the question of whether this is a predominantly rural formulation or if this is perhaps a more general shift in the construction of femininity. Harris (2004) offers considerable caveats with respect to what she argues are systematic and unrelenting pressures on contemporary young women to become impossibly agentic, unremittingly accomplished and the autonomous personal author of one's successes and failures. However, I would suggest a grain of positivity in response to this critique.

Perhaps the understanding that there is more possible for one is not an inherently problematic thing. The idea that it is possible to achieve more agency, more autonomy, more capacity to become a positive social actor in today's society could not be seen as an entirely negative conceptualisation, especially among those who have traditionally experienced systematic disadvantage with respect to these elements as women have

throughout much of history. While Harris (2004) acknowledges that young women are developing new forms of resistance to the hegemonic structures which have long oppressed them through some of the new freedoms that young women reap within today's society, she maintains a critical stance. I would not negate this, but I would like to suggest that perhaps among the young women examined in this research we might be seeing the decision-makers and the professional elite who will arguably be the norm producers (Frank et al. 1995) of tomorrow.

In my estimation, the selves that these Planning orientated young women are producing do not appear to be as problematic as Harris (2004) might suggest. This is because these young women, despite being those for whom academic success would not necessarily have been predicted, have developed coping strategies to deal with the patriarchal cultural structures they encounter in their local communities by aiming for work fundamentally outside of these traditional structures and the geographic localities which largely depend upon them. They negotiate their ties to home in such a way that they accept mobility as a necessity in order to develop the selves they understand as possible through their engagement with their white-collar teachers and their high-performance in the mainstream educational environment. Further, they accept the precariousness of contemporary society and labour markets as unavoidable if one is unprepared through failing to arm oneself with credentials, evidenced in their own family experiences. Thus, they prepare to do battle with this uncertainty through their remarkable resilience and strategic amassing of education and skills, the cavalry of their work ethic to be called in should the need arise.

Despite these assertions, this research is not suggesting that "all is well" in normative femininity. Neither is it discounting the arguments and evidence seen throughout Chapters Two and Three that femininity continues to be defined and regulated through and by patriarchy and therefore is necessarily problematic. Rather, this research suggests that it might be through young women engaging in innovative forms of self work via critical awareness of the changes in normativity that society has experienced where we can see increasingly empowered forms of selfhood and femininity coming to the fore. I would suggest that we get a glimpse of this via my Planning orientated respondents' engagement with critical self awareness, various identity commitments and post-reflexive

choice in how they are formulating and working towards what they understand as agentic future selves. I think evidence of this can be seen not just in the qualitative data explored here but by setting this against the literature describing macro-level social trends of female high-achievement in educational contexts, out-migration from rural areas and entrance into the broadly defined knowledge economy in higher numbers.

Female Planning orientated respondents understood their future possible selves and life plans as only attainable through the direct application and actualisation of their distinctively blue-collar capital of moral responsibility to succeed after their families, and implicitly their mothers I would argue, were not able to do so before them. The identity development surrounding “hard work”, “diligence”, “putting the effort in” that Planning orientated young women speak of is noticeably lacking among the predominantly white-collar respondents who were largely among the Dreaming orientated. This appears to be a distinctive trait and shows linkages to other work on the working-class moral imperative to perform academically well as we have seen above. It also makes strong connections to Archer’s (1982) psychological discussion of identity development as contingent upon particular levels of awareness, negotiation and commitment levels.

By tailor-making themselves into the “educable children” that Corbett (2007c) speaks of, Planning orientated young women are definitively advantaging themselves in not just the institutional environment of the education system, but they are arming themselves with formidable weaponry with which to make their way in today’s generally credentialist society. This, coupled with the considerable critical social and self awareness and engagement that they express, makes them not just interesting, but indeed provocative. The ways that they are strategically negotiating their social, institutional and familial worlds are dynamic and may provide important information in a number of respects. By attending to environments which cultivate this kind of orientation and behaviour and discerning whether or not they do indeed have higher rates of university attendance and completion, we might gain important insights, both conceptual and practical. This is something which touched on early in this thesis in recognising how the work of Phelan et al (1991) drew attention to how students negotiated their social worlds and that this was something that schools and educational intuitions needed to attend to in order to help students maximise their potential and strengthen their future life chances. Efforts to engage with this could range from

informing the ways that schools work with and develop their pedagogical praxis to exploring how structural bodies might work towards making rural communities more sustainable places by enabling such problem solving, motivated and resource-aware young people to live viable lives in their home areas. This could be through concerted study of rural schools or by longitudinally tracking the progress of efforts like the Vermont Promise Scholarship on such young people.

I would argue that the students who participated in this research essentially represent the kind of young people who could effectively revitalise rural areas, create work, problem solve and liaise with state structures of governance for a fairer and more beneficial outcome for local concerns. As such, it is important to pay attention to them, especially given the challenges the global recession has brought to rural spaces and places. By focusing on how young people engage in developing particular identities, relate to certain school environments, curricula, pedagogy and how they navigate community relationships, we might be afforded with a wholly more intuitive, attentive and forward-thinking means for affecting positive outcomes for young people, communities and schools. What is more, in order to influence wider, normative change, we are in fact required to attend to the “symbolic and communication systems” as well as the “institutionalised status-related structures and practices” that both translate and work upon our personal and social conceptualisations of things like class, power and gender (Kathleen Lynch and Lodge 2002:181). These are thing like media representations of women and men, what jobs they are associated with, what kinds of work are understood as high status and why as well as how the gender division of labour plays out in our everyday lives. By doing this, we can think critically about and work to improve the ways that young people make sense of, deal with and engage in their efforts to become adults. As has been seen throughout this work, in order to do this, we must begin by exploring their processes of self construction, social relationships and the ways that they go about conceptualising and working towards their futures.

Throughout this thesis I have often critiqued Harris’s (2004) assertions about the “can-do girl” for what I would suggest is a somewhat overly negative assessment of certain parts of what arguably makes up normative femininity today. Again, I am not completely disagreeing with Harris (2004) that today’s conceptions of the female ideal are problematic.

However, I am offering a slightly more optimistic understanding of the gender and self work that young women do via the narratives shared with me by my participants. Further, I would argue that there is little discussion of “geographies of gender” (Ní Laoire 2005) in the “can-do girl” critique and that this is where I think that my own research stands to offer the most. In its attentiveness to the ways that space, place and geocultural situatedness act upon particular notions of female self, this research has provided an in-depth look at what have been shown to be significant elements in how these young women from two different countries understand who they are and who they hope to become. I would argue that the ways in which these young women have negotiated their internal efforts of self formation while being mindful of external, material structures shows a kind of critical self and social work which could not be said to be negative.

The young women who expressed this kind of orientation were going about actively building futures for themselves which they understood to be freer of the patriarchal structures of their home communities, culturally, structurally and spatially. They were seeking to enable themselves to be empowered and agentic adults who would not be as vulnerable to the shifting economic tides of blue-collar labour which they witnessed among their parents and families. They were consciously working to enable themselves to have choices, not just over their educational trajectories and in their fields of future work, but over their bodies and their reproduction through delaying family formation so as to enable themselves to become financially stable and personally satisfied. These young women were unlikely achievers through their geographic locations as well as their sociocultural backgrounds and yet they were formulating the most resilient, determined, diligent and flexible formations of self while attaining the highest academic performance among their peers. They understood the road ahead of them with deeper critical consciousness, more acute awareness of structural and cultural constraints and with greater hope than any other respondents. These were not young women made victims of what could indeed be cogently argued to be a system which expects too much of and affords too little for women today. These were bright, resourceful, self-possessed and determined young women actively trying to forge positive and empowered futures for themselves, futures which were decidedly out of the reach of most of their mothers.

Ultimately, I would also like to suggest that this research has given a glimpse into the lives and selves of the people who will likely populate the knowledge economies of tomorrow. By examining the ways and means with which young women go about understanding who they are, conceptualising and becoming aware of the nature of their structures of opportunities and how they go about interacting with these, we are afforded with a unique opportunity to catch sight of social change as it is occurring. I argue this because the world over, women remain subjugated in many and varied ways to patriarchy. In exploring young women who are making plans for agentic futures and examining how they are formulating these plans and envision carrying them out, I think we get a snippet of the change that could, and indeed might be.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Initial Letter of Introduction to Schools (Leinster)

Address of School
6 November, 2008

Date

Dear Principal XXX,

Greetings, I am writing today to ask if your school would be willing to participate in an international doctoral research project being conducted here in Ireland and in the United States under the auspices of NUI Maynooth's Department of Sociology, the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) and the Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP). Your school has been specially selected for participation in this study and would greatly aid the research being undertaken. The work focuses on academically high achieving students in Junior Certificate year (tenth grade in the US), Transition year (eleventh grade), and Leaving Certificate year (twelfth grade) concentrating on particular themes such as students' ideas about the meaning of academic success, community, future life plans, travel, personal goals and reflections on ideals.

The project seeks to select, with the aid of relevant school staff and records, the two top performing young women and the top performing young man from each of the Junior Certificate, Transition, and Leaving Certificate years respectively, thus a total maximum of nine students per school. If one of these years is not present within the school (e.g. If a school does not have Transition year), then those years which are indeed present will be sampled. These students will each be asked to carry out one approximately sixty minute in-depth interview within the school environment and at the convenience of the school, staff, students and their parents. In conjunction with this, these students will be asked to complete a short questionnaire at home and return it to me.

The study also seeks to collect a short (writing time of 10-15 minutes) reflective essay from all students in one of the classes the participating students belong to at the convenience of the participating teacher. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and all taking part may withdraw at any time and at his or her discretion

The study is currently being conducted throughout Leinster and all data from the Irish component of the study must be collected before 20 December 2008. The convenience of all participants is a primary consideration of this study and I would like to make every possible effort to work with schools, students, staff and parents to ensure the study is as unobtrusive and non-disruptive as possible for all parties involved.

I am available to meet in person, talk over the telephone or via email at your convenience to discuss further details and address any questions you might have about the study, participation, logistics etc. I would like to kindly ask you to please respond by email, telephone or letter as soon as possible.

My contact details are listed below for your convenience:

Email:	wendy.fuller@nuim.ie
Telephone:	01 708 6731
Postal address:	Wendy Fuller National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) Hume Building NUI Maynooth Maynooth Co. Kildare

Most Sincerely,

Wendy Fuller
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Sociology
National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA)
Irish Social Sciences Platform
NUI Maynooth
Maynooth
Co. Kildare

Initial Letter of Introduction to Schools (Vermont)

School Address

Date

Dear Principal XXX,

Greetings, I am writing today to ask if your school would be willing to participate in an international doctoral research project being conducted here in Ireland and in Vermont under the auspices of NUI Maynooth's Department of Sociology, the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) and the Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP). Your school has been specially selected for participation in this study and would greatly aid the research being undertaken. The project focuses on academically high-achieving students in tenth grade (fourth year in Ireland), eleventh grade (fifth year), and twelfth grade (sixth year) concentrating on particular themes such as students' ideas about the meaning of academic success, community, future life plans, travel, personal goals and reflections on ideals.

The project seeks to select, with the aid of relevant school staff and records, the two top performing young women and the top performing young man from each of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades respectively, thus a total of only nine students per school. These nine students will each be asked to carry out one approximately sixty minute in-depth, semi-structured interview within the school environment and at the convenience of the school, staff, students and their parents. In conjunction with this, these students will be asked to complete a short questionnaire at home and return it to me.

The study also aims to collect a short (writing time of 10-15 minutes) reflective essay from all students in one of the classes the respective participating students belong to at the convenience of the participating teacher. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and all taking part may withdraw at any time and at his or her discretion.

As a Vermonter who has emigrated myself, the project is not just of professional but personal significance as well. The interviews are tentatively scheduled to commence during March and April 2009 and the convenience of all participants is a primary consideration of this study. I would like to make every possible effort to work with schools, students, staff and parents to ensure the study is as unobtrusive and non-disruptive as possible for all parties involved.

I am available to talk over the telephone or via email at your convenience to discuss further details and address any questions you might have about the study, participation, logistics etc. I would like to kindly ask you to please respond by email, telephone or letter by 14 November 2008. I will be in Vermont from early March 2009 and will be available to meet in person then, and would like to suggest a general meeting with the relevant staff members, participating students and their parents/guardians if your school is willing to come on board with the study. Hopefully we can discuss this further sometime in the near future.

My contact details are listed below for your convenience:

Email:	wendy.fuller@nuim.ie
Telephone:	011 353 1 708 6731
Postal address:	Wendy Fuller National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) Hume Building NUI Maynooth Maynooth Co. Kildare

Yours in education,

Wendy Fuller
Doctoral Fellow
Department of Sociology/National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA)
Irish Social Sciences Platform
NUI Maynooth
Maynooth
Co. Kildare
IRELAND

Appendix B

Introductory Letter to Students and Parents (Leinster)

Dear Parents/Guardians and Selected Student of XXXXX School:

You have been specially selected for participation in an international sociological study taking place here in Ireland and in Vermont, USA in association with the National Institute of Regional and Spatial Analysis, NUI Maynooth and under the auspices of the Irish Social Sciences Platform. This letter is an introduction to the study which is working titled:

The Meaning of Success: Young Women, High Achievement and the Development of Social/Cultural Capital in Rapidly Developed Areas. A Comparative Study of Contemporary Semi-Rural/Rural Vermont and Ireland.

The Purpose of this Study and What is required of the Participant:

The project focuses on academically high achieving students and concentrates on particular themes such as students' ideas about the meaning of academic success, community, future life plans, travel, personal goals and reflections on ideals in semi-rural/rural Vermont and Ireland.

The study requires one approximately sixty-minute interview per selected student along with a short take-home questionnaire. Also, one short in-class essay (about 10-15 minutes writing time administered by the participating teachers) will be collected from all the students who attend a given class with the respective students selected for interview. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and all taking part may withdraw at any time. This means a personal commitment of each student to only one hour of interview time, the time spent filling in the at-home questionnaire, and the ten-minute in-class activity which they will complete along with the rest of their respective classmates.

As the interviews are one-to-one, scheduling is an important consideration and participants' convenience is a primary concern. Ideally the interview component of the project will take place on the school premises, either at times when a student could be excused from a class period/study hall, has a free period or after school if that is more convenient for particular students and parents/guardians.

I would like to work as closely, unobtrusively and efficiently as possible with the participating school staff, students and parents/guardians; thus, if there are any questions or concerns at all, please don't hesitate to let me know. My contact details are listed below for your convenience. The Irish half of the study is scheduled to take place from October to December 2008. I plan for the research in each of the six participating schools to take place over a span of no more than one week in each school as the interviews, collection of the questionnaire at the time of interview and the ten-minute full-class writing activity should not take more than a maximum of nine hours total so as to be as non-disruptive as possible to all parties involved.

There will be an introductory meeting scheduled to take place **(DATE, TIME and VENUE OF MEETING)** with me, Principal XXX, relevant school staff members, the selected participating students and their parents/guardians to address any remaining questions or concerns there might be. You are asked to please attend this meeting as we will be scheduling the interviews at this time and the consent forms can be signed by the parents/guardians or participants themselves if they are 18 years of age or over. Also, the take-home questionnaire will be given to the student participants at this time and they will be asked to complete it and then return it to me on the day of their interview. Any remaining questions or concerns can also be raised at this meeting as well for your convenience.

I hope very much that you will be willing to allow your child to participate in this internationally significant research. Please feel free to raise any questions or concerns you or your child might have about the project with me directly at any time. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future and wish you all the very best.

Most Sincerely,

Wendy Fuller

Wendy Fuller
ISSP/Government of Ireland Doctoral Fellow
Department of Sociology
National University of Ireland Maynooth/National Institute for Regional and Spatial
Analysis (NIRSA)

John Hume Building
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Introductory Letter to Students and Parents (Vermont)

29 September 2008

Dear Parents/Guardians and Selected Student of XXX School:

This letter is an introduction to and respectful request for participation in an international sociological study working titled:

The Meaning of Success: Young Women, High Achievement and the Development of Social/Cultural Capital in Rapidly Developed Areas. A Comparative Study of Contemporary Semi-Rural/Rural Vermont and Ireland.

The Purpose of this Study and What is required of the Participant

The project focuses on academically high achieving students in tenth grade (fourth year in Ireland), eleventh grade (fifth year), and twelfth grade (sixth year) concentrating on particular themes such as students' ideas about the meaning of academic success, community, future life plans, travel, personal goals and reflections on ideals in semi-rural/rural Vermont and Ireland.

The study requires one 60 minute interview per selected student along with a short take-home questionnaire. Also, short in-class essays (about 10-15 minutes writing time administered by their respective teachers) will be collected from all the students in the "homeroom" or "teacher advisory group" class of the nine students who were selected for interview. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and all taking part may withdraw at any time.

As the interviews are one-to-one, scheduling is an important consideration and participants' convenience is a primary concern. Ideally the interview component of the project will take place on the school premises, either at times when a student could be excused from a class period/study hall or after school if that is more convenient for particular students and parents/guardians.

I would like to work as closely, unobtrusively and efficiently as possible with the participating school staff, students and parents/guardians; thus, if there are any questions or concerns at all, please don't hesitate to let me know. *However, as the work is time sensitive, I must respectfully ask that confirmation or refusal of participation be made by Friday, 17th October to both your school Principal and to myself. Confirmation or refusal via email is probably the easiest method but if email is unavailable, please contact Principal Holmes (802-728-3397 ext. 202) and he will inform me of your decision. My own contact details here in Ireland are listed below for your convenience.*

The Vermont half of the study is scheduled to take place from March to April 2009. I will be in Vermont from early March and will be scheduling a meeting to take place then with the Principal, relevant school staff members, the nine selected participating students and their parents/guardians to address any remaining questions or concerns there might be. During this meeting we will schedule the interviews and the consent forms will be signed by the parents/guardians or participants themselves if they are 18 years of age or over.

Also, the take-home questionnaire will be given to the participants at this time and they will be asked to complete it and then return it to me on the day of their interview.

I hope very much that you will be willing to allow your child to participate in this internationally significant research. Please feel free to raise any questions or concerns you or your child might have about the project with me directly at any time. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future and wish you all the very best.

Most Sincerely,

Wendy Fuller

Wendy Fuller
PhD Fellow, Sociology
National University of Ireland, Maynooth/National Institute for Regional and Spatial
Analysis (NIRSA)
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Appendix C

Consent Form (Leinster)

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This cover letter is a quick explanation of the Consent Form you'll find on the following pages. For academic purposes the letter is written with a lot of terminology you mightn't be familiar with so this letter outlines everything in the Consent Form in a more accessible format.

The project focuses on academically high achieving students and concentrates on particular themes such as students' ideas about the meaning of academic success, community, future life plans, travel, personal goals and reflections on ideals in semi-rural/rural Vermont and Ireland.

The study requires one approximately sixty minute interview per selected student along with a short take-home questionnaire. Also, short in-class essays (about 10-15 minutes writing time administered by the participating teachers) will be collected from all students who attend a given class with each of the respective students selected for interview. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and all taking part may withdraw at any time.

As the interviews are one-to-one, scheduling is an important consideration and participants' convenience is a primary concern. Ideally the interview component of the project will take place on the school premises, either at times when a student could be excused from a class period/study hall or after school if that is more convenient for particular students and parents/guardians.

I would like to work as closely, unobtrusively and efficiently as possible with the participating school staff, students and parents/guardians; thus, if there are any questions or concerns at all, please don't hesitate to let me know. My contact details are listed on the Consent Form for your convenience. The Irish half of the study is scheduled to take place from October to December 2008. I plan for the research in each of the six participating schools to take place over a span of no more than one week in each school as all of individual sixty minute interviews, collection of the questionnaire at the time of interview and the ten-minute full-class writing activity should not take more than a maximum of nine hours total. By nature the study is designed to be as non-disruptive as possible to all parties involved. This means a personal commitment of each student to only one hour of interview time, the time spent filling in the at-home questionnaire, and the ten-minute in-class activity which they will complete along with the rest of their classmates.

I hope very much that you will be willing to allow your child to participate in this internationally significant research and again, please feel free to raise any questions or concerns you or your child might have about the project with me directly at any time.

**This form consents for participation in an international sociological study titled:
The Meaning of Success: Young Women, High Achievement and the
Development of Social/Cultural Capital in Rapidly Developed Areas. A
Comparative Study of Contemporary Semi-Rural/Rural Vermont and Ireland.**

Name of Researcher:	Wendy Fuller
Appointment or Position held:	ISSP/Government of Ireland Doctoral Fellow
Qualifications	BA Soc/Anth, MA Soc
Contact Details:	Email: wendy.fuller@nuim.ie Tel: 01 708 6731 - Office National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) National University of Ireland, Maynooth Maynooth, Co. Kildare
Name of Supervisors:	Dr. Deirdre Kirke (2006-present) Dr. Rebecca King-O’Riain (2006-present)
Position Held:	Dr. Deirdre Kirke—Senior Lecturer, Sociology Dr. Rebecca King-O’Riain—Lecturer, Sociology
Contact Details:	Dr. Deirdre Kirke Email: deirdre.kirke@nuim.ie Tel: 01 708 3723 Dr. Rebecca King-O’Riain Email: rebecca.king-oriain@nuim.ie Tel: 01 708 3941 Department of Sociology National University of Ireland, Maynooth Maynooth, Co. Kildare

The Purpose of this Study and What is required of the Participant:

The objective of this study is to delve into the nature and dynamics of identity development and to compare and contrast the changing conceptions of cultural/social capital among high achieving young women in semi-rural/rural Vermont and Ireland. The methodology is qualitative, focusing on the ways academic achievement is conceptualised as cultural, social and personal capital between the two geographic areas. This work aims at addressing how globalization, capitalism and rapid economic development have influenced young women’s levels of educational achievement, identity construction and conceptions of community. Working to engage with the concept of academic achievement as a direct, and perhaps primary, source of cultural/social capital, this project examines the various influences and nuances contributing to high levels of achievement in Ireland and Vermont’s young women today and over the past 30-50 years.

A deductive study, the primary research method will be cross-sectional, semi-structured 30-60 minute in-depth qualitative interviews in conjunction with short questionnaires guided by particular themes on which I would like them to reflect, thus ensuring comparable data are collected from the two samples. By asking participants to write, think and talk reflexively about their identities, both personal and social, this project will gain a richer understanding of what core values and norms the participants feel best encompass and anchor their self-concepts, attitudes and behaviours concerning high academic achievement, community and mobility.

This method aims at examining participants' levels of conscious reflection concerning their internalization of credentialist messages surrounding academic achievement, educational excellence and the practical application of said values and concepts. Internalization processes will be examined with attention to what degree (if at all) participants' personal identities are consciously (or unconsciously) informed and shaped by their conceptions of educational achievement and the social/cultural benefits thereof.

This project will highlight adolescents in fourth, fifth and sixth years respectively (corresponding to tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades in the US), gathering purposive samples of high-achieving young people, the two top performing young women and the top performing young man from each year respectively, from six different secondary schools in each location (Vermont and Ireland), three from white collar and three from blue collar socio-economic areas providing comparable data between cases. In the case of Irish schools without transition year, only Junior and Leaving Certificate years will then be sampled. Socio-economic conditions will be discerned by reviewing school budgets as well as household budget surveys and census data from students' areas of residence. A smaller sampling of young men will be used to provide an element of gender comparison.

Short reflective essays collected from each "homeroom" or "teacher advisory group" class of the sampled students will bring insights into whether or not the aspirations and motivations of high achievers are in any way anomalous. Using educational attainment data from the past 30-50 years from both locations, the project will also examine changes in the number of women and men attaining third level education in the sampled areas.

Confidentiality of Data

The information obtained will be treated with the utmost respect, confidentiality and consideration for the participants. The data will be kept in a secured cabinet at my place of work. Any and all information pertaining to respective participants is available to them at their discretion.

Results of the Study

The data obtained will be analysed and produced in the findings of the written dissertation work. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the participants and any identifying information will either be omitted or altered to protect the respondents. Complete confidentiality is assured.

Withdrawal from the Study

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. At any time during the research, participants are free to withdraw. Any data obtained from the withdrawing participant will remain completely confidential.

Participation in this study does not constitute any form of advice or counselling and will not offer any therapeutic value to the participant.

Contact will be established for you with your educational institution's Careers and or Guidance Counsellor(s) (if you are not already in contact with him/her) prior to the interview. Please indicate one of the following:

- I am in contact with my Careers and or Guidance Counsellor(s)
 I would like for contact to be established with my Careers/Guidance Counsellor(s)

The aim is to ensure that each participant has adequate support available should she/he experience the unlikely event of any distress or discomfort as a result of the interviews. Below are the contact details for your educational institution's respective Careers and or Guidance Counsellor(s):

Career/Guidance Counsellor's Name:

Contact #:

Email Address:

If, at any time during your participation in this study, you feel that the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way or if you are in any way unhappy about the data gathering process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth Ethics Committee at pgdean@nuim.ie or 01 7086018. Please be assured that your concerns are dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Name of Participant (Block Capitals) Date

Signature of Participant Date

Name of Parent/Guardian (Block Capitals) Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Consent Form (Vermont)

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This cover letter is a quick explanation of the Consent Form you'll find on the following pages. For academic purposes the letter is written with a lot of terminology you mightn't be familiar with so this letter outlines everything in the Consent Form in a more accessible format.

The project focuses on academically high achieving students and concentrates on particular themes such as students' ideas about the meaning of academic success, community, future life plans, travel, personal goals and reflections on ideals in semi-rural/rural Vermont and Ireland.

The study requires one approximately sixty minute interview per selected student along with a short take-home questionnaire. Also, short in-class essays (about 10-15 minutes writing time administered by the participating teachers) will be collected from all students who attend a given class with each of the respective students selected for interview. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and all taking part may withdraw at any time.

As the interviews are one-to-one, scheduling is an important consideration and participants' convenience is a primary concern. Ideally the interview component of the project will take place on the school premises, either at times when a student could be excused from a class period/study hall or after school if that is more convenient for particular students and parents/guardians.

I would like to work as closely, unobtrusively and efficiently as possible with the participating school staff, students and parents/guardians; thus, if there are any questions or concerns at all, please don't hesitate to let me know. My contact details are listed on the Consent Form for your convenience. The Irish half of the study is scheduled to take place from October to December 2008 and the Vermont half from March to April 2009. I plan for the research in each of the participating schools to take place over a span of no more than one week in each school as all of individual sixty minute interviews, collection of the questionnaire at the time of interview and the ten-minute full-class writing activity should not take more than a maximum of nine hours total. In most cases, I can start and finish the research within two days if interviews can be scheduled back-to-back. By nature the study is designed to be as non-disruptive as possible to all parties involved. This means a personal commitment of each student to only one hour of interview time, the time spent filling in the at-home questionnaire, and the ten-minute in-class activity which they will complete along with the rest of their classmates.

I hope very much that you will be willing to allow your child to participate in this internationally significant research and again, please feel free to raise any questions or concerns you or your child might have about the project with me directly at any time.

**This form consents for participation in an international sociological study titled:
The Meaning of Success: Young Women, High Achievement and the
Development of Social/Cultural Capital in Rapidly Developed Areas. A
Comparative Study of Contemporary Semi-Rural/Rural Vermont and Ireland.**

Name of Researcher:	Wendy Fuller
Appointment or Position held:	ISSP/Government of Ireland Doctoral Fellow
Qualifications	BA Soc/Anth, MA Soc
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Name of Supervisors:	Dr. Deirdre Kirke (2006-present) Dr. Rebecca King-O’Riain (2006-present)
Position Held:	Dr. Deirdre Kirke—Senior Lecturer, Sociology Dr. Rebecca King-O’Riain—Lecturer, Sociology
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The Purpose of this Study and What is required of the Participant:

The objective of this study is to delve into the nature and dynamics of identity development and to compare and contrast the changing conceptions of cultural/social capital among high achieving young women in semi-rural/rural Vermont and Ireland. The methodology is qualitative, focusing on the ways academic achievement is conceptualised as cultural, social and personal capital between the two geographic areas. This work aims at addressing how globalization, capitalism and rapid economic development have influenced young women’s levels of educational achievement, identity construction and conceptions of community. Working to engage with the concept of academic achievement as a direct, and perhaps primary, source of cultural/social capital, this project examines the various influences and nuances contributing to high levels of achievement in Ireland and Vermont’s young women today and over the past 30-50 years.

A deductive study, the primary research method will be cross-sectional, semi-structured 30-60 minute in-depth qualitative interviews in conjunction with short questionnaires guided by particular themes on which I would like them to reflect, thus ensuring comparable data are collected from the two samples. By asking participants to write, think and talk reflexively about their identities, both personal and social, this project will gain a richer understanding of what core values and norms the participants feel best encompass and anchor their self-concepts, attitudes and behaviours concerning high academic achievement, community and mobility.

This method aims at examining participants' levels of conscious reflection concerning their internalization of credentialist messages surrounding academic achievement, educational excellence and the practical application of said values and concepts. Internalization processes will be examined with attention to what degree (if at all) participants' personal identities are consciously (or unconsciously) informed and shaped by their conceptions of educational achievement and the social/cultural benefits thereof.

This project will highlight adolescents in fourth, fifth and sixth years respectively (corresponding to tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades in the US), gathering purposive samples of high-achieving young people, the two top performing young women and the top performing young man from each year respectively, from six different secondary schools in each location (Vermont and Ireland), three from white collar and three from blue collar socio-economic areas providing comparable data between cases. In the case of Irish schools without transition year, only Junior and Leaving Certificate years will then be sampled. Socio-economic conditions will be discerned by reviewing school budgets as well as household budget surveys and census data from students' areas of residence. A smaller sampling of young men will be used to provide an element of gender comparison. Short reflective essays collected from each "homeroom" or "teacher advisory group" class of the sampled students will bring insights into whether or not the aspirations and motivations of high achievers are in any way anomalous. Using educational attainment data from the past 30-50 years from both locations, the project will also examine changes in the number of women and men attaining third level education in the sampled areas.

Confidentiality of Data

The information obtained will be treated with the utmost respect, confidentiality and consideration for the participants. The data will be kept in a secured cabinet at my place of work. Any and all information pertaining to respective participants is available to them at their discretion.

Results of the Study

The data obtained will be analysed and produced in the findings of the written dissertation work. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the participants and any identifying information will either be omitted or altered to protect the respondents. Complete confidentiality is assured.

Withdrawal from the Study

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. At any time during the research, participants are free to withdraw. Any data obtained from the withdrawing participant will remain completely confidential.

Participation in this study does not constitute any form of advice or counselling and will not offer any therapeutic value to the participant.

Contact will be established for you with your educational institution's Careers and or Guidance Counsellor(s) (if you are not already in contact with him/her) prior to the interview. Please indicate one of the following:

- I am in contact with my Careers and or Guidance Counsellor(s)
- I would like for contact to be established with my Careers/Guidance Counsellor(s)

The aim is to ensure that each participant has adequate support available should she/he experience the unlikely event of any distress or discomfort as a result of the interviews. Below are the contact details for your educational institution's respective Careers and or Guidance Counsellor(s):

Career/Guidance Counsellor's Name:

Contact #:

Email Address:

If, at any time during your participation in this study, you feel that the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way or if you are in any way unhappy about the data gathering process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth Ethics Committee at pgdean@nuim.ie or 011 353 1 7086018. Please be assured that your concerns are dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Name of Participant (Block Capitals)	Date
_____	_____

Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____

Name of Parent/Guardian (Block Capitals)	Date
_____	_____

Signature of Parent/Guardian	Date
_____	_____

Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Participant Demographics

What's your name?
How old are you?
Where do you live?
Have you always lived there?
Do you have any siblings?
(If so, how old are they?)
How old are your parents?
What are your parents' occupations?
Where do your parents come from?
Did either of your parents go to university?
Can you tell me a little bit about your family life?

Participant Profile

Can you tell me about some of your favourite things to do?/Do you have any hobbies?
Do you participate in any extracurricular activities?
If you had to tell someone about yourself, how would you describe yourself?
Can you tell me about some of the characteristics that you have that you think are your strongest ones? (Best ones?)
Can you tell me about what you would consider some of your weakest characteristics?

Thoughts on Education

Do you like school? (Please tell me why or why not? Explain it to me?)
What do you want to do when you grow up? (Why? Where did you get this idea?)
Who are your role models?
Do you feel like there has been anyone (or perhaps a few people) that has (have) influenced you in terms of what your goals are?
Is education important to you? (Why or why not? How important? Scale of 1-10?)
Can you tell me a little about your study habits?
Do you think that you are preparing well for university?
Can you name any teachers who are particularly helpful to you/encouraging to you?
Can you tell me how they are helpful/encouraging to you and how that makes you feel?

Planning Ahead

Where do you see yourself in five years? In ten years?
Where do you want to go to university? Why?
What do you think is the purpose of university education? (What about for you in particular? Why is this/isn't this important to you?)
When did you know that you wanted to go to university? (Where did you get that idea?)
Do you have plans to live here (your home community) at any stage in your life? (would you like to live there all your life?)/Where do you see yourself living when you're an adult?
Do you have thoughts about a "life plan?" Can you tell me about them?

What would “success” mean to you? (What do you feel you will need to do to consider yourself successful in life?)

Identity

How would you discuss what you feel your identity is?

What are the things that you think make up your identity?

In terms of your ideal identity (i.e. who you would like to be), what does it look like?

Can you describe the characteristics that your ideal identity has?

How do you try to achieve your ideal identity? (i.e. specific behaviours and attitudes)

Perceptions of Home Community

How would you describe your home community?

What are the best things about it? (What are your favourite things about it?)

What are the worst things about it? (What are your least favourite things about it?)

What would you change about it? (What are the things you wish were different?)

Do you feel there are opportunities for you in your home community?

What type of people would you say live in your home community? Can you talk about their main characteristics?

Would you say that there is community spirit in your community? Why or why not?

Would you say that you have a feeling of belonging in your home community? Why or why not?

Appendix E

Take-Home Questionnaire

Name: _____ **Age:** _____

Gender: _____ **School:** _____

Year in School: _____ **Hometown:** _____

1.) Please list below the classes you are taking this year:

Autumn Semester/Term

Spring Semester/Term

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2.) Please list below your favourite classes/subjects from any year of high/secondary school:

3.) Please list below your favourite things to do (e.g. hobbies, sports, clubs...):

4.) Please rate from 1 to 10 (1 being the least and 10 being the most) your enjoyment of school so far:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

5.) Please list a few things you are looking forward to in the next five years:

6.) Please rate from 1 to 10 (1 being the least and 10 being the most) your opinion about the importance of going to university/getting a college education:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

7.) Please write down five of your favourite things about your hometown/community:

1.)

2.)

3.)

4.)

5.)

8.) Please write down five of your least favourite things about your hometown/community:

1.)

2.)

3.)

4.)

5.)

9.) Please write down what types of career opportunities/types of work/jobs you think are available in your hometown/community:

10.) Please write down what types of career opportunities/types of work/jobs you yourself are hoping/planning for:

11.) Where do you think these types of career opportunities/types of work/jobs are available?

12.) What is the highest level of education you plan to complete (please circle one)

Primary

**University/College Degree
(e.g. BA, BS etc.)**

Secondary

**Some Postgraduate
(e.g. attending a course/not yet finished
with a course/ not yet finished with
degree)**

**Some University/College
(e.g. attending a course/not yet finished
with a course/not yet finished with
degree)**

**Postgraduate Degree
(e.g. Master's, PhD, MD etc)**

Other Qualification (Please specify): _____

13.) What is the highest level of education completed by your mother? (please circle one)

Primary

**University/College Degree
(e.g. BA, BS etc.)**

Secondary

**Some Postgraduate
(e.g. attending a course/not yet finished
with a course/ not yet finished with
degree)**

Some University/College
(e.g. attending a course/not yet finished
with a course/not yet finished with
degree)

Postgraduate Degree
(e.g. Master's, PhD, MD etc)

Other Qualification (Please specify): _____

14.) *What is the highest level of education completed by your father? (please circle one)*

Primary

University/College Degree
(e.g. BA, BS etc.)

Secondary

Some Postgraduate
(e.g. attending a course/not yet finished
with a course/not yet finished with
degree)

Some University/College
(e.g. attending a course/not yet finished
with a course/not yet finished with
degree)

Postgraduate Degree
(e.g. Master's, PhD, MD etc)

Other Qualification (Please specify): _____

15.) *What is your mother's occupation?*

16.) *What is your father's occupation?*

17.) *Do you read for fun? (please circle one)*

Yes

No

18.) *How often do you read for fun?*
(please circle the one that most describes your reading)

At least once a day

**More than once each month but not once
a week**

**More than once a week but not once a
day**

Once a month

Once a week

Less often than once a month

19.) *Do you have access to the Internet at home? (please circle one)*

Yes

No

20.) *How often do you use the Internet?
(please circle the one that most describes your use)*

At least once a day

More than once each month but not once a week

More than once a week but not once a day

Once a month

Once a week

Less often than once a month

21.) *What are the main purposes for your use of the Internet?
(please circle all that apply)*

**Connecting with friends
(e.g. Bebo, MySpace, instant messaging,
Skype etc.)**

**Connecting with family
(e.g. Bebo, MySpace, instant messaging,
Skype etc.)**

Emailing

Looking up information

Doing homework

**Other
Please specify: _____**

22.) *Where is/are the farthest place you've ever travelled from home?*

23.) *When and with whom did you travel there?
(e.g. family holiday, with my Mum, Dad...)*

24.) *How often do you travel more than one hour from your hometown/community?
(circle the one that most describes your travel)*

At least once a day

More than once each month but not once a week

More than once a week but not once a day

Once a month

Once a week

Less often than once a month

25.) *For what purposes do you travel more than one hour from your hometown/community? (e.g. visiting family, training, competition...)*

26.) *Please list at least five characteristics of your “ideal self”? (i.e. the person that you’d like to be/try to be):*

27.) *Please list and/or describe how you try to work towards being your “ideal self”:
(space for writing continues onto the next page)*

28.) *What are some of the reasons you think young people might want to leave your hometown/community?*

29.) *What are some of the reasons you think young people might want to stay in your hometown/community?*

30.) *Please rate from 1 to 10 (1 being the least and 10 being the most) how much you feel that belonging to your hometown/community influences your identity:*

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

31.) *Please rate from 1 to 10 (1 being the least and 10 being the most) how much you feel that becoming educated/skilled influences your identity:*

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

32.) *Please rate from 1 to 10 (1 being the least and 10 being the most) how much you feel your goals and future hopes/plans influence your identity:*

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

33.) *Please rate from 1 to 10 (1 being the least and 10 being the most) the influence you feel the following have had on your identity formation:*

(please write your rankings in the brackets beside the options below)

[] **Family**

[] **Community**

[] **Ethnicity/cultural background**

[] **Goals/Aspirations/Dreams**

[] **Gender**

[] **Other (please specify)**

[] **Friends**

[] **Participation in Extracurricular Activities (e.g. Sports, Theatre, Arts, Clubs, Societies etc)**

[] **Hobbies/Interests (please specify)**

[] **The place you come from (i.e. your hometown)**

[] **Education**

34.) What (if anything) do you think could be done to make young people want to stay in your hometown/community?

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and thank you for your participation in this study!

