

An investigation of the effect of route
to university on UK Business School
students' experiences of a professional
mentoring scheme

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Abstract

This thesis presents a Bourdieusian analysis of a mentoring scheme in order to understand whether it may develop social capital at the individual level. Differential rates in the acquisition of sought after graduate jobs suggest that higher education is not facilitating fair access to what is a limited supply of graduate-entry, high status, well-paid careers. As such, there is a need to understand how universities might best support their students who come from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education in obtaining graduate level employment. This thesis seeks to make a contribution to knowledge in this area; it offers an evaluation of the effectiveness of a mentoring scheme run in a Russell Group University Business School in preparing students for and connecting them with the world of work. The research aims to create knowledge about how students from different backgrounds experience and benefit from mentoring by business professionals. It tests the application of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to the professional mentoring scheme and makes some proposals as to how Bourdieu's theories might be refined. The insights gained from the study are used to offer suggestions for the design of future mentoring schemes to ensure that they optimise value to students from non-traditional backgrounds.

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Glossary

Acronym	Stands for	Notes
ACA	Associate Chartered Accountant	The accounting qualification of the Chartered Institute of Accountants in England and Wales
A Levels	General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level	The main secondary school leaving qualification in the UK; University entry standards are set by reference to A level grades
ATU	Access to University	The pseudonym for the contextual admissions scheme used by the university in which this case study is based.
BFMS	Building Futures Mentoring Scheme	The pseudonym for the mentoring scheme that forms the basis for this case study
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education	National annual survey of graduates' destinations from university (graduate level employment and post-graduate study are categorised as positive destinations, feeding into published league tables of UK universities)
Foundation Programme		A two year programme in the University's life-long learning department from which students may articulate in to the second year of degree programmes offered by the Business School
SEG	Socio-economic group	

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1 CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Differential rates in the acquisition of sought after graduate jobs suggest that higher education would seem to be “*perpetuating existing inequalities*” (Brown and Hesketh 2004, p.viii) that derive from socio-economic structures rather than enabling fairer access to what is a limited supply of graduate-entry, high status, well-paid careers. Thus if universities, and particularly selective universities, are to fulfil a role as “*engines of social mobility*” (Gibb 2016) then we must understand if and how they can support students who come from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education (Office For Fair Access, 2017) in order to close the gap in obtaining graduate level employment.

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to knowledge in this area; it offers an evaluation of the effectiveness of a mentoring scheme in preparing students for, and connecting them with, the world of work. The case study is located in a UK Business School and aims to create knowledge about how students from different backgrounds experience and benefit from mentoring by business professionals. It tests the application of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to the mentoring scheme and makes some proposals as to how Bourdieu’s theories might be refined. The insights gained from the study are used to offer suggestions for the design of future mentoring schemes to ensure that they optimise value to students from non-traditional backgrounds.

The introductory chapter begins with a description of my own journey to university and beyond, setting out how this informed my concern for social justice in higher education. It describes why and how I, whilst employed at a Russell Group university, established a mentoring scheme with the aim of providing support for students with few or no connections with the world of graduate employment. This section is followed by a brief outline of why I chose the mentoring scheme as the topic of this piece of practitioner research and of the theoretical framework that is adopted in this thesis. Finally, it outlines the research questions that the study sets out to answer and provides an overview of the methodological approach.

1.2 My Journey

This thesis is based on the analysis of the transcripts of interviews with twelve students in which they describe their journeys to and through university and potentially on to the world of graduate level work. As such, it seems only fair that I describe my own journey to the EdD programme and my decisions, firstly, to establish a mentoring programme and secondly, to use it as the case study for my doctoral thesis research.

I was the first in my family to go to university and one of only two in my set of school friends to do so. University was an unfamiliar and an uncharted territory and arriving in Manchester in the mid-eighties, I experienced a jarring of habitus (Lehmann 2012 p.530) similar to that recounted by Skeggs (1997). Looking back now, I see myself as an outsider (Lynch and O'riordan 1998 p.462), edging around the peripheries of university life, not knowing quite what to do or how. This was a stark contrast with the me that I had been at school and six-form college, where I was firmly on the inside; hardworking and high achieving, a skilled social chameleon who could blend into any company or occasion.

My purpose of getting to university was replaced with a purposelessness; I never really get the point. In contrast to students nowadays, who are primed to see higher education as a stepping stone to a shiny graduate level career, my generation was perhaps the last to go to university in order to be at university. There is an irony in this. Participation rates were around 13% in the 1980s, compared to over 50% in the early twenty-first century (Greenaway and Haynes, 2003, p.152). With a much smaller supply of graduates into the eighties job market, I had a much higher chance of securing a graduate level role than do many of my students today.

From university I went into a training contract with one of the large Accountancy firms¹. I did not have any interest in business or finance but I liked the idea of gaining a qualification that secured me a new identity as a professional. Whilst I did not experience the same sort of intensely painful clash of habitus as previously, my "*hippy chick*" (so-called by one of my line managers) qualities were not an ideal fit for eighties yuppie-dom. And, going back into higher education, this time as an employee, turned out to be a good move for me personally and professionally, even if it did come with no small measure of imposter syndrome, of which I am waiting to be cured by the EdD.

¹ At that time the Big 8 dominated the professional services industry; through a series of mergers, they have since become the Big 4 <https://big4accountingfirms.com/big-8-accounting-firms/>.

What my accountancy training did leave me with was a balance sheet and income statement view of the world. By this, I do not mean a desire to measure in financial terms. Rather it is a propensity to apply the concepts of valuation and changes in value, of assets and liabilities, to the social as well as the economic world. Hence my affinity with Bourdieu's conceptualisations of different forms of capital: social, economic and cultural and my understanding of these, not as "*metaphors*" (Skeggs 1997 p.10) but as tangible (economic capital) and intangible (cultural and social capitals) assets that are inherited, acquired and traded by individual players competing in the market for graduate employment and other arenas.

1.3 Creating the Mentoring Scheme

From 2002 onwards, in my role first as Undergraduate Tutor and then as Director of Undergraduate Studies, I worked on a day-to-day basis with the students in a Russell Group university business school. My interactions with them, particularly those seeking and obtaining placement year internships, revealed a wide variety in the quality and quantity of connections with the world of professional employment. Some students seemed to know nobody who worked in graduate level employment whilst others described how they were able to secure opportunities and obtain advice through family and friends. Outcomes from the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) surveys were poorer for the School's students from low socio-economic groups (SEGs). The degree, by itself, was not enough (Tomlinson 2008) and some of our students, even though academically excellent, were not able to demonstrate their employability through "*soft currencies: e.g., personal skills; appearance/dress/style*" (Brown and Hesketh 2004 p.35). After one woman had swept the board of almost all the prizes in her year, I commented to a colleague that she would surely go far. "*Not unless she gets rid of that accent*", came the reply.

One practical way in which I thought I could support those students who did not have connections with the world of professional work through their family and friends was to offer them a substitute in the form of a mentor. My role brought me into contact with many representatives of graduate employers, some of whom were alumni, and I knew that I should be able to mine these connections for the benefit of current students who did not have these sorts of links themselves.

I successfully applied for university funding to run a pilot scheme for a mentoring programme. The pilot ran in academic year 2012/13, offering 6 second year students one-to-one mentoring from an individual working in a graduate or more senior level role. All of the mentees had applied to University through its contextual admissions scheme. In 2013/14, the mentoring

programme, which in this thesis I will refer to by the pseudonym, Building Futures Mentoring Scheme (BFMS), was launched with 50 mentee/mentor pairings. This had expanded to 140 by 2015/16, the year in which the research for this thesis was carried out. Application to the scheme was open to all students in the Business School, with preference being given to those who had joined the University through its contextual admissions scheme or whose application to the mentoring programme indicated that they would have met the criteria for the scheme.

Further details of the mentoring programme as a basis for the case study are included in the methodology chapter.

1.4 Higher Education, Mentoring and Social Justice

As described above, the original purpose behind the mentoring scheme was to address what I perceived to be issues of inequity in the allocation of those soft currencies valued by graduate recruiters. As such, the author *qua* practitioner would make a claim that the scheme was motivated by a concern for social justice as defined by Singh:

The pursuit of social justice can be seen as the search for a fair (not necessarily equal) distribution of what is beneficial and valued as well as what is burdensome in a society.

(Singh 2011 p.482)

This is important to highlight since the mentoring scheme may be criticised for its focus on economic returns through the obtaining of graduate level employment. Indeed, from a critical perspective, it might be seen as yet another weapon in the arms race that is graduate employability.

Yet motivations are never singular and it is important that the reader understands that whilst I did have a genuine concern for my students and a wish to help them, my actions were in no way altruistic. Any of us who has the freedom to establish a new initiative in a higher education setting is aware that its success brings personal and professional reward if successful. Certainly, the mentoring scheme fitted a zeitgeist in which policy makers, business and higher education were under pressure to make access to graduate level employment, particularly the professions (Milburn (2012); Great Britain Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2015)) more equitable.

Thus, my “*ontological complicity*” (Puwar 2004 p.119) that arises from my personal investment in and power over the scheme, makes any objective evaluation by me impossible. Instead, I offer an interpretation of students’ accounts of their experiences of the scheme that seeks

to provide a contribution to that literature which problematizes and critiques the construction of graduate employability.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Bourdieu's theoretical framework provides a critical lens through which to view the field of higher education (Maton, 2005) and much of the work on widening participation and equity in graduate employment is informed by the writings of Bourdieu. This thesis will seek to test the application of his theories to the mentoring scheme as lived and reported by the students. Three theoretical constructs were identified through the literature search as having potentially powerful explanatory power in analysing the case study: social capital, selection survival and habitus. These are outlined briefly below with a fuller discussion being included in the literature review.

1.5.1 Social Capital

Bourdieu's defines social capital as being the *"aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition"* (Bourdieu 1986 pp.21-22). Membership of the BFMS provides the mentees with the *"credential(s)"* (Bourdieu 1986 p.21) to access an increased *"network of connections"* (Bourdieu 1986 p.21) through their mentors,

In the context of the mentoring scheme, social capital is understood as access to, familiarity with and, hence, sense of fit with, the world of graduate-level work. Following Bourdieu's theory, students who do not have family or friends working in occupations for which a degree is normally a condition of entry, will have lower accumulations of forms of social capital that are of value in the graduate recruitment market. As will be discussed in the literature review, the concept of employability is contested. A purely economic framing of the role of higher education, as being the development of employable graduates, ignores its wider social value (Kahn, 2009). Moreover, it risks reducing notions of agency to those of economically rational decision making found in the Finance disciplines (see, for example, Jensen, 1986). Nevertheless, the BFMS does have as its purpose the development of students' employability. For higher education to have a role in social transformation, it must help to level the employability field by providing these individuals with the support they need to compete against their better-off (in social capital terms) peers (Clarke, Hallett & Miller, 2014).

Hence, BFMS presents an opportunity to study how students, with varying accumulations of “*inherited*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17) social capital, experience and draw benefit from mentoring in the form of their contacts with and their sense of belonging in the world of graduate work.

1.5.2 Selection Survival

Bourdieu’s work on the French educational system of the 1960s showed that the rates at which individuals continued into higher education were related to social class, with a higher proportion of those from poorer and non-professional backgrounds being selected out (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Similarly, the underrepresentation of students from low SEGs at selective UK universities (Boliver, 2013), such as the one that forms the basis of this case study, would suggest that those who do succeed have to possess “*manifest exceptional qualities*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.84) in order to meet the demanding entry requirements. This is not to suggest that all students at selective universities who are from higher SEGs will be less intellectually gifted than all those from lower SEGs; rather that the latter have typically to possess greater inherent academic abilities in order to achieve the set entry qualifications in loci which are less conducive to academic attainment.

1.5.3 Habitus

Schemes such as the BFMS cannot guarantee the creation of social capital since the individual must not only invest effort into the building and maintaining of social relationships but also acquire the disposition (Bourdieu, 1986, p.23) to do so. Possession of the disposition to benefit from the opportunities afforded in a specific field, for example, a Russell Group university, is, for Bourdieu, determined by the individual’s habitus, their fit with that field through their unconscious embodiment of its mores and norms. Those students who have family experience of higher education and graduate level employment are more likely to possess a sense of belonging in these worlds than those who do not. This case study provides an opportunity to investigate whether those students joining the scheme with higher levels of social capital, who already embody the habitus of the fields of university study and professional work benefit less, the same or more than their peers who do not possess this sense of belonging in and fitting in with these worlds. This will build evidence for whether interventions such as the BFMS may contribute or not to a narrowing of any social capital gap that exists between students from different backgrounds.

1.6 Aims of the Research

The thesis compares experiences of, and outcomes from, the mentoring scheme for students from various backgrounds drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of social capital, habitus and selection survival as a theoretical framework. Hence, it seeks to extend our understanding of whether such schemes may contribute to or, alternately, may mitigate the social reproduction of inequalities through higher education. The thesis also examines the extent to which Bourdieu's theoretical framework remains useful in explaining the experiences of students in an early twenty-first century business school, a context in which higher education is much more marketised than it was at the time and place of Bourdieu's own research.

The research questions are:

1. How do students' backgrounds impact their access to professional networks that will be of value to them in the competition for graduate employment?
2. How do students' backgrounds affect how they engage with, and benefit from, mentoring by professionals?
3. How should mentoring schemes be designed and implemented in order to contribute to social transformation?

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

This introduction has been written in the first person because it has described my personal journey as a researcher practitioner. The remainder of the thesis will revert to the third person and is organised into five chapters.

The first of these, the literature review, in its first section outlines the large Sociology of Education literature on widening participation and graduate employability, much of which is informed by Bourdieu's canon of work. The literature review then goes back to Bourdieu's own writing to discuss the theoretical constructs which inform the design of the research.

The methodology chapter sets out the approach taken to seeking to answer the research questions which were drawn from the literature review. This is an exploratory case study (Yin 2008) of twelve interviews with student participants in the mentoring scheme using an interpretive

approach (Cousin, 2008, p.7). The collection of data through one-to-one semi-structured interviews and the analysis of the data using a narrative analysis approach (Maitlis 2012) provides a set of thick data (Cohen, Manion et al. 2013) which is analysed in the results chapter. The results are interpreted using Bourdieusian theory in order to determine the applicability of these concepts to the case study. Whilst the conclusions and recommendations must be understood to be specific to the case under consideration, their framing in widely-accepted theoretical concepts may allow them to be applied in other contexts and so be of value to other researcher-practitioners. Thus, the final chapter makes a series of recommendations on how mentoring schemes might be designed and operationalised.

2 CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The responsibility of universities to develop their students' employability is a defining feature of the UK higher education sector in the early twenty first century, as evidenced by government policy statements (Browne, 2010; Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2015), league tables and institutional marketing literature (Williams, 2013). At the same time, universities are urged to play a role in enhancing social justice through providing opportunities for upward social mobility through the inclusion of, and support for groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2015).

One means by which universities might help students to develop their employability is to provide access to mentoring by business professionals. Just such a scheme forms the basis of the case study presented in this thesis. Yet employability remains a contested concept and one that may be over-simplified when policy and institutional responses tend to be based on models of one directional upward social mobility which assume the inevitability of class inequalities (Reay, 2013). Therefore, following in the footsteps of those taking a sociological approach to widening participation which recognises the complexities of social mobility and employability (for example, Reay, Lehmann and Archer) this thesis applies a sociological framework to the study of mentoring of university students by business professionals.

Much of the literature using sociological approaches to analyse widening participation and graduate employability has been informed by Bourdieu's theories. In the same way that university access schemes may be understood as supporting students as they move from one field to another (school to university) so mentoring may be understood as supporting them in moving from the field of higher education to graduate employment. Hence, Bourdieu's theoretical framework and his concepts of field, habitus and social and cultural capital may provide a useful toolkit for the analysis of mentoring schemes.

This review of the literatures on employability and on mentoring schemes analyses previous studies that have considered these issues from a sociological perspective. The chapter is split into three sections. The first part provides an outline of alternative models of the early twentieth century English graduate labour market which forms the setting for the case study. Within consensus theory models (Brown & Hesketh, 2004), competition is understood to be fair in that students determine

their own futures through the exercising of individual agency. In contrast, in conflict theory models (Brown & Hesketh, 2004), agency is understood to be, at least partially, limited by the individual's positioning within the social structures. Empirical evidence, for example, the annual national survey of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) supports the second model in that it shows that success in obtaining graduate level positions is related to characteristics of class, gender and ethnicity (Britton, Dearden, Shephard & Vignoles, 2016).

The second section is an overview of the literature on mentoring schemes which have been designed to support the personal and professional development of students from backgrounds historically underrepresented in higher education. Many of the studies on access to graduate level opportunities discussed in the first section are influenced by the work of Bourdieu, using his theoretical concepts of social capital, of selection survival and of habitus to explain the under-representation of certain groups in graduate roles. Other authors, however, question or build on Bourdieu's theories to offer alternative explanations that pay more attention to other factors, including gender (Adkins, 2005; McNay, 1999; Skeggs, 2004) and individual reflexivity (Archer, 2007). Yet no application of Bourdieusian theory to mentoring schemes designed specifically to support students through mentoring by business professionals was found in the sociology of higher education literature dealing with widening participation and graduate employability, despite the potential value of such an approach to make visible the relationship between mentoring schemes and the wider social structure.

The final section of the literature review, therefore, outlines Bourdieu's concepts of selection, social capital and habitus to explore their value in understanding the experiences of students participating in the mentoring scheme. The chapter concludes with the research questions that the thesis will seek to answer.

2.1.1 Competition and Employability

2.1.2 The English Graduate Recruitment Market in the Early Twenty First Century

The reforms to undergraduate fees and admissions implemented following the 2010 *Browne Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance* have pushed English higher education firmly onto the market vertex of Clark's triangular model (market, collegiate, government/managerial) of higher education (Clark in Marginson and Rhoades 2002, p.284). Browne's recommendations made competition a defining characteristic whereby "*students' choices will shape the landscape of higher education*" (Browne, 2010, p.4). Competition, between universities for students and between applicants for places, was subsequently further strengthened with the removal of student number controls, announced in 2013 (Hillman, 2014). Browne was explicit that this competition should be played out around universities' comparative abilities to prepare their students for highly paid graduate employment:

Where a key selling point of a course is that it provides improved employability, its charge will become an indicator of its ability to deliver –students will only pay higher charges if there is a proven path to higher earnings. (Browne, 2010, p.31)

With nearly all English universities choosing to charge the maximum fee of £9,000 for home and EU students for all of their undergraduate courses (Reddin, 2016), marketing differentiation has been through product rather than price. Hence, schemes, such as the mentoring programme that is the subject of this case study, which may help students build their employability by acquiring those qualities and attributes sought by employers, have become a key element of product differentiation in the market for university students.

As discussed below, employability is a contested concept but a working definition is provided by the Higher Education Academy:

a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy

(Thomas and Jones, 2007, p.2).

Models for developing student employability applied in UK universities, including the one in this case study, often include the four elements of the USEM framework: Understanding, Skills, Efficacy, Meta-Cognition (Yorke and Knight, 2006). Universities' effectiveness in developing their students' employability is measured through positive destinations in the DLHE; hence, employability is equated with the ability of graduates to obtain graduate level jobs or postgraduate study (Cashian, Clarke and Richardson, 2015).

Two broad approaches to conceptualising graduate employability can be identified from the literature. The first assumes that individuals exercise agency in competition that is rational and consensual and, hence, fair. In the second, the field of the graduate recruitment market is understood as one of conflict in which participants compete for, and with, scarce and class-determined economic and social-cultural resources. Both models are concerned with how students develop "*the qualities valued by employers*" (Brown & Hesketh, 2004, p.35) which may be termed personal capital:

[P]ersonal capital depends on a combination of *hard currencies* including, credentials, work experience, sporting or music achievements, etc. and *soft currencies*, including interpersonal skills, charisma, appearance and accent.
(Brown & Hesketh, 2004, p.35)

Consensus theories (Brown and Hesketh 2004) focus on competition between students at the micro-level; success depends on students making instrumental (Schuller, Baron et al. 2000) choices to invest in their personal capital (see, for example, Yorke and Knight (2006)). Issues of power and conflict tend to be disregarded (Schuller, Baron et al. 2000) and competition is understood as fair because students exercise agency as fully informed and economically rational beings (Olssen and Peters 2005, p.314) who have freedom of choice whether or not to engage in activities that will make them more attractive in the graduate job market.

In consensus models, potential stocks of personal capital are not limited, at either the micro or the macro level and unmet demand for suitably skilled graduates is assumed (Brown and Hesketh 2004) by neo-classical models of economic growth. Thus, interventions such as mentoring are conceptualised in these approaches as being able to effect social transformation at both an individual and society level by building an individual's employability, allowing an individual to trade up in the graduate job market and so to climb the rungs of a one-way ladder of upward social mobility (Walkerdine, 2003) without squeezing out others. The virtuous circle logic of endogenous growth theory (Aghion, Howitt, Brant-Collett, & García-Peñalosa, 1998), which predicts that constant growth is generated through increasing rates of return on human capital, is that the greater the

investment in personal capital at both individual and societal level, then the more employable graduates there will be, the more economy will grow and so the more employable graduates will be needed (Brown and Hesketh 2004). This neo-liberal economic model underlies the dominant discourse of employability which constructs the role of the university as a provider of opportunity (Clarke, Hallett et al. 2014) and the student as an informed consumer (Browne 2010). In this model, interventions such as mentoring programmes may be understood as contributing to the success of the system of competition both by building the pool of employable graduates and by mitigating inequalities in access to opportunities to develop personal capital.

In contrast, approaches based on conflict theories (Brown and Hesketh 2004) emphasise the structural determinants of outcomes for different students (see, for example, (Moreau and Leathwood 2006), Tholen (2013)). In these alternative models, the fairness of competition is questioned because students' abilities and opportunities to trade their personal capital in the market for graduate talent (Brown and Hesketh 2004) are largely determined by their socio-economic biographies (Moreau and Leathwood 2006, Allen, Quinn et al. 2013, Tholen 2013). As participation in higher education has expanded, the graduate labour market has become "*crowded*" (Tomlinson, 2012, p.408) requiring applicants for sought after roles to compete not just on the basis of academic credentials but also on their skills, experiences and fit with a specified graduate type (Tomlinson, 2012; Morley, 2007; Morrison, 2014). Thus, decisions about which applicants obtain limited graduate level positions appear "*relatively arbitrary*" (Tholen, 2013, p.6) but are actually based on the softer currencies of personal capital which are unequally distributed across different socio-economic groups (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Students from higher socio-economic groups will fare better in a congested market for graduate talent and so, where supply outstrips demand, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may find themselves locked out of opportunities to move up the social structure (Brown, 2013, p.682).

Tomlinson argues that, as a result of the combined expansion of British higher education and of technological changes affecting the world of work, an oversupply of graduates has led to a "*decoupling*" of Higher Education and the graduate labour market (Tomlinson, 2012, p.409). Universities are no longer producing a homogenous cadre of graduates with a specific set of technical skills and body of academic knowledge in numbers that (at least approximately) meet the employers' demand for graduate labour. Instead, a much more "*heterogeneous mix of graduates*" (Tomlinson, 2012, p.410) are competing for a limited supply of graduate level opportunities and the construct of graduate employability in early twenty-first century English higher education system favours middle-class dispositions (Morley, 2007; Tomlinson, 2014).

From a conflict theory perspective, interventions such as the mentoring programme might play a role in mitigating inequalities at the micro level. Yet at the macro level, such interventions will only contribute to intra-generational social mobility (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992) if mentees from low SEGs displace their higher SEG peers in the crowded graduate job market. Indeed, if the graduate employment market is understood as a field of competition and conflict, such programmes which support a lucky few (Wakeling, 2010) may actually be contributing to the maintenance of structural inequalities through helping to legitimise them.

2.2 Access to Graduate Opportunities

Budd (2016) notes that, relative to the large literature on inequality of access to university, studies considering experiences of students from widening participation backgrounds at and after university are more limited. Therefore, this thesis may make both contributions to knowledge and to practice through an investigation of the experiences of students from different backgrounds in a Russell Group university.

Notions of fairness are complex (or perhaps even meaningless) in the context of a society characterised by significant inequalities (Reay, 2013) but for access to graduate opportunities to be understood to be fair, then as a minimum, students, regardless of socio-economic background, should have equal success in obtaining graduate level employment. That this is not the case is evidenced by studies of UK graduate employment that have found that employment and salary outcomes are related to socio-economic group (Furlong and Cartmel, 2005; Britton et al., 2016). Of course, this under-representation is, at least in part, a consequence of the lower proportion of individuals from low SEG backgrounds who go on to higher education, a disproportionality which itself has been found to be largely explained by secondary school attainment (Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman & Vignoles, 2013; Gorard 2008). The type of higher education institution attended has also been found to be related to graduate employment outcomes (Britton et al., 2016) and students from lower socio-economic groups are similarly underrepresented in institutions higher up the “*reputational hierarchy*” (Singh, 2011, p.484). These universities with high “*reputational capital*” are the ones targeted by employers (Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p.218),

Not only are students from low SEGs are underrepresented in universities with high reputational capital, including the Russell Group institutions, (Boliver 2013) like the one in this case study, but they also find themselves in a mass higher education where the value of academic

credentials are falling (Collins, 2002). Given the over-supply of graduates, even just from high-status institutions, employers' differentiation of applicants by reference to the soft currencies of personal capital (Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p.35) may disadvantage students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Tomlinson 2008).

Not only may students from low SEGs face a deficit on arriving at university, they may also find it difficult to accumulate personal capital valued by employers whilst in higher education. Students' attitudes to personal and professional development have been found to be shaped, at least in part, by background (Bowman, Colley, & Hodkinson, 2005, p.77; Tomlinson 2008). Opportunities to acquire skills and competencies through extra-curricula and extra-university activities may depend on individual biographies (Furlong & Cartmel, 2005, p.40) with students from low SEGs often lacking the resources, including time, to participate (Stevenson and Clegg 2011).

Certain groups may be disadvantaged by a lack of understanding of the "*rules of the game*" (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013, p.724) of employability and of the high value placed on activities such as volunteering or participating in student societies. The ways in which students engage with opportunities for professional and personal development may depend on their sense of belonging in university life (Lehmann, 2012; Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003) and how they envision their future possible selves (Leondari, 2007).

Ball, Macrae & Maguire (1999, p.221) argue that "*imagined futures*" are shaped by position in the socio-economic structure with high status careers being simply unimaginable for students from families where nobody has modelled such possibilities. Even where low SEG students have positioned themselves inside HE (Archer and Hutchings 2000) and so would seem to aspire to graduate level employment and status (Archer and Hutchings 2000), they may, once at university, revise their ambitions downwards (Lehmann, 2012).

Hence, it would seem worthwhile to compare the experiences of students from different backgrounds in constructing their employable selves within the setting of a high status institution. Such an investigation may enhance our understanding of whether and how, initiatives such as mentoring, might enable students from lower SEGs to use their university learning and experiences to compete successfully in the competition for graduate jobs. The next section of this chapter provides a review of the literature on the potential of mentoring in higher education to contribute to upward social mobility of students from low SEGs.

2.3 Mentoring, Professional Development and Social Justice

2.3.1 Mentoring in Higher Education

There is no universally accepted definition of mentoring (Woolnough & Fielden, 2017) but four elements may define mentoring in a University context:

- (1) *psychological and emotional support,*
- (2) *support for setting goals and choosing a career path,*
- (3) *academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing a student's knowledge relevant to their chosen field, and*
- (4) *specification of a role model.*

(Crisp & Cruz, 2009, p.528)

Literature reviews of US mentoring programmes have reported generally positive outcomes (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng & DuBois, 2008) but warn that the research is theoretically under-developed (Crisp & Cruz, 2009) and lacks methodological rigour (Eby et al., 2008). Yet to accept the seemingly non-theoretical nature of much of this writing is to ignore the managerialist agenda on which much of the work on mentoring and coaching is based (Western, 2012). In positioning this thesis within the conflict model of employability, the focus of this review is on the narrower sub-section of work that problematizes mentoring by considering it through a social justice lens. This enables consideration of how the benefits of mentoring may vary by ethnicity (Crisp 2010, Hu and Ma 2010), gender (Crisp 2010, Smith-Ruig 2013), disability status (Patrick and Wessel 2013) or family background (Snowden & Hardy, 2012).

Girves, Zepeda & Gwathmey (2005) found *“only a few empirical studies have been conducted in academic settings”* (Girves et al., 2005, p. 452) and that, furthermore, that the few studies of women and ethnic minority mentees that have been undertaken provide mixed results on the benefits (Girves et al., 2005). In contrast, Smith (2007, p. 36) describes the literature as *“vast”* and demonstrating, in the main, positive effects for ethnic minority and first-generation students. Yet she qualifies this position by stating that few mentoring schemes are rigorously evaluated and that methodological problems limit generalizability of findings on impact on academic outcomes

(Smith, 2007, p. 36). Most of the studies of higher education mentoring programmes located in the course of this review are of peer mentoring or buddying schemes (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014; Liu & McGrath-Champ, 2014; Noakes, May, van der Sluis, & Gay, 2013; Tremblay & Rodger, 2003; Salinitri, 2005; Snowden & Hardy, 2012) and some of staff/student mentoring (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Museus, 2010; Smith, 2007). Thus, the focus of most of the studies is on on-campus networks and belonging and success at university. Collings, Swanson and Watkins (2014), whilst highlighting the increasing popularity of peer mentoring schemes in UK universities, in common with Crisp and Cruz (2009), note a lack of rigour in the research, finding only twelve quantitative studies (Collings et al., 2014). All of these, as peer mentoring schemes, sought to enhance student retention, satisfaction or academic outcomes (Collings et al., 2014). Fewer studies were found of mentoring schemes like the one that forms the basis of this study, which match students with employers and alumni (D'Abate and Eddy 2008, Gannon and Maher 2012, Smith-Ruig 2013) and so these will be considered in some detail.

2.3.2 Mentoring of Students by Business Professionals

The mentoring scheme that forms the basis of the study by D'Abate & Eddy (2008) matched undergraduate business students with mentors from the business world and a follow up longitudinal study by D'Abate found a significant positive relationship between mentoring and alumni's self-reported career development (D'Abate, 2010). The focus of their study, however, is on evaluation of the scheme for the purposes of continuous improvement and there is no attempt to investigate differential impacts and experiences. Gannon & Maher (2012) report on an alumni mentoring scheme for students on hospitality and tourism programmes and identify mentoring as a means of developing "*competitive success*" in the graduate labour market (Gannon & Maher, 2012, p. 442). The authors conclude that, although some mentees felt that they benefited from the networking opportunities, more needed to be done to make these explicit to participants. As with the study by D'Abate & Eddy (2008), only direct rather than institutionalised social capital was considered, and there is no discussion of the differential levels of social capital that students may bring to the programme.

Smith-Ruig (2013) also considers a professional mentoring scheme for business students, this time in Australia and interestingly specifically for women only, although no gender, ethnicity or class analysis is offered. Like the other studies, this qualitative research, found that mentees

reported positive impacts for career development and also “*psycho-social benefits*”, enhanced confidence and motivation (Smith-Ruig, 2013, p. 778).

2.3.3 Mentoring and Social Justice

A relatively small proportion of studies problematize mentoring of students by viewing it through a social justice lens in order to enable consideration of how the benefits of mentoring may vary by ethnicity (Campbell and Campbell 2007, Crisp 2010, Hu and Ma 2010), gender (Crisp 2010, Smith-Ruig 2013), first generation status (Soria and Stebleton 2013, Stebleton and Soria 2013, Lightweis 2014), socio-economic group (Snowden and Hardy 2012, Noakes, May et al. 2013, Liu and McGrath-Champ 2014) or disability status (Patrick and Wessel 2013).

Moore, Sanders and Higham’s (2013) review of research into widening participation in UK higher education concludes that mentoring, particularly mentoring by current students, may be a valuable intervention for providing information and advice to university applicants from underrepresented groups and for helping them to acculturate to university (Moore, Sanders & Higham, 2013). Snowden and Hardy (2012), in a study conducted in an institution in which 65% of the students come from low SEG and 90% lived at home, found that peer mentoring improved student engagement and outcomes including in formal assessments.

There were no studies of mentoring of students by business professionals mentioned in the review by Moore et al. (2013) and more broadly they comment that:

The review found little research examining how engaged under-represented groups are with higher education provider employability programmes and no systematic research of the impact of interventions on employment outcomes for under-represented groups (although there was a large amount of anecdotal evidence). As a result it is unclear whether approaches being developed are working and little robust evidence to suggest which interventions have an impact.

(Moore et al., 2013 p.116)

As such, this thesis may provide a useful contribution to knowledge in providing an evaluation of the impact of one intervention designed to enhance the employability of students from groups under-represented in higher education, by engaging them with employers through one-to-one mentoring. Positioning the study within the sociological literature on higher education means that this work can build on previous studies that understand access to higher education and to graduate level employment as determined, either wholly or in part, by an individual’s inherited position in the socio-economic structures. Much of this literature uses Bourdieu’s theories of

selection survival, habitus and social capital as a conceptual toolkit to make sense of the differential experiences of students of different classes, ethnicities and genders. The next section of this chapter outlines concepts from Bourdieu's work which may be helpful in understanding how students from different groups engage with and benefit from mentoring by business professionals.

2.4 The Application of Bourdieu's Theories to Higher Education

Bourdieu's body of work is vast and wide-ranging, covering not just the field of education but also, for example, those of culture, colonial politics and the discipline of sociology itself and has been "the key source for inspiration" for sociologists studying class in early twenty first century Britain (Atkinson, Roberts & Savage, 2012, p.1). In particular, Bourdieu's theories have been relevant to the sub-discipline of sociology of education (Reay, Arnot, David, Evans & James, 2004). Much of the literature on employability discussed above is informed by Bourdieu's theories, which, indeed, Donnelly claims are "ubiquitous" to studies concerned with equity in higher education (Donnelly, 2016, p.2).

This section outlines those key theoretical concepts that will be used as themes in the data analysis for this study: selection survival, habitus and social capital. This requires reference to a number of different works but draws particularly on *The Forms of Capital* (Bourdieu 1986) , *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977) and *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). *The Forms of Capital* presents Bourdieu's theory of how three types of capital – cultural, economic and social – are distributed within society and how an individual's possession (largely through inheritance) of these three capitals determines that person's position within the social structure. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu discusses the concept of habitus, one's unconscious fit with, and shaping by, one's social milieu. In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu and Passeron set out their theory of education as a mechanism for social reproduction through the selecting out from entry into higher education a greater proportion of lower than higher socio-economic groups. They test this theory by application to the *Concours*, the French system of examinations for entry to the *Grandes Ecoles*. As such, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* is directly concerned with the issues of selection and selection survival, with the impact of social background on engagement with education, with the interface between higher education and graduate employment and with the diminishing returns on cultural capital in a mass system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). All of these themes will be explored in this thesis.

2.4.1 The Cultural Arbitrary and Selection Survival

For Bourdieu, the purpose of education in capitalist society is social reproduction. Existing social structures are perpetuated through a system that fits, and therefore rewards, the dispositions of the upper and middle classes. What is valued, and so has value recognised in the form of cultural capital through academic credentials, is determined not *objectively* by intrinsic worth but arbitrarily by its relation to the dominant power structures (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). This “*cultural arbitrary*” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990 p.5) is mediated and reproduced by the education system through “*symbolic violence*” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.5), the imposition and legitimising of meanings, whilst “*concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force*” so that “*it adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations*” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.4). For Bourdieu, it is through the cultural arbitrary that values are placed upon different art forms, for example, highbrow classical music compared to lowbrow pop music and indeed academic disciplines and courses (PPE at Oxbridge contrasted with Events Management at a new university).

Bourdieu’s concept of selection survival (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 80) underlies his conceptualisation of how education supports the inter-generational transmission of privilege. For Bourdieu, dispositions are shaped by “*objective conditions*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.78) meaning that aspirations, both for university study and graduate employment, will be determined by the individual’s positioning in the socio-economic structure, which for certain groups make higher education an “*improbable practice*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.78). Thus, only those from low SEGs possessing “*manifest exceptional qualities*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.84) will survive being selected out as they move from compulsory to higher education. Bourdieusian analyses problematize the widening participation agenda by showing how choices or non-choices of where, what and how to study are informed by biography (Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002). In this way, they seek to move away from deficit models of widening participation (Stevenson, 2010) that explain under-representation of certain groups through “*self-inflicted*” (Day, Rickett, & Woolhouse, p.404) failures to meet the requirements set for participation.

Bourdieu & Passeron argued that, in 1960’s France, the “*dominant classes*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.117) benefited from the misrecognition of academic credentials as an indicator of the technical abilities actually needed to do the job (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). In the early twenty first century, academic credentials are no longer, of themselves, sufficient to obtain good graduate employment (Tomlison, 2008) and so misrecognition may be extended to qualities beyond academic qualifications. Thus, those from non-traditional backgrounds who do manage to survive into higher education may not survive the next selection stage, if they do not possess the “*soft currencies: e.g., personal skills; appearance/dress/style*” (Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p.35) deemed to be required for graduate roles.

And what is understood, or “*systematically misrecognised*” (Moore, 2004, p.446) by employers as employability and how this bundle of qualities is measured and valued, is again a cultural arbitrary (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), a construction that is determined by and reproduces the existing social structures (Tholen, 2013, p7). In early twentieth century England, the “*performative function of universities*” (Boden & Nedava, 2010, p.37) as producers of employable graduates shifts power to determine what is valued in higher education away from the universities and towards employers, particularly the large graduate employers, who as representatives of the dominant classes will reproduce the existing social structures through their recruitment practices.

Moreover, in a vertically differentiated higher education system (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008 p.291), this performative function may vary across different types of institution, “*with two tiers of universities – those that produce docile employees and those that produce employers/leaders*” (Boden & Nedava, 2010, p.37). Empirical evidence suggests that graduate employers do indeed target the more prestigious universities². And the over-representation of those from the dominant classes within these institutions (Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001; Boliver, 2013) makes such targeting an effective and efficient means of reproducing existing social structures.

Just as many working class people “*position themselves ‘outside’ of HE*” (Archer & Hutchings, 2000, p.570) because university is inhabited by an unimaginable and unimagined future self (Ball et al., 1999) so might those who do survive selection into higher education still position themselves outside of the most prestigious graduate employment. In the same way that they may be drawn to lower-status institutions (Reay et al., 2001), perceived as a better fit for “*people like me*” (Bowl, 2001, p.147) or limit their horizons to local institutions (Thomas & Quinn, 2006, p.2) they may aim for less prestigious employment after graduation. This contrasts with the behaviours of many middle class students who may not even consider lower-status institutions as a possibility (Ball et al., 2002, p.68) and who, from the very outset of their university career, appreciate that the degree is just one part of the resources they will need to obtain graduate level employment. Students from non-traditional backgrounds have been found to misrecognise the importance of their academic qualifications relative to non-academic attributes (Burke, 2016). And what seems realistic to someone who knows family and friends in high status positions may seem unattainable to somebody who does not have any insider knowledge or sense of belonging. The rules of the game, are not explicit or codified (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.98) and a sense of fit, or at least successful

² See, for example, the absence of any post-92 institutions from the Top 25 Universities Targeted by the Largest Number of Top Employers in 2016-2017, http://www.highfliers.co.uk/download/2017/graduate_market/GMReport17.pdf

imitation of sense of fit, with the worlds of the elite university and of graduate level employment will be needed by winners in the game of obtaining graduate level employment.

2.4.2 Habitus

The “unconscious” is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus.

(Bourdieu 1977, p.78)

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to explain how understandings of the social world are unconsciously mastered and so transferred between generations (Bourdieu, 1977, p.90). Habitus is created and maintained through “*pedagogic work (pw)*, a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, i.e., a habitus, the product of internalisation of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after PA has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalised arbitrary” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Habitus mediates between agency and structure (Davey, 2009, p.276) but not through a simple, one way and clearly defined relationship but one that is complex and dynamic, both determining and determined by the individual’s relationship with the social world. Habitus, as well as being constructed, is constructing, being the internalisation of a system of “*structured and structuralising dispositions*” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.121). Our relationship with the social world, our “*socially constituted principle of perception and appreciation*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.20), is unconscious because it is specific to our biography and to the pedagogic authority (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, p.131) to which we are subject. Since a child’s earliest pedagogic authority is the family (or carers) then the habitus of which we gain mastery is determined by our family’s socio-economic positioning (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

The concept of concept of habitus is linked to that of the “*field*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 94), the nexus of powers and capitals of the environment in which agents interact. As students move between different fields from family, to formal education, to graduate employment they may experience a dissonance between the habitus they embody and that of the field into which they have moved. So where the habitus of her family does not fit with that met later on in the school (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) or, indeed, university (Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003;

Redmond 2006), a student may not possess the *“feel for the game”* (Bourdieu, 1990, p.66) that she needs in order to succeed in that field, be it school, higher education or the graduate employment market. In contrast, her peers whose habitus already fits with that of this new field would feel no such sense of struggle:

And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like “a fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1990, p.127)

This case study concerns students at the juncture of two fields, the fields of higher education and the graduate employment market. It explores the extent to which, by having adapted, or not, to the field of the university, students from non-traditional backgrounds have acquired *“the disposition to make use of”* the mentoring scheme *“and the predispositions to succeed in it”* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.204). The students’ narratives on their own development through their engagement with their mentors may offer insights into changes over time in students’ fit with the habitus as they move between these different fields. For Bourdieu, a habitus will be more or less *“exhaustive”* depending on *“the completeness with which it reproduces the cultural arbitrary of a group or class in the practices it generates”* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, p.34). Investigating any effects on the exhaustiveness or otherwise of the habitus of a Russell Group university may contribute to our understanding of the pedagogic work of schemes such as the mentoring programme. It can help us know whether such interventions reinforce the cultural arbitrary of graduate employability or whether they chip away at *“the durability, the transposability and exhaustivity of a habitus”* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, p.34) by denting the unconsciousness of this cultural arbitrary.

2.4.2.1 The Habitus of the University

It is not only in elite universities that a sense of other may be keenly felt (see, for example, (Reay, Crozier et al. 2009)) by students from non-traditional backgrounds. Even in institutions where *“people like me”* (Bowl 2001, p.147) are in the majority they may still feel the weight of the water of the habitus of higher education (Redmond, 2006; Hill 2009; Anderson, 2010; Greenbank, 2011) hence choosing to spend the minimum of time on campus and so not participating in university-based extra-curricula activities (Redmond, 2006).

Other characteristics that have been found to be associated with level of engagement in university based extra-curricula activities include ethnicity (Stuart, Lido, Morgan, & May, 2009) and class (Stevenson and Clegg 2011). Stevenson and Clegg (2011) identified differences between working-class and middle-class students with regard to engagement in extra curricula activities and the value put on these as a means of developing possible future selves. Future selves are our imaginings of *“what is possible for (our)selves by comparing with significant others and by internalizing stereotypes and norms relating to important social identities”* (Vignoles, Manzi, Regalia, Jemmolo & Scabini, 2008, p.1168). For Lehmann (2012), working class students’ lack of economic and social capital, causes them to lose out to *“the inflation of extra-credential experiences”* (Lehmann 2012, p.203). Keane argues that working class students, finding themselves locked out by their middle class peers from access to these *“scarce goods”* (Keane 2011, p.460), purposefully distance themselves further from opportunities for professional and personal, although whether this is in order to protect their own class identity is not clear (Keane 2011, p.461). It may be because they *“misrecognise”* the value of extra-curricula activities (Keane, 2011, p.461) over-estimating the relative importance of academic credentials and focusing instead on these.

2.4.3 Habitus, Agency and Reflexivity

Noting that temporal orientation and participation did not match exactly onto class, Stevenson and Clegg (2011) raise the question of the role of agency. This highlights an important criticism of Bourdieu’s theories: their perceived failure to acknowledge the role of agency in individual biographies. Archer (2007) argues that agency exercised through reflexivity, which she defines as *“the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa”* (Archer, 2007, p.4), enables and *“requires a separation between subject and object”* (Archer, 2007, p.42). For Archer, it is our differing aptitudes for, and levels of, reflexivity that determine how we go about making our way through the world (Archer, 2007) rather than our unconscious internalisation of class structures which set us on a pre-determined journey.

Yet in contrast to Archer, other authors argue, that we can never entirely separate the individual’s success in reflexivity from their social and economic positioning because *“(r)eflexive awareness does simply not equate with the ability to transform one’s situation in every context.”* (Adams, 2006, p.522). And, furthermore, if we do accept Archer’s taxonomy of reflexive types, then

these different types will be differently affected by how others, and so those others to whom they have access, see the world (Kahn, 2007, p.65).

Much of Bourdieu's concern with reflexivity is as a weapon in the armoury of the sociologist in their struggle to reveal the discipline's normative bases and practices, "*to problematize the sociological gaze*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.46). Nevertheless, Bourdieu, like Archer, does consider individual reflexivity as affecting how individuals perceive and react to their situations (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). A key difference is that Bourdieu understands reflexivity as being "*largely determined by the social and economic conditions*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.136).

Reflexivity may be learnt (it is certainly taught, be it through the concept of the reflexive practitioner (Cunliffe 2004) or the consciousness raising of second wave feminism (Sowards and Renegar 2004)) and education is primarily a social process. Bourdieu's own "*Invitation to a reflexive sociology*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) is based on a refutation of the duality of "*object and subject, intention and cause, materiality and symbolic representation*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.5). It encourages us to make sense of the social world through our reflexivity and to recognise how both material external structures and our own internalisation of these shape our constructions of our "*possible future selves*" (Leondari 2007, p.18) .

Thus, for Bourdieu, whilst reflexivity is not the determining driver of individual biographies as it is for Archer, it does have a potential role in the development and change in habitus as individuals move from field to field. Atkinson introduces the concepts of the individual lifeworld, "*the individual agent's milieu and conduit of everyday experience that, being particular to her, builds uniquely into her biography and habitus*" (Atkinson, 2010, p.9) and "*mundane consciousness*" (Atkinson, 2010, p.10), the layering of conscious thought on unconscious disposition . These combine to provide an alternative explanation to Archer's "*ex nihilo*" (Atkinson, 2010, p.12) reflexivity as an explanation of individual choices made and actions taken and hence an account of the differing social and economic trajectories of individuals from similar backgrounds that is consistent with Bourdieu's emphasis on (but not monopoly of) structure over agency.

By investigating how students engage with the mentoring scheme in this study and considering differences from and within groups, this study aims to contribute to this debate on the relationship between structure and agency in the context of graduate employability. For Bourdieu, differences in structural positioning are determined by, and determine access to, three forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. In particular, social capital is similar to the concept of personal capital identified by the conflict theorists as being a key determinant of success in competition for graduate employability (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). It is to the nature of social

capital, its relationship with the other forms of capital and its relevance to students' access to graduate employment to which the next section turns.

2.5 Social Capital

2.5.1 Combining Cultural, Economic and Social Capitals

In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu identifies three forms of capital – economic, cultural and social. Bourdieu criticises economic theory for being solely concerned with economic capital, “*which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.16). He argues that we must also acknowledge two other forms of capital, cultural and social, both of which may be converted into economic capital.

Cultural capital, “*the cultural goods transmitted by the different family pedagogic authorities*” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p.30) itself has three forms – objectified (cultural assets such as books and pictures), embodied (“*long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17)) and institutionalised (objectified capital which has been attributed value in the form of qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17)). The students in this study all have access to institutionalised cultural capital through their study towards a degree awarded by a Russell Group university, which is in itself critical in the graduate recruitment market (Ashley & Empson, 2016). According to Bourdieu, the accumulations of embodied cultural capital that they bring to university and also to their quests to obtain graduate level employment, will be unequally distributed being determined by class (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). This thesis seeks to explore whether differing accumulations of cultural capital are related to students' backgrounds in this particular context and, if so, whether mentoring may help students to embody the cultural capital they need to move successfully from the field of university to that of graduate-level employment.

Bourdieu defines social capital as the “*aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition*” (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 21-22). For Bourdieu, the institutionalised form of social capital “*par excellence*” is the title of the nobility (Bourdieu, 1986, p.23) but membership of the mentoring scheme that forms the focus of this study may also be understood as an institutionalised form of social capital. By being accepted as mentees on the programme, the

participants in this study have access to a formally recognised relationship with their mentors which may help them in to develop resources and attributes that will be of value in the graduate labour market.

For Bourdieu, an individual's ability to generate financial returns through their career trajectory, is not determined solely by their academic achievements, institutionalized cultural capital in the form of education qualifications (Bourdieu 1986) but by how these may be combined with their stores of social capital and of economic capital. For example, two graduates both holding a first class honours in Law may have different opportunities open to them if one possesses the social capital of contacts in a New York law firm and the economic capital to relocate to take an unpaid internship and the other does not. In a mass higher education system, such as that described in this thesis, the scarcity value of academic credentials (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) is reduced and so we might predict that that social capital will form a greater proportion of the baskets of capital than it did in 1960's France. Indeed, very few of the careers which Business School students will go on to pursue will require subject specific knowledge; for example, accountancy firms recruit from all discipline areas. The qualities emphasised by employers are the soft currencies such as personal skills (Brown & Hesketh, 2004) rather than the hard currencies of academic qualifications. Hence there is a *"mismatch between what it takes to get a good job and what it takes to do a good job"* (Brown & Hesketh, 2004, p.232). The need to combine the three forms of capital in order to maximise returns in the contemporary context is perhaps most vividly illustrated by the example of lower SEG students' limited access to unpaid placements (Burke & Carton, 2013, p.123). Cultural capital in the form of required qualifications or a place on a relevant degree programme is likely to be a condition for doing a placement. Yet access is only actually available to those who have the financial means, economic capital, to work for no salary. Furthermore, an entrée to the placement may necessitate social capital in the form existing connections with those in whose gift it is to offer that placement.

Thus, in the context of the mentoring scheme, social capital can be understood as access to, familiarity with and, hence, sense of fit with, the world of graduate-level work. Following Bourdieu's theory, students who do not have family or friends working in occupations for which a degree is normally a condition of entry, will have lower accumulations of social capital that are of value in the graduate recruitment market (Waters & Brooks, 2010). For higher education to have a role in social transformation, it must help to level the employability field by providing these individuals with the support they need to compete against their better-off (in social capital terms) peers.

The mentoring programme that is the basis for the case study was established to support students who might come to university with lower stores of “*inherited*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17) social capital in the form of their contacts with and their sense of belonging in the world of graduate and professional work. Membership of this formal scheme provides the mentees with the “*credential(s)*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21) to access an increased “*network of connections*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21) through their mentors. Such social engineering on the part of the university cannot, however, guarantee the creation of social capital since the individual must not only invest effort into the building and maintaining of social relationships but also acquire the “*disposition*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.23) to do so. For Bourdieu, the more social capital an individual inherits, the higher the profits generated from her work at building social capital will be:

...the profitability of this labor of accumulating and maintaining social capital rises in proportion to the size of the capital. Because the social capital accruing from a relationship is that much greater to the extent that the person who is the object of it is richly endowed with capital (mainly social, but also cultural and even economic capital), the possessors of an inherited social capital, symbolized by a great name, are able to transform all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections .

(Bourdieu, 1986, p.23)

For Bourdieu, social and cultural capital always have the potential to be transformed from and into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p.24). Thus from a Bourdieusian perspective, the mentoring scheme might be understood as recognising and responding to a social capital deficit, in the same way that the University has introduced bursaries designed to address certain students’ lack of economic capital and an alternative university admissions scheme to address shortfalls in cultural capital in the form of entry qualifications. Whether such deficit approaches can foster social justice at a structural level is debatable and debated (Singh, 2011) but what this study will seek to understand is whether the mentoring scheme is effective in helping individual students with lower accumulations of social capital that are of value in the graduate recruitment market in building these. And, since the scheme is open to all students regardless of social background, the study can also provide evidence as to whether such open schemes may lead to regressive social capital redistribution. This could be the case if students with lower accumulations of inherited social capital, in contrast to their better-off (in social capital terms) peers, do not have the dispositions required to be able to take full advantage of the opportunities that the mentoring scheme affords.

Bowman, Colley & Hodkinson (2005) found that “*existing relevant social capital often helped in developing more*” (Bowman et al., 2005, p.82) but offer no analysis of how existing relevant social capital was distributed across different socio-economic groups. Moreover, they concluded that

most of their participants developed such social capital after graduation (Bowman et al., 2005) whereas this study is concerned with changes in social capital during university study.

2.5.2 Gender and Social Capital

The mentor/mentee pairs in this case study include female mentees matched with either male or female mentors and male mentees matched with male mentors and so gender dimensions will be explored in the study. Bourdieu's writings do engage with gender issues. For example, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, he describes how the habitus of the Kabyle society embodies differentiated labour roles and, in *Reproduction*, he analyses differential results in the arts subjects by reference to the different rates of selecting out for men and women (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Some feminist theorists, however, have been critical of Bourdieu, arguing that his conceptualisation of gender relations, as an unproblematic dichotomy of dominant and subordinate, "*oversimplifies the complexities of gender identity in late capitalist society*" (McNay 1999, p.109) and that whilst he considers gender relations, that he is not concerned with feminist theory (Skeggs, 2004, p.19).

Nevertheless, Skeggs suggests that Bourdieu's canon of work, its concepts of habitus and the forms of capital and its emphasis on reflexivity provides "*explanatory power*" for the study of gender (Skeggs, 2004, p.21). McNay, acknowledges the affinity of Bourdieu's concept of habitus to feminist theories because of its emphasis on embodiment (McNay, 1999). Furthermore, McNay suggests that Bourdieu's concept of field may provide a helpful framework for conceptualising how "*the lack of fit between gendered habitus and field may be intensified*" (McNay, 1999, p.107), giving rise to greater reflexivity as individuals move between fields (McNay, 1999, p.110). This is of particular interest in the context of this study where we will have the opportunity to consider male and female participants' reflexivity on their experiences of the mentoring scheme.

Adkins (2005) calls for feminist theorists to reject the concept of social capital because it traps us in the gendered notions of the industrial age and Reay (2004) proposes Nowotny's conceptualisation of emotional capital, to apply a further form of capital to Bourdieu's typology in the sociology of education:

knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets, which hold within any social network characterised at least partly by affective ties

(Nowotny, 1981, p.148)

For Nowotny, emotional capital differs from social capital in that it is accumulated in the private rather than the public sphere and is not directly transferable into economic form (Nowotny, 1981). Reay (2004) notes, that Nowotny was writing at a time and place when women had a much lesser role in the public sphere (Reay, 2004) but uses the concept of emotional capital in her own analysis of mothers' support for their children's education, describing trade-offs between emotional and cultural capital (Reay, 2004). For Reay, the transmission of emotional capital occurs within family settings (particularly from mother to child), making it different from Bourdieu's forms of capital both because it is gendered rather than class-based and because the purpose of its accumulation is to invest in another rather than oneself (Reay, 2004). Comparison of the students' experiences of differently gendered mentor-mentee pairings in this study will provide an opportunity to explore whether capital developed through female to female pairings has characteristics akin to emotional rather than social capital.

2.6 Summary

This review of the literature indicates that a study of mentoring by business professionals designed to help students prepare for life after university might be a useful addition to the research and that concepts from Bourdieu's canon of work may provide a potential theoretical framework for such a study. Bourdieu's theories have provided researchers with a useful and widely used (Lehmann (2014)) framework for studying the university experiences of students from different socio economic backgrounds. Much of this work concerns habitus and transition into university (Crozier, Reay et al. 2008, Reay, Crozier et al. 2009, Soria and Stebleton 2013). Other work uses Bourdieu's concept of social capital to analyse student experiences and outcomes (Redmond 2006, Greenbank 2009, Hill 2009, Bathmaker, Ingram et al. 2013). This thesis may be a useful addition to the literature in that it applies Bourdieusian analysis to a scheme designed to effect social transformation in order to investigate individuals' experiences of that process.

Much less use has been made of Bourdieu's theories in studying mentoring programmes within higher education settings, possibly because much of the work on mentoring is based on US studies. As Martin (2013) notes, the influence of Bourdieu on American sociology has been limited

(although, see Museus (2010) for one US study which does use a Bourdieusian definition of social capital to analyse mentoring relationships). More studies use Coleman's conceptualisation of social capital (see, for example, Salinitri, 2005, Gaddis 2013, and Smith, 2007). In contrast to Bourdieu, Coleman downplays the role of social background in determining access to social resources (Martin 2013) and focuses on immediate rather than institutionalised forms of social capital (Martin 2013). Gaddis (2012), using Coleman's theoretical framework, found no significant impact of class and ethnicity on a national mentoring scheme for young people in the US but noted, however, that *"benefits of social class difference between mentor and youth might appear in an analysis of adult outcomes, such as college attendance or job placement"* (Gaddis, 2012, p.1263).

Thus, this study should be timely in the context of the increasingly marketised system of higher education in England as it will contribute to our understanding of how social capital is accumulated and expended by different groups of students as they invest in their future selves (Stevenson and Clegg 2011) through activities offered by universities to support their professional development. From a practitioner perspective, it should also provide insights into the design and operationalization of effective support mechanisms to enable students from non-traditional backgrounds to successfully negotiate a graduate job market in which the dominant personal capital construction of employability would seem to position them as *"the Other"* (de Beauvoir, 2011, p.26). than the ideal graduate (Morley 2007). The final section of this chapter will set out the research questions that the thesis will seek to address.

2.7 Research Questions

Schemes, such as the mentoring programme, which seek to effect transformation at an individual level may be criticised for reproducing discourses of employability, based on the idealised graduate (Morley 2007), which reproduce existing class structures. From a conflict perspective, if the mentoring scheme is to help students from lower socio-economic groups *as a class*, it would need to effect the transfer at structural level of social capital across socio-economic groups from the well-off to the less well-off. If not, then logically it is just a pressure valve, another *"sticking plaster"* (Shaikh and Jakpar 2007, p.1) that supports the existing class structures, managing the containment of class conflict through the release of a lucky few. In the same way, a mentoring scheme to support a small number of low SEG students who have already succeeded in gaining admission to a Russell Group university may in itself be understood as legitimising a further *"channelling"* (Bradley, and

Ingram, 2013, p.52) of opportunity according to social and economic position. Thus, the effect of the mentoring scheme on the flows of social capital will be one of the issues explored in this thesis.

By comparing experiences of, and outcomes from, the mentoring scheme for students from various socio-economic backgrounds, the thesis will explore how the scheme may either contribute to or mitigate against the social reproduction of inequality in higher education. The research also aims to improve practice by making recommendations as to how the mentoring programme might be revised in order to most effectively meet its aim of supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds in building their social and cultural capital. The research questions that this study seeks to address, therefore, are:

1. How do students' backgrounds impact their access to professional networks that will be of value to them in the competition for graduate employment?

2. How do students' backgrounds affect how they engage with, and benefit from, mentoring by professionals?

3. How should mentoring schemes be designed and implemented in order to contribute to social transformation?

The approach taken to investigating these research questions will be explained and justified within the next chapter, which focuses on the methodology adopted in this thesis.

3 CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on

(Austen, J., to Anna Austen Lefroy, 18th September 1814)

This chapter sets out the ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches which form the basis for this thesis. In outlining an interpretivist approach the chapter demonstrates how this fits with the Bourdieusian theoretical framework of the study. The choice of a qualitative methodology follows logically from this ontology and epistemology, providing, as it does, methods that enable the collection and analysis of “*thick description*” (Cohen et al., 2013, p.538) which can capture the complexities and uncertainties of constructed realities at the micro level in ways that quantitative approaches may not (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002).

By formulating the research as a case study, this thesis looks to emulate, but in no way to equal, Austen’s work with a fine brush “*on the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory*” (Austen, J., to James Edward Austen, 16-17th December 1816) in order to provide an analysis of a single mentoring scheme at a particular time and location. Hence, whilst it endeavours to make contributions to knowledge that may be useful to researchers and practitioners more broadly, the findings do need to be understood as being specific to this case. Rather it is through theoretical scrutiny of the findings that case study researchers may demonstrate the applicability of their work to other settings (Yin, 2008). Bourdieu describes just such a case study approach using the example of his research into the Grandes Ecoles, one of which he attended. He describes how, through “*tackl[ing] a very concrete empirical case with the purpose of building a model*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.233), the researcher can move from “*monography*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.231) , a detailed study of, for example, a single *Grande Ecole* to a “*genuinely constructed social object*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.231), such as the reproduction of social structures through the French educational system.

As explained in the previous chapter, a sociological approach will be applied to the analysis of the mentoring scheme presented in this thesis and specifically a constructionist sociological approach that assumes that “*our knowledge of social reality is: 1. subjective; 2. situationally and culturally variable; and 3. ideologically conscious*” (Marvasti, 2003, p.5). For the practitioner-researcher, ideological consciousness is fore-grounded in a way that it is not for the traditional researcher. An external researcher who investigates a mentoring scheme and concludes that such

programmes further entrench social inequalities has made a useful contribution to knowledge from which they can move on with no personal harm done. For the practitioner-researcher, however, such a finding would trigger a personal and professional crisis.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

It is at the cost of such a work of construction, which is not done in one stroke but by trial and error, that one progressively constructs social spaces which, though they reveal themselves only in the form of highly abstract, objective relations, and although one can neither touch them nor "point to them," are what makes the whole reality of the social world.

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.231)

This research takes an interpretivist position (Cousin 2008) , understanding reality as existing externally to, and independently of, the researcher with that reality being filtered through the lens of the researcher's individual interpretation of this external world. Since reality is individually interpreted there exist multiple constructions of social phenomena and the analysis presented here will be just one of many possible constructions of the reality being investigated. The one-to-one interviews through which data was collected are understood as joint constructions (Mischler (1986) in Scheurich, 1995 p.243) by the interviewer and the student interviewees.

Nevertheless, the nature of that joint construction is a slippery one in that what is captured is incomplete (Scheurich, 1995, p.249). The data collected is based on each student's own construction of their experience of the mentoring scheme and the persona that they choose to present to the interviewer (Scheurich, 1995, p.248). Each student's interpretation will be shaped by their position in the social structure, by the lens(es) through which they view their world (for example, gender, ethnicity, nationality) and how they make sense of their own experiences in that world through ex post reflection and articulation to the researcher during the interview. Similarly, the analysis of the students' narratives will be the researcher's interpretation, shaped by her foreknowledge and values (Moses and Knutsen 2007); Scheurich, 1995).

So working within this epistemological framework, requires an approach that enables the collection and analysis of a rich dataset (Cousin 2008) that captures in depth the multiple voices of a range of participants and acknowledges (Clegg & Stevenson, 2013) alternative possible voices of individual participants. In order to retain the thickness of the data collected through one-to-one

interviews, the analysis focuses on the level of the “*data item*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79), this being each interview as a single and complete narrative rather than dissecting this into “*data extracts*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). For Bourdieu, the object is always relational “*since it is nothing outside of its relations to the whole*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.232). To adopt one of the more quantitative approaches to content analysis which reduce the unit of analysis to frequencies of particular words, would be to overlook the relation between the interview as an interpretation of the student’s experience (the specific) to the forces of social capital (the whole).

The scheme which is the object of the study was established in response to the author’s own perception of an unfairness of access to opportunities in the world of graduate employment. Furthering understanding of how participants’ relations to structures may shape their experiences of the mentoring scheme may enable the researcher-practitioner to make recommendations that will make the scheme *better* but only as she understands better. The researcher may make a claim to a concern for social justice, but that claim is based on the researcher’s individual understanding of social justice which is a contested concept in educational research (North, 2006). The extent to which that conceptualisation aligns, or not, with the accepted view of the world (for example, that a market system for higher education will deliver fair outcomes for graduate employment) may be used to determine whether the researcher is defined as a “*critical theorist*” (Moses and Knutson, 2007, p.181).

This study may be categorised as critical even though the author as a research-practitioner is working within the system. The concern to level the playing field in the graduate employment game does coincide with the stated endeavours of successive UK governments to further social justice through widening participation in higher education (Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman, & Vignoles, 2013, p.431) and upward social mobility (Bathmaker, Ingram, & Waller, 2013, p.723). Nevertheless, there is a gap between the equity discourse of the widening participation agenda (Archer, 2007) and the ideology of the neo-liberal economic project (Olsen and Peters, 2005) of early 21st century UK higher education which is based on market competition. The invisible hand of the market does not allow for a mechanism for the allocation of graduate level opportunities that makes adjustment for inherited capitals (economic, social and cultural) as evidenced by the disproportionate representation of certain socio-economic groups in the professions and other highly-paid employment (Milburn, 2012).

Of course, the mentoring scheme itself may be critiqued from a Bourdieusian perspective as helping to legitimise existing structures rather than seeking to change them fundamentally. As a practitioner, the author is thus complicit in a “*legitimation strategy*” (Ogden and Clarke, 2005, p.341)

of the higher education system's reproduction of social and economic inequalities which, as a researcher, she seeks to critique. The author as practitioner perceives the participants as individual students and celebrates with them the successes that they have achieved through their engagement with their mentors. Moreover, she must also acknowledge that she has a very personal interest in the success of the scheme in that it has helped her own career progression and enhanced her professional reputation.

As a researcher, the "*break*" with, or the "*radical doubt*" of, the pre-constructed common sense (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.235) of the field of higher education, should both require and engender criticality, not just of the system within which the scheme sits, but of the role it potentially plays in supporting that system. Yet as Clegg and Stevenson (2013) argue, it is impossible for the researcher of higher education to escape their insider status (Clegg & Stevenson, 2013, p.7). Instead, it is important to acknowledge the subjectivity "*double-bind*" (Reay, 1997, p.19) of researching an activity in which the researcher is herself a participant and therefore to adopt a methodology that recognises the researcher's role in constructing the research outcomes. Moreover, it is critical that the methodology, since it shapes the knowledge which is being created, is made explicit (Clegg & Stevenson, 2013) to both writer and reader.

3.3 Research Design

The thesis will present an exploratory case study (Yin 2008) based on an interpretive approach (Cousin, 2008) using qualitative research methods to build and present the author's interpretation of the participants' own interpretations of their experiences in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students' backgrounds impact their access to professional networks that will be of value to them in the competition for graduate employment?
2. How do students' backgrounds affect how they engage with, and benefit from, mentoring by professionals?
3. How should mentoring schemes be designed and implemented in order to contribute to social transformation?

The collection of data through one-to-one semi-structured interviews and the analysis of the data using a narrative analysis approach (Maitlis, 2009) is designed to provide a set of thick data (Cohen, Manion et al. 2013) that will then be interpreted by the researcher using Bourdieusian theoretical concepts identified through the literature review as being potentially applicable. In this way the thesis sets out to test the explanatory power of Bourdieusian theory, which has come to dominate sociological literature (Donnelly, 2016), in the previously unexplored context of a professional mentoring scheme in a Russell Group University Business School. Whilst the conclusions and recommendations must be understood to be specific to the case under consideration, their framing in widely-accepted theoretical concepts may allow them to be applied in other contexts (Yin, 2008) and so be of value to other researchers and practitioners.

3.3.1 The Case Study Method

The case study method was selected as the researcher was concerned to understand a specific "circumstance" (Yin, 2008, p.2), a single mentoring scheme operating within a particular business school. The case study method is widely used within the sociological approach (Steinmetz, 2004) adopted in this thesis. Given the researcher's relationship to the research topic, the study is

framed as a “*participative case study*” (Baskerville, 1997, p.41), including “*impressionistic*” data (Stake, 1995, p.49) collected through the researcher’s development and oversight of the scheme and her engagement with the mentors and mentees. Thus, the position of the author as a researcher-practitioner is key to the method adopted in this study. Her knowledge and reflexivity (Cousin, 2005) combine with “*sufficiently thick description*” (Cousin, 2005, p.426) in the form of the interviewees’ narratives to provide an understanding, a “sophisticate ..beholding” (Stake, 1995, p.43) of the mentoring scheme.

The case study method allows in depth exploration of the topic and so is particularly suited to the how and why questions (Yin, 2008, p.2) which the research will seek to answer. Rather than testing of the validity and reliability of hypotheses of universal truths (Marvasti, 2003, p.5) through the application of statistical methods (Marvasti, 2003, p.7) , the case study as, “*a particular instance of the possible*” (Bachelard in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.233) may be used as a site from which can be uncovered general properties through systematic interrogation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.235). Through “*analytic generalisation*” (Yin, 2008, p. 43), research based on case studies may contribute to understanding and knowledge. For example, the case study that forms the basis of this thesis, when added to other case studies of non-traditional students’ experiences of coming to, being at and leaving university (Reay et al. (2009), Keane (2011), Lehmann (2014)) may make a contribution to knowledge of non-traditional students’ experiences of higher education. It also sets up, a future opportunity to examine rival explanations (Yin 2008, p.133), through the application of other theoretical frameworks; for example, to further test the applicability of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus against Archer’s emphasis on the importance of internal conversations and reflexivity (Lopez, 2009, p.175).

3.3.2 The Case

This section outlines the case study, describing the context in which the author was working as a practitioner at the time that the study was undertaken. This is important given both the case study method adopted and the purpose of the thesis as a chronicle of “*an original piece of practitioner research in higher education, generating new, actionable knowledge*” (EdD. Thesis handbook, p.25). The first part of this section locates the case study in the fast-paced marketization of English higher education that was in progress at the time of the study. It goes on to describe the specific institutional setting and to detail the mentoring scheme, the Building Futures Mentoring Scheme (BFMS) that forms the case study.

3.3.2.1 Context

3.3.2.1.1 Higher Education in England and Wales

The pilot study for the BFMS was launched in the same year that English universities were first able to charge fees of up to £9,000 to home/EU students joining their undergraduate programmes. The chipping away of the concept of higher education being free at the point of delivery had begun in 1998 with the introduction of a means-tested £1,000 annual fee which was then increased to £3,000 in 2006 (Johnston & Barr, 2016). The introduction of variable fees of between £6,000 and £9,000 in 2012 was accompanied by the removal of the previous system of quotas (initially only for those students achieving A levels above specified grades but subsequently for all (Hackett, 2014) on the numbers of students that could be taken by each institution. That fees were devised, introduced and increased by successive Conservative, Labour and Conservative/Liberal Coalition governments is symbolic of the dominance of the neo-liberal agenda in higher education (Olssen and Peters 2005). This consensus that the marketization of higher education was the only way to ensure its affordability to the state and its quality to the individual student/consumer is founded on an conceptualisation of the primary purpose of higher education being “*workforce development*” (Leitch Review, 2006, p.91), the parameters of which should be set by employer demand (Leitch Review, 2006).

The purpose of the reforms introduced by Parliament following on from the Browne Review of the funding of higher education was to create a market in which product offerings (degree courses) were differentiated by price with the maximum possible fee of £9,000 being the exception rather than the norm. In fact, all but a handful of institutions chose to charge the highest possible fee of £9,000 (Jobbins, 2015). Rather than competing on price which, for a positional good such as higher education (Hirsch in Marginson, 2006, p. 4) is understood largely as a proxy of quality, universities chose instead to compete in the new market place through product differentiation. The neo-liberal consensus conceptualises the purpose of higher education as one of investment by the self-interested economically-rational individual (Olssen and Peters 2005) in their personal capital through which they will then generate higher returns in the employment market. Much of that competition quickly became focused not on the quality of the education itself (as had been predicted by Browne) but on how universities advanced their students’ employability. Thus, the BFMS has been designed, operationalised and evaluated in a neo-liberal context which positions the dominant purpose of higher education as being to prepare students to compete for the best outcomes in the form of the highest potential earnings (Ingram and Waller, 2015, p.2).

3.3.2.1.2 The University

The University is one of the largest British universities with around 30,000 students. Awarded its University charter in the early twentieth century, it is one of the “redbrick” universities established around the start of the twentieth century in six English industrial cities (Collini, 2012). Created with a “*local, practical, aspirational*” (Collini, 2012, p.28) purpose all of the original redbricks are now members of the Russell Group, the 24 British universities who lay claim to be “*world leaders in research and innovation*” (Russell Group, 2014, p.6).

The Russell Group universities “*attract applications from the brightest and most highly qualified students*” with the average entry score being “*480 UCAS tariff points (equivalent to four A grades at A-level)*” (Russell Group, 2014, p.13). The Russell Group articulates these high levels of cultural capital as requisite for students to benefit from the experience its universities offer even whilst it proclaims a commitment to opportunity for all:

We want every student with the qualifications, potential and determination to succeed at a Russell Group university to have the opportunity to do so, whatever their background.

(Russell Group, 2014, p.13)

Many of the Russell Group universities do acknowledge the causal relationship between applicants’ socio-economic background and the acquisition of cultural capital in the form of high A level grades. Therefore, they operate contextual admissions schemes which are designed to “*help universities identify potential to succeed in applicants whose formal attainment, relative to others, does not necessarily do justice to their true ability*” (Boliver, Gorard, & Siddiqui, 2015, pp.307-8). These include the University in this case study, which, through its access scheme (referred to in this thesis as Access To University, ATU) makes offers two ‘A’ level grades lower than its standard entry requirements to students who meet the scheme’s criteria.

3.3.2.1.3 The Business School

The Business School is a large, by UK standards, multi-service School offering undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research degrees and executive education across the broad discipline areas of Management, Marketing, International Business, Accounting & Finance, Human Resource Management and Economics. It is a highly research intensive Business School, with its website

claiming a top ten ranking for the Business & Management unit of assessment in the REF2014 on the measure of research “power”³.

The changes in the English higher education system in the last decade, described above, have resulted in a greater focus on home undergraduate provision in Russell Group university Business Schools. At the same time, the School’s ambition to be a “triple accredited” (Bell and Taylor, 2005, p.247) business school resulted in an additional emphasis on undergraduate provision. This strategic re-prioritisation facilitated successful bids for investment in the undergraduate experience, including that for the establishment and running of the mentoring scheme, but also for the wider resources and structures within which it was located.

3.3.3 The Building Futures Mentoring Scheme

As described in the introductory chapter, the mentoring scheme was established by the author in her previous role as Associate Dean for Education and first ran as a pilot scheme in 2012/13. The scheme was designed to connect undergraduate students with individuals working in typical graduate employment environments (professional services firms, banks, businesses operating graduate recruitment schemes).

The mentors support the students in their professional and career development by offering advice, guidance and links to their own professional networks. Mentoring takes place on a one to one basis, with meetings recommended to take place once a month over nine to twelve months. All mentors and mentees must attend mandatory training sessions which include guidance on boundaries and ethical issues as well as suggested structures for mentor-mentee meetings. In addition to the one-to-one meetings, mentors and mentees are invited to two annual events, a networking evening and an end of year celebration.

The pilot ran with six students who had joined the University through the University’s contextual admission scheme. The pilot evaluation, carried out by the author, indicated that the participants valued the opportunities to build connections with the professional world that they felt they lacked relative to other students on their programmes.

Following on from the pilot, the BFMS was launched in September 2012. By the time this study was undertaken, in 2015, the scheme supported around 140 mentoring pairings annually. The scheme is supported by a full-time manager who has responsibility for admitting applicants to the

³ [Official University Website](#)

scheme and for matching mentees and mentors. She also has oversight of the training of both mentors and mentees and of the ongoing mentor-mentee relationships.

3.3.3.1 *Routes into the Mentoring Scheme*

Unlike the pilot, the BFMS is open to all students in the Business School. Students participating in the mentoring scheme have joined the Business School through one of three routes: standard application to the University through UCAS, application to the University through the contextual admissions scheme (ATU) or articulation into the second year of their degree from the University's Foundation programme.

The access scheme recognises a range of different characteristics and life-events that could have an impact on an applicant's performance in entry qualifications, aligned to the Office for Fair Access criteria (OFFA, 2017) with a focus on attracting and admitting students from "*an educationally or socially disadvantaged background*".⁴ The proportion of the University's students from socio-economic groups 4-7 was about 20% for each of the years 2004/5 to 2008/9⁵ and remained at 20% by 2013/14⁶. The University is committed to increasing this proportion to 23% by 2017/18⁷

ATU is one of the longest standing and largest access schemes in the UK but still accounts for a relatively small number of the University's intake. This makes evaluation of outcomes relative to the general student population difficult but most students joining through ATU graduate with an upper second or first class honours⁸.

The decision to broaden access to the mentoring programme all Business School students was taken in order to obtain management support for resource; the BFMS is now positioned as an important part of the School's employability offering in its marketing to prospective students in the competitive post-2012 student recruitment landscape. This offered-to-all model avoids stigmatisation that can be associated with programmes for students identified as having a particular need (Warren, 2002).

In the year that data was collected, 2014/15, a third pathway into the Business School programmes had been added to ATU and the standard entry route. This enabled students to join the second year of the programmes in the Business School from a foundation programme offered in the University's life-long learning unit. The two-year Foundation programme is designed for

⁴ University Access Agreement for 2013/14

⁵ University Access Agreement 2007/8 – 2011/12

⁶ University Access Agreement for 2013/14

⁷ University Access Agreement for 2015/16

⁸ Russell Group Case Study

students who meet the ATU criteria but do not meet its academic entry standards. Applicants must be from a neighbourhood with low progression to higher education or have attended a school which achieved less than the national average of five A* - C passes at GCSE or have grown up in public care. Hence, these students are likely to have similar social capital levels to the ATU students but lower cultural capital, in the form of university entry qualification grades.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Sample

Purposive sampling (Silverman 2013) was used to select students in order to include some who came through the institution's access scheme, some who joined their degree programme from the Foundation programme and some who came through standard admissions routes. The objective of this purposive sampling was to try to obtain a group of participants with varying socio-economic backgrounds in order to answer research question 2. As Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller (2013) note the operationalisation of class necessitates a "*simplification of its complexities*" (p.728) and the purposive sampling is not assumed to give us a binary allocation into working class and middle class. To do so, would be to ignore the individuality and complexity of the students' biographies that come through in their narratives and the differences in experiences within as well as between the groups. Nevertheless, an analysis by route into university does enable a consideration of how students' backgrounds might affect how they benefit from their engagement in mentoring.

The researcher asked the Mentoring Manager to provide a list of students who could be invited to interview, requesting coverage of the three different entry routes (Standard entry, Access to University, Foundation Programme). The students were not selected at random, rather the Manager asked students she knew and whom she thought would be willing to take part. The fact that all twelve students identified by the Manager did agree to participate indicates that they were highly engaged with the scheme. As such, their experiences of the mentoring scheme may have been more positive than some other students in the cohort. The sample of twelve participants (table 1) included six access students, four standard entry students and two Foundation Programme students; the latter forming a much smaller group within the mentoring cohort. Pseudonyms will be used throughout this thesis.

As noted above, the two alternative entry schemes, the Foundation Programme and the Access Scheme, are designed to facilitate access to the University for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Contextual admissions schemes are designed to support social mobility (Bridger, Shaw & Moore, 2012). The extent to which they do so is debated because indicators or batches of indicators may not be accurate proxies for disadvantage (Boliver, Gorard, & Siddiqui, 2015). The Access Scheme was reviewed by the University in 2012/13 and the use of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data introduced as a more robust indicator of socio-economic grouping⁹.

In this case study, using entry route as a proxy for socio-economic group is complicated by two factors. Firstly, not all eligibility requirements for the ATU scheme, of which participants must meet a minimum of two, relate to SEG. Whilst the criteria for the Foundation Programme are limited to low participating neighbourhoods, attendance at low achieving schools and being in public care, those for the ATU scheme also include being the first in immediate family to go to university, disruption to studies and need to attend a local university¹⁰. Secondly, there may be students who have joined through the standard route who meet the ATU criteria related to SEG but have chosen to bypass the scheme (perhaps because they are confident of their predicted A level grades).

Notwithstanding these complications, the students' narratives revealed that for this sample, the routes into university mapped onto middle to high SEG (for standard entry students) and low SEG (for Access and Foundation) (see Table 1).

Table 1 – List of Participants in the Study

Pseudonym	Gender	Academic Year	Ethnic Group *	Route to Business School	Indicator of SEG
Owen	M	1 st	White British	ATU	First Generation to HE/ Mother's occupation
Jennie	F	1 st	White British	ATU	First Generation to HE /Parents' occupations
Aalia	F	1 st	Asian British	ATU	First Generation to HE/ First Generation immigrant/Parents' education
Natalie	F	2 nd	White British	ATU	First Generation to HE/Parents' occupations
Phil	M	2 nd	White British	ATU	First Generation to HE /Father's occupation
Yasmina	F	4th	Asian British	ATU	First Generation to HE/ First Generation immigrant/Parents' occupations
Shadha	F	2 nd	Asian British	Foundation	Low Participation Neighbourhood or Low

⁹ University Access Agreement for 2015/16

¹⁰ Official University Website

					Achieving School/First Generation immigrant
Michael	M	2 nd	White British	Foundation	Low Participation Neighbourhood or Low Achieving School/First Generation to HE
Harvey	M	1 st	Black British	Standard	Parents' occupations and education
Sam	M	2 nd	White British	Standard	Parents' occupations and education
Marcus	M	2 nd	Asian British Chinese	Standard	Parents' occupations (although First Generation immigrant)
Emily	F	4 th	White British	Standard	Parents' occupations and education

* Ethnic group uses the 2011 census classification

3.4.2 Data Collection

Individual semi-structured interviews provided participants with the opportunity to talk at length and in depth (Cassell 2009) about their experiences in order to create thick data (Cohen, Manion et al. 2013) that could be interpreted by the researcher. Along with similar studies undertaken elsewhere or in different contexts using similar methodologies (Reay, Crozier et al. 2009, Keane 2011, Lehmann 2014, Burke, 2015) such research may contribute to our knowledge and understanding of non-traditional students' experiences of higher education through "*analytic generalisation*" (Yin, 2008, p. 43).

Interviews were held with twelve students who were participating in the BFMS. The interviews lasted up to an hour and took place on campus, during normal university hours and were digitally recorded. The schedule of questions (table 2) was sent to each participant one week before their interview took place.

Table 2 – Interview Questions
1. Why and how did you join the mentoring scheme?
2. What were you expecting it to be like?
3. What has it been like?
4. How do you work with your mentor?
5. What is your mentor like?

6. Would you say you and your mentor have a lot in common?
7. Do you know what you want to do after university?
8. What do you understand by the term “graduate employability”?
9. How do you think your employability has developed since you joined university?
10. Besides your mentor, what are the other support/resources to which you have access to support you in achieving your goals?
11. Should the mentoring scheme be available to all students?
12. What improvements could be made to the mentoring scheme?

The first two questions and questions 10 and 11 were designed to provide data for research question 1. Asking students about their reasons for joining the mentoring scheme and their expectations of it should reveal whether there are differences across the three groups in their pre-existing access to business professionals. The semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that these questions could be followed up with further prompts to elicit details about the students’ networks and gaps that they hoped the mentoring scheme would fill. Question 10 acted as both a check on answers given in question 1 and furnished further data on pre-existing networks and connections.

Questions 3 to 6 were asked in order to answer research question 2 by providing narratives of the students’ experiences of mentoring that could then be analysed to reveal whether there were differences between the groups in how they engaged with and benefited from mentoring by professionals.

Questions 7 – 9 also provided data about students’ engagement with the mentoring scheme, particularly through understanding how this fitted within their wider project to develop their employability and their understandings of the construct of employability. Additionally these two questions along with questions 11 – 12 were designed to elicit experiences and views from the

different groups of students that would help to answer research question 3 on designing and implementing mentoring schemes in order to optimise their potential for social transformation.

3.5 Analytical Approach

3.5.1 Data Analysis

My thematic analysis provided a compelling story, but I am aware that it is just one of the many that could be told.

(Maitlis, 2012, p.508)

There were a variety of ways in which the data collected could have been analysed ranging from strongly categorical approaches such as template analysis (see for example, King, 2012) through to the more holistic approaches of narrative analysis and phenomenography (see, for example, Cunliffe, 2004). What became clear from transcribing the interviews was that narratives unfolded as the interviewee told his or her story of his or her experience of the mentoring scheme. As such, it was important to analyse them as a coherent whole in order to capture the ways in which the participants constructed their experiences of the scheme within the context of their individual life history. Allowing the “*authentic*” student voices to be heard (Roberts, 2011, p.190) could also be considered the most respectful approach to the students who had put their own personal labour into the mentoring scheme and into being interviewed. Therefore, narrative analysis was chosen to make sense of the data.

One limitation of the study that should be noted, given its consideration of the agency-structure debate in the sociology of higher education, is that no interviews were held with mentors. As such, the agency of the mentors is probably underplayed as the roles that they played are filtered through the lens of the students’ accounts.

3.5.2 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is closely associated with the discipline of linguistics and with the seminal work of Labov on the analysis of oral narratives (Cortazzi, 1994). Labov & Waletzky define a narrative as *“any sequence of clauses that contains at least one temporal juncture”* (Labov & Waletzky, 1997, p.21), so a sequencing of events. For a narrative to have significance, however, it must have an evaluative function: *“without an evaluation element a narrative has no point”* (Labov & Waletzky, 1997, p.21). The students’ responses in the interviews for this study are examples of the oral narrative of personal experience (Cortazzi, 1994) for which Labov & Waletzky identify two functions, the referential and the evaluative (Labov & Waletzky, 1997, p.4). The referential is the provision of information (Cortazzi, 1994), for example, an interviewee recounting how they heard about the BFMS. The evaluative is the giving of meaning, *“reveal[ing] the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative”* (Labov and Waletzky, 1997, p.32).

One criticism of Labovian approaches is that they fail to address sufficiently the importance of context (Gimenez, 2010) which is, of course, crucial to the concern with the relationships between agency and structure which are at the heart of the sociological tradition in which this thesis is located. As such the analysis presented in this thesis focuses on the *“representational function”* (Gimenez, 2010, p. 204) of the narrative, *“how narrators represent or interpret the world (Schiffrin, 1996); how they represent self and others (e.g. Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000); and how they construct their – gendered, ethnic or class identities (e.g. Goodwin, 2003)”* (Gimenez, 2010, p. 204).

Maitlis (2009) defines *“the story or narrative”* as *“the central means through which people construct, describe and understand their experiences, and, through this their identities”* (p.50). An individual does not construct their identity in a social vacuum and for identity to *“be accepted as legitimate”* (Maitlis 2009, p.50) this must be, Maitlis argues, through negotiation (Maitlis, 2009, p.50) with others. Legitimacy also requires fit with structures and the essential purpose behind the founding of the BFMS scheme was to legitimate entry into the world of professional work through the creation of sanctioned mentoring relationships. Hence, this thesis seeks to explore the participants’ experiences and their evaluations (Cortazzi, Jin, Wall and Cavendish, 2001, p.253) of their experiences of the mentoring scheme.

This requires an analytical approach that takes each interview as the unit of analysis (Yin, 2008) allowing a holistic consideration of *“event structures”* (what happened), *“description structures”* (what it was like) and *“evaluation structures”* (how the narrator perceives it) (Cortazzi et al., 2001, p.253). Narrative analysis, by enabling investigation of the relationship between different

parts of the story (Maitlis,2012) is a method that meets this requirement. Whereas the more categorical approaches to theme analysis see (or even count) the trees, narrative analysis sees the wood, respecting the coherence (Cortazzi, 1994) of the interviewee's account as an "*interesting intelligible whole*" (Cortazzi, 1994, p.158). Through thick description (Cohen et al., 2013) it requires and facilitates engagement with "*issues of belief, doubt, emotions, intentions, and accommodates ambiguity and dilemma*" (Cortazzi, 1994 p.157).

One criticism of narrative analysis is its subjectivity. The work of both the researcher and the participant in this method is "*the imposition of a pattern on the past in order to tell a coherent story about it*" (Cortazzi, 1994, p.158) with the interview being a "*joint construction*" (Cassell, 2009, p.506) which is subjected to further reconstruction through the analysis of the researcher. But the purpose of this thesis is not to prove an "*objective truth*" (Cassell, 2009, p.506) about how inherited levels of social capital will predict employability outcomes; rather, it is to gain in-depth insights into how participants experienced the mentoring scheme and how they perceived its value, or otherwise, in the development of their own social capital. Hence, the researcher's interpretation is understood as an integral part of the data and recognised through reflexivity (Cassell, 2009, p. 507) on the research process.

As well as recognising the researcher's own part in shaping the research outcomes, we also need to acknowledge the participant's role in constructing the experience that they relay to the interviewer. The experience described is not necessarily the *truth* as lived, rather it is the interviewee's (re)construction of that experience, a "*re-experiencing*" (Goffman in Cortazzi, 1994, p. 162) as they recount it to the interviewer, sharing "*what would otherwise be private experience*" (Cortazzi, 1994, p.160). In doing so, they are having to reflect on events and emotions that they otherwise may not consciously have thought through. This re-experiencing is filtered through the prism of the interviewee's self-identity and life history. For example, as will be seen in the results chapter, the term good communication skills was used by several participants in the interviews for this thesis. Yet their understanding of what constitutes good communication skills may vary. To one participant good communication skills maybe a clearly defined and measurable attribute which they are confident of possessing; to another it may be a hazy concept, seen listed in person specifications and understood as a potential barrier to gaining graduate level employment. Furthermore, the interviewees may answer with what they think I as the interviewer want to hear (Silverman 2013) . Whilst this would be problematic if a positivist approach were to be taken, the constructionist framework taken in this study acknowledges that *what is researched* is, in part, being constructed through the process of the research.

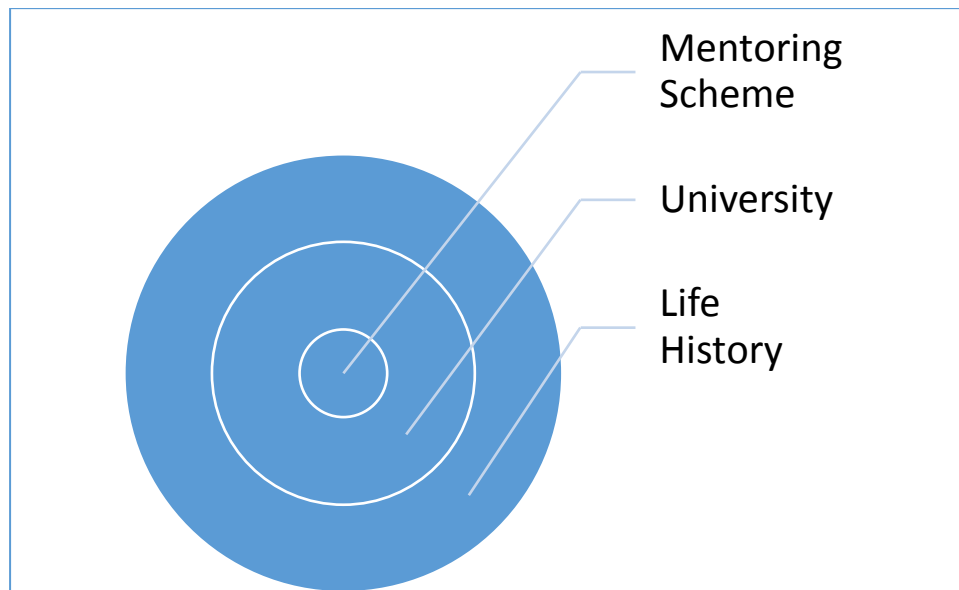
3.5.3 Analysis of the Transcripts

To build the *“analytic generalisation”* (Yin, 2008, p.43) required to develop and to test theory, the individual narratives will be compared to identify commonalities and differences. But in order to respect the interview data as the participant’s narrative, and because of the need to understand each interview as a whole, no attempt is made to identify, categorise, code or count pieces of text as themes as is done with more quantitatively informed approaches to theme analysis, for example, the approach popularised by Braun and Clarke (2006). Instead, this thesis draws on the method for narrative analysis used by Maitlis in her study of musicians’ development and sense-making of their identities following trauma that affected their abilities to perform (Maitlis, 2009; Maitlis, 2012).

Firstly, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and each transcript individually analysed to identify themes deduced from theory or induced from the text (Maitlis, 2012). Maitlis was *“especially interested in how they narrated themselves at the present time and their ways of relating to their former identity of musician”* (Maitlis, 2012, p.501). In this thesis, the focus is on how the students experienced, described and evaluated their journey through the mentoring programme and how each individual’s experience was shaped by their own life story and their sense of fit or otherwise with the habitus of the university and graduate employment fields.

The notion of a university habitus goes beyond the organisational culture, which in Bourdieusian terms may be understood as cultural capital (Lehmann, 2007, p.92). The concept of institutional habitus recognises the classed nature of organisational culture and how this impacts differently on individuals from different social groups (Reay et al, 2001). As will be discussed later on, an individual’s habitus and the changes in it are not directly observable by another person. Nevertheless, there is a body of literature which considers the contradictions between the habitus previously encountered by students from non-traditional backgrounds and that of the university, particularly the elite university (Lehmann, 2013; Reay et al., 2009). By listening to the students’ narratives, this study seeks to understand how their sense of fit with and their differing and changing internalisations of the habitus of the university affected their success in assuming characteristics and engaging in experiences that are associated with the construct of graduate employability.

Figure 1 – Individual Contexts of the Mentoring Scheme



In order to help her readers understand the nature of each narrative and the analytic process she had applied, Maitlis wrote up short summary narratives of each of her transcripts (Maitlis, 2012). This to some extent transfers authorship of the narrative from the interviewee to the researcher (Maitlis, 2012). Nevertheless, heavy use of direct quotations ensures that the participant's voice is heard in a way in which it is not in methods in which analysis is presented as categories of themes either within or across transcripts.

In Maitlis's study, the participants were understood as a unitary group sharing a common experience of trauma affecting their identities as musicians. In contrast, this thesis focuses on differences in background (research question 2) and so the participants are split into three groups: those who joined university through the standard entry route, those who joined through the University's Access programme and those who joined the Business School through a foundation programme.

Unlike thematic analysis which assumes "*empirical... standards of truth*" (Sandelowski, 1991, p.165), narrative analysis accepts that the students' accounts are "*remembrances, retrospections and constructions about the past in a fleeting present moment soon to be past*" (Sandelowski, 1991, p.165). Setting, instead, a "*narrative standard(s) of truth*" (Sandelowski, 1991, p.165) liberates the researcher to be able describe (through her own narrative) the episodes recounted to her in order that she can offer her interpretation of these episodes and compare them to "*the available cultural stock of stories*" (Sandelowski, 1991, p.163).

This thesis presents an analysis of the students' narratives that compares them to cultural stock of stories (theoretical constructs) contained in Bourdieusian theory. In this way, it seeks to understand whether Bourdieu's concepts of selection, social capital and habitus can be applied to help us understand the experiences of students in the context of an early 21st century Russell Group Business School education. This approach is similar to other case studies which explore inequalities in higher education by comparing across different groups of students (Ball et al., 1999; Ball et al., 2002). What is new is the application of these theories to the specific context of students participating in a professional mentoring scheme in a Russell Group university business school.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

At the time the study took place, the researcher was Associate Dean for Education of the Faculty in which the participants were studying. Issues arising from the resulting power asymmetries between interviewer and interviewee (Cassell 2009) and other ethical concerns were addressed to the satisfaction of the University of Liverpool's International Online Research Ethics Committee. These are outlined below.

First Do No Harm

The principle *primum non nocere*, "first do no harm", (Cohen, Manion et al., 2013, p.35) had to be considered with regard to the potential impact of the interview experience on the participant. In the context of a study that investigates the habitus of the university and the world of professional employment, a particular concern would be that participation in the research would unsettle participants' sense of fit with that habitus.

Moreover, the author's responsibility went beyond the negative duty of the researcher to do no harm to participants to a positive duty as a practitioner to support their well-being. The author sought to address these responsibilities by remaining actively aware of them throughout the design and process of the interviews and endeavouring to keep separate her identities as researcher and teacher. For example, in one of the interviews the participant identified that she wanted advice on whether she should specialise in taxation within professional accountancy practice. After the interview was completed the participant *qua* student and the interviewer *qua* chartered accountant had a separate conversation about working in taxation.

Voluntary Participation

The consent letter made clear that participation was voluntary, that participants could withdraw at any time and that non-participation would not adversely affect them, nor participation positively affect them. The participant information sheet (PIS) made clear that students would be invited to discuss their own experiences of the mentoring scheme. The PIS and consent letter were sent to participants one week before the interview and made clear that they could withdraw at any time.

According to Oliver (2010) participants must have full information about the research in order that they can give informed consent. Yet asking the research question directly (Silverman, 2013) may compromise the research by leading responses. To manage this, participants were told that the research sought to understand how students from different backgrounds experienced the mentoring scheme but no direct references were made to the theoretical concepts, such as social capital, which were being investigated in the study.

Confidentiality

Care has been taken in the writing up to ensure that the reported results cannot be attached to a particular student. Pseudonyms have been used and no identifying information has been included.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the methodological approach that is used in this thesis, an exploratory case study using qualitative methods, justifying it by reference to the underlying ontology and epistemology. It has outlined how data was collected and analysed and provided an outline of how key ethical considerations arising from the research have been addressed. The next chapter will present the analysis of the data collected through the interviews conducted with the twelve students.

4 CHAPTER 4 – Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data from the interviews with the students. In order to provide the students with a voice and to protect the integrity of the transcripts as narratives, the first section provides a summary of each interview. This is followed by an analysis focusing on the first two research questions posed in this thesis. It considers how students experience networking opportunities provided by university mentoring schemes and how their life histories affect how they engage with, and benefit from, mentoring by professionals. The findings presented here will be discussed in the next chapter under the themes identified from the literature search. The conclusion chapter will focus on the study's third research question by making recommendations on how mentoring schemes might be designed and implemented in order to make a contribution to social transformation.

4.2 Pen Portraits

The pen portraits that follow are representations of the students' interpretations of their experiences as they chose to present them to the researcher. Whilst the interviews themselves may be understood as, albeit incomplete, co-constructions between researcher and participant (Scheurich, 1995), the summaries of the transcripts below should be read as the researcher's constructions of the narratives. Not only will these constructions be affected by the researcher's memory of each interview (the student's appearance, body language, sense of rapport) but also by the researcher's "*institutional habitus*" (Clegg and Stephenson, 2013, p.11); hence the attempt to make this explicit (or at least the author's interpretation thereof!) in the methodology section. The research questions have been approached from a particular disciplinary perspective, that of the sociology of higher education and this disciplinary choice is critical in shaping the results (Clegg and Stephenson, 2013, p.10); if the transcripts had been analysed by a behavioural psychologist, for example, the results would undoubtedly have been constructed very differently.

4.2.1 Standard Entry Group

The first set of portraits are of the four students who had joined University through the standard admissions route.

4.2.1.1 Emily

Emily is in the final year of her degree having returned from placement. She describes herself as *“not hugely academic”* but works very hard to get good marks. Her parents both went to university and have had successful careers but she values having objective advice that is specific to her area of interest.

Emily has been offered a couple of jobs but does not think she will take either of them as she would prefer to work abroad for a while and *“after my placement year I’ve actually become quite picky... I know that I’ll get a job if I try so I want to take the right one”*.

Emily understands employability as being *“certain skills and, not necessarily qualifications”* and hence one should be doing things such as volunteering and internships *“to build up those skills that make you employable...to make sure that you I guess fit certain criteria and have abilities and skills that make you suitable for the job market.”* Emily is *“quite competitive I like to know that I’ve got a good CV etc”* and started working on these skills as soon as she got to university.

“So I’ve got a whole bunch of stuff written on my CV that I know make me stand out from perhaps somebody who taken a more relaxed approach to uni. But I don’t think that I missed out on anything by doing those things. So I might have sacrificed a couple of nights out or whatever but to me it’s made such a huge difference in getting a placement in enhancing my skills and hopefully getting a great job as well.”

4.2.1.2 Sam

Sam is in the second year of his degree. One of his parents went to university. He joined the mentoring scheme wanting to build his links with business.

A particular incentive was to access unbiased advice which he felt he would not get this from his parents or from the University.

Sam describes his mentor as an *“aspirational figure, like he’s obviously got a good job now and he’s got potential to go up and that”, “I suppose he’s kind of where I’d like to be in a few years’ time”*. As they are both male *“we talk about playing rugby and stuff like that”*.

For Sam, the mentoring scheme is *“probably one of the best things I’ve done at uni”*. He has secured a placement for next year and although *“it wasn’t him that just got it by himself”* he thinks his mentor helped.

Sam receives a lot of support from his family and knows that there is a place in the family business for him should he want it but it *“would be pointless me getting a degree at X University to do”* so. Whilst his father would be able to make business contacts for him *“the links that I have got in the past, well in this year, are much more than my dad could offer”*.

Sam differentiates *“academic employability”* and *“personal employability”*. The latter is potentially more important than the former and as *“I don’t think I’m going to get a first so then my employability I’ve then got to back up with what else I do so stuff like I’ve been doing”*. The Officer Training Corp has been particularly important for developing *“leadership and organisation and stuff like that which has been really helpful for my assessment centre to be able to talk about stuff”*.

4.2.1.3 Marcus

Marcus is a second year student. He came to University certain that he wanted to pursue a career in banking. Marcus's parents did not go to university. They run a small business. Marcus has one older sibling who went to university.

Marcus has been on the mentoring scheme since his first year and described joining it as *"probably the best decision of my life"*. He aspires to be like his director level mentor *"at that stage as well, hopefully, fingers crossed, I'm just at the beginning now"*. Marcus describes them as quite similar, with a shared passion for sport and banking; he doesn't think it would have mattered if he had had a female mentor as long as she was *"sporty"*.

Marcus credits his mentor for his success in securing three offers of summer internships. His choice of which to accept was influenced by his perceptions of the quality of the competition, which included people from Oxford and Cambridge in contrast to the other two banks where some of the applicants were from *"middle-tier"* universities.

Although his parents had helped him get work experience during his A levels, they could not have got him this type of role because *"they really don't know anyone else"*. This is why the networks that he has established through introductions to his mentors' contacts have been so valuable, *"I really now know the true value of a network"*.

4.2.1.4 Harvey

Harvey is in the first year of his degree. His parents both went to university. Harvey thought that doing the mentoring scheme would give him an *“edge”*. He describes himself as being *“far too money driven”* and wanting a career in something that is *“fast paced”* rather than doing *“something really boring, 9 to 5”*. He got the idea of working through family contacts and seeing *“the lifestyle that comes with it as well and just you know when you see something and you think, I want that”*.

With his mentor’s help Harvey has applied for a number of short internships. He would not have known about these without his mentor. His mentor has helped him to think about widening his career choices and possibly to do accountancy first as a route into investment banking.

Harvey describes graduate employability as what *“you need to have done throughout university to make yourself employable and appealing to possible employers”*. He is actively developing his own employability through his membership of various societies and his music to be able to demonstrate that he is *“not just a one track minded candidate”*.

4.2.2 ATU Group

The five students in this group had all joined the University through its contextual admissions scheme (described in the methodology section).

4.2.2.1 Phil

Phil is in the second year of his degree and he has been on the mentoring scheme since the first year. Phil is the first in his family to go to university; his father is in a SOC group 6 occupation, his mother *“just a housewife”* and his sibling is *“completely different”*.

Phil applied to the mentoring scheme because he did not have *“a particularly big network”* and did not know anybody in the industry. He contrasted his lack of networks with other students who were able to get their parents to look through their CVs and to make connections for them:

“No, because even like I hear people saying oh are you applying for internships and they’re oh yeah, my Grandad he can get me like a week at Santander and I’m just like how could I possibly do that.”

Phil also wanted to gain employability skills, perceiving that he had come to university *“without a CV, without a proper CV. I didn’t know much about interviews, assessment centres I didn’t even know they existed”*. He explained that it was his mentors who have enabled him to articulate the skills he had developed through part-time work.

Phil does not think that he would have secured his internship if he had not had a mentor, even though he got some help from his personal tutor with the application, *“without my mentor I wouldn’t have had that sort of application in the first place to give to him”*.

Phil thinks that the mentoring programme is *“a brilliant scheme, I’ve been so impressed by it”* and he thinks it is most valuable to and valued by students such as himself who have joined the University through ATU.

4.2.2.2 Jennie

Jennie is on the first year of her degree. She has always been *“quite practical”* and she has always wanted a degree that is *“going to take her to a career”* unlike some of her university friends who are doing arts degrees.

“I’m really enjoying uni but I’ve always been a person who just wants to get it done and I want to get the job.”

Neither of her parents went to university but her sibling is also at university:

“I think we’ve both broken the cycle because none of our family have been through university. So it’s nice, I think for my parents to see us, not do better than because they do great themselves but just moving out of the whole rut of Xshire I suppose. I never wanted to stay at home, there’s not a lot there.”

Jennie joined the mentoring scheme because she *“wanted to give myself a bit of an advantage”*, having *“always been quite nervous about the whole networking side”*, and also *“to get the knowledge from someone whose been through it”*.

The mentoring scheme has enabled Jennie to start to build the sort of networks that she thinks will be useful for her future:

“There’s no, like, there’s no sort of anyone in my family who is anything to do with business and I think that my mentor has added that network for me that I couldn’t have got anywhere else. And that’s the network I need really in order to become more employable and get more confidence.”

It has also helped build her confidence, something which her mentor *“can notice as well”*. Her discussions with her mentor have led Jennie to decide she definitely wants to do the placement year although *“it’s annoying that it’s delaying the whole process a year”*.

Jennie defined employability as *“literally becoming more employable, so more appealing to employers and what can you do to make them want to employ you and what also can the uni do to make you more employable”*. She sees it as her responsibility *“to take the opportunities and that’s what I thought with the mentoring scheme”*.

4.2.2.3 Aalia

Aalia is in the first year of her degree. Her parents did not go to university, *“they’ve not been to school or anything”*, and nor have any of her siblings; her *“older sisters they married at such a young age like eighteen, nineteen”* and *“then my brothers like they like, it was just like, it wasn’t, it seemed like it wasn’t possible”*. For her siblings *“education wasn’t their thing coz we’re like we live in an area which is really disadvantaged so it’s like a state school and a really bad environment to be honest”*.

Aalia joined the mentoring scheme because she wanted to gain insight and advice *“from someone more experienced and someone who knows the industries more than I do”*. But she has found her mentor has offered not just advice, *“it’s like having a friend there as well, like having somebody who knows your problems and someone who can help push you out as well”*. Not only has her mentor helped with career choice but she has helped Aalia with her time management of her studies too.

Through the mentoring scheme Aalia has *“got to meet so many people and networks and already got connections”*. Talking to these has made her think that she would like to do a placement year overseas *“because I’d gain much more skills than I would working in an industry in the UK, purely because it’s more global”*.

Aalia defines employability as including *“making yourself standing out academically so achieving that 2i, that 1st”* but that alone is not enough:

“But you need something else to make you stand out so that extra factor that you have, so the experiences, the non-academic side so for me that’s important as well not just having, because anyone like there’s so many people who can go with a grade but you have to have that wow factor to make you employable to make them think oh I’d prefer to have someone like this in my company, someone whose got another side to them.”

4.2.2.4 Yasmina

Yasmina is a final year student who has completed a placement year and has secured a position on a graduate scheme. She joined the mentoring scheme in her first year as she wanted help in gaining a placement year and to be able *“to speak to somebody whose been there, done that”*. Her mother is *“quite a good sounding board she’s not in a business environment”* but she does have some extended family members who are. Without her mentor, however, Yasmina does not think she would have had the sort of links to the corporate world that he has provided:

“Oh no, no. I don’t think, well I’ve got an uncle that works for X but he works more on the y side so I think it would have been a lot different, I think it would have been very different so it’s been very useful having [my mentor].”

Yasmina understands employability as having *“the necessary attributes and the ones that come to my mind are the general ones: teamwork, commercial awareness, leadership, innovative thinking”* but also knowing *“specifically about the company as well”*. Whilst it can be “hard” to develop employability, *“you’ve just got to be confident and be involved in different projects because that’s how you gain new skills”* and this is what Yasmina has done through the mentoring scheme and her involvement in student societies.

4.2.2.5 Natalie

Natalie is in the second year of her degree. She is the first in her family to go to university. There had never been “*any other option*” for Natalie than to go to university:

“I guess just for me, I know it’s not always the case, I thought better career prospects from coming to university. And I enjoy education as well. That sounds weird but I wanted to stay in education so.”

She had joined the mentoring scheme in her first year because she had been invited to do so “*and then I got so much out of it last year that I decided to apply again*”:

“It was nice, because as soon as I got to university I was made aware of it and it kind of comforted me and it was nice to know that I got that opportunity. Because perhaps I felt like I hadn’t had as many opportunities as other people before before I came to uni if that makes sense.”

Her mentor had provided advice on different career options and through him Natalie “*got to meet other people through his network as well which was probably one of the best things about it because it built my confidence up quite a lot as well with um meeting other people and talking to other people obviously in professional business*”.

Natalie has secured a work placement for next year.

Natalie understands the term “graduate employability” as being the skills that you will need when you apply for jobs and which you get through experience, such as group work on the degree programme. The mentoring scheme has also been important in developing her communication skills, as has attendance at networking events and being on a University society committee, something she decided to do because “*I knew that it would really look good on my cv*”.

4.2.2.6 Owen

Owen is on the first year of his degree. He is the first in his family to go to university. He has already decided he wants to go into banking or finance (*“seems to be the most lucrative, I don’t know I just want to be rich that’s all”*) and his mentor has helped him a lot, providing connections and work experience:

“because he’s quite high up or I don’t know how high up he is but it’s more acceptable if he asks, they’re less likely to say no to him than to a business student.”

In particular, he felt he was able to provide access to a sector which was not available in his home town; *“there’s literally nothing there”*. His mentor has also helped him with some resources for coursework.

Owen understands graduate employability as what would differentiate *“three graduates [who] had the same degree”*.

Owen does not want to do a placement year *“coz if I took a year out there’s no way I could carry on .. it’s like some offer £25,000 a year there’s not a sniff I’d end up coming back.... I just want to get a degree, get the sticker.”*

Owen suggested that the mentoring scheme could be usefully expanded so that there would be more places *“for all the students who got in the fair way shall we say, the proper way”*. He considered that his own route in through the Access scheme, with its lower A level grade requirements was *“cheating”*; *“it’s quite a hush hush, wouldn’t like to say to anyone else on my course”*.

4.2.3 Foundation Programme Students

The final group of two students had joined the Business School at level 5 (second year of degree) via the University's two year foundation programme and so were in their third year of university studies but in their first year in the Business School.

4.2.3.1 Shadha

Shadha has transferred into the second year of a Business School programme having completed the University's Foundation Programme. One of her parents went to university *"so it's kind of like in the family"*. Shadha feels they are of limited help in her own professional development; *"I don't know it's like completely different to what I want to do. So he's not like on the way I would like"*.

Shadha joined the mentoring scheme in order to meet somebody who was doing what she wanted to do and sees her mentor *"as like me in a few years"*. Without her mentor she might have given up on her quest to find a summer internship. She does not want to do a year long placement as *"I want to graduate and start working"*.

Shadha understands employability as being *"the skills that you learn ..you need to be like a critical thinker, and to think outside the box"*. Shadha described how she had developed these skills through her studies on her degree programme. She explained how in order to make oneself more employable it was important to know *"what kind of personality you are and kind of knowing what you're good at I think like if you apply for certain jobs that you think you will be good at that it could make you more employable."*

For herself, this meant:

I am one of those people who kind of like to just sit and do my work. And I think it would be like quite a good job for me. Just like with Maths as well, you do like, it's something that you do over and over, some people say it's boring but I kind of like it like that.

4.2.3.2 Michael

Michael has transferred into the second year of a Business School programme having completed the University's Foundation Programme. Higher education had always been part of his life plan: *"Uni was always my kind of thing, I always I assumed I would from since I can remember what university was and my high school was very good at applications and that"*.

He joined through the Foundation Programme because he did not do as well as had hoped in his A levels. Having originally wanted to do a highly selective programme, he eventually *"just went"* for accounting and finance:

"Oh yeah that was just were at six form kind of just applications got on top of me and I just went for accounting. Not the best answer I suppose. I kind of thought I'll do that. It's always kind of been there because I've been good at Maths but."

He is the first grandchild in his family to go to university, something which marks him out as different from his cousins and siblings although not better:

"No it doesn't really matter, no, they're just different, different interests and that. They're all quite good in what they do so they've never just thought of uni because it wasn't kind of the thing."

He joined the mentoring scheme as he did not want *"when I graduate just to be clueless about everything"*. He saw it as an alternative to doing a placement year which he had never wanted to do *"because I did an extra year anyway"*.

He wanted, through the mentoring scheme, to find out more about the professional accountancy firms but *"I don't know if it's for me the Big 4 anymore"* as when he visited the offices they were very quiet.

Michael has returned each summer to a job he found himself in an office whilst he was doing his A levels and might like to go back there after graduation although normally they take applicants straight from school rather than graduates. The managers that he worked for there have been helpful in providing him support such as report writing for his course – as has his mentor.

He sees employability as being evidenced through work experience and *"with soft skills I'm pretty sure I kind of developed them in other aspects"* but not specifically through university, rather through working in part time jobs. He is not worried that his A level grades may not meet the minimum requirements for some graduate schemes because he has been told that:

"a lot of the time they put the UCAS [points] just to differentiate from different universities and not to focus on that. It kind of once you are classified and you've got your qualification that can override it plus other things yeah."

4.3 Do students' backgrounds determine their access to professional networks that will be of value to them in the competition for graduate employment?

*And you may ask yourself, how did I get here?
(Talking Heads, Road to Nowhere)*

The mentoring scheme was originally established with the aim of providing connections with the world of graduate employment for those students who might not possess such networks through family or friends. The researcher had observed, in her role first as Director of Undergraduate Studies and then as Associate Dean, that access to support that helped students negotiate the routes into graduate employment was varied. Some students had parents, other relatives and family friends who were able to, for example, offer access to work placements and guidance on CV building and writing. Others were much more reliant on the University helping them to obtain access to and build knowledge of the world of graduate level employment. As such, there was an expectation when the mentoring scheme was established, that it would have greater value to some students than to others. This thesis investigates this assumption by comparing how students from different backgrounds described how they experienced and benefited from the mentoring in which they participated. The first question that will be explored through the analysis of the narratives is whether and how the students' backgrounds shaped their access to professional networks that would be of value to them in the competition for graduate employment.

4.4 Standard Group Students: Getting on with and through their mentors

For all of this group, the connections that they made through the mentoring scheme were additional to those to which they already had access through family and friends:

So I'd say I've got a lot of family backing so I think I've got the potential to join my dad's business if I needed it but I've basically said I want to do my own thing at the moment (Sam)

But the new contacts that they made through the mentoring scheme were seen by most of them as being more valuable than their existing ones, perhaps because they would be more objective (Emily) or because they would provide access to higher level corporate contacts (Sam, Marcus). Even Harvey who described the connections that he had made through family friends as being at a very senior level in investment banking valued the advice of his mentor about alternative routes into his chosen career.

All of the students in this group were extremely positive about the value of the mentoring scheme in helping them to build networks through which they were able to enhance their own future careers. All those who had secured work placements credited their mentors with being critical to their successful negotiation of the placement recruitment process and helping to familiarise them with the corporate world. The way in which the standard entry group students used the opportunities afforded to them by the mentoring scheme to build on their existing accumulations of social capital indicate their mastery of the rules of the game (Bathmaker, Ingram et al. 2013). Like middle class students in other studies (Burke 2015, Watts 2007), they were astute in their recognition of opportunities and valuation of the social capital that these could generate. They were able to strategize their accumulation and deployment of social capital to their own advantage, even if this was done seemingly unconsciously (Watts, 2007). And, this highlights the danger that the mentoring scheme may not only legitimate (Ogden & Clarke, 2005) existing differences in social capital, it may actually further widen the social capital gap should students with lower inherited social capital be less skilled in playing the game.

4.4.1.1 ATU Students: Mentors as map makers, orientating their mentees into the world of work

In contrast to the students from the Standard Entry Group, when asked about support they could access outside of the mentoring scheme, most of the ATU group cited resources from within the University such as personal tutors, the Careers Centre and skills modules. For them, the mentoring scheme was a means of building networks that they perceived they needed but did not possess:

I haven't really got family members or anything that are anything related to what I want to do. (Natalie)

There's no, like, there's no sort of anyone in my family who is anything to do with business. (Jennie).

I got to meet so many people and networks and already got connections. (Aalia)

Phil had joined the mentoring scheme in order to fill what he saw as a gap in his own connections with the corporate world and his “employability skills”. Similarly, Aalia felt herself to be at a disadvantage because of her lack of connections through family and saw the mentoring scheme as something that was helping to overcome this and, hence, something that could be of value to students like herself who had joined through ATU. Moreover, not only would it be more helpful to these students because they did not have networks through family and friends but they had earned the right to this support by getting to university against the odds:

Like there's some people who in university they can go back to their family and they can work with their family and they, you know, they have so many connections but whereas I'd have been so clueless after university, I wouldn't know which way to go, I don't have that support so I feel like yeah that in that sense yeah they should maybe get priority because they need it the most and they've worked so hard just to get there without any support and so many barriers as well. (Aalia)

Natalie, similarly, perceived the mentoring scheme as being particularly useful to students like herself who “hadn't had as many opportunities as other people”. Yet, in addition, and in contrast with the predictions of social closure theory that the middle classes will seek to “lock out” (Lehmann, 2012, p. 203) competition for scarce graduate roles, Natalie mentioned university friends as a valuable source of support, filling a gap in her inherited social capital:

There've been quite a few people applying for internships and placements and that sort of thing. Definitely learned a lot. Especially for me because I haven't really got family members or anything that are anything related to what I want to do. But some of my friends have so they've given me a bit more insight, yeah definitely.

Owen had participated in another mentoring scheme whilst doing his A levels and he was grateful for the opportunities his previous mentor had given him. He perceived these as limited, however, compared to the connections he was able to make through the BTMS scheme: “it's like these are more, not more professional, but there's more variety and there's more business related.”

In contrast to the other ATU students, Yasmina did not identify herself as lacking professional networks, citing her uncle who worked in finance as a source of advice and networks. Other family members, however, she found were unable to provide such useful support because they worked in other sectors. In contrast, her mentor provided the access she thought she needed

to a wider network: *“the people who were doing other roles so I was able to find out more information that way as well”*.

Hence, all the students from the ATU group described how they were consciously using the mentoring scheme to access the networks that they felt they needed but had previously lacked; *“I think that my mentor has added that network for me that I couldn’t have got anywhere else.”* (Natalie). Jennie thought that *“if I had the contact through family then I probably wouldn’t necessarily have considered the mentoring scheme.”* For Aalia, not only was her mentor helpful to her in navigating this new world, without her she would not have known it existed:

So if it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have known about [Big 4 Firm], for example, and then I wouldn’t have applied, so like I applied for the insight day in London. Um I would never have thought oh I can get it coz you have to pass like application test and numerical tests and I thought it was quite lengthy but she pushed me she was like you can do this, literally five minutes out of your time. (Aalia)

For these students the mentoring scheme had *“broke(n) down the barriers”* (Yasmina) and provided a way into the world of graduate employment which otherwise may have seemed *“a little bit unapproachable”* (Yasmina).

For Phil, who described himself as having no existing contacts in the world of professional work, any connections to it were of significant value (*“I just thought any mentor’ll do”*). Yet, in common with all the ATU students, he was able to describe how had worked with purpose to leverage support that fitted what he wanted and needed at that particular point in time. There was also a lot of knowledge transfer happening as the students used their mentors to help them fill in the gaps in their routes to and maps of the world of graduate level work:

She said just in terms of the CV just getting little building blocks onto it she was talking to me as well through all the different departments in X and she said she thought it would be good for me to see that and she said she’s more than happy to organise it for me. (Jennie).

4.4.2 Foundation Students: Seeing the Trees with their mentors but not the Wood

In common with most of the ATU students, when asked about what support they had, both the Foundation students identified resources from within the University. Both did have connections from outside university on which they could draw but were doubtful about their value to them in their search for graduate level employment.

Shadha was able to draw on connections with the world of graduate level work through family, including her cousin who was in a professional occupational though she was clear that her own choices were not based on her cousin's example, "*I didn't like look at her and think I wanted to be an [x] this was like later on*". Her father had been to university but Shadha did not see any contacts that he might have through his work, since it was not in business, as being transferrable to her own planned career area: "*it's like completely different to what I want to do. So he's not like on the way I would like*".

Michael was the first in his family to go to university which meant that he did not feel he had connections in the world of graduate employment or indeed academia through his parents: "*my mum and dad, they're very supporting about it so. But no I don't really get that academic do you know like.*"

Michael also described how, having decided on a particular career area, he had obtained summer work, through a short unpaid placement which had led to paid work. He made clear that this was down to his personal efforts without any help from the University:

Well last two summers I've worked just by my own accord ... I've not done ought through the uni it's just this is what I've done the last two summers.

Both students in this group saw the mentoring scheme as an alternative to a placement year, which being already on a four year programme, they perceived they did not have time for, as an alternative route into graduate level employment. They appeared to have "*a poor understanding of the market*" (Burke, p.105, 2015) meaning that the choices made (not seeking a placement year; Michael doing summer work in a role not requiring a degree; Shadha focusing on individual numerical skills rather than team working) might limit their potential trajectories.

4.4.3 Summary

The analysis of the students' narratives has revealed differences between the three groups in the quality and quantity of contacts that they had before they started the mentoring scheme. The picture, however, that emerges is a more complex one than the bimodal distribution of social capital determined by class positioning, that would be predicted by Bourdieu's theory. Rather, there is a spectrum of inherited social capital levels that the students have brought to university. And, some students with low inherited levels had already generated additional social capital through their own efforts (Michael Foundation) and pre-university aspiration raising schemes (Owen ATU, Aalia ATU).

Nevertheless, all of those from the standard entry group were able to identify support from family, friends and contacts outside of the University that they thought would be useful. In contrast, many of the students from the other two groups reported that they were reliant upon support from within the University and that the mentoring scheme was filling a gap by providing connections with the professional world

Such differences in pre-existing networks (inherited social capital) may make a prima facie case to exclude standard entry students from the mentoring scheme. The practical reasons for not doing so will be discussed in the final chapter but the next section of the discussion focuses on how the different groups of students engaged with their mentors. The following analysis of the narratives of the students' experiences seeks to contribute to our knowledge of whether and how students' backgrounds affect how they benefit from mentoring by business professionals.

4.5 How students' backgrounds affected how they engaged with, and benefited from, mentoring by professionals

As has been outlined above, all of the students stated that the mentoring scheme had facilitated the development of networks that they felt were useful to them. This section moves on to the second research question, analysing the students' narratives of how they made use of their new contacts to enhance their employability. For Bourdieu, those students who come to university with inherited cultural and social capital that means that they embody the habitus of the University field (*Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992*) will by definition be those whose "*feel for the game*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.128) will best place them to succeed in and beyond higher education. This section explores the extent to which the "*disposition to make use of*" the mentoring scheme "*and the predispositions to succeed in it*" (*Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.204*) seem to be determined or not by pre-existing networks (social capital). This includes consideration of how the students defined employability and hence the work that they undertook through and outside the mentoring scheme, particularly for the Foundation and ATU groups with their personal tutors, to make themselves more attractive to potential employers.

What emerges is a rich and complex picture of the ways in which students engaged with the mentoring schemes but with strong themes around the effect of gender and of pre-university academic achievement

4.6 Playing the Mentoring Field

4.6.1 Standard Entry Students – the University and Beyond

4.6.1.1 *University as a Non-Choice*

For all the standard entry students going to university had been a non-decision (Ball et al., 2002, p.57). Decision-making had been about where to go. For example, for Marcus opportunities to play sport had been important. Whilst some of them, such as Sam, articulated some concern with choosing a degree that would be useful to their future careers, this was not the main driver: *“probably ...the interest in the subject”* had determined his choice of what to study. Hence, students in this group seemed to have expectations of university study as an enjoyable *rite de passage* (*“It was something that I looked forward to, I still enjoy it. People say university’s the time of your life”* (Marcus)). Yet they were not quite the accidental achievers found in the study by Waters and Brooks (2010). Although they shared the language of *“‘excitement’, ‘glamour’ and ‘adventure’”* (Waters and Brooks, 2010, p.221), they were often quite strategic, or to use Sam’s term, *“canny”* in their decisions.

Even though university was a non-choice, members of the standard entry group self-identified as being not overly academic: *“I don’t think I’m going to get a first”* (Sam), *“I don’t think I can necessarily be classified in the super keen area”* (Emily). Marcus described *“struggling with my Maths A level”* and Harvey felt himself disadvantaged relative to fellow students who had done *“relevant”* A levels.

Yet none of them described any sense of the *“weight of the water”* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, p.127) in terms of any doubts of being clever enough to be at a selective university or in lacking the requisite cultural capital that might be required by their future employers. For example, Marcus described his transfer to a different degree programme as being because his first subject was *“too dry”*. He was confident he was in the right university, just not on the right degree; the problem was not with him but with the subject. Of course, there may have been aspects from his first year experience that he chose not to share with the interviewer but Marcus had done sufficiently well in his original programme to be allowed to take the placement year option and was seemingly now thriving on his new degree.

4.6.1.2 A Clear View of the Future

What the Standard Entry Group students demonstrate in their choices around university destinations, as will be shown below when discussing extra-curricula activities, is that they were astute in their valuations of social-capital enhancing activities. Hence, their choices about what and where to study, although often framed in terms of fun and excitement, were not accidental but deliberately made thanks to a good “*sense of the game*” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, p.121). These students carried their knowing understanding of the rules of the game into their interactions with their mentors in ways that benefited their further accumulations of social capital.

For all students in this group, qualifications by themselves were not perceived to be sufficient to acquire a graduate job and all of them placed a high importance on non-curricula activities as a means of developing the social capital valued by employers (Burke, 2015).

For Sam, there was a trade-off between investment in social capital and that in cultural capital, being in the Officer training corps had “*taken up a lot of my time which probably affects my degree a little bit but I’m still doing okay*”.

Marcus identified a similar trade-off and described how he calculated optimal levels of investment in cultural or social capital:

I think for the treasurer or president role it’s more thought of in an employability perspective but I might reconsider that because if I do get graduate scheme with [X] then I don’t really need to have that and again it’s all about managing my time in terms of coming into final year.

Similarly, Emily had undertaken a deliberate strategy to build her CV in order to compete but also taking calculated risks whilst at university: “*I’ve kind of been a bit like you only live once, I’m going to give it a go, if it crashes and burns it doesn’t really matter*”.

All of the students in the standard entry group saw themselves as living and working abroad at some stage and working in the world of big business and these international ambitions had been factored into degree choices (Sam), decisions about internships (Marcus) and rejections of job offers “*the right job but not in the right place*” (Emily). These future selves had always seemed possible to these students; they did not require the mentoring scheme to make them happen, it had been helpful and they had made full use of it but such opportunities were already their entitlement (Bathmaker et al., 2013, p.738).

4.6.2 ATU – Onwards and Upwards

4.6.2.1 Deliberate Journeys to University

I never wanted to stay at home, there's not a lot there. (Jennie)

Most of the students in the ATU Group had actively made a choice not just to come to university but also to move away from the home environments that they felt offered little opportunity. Natalie was the exception in that she did not express any sort of desire to get away from her hometown and for her there was “*no other option for me really*” than coming to university. But, in contrast to the students who had come through the standard route for whom university being something that everybody did, was a non-decision (Ball et al., 2002, p.57) that was typical of their peers and expected of them, Natalie’s language is one of active and individual, in her words “*weird*”, decision-making.

All of this group were first generation university students and some explicitly identified higher education as an enabler of upward social and economic mobility. Through doing well at school and now university they *might*, but without showing the sense of entitlement expressed by some in the other group and by middle class students in other studies (for example, (Burke, 2015, p.111), earn themselves “*better career prospects*” (Natalie) and opportunities that exceeded those that had been available to their parents.

But, unlike the working class Canadian students in Lehman’s study, who perceived the achievements of pre-university friends and family as “*deficient or of lesser value*” (Lehmann, 2013, p.12), most of them were quick to clarify that their movement away from their family’s social positioning did not make them better just different. Jennie’s sibling was also studying university:

We’ve both broken the cycle because none of our family have been through university apart from my aunty. So it’s nice, I think for my parents to see us, not do better them because they do great themselves but just moving out of the whole rut of [X] I suppose.

Jennie’s explicitly utilitarian approach to the matter of getting to and getting through university is somewhat similar to the language of the standard entry group but her emphasis is on “*get[ting] it done*” rather than the intrinsic value of the University experience. She has a “*planning mind-set*” with regard to getting to university (Bradley & Ingram, 2013, p.57) and this orientation is also evident in her strategizing with regard to developing her employability whilst at university.

Unlike the students in the Standard Entry Group, who are not using HE to move out of their class but as a route to even shinier, global futures than those of their parents, Jennie is clear that she has work to do to get the employment that she needs; in her language *“to break the cycle”*, to break out of the position she has been assigned by birth in the social structure.

All of the students in the ATU group, with one exception, either, described explicitly how their academic aptitude and abilities differentiated them from their peers, or, through the relation of their experiences and achievements, indirectly alluded to their academic abilities. For example, Phil mentioned an academic scholarship and Yasmina described how other students asked her to help them with their work. Unlike the students from the standard entry group, for whom university was something that everybody did, for this group, university was something that they had been able to do only because of their *“exceptional qualities”* (Bourdieu, 1977, p.84).

Aalia contrasted her own selection survival (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) with the non-survival into higher education of her eight older siblings, identifying the barriers that, for them, made continuing with formal education seem *“like it wasn’t possible”*. Aalia was able to take a different route because of the interplay of her own *“good grades”* and an Aim Higher programme which enabled her to envisage her possible future self (Leondari 2007) as a university student.

Similarly, it was Phil’s high academic abilities that put him on the road to higher education; the decision to come to university *“just happened gradually. I did well at my GCSEs so, did my A levels, did well at them.”*

In contrast to Jennie, Owen did see his attainment of a university place as outdoing (Lehmann, 2013, p.12) his siblings: *“I was always trying to beat [them] and I thought I might as well beat [them] straight away”*. Yet Owen was the exception in the group in not acknowledging his own academic abilities as justifying his place at university. His contrasting the standard admissions route, *“the fair way shall we say, the proper way”* with the alternative admissions programme, ATU *“cheating like we did”* demonstrates a lack of belonging (Leathwood and O’Connell 2003, Redmond 2006) that the other students in this group did not reveal. Similarly, this sense of not being deserving of his place at university contrasts sharply with the sense of entitlement that was apparent in the language of the standard entry group when describing their journeys to university. And as discussed below, Owen’s ontological insecurity, the uncertainty that things will be tomorrow as they are today (Skey, 2010), affected how he engaged with the mentoring scheme, requiring him to stage sequentially his inhabiting of the fields of university and of graduate employment.

4.6.2.2 Competing to Become Employable

For the students in this group the employability arena was a highly competitive one:

I always like to think of it as like setting yourself, comparing yourself to other students and saying why would they want you rather than someone else. I think that's what I probably get from employability sort of like the competition between other students. (Phil)

To succeed, one had to stand out from the competition, academically “*making yourself standing out academically so achieving that 2i, that 1st*” (Aalia) but that could be difficult “*a lot of jobs ask for a 2:1, a lot of people fulfil that criteria*” (Yasmina). And, similarly to group 1, these students perceived that cultural capital alone did not make one employable, one also needed “*a range of things besides your academic skills I guess it's things like communication skills, team-working skills, managing to get on with other people um, management skills that sort of thing*” (Natalie), “*a wow factor*” (Aalia).

For Jennie, the onus was on her to more make herself “*appealing to employers*” and so she needed to do what she could “*to make them want to employ you.*”

The strategies that this group of students used to develop their employability varied. Phil, Jennie and Owen did not mention extra-curricula activities but saw work experience as being important and Phil considered that the mentoring scheme had enabled him to articulate the skills he had gained through working:

I'd say yeah but you've still got to be able to evidence them well. Coz I've done part time work and I feel like saying in applications now that I can evidence I've done that better than other people coz of what I've done with my mentors. Whereas if would have done a part time job and not had this mentoring I wouldn't be able to put that down on my CV as well so it comes across a lot better just having them to support you and telling you like how you should evidence that part time work to make you more employable.

But the others in this group saw extra-curricula activities as important in developing their employability, although in contrast to the first group, only one student, Natalie, mentioned sport. Yasmina, Natalie and Aalia had each become or was trying to become involved in student societies. For both Yasmina and Natalie, this was with the deliberate intention of enhancing their employability:

I knew that it would really look good on my cv. (Natalie)

And that ticked lots of different skills on the list. So that was a very good selling point for employers because I think they really value. (Yasmina)

Again, these students are showing a forward looking temporal perspective. This active engagement in extra-curricula activities by this group seems to contradict others studies which have found that working class students tend to over-emphasise “*scholastic capital*” (Burke, 2015, p.109) at the expense of building social capital that is of value in the graduate recruitment market(Stevenson and Clegg 2011). Lehmann 2012; Keane 2011).

4.6.2.3 Mapping Routes with their Mentors

She’s just helping me just visualise the future more. (Jennie)

In contrast to the students in the Standard Entry Group, only one of the students the ATU group, Aalia, mentioned ambitions to study and work overseas. Her aspirations to do so were an outcome from the mentoring scheme: “*now I feel like I should do that because I’d gain much more skills than I would working in an industry in the UK*”. Except for Owen, all of this group intended to (Aalia, Jennie), had secured (Natalie and Phil) or completed (Yasmina) a placement year.

Phil had initially thought of doing study abroad and had indeed secured an exchange place at a prestigious university but had turned it down in favour of a placement year, as advised by his father, who he also identified as the person who “*pushed*” him to go to university:

He’s even pushing me to don’t do study abroad go for internship. (Why?) I think he just thinks it’s better. I think he sort of knows how hard it is so if I do this and do well he knows that long term it’ll benefit me.

A key difference between placement years and study abroad is that on placement students will earn a salary. Even that, however, might not always be sufficient to make a placement year possible:

I think even when it comes to picking a placement you’ve still got to think about the cost of doing it coz they are some of them are fairly well paid but some of them like you could get priced out of because you might be able only to earn 10 grand and then you don’t get like a grant or anything. Whereas if your parents had a bit of money they could support you but if you’re getting 10 grand and it might not be enough to support you for a year because you might get less than what you do in terms of your grants and your loans. (Phil)

So when it came to taking up opportunities to develop his employability, Phil's relative lack of social capital was compounded by a similar economic capital deficit. Phil had to map a route to his possible future self that worked for him by obtaining a well-paid placement, one that was highly competitive and which required high levels of symbolic cultural in the form of excellent examination results.

Jennie had initially been hesitant about doing a placement year because she saw this as "delaying" her time at university:

I'm really enjoying uni but I've always been a person who just wants to get it done and I want to get the job, I don't just want to, yeah.

Her mentor had helped her to change her mind:

She said for the person who's applying it's a lot more beneficial and it helps your own confidence. And I think she said you'll feel like you're more worthy of a job if you've got that experience there so she said it's just nice for your confidence levels as well. And for the experience.

For most of the students in the ATU group, by building confidence and mapping routes the mentors had helped them transfer into the habitus of the university and graduate employment. They now positively anticipated the opportunities they faced. The exception was Owen who, as described above, was still not sufficiently secure in the habitus of the university to risk leaving it to do a placement year such was the fragility of his hold on the possible future self of a graduate. Like the Foundation students and as Jennie (ATU) had done previously, he wanted to get his degree done as quickly as possible and, indeed, expressed the possibility that if he took time out he might not come back:

I definitely know the benefits and all that and fair play to everyone who does it coz if I took a year out there's no way I could carry on, come straight back and do some more, go straight back into academic. If I once I did a year working and it's like some offer £25,000 a year there's not a sniff I'd end up coming back. I'd just have to do it. Er for me it's just getting straight into a decent edition of work so you don't know what that year could lead to you could end up working there for I don't, to me I just want to get a degree, get the sticker on your badge and then just turn up everyone's doing the same here. But I do fully understand the benefits and but I just don't think that you'd have anything to come back to from earning that much and having that much autonomy to go back to dissertations and you've just got to keep the ball rolling for academic stuff.

4.6.3 Foundation Programme – A Patchwork of Fields

4.6.3.1 A Two Stage Journey

In common with Owen and unlike all of the other ATU students, the two students in the Foundation group were ambiguous about their academic achievements. Michael did describe himself *“always quite bright at school”* but that he *“slipped at A level”*. Rather than describing herself as academic or clever, Shadha talked about others in these terms, *“well my cousin’s quite academic so I always look up to them and they motivate me”*.

This contrast between these two groups is perhaps not surprising given the relationship between the two routes into the University; the Foundation programme is designed as an extended entry scheme to degree level study for students who do not meet the access scheme entry requirements. That is not to say that either Shadha or Michael do not possess the same *“exceptional qualities”* (Bourdieu, 1977, p.84) as the students from the ATU group. Rather, they perhaps had not been able to demonstrate these through the acquisition of such high levels of cultural capital in the form of good ‘A’ level results. But, in common with Owen and unlike all the other students, they were not holding one of the cards required for entry into the selection pool for graduate recruitment, good ‘A’ level grades. This not only made future possible selves in the world of graduate level work less certain but undermined their fit sense of belonging in a Russell Group University.

Michael, seemed certain that his ‘A’ level results would not be a barrier to his success in obtaining a graduate role because they would be trumped by his gaining a degree from a prestigious university. Thus, he seems to have been quite strategic in making his university choice (foundation programme in a Russell Group rather than directly onto a degree in a post 92) as a way to a possible future self in a professional graduate level occupation. He even went on to suggest that he might circumnavigate any such requirements by applying to firms other than the prestigious Big 4:

I mean I probably will apply to a lot of places, you know just give it a go and see what I get back but I’ve not focused too much on the Big 4 or anything or even top 10 at the minute so I don’t know if that’s the direction want to go in anyway.

4.6.3.2 Find a Shorter Route or Maybe Turn Back?

Both Foundation students were conscious that their degree studies already extended to four years and so felt that they did not have time to do a placement year; having done “an extra year anyway” (Michael) they wanted “to graduate and start working” (Shadha).

Both were interested in an accountancy careers but did not perceive a placement year, which actually could have counted towards their training contract and put them ahead with their professional examinations, as of value or even possible to them because of their struggle (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003) to get as far as they had at this point:

I did consider it but then I was just I don't know I think I was just like I want to graduate first and then do my accounting exams because that's quite long as well isn't it so just get into it. (Shadha)

Michael, although he talked about the standard route into a job at his summer workplace not requiring a degree, implied that his summer job had social and cultural capital equivalence with a training contract placement year, removing the need for him to do this:

Yeah it's different coz I've worked over summer in like my own thing anyway so.

Understandings of professional qualifications may be classed (Burke, 2015, p.122) and whilst Michael appreciated that there were different types of professional qualification he understood them as differentiated by subject focus rather than prestige and did not articulate an awareness of the higher social and cultural capital embodied in a particular qualification. For Michael one quick visit to his mentor's workplace was sufficient to convince him that this was not the place for “people like me” (Bowl 2001): “now I mean I don't know if it's for me the Big 4 anymore”.

When asked why, he continued:

It's very quiet, it's very, I mean I know it's because people are like out on the job so the offices are very but the offices I've worked in before have been very communal I mean just because everyone was really quiet and having a quiet afternoon when I went. It was very empty lots of empty desks. I was very I dunno if I'm that.

Rather than try for a summer placement with a professional firm he was retreating to the world where he felt he was accepted and fitted in, the office where he had worked the last two summers “they're always happy to have me back so..”. This was in spite of his recognising that he

might now be over-qualified for the job: *“they just seem to go you know through college applicants. So I’m kind of the one of you know, like straight out of school”*.

One interpretation of his rejection of this possible future would be that he was distancing to self-protect (Keane, 2011), aware that he lacked the necessary composite social and cultural capitals, he was closing the door before it was closed on him.

4.6.3.3 *Foundation Students: Misunderstanding the Rules of the Employability Competition*

Compared to Harvey, whose connections were with people in prestigious and senior roles, the contacts that Michael had built outside of the mentoring scheme were in a work environment that did not require graduate qualifications. Unlike, Sam, who considered that working for his father’s business would be a retrograde step after going to university, Michael seemed drawn back to his holiday workplace even though he recognised that he could have got employment there without having gone to university. Michael was not only struggling to embody the habitus of the Russell Group University student, he had come to reject his previous possible future self as a graduate trainee with one of the Big Four accountancy firms, having, prior to coming to university, rejected another possible future self in a prestigious profession.

Both Shadha and Michael said they had joined the mentoring scheme in order to find out more about their chosen careers. Like the ATU students, Shadha and Michael saw their mentors as helping them map their way through an unknown world: *“I didn’t just want to go into you know when I graduate just to be clueless about everything.”* (Michael); *“I hoped to like understand my mentor and my mentor’s an X and she works at Z so I wanted to understand like what she does and it’s kind of what I want to do as well”* (Shadha).

Michael was clear that he had chosen mentoring over a placement year as an induction to the world of the professional firm and his mentor could map out a territory about which he knew very little but unlike Marcus (Standard Group) who had talked about the culture of the organisations he might work in, Michael was more concerned with *“the actual [technical] practices”*.

Shadha’s had chosen accountancy as a potential career:

I am one of those people who kind of like to just sit and do my work. And I think it would be like quite a good job for me. Just like with Maths as well, you do like, it’s something that you do over and over, some people say it’s boring but I kind of like it like that.

Shadha has misunderstood the *rules of the game* (Bathmaker et al., 2013) for getting into and getting on in a professional firm; technical skills have much lower value than the soft skills of team work, communication and flexibility, proxies for the middle class status preferred by leading professional firms (Ashley & Empson, 2013; Ashley & Empson, 2016).

4.6.3.4 Moving Between Fields

For both Shadha and Michael, joining both the Business School and the mentoring scheme at the beginning of the third year of their four year programme, meant that they were managing the transition to two new fields at the same time, the Business School and the field of the graduate employment search. Both expressed concerns that they had missed out relative to other students because they had joined the Business School “late”. Their transition to university had been a staged and drawn out process. Although Aalia and Jennie, both first year ATU students, found their mentors helpful in managing their transition to university, they were also very clear that they were also preparing them for post-university life and accurately identified ways in which they could best do this. In contrast, Shadha was very focused on specific skills and Michael on support for his studies.

Hence the mentoring scheme seemed to have greater potential value to those students who were at a point in their own journey where they could take a forward temporal focus (Stevenson and Clegg 2011) and an appreciation of the relative values of social versus cultural capital. Within a Bourdieusian framework (although Bourdieu’s interpretation of Husserl’s concept has been criticised as being overly simplistic (Myles, 2004)) the notion of protention (Bourdieu and Wacquant, p.129) may offer an explanation of these differences between the students. In order for their interactions with their mentors to be able to provide “a practical reference to the future” (McNay, 1999, p.102) in the world of graduate employment the students had to perceive that field as accessible and so relevant to them. In a mentoring context this would require mentors to role-model future selves that mentees can envisage inhabiting and to show how networks of contacts provide routes that their mentees visualise travelling down.

4.7 A Disposition to Network

Students from both the Standard Entry and ATU groups were highly successful in building valuable networks through the mentoring scheme. The Standard Entry students were focused on those contacts that they made through their mentors that were of value over and above those they already had through family and friends. The ATU students described how their mentors provided networks they lacked (and were aware of lacking) had helped them negotiate their way through the etiquette of networking. Similarly, the Foundation group students were aware that they lacked connections with the world of graduate employment but whilst Shadha saw her mentor as meeting that gap, Michael put greater store on the connections he had built himself.

Thus students from both ATU and standard groups demonstrated the disposition to make use of the mentoring scheme (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In doing so, most of the students from the ATU group were successfully adapting to the habitus of the mentoring scheme, in the same way as the academically able working class students adapted to the world of the elite university (Reay, Crozier et al. 2009). In contrast, the students from the Foundation group and one student from the ATU group, Owen, seemed less successful in refashioning themselves (Reay, Crozier et al. 2009) to enable them to optimise benefit from their interactions with the mentor. In particular, for the Foundation students, the value that they put on the mentoring scheme was as an alternative to the placement year but this was to misrecognise both the value of a placement year and the access to networks afforded by their mentors.

The students from the standard entry group were similar to the middle class students in earlier studies in seemingly feeling entitled to the networks they possessed through family and friends (Abrahams, 2016, p.8). None of them expressed any sense of being fortunate to have these contacts, demonstrating *“a taken-for-granted disposition towards opportunity, considering such opportunity their entitlement”* (Bathmaker et al., 2013, p.738). Yet Marcus, Emily and Sam expressed a view that the connections they made through the mentoring scheme were better, with Sam and Emily both valuing the objectivity that these provided. Phil was the only student who expressed any sense of unfairness in other students possessing social capital to which he did not have access because it was not *“a level playing field”*. And none of the students raised the sort of moral objections to using their contacts for their own benefit that Abrahams found were held by the working class students in his study (Abrahams, 2016, p.11).

In summary, membership of this formal scheme did provide the mentees with the *“credential(s)”* (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21) to access an increased *“network of connections”* (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21) through their mentors. Most of the students were able to utilise these networks effectively and the contacts they made through the scheme had a higher incremental value to those

students who brought lower stocks of inherited social capital to university. Nevertheless, designers of such programmes need to pay careful attention to ensure access to these networks are not actually harmful. For some students who are not sufficiently secure in their habitus these encounters may confirm their sense of alienation from the world of graduate level work. The final chapter will return to this issue of potential harm.

4.8 Mentors as Role Models or Not

4.8.1 Standard Group - Mentors as “People Like Me”

None of the Standard Group students recounted any feelings of nervousness or shyness about being introduced to other people by their mentors; rather these were exciting opportunities to be mined for the benefits that they brought (Waters and Brooks, 2010, p.221):

And he also linked me up with people from different [companies]. Even if it was just a phone call you know I did know the different cultures there. And one of the people actually invited me up to their office which is close to my home and again that was just something for me to do over the summer and it was just really great to get a feel for the work. (Sam)

Sam, like the others in his group, was already comfortable with people from the world of graduate employment. All felt they had a lot in common with their mentors:

he’s kind of out doorsy and then he’s got a switched on business mind which I’d like to think I had a little bit...we talk about playing rugby and stuff like that (Sam)

we manage to banter (Emily)

a lot in common career wise and er slightly personality as well yeah, so it’s quite fun (Harvey).

All saw their mentors as role-models and potential future selves (Clegg and Stevenson, 2013): *“I think what is good in a mentor is if you can see yourself in them”* (Emily). Sam described his mentor, in his mid-twenties, as an *“aspirational figure, like he’s obviously got a good job now and he’s got potential to go up and that”*, *“I suppose he’s kind of where I’d like to be in a few years’ time”*. Marcus’s mentor is *“director level ... which is quite high up”*, which is where Marcus would aspire to be *“at that stage as well, hopefully, fingers crossed, I’m just at the beginning now”*.

This is a world where they belonged and which they could see their future selves (Ball et al., 1999; Leondari, 2007) inhabiting. Indeed, that Sam rather scorned the contacts he could access

through his father comes from his lack of awareness of the way his inherited social capital helps him to feel at home in this new environment. He cannot appreciate it, because his embodiment of the habitus of the secure middle class student in a Russell Group university, means it is “*without consciousness*” (Puwar, 2004, p.126).

The banter and the sports talk indicates how able these students are in negotiating their way through the professional business world. Just as coming to university was an entitlement (Bathmaker et al.,2013, p.738; Abrahams, (2016)), so was a good graduate job; their mentors were role-models precisely because they were modelling the sort of roles that these students expected to inhabit in the future.

Hence, confidence did not seem to be an issue to these students. Harvey and Marcus did not mention confidence as something that they had either sought or gained from the mentoring scheme. Sam said he had become “*a lot more confident speaking to people*” although “*not that I wasn’t before*”. When Emily talked about the confidence that her mentor had given her, it was “*the confidence that I **deserve** to be in a job role that I want*”, so reinforcing an existing sense of entitlement (Bathmaker et al.,2013; Waters & Brooks, 2010).

4.8.2 ATU Students: Building Meaningful and multi-faceted relationships

In contrast to the students who had joined university through the standard route and the students who joined through the Foundation programme, the ATU group, other than Owen, made significant reference to confidence. They talked about how they had lacked confidence, how gaining confidence was one of their objectives in joining the scheme, (“*I would gain confidence*” (Yasmina)) and how their mentors had helped them in developing their confidence, (“*it’s built my confidence up so much*” (Natalie)). Thus the mentoring scheme, like the interventions to support employability for law students in a post-92 institution reported by Dickenson and Griffiths (2017), may play an important role in building self-assurance and resilience that will be critical in competition for graduate employment. Ways in which mentors had helped students to feel more confident included providing opportunities to practice activities such as networking and interviews (“*my confidence went up in interviews completely*” (Aalia)) as well as offering reassurance and support:

I worry, I like to plan I like to know everything. And I think [mentor] said well if you’re like that then let’s plan your CV, let’s plan your future, let’s sort it all out so you don’t have to worry which has helped a lot. (Jennie)

Like the Standard Group Students, the ATU students also saw their mentors as role-models, indicating that for them also the professional business world was an obtainable goal, a field which was accessible. For these students too, their temporal focus was on the future (Stevenson and Clegg 2011) and their mentors, “*somebody who’s been there*” (Yasmina) could help them map their way to that future. Natalie and Jennie also valued getting “*the knowledge from someone who’s been through it all*” (Jennie) and the connections with those in the business world that the mentoring scheme provided:

I was really unsure especially at the start of last year what I wanted to do and I thought it may be able to help me get a few more ideas by talking to someone professional, they’d be able to help. (Natalie).

In contrast to the students in the first group, however, students from the ATU group expressed a feeling of being outsiders of professional networks:

Like, before I started the scheme I would have maybe seen the corporate world a little bit unapproachable. (Yasmina)

Phil perceived he lacked the social capital required to negotiate the professional world, “*I’d not done the sort of networking skills*” and felt that he needed guidance on the etiquette of how to network, “*he’s told me not to have a conversation with someone if there’s two people talking to each other*”.

For Phil, the mentoring relationship was, in part, built on a transfer of knowledge model through which he has reduced his inherited social capital deficit:

A lot of what I enjoy is just him going through what he’s done in the past and his I don’t know he’ll say oh I’ve been to a networking event and he can just bring stories from that which inspires me. ...I wouldn’t know to do that if I were to go to a networking event until I talked to my mentor.

Like the standard group students, the students in this group had used their mentors’ contacts to build their own networks. Confidence building and networking were iterative processes where confidence was identified as something that grew “*with meeting other people*” (Natalie) and networks were what were needed “*really in order to become more employable and get more confidence*” (Jennie). The mentoring scheme was enabling them to build that confidence so that they could take their place in the world of graduate level work. For example, Aalia, who had very low levels of inherited social capital that would be of value in the world of graduate employment,

used upbeat language to describe her networking experiences; her interactions with professionals had been “informal” and “inspiring”.

All of the students in this group were positive about their experiences of the mentoring scheme and quality of the relationships that they had built with their mentors seemed to be key for many in this group. In particular, the two women in this group who had female mentors seemed to have developed relationships that were transformative for them not only in terms of their employability development but also their acculturation to university. For example, Aalia described how her mentor had helped her with her time management in her first semester:

The way she approached first year, I think I was a bit too stressed but I think we approached it similar because she was doing all these things but she was focused on her studies as well. So she was helping me achieve what I wanted to achieve.

The sense of stress and of being overwhelmed that Aalia described experiencing in her first semester is typical of the feelings of many first year undergraduate students but Reay et al. (2009) argue that for first generation students this sense of panic is symptomatic of a lack of fit with the habitus of the university. Similarly, Jennie appreciated her mentor’s support at the outset of her university career:

At the minute I’m just getting used to everything myself. But it’s nice to have that sort of, I dunno, like my mentor she’s really good at just general advice as well so it’s really nice for that sort of layer to be there for me.

Even though she admired her mentor’s achievements, Aalia was not in awe of her; they shared commonalities of gender and student experience, although not from the same cultural background and she is “like a friend”.

So for both Aalia and Jennie, their mentors were helping them not only by being role-models for life after graduation but also providing them with support in their adjustment to the new identities as university students. Both were able to successfully negotiate this two-track approach but, as discussed below, for the Foundation students this was more mixed.

4.8.3 Foundation: Mentors for the Here and Now

For Shadha too, her mentor was a role model:

So I see her as like me in a few years so I kind of ask her like how she’s got there and what she’s been doing. It’s been really helpful for me.

Despite later mentioning that she had a cousin who is an accountant, Shadha *“wanted to meet somebody who had, well who had a similar, well who was doing what I wanted to do in a few years”*. Indeed the way she described her mentor contrasted with the way in which she talked about her cousin, about whom she said *“when I saw her do it, I didn’t like look at her and think I wanted to be an accountant”*.

Shadha did not specify the nature of her cousin’s work as an accountant but she seems here to recognise the value of her mentor relationship in providing access to the Big 4 firms. In common with students from both other groups, she seemed to perceive the connections gained through the mentoring scheme as qualitatively different to those they have from elsewhere.

In contrast to Shadha and to students in the other groups, Michael did not see a possible future self in his mentor, saying that he did not *“really kind of have role models. I’m not the kind of person who you know tries to be like a person, I’m not really into that”*.

Some of the students in the other groups also mentioned how their mentors had helped them in the management of their studies but Michael, with a temporal focus much more on the present, seemed to put a higher value on his mentor’s support for his studies in the present relative to his career opportunities in the future:

Coz I, we did meet once to discuss something but I kind of changed it because I had something due which was to do with accounting and I just ended up discussing that for like an hour. That was really helpful, he was fine to do that.

Michael did not seem to possess the sense of belonging necessary to construct a future self (Vignoles et al., 2008) who could inhabit the field of the professional accountancy firm. This contrasted with those students who, through their work with their mentors, could see how they would do so in the future. As discussed in the next chapter, these students’ consciousness of the difference between their present and future fields, demonstrates that they did not yet possess unconscious mastery of the rules of the game. Yet because they could see how they could belong, they could construct future selves who would move into this field. In contrast, for Michael, this lack of belonging either now or in the future, this mismatch of his current or future habitus with that of the professional firms resulted in a revision of what he was seeking both from the mentoring relationship and his career choices. His experiences through the mentoring scheme seemed to have led to him rejecting a possible future self in the image of his mentor working for one of the Big 4; *“I mean I respect him for what he does and I like I admire what his career is but I’m not, I don’t picture...”*.

4.9 The Gender Dimension in Mentoring Relationships

The research for this thesis focused on the relationships between socio-economic grouping and the inheritance and acquisition of social capital but the issues of gender and of the intersectionality of gender and class in relation to social capital acquisition became apparent through the analysis of the transcripts. Given the criticisms of Bourdieu, for lack of attention to gender (Skeggs, 2004) and the potential need to recognise gender dynamics in mentoring relationships in order to improve practice, it is important to consider the students' narratives on gender in some depth.

Those students who talked about gender expressed a range of views on whether the gender of their mentor mattered or not. What was clear, however, was the importance which the three women who had women mentors attached to this. All in this category had joined the School through ATU (Aalia, Jennie) or Foundation (Shadha) and all described how they benefited from the conversations with their mentors blurring the professional and the personal:

Like when I spoke to her about my own issues like personal issues with family and relationships, I felt like yeah it was important so I got to connect with her and I got her point of view, I feel like it really helped, definitely (Aalia)

For all three, having a woman mentor was helpful to them in transitioning to university as well as preparing for graduate employment:

In contrast, Emily (standard group) did not need to seek any help from her mentor in managing her university self, and identifying that *"the ability to capitalise on femininity is restricted"* (Skeggs, 2004, p.10) valued having a male mentor who could help her create a persona that fitted a masculine business world: *"I was able to joke along and stuff"*. Natalie and Yasmina (ATU) both had male mentors. Whilst, for Natalie, although the gender difference *"didn't bother me at all no"* she had been curious about the position of women in her mentor's profession. Yasmina described her male mentor as *"a very good role model"*. They both liked football and talked about this quite a lot but avoided the *"personal"* agendas covered by Aalia and Jennie with their female mentors: *"I don't really ask him personal questions"* (Yasmina).

All of the male mentees had male mentors and whilst Michael (Foundation) and Phil (ATU) were certain that gender did not matter, for Sam and Marcus, the male camaraderie and the commonality of sport was important. Indeed, whilst Marcus thought that he was *"sure a female*

mentor could have done exactly the same” it would help “maybe if a female mentor could be sporty as well”.

The intersectionality of class and gender is interesting; whilst Natalie and Yasmina did not feel they had missed out by having a male mentor, the depth of the relationships and hence the quality of the support that Jennie, Shadha and Aalia received from their female mentors suggests that possibly they did. Puwar argues that mentors are particularly important for women seeking to move into male dominated fields such as the higher echelons of the professions because they benefit from having an *“established insider”* to facilitate their crossing the boundary into alien territory (Puwar, 2004, p.121). The findings presented here indicate that for women who might experience double alienation through class and gender, having a mentor who is a woman could be important in overcoming these dual barriers.

4.10 Deploying Inherited and Acquired Resources to become Employable

The narrative analysis presented in this chapter shows that there were differences across the three groups in the access to networks that the students possessed outside of the mentoring scheme. Their routes into the mentoring scheme did affect how they engaged with their mentors and what they valued from the scheme and how they supplemented mentoring with other activities that they thought would help to make them more employable.

The term extra-curricula is value-laden; students who participate in sports and other societies and volunteering activities are doing *“extra”*, seemingly exercising agency to put themselves ahead of the competition. Yet access to, time for and disposition for (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) those activities with high symbolic value are determined by an individual’s position (age, class, gender) in the social structure (Harflett, 2015; Bennett & Parameshwaran, 2013; Bradford, Hills, & Johnston, 2016). Moreover, as competition intensifies, credential inflation of the value of extra-curricula activities (Lehmann 2012, p.204) may work against students from non-traditional backgrounds .

In contrast to many of the working class graduates in Moreau and Leathwood’s 2006 study, Owen, Phil and Jennie (ATU) considered that through part-time work they had developed skills that would be of value in the competition for graduate employment. In contrast, the cases of the two students who had joined through the Foundation Programme demonstrated how an over focus on

the importance of cultural capital, and a misrecognition of its value relative to social capital, may lead to the closing down of opportunities.

Owen (ATU) seemed, similarly to Sam (Standard Group), to recognise the value of the social capital acquired through the mentoring scheme relative to that of the opportunities afforded through his summer job and appreciated that by coming to university he has acquired access to graduate level opportunities. As discussed above, however, he implied that his hold on this newly acquired social capital was somewhat tenuous and stepping out of university studies might endanger it.

Michael, like the students in Lehman's 2012 study of working class students at a research intensive Canadian University, was lowering his ambitions progressively downwards. But rather than this resulting from a realisation that he had not accumulated sufficient social capital in the form of extra-credential experiences (Lehmann, 2012, p.209), Michael's position is also complicated by his relatively low levels of cultural capital. Even though he has succeeded in getting to university, his failure to embody the habitus of a Russell Group, the low combined levels of his social capital and cultural capital, was putting a graduate place with one of the Big 4 firms beyond his reach. His retreat to a possible future that would not require a university education contrasts with Sam's (Standard Route) view that "*it would be pointless me getting a degree at X University*" just to go to work in his father's business and with Marcus's transfer to another degree when he found his initially selected discipline did not suit him. Marcus and Sam, secure in their identity as university students *qua* future professionals do not suffer the "*habitus disjuncture*" (Reay, 2004, p.438) experienced by Michael and guarded against by Owen in his decision not to take a placement year.

This misrecognition of the value of social capital and of the cultural capital of the degree displayed by some of the students is consistent with findings of other studies of first generation students (Burke, 2015). But it is not common to all the first generation students in this study; the other ATU students with higher levels of cultural capital had understood both the importance of developing their own social capital and the value of social capital that could be accessed through the placement year, and for some, also through extra-curricula activities. Most of the ATU students had acquired a "*sense of the game*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.121) of graduate employability although they might not yet have achieved the unconscious mastery of it demonstrated by the students in the standard entry group. Thus the mentoring scheme had certainly helped them on their journey to "*becoming insiders*" (Puwar, 2004, p.119) in the world of graduate-level employment.

4.11 Chapter Summary

The students' accounts of how they benefited from mentoring by business professionals are consistent with the positive outcomes from peer mentoring schemes reported by Moore et al. (2013) in their review of widening participation research. In contrast to the studies in their review, however, the results reported here are for students from a range of different backgrounds and of a scheme where students were mentored by business professionals rather than their peers. This provides an opportunity to consider whether there was sufficient variability in outcomes across the different groups for the scheme to narrow the pre-existing differences in access to opportunities which the results reported here have revealed. The next chapter uses the lens of Bourdieusian theory both to analyse the potential for professional mentoring schemes to effect upward social mobility and to test the application of Bourdieu's concepts of selection, social capital and habitus to the field of mentoring.

5 CHAPTER 5 – Discussion

5.1 The Application of Bourdieusian Theory to Mentoring

The previous chapter presented an analysis of the students' narratives of their experiences of the mentoring scheme and how the outcomes they derived from mentoring were affected by their individual biographies. This chapter offers a discussion of the extent to which the findings from this study support, or not, Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of selection survival, of social capital and of habitus.

The narratives provided some support for Bourdieu's prediction that an individual's inherited social capital and that their ability to build further capital is determined by their position in the social structure. The findings suggest, however, that there are other factors also need to be considered if we are to understand better how the students engage with and benefited from the mentoring by professionals. It is not sufficient just to expand their connections with the professional world in order to support students to build social capital that will be of value in the graduate job market. Instead, attention needs to be paid to individual students' combinations of social and cultural capital and to the extent of their embodiment of the habitus of the University. The results paint a rich and complex picture of how students build their social capital whilst at university and the designers of the mentoring scheme in this study will need to be cognisant of these complexities if the scheme is to succeed in its objectives.

5.1.1 Mentoring to Survive Selection

During the course of the interviews, most participants reflected on their academic abilities and how they perceived these had affected their life journeys and also their experiences of university. What their narratives reveal is an example of selection survival both with regard to coming to university but also in the move from the field of higher education to graduate employment. Broadly, the students' articulation of their thinking about coming to university supported the findings of previous studies with university a non-decision (Ball et al., p.57) for those in the SE group but not for students joining through ATU or FP. Moreover, the experiences of how they were using the mentoring scheme to optimise their chances of survival into the graduate level employment differed across the three groups

The students' reflections on their journeys to university broadly offer support for Bourdieu's theory of selection survival. All in the standard group had internalised the expectation that they would go to university (Bourdieu and Passeron) so that it was a non-choice, going to university was "*about staying as they are and who they are*" (Ball et al., p.69) "*the norm here now I guess in the present day*" (Marcus). These students had all been conditioned to frequent university through their inherited family disposition to do so (Bourdieu & Passeron, p.38) even, in the case of Marcus, neither of whose parents had been to university.

Bourdieu's construct of survival is one of a passive process whereby working-class survivors into higher education are selected as survivors because of their "*exceptional qualities*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.84) rather than actively surviving selection through their agency in exercising of these exceptional qualities. The ATU students may be seen as selection survivors who have, thanks to their academic abilities, slipped through the sieving process to get to a prestigious (Russell Group) university. Yet their active language of choice seems to contrast, not only with their peers in the standard group, but also with the emphasis of Bourdieusian theory on the survival of a few as a means of securing the extant social and economic structures.

Bathmaker et al. (2013) found that middle class students were more successful than their working class peers in acquiring internships and conclude that "*(l)argely this was down to middle-class social capital advantage*" (Bathmaker et al., 2013, p.737). In contrast, students (in this admittedly much smaller sample) from both the ATU group and the Standard Entry group were successful in obtaining placements. Most of the students from the ATU group had overcome their lack of inherited social capital and were now creating future selves (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011; Leondari, 2007), in graduate level employment, having either returned from, secured or planning to undertake a placement year.

For the two students from the Foundation programme, however, the potential for the mentoring scheme to help them survive selection out of the world of graduate employment, seemed more limited. Yet the starting points of their journeys to university were not any further away from those of the ATU group. Indeed, both Shadha and Michael had, in common with the students from the standard entry group, and in contrast to most of the ATU students, seen going to university as a non-choice even though Michael, like the ATU students described himself as "*different*" for doing so.

So students' journeys to university did influence how they benefited from the mentoring scheme and the factors that had enabled them to avoid selection out of university seemingly influenced the ways in which they were now competing to avoid selection out of the graduate

recruitment market. As Bourdieu's modelling of social capital deployment would predict, the students from the standard group were making effective use of the mentoring scheme, adding it to the arsenal of resources that would help secure their inherited future position in the social structure. For the students from the other two groups, the picture was more mixed and, as discussed later on, the ways in which they combined social and cultural capital, seemed to influence how they were able to utilise mentoring to orientate their ways through the next round of selection.

5.1.2 Mentoring, Institutional Capital and the Cultural Arbitrary of Employability

Students' background may have an effect on how they form their identities as learners in different types of institution (Reay et al., 2010, p.115). As this is a single institution study, it cannot make a direct contribution to the comparative literature on institutional habitus but, as discussed below, it can provide insights into how students achieve (or not) a fit with a particular institutional habitus and, from this, their fit with the habitus of the field of graduate employability.

As discussed earlier, graduate employability is a constructed concept and the way in which it is fashioned to fit with a middle class habitus and require the deployment of combinations of social, economic and cultural capital which, typically, working class students will struggle to muster (Morley, 2007; Tomlinson, 2014) makes it, in Bourdieusian terms, a cultural arbitrary.

All of the students from the ATU and standard entry groups, described how they had used the mentoring scheme to develop qualities assigned high values by the cultural arbitrary of employability. The students' judgements on the worth of different components of social capital were determined not solely by the skills and attributes that they could generate through their experiences but also by reference to valuations that society places on their various experiences. For example, not only did Marcus's captaincy of a sports team provide him with opportunities to develop and articulate those skills sought by employers (Greenbank, 2015) but the sport itself is one with high "*symbolic value*" (Warde, 2006, p.110). In contrast Owen, like the students at a new university in Greenbank's 2015 study of extra-curricula activities, perceived his employment experience as "*just*" summer jobs, generating economic, ("*it's good money, good pay*", Owen) rather than social capital.

Just as Owen underplays the leadership qualities he gained from his part-time employment, the Foundation programme students were less concerned than the others about developing employability in the form of generic skills. Instead, they emphasised the technical aspects of their education as critical to their employability. Other studies have indicated institutional effect on

student engagement with extra-curricula activities (Greenbank, 2015) but the findings from this study suggest that Boden & Nedava's distinction between "*docile employees*" and "*employers/leaders*" (Boden & Nedava, 2010, p.37) may not just be at the institutional level. The students' differing narratives show they "*subjectively experience and perceive employability and the competition for jobs*" (Tholen, 2013, p.8). Rather than the students' constructions of employability being solely a function of their position as a Russell Group University student, they seemed to be shaped by their individual biographies, their temporal foci and their fit with the habitus of the University.

Not only do middle class students benefit from the cultural arbitrary of graduate employability, so do the institutions which build their own institutional capital through their positioning in league tables. The Russell Group's "*position-taking*" (Naidoo, p.467) in shaping the construct of graduate employability has been to connect it to a cultural arbitrary of the benefits of a research-based education, despite the "*lack of an empirically proven link*" (Schapper and Mayson, 2010, p.642). For the students in this study, the value of their Russell Group university education was not questioned yet none of them mentioned the research that the University articulated as being fundamental to their student experience. Rather its value to them in the graduate recruitment market was largely articulated as deriving from the reputational capital of the institution (comments from Marcus, Michael and Sam). Where they commented on their learning, either through curricula or extra-curricula activities they tended to emphasise their mastery, or need to master, those qualities they perceived to be sought by graduate employers such as leadership and communication skills.

For Bourdieu, the mentoring scheme is undertaking pedagogic work on behalf of the dominating classes (here employers, university leaders, middle class students and their parents) by contributing to the systematic misrecognition (Moore, 2010, p.446) of an ideal of employability. The students' interactions with their mentors may be understood as symbolic violence, reinforcing a cultural arbitrary whose value is "*relational rather than intrinsic*" (Moore, 2010, p.455). The scheme could only be judged as a force for social justice, if it provides some with the tools that they would otherwise not have had to survive into graduate level employment. Certainly, except for Michael, the students' own assessments were that the mentoring scheme was indeed valuable in enabling them to make the transition from the field of university to that of graduate work. As such, through its coaching of students in the construction of their employability, the mentoring scheme seems to have potential to impact upward social mobility at the individual level. At the macro-level, however, it may be framed as legitimising the cultural arbitrary of graduate employability through channelling a few through the structural barriers faced by them as a class.

5.1.3 Building Social Capital Through Mentoring

Bourdieu's definition of social capital as "*the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network*" (Bourdieu, 1986, pp.21-22) suggests it has a static quality. But this study has shown how students, through their interactions with their mentors, were able to build new social capital and that, importantly, it was those students who came into the scheme with lower actual and potential resources who made the greatest incremental gains. The distribution of social capital in early twenty-first century England does not have the binary pattern found in Bourdieu's studies of late-mid twentieth century France; some students who had joined the University through the access scheme did have some connections that were useful to them in developing their employability. Nevertheless, the findings were broadly consistent with Bourdieu's model of inherited social capital being related to socio-economic positioning, with the students from the standard entry group enjoying better pre-existing access to people who connected them to the world of graduate-level work. The students' accounts of how they were working with their mentors to develop their employability makes the mentoring scheme a useful case study to help us better understand how differing existing accumulations of social capital affect incremental gains. Importantly, we need to understand whether the differential in incremental gains is such that we are effecting any redistribution of social capital or whether increases just reproduce existing gaps between the different groups.

A possible model for valuation of incremental social capital is outlined below. This is followed by a detailed discussion of two factors that were emphasised in the students' narratives as impacting upon the differences in how they generated social capital through their relationships with their mentors: academic abilities and gender.

5.1.4 Network Credentials

In their narratives, all the students described how they valued the connections they made through the mentoring scheme, placing a high value on the social capital that they had generated. Thus, membership of this formal scheme did provide the mentees with the "*credential(s)*" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.21) to access an increased "*network of connections*" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21) through their mentors. For most of the students in the ATU group, the social capital that they generated through the scheme transformed the possible future selves that they were constructing. Whilst the Standard Entry students also built social capital that was valuable to them, it did not have the same

transformative quality; they already had their futures well mapped out. This provides some assurance that even open-to-all mentoring schemes, despite the skill of the standard entry group in using the opportunities it undoubtedly afforded them, may contribute to a narrowing of the social capital gap: as modelled below, the social capital gains available to all students are magnified for those with lower inherited social capital.

In setting out his theory on how social capital is reproduced and transformed to and from the other forms of capital, Bourdieu used the example of the French aristocracy, acknowledging that social capital “symbolized by a great name” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.23) is “*the form par excellence of the institutionalized social capital*” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.23). Therefore, it is to be expected that the social structures negotiated by the students in this study would be rather more scalable than those to be climbed by any aspiring members of the French nobility.

Nevertheless, Bourdieu’s theories of the begetting and building of social capital were found to be relevant to this setting but their applicability was more nuanced with variabilities across groups with low inherited social capital in how successful students were in developing social capital through the mentoring scheme. The findings suggest that other factors also played a part in how the students were able to accumulate social capital through their participation in the scheme. Some of these differences seem to relate, broadly, to route to university but the intersectionality of class and gender also appeared to play a role. Furthermore, the aggregate levels of social and cultural capital in combination, seemed to play a role in how the students from non-traditional backgrounds engaged with and benefited from their mentoring relationships.

5.1.5 Building Incremental Social Capital at the Micro Level

***Total cost (TC)** in the simplest terms is all the costs incurred in producing something or engaging in an activity. In economics, total cost is made up of variable costs + fixed costs.*

(Study.com, 2017)

Bourdieu does outline how the profitability of work to accumulate and maintain social capital varies in proportion to an individual’s inherited accumulation:

....the profitability of this labor of accumulating and maintaining social capital rises in proportion to the size of the capital. Because the social capital accruing from a relationship is that much greater to the extent that the person who is the object of it is richly endowed with capital (mainly social, but also cultural and even economic capital), the possessors of an inherited social capital, symbolized by a great name, are able to transform all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections.

(Bourdieu, 1986, pp.22-23)

He does not, however, extend his calculations to consider the converse, how the returns from the development of marginal social capital will vary in value from individual to individual depending on how their total social capital combines inherited and developed social capital. This issue of how the value to an individual of the social capital he or she develops may be linked to their accumulation of inherited social capital seemingly remains under-explored in the sociology of education literature. References to *incremental or marginal social capital* do appear in the economic development literature (Isham, 2002, p.6; Schmid., & Robison, 1995) but are at the macro rather than the micro (individual) level.

As a Chartered Accountant, the author was rather drawn to the “*cold and classificatory*” (Skeggs, 1997, p.10) schema of the forms of capital put forward by Bourdieu and the conceptions of accumulating and trading different forms of capital. And, accounting concepts may provide a useful means of modelling returns from social capital generated by individuals.

Accountants classify costs into two types depending on how they change (or not) in relation to activity. Fixed costs are those that remain the same within a certain level of activity; for example, the rent of a factory. Variable costs move up and down in relation to the level of activity. Expenditure on pickles, for example, will vary according to how many jars of pickles are produced. This classification of costs by behaviour in relation to activity enables accountants to think about the *contribution* a business needs to make in order to break even, that is, how many jars of pickles it needs to sell at a particular price in order to cover its fixed costs. For a business with low fixed costs, such as a small-holder who pickles and packs produce in her kitchen, the contribution from each additional unit of production will make a proportionally higher contribution to her total costs and hence profits than for a business with higher fixed costs (for example, a multi-million turnover food producer such as Heinz).

The students’ narratives suggest that just as the value of incremental contribution varies between different firms, so the value of incremental social capital that maybe useful in the search for graduate employment may vary between students. Generating additional social capital may require less input the more one already possesses, making this activity relatively more profitable

(Bourdieu, 1986) in absolute terms to someone with high inherited social capital. Nevertheless, these returns, even though harder to earn, will have a higher relative value to an individual who started out social capital poor.

For example, Emily, who started with very high levels of social capital (private school education, parents in highly successful careers, relatives in board level positions) described the ease with which she generated additional social capital through the mentoring scheme. She herself admitted that she could have obtained guidance and support, and importantly contacts, from her family but she preferred the independence from them that the mentoring scheme afforded. The mentoring scheme was useful in working towards her possible future self in a successful graduate career but that future self was already securely envisaged prior to joining the scheme.

In contrast, Aalia had very low levels of inherited social capital, growing up in an area of high multiple deprivation (Smith, Noble, Noble, Wright, McLennan, & Plunkett, 2015) with immigrant parents who she described as not having gone to school. She recounted how she worked hard with her mentor to manage her success at university and map out progression through university and into a graduate future. Aalia described her sequential accumulation of social capital; attending an insight day, then a residential, applying for a society role:

I've used all the experiences I've done through the mentoring scheme, through these opportunities and I've put that in my cv, I've done this, I've done this, I've done this so....

These resources she had built may have seemed unexceptional to others but Aalia saw them as transformative, enabling her to fashion a future self that otherwise would have seemed impossible, in the same way that university “*seemed like it wasn't possible*” for her siblings.

Unlike economic capital, social capital does not have a value independent of the individual who has accumulated that social capital. The value of that social capital comes from how the individual in whom it is embodied is able to generate returns in the form of socio-economic positioning and advancement. Hence, if Phil's participation in the mentoring scheme had enabled him to access graduate level employment then even though he had only made two connections through the scheme these are potentially of higher value to him than were, for example, Marcus's connections with lots of different people or Sam's contact at board level.

5.1.6 Incremental Social Capital at the Macro Level

An initial reading of the outcomes from the mentoring scheme might seem to be supportive of consensus theories. Students from non-traditional backgrounds were able, at an individual level, to develop their own stocks of social capital that were of value to them in the graduate job market. And, at a macro level, these increased stocks of “*employability*” could, following the logic of endogenous growth theory, be deployed by employers to generate economic growth that will fuel demand for yet more graduate talent. However, this would be to assume that the incremental social capital generated by the mentoring scheme will meet a latent demand in the graduate employment market. But in a context where there is already an over-supply of graduates into the job market (Brown and Hesketh, 2004) this cannot be the case. Rather, the generation of additional social capital that can be traded in the competition for graduate employment may be understood as a zero-sum game whereby social capital inflation wipes out the value of any such growth. Hence, those students who go on to be successful in obtaining graduate employment following their engagement in the mentoring scheme would be simply displacing other candidates. Therefore, to understand whether such interventions drive social mobility at the macro level, we would need to look at longitudinal patterns of distribution to understand whether there are any changes in the types of graduates being selected out of graduate level employment.

5.2 Gender and Social Capital

The relationship dynamics of the mentor and mentee pairings and thus how the pairs worked together to build the mentees’ social capital seemed to be influenced by gender. The warmth with which the female students from the ATU and Foundation Programme groups spoke of their mentors, their descriptions of how their conversations with their mentors blended the personal and the professional are revealing of gender differences in management and leadership styles. These young women, with limited or no prior connections to people in graduate level work, not only valued their mentors as role models but specifically their mentors’ role-modelling of behaviours which revealed to them the professional world as being one in which they, as women, would fit.

Whilst the female mentees’ retelling of their experiences with female mentors emphasised “*emotionally valued skills and assets*” (Nowotny, 1981:148) it would be unhelpful to label the accumulations of their labour as emotional rather than social capital. Nowotny’s work, which focuses on the private sphere, like that of Reay (2004), differentiates emotional capital from social capital as being an investment made by an individual (mother) in another (child). In contrast, the

women mentee women mentor pairings in this study were producing outputs that the mentees were able to utilise in negotiating the habitus of the university and in making themselves more employable. Moreover, to exclude these emotional resources from our understanding of social capital is to leave it vulnerable to a “*hegemonic form of masculinity*” (Ingram & Waller, 2015, p.3), a cultural arbitrary conceptualised around sports talk and old boy’s networks. Instead of trapping women in such a “*deficit model*” (Clegg, 2011, p.99) we should seek to celebrate and mainstream these qualities as an integral element of social capital.

5.3 Combining Cultural and Social Capitals

Naidoo (2004) argues that Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts, specifically that of the field, which were framed in a mid 20th century French system based on a “*social compact*” (Naidoo, 2004, p.469) are still relevant in our more market based education system. The findings from this study are consistent with Naidoo’s conclusions in indicating that the value of symbolic cultural capital in the form of academic credentials has not been undermined by the “*valorization of economic capital*” (Naidoo, 2004, p.469). Rather the increased importance of social capital in the bundle of capitals held by students accrues from its systematic misrecognition (Moore, 2010, p.446) as a key determinant of employability alongside or indeed, even above academic credentials (Lehmann, 2012; Brown, Power, Tholen, & Allouch, 2016) in the graduate employment market of the early 21st century.

The high levels of academic abilities evidenced by the students in the ATU group are consistent with findings from previous studies that inequalities in secondary school achievement (Chowdry, Crawford & Dearden (2013); Goodman & Vignoles (2013)) tend to limit survival into higher education to those who have exceptional academic talents (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Certain groups of students tend to be more astute in combining capitals to mobilise them to their advantage (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Most of the students from the ATU group, when given the opportunity to develop their social capital, were able to combine this with their high levels of cultural capital in order to play the game (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013) with great success.

The higher proportion of middle class students surviving into Russell group universities (Boliver, 2013) demonstrates that entry requirements are pegged to the typical “good” ‘A’ level grades of the middle classes. The proportion of students graduating with good honours (upper second or above) is one of the measures on which universities are measured directly in league tables. It is also one on which they are measured indirectly through the Destinations of Leavers of

Higher Education survey because typically access to graduate schemes is rationed via the requirement for an upper second class degree. Contextual university schemes, such as ATU, are designed to help those students who find themselves with a cultural capital deficit because of their life circumstances. Yet even with the existence of such schemes, the intellectual abilities of many of the students from lower SEGs who survive into Russell Group higher education may surpass those which are actually needed to succeed educationally at these institutions.

Indeed, rather than focusing on skills for learning and skills for employability, the findings from this case study suggest that these are the very students who might benefit from, and rise to the challenge of, a more intellectually challenging education. The embedding of skills into the curricula does avoid the deficit approach of bolt on models and ensures reach to those students who most need support (Wingate, 2006). Yet in the context of an elite university, very able students who have joined through a contextual admissions scheme may already be amongst the most proficient in managing their own studies; they have had to be in order to survive selection (Reay et al., 2009). Following Bourdieusian logic that the lower the SEG, the higher the rate of selecting out; students from low SEGs should be disproportionately represented amongst the most academically able of the University population. As such these students would benefit from a re-calibration of the cultural capital represented by a “*good degree*” from a “*good university*” (Tomlinson, 2008, p.57).

5.4 Mentoring and Habitus

The discussion so far in this chapter has considered how students’ development of social capital might be supported by interventions such as mentoring in order to try to ensure that incremental gains in social capital narrow rather than widen differences between students from different backgrounds. Possessing the levels of social capital required to gain entrée to the field of graduate employment does not of itself, however, guarantee a sense of belonging in the professional world. The final part of this section focuses on the third theoretical construct drawn from Bourdieu’s work, that of habitus, although, such is the nature of this embodied and embodying, internal and external, structuring and structured concept, however, that it has seeped into earlier parts of the discussion. Habitus is by its nature not directly observable nor can changes in the levels of habitus be measured although there might be a possibility through longitudinal studies to identify instances of “*habitus transformation*” (Lehmann, 2012a, p.542). So, the findings from the narratives on how students perceived their changes in confidence levels, may provide a

proxy for habitus through an indication of their changing feeling of fit within the field of the graduate employment search. In addition, the students' comments on the gender dynamics of their mentoring relationships also provide insights into the importance of gender in shaping habitus.

Consistent with Bourdieu's predictions, the narratives of the students in the Standard entry group, who possessed high levels of inherited social capital, demonstrated that they embodied the habitus of the fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) of university and of graduate level work. Their "feel for the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.128), their "disposition to make use of" the mentoring scheme "and the predispositions to succeed in it" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.204) meant that they were able to utilise it effectively to build relationships that they used (relentlessly!) to improve their position in the graduate recruitment market.

Students from the ATU group, even though they did not possess the same high inherited levels of social capital, were also able to utilise the scheme effectively to build social capital that was useful to the graduate recruitment field. Yet their language did not have the same taken for granted tone of the students from the standard entry group; for example, Phil and Natalie both referenced their lack of opportunities compared to other students at university. Natalie had anticipated not fitting with the habitus of the university but reported that these fears had turned out to be largely misplaced:

Not really I guess a lot more of my friends have been to private schools and that's something which I haven't so. I don't know. I've noticed the difference a little bit but it's not been how I thought it would be, I thought I'd have got to uni and be like oh God I feel a bit out of my depth and a bit not the same as everyone else. But it's not been like that. (Natalie)

Like the working-class students in the elite university of Reay et al's study, the students from the ATU group were engaged in a "refashioning of the self" (Reay et al, 2009, p.1111) enabling them, if not to embody the habitus of the university, at least to fit with it sufficiently to be able to negotiate their way through the field of graduate recruitment. Bathmaker et al. (2013) distinguish between "active" and "internalised" (Bathmaker et al., 2013 p.730) deployment of social capital and some of the students from the ATU group seemed to be actively deploying social capital that they were developing from participation in new activities. For example, Natalie described how she had taken up new sports and Aalia, who from her own description, came from a very poor background, did not mention lack of money as a potential barrier to her plans to study or work abroad. This contrasts with the findings reported by Bradley & Ingram (2013), that many of the working class students they interviewed were made to feel excluded from university life because they lacked the

economic capital to participate in social (and social capital enhancing) activities (Bradley and Ingram, 2013, p.60).

5.4.1 Habitus, Confidence and Possible Future Selves

All of the students from the ATU group perceived the mentoring scheme as supporting them in the development of their employability, for example, crediting it with helping them to secure internships. Like the Standard Entry Group, they focused on the development of the skills and characteristics that they correctly judged to be of value in the graduate recruitment market. They may not yet always have completely internalised the habitus of the world of professional work (contrast, for example, Aalia's description of her realisation that she might choose to work abroad with Emily's "*always*" seeing this as a possibility) but their work with their mentors had made these future selves possible.

Owen was the only one of the students in either the standard or the ATU group who seemed to struggle with a possible future self in graduate employment. He could imagine such a future for himself but indicated that his hold on this was not secure; hence his decision not to do a work placement.

In contrast, the possible future selves envisaged by the students from the Foundation Programme group were still rather blurred and distant. Shadha saw herself in a graduate career but emphasised qualities that did not align to those typically signified as valued by graduate employers: "*like to just sit and do my work, ...something that you do over and over*". Michael, was the only student in the study who questioned whether graduate level employment was for him.

Even where students from the different groups aspired to similar occupations these might still be rather different in how they saw their possible future selves: Shadha in a regional firm, Marcus, shiny buildings in London, Michael rejecting a possible future in the Big 4 Accountancy Firms. Such differences in the possible became actual for the recent graduates working in finance who feature in the vignettes presented by Ingram and Waller to demonstrate how privilege is reproduced (Ingram and Waller, 2016). A recent analysis of British Labour Force Survey data suggests that within professional occupations there exists a "*glass ceiling*" which those who have come from lower SEGs are less likely to break (Laurison and Friedman, 2016, p.2). Whilst such a glass ceiling may hang directly from structural inequalities, the findings here indicate it is also supported by the internalisation of these inequalities which shaped the students' envisioning of their future careers.

For example, Michael struggled to see the value of the connections that he had made through the mentoring scheme in building his social capital. He valued his mentor's knowledge that was helpful to his studies rather than the introductions that he might broker in the world of graduate-level employment. Owen, Michael and Shadha expressed themselves in ways similar to the descriptions in Redmond's study of living at home students, "*Wash 'n' Go' students*" (Redmond, 2006, p.127) for whom a significant part of their lives took place outside of university. Michael and Shadha, having moved from the Foundation Programme Department to the Business School found differences between the habituses of the two fields even though they were located in a single institution; Michael noted that "*we missed a lot we missed a lot of like graduate fairs and that just little things and like module choices that kind of stuff*".

If an individual's successful embodiment of the habitus of a particular environment depends upon the combined accumulations of social, cultural and economic capitals, then meeting that habitus bar may be achieved through varying the proportions of the component parts. Some of the ATU students appeared to be able to compensate for their relatively low levels of social capital by cashing in their higher levels of cultural capital. In common with students from the standard entry group, they possessed the required combined levels of social and cultural capital to fit with habitus of the Russell group university. In contrast, students with lower combined levels of social and cultural capital were still feeling the weight of the water.

5.4.2 A Confidence Trick?

*No wonder I had to unlearn everything my brain was taught
Do I really belong in this game? I pondered
I just wanna' play my part, should I make waves or not?
So back and forth in my brain, the tug-o-war wages on*

(Eminem, Guts Over Fear)

One of the objectives of the mentoring scheme, was to help students build their confidence in negotiating the world of graduate work. Earlier studies (Davey, 2009; Gaddis, 2013; McNamara Horvat & Earl Davis, 2011) have explored the relationship between habitus and confidence. For Davey, in her study of independent school students, changes in confidence signal changes in habitus (p.277) and Gaddis argues that positive feedback "*builds students' confidence, thus altering their habitus*" (Gaddis, 2013, p.2).

Of the ATU group, Owen was the only one who did not speak at length about their need to develop confidence and how their mentors had supported them in doing this. Yet, in terms of academic ability, these students had the most to be confident about, self-identifying as they did as clever. Rather their lack of confidence seemed to relate to their perceived lack of fit with the world of graduate employment and the barriers to entry which positioned them as outsiders. Their mentors acted as both guides and supporters helping them to breach these barriers. All of these students now seemed to feel they were inside the circle and their successes in obtaining, and learning from, experiences in the world of graduate work indicate that their judgements on this were sound.

Owen did not refer to either to the need to develop confidence or that the scheme had helped him build his confidence. Yet, he was the one of the ATU group who seemed, at the time of the study, to be struggling to feel a sense of belonging in university. He was the only student from this group who did not self-identify as clever; indeed his belief that he had got to university by "*cheating*" positions him closer to Michael and Shadha who had joined through the Foundation not having the 'A' level grades for either the standard entry route or ATU. Michael described himself as always being "quite bright" but because "*I developed at GCSE but then I kind of slipped at A level*"; Shadha talked about others rather than herself as being academic. Whilst all three had engaged with the mentoring scheme, none of these three had used it to explore or secure placement year opportunities which all of the others had done. In contrast to all the other students, these three, had not been invited to lean in and remained wobbling on the edge between future graduate and non-graduate careers.

Students from the standard academic group did not self-identify as academic or clever in the way that most of the ATU students did; but neither did, unlike Michael (Foundation) and Owen (ATU), they express any insecurity that they might not be clever enough for university or for the world of graduate employment. Perhaps this group did not talk about confidence precisely because they so securely embodied the habitus of the university and clearly understood its purpose as preparing them for a graduate career. They did not need the mentoring scheme to develop their self-assurance; the combined value of their cultural, economic and social capitals already provided them with the deposit on a graduate level career. Rather the mentoring scheme was helping to give them an edge over the rest of the competition, enabling them to access "*shinier*" (Marcus) prizes.

A good example of this is Emily turning down the offer of a job because she did not like the location and expressing doubts that a graduate scheme will be sufficiently stretching. Instead, she was seeking a place on a highly selective internship scheme. She was confident that she would get the requisite cultural capital of an upper second, could demonstrate the necessary social capital in terms of extra-curricula activities and had the economic capital to get to move overseas and survive for a year on a scheme that paid living expenses rather than a salary.

The marked differences between groups in how the students talked about confidence, with all but one of the ATU students identifying an increase in confidence as one of or the key outcome of their participation in the mentoring scheme, might seem to support earlier American studies that have understood increased self-esteem as a change in habitus. Indeed, the initiative that forms the basis of one case study is described by the authors as “*intentionally altering the habitus of students*” (McNamara et al., 2011, p.24) even though they recognise that habitus “*is a slippery concept that lends itself to tautological definitions. Thus demonstrating change in an individual’s habitus is difficult.*”

Yet, the very definition of habitus as embodied makes changes not just difficult to demonstrate and measure but impossible because “*notre personnalité sociale est une création de la pensée des autres*¹¹” (Proust, 1954, p.29) suggesting that we can never know other people as they know themselves and they can never know us as we know ourselves. Our knowledge of other people comes to us through filtered through the lens of our interpretations of their behaviours and actions, through the “*the socially constituted principle of perception and appreciation*” (Wacquant, 1992, p.20). It is through the lens of our interpretations of their behaviours, actions and words that we understand other people, *not* through our observations of their internalisation (which being internal we cannot see) of the social world in which they find themselves. The participants’ assertions that they are more confident are supported by the empirical evidence of their narratives of their encounters and activities within the mentoring scheme. We cannot, however, observe the process by which “*history [is] turned into nature*” (Bourdieu, 1977,p.78) for and within each student.

Moreover, these students’ consciousness of their changing levels of confidence distinguish them from the students in the standard entry group for whom confidence was so internalized, so turned into nature that it was largely unmentioned. For Bourdieu, an individual’s habitus is the “*modus operandi of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery*” (Bourdieu, 1977,

¹¹ Our social being is a creation of the thoughts of others

p.79). The students joining University from non-standard entry schemes who so readily identified their new-found confidence were extremely conscious of it because their mastery of it was so recent and still partial. Maybe in future that consciousness will fade but not yet; these students have not yet fully embodied the habitus of the world of professional work.

Instead we should understand (and celebrate) the students' increased confidence as adding to their accumulations of social capital, being a resource they have built through their development of their network through their work with their mentor, that enables them to engage in the world of professional work. Phil (ATU) describes this nicely:

I think he more developed my confidence really, he was always praising me and things like that. We got a base from him that we could work from. So we got a CV just something from nothing.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has considered how Bourdieusian theories might offer an interpretation of the results from a series of interviews with twelve mentees participating in a scheme designed to build their connections with the business world. Bourdieu's concepts of selection survival, social capital and habitus were found to be helpful in explaining how students from different backgrounds engaged with and benefited from the scheme.

Nevertheless, the results do highlight that a nuanced approach, in particular taking into account qualities of gender and academic aptitudes, may be helpful in considering how students acquire and deploy social capital whilst at university. The findings are consistent with Bourdieu's claim that those with lower accumulations of inherited social capital have to work harder to generate more and in that sense, because inputs are greater, that their work is less profitable. This presents a risk that schemes such as mentoring schemes may be regressive in their distribution of additional social capital.

This chapter has argued that this theory of accumulation of social capital may be extended by considering the value of incremental increases at the individual level. The value of incremental social capital that is of value in the competition for graduate employment is relative and is greater where it is embodied in an individual who started with a lower stock. As such, schemes designed to

support students in building such social capital may actually be progressive in the distribution of additional social capital.

The next chapter will offer conclusions and recommendations from the analysis of these findings that may be useful to practitioners who implement similar initiatives to support students from non-traditional background in developing their employability.

6 CHAPTER 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Practice and Research

6.1 Introduction

The research presented in this thesis has sought to make a contribution to the debate about whether and how higher education plays a part in making society more equitable by enabling fairer access to graduate level employment or not. Using the lens of Bourdieu's theories of selection, habitus and social capital it has presented the case study of a mentoring scheme to investigate whether it has facilitated a neutral, progressive or regressive distribution of social capital amongst students studying in a Russell Group University Business School.

The introduction to the thesis described the author's own journey from student to researcher-practitioner in order to make explicit her own position with regard to both the practice being researched and the ontological basis of the research. It also positioned the object of the research within the context of the increasingly marketised higher education system in early twenty first century England, which is based on competition at all levels: between staff, between students and between institutions.

The second chapter used this context of competition to frame a review of the literature on graduate employability contrasting two broad approaches, consensus theories and conflict theories. The literature review revealed that much of the sociological literature had used Bourdieu's theories to explain how students' differing positions in the social and economic structure affected (or determined even) their journeys to, through and beyond university. Less research had been done to apply these frameworks specifically to the mentoring of students by professionals. The concepts of social capital, habitus and selection were identified as having potential explanatory power in this field. From the literature review, three research questions were formulated:

1. How do students' backgrounds impact their access to professional networks that will be of value to them in the competition for graduate employment?
2. How do students' backgrounds affect how they engage with, and benefit from, mentoring by professionals?
3. How should mentoring schemes be designed and implemented in order to contribute to social transformation?

The third chapter set out and justified the methodological approach: an exploratory case study applying narrative analysis to the transcripts of semi-structured one-to-one interviews with twelve students participating in the mentoring scheme. The chapter described how a purposive sampling approach was used to secure participants from three different groups: standard entry, access scheme and foundation programme.

The analysis of the transcripts presented in the fourth chapter used these groupings in order to explore whether and how students' experiences of the mentoring scheme were affected by their differing inherited positions within the social structure. The findings did indicate that the ways in which students engaged with the mentoring scheme and the benefits that they drew from it were shaped in part by their position in the social structure but that other elements of personal biographies also played a part. Thus the conjunction of social and cultural capitals were found to be important but so too were intersectionalities of class and gender.

In the penultimate chapter, these findings were analysed using Bourdieu's concepts of selection survival, habitus and social capital. Given that the findings had shown that inherited social capital was not the sole predictor of how well the students were able to develop incremental social capital, other explanations were offered. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of selection survival remains highly relevant not only to patterns of access to higher education but also to opportunities for graduate level employment after university. The students' use of the mentoring scheme to accumulate social capital that would be of value in the competition for graduate level employment appeared to be shaped by their journeys to university but the scheme was largely progressive in its development and distribution of incremental social capital. Finally, Bourdieu's theory of habitus was important in that it fit with the habitus of the fields of the University and the graduate recruitment market seemed to affect how beneficial mentoring was to the students.

This final chapter makes recommendations to how these findings might inform both future practice of the BTMS specifically but also professional mentoring schemes that are now being developed across the sector. It closes with some ideas on potential future approaches to this area of research and some reflections on the advantages and disadvantages of undertaking this work as a practitioner-researcher.

6.2 Designing and Implementing Mentoring Schemes to Contribute to Social Transformation

Given that students from a range of different backgrounds were able to utilise the mentoring scheme to expand their social capital, the prima facie most efficient way to ensure that such programmes help to close the inherited social capital gap would be to make them exclusive to students from lower SEGs.

Literature on student support, however, highlights issues of stigmatisation and mis-targeting that may arise in the operation of deficit model schemes (Thomas and Jones, 2007). Importantly, narrowing the group of students who can access the scheme, would have made it much harder to get the institutional commitment to its success in the post-2012 competitive environment.

6.2.1 Identifying Students with Low Inherited Social Capital

In order to identify students with low accumulations of inherited social capital it may be necessary to look beyond indicators such as contextual admissions schemes

The allocations of social capital across the three groups in the study was found to be broadly consistent with the prediction that these would be higher in the standard entry group than for those from the ATU and Foundation groups. Nevertheless, there were variations within the group and other studies have found that contextual admissions schemes may not be precise in identifying relative socioeconomic positions (Boliver, Gorard, & Siddiqui, 2015, p.317). Moreover, one indicator typically used in contextual admissions schemes is first-generation into higher education status. As we move closer, however, towards a second generation entering a mass but hierarchical higher education system the binary distinction between first and second generation may start to break down. For example, there may be a significant difference between the family experiences of higher education of two second generation students, one of whose parents followed their own parents to Oxbridge and one who has one parent who studied part-time at a metropolitan university. And, in a context where demand for graduate level roles outstrips supply, social congestion means that higher education is no longer a means of assuring upwards intergenerational mobility (Brown, 2013, p.684).

Therefore, designers of schemes which aim to target students with low social capital should complement information from contextual admissions schemes with other information sources such as interviews or recommendations from personal tutors.

6.2.2 Optimising Outcomes for Students with Low Inherited Social Capital

In order to optimise outcomes for students with lower inherited social capital, a professional mentoring scheme needs to be integrated into a broader system of student support.

The BTMS is located in a Business School which has taken deliberate steps to enhance the student experience through an emphasis on the first year as a period of transition to higher education. The introduction in 2010/11 of a year tutor system and of a new model of integrating skills development into the taught curriculum had resulted in significant improvements in student outcomes and in the School's National Student Survey Results.

Both students from the Foundation and all students in the ATU group other than Owen referenced their personal tutors as a source of support when asked directly or through the course of the conversation. Marcus (Standard) and Harvey (Standard) mentioned their personal tutors only in passing with regard to them telling them about the mentoring scheme; neither Emily (Standard) or Sam (Standard) mentioned their personal tutors at all. Thus personal tutors seemed generally to have played an important role as a source of social capital for those students with low inherited levels, working alongside (although not physically or always intentionally) the mentors to support these students in navigating their way through the personal development jungle. Intuitively this joint endeavour could be made even more effective by introducing the personal tutors and the mentors to each other, particularly as the support that mentors and tutors provided was not always clearly delineated for the students between academic and non-academic.

For example, Aalia was extremely grateful to her mentor for her support in helping her manage her academic workload which she found overwhelming in her first semester as she struggled to embody the habitus of a university student. Sharing this with her personal tutor (which she may or may not have done) would enable the University to ensure that the support on time management that she received through personal tutorials complemented rather than duplicated the work of Aalia with her mentor. Phil's personal tutor, because of his disciplinary knowledge and prior experience, was particularly helpful to him in securing his placement. Yet Phil did not think that he would have secured his internship if he had not had a mentor. Phil was the most explicit of all the students in comparing his low inherited social capital to that of his peers. Despite his father's strong support for him in going to and making the most of university, he was unable, with only his inherited social capital, to access the connections or knowledge needed to secure this prestigious placement;

he perceived he needed the combined support of his personal tutor and his mentor to make this happen.

6.2.3 Frontloading mentoring for students with low social capital

Mentoring programmes should start in year 1 because early engagement with mentors facilitates greater development of social capital for those students with lower inherited accumulations.

Although both students who had joined the Business School from the Foundation Programme were positive about their experiences of the mentoring programme, joining both it and the School at the beginning of their second year meant that they had missed out on the mentoring scheme in their first year. Moreover, they had also missed out on its integration with the model of personal tutoring, which was specific to the Business School, and hence the value of the symbiotic relationship between the personal tutoring system and the mentoring scheme. Neither was seeking to do a placement year, the returns on which in terms of degree outcomes and career destinations are well evidenced and well-communicated to the School's other students from the beginning of the first year onwards. Indeed, Shadha (Foundation) had relinquished a place on a module that would have been valuable for her personal development because she was planning not to do a placement year. Their shutting down of this option contrasts with Jennie (ATU), who had initially been reluctant to consider a placement year but who through discussion with her mentor had decided that she would. Similarly, Aalia (ATU), through the mentoring scheme, had seen a possible future self as a study abroad student.

Making decisions to compete for placements and study abroad in the first year is critical to students' success in obtaining these opportunities because applications need to be made early in the second year. Moreover, the cumulative rates of social capital development identified in this thesis, mean that the earlier the investment the greater the return. Those of us who work in universities, of course, tend to see our students as just that, university students. By adjusting our focus so that we contextualise the university experience as just one part of an individual's biography, we should be able to better support those individuals who face the greatest challenges of transition as they struggle, firstly, to embody the habitus of the university, then, of the graduate employment market and, finally, of the world of professional work.

For example, Aalia (ATU), whose parents (both immigrants to the UK) had, she said, not been to school and whose older sisters who had all married at an early age, brought to university extremely low accumulations of social capital (in terms of value in the graduate employment world). Yet her involvement in the mentoring scheme in the first year had provided her with the foundations on which she could then build in her second year. She described how her mentor purposively helped her not only prepare for the postgraduate world but also her acculturation to university. Yasmina (ATU), by the time of the study in her fourth year, related how her engagement in the scheme from the first year onwards, had helped her map and negotiate the path she had taken; from finding out about the world of the accountancy professional in her first year, through acquisition of a placement in her second year, completion of that placement in the third year and decision about graduate role in her fourth year.

6.2.4 The Intersectionality of Class and Gender

Mentoring programmes should acknowledge the intersectionality of class and gender in the mentor/mentee matching process and use awareness of this to benefit those students with low inherited social capital.

Thus, it is recommended that the intersectionality of gender and class should be acknowledged in the design of the mentoring scheme by seeking to match women mentees from low SEGs with women mentors. As no male mentees were matched with female mentors it is not possible to comment upon the value to men from low SEGs being matched with female or male mentors although it is noticeable that the two men (Marcus and Sam) who expressed a preference for having male mentors both joined the Business School through the standard entry route. Perhaps this was because these “sporty” “outdoorsy” men reinforced their sense of fit with the world of professional work. Training for mentors that draws their attention to how the dimensions of gender impact mentoring relationships may be helpful.

6.2.5 The Minimisation of Harms

Mentoring schemes should be designed to minimise the potential harms that might arise from any awakening of a sense of not belonging.

Because the dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions (which science apprehends through statistical regularities as the probabilities objectively attached to a group or class) engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements, the most improbable practices are

excluded, either totally without examination, as unthinkable, or at the cost of the double negation which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable.

(Bourdieu, 1977, p.77)

We will only feel the weight of the water if we have a sense of our own lack of belonging. Such a sense of a lack of belonging was awakened in Michael through his visit to his mentor's office, "*I dunno if I'm that*", which for him contrasted negatively with the office where he had worked during holidays, "*they're always happy to have me back*". We cannot know if Michael would have pursued, and obtained, a career in one of the Big 4 Professional Firms if he had not participated in the mentoring scheme or, indeed, that he will not go on to do so in the future, notwithstanding the views he expressed at the time of the study. But, if his participation in the mentoring scheme has in anyway closed down his aspirations by restricting rather than expanding his perceptions of possible future selves, then not only has it failed in its objectives but it has caused him harm.

It could be argued that the scheme's managers' negative duty to refrain from harming any participant (Bellotti, 1981) outweighs the positive duty to provide assistance to those they have identified as being in need (Bellotti, 1981). Within a utilitarian framework, of course, the benefits to the many would outweigh the harm to the few. Yet, given both this thesis and the mentoring scheme are concerned with the participants as individuals, such a rational calculative approach would be antithetical to the ethos of this work. Rather it is recommended that managers of mentoring scheme, through careful training of mentors and support of reflexivity in the mentees, design in processes to anticipate and manage negative impacts.

6.2.6 Structure, Agency and Reflexivity

Mentoring Schemes should encourage positive reflexivity in mentees.

The findings of this study have identified a complex agency/structure nexus which does not support Archer's privileging of agency over structure such that reflexivity, of itself, can be seen as a determinant of social mobility. Nevertheless, reflexivity may be a useful *additional* tool in a toolbox, such as the mentoring scheme. If mentoring interactions are understood as moments of crisis which let reflexivity in (McNay in Adams, 2006, p.518), then by revealing the social structures on which rest the foundations of their future careers, they may facilitate an individual's negotiation of these social structures.

One possible method would be to introduce a personal development plan for mentees whereby they make an assessment of their own social capital and reflect on their ambitions and aspirations at the beginning, during and at the end of their participation in the programme. This, if shared with mentors and personal tutors, could also support recommendations 1 and 4 above. The designers of any such system would need, however, because critical reflection is based on a “*doubting model*” (Brookfield, 1987, p.32), to be mindful of the slippery slope from reflexivity to self-criticism and that this slope may be steeper and shorter for those individuals without the cushion of large accumulations of inherited social capital.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

This study is undertaken in the context of early twenty first century English higher education where a degree in itself is no longer a passport to a graduate job (Tomlinson, 2008). Bathmaker et al. (2013) argue that in order to level the competition, universities should be “*actively providing opportunities to have ‘more than just a degree’ in order to begin to address the equity challenges currently facing working-class young people*” (p.742). The mentoring scheme presented in this case study is one such response to this challenge.

Ashwin (2012) calls for more higher education researchers to use empirical research to interrogate and develop theory and this thesis has attempted to do this by applying theoretical concepts from Bourdieu’s canon of work to the analysis of the data collected in a case study of a mentoring programme. As a work by a practitioner-researcher, however, this thesis also seeks to identify potential for improvements to practice. A Bourdieusian analysis has highlighted changes that may be made to the scheme in order to further its original aim of supporting students with low accumulations of inherited social capital to develop connections that will be of value to them as they move on from university to the world of work.

Nevertheless, as a small qualitative study which has used route into university to categorise students into different groups it offers limited insight into how mentoring might effect social mobility understood as movement between different socio-economic groups. Therefore, a larger study, possibly cross-institutional, which allocates students by low/high SEG and collects data by questionnaire rather than interview could focus on outcomes rather than on lived and reported experiences as this methodology has.

One issue has been that writing a thesis, just as writing for publication, requires a line of argument. This pressure on any author to make a contribution to knowledge within a set word limit requires a condensing of data and the imposition of a narrative thread (Clegg and Stevenson, 2013, p.9). This may push us towards an over-interpretation of our results and, ironically, away from the accepting of uncertainty that doctoral study is supposed to encourage us towards. Thus one recommendation for future study might be another case study of the same locus, not just, or even, working within a different disciplinary framework but presented as a 100,000 word PhD thesis.

This thesis has used a case study to test the application of Bourdieusian theory to a specific context and has concluded that it does, broadly, provide an effective approach for understanding the ways in which students from a variety of different backgrounds engage with and benefit from this particular mentoring scheme. One way in which we might also test the robustness of the theories and their application to the case would be to analyse the results through the lens of another theory. Possible alternative approaches which might be applied would be that of Archer, which is critical of Bourdieu's emphasis on structure over individual agency (Archer, 2007) or of Bernstein, whose ideas, Donnelly argues, offer a more precise and neutral framework than do those of Bourdieu (Donnelly, 2016, p.23). Such dialogical reflexiveness (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles & López-Torres, 2003) should enhance both the theory and practice of mentoring programmes.

6.4 The Practitioner-Researcher's Dilemma

He no longer believed that it was possible to struggle against the cruel forces of capitalist wealth. Nor did he particularly care. He had given up in despair.

(JG Farrell, the Siege of Krishnapur, p.285)

In JG Farrell's novel about an English community besieged in the Residency of a remote town during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the Magistrate, a life-long socialist, rejects his opportunity "*to act, not merely to argue*" (p.285) when he allows the few remaining foodstuffs to be auctioned for money rather than distributed on the basis of need. This author faces a similar dilemma, in that the mentoring scheme, by enabling a lucky few who have survived being selected out of the Russell Group (Bradley and Ingram, 2013, p.52) to survive being selected out of graduate level work, may help to legitimate rather than challenge structural inequalities in the distribution of social capital. Thus to act, not merely to argue, would seem to require more radical recommendations for practice than have been made above: closing down the scheme altogether, limiting it to low SEG students

only or introducing a reverse mentoring model that seeks to fit the field of graduate employment to the habitus of these students rather than the other way around.

But, of course, any such restructuring or repurposing of the scheme would be highly unlikely to gain support from senior university leadership, employers or those students who have benefited from it. And, the qualitative approach taken in this thesis emphasises the importance of the micro-level with the narrative analysis of the students' accounts of their experiences demonstrating the value to them as individuals. So whilst acknowledging the mentoring scheme cannot drive the redistribution of social capital at the macro level, let us celebrate the ways in which those students with low inherited social capital have used it overcome the barriers to graduate level employment that they undoubtedly faced. And, to do this, let us leave the last word to Phil, who whilst recognising that it might be fairest for the scheme only to be available to ATU students like himself, shows us even if it is open to all, those who have the most to gain and so work the hardest, will hopefully benefit the most:

I think it should benefit people that don't have the big networks definitely, people who've come through the access programme coz it sort of makes it an even playing field from the fact that you can have that network and that you can develop your confidence. Maybe coming from a poorer background, not having that confidence whereas these other people they have confidence to, parents and stuff and they spoke to were professional people. Whereas you coming in not having that background you shouldn't come in at a disadvantage because you're coming to the same uni, at the end of the day you've got the same grades they're on the same course so you should sort of come at at a level playing field sort of. Like I'd say for access students, I'd say it's more beneficial as well. It's like it makes it more beneficial in that in that they work harder at the scheme. It's not just like get a mentor and then that's it. You've got to work at it.

7 References

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