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Belonging, Gender and Selfhood: Women's Life History Narratives and the 11+ Exam in England and Wales, 1955–1965

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ABSTRACT

Educational policies of the 1944 Butler Act sought to assign each child to a secondary school, dependent on their proven competence at the 11+. This paper draws on oral history interviews to explore notions of belonging and how the effects of perceptions of "passing" or "failing" the exam influenced, and continue to inform, women's adult lives. Belonging is often understood to be structured on social inclusion, inhabiting an environment in which to flourish with and alongside others. Steedman describes marginalisation through an inability to belong as "a terrible exclusion, an exclusion from the experience of others." These interviews suggest that belonging at secondary school required more than simply passing or failing the 11+, but also involves notions of class, gender and perceptions of inequality through differentiation. Informed by societal influences, experiences of belonging by intelligence are challenged by those of isolation, separation and eventual reconciliation.

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Introducing Belonging

The tripartite educational policies of the 1944 Butler Act sought to assign each child to a secondary school, dependent on their proven competence at the 11+ exam. In this respect, the result of the 11+ exam was, in part, used to ensure that pupils "belonged" academically to the community of the school that they were allocated. This article draws on oral history interviews to explore differing notions of belonging and how the effects of "passing" or "failing" the 11+ exam influenced, and continues to inform, women's adult lives. Importantly, the process of differentiation was not imagined around such simplistic outcomes, but rather selection was based on the provision of available places, something that varied between education authorities. Using the dual lens of class and gender, these life history narratives of women now in their seventies illustrate the role of communities and familial influence as factors that aided or hindered their individual experience of belonging.[1]

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The Education Act of 1944 (The Butler Act) sought to abolish the old order distinction between existing elementary and secondary education, where only those who could afford to stay on at school were able to attend.[2] Post-war educational restructuring in the form of a tripartite system sought to provide an equality of opportunity where every child left school aged 15, equipped for the world of work. Introduced in 1944, as a cornerstone of post-war reform, the 11+ exam was compulsory until the late 1960s when the rapid expansion of the comprehensive system removed the need for selection to secondary school.[3] Upon receipt of the exam outcome, every child was allocated a secondary school type that was deemed to be most suited to their capabilities, either the Grammar school, Technical High School or Secondary Modern.[4]

Belonging is often understood to be structured on social inclusion, inhabiting an environment in which to flourish with and alongside others.[5] Research associating recognition with personal self-worth argues that belonging signifies an acceptance by others, whether in relation to family, friendship, or school community.[6] Social and cultural historian, Carolyn Steedman explains marginalisation through an inability to belong, as "a terrible exclusion, an exclusion from the experience of others."[7] What these interviews suggest, however, is that belonging at secondary school required more than simply passing or failing the 11+. Belonging is experienced through notions of class and gender and perceptions of inequality through differentiation. Using oral history interviews, this article argues that, for the recipients of post-war policies promising "an opportunity for all," the ability to belong in their allocated secondary school relied on more than just the outcome of a written academic test. Moreover, that the experience of belonging is best understood through the highly personal and nuanced voices that convey, in close-up, the move from primary to secondary education. Informed by the influences of their wider social structures of family and community, experiences of belonging by intelligence are challenged by those of isolation, separation, and eventual reconciliation.

This article draws on the external influences that foster or challenge feelings of belonging, as existing identities and relationships merge with new communities. Notwithstanding the outcome of the 11+ as a means to determine academic belonging, it is important to understand how conflicting messages, both overt and subliminal, place pressure on an individual to withdraw from the unfamiliar society. Arguably, any experience of disconnect with the school, or the inability to feel a genuine sense of belonging through mutual beliefs and values, will damage the educational opportunity. This article examines the notion of belonging which provided the subconscious framework on which their secondary educational experience was supported. Close analysis will focus on two registers of belonging: intellectual and emotional. To what extent does the ability to succeed fulfil perceived expectations of belonging within a school community and, in what ways do the values and beliefs held within a family influence a child's ability to fit into a different social environment? Accepting that eligibility was secured through an academic examination, this article considers the hidden obstacles such as "cultural capital" that pre-determined any genuine sense of belonging.[8] Finally, this article will focus on the subjective understanding of the 11+ as a means to determine secondary education, examining the lasting effects that arose from a sense of un-belonging in either selective or secondary modern schools. As latent feelings of experiences from some 60

years ago are retold, what re-evaluations are made as their past lives become part of their present?

Life history perspectives enable us to consider the differing individual understandings in relation to selective secondary education experience. Cultural geographer, Daniel Trudeau, associates the notion of belonging with that of place-making through which the ability to connect with the new school community cannot be linked to academic ability alone, but relies on the mutual acceptance and compatibility of both the pupil and the school.[9] Acknowledging the significance of class and community as contributing factors of belonging, sociologist Darren O'Byrne argues for an understanding of the necessary "ingredients" which provide individuals with a level of commonality.[10] Thus, in any experience of movement or change, securing a personal sense of belonging to that new environment will be shaped not only by the voices and actions of close family members, but also by the wider "homophilous relationships."[11] As this article will demonstrate, the concept of homophily, formed through family and friendships, has a significant impact on the experiences of belonging held within their narratives.

Childhood sociologists, Liz Spencer and Ray Pahl, describe the presence of a "social convoy" made up of significant individuals, both family and friends, that exists within the whole life course.[12] Though school settings provide the social context in which friendships can develop, transitions in adolescence through different school experiences often place existing relationships at risk. Different opportunities and challenges of integration can result in having little in common with those they once shared their time with. Psychological understanding of childhood friendships charts the importance of companionship, creating an environment which allows "a level of self-disclosure that happens when a person truly trusts another person and feels safe and secure in [their] presence."[13] Steven Asher and Molly Weeks argue that friendship is developed not only through the initial criteria of "proximity and engagement" but also latterly by "shared characteristics and personal qualities."[14]

Acknowledging the necessary relational aspects of belonging and the importance of self with others, the perceived existence of any form of barrier, one that acts to prevent such integration, creates a lasting divide and hampers any possible connection.[15] Studies into the wider significance of belonging consider the existence of "emotional communities," environments where shared values can both be experienced and expressed.[16] Monserrat Guibernau argues that belonging "fosters an emotional attachment [...] providing access to an environment in which they matter."[17] Moreover, that "self-identity is constructed through belonging and through exclusion – as a choice or as imposed by others."[18] Matters of belonging shared in the life histories reveal the emotional significance of these relationships that continues to influence the self in later life. This article argues that, as a means of selecting educational destinations, the 11+ created unfamiliar environments in which young girls accepted or resisted the experience of belonging.

Methodological understanding accepts the composure of oral narratives to be temporary in construct, provisional rather than accomplished, shaped both by the stories we tell and by the relationship of the two parties involved.[19] Dialogical in process, recollections are subject to change as any re-interpretation is informed by the conversation. Ideas of composure are further challenged by the effects of dis-composure, a form of instability

within the narrative. Sparked by the uniqueness of the process, narrators often re-examine previously held subjectivities, to gain a different understanding.

This study uses the Life History method of Oral History research to investigate how classed and gendered experiences and identities in childhood continue to shape subjectivities throughout the life course.[20] Focusing on the experiences of young girls, this social history project utilises life history methodology to better appreciate the impact of attainment-led provision and the role that education played within the individual's life. Altering the "angle of vision," to focus on those shaped by policy rather than those responsible, this research examines how feelings and emotions experienced as young girls shape later life.[21] A sample of the 15 suitable self-selecting participants, identified via women's organisations, will enable an exploration of memory and subjectivity.[22] Focusing on girls who sat the 11+ between 1955 and 1965, a cohort of this size allows for deep exploration of individual subjectivities constructed by the lifelong effect of a pass or fail, enriching sociological studies of 11 + outcomes.

Intellectual Belonging

For Steph (Born 1943, Exam 1954), success at the 11+ confirmed an assumed level of academic ability that was anticipated by her parents, resulting in a place at the grammar school in a Cambridgeshire town. Confident of this seamless progression from primary school, Steph's experience of belonging was brought into sharp focus when, after three years of secondary school, there was a move to establish two streams. As Steph explained:

> We did the first three years [. . .], and then we were, erm, divided into 4S, which was 4 "Special" and 4 "General". And 4 "Special" went on, I think, mainly to do the sciences, [. . .] And 4G did the more general. And I thought to myself, if I don't pull my socks up, I'm going to end up in 4G and that's not my place. So, I did pull my socks up, and I did go into 4S.[23]

In this extract, Steph appeared to recognise a level of complacency that, unless action was taken, would place her in a stream that did not match her real capability, one in which she did not believe she belonged. "And I thought to myself, if I don't pull my socks up" demonstrates a form of internalised rallying cry, warning herself to take action or face the consequences. Sentiments such as "end up" and "that's not my place" reinforce her awareness of the difference between the two streams, her rejection of the general level and, more importantly, her refusal to belong there. Streaming at grammar school featured in several accounts, illustrating how those deemed capable in science were separated from those more suited to arts and humanities. Indeed, recollections of defined hierarchies appeared to affirm their fixed position within the whole school order.[24] Arguably, Steph's sense of belonging was shaped by a certainty in her own abilities. Through repeated emphasis that she "did" alter her mindset and gained recognition for her achievement, Steph affirmed both her motivation for the task and her lasting satisfaction at the outcome. The risk of being perceived as anything other provided sufficient impetus to ensure her place among others in 4S. At a Staffordshire high school, Lily's (Born 1951, Exam 1962) weakened sense of intellectual belonging came from the intense level of competition she encountered in the move away from primary school and a heightened awareness of

her own position in this changed regime, where she openly acknowledged being, "not one of the brightest."[25]

> I've moved from a school where . . . I was fine, and I was, you know, I was sort of somewhere in the middle, I guess, [. . .], I could answer the questions. I knew what was going on, um, but I wasn't the one getting the prizes, so I was in the middle, no trouble [. . .] They probably wouldn't remember who I was, you know. And then, when I moved to the high school, I was with the brightest in the region because it was the best school to go to. [. . .] And so, then, you start to realize that everybody else seems a lot cleverer than you. [. . .] So, then it, it all got a bit competitive, and [. . .] you started to be labelled by this point.[26]

This "label" was not without effect. Lily's narrative expressed the subtle change to her personal identity at school as a result of the move from primary to grammar. Lily took comfort from lack of recognition and anonymity within the classroom. Moreover, her ability to perform as required alleviated the risk of potential difficulties. In this very candid account, Lily's choice of language reinforced the emotional consequence to her altered school identity. Aware of being among the "brightest in the region" and attending the "best school to go to," the shift from anonymity to someone recognised by her likely weakened performance left a lasting insecurity from this changed persona. Asked if she felt able to overcome the label or if she recalled feeling any self-acceptance of this prescribed identity, Lily replied, "No, I accepted it [. . .] I just figured it must be right, because that's what my academic record proved [. . .] and that's what I was."[27] Unlike the selfdetermination expressed by Steph, Lily's narrative conveyed a feeling of acquiescence, believing the school report to express an unchallengeable account of her academic ability. Lily's working-class parents placed little or no pressure on their daughter regarding school attainment, content instead to take the attitude of, "do your best, that's good enough for us."[28] Whilst not diminishing their pleasure at her 11+ success, with little or no expectation for any future career choices, there was no reason to challenge or affect the feelings of disconnect Lily experienced at the grammar school.

Latterly in our conversation, Lily acknowledged that she had never experienced any sense of belonging at the high school, "I never thought I was clever enough."[29] The narrative revealed how, marked out as a low achiever, the high expectations of the grammar school conflicted with her more realistic level of attainment, "my definitely preferred place would be in the middle somewhere."[30] Returning to the notion of belonging as a sense of place-making, Lily's repeated reference to "middle" within her narrative, as a means of expressing her preferred position, suggests an awareness that this was no longer acceptable. Moreover, by her own admission that she believed herself not to be "clever enough," Lily affirmed her understanding of belonging at the high school to be dependent on her academic skills. Any such sub-par performance would only damage or limit her ability to feel fully part of the school community. Lily was not alone in experiencing feelings of insecurity and isolation as a result of her disappointing level of attainment. For Audrey (Born 1941, Exam 1951), however, the level of disconnect was further exacerbated by her inability to belong in either school type.

In the emotional and often candid recollections of her 11+ experience, Audrey raised the challenges faced by an altogether different problem in relation to selective education. As someone who failed the 11+, but passed at the second attempt two years later, Audrey recalled the barriers to belonging she encountered, both intellectually and emotionally.

Following the "failed" outcome of the 11+, Audrey was offered a place at an Essex secondary modern. Recalling her early experience there, she acknowledged:

> I made a few friends, and all the teachers kept saying to my parents, because my parents knew a lot of teachers there, "she shouldn't really be here, she's very bright, you know," which didn't really help. And I was top of the A stream.[31]

This extract reflects the conflicting notion of belonging. Reputationally, among mainly middle-class parents, secondary modern schools were considered to be the educational home for those who failed.[32] For Audrey's parents, remarks of this nature only reinforced their belief that she was in the wrong school. Whilst very aware of her performance at the 11+ and the self-imposed distance she maintained from her primary school friends, at the secondary modern she was perceived to be "very bright," performing at the top of the A stream, arguably, a place in which to grow and flourish. Though Audrey felt able to make new friends among her peers, the overarching influence of her parents' social relationship with a number of her teachers brought conflicting messages about where she ought to be. Secondary educational policy was seen to reinforce the class structure, with an assumption that "different schools and different types of education would be provided for different social classes."[33] Though not academically inclined herself, Audrey's mother had high aspirations for her daughter and the company of those in which she sought inclusion was, predominantly, among middle-class professional types.[34] Audrey's attendance at the secondary modern was perceived to weaken her mother's aspirational social status, damaging her chance of a full membership within a highly desirable society. Audrey acknowledged that, though her mother wanted her to do well, "she wanted the right uniform."[35] Such fervent intention emphasised the favoured academic status and apearance over intellectual surety. In this instance, the issue of belonging related not only to Audrey, but, more importantly, to her parents. Positive affirmation, even assumptive, was sufficient reassurance that their daughter was perceived to be too clever for the school she was in. Acknowledging that messages of this type "didn't really help" her situation, it can be argued that Audrey had been only too aware of her mother's aversion to the secondary modern and her intense desire for a move to a selective school.[36]

In contrast to other narrators in the study, though Audrey was very anxious to share the 11+ "trauma" she had experienced and the resulting confusion regarding the most suitable school for her abilities, Audrey appeared to be acutely aware of the long-term impact of such conflicting messages:

> Being told that you were somewhere, which wasn't the right place for you, actually, because you, you know, other people were telling you, "you shouldn't be here." "You, you, you shouldn't be at the secondary modern." You know, you're better. "You're better than that."[37]

The extent of repetition expressed in this brief extract provides an indication of the recurring messages Audrey received about her suitability for the secondary modern. The constant reiteration that she was identified as not being in the "right" place compromised any likelihood of securing the most appropriate form of secondary education, something she later reflected may have been the correct destination for her ability at the time. "You're better than that," epitomises the supposed reputational damage caused by the inaccuracy of the selective process. Perceived to be in the wrong school environment, Audrey was believed to be "better" than the expected cohort type. Such experience

mirrors those of Annette Kuhn, who described the existence of a "them" and "us" form of demarcation as "a cornerstone of the school's value system, [to separate] the chosen few, or elect, from the rest [...] the *hoi polloi*."[38] The impact of such stratified policy was affirmed in the 1961 study by social scientist, John Barron Mays, who argued that the educational system "reinforce[d] and perpetuate[d] class divisions [...] producing two main social groups [...] who confront each other with mutual distaste."[39]

The family's quest for academic validity continued. After two years at the secondary modern, Audrey sat and achieved the 13+, gaining a place at the technical school in northeast Essex.[40] Audrey's narrative exposed the bitter-sweet outcome for this academic success:

> And I, I got there and I quite liked ... I was happy. I made friends. But the level of work expected, I hadn't been trained up for two years to do ... so, I wasn't doing all that well, really. For instance, you copied notes in biology at a secondary modern, you were expected to take dictation ... and I wasn't used ... just as a ... simple things. I wasn't, I wasn't sort of ready for it. [...] And everybody was so pleased, you know, that I'd managed to pull it off.[41]

Audrey's narrative revealed not only the anxiety she experienced as a result of the re-test, but of her apparent isolation. In the previous extract her repeated use of "you" affirmed how she was identified as capably different. However, in this instance expressions such as, "I wasn't," illustrated her awareness of being intellectually and academically unprepared. In his 1953 study into the effects of intelligence testing and selection, educationalist Brian Simon argued that, such was the gulf between the two paths for grammar and secondary modern, "it [was] extraordinarily difficult to jump from one to the other."42 Though Audrey had achieved the desired grade, she lacked the necessary rigour to maintain the necessary level of expectation. Her obvious need to appease her parents and affirm the views of those among their society was evident. "And everybody was so pleased, you know, that I'd managed to pull it off," suggests that her motivation was centred on the happiness of others, rather than any personal satisfaction Audrey could gain from such a transformative achievement. In contrast to Steph's earlier example of self-determination, Audrey's admission that she'd managed to "pull it off," reveals a lack of conviction both at the likelihood of success and the expectations of her parents. I asked Audrey if she remembered feeling any increase in her self-esteem at this subsequent achievement:

> Yes [...] But to be honest, I think in a lot of ways, the damage had been done, a bit. And I think, for a long time in my life, I sort of underplayed myself, I felt a failure.[43]

When asked about her parent's reaction, Audrey replied, "Yes, my parents were happier I was there [...] but then they were quite happy for me to leave [...] they didn't really see me going on for future education."[44] Audrey's open acknowledgement of "damage" in relation to her 11+ experience indicated a link between her academic ability and the weight of such a failed result. Social interactionalist theory considers the effects of "self-concept of ability" in relation to a significant other, in this case educational achievement, which influences future behaviours. In their 1964 study into the notion of self-concept of ability and school assessment, Wilbur Brookover and Shailer Thomas argue that forms of school assessment can result in the conception of an individual's idea of their own ability.[45] Arguably,

for Audrey, irrespective of her success at 13 years old, the legacy damage done by the 11+ experience left a marked impression regarding her own perceived capabilities.[46] The expression of "damage," in relation to the 11+ exam experience, demonstrated the lasting emotional impact to Audrey's 11-year-old self as a result of such perceived demarcation.

Sadly, for Audrey, any attempt to secure a purposeful sense of belonging during her secondary school years was thwarted by the influential ideals of class and gender held by her parents. Explaining how they saw no need for her to pursue any form of academic progression after the year 11 equivalent, Audrey revealed how their longing for their daughter to achieve a place at the selective school was never about the long-term aim of higher education, "it was about being back in this society [. . .] once I got there, . . . it didn't matter if I achieved anything more."[47] Audrey's narrative encapsulates the complexity of the 11+ and the contentious notion of opportunity for all.

Emotional Belonging

This next section explores the differing emotional connections through which belonging is experienced. Returning to Healy's explanation that, "belonging is at heart *relational*, it is about the self *with* others," experiences of emotional security that existed in school-girl friendship suggest a need for continuity and shared experience.[48] Differentiation identified through the selection process risked jeopardising the somewhat easy relationships forged at primary school. Educational science research argues that a sense of belonging at secondary school is gained from an individual's perceptions of being liked, respected, and valued by others in the school community. Indeed, historian Hannah Charnock argues that, aside from being "sites of learning," schools provided a social place in which girls could bond with peers.[49] The inability to experience such belonging places at risk their "developmental need for relatedness."[50] I asked Paula if the outcome of the 11+ had any lasting effect on her friendship group:

> Now, that's the important thing that I've been thinking about. I've, I've often thought that since . . . since I moved away from there, I **lost** my friends. [. . .] When I changed schools. Hmm . . . We . . .. we had a friendship group. [. . .] Erm, there were four of us, two, two Paulas and two Pennys. Were, were a school group. And, do you know, after . . . we finished that term, I never saw any of them again. And she, she only lived around the corner. I don't know why?![51]

Paula's narrative reveals a harsh separation experienced by the move away from primary school, one that speaks both of loss and of bemusement. "I lost my friends," suggests something she knew she had, but could no longer find, they were missing from her life. In her closing statement, "I don't know why?!" Paula questioned, with a palpable sense of disbelief, how this neat band of girls, each sharing a name with another, could just dissolve.[52] In the recollection process, Paula appeared to re-open the emotional wounds of hurt and confusion, long since set to one side. Graham Dawson describes an "afterlife" of emotion, as our dynamic understanding of past experience alters with the passing of time.[53] Whilst her narrative demonstrated an ability to forge close bonds, the friendship dissolved once the common experience of school was weakened. I asked Paula if she felt this sudden loss was caused by an attempt for her to move forward, or perhaps that they

felt they could no longer accept or connect with someone who had been elevated to a different academic tier:

> There was, I think there was a bit of that, [. . .] two of them passed for the same high school, which wasn't Cardiff High [. . .] so they became a friendship of two. So, I wouldn't have fitted in anyway. [. . .] the four of us used to have a little gang in Penny's house around the corner, in . . . in the coal shed, I remember. It was that sort of, that sort of area.[54]

This narrative extract explained the extent of loss experienced by Paula, both emotionally and physically. Notwithstanding the enforced division as a result of their varying outcomes of the 11+, Paula's isolation was further cemented by her subsequent exclusion from the peer group. Whilst petty childhood differences often create a temporary interruption to friendship ties, the level of marginalisation experienced among her own society was not insignificant. Aware of the differing layers of grammar school in her area, Paula acknowledged:

> how you passed the 11+, depended what grammar school you were offered. [. . .] Because there are about four or five in [the area, and mine] was the top one.[55]

Though her two friends gained grammar school places, their level of achievement was lower than Paula's which resulted in their admission to a different school, understood to be lower in the hierarchical school structure. Paula's account affirmed her awareness of the lack of shared experiences, conditions necessary for their friendship to continue. When asked if this immediate loss of friendship was unexpected, Paula replied only "Mm," remembering, perhaps, the level of sadness she experienced at the time and the unanticipated nature of such separation. Paula's recollections revealed the personal conflict experienced as a result of her selection, separated from others in her local community. Childhood psychologists Julie MacEvoy and Steven Asher argue that, though girls are perceived to out-perform boys in relation to testing, they have "particular difficulty coping with transgressions of core friendship expectations, including reliability, loyalty and emotional support."[56] The implications of "porous" friendships, disrupted by margin and opportunity, resulted in feelings of isolation and insecurity.[57] The perceived effects from division at 11 years remained very much in the present, affirming the cruel emotional impact felt by that sudden loss of certainty.

Friendship fragility was also experienced by Carol (Born 1951, Exam 1962) through her swift transition from the secondary modern to the grammar school. Though originally marked as having failed the 11+, after just one term at the secondary modern, Carol was assigned a place at the grammar school.[58] As she spoke of her feelings regarding the change between the two schools, Carol recalled the unexpected reaction of a friend's parent:

> What you might be more interested in, is [. . .] a friend, um, who lived [locally], who'd I'd known at the primary school, um. And . . . it transpired that her mother was not happy for her daughter to then play with me when I went to the secondary modern, but once I went to the grammar school, all was forgiven, and em, we were allowed . . . to play.[59]

Discourse on the effects of division through selective education argues that a wedge is driven between those deemed to have achieved and those who were left behind. As Stephanie Spencer argues, "division at eleven, ostensibly on academic grounds, usually followed a class divide which affected the aspirations and expectations of school

leavers."[60] The wider implications of the 11+, therefore, are not only as a means through which to determine the appropriate educational opportunity, it can also be understood as a vehicle to affirm the most apt form of friendship. Sociological understanding of friendship places emphasis on the role of "personal communities" in which people gather through their social setting and lives. Moreover, that the structural power relations existing within these personal communities, "become sutured into the friendship relations."[61] Certainly, in her re-calibrated status as a grammar schoolgirl, Carol had been deemed a proper "fit," enabling the reinstatement of their friendship. Listening again to the recollection, her level of disbelief at being the recipient of such discrimination is acutely evident. Though Carol spoke softly throughout our meeting, there is, at this juncture, an audible change in her orality. In recalling the conditional nature of their friendship, specifically, "we were allowed . . . to play," Carol's speech slowed down in pace and became far quieter. Arguably, in the process of remembering, Carol attached some level of emotional response to the unexpected actions of her friend's parent which reflected the lasting controlled anger experienced many years ago.

Accepting that whilst oral histories can alter the angle of focus towards previously hidden experiences, though not considered to provide the "truth" about the past they, nonetheless, supply meaning to an individual's experience. Given the manner in which this recollection was shared, and the subtle hint of sarcasm in her voice, it is possible to understand how it continues to retain such significant meaning for Carol, vocalising the conditional implications for her childhood friendship and the fragile nature of their shared belonging. Her assertion that, "all was forgiven" suggests that, by failing to pass the 11+, she was perceived to have committed some form of misdemeanour that, once corrected, enabled an automatic reinstatement of their friendship. In their study into the role of friendships, Jill Hamm and Beverly Faircloth argue that experiences of belonging gained in early adolescence "facilitate intimate disclosure, sharing feelings of trust, worth and acceptance."[62] In view of the level of intrusion by the friend's mother, any such characteristics that existed between the two girls were not exclusive, however, but subject to consent. I asked Carol if she was aware of a conscious separation of friendship caused by the change of school:

CX: By some parents, em, as to who their children should be playing or shouldn't be playing.

AL: And how as a parent now, yourself [. . .] How does that make you feel, now that you are older?

CX: Appalled, I'm absolutely appalled that people could have, that an exam can . . . segregate your friendships. [. . .] I just think that's awful.[63]

Whilst this extract helps to illustrate the fragility of adolescent friendships and the reliance of young people on parental approval, the temporary cessation caused by a "poor" exam mark reinforces the varying emotional experiences faced by individuals as a result of the 11+. At this point, Carol's narrative is shaped around two strands; their inability to continue playing together whilst she was a pupil at the secondary modern, and her strength of feeling now as a parent and grandparent, at the effects of such "appalling" segregation. Through his exploration into the role of composure in oral narratives, Graham Dawson argues that, to better appreciate the content of an

individual's account, it is important to place their story alongside the recognised frameworks to provide shape and understanding. Born in 1951, a post-war baby boomer, Carol will have been socially informed of the wider values and behaviours of the period, specifically tolerance and stoic acceptance. As Lynn Abrams affirms, "narrators do not draw on cultural constructs randomly, but [. . .] tend to choose those that cohere most closely with their own experience."[64] Though understandably hurt by their breakdown in friendship, Carol's account aligns emotionally with her parents' generation, suggesting instead a passive response in times of frustration.

As the life history content has revealed, securing a lasting sense of belonging through friendship at school was far from straightforward. Paula spoke extensively about the damage to her primary friendships, caused by her move to the grammar school and the subsequent disconnect she experienced once there. I asked Paula if she had a friendship group at the high school

> I had two friends, but we were all sort of on the edge of things, which is why we were friends, if you like. Once again, when I left school at 16, or after . . . taking the exams, I never saw them again. They both stayed on to do "A" levels, and I never saw them again or heard from them again. We sort of stuck together because we were all sort of the loners really.[65]

Unlike the obvious emotional certainty of the primary "school group" Paula's experience of belonging at the high school appeared fragile, held together only by their shared feelings of insecurity amidst the wider school community. Paula's assured sense of belonging altered from the band of four with much in common, to three individuals, "stuck together" by a shared feeling of loneliness and the fear of further isolation. Echoing the experience of that move away from primary education, as Paula's time at the grammar school came to an end so too did her friendship. Jill Hamm and Beverly Faircloth express the notion of "companionship" as a symbolisation of friendship, one which can generate a positive association with the school.[66] Given that their only notable common experience relied on a shared position at the periphery of school society, there appeared little opportunity to forge valuable, supportive relationships. Whilst accepting that this parting of the ways was caused by Paula's transition from school to adult life, her sensory recollection reinforces the extent of isolation she experienced in this transitionary period in her life.

Feelings of isolation were not uncommon among those girls for whom the academic testing appeared more straightforward than their leap into the unknown world of the grammar school. Recalling her own challenges as a young girl, faced with the transition between a working-class home and a middle-class education, Valerie Walkerdine argues that selective educational policy demanded not only the need to achieve but, crucially, a deeper understanding of the lasting effects of being one of the chosen:

> They held out a dream. Come, they told me. It is yours. You are chosen. They didn't tell me, however, that for years I would no longer feel any sense of belonging, nor any sense of safety.[67]

This succinct evaluation of the impact experienced through the effects of selective education policy illustrates the "thrilled, but terrified" emotional reaction by Paula's parents to their younger daughter's ascension into the high school.[68] Accepting their obvious feelings of delight and pride at the notable achievement of the two girls, their

social disconnect from the grammar school community fashioned a vulnerability that affected the emotional security of the whole family.

Conclusion

The two registers of belonging explored within this article illustrate the risks involved in differentiation by selection. Though the tripartite policies of the 1944 Butler Act sought to deliver a process of secondary education for post-war Britain that met both the needs of the children and of the country, the genuine ability to flourish and exist as an equal member of the school society relied on more than the outcome of a written school exam. Narratives have revealed the both the lasting effects on the individual of their 11 + experiences nearly 70 years ago and the conflicting sense of self they continue to negotiate in later adult life. Though small in number, they nonetheless extend the work of Stephanie Spencer whose oral narratives sought to place the stories of individuals against the dominant post-war education narrative.[69] Heartfelt stories of success and failure are continually relied upon to challenge the need for grammar school expansion.[70] The legacy of selective education remains complex, as notions of being "chosen," as described by Walkerdine, reinforce not only the likely emotional effects on those who did not achieve the necessary grade, but importantly, the uncertainty of an unfamiliar community for those who did.[71]

Girls' experiences now retold though the lives of their adult selves reveal the very real need for acceptance and inclusivity, not only at home, but within their social school society. Experiences of isolation and differentiation from peers leave marked impressions and feelings of insecurity that remain in adult life. Whilst acknowledging the many differing perspectives from the ideas of belonging and accepting that those explored in this article are unrepresentative, life history narratives provide a close-up account of an individual's experience enabling deeper interpretation of the influence and perceived effects of the "ingredients" involved.

Notes

1. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 17.
2. Butler, *The Education Act 1944.*
3. The use of the 11+ as a means to determine selection to secondary school had ceased across most education authorities by 1974 following the introduction of the comprehensive system.
4. Though primary schools were mixed, secondary schools of all type were single sex and did not become mixed environments until the move to a comprehensive system.
5. Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging.*
6. Ibid., 52.
7. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 17.
8. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."
9. Trudeau, "Politics of Belonging in the Construction of Landscapes."
10. O'Byrne, "Working-Class Culture," 75.
11. Vincent et al., *Friendship and Diversity*, 5.
12. Spencer and Pahl, *Rethinking Friendship*, 88.
13. Asher and Weeks, "Friendships in Childhood," 119.
14. Vangelisti and Perlman, *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, 121.
15. Healy, "Belonging, Social Cohesion," 423–38.

16. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, 3.
17. Guibernau, *Belonging*, 28.
18. Ibid., 26.
19. Coleman, "Aging and Life History"; Dawson, *Soldier Heroes, British Adventure, Empire*; Summerfield, "Dis/Composing the Subject, Intersubjectivities in Oral History."
20. Ethics ETH2223-0230, Ethical approval granted from University of Essex, November 16 2022.
21. Summerfield, "Culture & Composure," 65–93.
22. The National association of Women's Clubs, The Women's Institute and the U3A were approached regarding the study. Members were informed of the research and those who met the necessary demographics and school location were encouraged to make contact with regards to possible involvement. The final number related more to time constraints and the necessary methodological transcript analysis. Though the particpants now live in East Anglia, their geographical origins provide an insight into educational experience across England and Wales.
23. Narrator Steph, interviewed January 2024.
24. For experiences of streaming see: Evans, *A Good School*; Ingham, *Now We Are Thirty.*
25. Narrator Lily, interviewed May 2023.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Narrator Audrey, interviewed April 2023.
32. Butler himself recognised the need to minimise any stigma of inferiority from "attach[ing] itself to those secondary institutions . . . which lacked facilities and academic prestige of the grammar schools." Butler, *The Art of the Possible*, 124, 125. More details on the reputational consequence of the 11+ can be found in: Laurie, *The Teenage Revolution*; Sandbrook, *Never Had It so Good*; and Taylor, *The Secondary Modern School.*
33. Arnot, "State Educational Policy and Girls," 146.
34. More information on parental aspiration can be found within Roberts, *Women and Families*, 169.
35. Audrey, April 2023.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, 104.
39. Barron Mays, "Teen-age Culture in Contemporary Britain and Europe."
40. To mitigate the situation where a pupil was placed in the wrong school, local education authorities were required to enable transfers between school type. Ministry of Education, *New Secondary Education*.
41. Audrey, April 2023.
42. Simon, *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School*, 21.
43. Audrey, April 2023.
44. Ibid.
45. Brookover et al., "Self-Concept of Ability and School Achievement."
46. Audrey, April 2023.
47. Ibid.
48. Healy, "Belonging, Social Cohesion," 423–38.
49. Charnock, "Teenage Girls, Female Friendship."
50. Hamm and Faircloth, "The Role of Friendship in Adolescents' Sense of School Belonging."
51. Narrator Paula, interviewed April 2023.
52. Ibid.
53. Dawson, "Memory, 'Post-Conflict' Temporalities."
54. Paula, April 2023.

55. Ibid.
56. MacEvoy and Asher, "When Friends Disappoint." For more information on girls' attainment levels in the 11+ see: Hunt, *Lessons for Life*.
57. Charnock, "Teenage Girls, Female Friendship."
58. Carol's father received a letter from the school head at the secondary modern informing him of the need for his daughter to take a place at the grammar school. No further test was taken. She had shown the necessary aptitude for the change in location.
59. Narrator Carol, interviewed May 2023.
60. Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s*.
61. Vincent et al., *Friendship and Diversity*, 8.
62. Hamm and Faircloth, "The Role of Friendship in Adolescents' Sense of School Belonging."
63. Carol, May 2023.
64. Abrams, "Transforming Oral History through Theory."
65. Paula, April 2023.
66. Hamm and Faircloth, "The Role of Friendship in Adolescents' Sense of School Belonging."
67. Walkerdine, "Dreams from an Ordinary Childhood," 74.
68. Paula, April 2023.
69. Spencer, "Reflections on the 'Site of Struggle'."
70. https://11plusanonymous.org/tales-from-the-past.
71. Walkerdine, "Dreams from an Ordinary Childhood."

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