

“Much more than just a result”, using Life History Research to
Understand the Influence of the 11+ outcome on the identity of
Schoolgirls: 1955-1965

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Abstract

The Butler Act (1944) required all children in England and Wales to undertake the 11+ exam, determining the most appropriate secondary school destination for their perceived ability: grammar school, technical college or secondary modern. Postwar selective education policies sought to bring opportunity for all children, irrespective of their family circumstance. Synonymous however with notions of success and failure, the 11+ exam became a marker through which children were identified and continues to stimulate conversation and debate. Using a feminist framework, this study aims to demonstrate that this momentary mechanism for school selection remained on into adulthood and continues to inform the sense of self and personal identity of women, now in their 70s.

Placing the lived experiences of ordinary women at the heart of 11+ debate, this thesis looks beyond the exam itself to examine the lasting emotional implications of such marked differentiation as past events are evidenced within their present lives. This thesis explores the connection between identity and belonging in relation to education, providing a nuanced insight into the associated feelings of disappointment and success. Life history narratives revealed how the aspirations and expectations of family and community were critical in the school experiences of adolescent girls in postwar Britain.

The 11+ experience is more complex than the opposing outcomes of success and failure. Narratives expressed the emotional implications of lasting anxiety and insecurity, feelings of pressure as a result of attainment and gendered barriers to opportunity and fulfilment. Triggered by the emotional response to the 11+, it is the associated influence of family and community that informs the adult identity. This

intimate study demonstrates how the critical events in an individual's life are shaped not only by the social context of class and gender but continue to inform the adult sense of self in later life.

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Introduction

Opening discussion and central argument

From its conception in 1945 as a component within the Education Act (1944), to its eventual abolition with the advent of the comprehensive system over twenty years later, the 11+ was a rite of passage for children aged ten and eleven years across England and Wales.¹ Heralded at the time by educational reformers such as G.C.T. Giles, the Education Act, or Butler Act (1944) as it is more commonly referred to, sought to introduce a common system, one in which ‘the nature of a child’s education should be based on his capacity and promise, not by the circumstances of his parents.’² As a mechanism to direct children to the most appropriate form of secondary education, this mis-represents both the purpose of the exam, and the implications of the received outcome. Contrary to popular belief, the exam was not graded against a specific score across England and Wales, but rather it assigned children to their secondary destination based on the number of places available within the Local Education Authority (LEA) in relation to the number of children in the annual cohort. The Butler Act introduced a tripartite education system which provided three types of secondary education; grammar schools, technical colleges (of which there were very few) and secondary modern schools for those pupils who did not pass the 11+. Twenty-one years after its inception, the tripartite policies of Rab

¹ The 11+ is still taken in a number of Local Education Authorities in England and Wales where grammar schools remain, e.g. Among others: Essex, Kent and Buckinghamshire.

² Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present*. Polity, 2003. p. 16 The Butler Act was named after Rab Butler, President of the Board of Education from 1941-1944 who introduced the Act into parliament. After which time he became the Minister of Education until 1945.

Butler's Education Act were set aside as the move to comprehensive education was introduced by the new labour government under Harold Wilson in 1965, bringing an end to compulsory selective education.

In 1959, produced by the Central Advisory Council, the Crowther Report proposed an extension of the school-leaving age from fifteen to sixteen and focussed on the training and further educational opportunities for those aged 16-18, following the completion of their compulsory education.³ Emphasis was placed on the role of citizenship as young adults moved from school into the workplace to commence their adult lives. As with the wider welfare state, citizenship for adolescents was gendered both in structure and in expectation. In highlighting the importance of social responsibility, however, the assumed domestic destiny for girls was reinforced in skills such as home economics and sewing, more notable within secondary modern school provision. Even within wider social engagement such as the Girl Guide movement, the hidden curriculum of domesticity actively prepared girls for their true career as homemakers.⁴

This thesis aims to explore why the feelings held about the 11+ are more complex than just the outcome of a written school exam paper. This thesis now looks beyond the exam itself to examine the lasting emotional implications of such marked differentiation as the effects of past events can be evidenced within their present lives. Critically, this study explores the connection between identity and belonging in relation to education, providing a nuanced insight into the associated feelings of disappointment and success. Focusing therefore on the experiences of young girls,

³ Central Advisory Council for Educations (England), 15 to 18 (Crowther Report) (London, 1959).

⁴ For more information on citizenship in the Girl Guide movement, see Edwards, S. *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside: Creating Good Citizens, 1930-1960*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)

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. This study captures the responses of fifteen women, now in their seventies, who were among the first generation to experience the fully established and embedded system between 1955-65, at a point when educationalists, parents and politicians were expressing concern about the impact of the 11+ on children. Explored throughout this project, nuanced details of past lives from women who may not previously had the opportunity to participate in historical studies share not only the social environment in which they belonged, but the subtle inference of class and gendered attitudes to their educational experiences. At a time when greater historical value is placed on the appreciation and understanding of lived experience, it is important to recognise and give voice to these women whose lives were directly affected by influential policies in postwar Britain.

Extending the work of Peter Mandler whose recent project mapped secondary education and social change, this project takes a close-up exploration into the experiences of women surrounding the 11+.⁵ 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.⁶

Methodologically unique, a life history approach offers a collaboration between the interviewer and narrator, to generate an environment of 'trust and openness', giving women agency to situate and explain their feelings.⁷ This study situates those life histories within a history of policy and educational provision to understand how

⁵ <https://sesc.hist.cam.ac.uk/>

⁶ Penny Summerfield, 'Culture & Composure: Creating Narratives of the gendered Self in Oral History Interviews.' *Cultural & Social History*, 2004, 1:1, pp.65-93, p. 66

⁷ Sherna Gluck, 'What's so special about Women? Women's Oral History', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, Summer, 1977, Vol.2, No. 2, pp. 3-17, p. 7

experiences of failure and success differ and intersect with gendered and classed identities in postwar Britain. Fashioned by the new welfare state and gendered expectations of work and home life, working-class girls, who are the focus of this study were subject to historically specific notions of both class and gender.

Sociological research undertaken in the 1960s has been incorporated into the analysis for this thesis, supporting the primary oral history source material. With the advent of the Social Science Research Council in 1965, the period is widely recognised as a time of rapid expansion into the field of socio-scientific research.⁸ Though not in itself an interdisciplinary project, like other historical studies which seek to amplify the lives and experiences of women in twentieth century Britain, the existence of both sociological and psychological material provides an additional layer of contextual insight into areas of wider social concern and the responses of individuals at the time.⁹ Moreover, such socio-scientific investigations into selective education, stratification by measured ability and inequalities in social mobility not only interrogate the political intention but, more importantly, consider further the consequences on the lives of those effected.¹⁰

⁸ Opened in 1965, The Social Science Research Council was first chaired by Michael Young.

⁹ Helen McCarthy, 'Women, Marriage and Paid Work in Post-war Britain', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2017): pp. 46-61. McCarthy, Helen *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood*. Bloomsbury, 2022.

¹⁰ Brookover, Wilbur B, Thomas Shailer and Ann Paterson, 'Self-concept of Ability and School Achievement', *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (1964): pp. 271-278. Elder, Glen H. 'Life Opportunity and personality: Some Consequences of Stratified Secondary Education in Great Britain', *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1965): pp. 173-202. Swift, D.F. 'Social Class, Mobility-Ideology and 11+ Success', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol 18 (1967): pp. 165-186. Swift, D.F. 'Meritocratic and Social Class Selection at Age Eleven', *Educational Research*, Vol. 8 (1965): pp. 65-73

For me as historian, though this additional primary source material brings valuable social context, certainly into the concerns of further entrenched class based stratification that challenged meritocratic intention, it should not be assumed that such anxieties were experienced in the home of every ordinary family in England and Wales. Recognising these studies as snapshots into a focussed line of enquiry they, nonetheless, reveal an awareness of the disparity that was believed to exist within society, something which was communicated within the local press through reputational perceptions of educational opportunity.

Expanding the feminist perspective of Lynn Abrams, who recognises oral history as a 'feminist encounter', one which is best placed to reclaim women's experiences and liberate their otherwise muffled voices from traditional written sources, this feminist study uses the personal testimonies of women to challenge the dominant 11+ story of masculine social mobility and understand how selective education effected the identity of young girls on into their adult lives.¹¹ The histories of both emotion and of experience detailed later in this introduction play an important role in the interpretation of these 11+ recollections, but it is through the recognised field of autobiography or 'life writing', a framework which encompasses oral history, that this later life interpretation of individual experiences and meaning can now be understood.¹² Though shared in conversation, rather than a written format, oral history encapsulates the reflective act of an individual, but with the stimulation of the interviewer. Arguably, as with other written forms of self-reflection, any narrative

¹¹ Abrams, Lynn. *Feminist Lives: Women, Feelings and The Self in Post-War Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2023) p. 13

¹² Thompson, Paul & Joanna Bornat, *The Voice of the Past, Oral History, 4th edition* (Oxford University Press, 2017) p. 125 For more information, see Jolly, Marguerita. Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms* (Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001)

account would be shaped by experiences which continue to hold the most meaning and are subconsciously positioned within a broader sense of the past, in this case, home, family and community. It is the existence of such contextual information that deepens the appreciation of the stories that remain so interlinked with the women's adult identities.

Acknowledging, however, the omnipresent issue of authority and ownership associated with oral history interviews, significant attention has been given to the authenticity of the women's voice in this study, in an attempt to preserve the feelings, the moments of quiet contemplation or the immediacy to their responses. Closely compatible with feminist research, autobiographical material, in this case the life history narratives, bring the private and personal experiences of family and home away from the margins of historical interest and into the realms of public understanding.

This is a study of the lasting effects of the eleven plus and secondary education based on life history interviews with fifteen women. This study situates the effects of the 11+ outcome on an individual's identity at the core of the research. Coming as it does, over sixty years since their exam was undertaken, this research reflects on the changing sense of self through the educational transition of adolescent girl to adult woman.¹³ Morwenna Griffiths' philosophical understanding of identity considers how the self is best imagined through the shape and construct of a web, especially pertinent in relation to women's lives and their multiple associations.¹⁴ Though each individual is seen to have ownership of such a personalised paradigm, it is not

¹³ Tinkler, P. Spencer, S. & Langhamer, C. "Revisioning the History of Girls and Women in Britain in the Long 1950s", *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2016) pp. 1-8, p. 2.

¹⁴ Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity* (Routledge, 1995)

without the stimulation and authority of external constraints or circumstance.¹⁵ Indeed, the web of identity is not fixed in construct, but changes in response to altered communities and cultural influence. In this respect, aspiration and levels of personal agency can be supported, compromised or appear unattainable by the dominant societal ideals established and reinforced through the educational experience and the associated responses of others. Such visual imagining of identity and an internalised sense of self enables an understanding of the effects of the 11+ exam and the landmark political initiatives in postwar Britain. The psychological construct of personal identity is not confined to the interaction between the self and other influences, either personal or structural but, for Morwenna Griffiths, also includes the emotional relationship between the individual and their own self-esteem. Indeed, arguing that levels of self-esteem are 'derived from achievement', Griffiths acknowledges how any measures of difference that exist in relation to others can inform and shape the psychological sense of self.¹⁶ Arguably, 'parity of esteem', a phrase closely associated with the tripartite policies of the Butler Act can therefore be understood both socially and emotionally.¹⁷ Moreover, it is the effects of this subliminal form of interaction that extends the web of identity in relation to school attainment, something which is explored in detail throughout the study.

Identity is widely understood to be something that is free forming, existing, not as a fixed and finished entity, but rather a human characteristic that is developed over time and relies on the interaction between a person and their wider social relations.¹⁸ Such personal associations are informed both by places of socialisation such as

¹⁵ Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self*, p. 93

¹⁶ Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self*, p. 113

¹⁷ Ministry of Education, *The New Secondary Education: Pamphlet Number Nine* (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1947)

¹⁸ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Polity, 2014)

home, community, schools and workplace but also through the wider social structures of class and gender. For historian E.P. Thompson, awareness of class origin was gathered by the apparent similarities or differences in experiences from others.¹⁹ These differences were explained as common interests, manifested either by shared association or rejection. It is the existence of such distinctive attitudinal responses in relation to gender and educational opportunity that is of particular interest as attitudes to secondary education were not confined to personal motivations but were shaped by those of family, community and social expectations.

'Parity of esteem', a phrase adopted by the Minister of Education, Ellen Wilkinson, in her introduction to *The New Secondary Education*, was considered a necessary component of the Butler Act.²⁰ Written in 1947 as a method of communicating the pioneering new educational policies to the wider government and local authorities responsible for both implementation and execution, Wilkinson argued for an equal level of respect, not only between the differing school types, but through a greater 'parity of social esteem' that would give a balanced appreciation of the differing opportunities in adult life. Butler himself recognised the need to minimise any stigma of inferiority 'attach[ing] itself to those secondary institutions [...] which lacked facilities and academic prestige of the grammar schools.'²¹ Despite this well-intentioned directive, in reality, the secondary modern was considered both by press and public to be the poor relation. As sociologist M P Carter affirmed, 'those who are not selected go to the modern schools'.²² The historian, A.J.P Taylor even advised,

¹⁹ Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin Books, 1991) p. 8-9.

²⁰ Ministry of Education, *The New Secondary Education: Pamphlet Number Nine*. (His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1947)

²¹ Lord Butler, *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler*. (Penguin, 1973) p. 123

²² Carter, M.P. *Home, School and Work. A Study of the Education and Employment of Young People in Britain* (Pergamon Press, 1962) p. 2

'run[ning] away to sea rather than go to a secondary modern'.²³ Widespread public opinion was further agitated as concerns about lower aspirations and poor academic outcomes became the focus of attention within the local press. Though headline articles entitled, 'Is your child doomed at a Modern School', attempted to challenge the rhetoric and present instead the community integration of the secondary modern system, they only served to heighten the anguish experienced by hopeful parents, more specifically those among the middle classes whose social reputation could be tarnished by a failed 11+ exam outcome.²⁴ Moreover, in an effort to assuage parental concerns, reassurance was offered so that, from the 'point of view of their future careers, all is not lost, and that they are not necessarily condemned for ever to lives as underlings to their academic brilliant fellows'.²⁵

Stratification within secondary education at eleven not only affected the individuals concerned, but separation by ability was sociologically understood to act as a 'gentle shaking of the sieve'.²⁶ Arguably, through Dyhouse's description of 'grading, like eggs', the 11+ could be understood to underpin class differences rather than reduce them, as work-life opportunities reflected the level of educational attainment.²⁷ Considering the harsh effects of such differentiation, the process of grading could be viewed as sorting those that appear superior from those perceived to be of a lesser standard. Mention the 11+ to many of the postwar generation, and their reactions often relate directly and very personally, even after 70+ years, to memories of success or failure. In the years that followed the inception of the 11+,

²³ Taylor. A.T.P. 'The Thing', Is there a Power Elite? (1), *The Twentieth Century*, October 1957, p. 294

²⁴ Portsmouth Evening News, 20th August 1953 in William Taylor, *The Secondary Modern School* (Faber & Faber, 1963) p. 33.

²⁵ Birmingham Post, 11th September 1953, in William Taylor, *The Secondary Modern School*, p. 34.

²⁶ Jackson, Brian and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*. (Ark paperbacks, 1986) p. 231

²⁷ Dyhouse, Carol. *Girl Trouble* (Zen Books, 2013) p.132

however, such intentional stratification was to come under the scrutiny of socio-scientific studies keen to explore both the benefit, accuracy and value of such methods of differentiation.²⁸ Of particular interest were the effects on social class in postwar Britain in relation to selection and attainment. Focus was placed on the role of social and cultural communities, examining the implications of differing life chances as means of influencing academic performance and outcomes.²⁹ Moreover, consideration was given to the differing parental responses, with respect to both class and cultural origins, which could be viewed as aiding or restricting social mobility.

In his influential study into the effects of class structures and educational attainment Pierre Bourdieu highlighted the existence of an accumulated capital, whether cultural, social or economic as a means through which an individual's life would be pre-defined. Capital was understood to be embodied in the dispositions held within the society in which you lived, objectified through the desire of goods or belongings and lastly institutionalized through the presumptions associated with measured educational success. Bourdieu argued that the unequal access to such beneficial social understanding or knowledge would prohibit the life chances of those among the lower classes who had not benefited from any such accumulation.

²⁸ Swift, D.F. "Social Class, Mobility Ideology and 11+ Success", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 1967, Vol 18, pp. 165-186. Vernon, P.E. *Secondary School Selection, a British Psychological Inquiry* (Routledge, 1957). Wilbur B. Brookover, Wilbur B., Shailer, Thomas & Paterson, Ann. "Self-concept of Ability and School Achievement", *Sociology of Education*, Spring 1964, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 271-278. Mays, John Baron. "Teen-age Culture in Contemporary Britain and Europe", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Nov. 1961, Vol. 338, pp. 22-32. Floud, Jean. and Halsey, A.H. "Intelligence Tests, Social Class and Selection for Secondary Schools", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Mar. 1957, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 33-39.

²⁹ Bourdieu, P. "The Forms of Capital", in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. E. Richardson (Greenwood Press, 1986); 241-258 Translated by Richard Nice. Elder, G. H. "Life Opportunity and personality: Some Consequences of Stratified Secondary Education in Great Britain", *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1965) pp. 173-202, p. 173. Liversidge, W. "Life Chances", *Sociological Review*, Vol. 10 (1962) pp. 17-34

Though no specific association is made there is, nonetheless, a subconscious awareness of the effects or absence of such cultural within the lives of the women who have taken part, evidenced by an understanding in their lack of fit within a grammar school environment.³⁰ A further concept of Bourdieu's forms of capital can be better understood through the idea of 'habitas', or the 'material conditions of existence'.³¹ In this respect, the environment in which you lived was pre-disposed to an approach or patterned form of life understood by Bourdieu to be 'pre-orchestrated without ever needing the actions of a conductor'.³² Habitas, and its role in the formation of identity was apparent in each of the narratives, either by an understanding of classed differences between themselves and others or the expectations in relation to education and attainment held within the family.

This research is focused on the effects of the 11+ on an individual's adult life and their eventual sense of self. In view of the fact that this was an essential component in the educational journey of every child growing up in England and Wales post 1944, it relies on an epistemological understanding of ordinariness and lived experience, two significant characteristics that are woven throughout the narratives in this study. In her exploration of ordinariness as a means of historical classification, Claire Langhamer described those in society understood to be ordinary as 'powerful, yet mutable', one which offered a unique form of expertise.⁴⁰ In this respect, they were a significant proportion of society whose opinions and experience was of consideration to those in high office but who lacked the public platform on which to

³⁰ This would link to the experiences of GC.

³¹ Bourdieu, P. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 72

³² Bourdieu, P. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 72

⁴⁰ Langhamer, C. 'Who the hell are Ordinary People?' Ordinariness as a Category of Historical Analysis, *Transactions of the RHS*. Vol. 28, 2018, pp. 175-195, p. 194.

share them. Moreover, sociological evaluation assumed no class boundary to ordinary members of society, arguing instead that their identity was better associated to specific values, emotions and behaviours.⁴¹ For this study, I understand the definition of ordinary as those who were passive recipients of the selective educational policies of the Butler Act, and whose experiences were those of the majority. These women originated from regular, unassuming families, obliged to adhere to the requirements placed upon them.

Defined as ‘a representation and understanding of human experiences, choices and options and the way those factors influence perceptions of knowledge’, lived experience provides a foundation on which to offer a level of expertise that is shaped by personal experience.⁴² As ‘agents in, rather than the subject of’, individuals have the opportunity to argue the validity of their knowledge, better enabling the inclusion of hidden voices in historical research.⁴³ For this study into the 11+ from the perspective of young girls, it was critical to understand the experiences of those who had actually sat the exam as only they could provide a level of knowledge and expertise, both about the academic process and their perceptions of the requirements. In this respect, only the experiences lived by the fifteen women in this research and shared within their life history narratives would contribute to an

⁴¹ See Bott, E. *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families*. Tavistock Publications, 1971. Savage, Mike. ‘Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study’, *Sociology* Vol. 39, 2005, pp. 929-946.

⁴² Boylorn, R.M. Lived Experience in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. L.M. Given (Sage, 2008) p. 490 in Beaumont, C, E, Colpus and Ruth Davidson, eds, *Everyday Welfare in Modern British History: Experience, Expertise and Activism* (Springer Publishing, 2024) p. 12

⁴³ Crane, J. *Child Protection in England, 1960-2000. Expertise, Experience and Emotion*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) p. 2 in, Beaumont, C, E, Colpus and Ruth Davidson, eds, *Everyday Welfare in Modern British History: Experience, Expertise and Activism* (Springer Publishing, 2024) p. 13

understanding of the 11+ exam and its role in selective education policies for girls in postwar Britain.

Using the life history approach of oral history, this study problematises the relationship between ideas of the “pass” and the “fail”, success against failure, selection or rejection, to understand how and why it fashioned a lasting effect on the identities of women. Stimulated by the wider social and cultural ambitions of aspiration, parity of esteem, and democratic opportunity, the reactions of family and community worked to shape the very personal responses towards the move from primary to secondary education. Indeed, as this project reveals, such stimuli were active ingredients in the compilation of such retrospective understanding. Seen through the dual lens of class and gender, this study considers how the dominant structures within postwar British society fashioned both opinion and opportunity for young women between 1945 and 1965.

Initial engagement with such ideas of interaction and differentiation highlight the potential lasting implications on an individual as a result of the tripartite policy established in the Butler Act. Within five chapters focusing on the themes of gender and class, families, failure, achievement and belonging on which this research is examined, life history narratives bring past lives into the present, illustrating how subjective understanding of success and failure and the experiences resulting from two dominant school types, shape and continue to inform the adult self.

As the cohort for this oral history project is relatively small in number, with just fifteen participants, it is important to recognise the likelihood of variations in experience as the age range between the eldest and youngest is thirteen years. Two of the interviewees were born before the end of the Second World War, whilst half would have experienced the notable effects of wartime rationing which remained in

place until 1954. With the birth dates ranging from 1941-1954, the teenage years spread across the 1950s and on into the 1960s. This was a period of great social change as postwar affluence and the increase in social mobility led to a rise in the consumer culture. The introduction of landmark policies including the Abortion Act (1967) and the availability of birth control through the NHS, changed the social landscape from that of their mother's generation, giving young women increased ownership of their own choices.⁴⁴ Chronological positioning, therefore, relates not only to the variances in experience but, crucially, the possible attitudinal differences, as childhood and adolescence occurred at a time of extended educational opportunity and landmark societal change for women.

Though participants in this study make no mention of policy specifics, they nonetheless share an awareness from familial attitudes and expectations that relate to such gendered guidance. Among the first generation of teenagers, the older women in this study grew up in the Macmillan years beneath the mantra of 'never having it so good', through which an increase in economic freedom relieved young girls of the need to support their mother to the same level as previous generations.⁴⁵ Moreover, these women were to benefit from the introduction of the welfare state with the provision of care from cradle to grave.⁴⁶ With social freedom came economic possibilities as the increase in free time enabled part-time jobs which brought newly acquired disposable income into the economy.

⁴⁴ NHS Family Planning Act (1967)

⁴⁵ Sandbrook, Dominic. *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from the Suez to the Beatles* (Abacus, 2005) and the contemporaneous sociological work of Mark Abrams. For historical analysis of the teenager in postwar Britain, see Todd, Selina & H. Young, "Baby-Boomers to 'Beanstalkers': The making of the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain", *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 9, No 3 (2015), pp. 451-467

⁴⁶ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain since 1945*. (Bloomsbury, 2022).

The historiography of this study draws upon key aspects of the selective educational policy, so influential in postwar Britain, and illustrates the breadth of political, social, historical and cultural interest that resulted from such state intervention. Accepting that a contextual understanding of policy and provision will provide a foundation on which to situate the research, this review examines the sociological and cultural understanding necessary to appreciate the conflicting ideas that influence the individual experiences of success and failure. Building upon qualitative work by Worth and Spencer and examined through oral history narratives, this study works with an intersectional model of gender and social class in postwar Britain.⁴⁷

Recognising the need to shift away from the predominately masculine experiences of meritocratic social mobility that were so easily identifiable in the second half of the twentieth century, there is now a rich and growing vein of interest in the opportunities for young women and their lives as adults. Stephanie Spencer asserts that in the exploration of girls' educational experiences, those who were once seen perhaps as indifferent or 'powerless' to the demands of society's expectations, are now best placed to share their individual experiences and their own constructions of the past.⁴⁸ Certainly, it is this open recognition of the individual within historical research that has shaped both the undertaking of this study into the 11+ and the benefits of a more intimate recovery of past experience. Eve Worth challenges historians to look beyond the dominant interest in the grammar school pupil and consider instead the experiences of the under-represented majority who

⁴⁷ Spencer, S. "Reflections on the 'site of struggle': girls' experience of secondary education in the late 1950s". *History of Education*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2004) pp. 437-449. Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain since 1945* (Bloomsbury, 2021).

⁴⁸ Spencer, S. "Reflections on the 'site of struggle' pp. 339-340.

attended secondary modern schools.⁴⁹ Accepting that there is still much to be understood about the implications and effects of selective education, by focusing now on the effects of the outcome of the 11+ rather than the destination itself, this research extends our understanding of school identities and the sense of self that results from success or failure, irrespective of school type.

Alongside other exceptional moments in life, the 11+ 'served an important role in people's experience'.⁵⁰ Indeed, the 11+ was understood to have a destabilizing effect on the individual, as lives once assumed to be secure were challenged and compromised in the process of 'selection'.⁵¹ Though both historical and sociological scholarship on the effect of postwar selective educational policy considers the intersection of class and gender in relation to community, employment and the future role of wife and mother, less attention is given to perceived attainment and feelings of belonging. It is these subtle, but none the less influencing, building blocks of identity which inform and shape the sense of self at this key transition from child to adolescent.⁵² Life history narratives enable in depth analysis into the events surrounding the 11+, as individual recollections depict their own lived response to the memorable experiences of selection, differentiation, and aspiration. Placing the 11+ exam at the heart of the discussion provides the unique opportunity to gain a

⁴⁹ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain since 1945* (Bloomsbury, 2021) p. 12

⁵⁰ Todd, Selina "Class, experience and Britain's twentieth century", *Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (2014) pp. 489-508, p. 497.

⁵¹ Rogaly, B. & Becky Taylor, eds. *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 142

⁵² Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (Pelican, 1968). Jackson, Brian & Dennis Marsden, *Educating the working-class*. (1986). Roberts, Elizabeth. *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford University Press, 1995). Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education in Britain in the 1950s* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Todd, Selina. *The People. The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class 1910-2010* (John Murray, 2014). Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation* (2021). Young, Michael. & Willmott, Peter. *Family & Kinship in East London* (Penguin, 2007)

subjective understanding of what it meant to pass or fail, how that experience aligned with peer group, family and community and the notion of being defined by the outcome through the eventual designation of secondary school establishment. Critically, the identity and reputation of either school type was forged into the make-up of the individual. Education historian Laura Carter argues that the secondary modern schools defined an individual through the 'collective experience of twentieth-century class inequality'.⁵³ For Mary Ingham, the reputation of the grammar schools was something that was 'ironed on' through the distinctive school uniforms.⁵⁴ It is on these contrasting understandings of the importance of school that the nuanced experiences of differentiation at the age of eleven can be examined.

As historian, this study brings a committed focus to this specific moment in the lives of these fifteen women, providing them with the time and space to re-evaluate and re-interpret their own lived experiences. Giving emphasis to the experiences of those whose voices would normally remain muted, this historical study enables us to contextualise and better understand the long-term effects of political intention from those who are best positioned but rarely able to share. Critically, in this instance, historical research can look beyond any surface understanding of selective education, adding a new dimension to our appreciation of the 11+, one which amplifies girls experiences.

This project explores how the intersections between the individual, the inherent values, aspirations and expectations of family and community and the political desire for social change at a time of postwar recovery came together and shaped personal subjectivities. Why did well-intentioned policy, that aimed to offer children the most

⁵³ Carter, Laura. "Experimental' secondary modern education in Britain, 1948-1958". *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2016) pp. 23-41, p. 24

⁵⁴ Ingham, Mary. *Now We are Thirty* (Methuen, 1981) p. 51

appropriate education for their ability, result in life-defining stratification, and how did the existence of delineation by ability model the interviewees' sense of self and adult life experiences? To what extent can the adult self be understood to have been influenced by perceptions of intellect, community, appearance and belonging some sixty years prior? How important is the understanding of inclusion and exclusion in relation to perceptions of aspiration and opportunity? Though this research considers the effects of policy, specifically the Butler Act in its broadest sense, narratives from the fifteen participants express how life-long influence originated not only from political intention, but through the words, deeds, actions and understanding held by family and community structures. Indeed, it is through this inter-connecting lens that the subjective understanding relating to experiences of the "pass" or "fail" is both lived and articulated. Coupled with the further cultural and social junctures of class and gender, close analysis is given to the significance of such informed relationality between the individual and their immediate influences to better understand the educational aspiration for young adolescents in postwar Britain.

The Butler Act (1944) and selection through the 11+ exam

Examination of the Education Act (1944) or Butler Act as it was more commonly referred became the primary focus for both educationalists and sociologists of the twentieth century.⁵⁵ Two key phrases to stem from the Butler Act, 'opportunity for all'

⁵⁵ Hunt, Felicity. ed *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women, 1850-1950* (Blackwell, 1987) Lowe, R. *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History* (Routledge, 1988) McCulloch, Gary. *Educational Reconstruction: The 1944 Education Act and the Twenty-First Century* (The Woburn Press, 1994) McCulloch, Gary. *Failing the Ordinary Child: The Theory and Practice of working-class secondary education* (Open University Press, 1998). Mandler, Peter. *The Crisis of Meritocracy* (2020). Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain*. (2003). Young, Michael & Willmott, Peter. *Family and Kinship in East*

and ‘parity of esteem’, reflect the value placed on educational reform as an integral part of postwar construction and the strength of optimism and equality that existed from within the policy. This analysis now considers not only their position within the wider historiography, but also how experiences of opportunity and parity, the eventual yardstick by which the Act was measured, are presented some sixty years later within the narratives on which this study is structured. Additionally, in presenting the conflicting arguments about tripartite education this review evaluates whether the role of selection was indeed a ‘meritocratic triumph’ or rather a reinforcement of entrenched social divides which was to determine opportunity and inform the perceptions and aspirations in relation to ideas of success or failure.⁵⁶

In her introduction to the Ministry of Education pamphlet, *The New Secondary Education* (1947), Minister for Education Ellen Wilkinson, expressed the need for ‘parity of esteem’ not only between the differing educational types, but throughout the wider society.⁵⁷ The significance of such political rhetoric cannot be underestimated. Indeed, given concerns that the tripartite policy created ‘devices’ which could be seen to uphold the existing class system, Wilkinson’s introduction impressed upon readers the need to look beyond any preconceptions that acted to differentiate the grammar school from either the technical or secondary modern schools and to consider, instead, the task of honing the skills of all children that would contribute to a more equitable future citizenship.⁵⁸ Arguably, such reasoned aspirations reflect the level of broad cross-party support for the Act, given it was created by a Conservative

London. (Penguin, 2007). Jackson, Brian & Marsden, Dennis. *Education and the working-class*. (1986).

⁵⁶ Mandler, Peter. *The Crisis of Meritocracy* (2020). p. 33

⁵⁷ Ministry of Education, *The New Secondary Education: Pamphlet Number Nine* (London, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1947)

⁵⁸ Ministry of Education, *The New Secondary Education: Pamphlet Number Nine* (London, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1947) p. 5

Education Secretary at a time of coalition and continued under the postwar Labour government of Clement Attlee.

Attempting to quell the fears of possible inequality between the tripartite establishments, the Norwood report of 1943 decreed that parity of esteem essential across the three school types could not come by government policy alone, but rather, 'it had to be won by the school itself'.⁵⁹ In this respect, each individual school, irrespective of type, was responsible for working within an ethos and curriculum that challenged, enhanced and supported the educational outcomes of each pupil.

Sociological examination of the Butler Act acknowledged the intentional shift away from the schooling of the nineteenth-century, to one which focussed on the needs of postwar recovery and equity of provision, irrespective of circumstance.⁶⁰ In his assessment of Ellen Wilkinson's introduction to *The New Secondary Education*, Ken Jones identified the change in hierarchical perceptions of both the labour processes and schooling.⁶¹ Jones argued it was this move to a democratised system of education and a wider recognition of the need for workers, both manual and professional, which stimulated such mass appeal to the policy.

Although seen as a vehicle to bring about increased opportunity, economic growth and the much needed social citizenship required during postwar recovery, for education historian Peter Mandler, it was the wider factors of social change and attitudinal transformation that played an influential role in responses to selective education.⁶² Mandler argued that when considered alongside health as a 'universal

⁵⁹ Norwood, C. (1943). *Curriculum and examinations in secondary schools. Report of the Committee of the Secondary School Education Council appointed by the President in the Board of Education in 1941*. HMSO in Relly, Susan James. "The Political rhetoric of parity of esteem", *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (2021) pp. 513-528, p. 513

⁶⁰ Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain* (2003).

⁶¹ Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain*. p. 26

⁶² Mandler, Peter. *The Crisis of Meritocracy*. p. 2

public service', there was an aspirational move towards securing the best type of education, from the best teachers in the best possible schools.⁶³ Perceptions of education changed from something that provided a 'minimum level of competency', to a purposeful asset that brought potential new skills, opportunity and likely prosperity.⁶⁴ It was from this shift that the cross-class clamour for grammar school places grew. Mandler's analysis considered how lower middle and higher working class people were more likely to experience frustration at the process of selection, unprepared as they were to source an alternative 'best' option. As the narratives that feature later in this study contest, such idealistic ambition proved difficult for many children to attain.

This apparent lack of parity between educational routes was a concern for both politicians and educationalists at the time. In a Political and Economic Planning document of 1956, it was acknowledged that; 'the one characteristic which all secondary modern school pupils have in common is that they have not reached the required standard for entry into grammar schools in the area in which they live'.⁶⁵ Such reputational inferiority was not confined to the pupil and their perceived ability, but also to the school type. Identified by the category of child they received, secondary modern schools were widely acknowledged as an environment of un-achievers, faced with teaching children already marked by a failed outcome.⁶⁶

Though the Butler Act provided a blueprint for aspirational intent with regard to free secondary education, it was later recognised that this was an initial form of

⁶³ Peter Mandler, Peter. "Educating the Nation 1: Schools", *Royal Historical Society, Transactions of the RHS*, Vol. 24. (2014) p. 13.

⁶⁴ Mandler, Peter. *The Crisis of Meritocracy*, p. 1

⁶⁵ 'Secondary Modern Schools,' *Political and Economic Planning, Planning*, vol. XXII, No. 396, May 1956, p. 75 in Carter, M.P. *Home, School and Work*.p.2

⁶⁶ Sanderson, Michael. *Educational Opportunity and Social Change in England* (Faber & Faber, 1987) p. 56

guidance to the LEAs, something that would continue to develop as the Act came became established. In this respect, there was no immediate overnight change in provision, but rather a slow adaptation of the existing school portfolio. Arguably, it was this evident national disparity that contributed to the growing discontent experienced among parents and communities.

Selection in relation to the Butler Act and the allocation of secondary school destinations became more complex than originally intended. Intended as a vehicle through which to best differentiate between those who could 'grasp an argument', from others deemed only 'interested in things as they are', the 11+ exam became both a physical and emotional symbol of social delineation.⁶⁷ Controversial even through its early introduction, Sir Robert Wood a leading official at the Board of Education argued that 'replacing social class distinctions by equally objectionable intellectual distinctions – creat[ed] an aristocracy of talent in the grammar schools, [...] runners-up in the secondary (technical) schools and 'the field' in the modern schools'.⁶⁸ Such concerns matched those of R.H. Charles, Chief Inspector for Secondary Schools, who considered reality of the prescribed school type contained within the Norwood Report (1943), as 'hav[ing] anything but a happy social effect'.⁶⁹

In her recent social history study of the welfare state, Eve Worth argues that selection became a defining moment in the lives of every child at the age of ten

⁶⁷ Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain*. p. 21

⁶⁸ Sir R. Wood, minute, 15th April 1946 (Ministry of Education papers, ED. 136/787) in, McCulloch, Gary, *Failing the Ordinary Child*. p. 65. Further information on the distinctions between grammar and secondary modern education can be found in, Ingham, Mary. *Now We are Thirty* (Methuen, 1981). McCulloch, G. & L. Sobell, "Towards a social history of the secondary modern schools", *History of Education*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1994) pp. 275-286

⁶⁹ The Norwood Report (1943) Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools. (London: HM Stationery Office 1943)

R.H. Charles, Comments on a draft prepared by Mr Lester Smith and Mr Morris, 12th September 1945 (Ministry of Education papers, ED. 146/13) in McCulloch, Gary. *Failing the Ordinary Child*. p. 65

years as the Education Act allowed the state to intervene, 'sorting them into different school types with enduring consequences.'⁷⁰ This idea of 11+ legacy, something that resonated through the life history narratives for this study, is a recognisable motif of the postwar education experience. Concluding their own sociological study into the educational experiences of working-class families in Huddersfield, Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden warn that the 'educational stratifications determined at eleven plus are often preserved and confirmed in adult life'.⁷¹ Though arguably, this was speculation in 1962, subsequent reflective personal evaluation of the 11+, however, understood it to be a means of 'settling futures', marking out eleven year olds as 'clever, quite clever or stupid'.⁷² Certainly, experiences of this nature are evidenced later in this project by both APP and SW, whose unsuccessful 11+ outcomes continue to define their adult sense of self and as this qualitative research reveals, selection was personal and therefore emotional, affecting family dynamics, childhood friendships and their adult selves.

Sorting and differentiation as a means of selection was a recurrent theme in the later re-evaluation of the Butler Act and the 11+ specifically. Ken Jones' suggests that the ideological programme of 'opportunity for all' was hindered at the point of implementation by the elitist administrators among the civil service, entrenched by an obligation to support and reinforce the class divide through selection.⁷³ Assessing the role of 'rough groupings' as a means of pupil differentiation, Jones likens such intentional gradings to those within Plato's *Republic*, whose philosophical divisions in

⁷⁰ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 15

⁷¹ Jackson, Brian & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working-Class*, p. 213

⁷² Forster, Margaret. *Hidden Lives: A Family Memoir* (London, 1996) p. 174

⁷³ Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain*. (2003) For more information on the bureaucratic negotiations of the Butler Act (1944) see Mandler, Peter. *The Crisis of Meritocracy*. (2020), Simon, Brian. *Education and the Social Order: British Education since 1944* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1991)

humanity were characteristically determined as 'rulers, auxiliaries and farmers and the rest'.⁷⁴ Such purposeful intervention was believed to 'naturalise the intrinsic feature of social order and strengthen social unity'.⁷⁵ Though the analogy is stark, it nonetheless reflects the views of those within the Ministry of Education, that society needs a wide range of skills and abilities as 'not everyone wants an academic education. After all, coal has to be mined, and the fields ploughed'.⁷⁶

Gary McCulloch's later work on the secondary education system takes as its reference point the idea of the ordinary working-class child, the catalyst for 'secondary education for all' and arguably, the individual most affected by the introduction of the Butler Act.⁷⁷ His study brings the issues of class distinction and educational differentiation to the fore, as it seeks to answer how through the tripartite policy, the provision of mass education impacted four-fifths of the school population in the move from primary to secondary school. For McCulloch, the well-intended ideologies of the secondary modern school where, free from the burden of academic examination, emphasis was placed on future workplace skills, were considered second-class in relation to those perceived to 'achieve' through selection to the grammar system. Narratives in this study expressed conflicting thoughts of this ideal as experiences of targeted workplace skills were compromised by those with an overtly domesticated focus.

⁷⁴ Plato, *The Republic* (c. 380 BC), ed. Lee, D. (Penguin, 1955) in Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain*, p. 22

⁷⁵ Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain*. p. 22

⁷⁶ Ellen Wilkinson, quoted in Labour Party, *Annual Conference Report*, p. 22 in Todd, Selina. *The People* (2014) p. 218

⁷⁷ McCulloch, Gary. *Failing the Ordinary Child* (1998).

Grammar school narrative and gendered educational experience

The grammar school narrative is constructed around multiple themes that offer a historically situated identity; discipline and high standards, elite educational provision, nostalgia with regards to opportunity and the heralded ideal of social mobility and working-class children made good. Of greater significance, however, is the gendered imbalance in relation to such an important social discourse of postwar British society and the policy which advocated ‘opportunity for all’. Indeed, historiographical analysis of gender and education reveals the challenges faced by adolescent girls throughout England and Wales in relation to educational aspiration and the intersectional ideologies of class and gender in postwar Britain.⁷⁸ In addition to the variations in grammar school places across the local education authorities, due to the historical issue of dominant provision for boys, there were 2% fewer places for girls, meaning they had to achieve a higher score at the 11+ to secure a place.⁷⁹

Despite the eventual move away from selection some twenty years after inception and the shift to comprehensive education, such is the indelible strength of this narrative that, even in the twenty-first century, grammar school standards remain a highly desirable ideal in the growing demand for educational excellence. Such is the lasting strength of the ‘scholarship-boy’ narrative, however, whose meritocratic

⁷⁸ Wilson, Elizabeth. *Only Halfway to Paradise* (Tavistock Publications, Ltd, 1980). Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education in Britain in the 1950s*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

⁷⁹ Little, A. & J. Westergaard, “The Trend of social class differentials in educational opportunity in England and Wales”. *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 15 (1964): pp. 301-16, in, Bunkle, Philida, “The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism”, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (2016): pp. 791-811, p. 793. For more information on the allocation of grammar school places, see Thom, Deborah. “Better a Teacher Than a Hairdresser? ‘A Mad Passion for Equality’ or, Keeping Molly and Betty Down”, in Hunt, Felicity, ed. *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women*, p.142.

opportunity provided a golden-ticket to an academic secondary education, that it continues to resonate among those who still believe in the transformative effect of selective education policies.⁸⁰ Current debate, however, lessens the attention placed on social mobility and meritocratic opportunity but focusses instead on the intention to offer greater parental choice.⁸¹ Repeated interest in the possibility of grammar school expansion was considered in both the Conservative governments under the watch of Theresa May and Liz Truss.⁸² Though this is no longer part of the current political ambition, with the removal of charitable status from public schools and the subsequent increase in fees, desire among those keen to obtain what is still perceived an elite academic education risks increasing the clamour for limited grammar school places.⁸³ This exploration into the wider discourse that continues to surround 'equality of opportunity', examines the impact, if any, of social change via education for girls to better understand the contextual positioning of the women whose experiences feature in this study.

Dominant positioning, or the 'folk wisdom' of the grammar school experience centres on those of boys, as opposed to girls, to chart the social and cultural benefits of such anticipated class mobility.⁸⁴ In his study of representations of postwar masculinity, cultural historian Matthew Crowley identifies the working-class grammar

⁸⁰ Payne, Geoff, *The New Social Mobility: How Politicians Got It Wrong*, (Polity Press, 2017) in Worth, Eve, *The Welfare State*, p. 68

⁸¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/nov/11/boris-johnson-backing-grammar-schools>

⁸² <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/aug/23/argument-for-grammar-schools-selective-education-theresa-may>

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/sep/22/liz-truss-politicians-and-experts-criticise-grammar-schools-plan>

⁸³ <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/01/vat-private-schools-everything-you-need-to-know/> The standard 20% VAT charge was added to private school fees in January 2025.

⁸⁴ Mandler, Peter. "Educating the Nation: III. Social Mobility", *Royal Historical Society, Transactions of the RHS*, Vol. 26 (2016): pp. 1-23, p. 2

school boy as a distinct social group.⁸⁵ Crowley identified the importance of such a cultural group to exist in postwar British identity through its inclusion in the television drama serial, *Coronation Street* and the character Ken Barlow. Launched in 1960, with an intention to present 'life in an ordinary street, in an ordinary town', the opening episode featured conflict in the family as a result of the grammar school social disconnect, where norms and values expected at school conflict with those expected within the home and family.⁸⁶ Considering the importance of 'ordinary' as a key theme within the drama, the very inclusion of this issue highlights the potential challenges faced by ordinary families as a result of the grammar school experience.⁸⁷

Extending further this idea of identification that resulted from the grammar school experience, subsequent analysis has described the effects of such transition through a distinctive use of language that reinforces the likely disjuncture, specifically "culture".⁸⁸ In his exploration of the influential work of Richard Hoggart, Robert Colls, himself a grammar school boy, examined the importance of his own home community and the omnipresent role it played in his life when situated alongside his identity as a grammar school boy. In his later-life realization of the social structure of his community of South Shields, Colls acknowledges that through his alternative grammar school culture, he was 'being trained to purge himself of who he was and

⁸⁵ Crowley, Matthew. *Representations of Working-Class Masculinities in Post-War British Culture: The Left Behind* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020)

⁸⁶ *Spectator*, 24 March 1961, p. 405 in Laing, Stuart. *Representations of Working-Class Life, 1957-1965* (MacMillan, 1986) p. 187

⁸⁷ Experiences relating to the theme of ordinary are featured in the narratives of MB and GL.

⁸⁸ Crowley, Matthew. *Representations of working-class mentalities*. (2020) Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy* (Penguin, 2009) Colls, Robert. "When we lived in communities: working-class culture and its critics", in Colls, Robert & R. Rodger, eds. *Cries of Ideas: Civil Society & Urban Governance in Britain, 1800-2000* (Routledge, 2004)

where he came from'.⁸⁹ Such isolating experiences were not uncommon and are found replicated among the women's narratives that feature later in this study.⁹⁰

With the necessary division that resulted from the selection process came the emotional effects of separation as taking up a place at the grammar school often meant disconnecting yourself from the local school and the associated friendship group. In many cases, students had to take a bus to a 'different' part of the town from where they originated. It was this physical dislocation, which for Matthew Crowley, resulted in a form of social 'estrangement from [the] immediate community', as contact with unaccustomed cultural norms and values risked alienation from the familiar social structures of home.⁹¹ In this respect, ideas of place in relation to culture and community were challenged by the transference to a 'better' educational opportunity. Such understanding of 'better', in relation to others, is explored within Chapter 2: Stories of class and gender.

Although exploration into the cultural and social effects of selective educational policy is vital, what appears absent, however, is any similar or equivalent understanding of isolation and estrangement in relation to the experiences of girls. Highlighting the implications of only understanding historical events through a single lens, arguably that of the masculine experience, Virginia Woolf argued for a form of 'settlement' through which to redress the balance.⁹² 'Settlement', in the historical sense, suggests that by uncovering new ways of presenting past experiences, it is possible to open the dialogue with regards to knowledge and appreciation of earlier lives, 'challeng[ing] and relativis[ing]' our understanding of the historical event or

⁸⁹ Colls, Robert and R. Rodger, eds. *Cries of Ideas*, p. 286

⁹⁰ Contained within the narratives of PL and GC.

⁹¹ Crowley, Matthew. *Representations of working-class mentalities*, p. 107

⁹² Melman, Billie. "Changing the Subject: Women's History and Historiography, 1900-2000", in, Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina. *Women in twentieth-century Britain* (Routledge, 2014) p. 16

circumstance.⁹³ In addition to this levelling-up of understanding, it is important to challenge why there appears so little evidence of a grammar school narrative for girls. In contrast to the broadly opportunistic experience for boys in relation to the workplace, any examination of selective education for girls has to recognize their domestic obligations. When considering the experiences of success and failure in relation to individual identity, the opportunity to re-align the public understanding of selective education with specific reference to girls presents a new and equitable perspective on postwar policy and the mindset of those who lived within such change.

Exploration into gendered education opportunity would be incomplete without a historical understanding of the emotional resonance that remains situated within each individual experience. As Katie Barclay argues, for social and cultural historians in particular, emotional understanding can provide a deeper insight into ‘other facets of human experience’.⁹⁴ Indeed, for this piece of research, gaining a deeper appreciation of the impact of tripartite educational policies will enhance our understanding of the effects on the individual as a result of marked academic performance. Though emotions give insight and reactions into changes in society, they also reveal any feelings connected to social concepts or themes in the past, in this case social mobility and parity of esteem. Arguably, it is also likely that feelings expressed by participants in this study reflect those across a wider ‘emotional community’ in relation to educational opportunity for girls.⁹⁵ Indeed, the significant

⁹³ Melman, Billie. in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina. *Women in twentieth-century Britain*, p. 16

⁹⁴ Barclay, Katie and Peter N. Stearns, eds. *The Routledge History of Emotions in the Modern World* (Routledge, 2023) p. 1

‘How can we write the History of Emotions?’ *History Today*, April 2026.

⁹⁵ Rosenwein, Barbara. *Generations of Feeling: a History of Emotions*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 3

cultural shift away from ‘economy of feelings to one of expression’ has enabled women to share a better understanding of their own historical experiences, something that contributes highly to the aim of this study.⁹⁶

Illustrating the gendered experiences faced by young girls as a result of the Butler Act, memoirs and testimonies shared in the 1980s by feminist authors sought to convey the effect of necessary ideological compromises and realign the dominant narrative.⁹⁷ For Carolyn Steedman it was her father’s perceived ignorance of the ‘rules’ regarding her school uniform.⁹⁸ Valerie Walkerdine expressed her mother’s fears of ‘lasting and pasting’, shedding her own identity for the airs and graces of middle-class.⁹⁹ Despite these differing attempts to challenge the ‘historically situated identity’, little traction has been gained either by experiences of young girls or their lives as adult women in the years that followed, limiting any impact on the dominant gendered discourse.¹⁰⁰ For feminist historian Carol Dyhouse, the contradictory constructs for young girls demonstrated the problematic relationship between individual agency and external forces.¹⁰¹ Irrespective of their own aspirations, the lives of young women would be bound by the expectations of women’s ‘home-making mission’.¹⁰² Influential work by John Newsom *The Education of Girls* and the

⁹⁶ Abrams, Lynn *Feminist Lives: Women, Feelings and The Self in Post-War Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2023) p. 27

⁹⁷ Heron, Liz. ed. *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties* (Virago, 1985), Steedman, Carolyn. *Landscape for a Good Woman* (Virago, 1986)

⁹⁸ Steedman, Carolyn. *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p. 57.

⁹⁹ Walkerdine, Valerie. “Dreams from an Ordinary Childhood”, in Heron, L. *Truth, Dare or Promise*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁰ Handley, S., R. McWilliam and L. Noakes, Introduction, “Towards new social and cultural histories” in Handley, S., R. McWilliam, L. Noakes, eds. *New Directions in Social and Cultural History* (Bloomsbury, 2018) p. 1

¹⁰¹ Dyhouse, Carol. “Towards a “feminine” Curriculum for English Schoolgirls: The Demands of an Ideology, 1870-1963”, *Women’s Studies International Quarterly*, Vol. 1 (1978): pp. 291-311

¹⁰² Newsom, J. *The Education of Girls*, (Faber & Faber, 1948) pp. 11-14 in Dyhouse, Carol, “Towards a feminine curriculum”, p. 307

subsequent content of the Crowther report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1959) both acknowledge that employment ahead of marriage was a merely a stop-gap for their future career, that of wife and mother.¹⁰³ Given the rhetoric contained within the Beveridge Report (1942) regarding the role of married women and their ‘vital work [...] to ensure the adequate continuance of the British race’, it is not hard to see the influential impact of such maternalistic demands within the postwar educational reform and the resulting curriculum ambition.¹⁰⁴ As Elizabeth Wilson argued, such prevailing patriarchal values only fought to retain the position of women as homemaker, wife and mother, with an education centred on the valuable life skills necessary to fulfil this role.¹⁰⁵

In the latter part of the twentieth-century, feminist autobiographical writing brought personal experience and gendered understanding of girl’s schooling to the wider secondary education debate.¹⁰⁶ Irene Payne’s retrospective examination of her own experience as a working-class girl attending grammar school compares the relative perceived value of differently gendered subjects, such as maths and science when compared to needlework and domestic science. For Payne, the preference of proven knowledge over skills devalued and weakened the role of women and the associated

¹⁰³ Newsom, J. *The Education of Girls*, (London, Faber & Faber, 1948) and Central Advisory Council for Education (1959) 15-18 (Crowther Report), London, HMSO. in Finch, J. & P. Summerfield, “Social reconstruction and the emergence of companionate marriage, 1945-59”, in Clark, D. ed. *Marriage, domestic life and social change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne (1944-88)* (Routledge, 1991) p. 15

¹⁰⁴ William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London: HMSO, 1942) in Kent, Susan Kingsley, *Gender and Power* (Routledge, 1999) p. 317

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, Elizabeth, *Only Halfway to Paradise*, p. 33. For more information see, Deem, Rosemary. “State Policy and Ideology in the Education of Women, 1944-1980”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1981): pp. 131-143. Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education* (2005) Tinkler, Penny. “Girlhood and Growing Up”, in Zweiniger-Bargielowska. Ina, *Women in twentieth-century Britain* (2014) See also, Deborah Thom, Deborah. “Better a Teacher” in Hunt, Felicity. ed. *Lessons for Life*, p. 126

¹⁰⁶ Spender, D & E. Sarah, *Learning to Lose*, p.13. Similarly in Margaret Forster, *Hidden Lives*. (1996) Kuhn, Annette. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (Verso, 2002) Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education* (Routledge, 2000). Heron, L ed. *Truth, Dare or Promise*. (1985)

competencies seen as essential within the home. Consequently, such ‘undesirable’ skills-based subjects were reputationally perceived to be suitable only for the less capable pupils within the school.¹⁰⁷ Reactions to curriculum content most appropriate for girls was complex, both in the mindset of individuals’ and in the public’s perception of educational opportunity. Parental concerns regarding the apparent intentional bias towards useful skills was not unnoticed. In an article for the *Daily Mirror* in 1954 entitled ‘Spotlight on Education’, mothers commented on the narrowness of the curriculum and how the necessary ability to spell was being compromised by lessons in domestic science.¹⁰⁸ Subjective understanding of academic abilities versus the benefit of gendered skills feature later in this study as women bring a later-life reflection on their own school experiences, opportunities available and the conflicting value of qualifications versus skills.¹⁰⁹

Scholarship has drawn attention to the influential role of the family and the perceived level of educational opportunity experienced by young women of both classes. Evidenced by the level of interest or value placed on education, Hannah Gavron argued that either by a lack of parental awareness or differing attitudinal understanding of the educational system, working-class families may leave girls disadvantaged in relation to their middle-class counterparts.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Gavron’s study showed how by claiming its own kind each differing school type would reinforce the class divide, as middle-class parents strove for a repetition of their own school experiences.¹¹¹ Moreover, any psychological barriers that were perceived to

¹⁰⁷ Payne, Irene. “A working-class girl in a grammar school”, in Spender, D. & E. Sarah, *Learning to Lose*, p. 18

¹⁰⁸ Todd, Selina. *The People*, p. 223

¹⁰⁹ Themes of skills versus qualifications are featured in the narratives of PL, SW and JL.

¹¹⁰ Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 86.

¹¹¹ Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 77

exist among working-class families were only reinforced by the education system itself, which was widely understood to be structured around middle-class ideology.

Among both the middle and working classes, social and cultural expectations assumed that young married women would take a break from work, giving commitment to their role as mothers, before returning to part-time work once the children were of school age.¹¹² Familial support for daughters was challenged by the perceptions of value or priority in relation to educational attainment for girls when compared to their male siblings.¹¹³ Irene Payne described how her ‘brother’s success was seen as much more crucial than [hers]’, a view that was echoed within the life history narratives in this project in relation to parental educational aspirations.¹¹⁴ Such gendered emphasis within the family reflected the assumption contained within the reports of Norwood, Crowther and Newsom and which spanned a period of twenty years, that education for boys should remain focussed on their potential adult occupation, while ensuring girls education was targeted on their eventual place in the home.¹¹⁵ Writing in the late 1970s, Eileen Byrne argued that adult aspiration for young adolescent girls was shaped not by pedagogical content, but through a ‘hidden curriculum’, subconsciously transmitting social ideals through

¹¹² Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, pp. 69-94

This bimodal working pattern was first seen to take effect in the census of 1951, when there was a notable decline in the numbers of working women aged between 24-34, and an increase among those in the older age brackets. For discussion on the role of women and work in postwar Britain, see Lewis, Jane. *Women in Britain since 1945* (Blackwell, 1992) pp. 65-91. McCarthy, Helen. *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood*. (Bloomsbury, 2020) pp, 228-259.

¹¹³ Dyhouse, Carol. *Girl Trouble*, p. 131

¹¹⁴ Spender, D & E. Sarah, eds. *Learning to Lose: Sexism in Education* (The Women’s Press, 1980) p.13. For more details on gendered ideals in the family re educational opportunities see, M. Forster, M. *Hidden Lives* (Penguin, 1996)

¹¹⁵ Deem, Rosemary. “State policy and ideology”, p. 134. Board of Education, *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools* (Norwood Report) (London: HMSO, 1943); Ministry of Education (1959); Ministry of Education (1963) *Half Our Future* (Newsom Report) (London: HMSO, 1963)

families, social groups and school communities.¹¹⁶ In this respect, the experience gained in their secondary school years would continue to condition girls' attitudes in relation to their 'role of economic provider, homemaker, worker, voter and citizen'.¹¹⁷

The existence of an external or hidden curriculum was explored by feminist author and editor Pippa Brewster who, in her introductory essay "School days School days" considers the effects of the external messages originating from within the home, school and society that act to influence the female adolescent mindset.¹¹⁸ Brewster describes how, as primary school pupils, emphasis was placed by many parents on the value of a good education, 'school was not a place to play, but a place for serious aspirations'.¹¹⁹ Arguably, such analysis reinforces the view that education was valued for its own sake, particularly by working-class mothers keen to push back against the dominant ideologies of the pre-war years.¹²⁰ However, common experiences among those contributing to the study revealed that once at the secondary level, aspiration in relation to performance appeared to diminish. In teenage years, the focus of 'doing well' related instead to female future security and having something to fall back on, rather than personal ambition, something I experienced in my own educational journey.¹²¹ For Brewster, the result of such apparent lessening in the perceived value of education was, for girls, a disincentive to achievement. In this respect, education was a temporary provision that required

¹¹⁶ Byrne, Eileen. *Women and Education* (Tavistock, 1978), p. 110.

¹¹⁷ Byrne, Eileen. *Women and Education*, p. 110

¹¹⁸ Brewster, Pippa. "School Days, School Days", in Spender, D. & E. Sarah, eds. *Learning to Lose* (1980)

¹¹⁹ Brewster, Pippa. in Spender, D & E Sarah. eds. *Learning to Lose*, p. 7

¹²⁰ Todd, Selina. *The People*, p. 222

¹²¹ Janet Parr told of a similar experience, describing how her own secondary education had been steered around subjects that 'will always come in useful'. Parr, J. "Women, Education and Class: The Relationship Between Class Background and Research". In Mahony, P. & C. Zmroczek, *Class Matters: 'Working-Class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class* (Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1997) p. 31

minimal long-term commitment and was the cause of employment 'drift' experienced by many young school-leavers.

Class and educational aspiration

Although historiographical analysis regarding gender and class in relation to postwar education is undertaken separately, in this review it is important to acknowledge that they are not mutually exclusive. In many cases, research focusing on the gendered lives of women acknowledges the intersectional relationship of class and gender. While sociologists and historians of the 1940s-1970s focused largely on class or gender, more recent work has considered the intertwined relationship of the two.¹²² Considering the central themes of success, failure and belonging explored within the study, emphasis within this contextual analysis focusses now on classed values and aspiration motivation to better appreciate the implications of change.

Scholarship focusing on the adolescent experiences of girls is not confined to specifically thematic research but also features within the writing of those whose lived experiences were shaped by the wider postwar policies. Studying the complexities that lie behind women's experiences of class and education, Jane Thompson considers the cultural journey undertaken by working-class women in an attempt to validate the importance of their own educational opportunities, something that was assumed standard for boys, but which had to be negotiated by adolescent

¹²² Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, class and education* (2005). Steedman, Carolyn. *Landscape for a good woman* (1986). Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education* (2000). Janet Parr "Women, Education and Class: The Relationship Between Class Background and Research". In Mahony, P and C. Zmroczek. *Class Matters*. (1997).

girls.¹²³ Based in part on her own autobiographical accounts in conjunction with studies undertaken through the Ruskin University in Oxford, Thompson argues that our home environments are socially defined by ideas of class and gender. Through her understanding of social movement, Thompson's metaphorical use of 'journey' addresses the physical and emotional negotiation of the working-class experience. It is through this idea of movement that Thompson situates the change in behaviour believed necessary by her own mother to ensure her daughter's grammar school experience was not threatened by perceived class inadequacies.¹²⁴ Long-held memories of the 'starched white blouse' and the specially purchased blue 'Basildon Bond' note paper illustrate the socio-psychological re-positioning undertaken by parents in relation to their child's school environment.¹²⁵ As this study will also argue, particularly among working-class families, educational opportunity relied on an understanding that was both academically validated and socially acceptable as mothers' sought to re-align their own values with those expected at their daughter's schools.

Social positioning was not confined to materialistic understanding, for others it was something to be negotiated. Janet Parr recalled how upon receipt of her own successful 11+ outcome and the accompanying offer of a grammar school place, her mother was later asked "will you let her go?".¹²⁶ In highlighting this experience, Parr addresses not only the academic transition to an academically elite establishment, but that such a move risked inflicting a cultural shift from the working-class

¹²³ Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education*. (2000).

¹²⁴ Such experience is echoed by Margaret Forster, whose mother relied on her 'church voice' to demonstrate her suitability for the uniform retailer. Forster, Margaret, *Hidden Lives*, p. 180.

¹²⁵ Forster, Margaret. *Hidden Lives*, p. 15 and 21.

¹²⁶ Parr, J. "Women, Education and Class: The Relationship Between Class Background and Research". In Mahony, P & C. Zmroczek ed. *Class Matters*, p. 30

environment of home and family to the middle-class values on which the grammar school education was structured. Arguably, for both Thompson and Parr, their experiences of social re-positioning was something they became conscious of in the move from primary to secondary education. Moreover, aspirational opportunity was, for many of the working-class girls, constrained by the expectations and values within the home and a preservation of the status quo. Indeed, phrases such as ‘it just wouldn’t happen’, expressed within this study, reflect the ever-present boundaries at play as parents sought a trusted passage for their daughter’s transition into adulthood.¹²⁷

Class culture in regard to femininity and subordination was examined by the Women’s Studies group in the Centre for Contemporary Studies.¹²⁸ In this work, Angela McRobbie described the need to understand the mechanics of societal relationships, specifically how “working class-ness” both binds and informs culture.¹²⁹ This perspective is particularly useful when considering the challenges and possible disconnect faced by working-class girls amidst the unfamiliar grammar school society. Though directed to the experiences of working-class boys, Richard Hoggart’s expressions of ‘uprootedness’ and ‘friction point’ nonetheless reinforce the obstacles that existed between the home and school, something that is evident in the final chapter of this study on Stories of Belonging¹³⁰ Assessing her own socio-environmental challenges as a working-class girl in a predominantly middle-class grammar school, Irene Payne argues that moments of alienation from that which was

¹²⁷ Taken from Peg’s narrative, 120423

¹²⁸ Women’s Studies Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women’s Subordination* (Hutchison, 1978).

¹²⁹ McRobbie, Angela. “Working class girls and the culture of femininity” in, *Women Take Issue* p. 100

¹³⁰ Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 263

familiar created a social disconnect in the school community. Arguably, it is this detached relationship between the separate spheres of home and school that was perceived to construct 'two sites of authority'.¹³¹

For author Margaret Forster, recollections of her own education were not based solely on the views of her family but on her own aspirations, as someone who considered the 11+ more as a mechanism through which she could 'exceed [her] supposed reach', rather than an impediment to her personal progress.¹³² Forster's anxiety was situated on the implications of the outcome, rather than ability, as few children from her home on the council estate secured places at the County High School for Girls. Forster writes unabashedly about ambition and confronts any concern about distancing herself culturally from her family as a result of such a transition. Reading became the route to progression and separation, 'my reading was seen as a weapon I used against my family [...] a way of absenting myself'.¹³³ Aside from the cultural differences, Forster acknowledged the formation of a 'gulf', as the move to the High School brought opportunities that exceeded any experienced by her own mother at that same age.¹³⁴ This was evident too in the findings by Elizabeth Roberts, who argued that in the minds of many working-class parents' education was understood as a legal requirement, something that should be gained in as short a possible time, enabling their adolescent school leaver to contribute to the family income.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education*, p. 166.

¹³² Forster, Margaret, *Hidden Lives*, p. 176

¹³³ Forster, Margaret. *Hidden Lives*, p. 183

¹³⁴ Forster, Margaret. *Hidden Lives*, p. 182

¹³⁵ Roberts, Elizabeth. *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970*. (Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 159

Gendered expectations in relation to education and perceptions of class featured in the sociological study of Hannah Gavron. In *The Captive Wife*, Gavron seeks to understand how women's lives were influenced and impacted by their social class. Through a series of interviews with women in their mid-twenties, Gavron explored the constraints and expectations perceived to be attached to the two social classes through their experiences of education, work and family. Findings from the study reflected the conflicting values experienced by girls from working-class families in relation to educational aspiration. Reinforcing the necessary shift expressed by Parr and Forster, characteristic middle-class symbols such as ambition were perceived to be 'enemies' of those among the traditional working-classes, where commitment to the home, family and community were understood to be the normal expectations.¹³⁶ In this respect, personal aspiration may be compromised by the need to comply with social norms and values within the home and family, something which is present within the narratives in this project.

Gendered lives in postwar Britain.

Centred on the 11+ experience and the effects of selective education on the individual, it is important to recognise too the significance of contextual influences that shaped attitudes to education, not only for the young girls entering secondary school but also for their parents. Widely recognised to be a period of 'liberation and constraint', this review examines the challenges faced by participants in this study as

¹³⁶ Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 33

For more information on class understanding of educational opportunity and the scepticism among working-class families, see, Todd, Selina, *The People*, p. 220

they navigate their lives from adolescent schoolgirl to working woman.¹³⁷ Crucially, such conflicting ideas were considered to be experienced more keenly by women than men, as increased workplace opportunities were believed to compromise the modern domestic ideologies that emphasised the importance of home and family.

Scholarship focusing on the working, cultural and social lives of those born after WWII, charts the effect of such legislative influence of the welfare state and the emerging consumer culture.¹³⁸ Social historian Eve Worth defines the introduction of Beveridge's welfare state and the Education Act as 'two great landmarks' and, as the bringers of possibility and self-worth, signify their edifying status in postwar social structure and the impact made to girlhood in Britain post-1945.¹³⁹ Such social reconstruction brought with it a new norm, one in which young women married younger and had their children earlier.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, through the introduction of state provision of care from cradle to grave and as an industry in itself, the new welfare system brought employment opportunities in the form of clerical roles to young women across England and Wales. As a result of this 'occupational transition' and in the face of such upward social mobility, value by female school leavers was placed more on skills for the workplace as opposed to academic qualifications.¹⁴¹ Although the intentions of such landmark reforms were not overtly expressed within the oral narratives of this study, their influence in respect of family aspirations, however, were evident. Ideas of mobility in relation to job security were placed against the

¹³⁷ Roberts, Elizabeth. *Women and Families*, p. 21. Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 41

¹³⁸ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation* (2021). Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife* (1968). Roberts, Elizabeth, *Women and Families* (1995). Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina. *Women in twentieth-century Britain* (2014). Abrams, Lynn. *Feminist Lives* (Oxford University Press, 2023) p. 1. Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender work and education*, p. 1.

¹³⁹ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 2

¹⁴⁰ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 16

¹⁴¹ Payne, Geoff. *The New Social Mobility: How the Politicians Got it Wrong*. (Polity Press, 2017) p.113 in Worth, Eve, *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 42

uncertainty of a university education. In their sharing of experiences, it was important to understand how decisions made or advice they received was shaped both by continuity of recognised expectations alongside the changing social ambition.

With change, however, came uncertainty in the lives of women as the 'blueprint' of social expectations was open to negotiation.¹⁴² For Carol Dyhouse, postwar Britain was a contradictory period for young women, who sought to balance the desirability of a home-centred lifestyle, with the opportunity of returning to work when their children were of school age.¹⁴³ This theme of uncertainty featured in the sociological work of Alva Myrdal & Viola Klein who, in their 1956 study of the dual role of women, argued that as a result of contradictory positions regarding women's lives in postwar society, unlike those among their mother's generation, they could 'no longer be certain of what is expected of them'.¹⁴⁴

Influenced by the appeal of the newly realised 'home-centred society', for both working and middle classes, greater emphasis was placed on the life within the home as opposed to that among the community.¹⁴⁵ Modern ideals of home and marriage seen throughout popular culture, reinforced the value of family, domesticity and gender roles for those among the newly affluent society.¹⁴⁶ Such contemporary images of femininity worked in favour of policy makers whose intention was fixed on maintaining the traditionally gendered status quo.¹⁴⁷ Stephanie Spencer argues that

¹⁴² Harman, Harriet. *Women's Work* (Penguin, 2018). in Abrams, Lynn. *Feminist Lives*, p. 59

¹⁴³ Dyhouse, Carol. "Towards a 'Feminine' Curriculum For English Schoolgirls: The Demands of Ideology 1870-1963", *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, Vol. 1 (1978): pp. 291-311.

¹⁴⁴ Myrdal, A & V. Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* (Routledge, 1956) p. 190

¹⁴⁵ Langhamer, Clare. "The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2005): pp. 341-362, p. 341.

¹⁴⁶ Langhamer, Clare. "Feelings, Women and Work in the Long 1950s", *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2017): pp. 77-92. Dyhouse, Carol. *Girl Trouble* (2013)

¹⁴⁷ Report of Central Advisory Council for Education, *Half our Future*, London, HMSO, 1963. Further discussion on the disparity between education for girls and boys can be found within Irene Payne, "Learning to Lose", in, Spender, D & E. Sarah (1980)

through the dominant influence of girls' magazines in the late 1950s, attention was placed on a 'classless universal femininity', which reflected how young girls would look, feel and who they wanted to be.¹⁴⁸ For Spencer, such powerful representations of young girls in publications such as the *Girl*, which targeted their readership at a time of decision making, reinforced a world that was presented by Beveridge, one that promoted happy families and security within the home. Arguably, it was this 'network of conflicting roles' that was a contributing factor in the cause of such uncertainty.¹⁴⁹

Attempting to gauge the views of women in relation to home and family versus returning to work, Gavron's sociological study evidenced the contrasting viewpoint and appreciation of their role. Of the middle-class mothers interviewed, 40% believed that staying with their child all the time to be very important, however 52% argued that, if all necessary arrangements were in place, 'a small amount of separation from their mothers did the children no harm'.¹⁵⁰ No such understanding was expressed by working-class parents, for whom some 79%, felt they should be with their children 'all the time when they were young'.¹⁵¹ Such entrenched commitment to the role of the mother and her obligation to the family illustrates the conflict surrounding educational provision and aspiration for girls and their preparedness both for the world of work and their role in the home.

¹⁴⁸ Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education* p. 129

¹⁴⁹ Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 145 in Spencer, Stephanie, *Gender, work and education*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 78

¹⁵¹ Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 88

Research structure

Given the all-encompassing content of the life history narratives, the study will follow five key themes to feature within the oral evidence, contributing to the wider subjective understanding of their move as young girls from primary to secondary education.

Chapter one provides an overview of the methodological framework for this oral history study, detailing participant recruitment and project approach. Specific attention is given to the characteristics unique to oral history such as intersubjectivity and composure that are fundamental in the interpretation and meaning of their 11+ and secondary school experience. The latter part of the chapter explores the role of emotions within oral histories and their contribution to the formation of an individual's identity and their lasting sense of self.

Chapter two looks at the structural role of class and gender, as a means of influence and direction within the lives of the young women. Acknowledging the intersectional approach that exists within many studies of women's lives, it is important to understand the part they played as separate entities in the formation of an individual's sense of self. Experiences relating to class and gender are shared within the narratives, not always as identifiable moments in time, but rather through their inclusion within anecdotal stories. Close analysis of the life history narratives explores the idea of class through three key factors: as a means of identity through sense of place or community, through visibility and issues of difference, and finally through mentality and behaviour. Aspects of gender to be explored within this chapter are associated with the social and cultural expectations within the home and the effects of dominant patriarchal influence.

Chapter three considers the role of parents, both as individuals and as a combined relationship to understand how, through differing emotional reactions and behaviours, they communicate a means through which to inspire or influence their daughter's adolescent experience. Moreover, when gauging the relevance of familial structure, to what extent did the hierarchy within sibling relationships encourage or hamper the individual's potential ambition and achievement? Critically, this chapter focuses on the familial contribution regarding educational opportunity to better understand the long-lasting effects on their adult identities. At a time when parents were believed to be 'highly solicitous' of their children's educational opportunity, how influential were parents perceived to be in the lives of these young women?¹⁵²

Chapter four explores the notion that the 11+ exam created a line in a sand, a "sorting hat" through which a person's identity is forged by the score of a written test paper. Structured around three sections; parity of esteem & reputational implications, the differing notions of selection and the emotional responses to the 11+ and its life-long effects, this chapter demonstrates the complexities that lie behind a failed result and the very different experiences of "afterlife" held within the life history narratives. This chapter gives voice to those experiences of failure are not wholly a bad-news story, arguing there is more to the 11+ process than the wider discourse would suggest.

Chapter five examines three critical aspects in relation to success within the wider 11+ experience. The first focusses both on the level of preparedness ahead of the exam and the lasting recollections of sitting the 11+. Preparedness, in this instance, is not limited to ideas of pre-selection within primary schools and familiarity with

¹⁵² Mandler, Peter. *The Crisis of Meritocracy*. (Oxford University Press, 2020) p. 41

exam structure and content, but asks of the awareness, if any, to the level of expectation within the family and the perceived implications of the outcome.

Secondly, with regards to the outcome, this study explores how achievement was recognised in the home and asks to what extent such emotional responses continue to inform or shape the 11+ experience. Moreover, this chapter considers the experiences of those for whom success at the 11+ was deemed to be sufficient, once secured no further progression was required or sought. Lastly, the chapter draws attention to the complex understanding of achievement by assessing the differing ways it is assumed and its continued effects on an individual's identity.

In the final chapter emphasis is placed on the three registers of belonging: the policy of 'opportunity for all' and the lived experiences that challenge or reinforce equity of access, intellectual belonging through the ability to succeed and fulfil perceived expectations and lastly the emotional belonging that is secured through family and friendship. To what extent can the values and beliefs uniquely held within the family, influence a child's ability to fit-in to a new secondary school environment? Accepting that eligibility was secured through an academic examination, this chapter reviews the hidden obstacles such as 'cultural capital' that pre-determined any genuine sense of belonging. Finally, this chapter focuses on the subjective nature 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.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Introduction and methodological framework

This study uses life history narratives to understand the effects on the identity of women now in their seventies, of the 11+ exam and its outcome, something that they experienced over sixty years ago. Given the passing of time, it is important to consider too the process of memory, and how experiences from the past can continue to influence and inform their adult lives. Anthropological scholarship argues that recollections are founded on aspects of the past that remain important, moments that continue to resonate long within the individual life.¹ In her examination of the interconnections existing between the memory, personal cognition and historical understanding, oral historian Elizabeth Tonkin cites the words of R.L. Stevenson to argue, ‘the past is myself, my own history, the seed of my present thoughts, the mould of my present disposition’.² Such subjective evaluation of the relationship between the self and their past echoes the philosophical argument that ‘identity is constituted in memory’, presenting the lasting importance of experience and its unique contribution to the construction of identity and place within the present.³

¹ Stewart, Kathleen, “In the world that affect proposed”, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2017): pp. 192-198. For more information on the effects of the past histories into present selves see, Tinkler, Penny & Carolyn Jackson, “The Past in the Present: historicising contemporary debates about gender and education”, *Gender and Education*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2014): pp. 70-86

² Tonkin, Elizabeth. *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 1.

³ Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 288

As a method of research that can be 'tapped, unleashed and mobilized', oral history is antithetical to the conventional, authorised versions of history.⁴ In this respect, in contrast to the very fixed forms of written and documented historical references detailing specific moments or individuals, the spontaneity of dialogue enables a greater freedom to the pursuit of historical understanding. Moreover, it is through conversation where women have the opportunity to speak for themselves that, for feminist oral historians, the 'hidden realities' of lived experience can be shared.⁵ It is this understanding of experience as a source or active starting point within the life history narrative that enables interpretative analysis of the effects of postwar educational policy.

For social historians, motivated by the chance to better understand the lives of those without traditional access to power, the formation and construction of the self within the narratives brings a deeper insight into the meaning behind the experience. As this research demonstrates, meaning is not secured solely through the outcome of an exam, but rather through the adult life experienced as a result of the subjective understanding of educational opportunity and the responses to it from family and community. Though influential sociological studies of the 1950s and 1960s sought to understand the impact and effects of selective educational policy primarily among working-class families, limited attention was given to the potential life-long implications of differentiation through ability.⁶ In her ethnographic research into the significance of the seemingly ordinary and everyday aspects of life, Kathleen Stewart

⁴ Frisch, Michael. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (State University of New York Press, 1990) p. xxiii

⁵ Anderson, Kathryn., Susan Armitage, Dana Jack and Judith Wittner, "Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology in Oral History", *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1987): pp. 103-127, p. 104

⁶ Jackson, Brian. & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (1986) Young, Michael. & Peter Willmott, *Family & Kinship in East London* (2007)

argues that 'encounters, distractions [...] and opportunities lost and found' create an effect or become affected by each other.⁷ As the narratives in this study into the 11+ reveal, any emotional understanding of success, failure and later life identity has been shaped by the ordinary or unremarkable transition between primary and secondary education.

Approach, recruitment and interview technique

This study uses life history narratives of fifteen self-selecting women born in the aftermath of the Second World War. Participants were secured through a number of sources. Initial contact was made with the National Association of Women's Clubs, the National Federation of Women's Institute (NFWI) and the University of the Third Age (U3A), providing them with a brief of the project which could be shared among their membership.⁸ Though not intentional, it was anticipated that the likely participant profile of the women recruited from these three associations would be white. The primary analytical framework for the study required participants to have been educated within England and Wales and to have taken the 11+ exam. Though all of the women lived within East Anglia at the time of the interviews, they originated from a regional spread across England and Wales.

Interested applicants were contacted by phone, enabling a personal introduction to the study and the process involved. Those keen to take part were sent a copy of the participant information sheet and a short questionnaire for completion ahead of

⁷ Stewart, Kathleen. "In the world that affect proposed", p. 194

⁸ The National Association of Women's Clubs as an organisation has since been closed.

the interview which provided background information on their home and family.⁹ Of the fifteen participants, five were known to me, though only three of those had any real association. MB is my husband's aunt, HG was a work colleague at a previous employer and SW is a friend within my home village.¹⁰ Once all ethical paperwork and considerations were in place, interviews were arranged, and we met within their homes.

Theoretical evaluation of oral history interview technique recognises both the sociological and anthropological influences at play but acknowledges how each interviewer will naturally adapt their own style to suit their personality and achieve the best outcome.¹¹ My own approach sought to create an empathetic understanding between myself and the interviewee, one that supported and valued their contribution, enabling them to volunteer information rather than remain passive to the process. Though aware of the preference by other practitioners for minimal intervention within the life history process, I opted instead for a gentle engagement that would come more naturally to me and generate a more nuanced and considered set of recollections. Given their domestic setting, it was important to me that our conversation should develop organically, rather than through a fixed schedule of questions. Each narrator was invited to talk about their family and home as a gentle way of starting our conversation. This approach had three objectives; the first was to relieve the narrator of any initial concern they may have of the process and of their need to provide 'correct' information, but secondly for me as researcher, this offered

⁹ See Appendix II for Participant Information Sheet and Appendix III, Short Questionnaire.

¹⁰ See Appendix I for participant biographical details.

¹¹ Thompson, Paul & Joanna Bornat, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History Fourth Edition*. Oxford University Press, 2017. Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*, Hutchinson, 1987.

vital contextual detail that would broaden my eventual understanding of their educational experiences. Lastly, this approach was intended as an attempt to deflect initial attention from being placed solely on the 11+ and their recorded outcome. Given that the primary focus of the study is to understand the effects on the women's identity as a result of the 11+, as opposed to feelings about the process, it was important to gather context from their nuanced accounts which brought a wider perspective on the aspiration and expectations that were held within the family. It was from this starting point that their narratives developed with occasional questions from myself either to move their experiences forward or to probe for a deeper emotional understanding.

In order to fully appreciate the effects of the 11+ on the identity of the women in this study, it was important to give emphasis to the emotional resonance held within each life history account. I opted against relying on any technical support for the transcriptions, preferring instead to work through the recordings manually. Though labour intensive, this enabled me to listen and hear the meaning that remained embedded in the recollections, capturing both the emphasis and non-verbal elements associated with their 11+ exam.

The approach for this project was reliant on the recruitment of a small cohort which allowed for greater interpretation of lived experiences as a means to understand the impact of the 11+ on their adult selves. No attempt is made to offer a generalisation of the tripartite experience, as each individual shared with me what remains of significance to them now. Evaluating the value of the individual in historical research, James Hinton argues that as each person will experience things

differently, any concern for representation should be placed to one side.¹² In this respect, the life history narratives contain ‘expressions of experience’, that reveal the lasting emotional connectivity to ideas of success and failure which remain fundamental to the legacy of the 11+.¹³

Addressing the notable gaps in the sampled group, all women are white. This is not intentional but reflects both the methods of recruitment and wider structure of British society at that time. Though this research is centred on women’s educational experiences, it does not reflect all women and recognises how the experiences for women of colour and for women with disabilities would be very different. Seemingly egalitarian in its philosophy, but as a result of ‘quasi-scientific classification’, the Butler Act was seen only to reassert previous methods of educational provision for children with disabilities.¹⁴ For women of colour who moved to Britain as children in the mid 1950s, educational consideration in the form of policy was not in place until 1965.¹⁵ As with other studies by Stephanie Spencer and Eve Worth, those women who offered to be involved were primarily among those who passed the 11+.¹⁶ Given the widely acknowledged allocation of 20-25% for grammar school places, it is of considerable interest that those who were unsuccessful at the 11+ make up only

¹² Hinton, James. *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 29

¹³ Sheridan, Dorothy. “Writing to the Archive: Mass-Observation as Autobiography”, *Sociology*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1993): pp. 27-40, p. 29

¹⁴ Roulstone, Alan & Simon Prideaux, *Understanding Disability Policy* (Polity Press, 2012) p. 28

¹⁵ McKenley, Jan. ‘The Way We Were: Conspiracies of silence in the wake of the Empire Windrush’, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2001, pp. 309-328, p. 312. See also, Taylor, M. *Caught Between: a review of research into the education of pupils of West Indian origin* (NFER-Nelson, 1981). Tomlinson, S. *Ethnic Minorities in British Schools* (Heinemann, 1983). Townsend, H.E.R. *Immigrant Pupils in England: the LEA response* (National Foundation for Educational Research, 1971).

¹⁶ Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education* (2005). 23 women were interviewed for the study with the majority of those having attended grammar school. Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State*, p. 27. Of the 37 participants in the study, two thirds attended grammar schools.

25% of the cohort. Reasons for this imbalance may factor the perceived normality of secondary modern education and the absence of anything of notable to contribute, or that sharing a story that was understood to be 'bad news', might be less appealing to revisit.

Life history research and the role of the listener.

This study is an oral history project that uses a life history approach. Through the use of oral history research, this study situates the voices of those whose lives were affected by the 11+ and their experiences at the heart of the analysis, something which is only possible through a qualitative approach. In her discussion on the values of a life history study, oral historian Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet argues that the body of information gathered is more detailed and complex in nature than conventional social-scientific approaches.¹⁷ Moreover, women's life histories can be understood through the inclusion of myths as a foundation on which to base the narrative; either collective or individual, 'identifiable through markers such as stereotypical images, gestures, attitudes and behaviours.'¹⁸ Considering this study centres on education, with specific reference to selection, it is likely to evidence the existence of the 'golden age' myth, when the notion of 'opportunity for all' enabled children from working-class families to be educated alongside their middle-class peers within a meritocratic system of education.¹⁹ Narrative markers within this study reflect notions of gratitude at the perceived opportunity, norms and values instilling discipline and respect, and the differentiation inflicted by the selection process. Moreover, they demonstrate too an awareness of familial aspirations regarding the education opportunity for daughters in relation to attitudes of class and gender.

¹⁷ Chanfrault-Duchet, Marie-Francoise. "Narrative Structures, Social Models and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story", in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* ed. Gluck, S and D. Patai, (Routledge, 1991)

¹⁸ Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures", p. 81

¹⁹ Ware, Alan, "Grammar Schools, a Policy of Social Mobility and Selection – Why?", *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (2017): pp. 280-290, p. 280. For further discussion on the meritocratic opportunity of the selective education policy and the role of the grammar school, see, Todd, Selina, "The Golden-Age of the Grammar School" in Todd, S, *The People. The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class 1910-2010* (John Murray, 2014) pp. 216-235

Ahead of the appropriate methodological exploration, it is necessary to define the idea of life history narratives within oral history research in relation to this specific study. Often used interchangeably with 'life history' across the wider oral history field, this study adopts the use of 'life story' as a feature of self-narration, enabling a gentler, less chronologically constructed narrative, but one which retains key recognisable stages and moments within the person's life.²⁰ Arguably, it is through the use of 'stories' and the anecdotes shared within, that the thoughts and meanings of nuanced experiences are stimulated and which best signify the sense of self. Reflecting on the use of stories and anecdotal evidence, Penny Summerfield argues that by accepting their role as a narration, rather than a testimony, they 'capture the idea of telling a story about the individual [...] [that] endows it with meaning'.²¹ Arguably, it is this access to meaning that reveals the personal effects of secondary education on each individual in the project.

Over the past thirty years, the use of life history narratives in qualitative research has cemented the interpretative turn, not only in our understanding of the singular experience but in the fusion between the individual and the society in which they lived.²² This use of interpretation broadens the appreciation of the effects of education on the individual as political directives are explained through personal experience. Life history narratives do not constitute a final or 'complete' account of an individual's life, but rather they reflect a version or a 'fashioned identity' that

²⁰ Further information on the differences between the two types of oral narratives can be found in Abrams, Lynn *Oral History Theory, second edition* (Routledge, 2016) and Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures".

²¹ Summerfield, Penny. *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (Routledge, 2019) p. 5

²² Samuel, Raphael. & Paul Thompson, *The Myths We Live By* (Routledge, 1990). Thompson, Paul. *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (Routledge, 1992) For more information on the role of memory and subjective understanding in oral history, see Thomson, Alistair. "Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History", *Oral History Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2007): pp. 49-70.

illustrates a person's point of view at a specific moment in time in relation to the person they are sharing it with.²³ In this respect it is vital to situate the point at which narrator's memories are shared, something that is of particular importance when considering the late life understanding of educational experiences that occurred some sixty years or more before. Far from being static, life histories evolve with differing circumstance or influence, demonstrating the ongoing process of self-reflection and, as Peter Coleman would suggest, the 'underlying and continuing search for meaning'.²⁴

Certainly, this idea of fluidity within the narratives, something that is pertinent within the themed chapter analysis in this thesis, challenges the notion of historical memories as being fixed or unchanging. Given that the women in this study are, in most cases, mothers, wives and grandmothers, it became clear that meanings held within their narratives are inextricably shaped both by familial experience alongside their own personal ideals and those of the wider society. Indeed, as the narratives show, reactions and responses in relation to the 11+ within the family and community, continue to resonate with and shape the understanding of their educational opportunities. Irrespective of any conscious attempt to share details of events and experiences that relate directly to the 11+ outcome, they are further shaped by the influential norms and values originating through class and gender, both implicit and explicit within each nuanced account.

Close analysis of life history accounts reveals the possible disconnect, uncertainty or harmony that may exist between the individual themselves and their

²³ Abrams, Lynn *Oral History Theory*, p. 33

²⁴ Coleman, Peter "Ageing and life history: the meaning of reminiscence in late life", in *Life and Work History Analyses: Qualitative and Quantitative Developments*, ed. Dex, Shirley. (Routledge, 1991) p. 122.

wider society. Social anthropologist David Mandelbaum argues that life histories, 'emphasize the experiences and requirements of the individual – how the person copes with society rather than how society copes with the stream of individuals.'²⁵ Adopting a feminist perspective to aid explanation, it is possible to understand how women's narratives expose the dominance of a patriarchal ideology. Chanfroult-Duchet describes the frequent use of seemingly innocuous 'key phrases' that suggest the relationship between the individual and the social sphere in which they exist.²⁶ For Chanfroult-Duchet, phrases such as "I did not want to, but what could I do?", reveal the existence of tension or likely conflict felt by the narrator in relation to others in their immediate society and social understanding. In the oral testimonies collected as part of this research a similar process can be identified. Remarks like, 'that wasn't an option', or 'it wouldn't have happened', present in the oral testimonies in this project demonstrate how the individual negotiated their position within their own family relations and the cultural values held within the society in which they lived.²⁷ Interpretations of the myths and key phrases held within oral narratives enhances the base of knowledge relating to the experiences of secondary education for girls, providing greater appreciation of the social models that act to structure, yet define, an individual's life.

Feminist research considers the formation of self and how identity can be communicated through subjective narratives.²⁸ Certainly, the use of oral history has

²⁵ Mandelbaum, David G. "The Study of Life History: Ghandi", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 3, June 1973, pp. 177-96, p. 177 in, "Women's Life Histories: Method and Content", Geiger, Susan, N.G. *Signs*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1986): pp. 334-351, p. 336

²⁶ Chanfroult-Duchet, Marie-Francoise. "Narrative and Socio-Symbolic Analysis", in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* ed. Gluck, Sherna & Daphne Patai, (Routledge, 1991) p.78 p. 79

²⁷ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

²⁸ Gluck, Sherna & Daphne Patai, ed. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (Routledge, 1991) Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self* (1995)

broadened the scope of subjects open for discussion, to include those previously believed to be obscure or unworthy.²⁹ Chanfrault-Duchet challenges researchers to understand that within women's life stories, the social self does not just occupy a place in the social order, 'rather, its place is overdetermined by the status of women' in society.³⁰ Educational aspirations and opportunity revealed through the life history narratives in this thesis are therefore shaped not only by the 'emotional communities' of family structure or the social class, but crucially through the wider public sphere whose dominant ideologies informed an expected pattern of behaviour.³¹

Unique to the qualitative process of oral history is the role of the listener, someone who acts to 'facilitate' the conversation.³² Although the experiences held within oral history narratives are shaped around the process of dialogue, they are reliant on a focussed line of enquiry and, more importantly, on the invested curiosity by the person they are shared with. Moreover, pursuing 'a narrative that is based on the inner self' as opposed to adopting a fact-finding mission brings greater depth to the interview content.³³ Psycho-analytical understanding considers the listener as a 'validator', someone who is able to link the historical significance to the very nuanced experience.³⁴ I would argue that as the validator in this research project, my role is one of facilitator, encouraging the narrators to see the value and importance of

²⁹ McKenna, Yvonne, "Sisterhood? Exploring Power Relations in the Collection of Oral History", *Oral History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2003): pp. 65-72

³⁰ Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative and Socio-Symbolic Analysis", p.78

³¹ Langhamer, Clare. "Feelings, Women and Work in the Long 1950s", *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2017): pp. 77-92, p. 89

³² Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History theory*, p. 187.

³³ Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures", p.78

³⁴ Boulanger, Ghislaine. "The Continuing and Unfinished Present. Oral History and Psychoanalysis in the Aftermath of Terror", in *Listening on the Edge* ed. Cave, Mark & Stephen Sloan, (Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 122

sharing their experiences as much for themselves as for the contribution it brings to the understanding of selective education.

For psychologist Carol Gilligan, listening to women's recollections is less about validation, but relates more to the psychological interaction narrators have with their own experience, which shapes the nature of the recollection and the language they choose to use.³⁵ Similarly, Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack argue for enhanced listening skills or 'listening in stereo', as a means to understand the relationship between two differing perspectives within a life story, the dominant and the muted.³⁶ Whilst interview transcripts provide details of notable events and experiences, greater intimacy held within the oral account offers a depth of accuracy to the narrative through the exploration of meaning, something that is evident throughout this 11+ study.³⁷ Considering the ever-present need for the narrator to construct a narrative that both answers a question and provides an acceptable form of self, in failing to seek out the choices or anxieties that lie behind the recollection it is possible to 'miss the opportunity to document the experience that lies outside the bounds of acceptability'.³⁸ In voicing their 11+ experiences for this study rather than privately, the women interviewed for this thesis chose to express the deeper meaning of an event some sixty years in the past, and its lasting implications on their adult self. As the narratives in this thesis show, the differing expressions heard in

³⁵ Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press, 1990) p. 2

³⁶ Anderson, Kathryn. and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview techniques and analysis", in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, Gluck, Sherna & Daphne Patai, (Routledge, 1991)

³⁷ Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Writing a Woman's Life* (Norton & Co, 1988) pp. 30-31 in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, Gluck, Sherna & Daphne Patai, (Routledge, 1991) p.11.

³⁸ Anderson, Kathryn. and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen", p. 11

relation to the 11+ result reveal an ability to rationalise or situate the outcome, irrespective of success or failure.

As a qualitative historical source, the use of life history methodology is crucial for this study, enabling close exploration of the wider structures of class and gender as a means to model or influence the personal experience of secondary education. Moreover, life history narratives offer an alternative insight into the effects of selective education but also, for the individual, a space to consider how the 11+ experience has impacted her life over a long period of time, rather than as an isolated event.

Analysis within the study focuses on three critical areas of methodological engagement with the oral history narratives: intersubjectivity and power relations, memory, self and narrative composure, and finally the role of emotions.

Intersubjectivity and power relations

Intersubjectivity between the interviewer and participant is a critical aspect within oral history research, as the process of memory recreation is reliant on the dynamic interaction between two parties.³⁹ In her extensive work on the production of memory, Penny Summerfield argues ‘the cultural values of the narrator and audience affect the narrative produced’.⁴⁰ Indeed, the absence of such mutuality ‘can create

³⁹ Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, (2016) Frisch, Michael. *A Shared Authority*, (1990) Oakley, Ann. “Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms”, in *Doing Feminist Research* ed. Roberts, Helen. (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) Summerfield, Penny. *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (Routledge, 2019)

⁴⁰ Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing*, p.23

barriers to understanding'.⁴¹ Arguably, the ability to secure analysis for this study rests on the relationship and dynamics between myself and the participants. In contrast to traditional documents that offer explicit details of the past, oral history places emphasis on the 'shared authority' as the research interpretation reconstructs the 'story, frame and analysis' contained within the narrative.⁴² In his examination of authorship in oral history research, Michael Frisch discusses the mutual act of interpretation, not only by the interviewer as they seek to contribute to the wider historical understanding, but also by the narrators themselves who search for meaning behind their personal experience. Intersubjectivity can be understood too as a collision, as one person's subjectivity is shaped by the encounter with the other.⁴³

This reliance on 'the other' as a conduit to subjective understanding can be likened to the concept of social interaction theory used in anthropological and sociological scholarship, which argues that 'we only know ourselves through a series of interactive moments with others'.⁴⁴ Certainly, in this case, 'other' is not confined to the interaction with another individual, but rather, as feminist theory would suggest that, 'women's narratives are [...] stories of how women negotiate their "exceptional" gender status both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime'.⁴⁵ Although I

⁴¹ Michaels, Sarah. "Hearing the Connections in Children's Oral and Written Discourse", *Journal of Education*, Vol. 167, No. 1 (1985): pp. 36-56, p. 51 in, "When Gender is Not Enough: Women interviewing Women", Riessman, Catherine Kohler. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1987): pp. 172-207, p. 173.

⁴² Frisch, Michael. *A Shared Authority*, p. xx. For more information on the theme of shared authority, see Sitzia, Lorraine. "Telling Arthur's Story: Oral History Relationships and Shared Authority", *Oral History*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1999): pp. 58-67

⁴³ Abrams, Lynn *Oral History Theory*, p. 58

⁴⁴ Stuart, Mary. "How was it for you Maggie?' Self, identity and meaning for Oral Historians" *Oral History Society*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1993): pp. 80-83, p. 82.

⁴⁵ ed. The Personal Narratives Group, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Indiana University Press, 1989) p. 5.

made no mention of my own educational experience, I was conscious that any continued insecurities felt by the participants would resonate with those I had withheld and unintentionally shape the conversation. Certainly, irrespective of the age difference, being of the same gender and similar class origins to the narrators in this project brought a freedom to recount experiences that are familiar to both parties.⁴⁶ Whilst emphasis is placed on the participant experiences of the pass or fail outcome of the 11+ exam, my awareness of the emotional impact of educational displacement brings an opportunity to explore the feelings they encountered. Remembering that this research into the effects of the 11+ exam involves the successes as much as the disappointments, close attention is given to the nature of achievement and how it was understood and experienced both by the individual herself and by her supporting family and community. Though not directly associated with the 11+, my own understanding of the impact of failure and disconnect is shaped by my repeated failure of O-level exams in the mid 1980s. Watching close friends celebrate success and enthuse at the potential opportunities now open to them, the feelings of isolation and exclusion because of my failings were impossible to ignore. I took the decision not to share my own educational experiences of failure and anxiety as they were not associated with the 11+. For the focus of the study to remain fixed on those who participated, it was important that the feelings shared were theirs alone and not as a result of any mutual acceptance. Whilst it is impossible to ignore the presence of this intersubjective appreciation, my opinion was that any shared understanding would dilute or distort the integrity of their recollections.

⁴⁶ More details on class origin will be provided within the thematic chapter content throughout the study. For participant biographical information, see Appendix 1.

With greater emphasis on interpretation and meaning in historical understanding as a result of the cultural turn, attention is placed on the effects of power relations that exist within oral history research.⁴⁷ As a unique historical source, life history interviews demonstrate how stories recounting notable events or experience are not fixed, but rather they are open to being re-told, as the mutuality of dialogue encourages a different reimagining. Peter Coleman explains the dual influence of both the psychological and the contextual to the construct of a life history narrative. For Coleman, psychological influence in the form of personality, culture and major life events converge as narrators attempt to 'search for meaning' that both explains and defends their actions.⁴⁸ Contextual understanding, however, heightens an awareness of the role of the stimulus, the individual who has invigorated the memory.

As explained within the methodological introduction, among the cohort of fifteen women participating in this study, three are known to me personally. Open acknowledgment of such relationships is vital as it provides context to our interaction, both in content and in construct. Moreover, the very narration could be influenced by the apparent ease of conversation or hindered by unintentional assumptions. Of greater significance, however, is any perceived obligation they may feel towards the research as a whole, anxious to proffer an account which could be deemed 'correct' or 'true', as a means to assist in the 'success' of the study. Though seeking consistency of approach across the cohort as a whole, attention is given to

⁴⁷ Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing* (1998) Yvonne McKenna 'Sisterhood? Exploring Power Relations in the Collection of Oral History', *Oral History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2003): pp. 65-72. Minister, Kristina. 'A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview' in, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* ed. Gluck, Sherna & Daphne Patai, (London, Routledge, 1991)

⁴⁸ Coleman, Peter G. "Ageing and life history". p. 121

variances occurring due, in part, to my prior knowledge of their situation or any apparent reluctance to over-step our shared familiarity.

Feminist analysis of women's life histories acknowledges how subtle alterations to the imbalance in power between narrator and interviewer can bring about a more open and accepting environment as in the process of conversation both participant and interviewer appear to take turns holding the baton. Writing in 1981, Ann Oakley challenged feminist interviewers to reject the seemingly 'masculine' traits that reinforce a hierarchical relationship, emphasising instead the shared commonalities between women: 'their gender socialisation [and] critical life experiences'.⁴⁹ Furthermore, by demonstrating the existence of shared values, either through altering styles of dress or linguistic delivery, the researcher can be seen to consider the needs of the participant.

Though participants in this study are self-selecting, any heightened level of expectation that emphasizes the authority or status held by myself as the researcher, risks weakening their perception of suitability. All forms of communication to those who volunteered bore the University of Essex logo, reinforcing the academic nature of the study. Such interaction with higher educational institutions may be unfamiliar, serving to emphasise a potential sense of anxiety at the unequal power relationship. Arguably, the very explanation of the 'interview' process detailed within the information document suggests an anticipatory question and answer session, placing pressure on narrators to provide an accurate response, rather than the desired conversational interaction.⁵⁰ In an effort to pre-empt any concerns ahead of the interview, calls were made to each of the narrators for an informal conversation

⁴⁹ Oakley, Ann. 'Interviewing women', p. 55

⁵⁰ See Appendix III, Participant Information Sheet

about the process, providing the opportunity to familiarise each other with our voices and our likely considerations.

Memory, self and narrative composure

Alongside the omnipresent power relationships and intersubjectivity at play, the composition of the narratives provides a crucial level of detail in relation to the meaning behind each experience. Indeed, the selected memories shared within the narrative are curated and communicated in a way that is personally acceptable to the individual and which reinforces their sense of self. In his study of the appeal of ideals of the soldier hero and their role in shaping the dominant ideals of masculinity, Graham Dawson raises the interwoven nature of composure, that of the private and the public.⁵¹ For Dawson, the public aspect of composure is seen as an evolving construct, based around the perception and understanding of a given moment or experience that has been informed by wider discourse. In this respect, the narratives of women interviewed for this thesis are composed not only by personal experience but shaped too by their perceptions of subsequent educational developments and the grammar school debate. In retelling their personal experiences of the 11+, the narrator was required to compose a coherent account of the process and outcome, one that situated their own nuanced understanding of events alongside the perceived public discourse. Through their multiple understandings as parents and as grandparents, they will have had cause to revisit their own school experiences, opportunities and aspirations as a means of informing future decision-making for their own families.

The complex badge of honour long associated with a grammar school education is reinforced by supporters of the so-called “golden age” of education yet challenged

⁵¹ Dawson, Graham. *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Routledge, 1994)

by those more leftwing narratives for whom selection as a method of differentiation can only mean exclusion.⁵² Indeed, as some interviews showed, recognition for their daughter's achievement was important to parents, especially mothers. In one instance, a narrator recalled how she was reminded by her mother to state exactly which school she was due to attend, should anyone on the bus enquire.⁵³ Similarly, portrayals of increased social mobility resulting from success in the 11+ add to the potential burden of failure experienced by the majority who did not achieve. Dawson explains how, in the line of enquiry, the researcher may prompt hitherto dormant memories, perceived perhaps as insignificant which related to events or experiences that have been little considered for many years. In this instance, the narrator may take time to construct an appropriate response which reflects 'a version of the self that can be lived with'.⁵⁴ For Penny Summerfield, such 'well-being' provides the participant with an 'emotional equilibrium'.⁵⁵ Certainly, responses from those taking part in this study were very positive, having benefitted from the opportunity to revisit and share with me their past lives and experiences. There were, however, memories of anxiety, frustration or heightened emotion that required a subconscious process of negotiation in the way they were communicated. Arguably, it is only through this form of qualitative research that it is possible to understand the nuanced experiences in relation to selective education policies.

Composure in oral history relates not only to the memories selected but in their method of delivery. Widely understood as a means of securing meaning behind the

⁵² Todd, Selina. *The People*. (2014)

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/aug/23/argument-for-grammar-schools-selective-education-theresa-may>

⁵³ Taken from HG's narrative.

⁵⁴ Dawson, Graham. *Soldier Heroes*, p. 23

⁵⁵ Summerfield, Penny. *Histories of the Self*, p. 109.

experience, rather than the facts that surround it, events may be remembered “as if they had “really” happened’, rather than how they were actually experienced.⁵⁶ In this respect, memories from childhood that have traditionally remained within the private sphere, would undergo a process of reconstruction to ensure the narrator secures a level of ‘subjective composure’ as it is shared to a public audience.⁵⁷ Likening the conventional interview process to that of a journalistic endeavour, the narrator is required to ‘take to the floor’, delivering a story that satisfies the specified objective.⁵⁸ Kristina Minister considers the role of the audience in relation to composure, arguing that the oral history interview can be viewed as a form of performance, conducted as it is between the private and the public.⁵⁹ This interface between the two domains is indeed relatable. As a researcher within the public realm, I was invited into their home, their private space, to hear the details of events and experiences that they felt both able and willing to share. Dramatization within oral history interviews provides credible responses through the use of dialogue and asides and reinforce their validity.⁶⁰ Certainly, dramatization in the form of performance that are included in this study further emphasise the strength of feeling that continues to resonate throughout their adult lives.⁶¹ Symbolic meaning in the form of clothing, people or gifts played a significant part in their desire to share their very personal experiences of the 11+ exam.⁶²

⁵⁶ Dawson, Graham. *Soldier Heroes*, p. 22

⁵⁷ Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing*, p. 17

⁵⁸ Minister, Kristina. “A Feminist Frame for Interviews”, in *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. ed. Gluck, Sherna & Daphne Patai, (Routledge, 1991) p. 28

⁵⁹ Minister, Kristina. “A Feminist Frame for Interviews”

⁶⁰ Summerfield, Penny. *Histories of the Self* p. 113

⁶¹ Included in the narratives of MB, HG, APP.

⁶² Included in the narratives of MB, HG, PL, JJ, SW.

Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet argues that in an oral history study the participant is both subject and hero, 'aiming to communicate an experience laden with signification'.⁶³ In this respect, they became the 'keeper' of the knowledge with the ability to decide how and when to share it. This theme of 'keeper' is further explained by Daphne Patai in her consideration of a narrator 'agenda', questioning in what respect the life history narratives reflect an intended interpretation of experience or event.⁶⁴ My communication with potential participants informing them of the project focus, in this case their experiences of the 11+ exam, stimulated long-held thoughts or childhood memories. It was, therefore, reasonable to expect a level of preparedness, focussed on specific or appropriate experiences, which acted to validate their participation. Though personal motivations for involvement in the study are not a primary focus of the interview or analysis they, nonetheless, informed and shaped the eventual narrative outcome. Among the fifteen participants who took part in this study, two of the narrative accounts were composed around the challenges they faced in adolescence and their counselled attempts at personal reconciliation that continued on into their adult lives. Whilst their involvement in the study was no different to the others, their narratives were structured on the need to share the overarching challenges they faced. Delivered in a manner that validated their frustration this made the ensuing oral account challenging, both in the listening and latterly in the necessary interpretation.⁶⁵

In her work on narrative composition, Lyndsey Dodd describes the many component parts through which oral accounts are presented as that of an

⁶³ Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures", p. 79, note 8.

⁶⁴ Patai, Daphne. "Ethical problems of Personal Narratives, or, Who Should Eat the Last Piece of Cake?", *International Journal of Oral History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1987): pp. 5-27, p.10

⁶⁵ For more details relating to APP and GC, please see Appendix I, Participant Biographies.

'assemblage'.⁶⁶ For Dodd, the assemblage reflects the 'relations of things to each other which emerge in unpredictable ways around actions and events'.⁶⁷ Through the use of this expression, it is possible to better comprehend how diverse elements such as the conversation itself, the selection of memories or experiences shared, gestures and emotions within, and public discourse on the subject, jostle in the process of interaction, exerting their own power or influence over the narrative construct. In this respect, events and experiences shared within this life history study are not fully complete but are stimulated by their commitment to the subject and the specific themes under investigation. Crucially, this idea of assemblage can be used to better situate the narrative examination, in relation to how and when it was undertaken, where the meeting took place and what subliminal influences informed or empowered our conversation. Returning to the dual lens of class and gender through which this study is explored, dominant ideological influences evidenced within the narratives aid subjective understanding of their experiences as young women. Moreover, by acknowledging how and why the narrative is shaped by time and place, it is reasonable to assume that the educational opportunity they experienced as girls and their own feelings regarding success or failure, will be further evidenced in their adult lives as mothers to their own children.

Scholarship into the role of memory argues that it is not an exercise in pure recall but rather the result of a form of self-interpretation by the narrator, ensuring that understanding of the experience is secured within each individual account.⁶⁸ In this

⁶⁶ Dodd, Lindsey. "The Disappearing Child: observations on oral history, archives and affects", *Oral History*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2021): pp. 37-48

⁶⁷ Fox, Nick. J. "Emotions, affects and the production of social life", *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (2015): pp. 301-318, p. 306, in Dodd, "The Disappearing Child", p. 38

⁶⁸ Portelli, Alessandro. 'So much depends on a Red Bus or, Innocent Victims of the Liberating Gun', *Oral History*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2006): pp. 29-43. Passerini, Luisa. 'Memory', *History Workshop*, No. 15 (1985): pp. 195-196

respect, cultural influences that inform both the remembered and interpreted past must be considered in the research process.⁶⁹ For Summerfield, the construct of a life history narrative could be understood through two distinctive approaches, those of ‘explorer vs conserver’.⁷⁰ As a conserver, reminiscence is structured around the maintenance of their own self-esteem, aiming to maintain self-worth and value from their past lives. This somewhat protectionist form of composition reaffirms the understanding that whilst spoken narratives offer details from a life experience, their assemblage must be agreeable to the speaker. In contrast, however, the explorer opts for a process of life-review, in which they engage with and actively integrate their sense of self with the life experience. This, for Summerfield, is not without risks, as subjects normally only spoken of privately, are laid open for wider ‘public’ discussion. Moments of distress or anxiety laid dormant since childhood, may come to light within the conversation, forcing the individual to revisit challenging moments in their lives, integrating the past with their present. In reviewing those among this study, it was possible to see how three narrators shared a sense of certainty with regards to their own sense of self, while four of the others sought to understand or re-evaluate their own past experiences.⁷¹

Through the discussions of their 11+ experiences, the well-worn personal narratives of success or failure are evidenced. Subsequent re-evaluation may provide an alternative interpretation which differs from the one held within a ‘safe place’.⁷² Moreover, it is anticipated that for those participants in this thesis, later

⁶⁹ Summerfield, Penny. “Culture & Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in *Oral History Interviews*”. *Cultural & Social History*, Vol. 1, No.1 (2004): pp.65-93, p. 67

⁷⁰ Peter Coleman, ‘Ageing and Life History”, p. 140 in Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing*, pp. 18-19

⁷¹ Among the conservers: HG, MB and JJ. Those among the explorers: HB, SW, APP, GW.

⁷² Dawson, Graham, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 23

employment opportunities and familial expectations will demand a level of personal reconciliation before they can be retold. Alongside the anxiety and emotional fallout there are, however, examples of unbridled joy and pride experienced as a result of their successful outcome. In their broader conversations regarding the focus of this research, the open acknowledgement of success within the narrative demonstrated an attempt to maintain a level of self-esteem and elevated status awarded at that moment in their life. Arguably, the women who chose to take part in this study believed they had a story to share, irrespective of their exam outcome, one that reflect the level of importance this particular moment in their lives continues to have on their adult self.

The role of emotions

An integral part of this oral history research is the opportunity to look beyond the 'data' and pursue instead a deeper understanding of the emotional responses that were experienced as a result of the 11+ exam outcome. In 'altering the shift of focus from data gathering to interactive process', it is possible to enhance the value of the source material to reveal details of events and experiences that are supported and enhanced with emotional connectivity.⁷³ Arguably, it would be impossible to explore the effects on an individual's identity without attempting to understand the emotional reaction that remains associated with such notable moments in a person's life. Sara Ahmed considers a hierarchy of emotions separating the positive from the negative. In this respect, the narrator gains a certain confidence from the 'cultivation' of

⁷³ Kathryn Anderson & Dana Jack, "Learning to Listen", pg. 23

positive feelings, acknowledging that the weaker negative emotions threaten 'the formation of a competent self'.⁷⁴ Such hierarchies are not created in isolation, but are shaped by other views and responses, which only serves to reinforce the 'messiness' of feelings as one person's thoughts are compromised by others.⁷⁵ Certainly, in both the stories of failure and of achievement, many views held towards the 11+ outcome are founded on those expressed by close family members.

Despite the extent of clarity associated with memories of the 11+, it can be argued that the specific choice of word or phrase that is used to express their result, for example 'I hadn't passed and I hadn't failed', indicates the level of emotional connectivity that was made at the time.⁷⁶ Extending the value of emotional awareness further, Ahmed describes how emotions are not purely a reaction to a given moment, but rather they can be understood as an 'attachment' towards a situation or object as a result of wider influence.⁷⁷ Given the extent of public discourse concerning the perceived status of both grammar and secondary modern, it is likely that the feelings expressed regarding their exam outcome are influenced by the rhetoric of that particular time and in their subjective understanding in adult life.

Evaluating the effect of emotions within oral history narratives, Alistair Thomson describes the use of 'strategies of containment' as interviewees select what experiences to share and what memories, if any, are too difficult to express.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004) p. 32

⁷⁵ Ahmed, Sara, *The Cultural Politics*, p. 210

⁷⁶ Taken from JL narrative.

⁷⁷ Ahmed, Sara. "Collective Feelings: Or The Impressions Left by Others", *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2004): pp. 25-42, p. 27

⁷⁸ Thomson, Alistair. *ANZAC Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 237, in Layman, Leonore. "Reticence in Oral History", *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2009): pp. 207-230, p. 218

Moreover, they may opt instead to describe the actions or specific event with such an intensity that it masks the absence of any emotional recall. In this respect, moments of introversion can be understood as a form of self-preservation, as the reawakening of memories held secure for over sixty years threatens to undo the very personal reconciliation that has occurred over time, something that is evidenced within the memories of failure.⁷⁹

Notwithstanding the importance of emotion within oral narratives as a vehicle through which to understand the meaning of experience, the deliberate inclusion of restraint within the interview highlights the narrator's attempt to avoid potentially sensitive areas.⁸⁰ In her study on presence of reticence within oral histories, Lenore Layman characterizes reticence as an 'exercise of agency', a tool with which the narrator can assert authority on their dialogue, shifting the conversation away from specific moments or experiences.⁸¹ Given the emotive themes of success and failure, there are multiple reasons why narrators appear reticent in disclosing the extent of their feelings. Failing to pass the 11+ exam meant failing to be selected. For some, the reality of the selection process was harsh. Those who failed to achieve when aged just 10 years were assigned to the secondary modern school, establishments recognised as the home of non-achievers, whilst those deemed to be successful were offered the seemingly superior opportunity of a place in the grammar school system.⁸² Notification of exam results varied from letters to the home, notices in the local newspaper or communicated in the primary school classroom. Given the significance of this exam as an identifying marker to

⁷⁹ As understood through SW narrative.

⁸⁰ As understood through SW narrative.

⁸¹ Layman, Lenore 'Reticence in Oral History', p. 210

⁸² Sanderson, Michael. *Educational Opportunity*, p. 56

differentiate one child from another, it would be reasonable to consider how memories recalling disappointment, anxiety and separation have been psychologically processed to limit any further emotional re-engagement.

Conclusion

Acknowledging that this study is not structured specifically through a feminist framework, it is important to recognise the mutuality of women's research into the lives of other women. Assessing the importance of new material created by women about women, Sherna Gluck argues that 'women's oral history [...] is a feminist encounter, even if the interviewee is not herself a feminist'.⁸³ Furthermore, through this shared experience that reflects a 'familiarity with the textures of life', there exists a reciprocal affirmation that acts to increase the self-esteem of both parties.⁸⁴ As researcher, I actively seek support from and engage with other women keen to contribute, whilst committing to listen with interest to their stories and experiences. For those involved, given the time and space to reappraise aspects of their lives assumed otherwise mundane or uninteresting, there is the opportunity to better appreciate how past experiences shape, inform and continue to play a part in their present lives today.

Centred on the 11+ process and the effects of the outcome on women's identity, this use of life history methodology captures a qualitative understanding of the selective educational opportunity that existed in the Butler Act. Altering the angle of

⁸³ Gluck, Sherna. "What's so special about Women? Women's Oral History", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol.2, No. 2 (1977): pp. 3-17, p. 5

⁸⁴ Gluck, Sherna. "What's so special", p. 9

vision away from the dominant grammar school boy narrative places girl's experiences at the heart of the discussion, enabling a better understanding of how our past lives remain closely attached to the present. Notwithstanding that the 11+ was only a small moment in their seventy plus years, the now subjective appreciation of such significant delineation by ability can be realised within their working lives and relationships as wives and mothers. In this process of revisiting periods of change or transition through a life history approach, it is possible to chart the influence of wider social interaction as means of shaping the sense of self. Recollections of family, friends and local community which feature in the themed chapter analysis in relation to the progression from primary to secondary school, merge to contribute to and realise the 'web' of identity in adult life.⁸⁵

Summarily, theoretical understanding of oral history acknowledges that, as a historical source, it is not made up of factual statements but contains instead a dynamic combination of prominent recollections alongside moments of 'ideological and subconscious desires.'⁸⁶ Through their involvement in the study, the fifteen women contributed intimate aspects of their own experience as a means of informing the research agenda. Gendered details of clothing, friendships and nuanced associated interests are peppered throughout the narrative, reinforcing the personal meaning behind such state-led demands. Arguably, it is through the unique and often intimate and details accompanying the 11+ experience that their personal identity is shape

⁸⁵ Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self*, p. 93

⁸⁶ Passerini, Luisa. 'Work ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism', *History Workshop*, No. 8 (1979): pp. 82-108, p. 84

Chapter 2: Stories of Class and Gender

Introducing class and gender

In an attempt to understand the effects on identity as a result of a written 11+ exam paper, it is important to consider not only the role of policy and educational provision, but critically the wider social structures that play such an influential part in the construct of each individual life story. Indeed, experiences are not seen as 'free-floating' but remain connected to the structural workings of class and gender within the wider society.¹ The intersecting effects of these two social structures both informed and shaped the lived experiences of the 15 women in this study in relation to the selective education process and the 11+ exam. When compared to the scholarship of structures of power, however, ideas of class and gender are understood differently within the attitudinal evidence of each individual's life history account. Moreover, notwithstanding that the purpose of the postwar selective educational policy was to provide an opportunity for all, irrespective of class, location and income, school experiences are impossible to understand without considering the wider structures at play.

The relationship between class and education following the Butler Act (1944) is complex. Sociological studies suggest that the selective policies brought the opportunity of an academic led secondary education and enhanced social mobility to

¹ Lawler, Steph. *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects* (Routledge, 2000) p.13

those who would otherwise be seen as prohibited as a result of social economics.² Such discourse has, however, been challenged by those who perceive the policies of Rab Butler, and the written 11+ test paper specifically, as a mechanism for reinforcing class boundaries in postwar Britain.³ Indeed, as explained within the introduction, such issues appeared among the feminist writing from the 1980s onwards, as those who had been through the selective educational process chose to reflect on their own experiences of disconnect and conflicting aspirations as a result of the complicated transition between home and school communities.⁴

Evaluating his own working-class community as something that was ‘screwed tight with meaning’, cultural historian Robert Colls affirmed his early appreciation of the social framework in which his early family life was cemented.⁵ Moreover, such familiarity gained through the values and dispositions within the immediacy of home is challenged by interaction with external structures such as education and the workplace.⁶ Certainly, this relationship with a somewhat fixed and certain understanding of class ideals was shared by many of those participating in the study. Through specific references to home, family and community their subjective positioning reflects the idea that class enables ‘people to understand their daily life and their own place in society’.⁷ In his evaluation of working-class life, Richard

² Griggs, Clive. “The Rise, Fall and Rise again of Selective Secondary Education” in *The Social Contexts of Schooling* ed. Cole, M. (Falmer Press, East Sussex, 1989)

³ Bunkle, Phillida. “The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism”, p. 792. See also Hill, D & Mike Cole ed. *Schooling and Equality: fact, concept and policy* (Kegan & Page, 2001)

⁴ Spender, D. & E. Sarah, ed. *Learning to Lose: Sexism in Education* (1980) Heron, Liz. ed. *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties* (1985) Steedman, Carolyn. *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986) Kuhn, Annette. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (2002) Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education* (2000)

⁵ Colls, Robert. “When we lived in communities”, p. 286

⁶ Jones, Ben *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth Century England: Community, identity and social memory* (Manchester University Press, 2012) p. 65

⁷ Todd, Selina. “Class, experience and Britain’s twentieth century”, *Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (2014): pp. 489-508, p. 493

Hoggart identified that the privately held ideals of home and family were further reinforced by the opening of a front door and the influence of the very immediate wider social community.⁸ In this respect, the existence of norms and values were reinforced through a locally shared understanding.

The effects of class differentiation can bring lasting psychological challenges which, for Beverley Skeggs, are likened to a form of inscription, that 'cuts or scars bodies in the process of assembling them into composite forms [...] and habitual modes of behaviour'.⁹ Such visceral descriptions of classed identification reflect the feelings of those perceived to be judged or marked as different and, for some in this study, were symbolized through perceived discrepancies of school uniform. In her understanding of marker as something which determines feelings of superiority over inferiority, or judgement against shame, Steph Lawler argues that class identity is reinforced by a compulsive form of motivation which is rooted at the core of each individual.¹⁰ Women interviewed for this study often spoke about class difference without any prompting, evidencing how their sense of disparity was shaped by origin and familial experiences. As Ben Jones argues, when faced with such social differentiation, capitulation was impossible and only 'reinforced the sense of working-class pride'.¹¹ Certainly, as is seen later in the chapter, for girls like Peg, originating from a working class suburb of South Wales, there remained a steadfast loyalty to the values of both her home and community, despite her own personal understanding of the experiences of difference.

⁸ Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 45

⁹ Skeggs, Beverley. *Class, Self, Culture* (Routledge, 2004) p. 23

¹⁰ Lawler, Steph. "Getting out and Getting away: Women's narratives of Social Mobility", *Feminist Review*, Autumn, Vol. 63, No.1 (1999): pp. 3-34, p. 5

¹¹ Jones, Ben. *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth Century England*, p. 67.

Postwar recovery was an opportunity to reinforce the natural roles of gendered differentiation, something which influenced all aspects of a women's life, from their school curriculum to the primacy of their adult roles as wives and mothers.¹² Through the introduction of the welfare state, the need for homemaking itself was seen as an appropriate career for women, encouraged as they were by William Beveridge to move back into their homes and 'ensure the continuation of the human race'.¹³ Emphasis was placed firmly on the importance of the mother, as the conduit of nurture and family values. Spencer charts the emergence of a 'career pattern' in the 1950s, where it was assumed that women would cease work after marriage, only to restart work part-time when the children were older.¹⁵ Social and cultural historian Joanna Bourke explains how the intersecting effects of gender and class manifested in the perceived commitment to the duties of housewifery and motherhood.¹⁶ Such high standards of domesticity evidenced ideas of respectability that differentiated the layers of women in the working-classes, where cleanliness and discipline signified a committed approach.

Using life history narratives, this chapter examines the educational experiences of its subjects through the dual lens of class and gender to better understand the nuanced effect of such macro structures on the individual and also their eventual contribution to identity constructs. This study does not argue the rights or wrongs of

¹² Summerfield, P. "Women in Britain since 1945: companionate marriage and the double burden", in *Understanding Post-War British Society*, Obelkevich, J. & P. Catterall, eds. (Routledge, 1994) p. 54

¹³ Social Insurance and Allied Services (Beveridge Report, 1942) p. 53 in, Lewis, Jane. *Women in Britain since 1945*, p. 21

¹⁵ Spencer, Stephanie "Women's dilemmas in postwar Britain: career stories for adolescent girls in the 1950s" *History of Education*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2000): pp. 329-342.

¹⁶ Bourke, J. *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960*. (Routledge, 1994)

selective educational policies from the postwar period but seeks instead to present the challenges faced by young girls, whose lives were bound by the ubiquitous gendered ideals and the class structures in which they were situated. In the autobiographical writing of her own working-class childhood, Carolyn Steedman considers how the interconnecting structures of class and gender are shaped by the 'social circumstance' in which they exist.¹⁷ Kimberle Crenshaw's theoretical understanding of intersectionality argues that through the varying overlapping forms of social identity, be it class, gender, race or ethnicity, combine to create 'multiple versions of identity on which a social world is constructed'.¹⁸ Indeed, as this chapter will demonstrate, subjective understanding of aspiration and opportunity can be understood very differently both between and within the middle and working classes. Based on the cultural scripts which shaped the fifteen life history narratives used for this study, however, it was beneficial to explore separately the two distinct themes of class and gender, whilst acknowledging their connectedness within the women's experiences.¹⁹

Divided into two sections, this chapter considers the omnipresent influence of class and gender evident in the life history narratives to better understand how family and community negotiated wider social structures with regards to opportunity and aspiration for girls in adolescence. Focusing on three dominant themes in relation to class differentiation, that of place, visibility and mentalities, this chapter questions the effect of local community structure as a vehicle to shape or inform a girl's sense of

¹⁷ Steedman, Carolyn. *Landscape for a good woman*, p7.

¹⁸ Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review* Vol. 43, No. 6 (July 1991): pp. 1241-1300, p. 1244

¹⁹ ed. The Personal Narratives Group, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989) p. 5

place. Life history narratives express how class awareness can infiltrate the subjective understanding of the changing school environments and how the reactions of others in relation to perceived visible differences created psychosocial barriers preventing any possible social cohesion. In the second half of the chapter the focus moves to the effects of gender and asks how ideological understanding of gendered roles influenced not only the educational experience but, crucially, the views of others in relation to aspiration and opportunity. This section closes with an exploration into the challenges raised by patriarchal structures within the home to better understand the late life effects of gendered positionality on personal identity.

Stories of Class – place, visibility and mentalities

A sense of place

Peg's life history narrative was shaped by her strong sense of belonging to S*****, the working-class suburb of Cardiff that she grew up in. Despite moving away from home when married, Peg's accent revealed her strong Welsh origins which continue to reinforce her adult identity. Chatting informally ahead of our recorded conversation, Peg explained how, though now living in Essex, 'I'm Welsh... all of my life'.²⁰ This theme of lasting connectivity was woven through Peg's life history, as she described how both origin and sense of place were core family characteristics. Peg's father originated from Doncaster:

²⁰ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

'He had a Yorkshire accent and the Yorkshire attitude all his life [...] he maintained his roots, even though he moved.'²¹

This brief evaluation of her father evidenced both his inherent personality and, more importantly, the constant rootedness to his Yorkshire origins. At the beginning of each individual recording, all of the participants were invited to talk about their parents, their families, and childhood homelife. Born in 1948, the youngest of two daughters, Peg grew up in S*****, an industrial suburb on the outskirts of the city:

It was a working-class [...] Guest Keen iron and steel was right behind our house, so you had all the ... grit and all the muck and everything come out, but it was a good, it was a good community, and it still is.²²

Peg's recollection of her home in S***** provided a visual impression of the community alongside the emotional. Irrespective of the physical effects of the local heavy industry with the 'grit and all the muck', Peg's committed assessment of S***** as being 'a good community', demonstrated her lasting respect and appreciation of those she lived among, and the norms and values associated with the Cardiff suburb.²³ Success at the 11+ gave Peg entry to the grammar school. Though wide-ranging analysis into the wider 11+ and secondary school experience is contained

²¹ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

²² PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

²³ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

within the second half of the study, the strong sense of community Peg secured from her home and family in S***** contrasted with the unfamiliar society at the high school. Moreover, Peg's ability to gain any genuine sense of belonging at the secondary school was compromised by the somewhat alien lifestyle and expectations of her new contemporaries which contrasted dramatically with those she was familiar with in S*****:

Living in S***** and going to the sort of school I went to, the S***** accent is a very hard, or Cardiff accent, is a very hard accent [...] We were proud for it, but we always felt different, because once again, we were the only girls from S*****, and it seemed that there were an awful lot of girls from better areas.²⁴

In this extract Peg revealed an identifiable form of class division between herself and the other girls, that of accent. Accepting that all those at the school in Cardiff would have some variant of Welsh accent, Peg acknowledged the common understanding of her own particular dialect as being 'very hard', one which lacked refinement when compared to others.²⁵ Moreover, irrespective of behaviour and adherence to the required school standards, her accent would expose her working-class identity to the predominantly middle-class ears of those around her. Despite an awareness of difference, the level of pride in her community reinforced a lasting sense of loyalty. Ultimately, however, her admission that the majority of pupils came from areas of the

²⁴ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

²⁵ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

city that were identified as 'better', elevated their status and emphasised the perceived difference of those girls originating from the working-class communities.²⁶

Thus far, issues of class in relation to place have highlighted the role of community and the local structures that both influence and define an individual's sense of self. Lillian's experience, however, was a reminder of the differing levels that were perceived to exist within class definitions and how they were understood and reflected within the home. Born in Staffordshire in 1951, Lillian's father was a printer by trade, whilst her mother stayed at home. Acknowledging they were 'traditional' in outlook, with clearly defined gender roles, Lillian spoke of how her mother had firm ideas of where in the Potteries their home should be, avoiding any reputationally undesirable estates.²⁷ Speaking of her primary school friendship group, Lillian explained how class difference was first apparent, and the subsequent effects of both environmental and circumstantial disparity:

LW: But it was the first time I'd mixed with children who *really* didn't have much money.

AL: Okay, so you knew the difference.

LW: Yes. And also, there was, quite a, a stigma coming from the council estate. [...] and there's quite a big council estate sort of, on the other side of the school, um, and as soon as any suspects... 'cos, I remember having *nits*, because my mom was *horrified*, and that was firmly, the blame for that was firmly placed on where it came from.

²⁶ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

²⁷ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

[...] There was no doubt about that. Certainly, nobody in the avenue would have nits, goodness. And she didn't tell anybody either. It was a big embarrassment.²⁸

Though initial perceptions of difference are mentioned in relation to economic inequalities, the effect of that imbalance was widely translated through the ideas of stigma and reputation. Lillian's choice of language reflected a form of recognised wrongdoing originating among those in the council estate. 'Suspects' and 'where it came from', assume a level of guilt relating to behaviours that would not be expected on the 'avenue'.²⁹ In contrast to the unity of Peg's community in S*****, Lillian's narrative revealed socio-economic boundaries which defined accepted norms and values. In this respect, the transference of nits was understood to be more than an undesirable infliction, but rather, it was an attack on the reputational values and commitment to cleanliness of those unfortunate to receive them, but more specifically, their mothers.³⁰ Ben Jones acknowledges the 'gradation of status', as a means to differentiate between the layers within a social class.³¹ Arguably, for Lillian's mother, the belief in such perceived stratification was sufficient evidence on which to disassociate the family from values or behaviours that were not deemed acceptable.

Delineation by class in relation to place was not confined to local identifying factors but, for others, was experienced as a result of poor social understanding and perceptions of pre-defined class boundaries. Equality of opportunity was not

²⁸ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

²⁹ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

³⁰ Bourke, J. *Working Class Cultures*. p.161

³¹ Jones, Ben. *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth Century England*, p. 120

recognized by all children who sat the 11+, indeed for pupils like Gina, circumstances at home prohibited such opportunity, irrespective of the necessary exam outcome.

Born in 1947, the eldest of two children, Gina lived with her mother, younger brother and her mother's 'lover' in a village in Surrey.³² In contrast to the notions of class shared by Peg and Lillian, whose opportunities were understood to be meritocratic, those experienced by Gina at her childhood home in the rural Surrey village were fixed and uncompromising. As with others in the study, I started our conversation by asking Gina to talk about her home and family:

It was terrible [...] when we were six and my brother was about five, there's not much difference between us, my mum left my dad and took us to live with her lover in a caravan [...] and he hated us.³³

Though not specifically focusing on Gina's challenging circumstances, it is important to acknowledge how the move from her home to the caravan, as a sense of place, shaped any understanding of her early childhood in later life.³⁴ Indeed, reference was made to the caravan as the place in which she lived, and the implications of such a situation on several occasions within the narrative. In contrast to the sensory characteristics of Peg's industrial working-class community, the caravan signified an

³² GC, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.. Gina described how, having been a prisoner of war, her father was an alcoholic. As a result of which, her mother suffered from depression.

³³ GC, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

³⁴ In contrast to others in the study, GC's life history narrative was challenged and to some extent compromised by moments of dis-composure as she reflects on the seriousness of their situation, something she has only come to realise after 'ten years of therapy'.

alternative form of home, one which risked identifying Gina and her brother as “others” when compared to behaviours that were understood as conventional:

We lived in a caravan. We had to go across the road to go to the toilet [...] and then, one teacher said, um, something about gypsies, you know, *they* live in caravans. I mean, we weren't gypsies... we were just people that didn't have any housing.³⁵

In this extract Gina sought to both explain the challenges she faced whilst distancing herself from those in society that she did not feel reflected her own situation. Though spoken with little expression, the notable emphasis that ‘gypsies’ lived in caravans reinforced her understanding that their life in the caravan was not conventional through choice, but by circumstance.³⁶ Sociologist Richard Jenkins argues that an understanding of who we are is gained through the early process of socialization and the communication of others.³⁷ Through Gina’s distinction between her own family’s situation and the purposeful life choices of those among the travelling community, it is possible to appreciate that any potential association may have acted in a way that compromised her sense of self. Reconsidering the feminist idea of identity as a web constructed in part through external interaction, such conflicting change in circumstances during her early childhood likely disrupted any sense of surety she

³⁵ GC, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

³⁶ GC, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

³⁷ Jenkins, Richard. “Categorization: identity, Social Process and Epistemology”, *Current Sociology*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2000): pp. 7-25, p. 11 in Jones, B. *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth Century England*, p. 27

had gained when part of a nuclear family. Such feelings of disjuncture were not limited to the internal familial changes but the cultural gap between an individual's home life and that of others at school.

As detailed earlier in this chapter, Peg's narrative revealed the ever present class conflict between her own working-class roots and the society of other girls at the grammar school. Of greater significance, however, is her early awareness that these variations were not caused solely by the economic imbalance but appeared to stem from the contrasting cultural influence of her own family life and home environment:

Maybe the S***** thing, I think, and, that was, that was part of it. We weren't ashamed from what we.... We....it didn't occur to us to be ashamed of where we came from. [...] Everybody there seemed to have... more..., than, I don't know, I don't know, but just.... just never, Susan or I never felt we completely fitted in. [...] Yeah. Just got through it really at the time [...] but looking back, it was uncomfortable, sometimes. I can remember going to one...one of the girl's houses, Heather's house, and her father brought me back to Cardiff, back to S***** in his posh car. I'm thinking, oh, I wish he'd let me catch the bus.

AL: But you remember that?

PL: Oh, I do.... I remember him pulling up and... not feeling ashamed of where I lived... but different because of where they lived and where I lived.³⁸

Peg's life history narrative expressed the very personal challenges both she and her sister Susan faced as a result of the selective educational policy, situated as they were within two different societies. Her reference to the 'S***** thing' suggests the disconnect only became evident in Peg's later life appreciation of the norms and values intrinsic to her home community when contrasted with those at school.³⁹ Attempting to evaluate her own conflicting relationship with the grammar school, Annette Kuhn describes the effect of 'unwritten codes of its social agenda', which were so different to her own.⁴⁰ Repeatedly rejecting any admission of shame felt as a result of such pertinent class inequalities, Peg affirmed both to herself, and to me as the listener, her strength of loyalty to that 'good' community of S*****.⁴¹ Peg's acknowledgement of difference was reinforced through the contrasting home environments; 'where they lived and where I lived' indicated how ideas of place can affect a person's ability to feel connected.⁴² Recalling the heightened feelings of discomfort Peg experienced as result of such unfamiliar environment, only served to illustrate the imbalance perceived to exist between her own home and that of her friend.

³⁸ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

³⁹ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁴⁰ Kuhn, Annette *Family Secrets*, p. 105

⁴¹ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁴² PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

Sociological studies in the 1950s by Elizabeth Bott into the family and social networks of ordinary families found that whilst people did not experience any immediate sense of belonging to specific class groups, the 'direct experience of distinctions of power and prestige [became evident] among colleagues, schools and in their relationships with friends.'⁴³ In this respect, a person's identity was formed both in relation to others and to external forces. Though Peg was content and secure within her home and family community of S*****, as her two worlds came together, she realised the feelings of discomfort when bringing those whose lives appeared to be very different into her own home space.

Given the sensitive nature of such personal recollections, it is important to consider the 'storytelling devices' that reinforced, yet at times disrupted, the experiences Peg chose to share.⁴⁴ Though clearly loyal to her home in S***** and determined to maintain that strong emotional connection, Peg was compelled to reaffirm how she never felt any sense of shame about her origins. Indeed, such was the pace of delivery that this repeated message seemed to interrupt the recollection of that specific car journey home. In the move from 'him pulling up... and not feeling ashamed', there was a distinct change of tone as the narrative altered from one of recollection to that of affirmation.⁴⁵ On this occasion it seemed of greater importance for Peg to reinforce her loyalty to her home, than to re-experience any discomfort she felt from the car journey. In her exploration into the sense of self within life history narratives, oral historian Lynn Abrams argues that in the process of conversation, the narrator will seek to 'fashion an identity', one that both supports

⁴³ Bott, E. *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families* (Tavistock Publications, 1968) p. 163

⁴⁴ Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 151

⁴⁵ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

and reinforces the information that they choose to share.⁴⁶ In this respect, it is possible to understand how Peg's sense of self was constructed around her family and home in S*****. Irrespective of the differences she encountered through her time at the high school, the strength of emotional rootedness to the place of home was too important to compromise.

One further aspect within this discussion of sense of place, is the relationship between class differentiation and aspiration. As Peg's narrative progressed from experiences of home and school to workplace aspirations, it was evident that her 'good' community of S***** had its own unspoken expectations that challenged those of the grammar school. Indeed, traditional ideals of class and gender that shaped the working-class community in Cardiff appeared to curtail any aspiration Peg and her sister Susan may have had from pursuing higher educational opportunities:

And the school was aimed, the whole thing with the school, it was aimed to get people to Cambridge, or.... or Oxford University, or... to good university. And we knew that wasn't gonna happen with us. [...] Because we...
(long sigh and silence for a moment) My sister, of which I only found out the other day. I said, "what did you want to do when you left school?" Erm, she said, "I wanted to be a maths teacher. I wanted to go to college and be a maths teacher." Which I never knew. I mean, she's 76 now, 'em, and no, we just knew that my parents, they'd struggle to

⁴⁶ Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 33

get us through school [...] it wouldn't have happened. It just wouldn't have happened. We were expected to go out to work.

AL: That was an expectation of the time?

PL: Yes, very much so. [...] Yeah, there's a working class... it was a totally working-class community in that area. There were better areas in Cardiff, and a lot of the girls at the school came from the better areas. [...] So yeah, that's, yeah, that that did make a difference.⁴⁷

Omnipresent issues of class in relation to selective educational policy inform the content of Peg's oral narrative. Irrespective of her success at the 11+, securing a place at the top grammar school in the area did not aid the path to higher education. Indeed, Peg expressed a very clear distinction between the aims of the school and the positioning of themselves as a family. Her repetition of 'it wouldn't have happened', both emphasized her own understanding of her parents' perspective and, critically, their non-negotiable stance regarding the end of childhood education with its economic implications, and the necessary move to adult responsibilities and expectations. In this respect, for Peg and her sister Susan, success at the 11+ and entry to the grammar school offered an enhanced educational experience, but one that only led so far. Such class conflict was noted by Elizabeth Roberts who argues that a child's ability to reach their potential was not based solely on intellect or

⁴⁷ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived. Involvement in this study prompted Peg to chat to her sister about her 11+ experience and enquire about her own ambitions when she was sixteen.

aspiration, but also on budget.⁴⁸ The repeated assertion that ‘it wouldn’t have happened’ echoed the views of educationalist, Janet Parr, whose own understanding of working-class expectations required young girls like herself ‘to leave school, get a job and contribute to the family income’.⁴⁹

The structure and delivery of this narrative extract reinforced the conflicting situation for Peg and Susan, that of ‘liberation and constraint’, where a positive 11+ outcome was attended by an obligation to the expectations of their home.⁵⁰ Attempting to explain why a move to higher education would not be deemed appropriate, Peg chose instead to temporarily close the narrative down. ‘Because we...’ was not expanded upon and altered the direction here. Having stressed that university was not an option, Peg stopped ahead of providing any immediate explanation. Aside from any direct relationship with her academic performance, something that will be focused on in the second half of the study, it is likely that this perceived barrier to university was informed by contemporary class and gender ideals which instilled an obligation to paid employment. Repetition of ‘better’, in relation to the origins of other girls at the school, differentiated her own ‘good’ community of S***** from those she had become aware of. Recalling how, in an earlier narrative extract, S***** was defined as a ‘good’ place, when contrasted alongside the ‘better’ areas of the city, it is possible to appreciate the subjective re-evaluation of better when compared to good. Arguably, these differing descriptions of place separate those perceived by Peg to be economically or aesthetically privileged, from the familiar, safe and cohesive community in which she grew up.

⁴⁸ Roberts, Elizabeth. *Women and Families*, p. 173

⁴⁹ Parr, J. “Women, Education and Class: The relationship between class background and research” in, *Class Matters: ‘Working-Class’ Women’s Perspectives on Social Class* ed. Mahony, Pat & Christine Zmroczek, (Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1997) p. 31

⁵⁰ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 41

Visibility and class

Moving away from conflicting notions of class that originated from within the home and community, attention now turns to the perceptions of class that are stimulated by visible differentiation such as school uniform. Unlike the structural implications of selective education, the conspicuous effects of class inequality instil an indelible impression on those who are perceived to be different. Narrative extracts featured within this theme of visibility, present emotional responses that were either positively encouraging or negatively damaging. In this respect, the subjective understanding of visible differences experienced in adolescence, as secured through qualitative research, demonstrates an alternative perspective to the lasting consequence of stratified policy.

In contrast to the secondary modern experience, within the popular discourse on the 11+ and selection for grammar school emphasis is placed on the non-negotiable demands of school uniform and its role in securing identity and loyalty to the institution.⁵¹ Applying Morwenna Griffith's notion of identity as a fluid construction, something that is 'not in circumstances of our own choosing', it is possible to understand how any visible discrepancies would be distinguishable, further identifying those who were not seen to conform.⁵² Several participants spoke of their uniform, though mainly as a way of addressing parental responsibility; the father who worked to fund, and the mother whose role was to organise and manage.⁵³ For

⁵¹ Evans, Mary. *A Good School: Life at a girl's grammar school in the 1950s* (The Women's Press, 1991)

⁵² Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self*, p. 141

⁵³ This was the case for both PL and LW

Helena, Peg and Maggie, recollections of the uniform were not solely confined to the necessary husbandry within the home but instead revealed how experiences from some sixty plus years ago continue to inform their sense of self. Born in West Yorkshire in 1953, Helena was the eldest of four children. Educational opportunity and academic ability were of primary importance in the home, as both parents were teachers. Helena spoke of the necessary preparations for her move to secondary school:

The other significant thing I remember was going to buy the uniform. We had to go to a shop in Bradford - Brown Muff's which was a, you know, quite a posh shop really [...] I was aware that it was expensive. I don't know if that was a deliberate thing, but I was. [...] And you needed a lot of stuff you know - gymslips and blazers. Hats and all. Lisle stockings we had to wear and then all the PE kit, plimsoles, indoor shoes and outdoor shoes. A lot of stuff. It was a big thing getting it and then ... that must have been a Saturday because the next day we went to my maternal grandparents and the uniform came and I had to try it all on for them (*laughter*), so I remember that. That was a big thing.⁵⁴

This life history extract provided more than just the necessary components in a well-documented grammar school experience, as the lasting significance of such a

⁵⁴ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

moment was shared with clarity and meaning. For the eleven-year-old Helena, this was not the usual type of shopping trip, but rather one which focused solely on her needs and her preparedness for secondary education. Indeed, as Helena acknowledged, the dedicated outing to a specific store in Bradford, the extensive list and type of clothing and, of course, the significant economic investment, 'that was a big thing'.⁵⁵ Itemised rather than described, the very specific standard of dress that was required reinforced the notion of the grammar school identity, 'as different [...] a cut above the rest'.⁵⁶

Though equality of opportunity aimed to offer a meritocratic entrance to the grammar school system, for those girls from working-class families, considerations regarding school uniform provision had serious implications regarding cost and household management. Born in 1947, the eldest of five children, Maggie's father was a bricklayer in a coastal town in East Lancashire and her mum stayed at home. In speaking of the implications of her place at the grammar school, Maggie recalled the efforts made by her father to secure additional funding for the uniform:

My dad, as I say he was a bricklayer... got this "foreigner", as he... you know, he worked Monday to Friday but if he could find a job at weekends. In the local [works] they had this big furnace, and it needed re-doing all inside. And it was horrendous. [...] Absolutely... terrible. I didn't realize he was doing it to pay for my uniform, and that's what he

⁵⁵ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁵⁶ Kuhn, Annette. *Family Secrets*, p. 109

did. Two or three weekends of that and he'd bought my uniform.⁵⁷

This narrative extract reveals the unacknowledged effort, and the unspoken pressures placed on working-class parents to facilitate their child's access to a grammar school education. Maggie's use of the term 'foreigner' as a means to describe this supplementary income, illustrated how families negotiated the unexpected need for increased funds by taking on additional and less desirable work.⁵⁸ Indeed, in this instance, the work within the furnace was both hard and dangerous. Her closing remark reflected a sense of gratitude, not only for what he had undertaken, but for his commitment to her school education. As with Helena, Maggie too was able to recall both the required shopping list and the need to show other close relations:

And then suddenly I had to have indoor shoes and outdoor shoes - lace ups for outdoors and then a shoe with a bar strap for indoors 'cos "you couldn't be walking round the school in your dirty shoes, you day girls", could you? [...] Then two jum... no blouses, er shirts, a tie, a skirt, a cardigan. PE shirt and shorts, knee length socks, hat, blazer in the summer, green gaberdine in the winter. That was it. [...] And aunty Annie coming and mum

⁵⁷ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁸ The term 'foreigner' was a slang word used for unofficial work, or work that was not part of the normal occupation.

saying, “Put your uniform on for aunty Annie”. (*quiet laughter*)⁵⁹

It is notable that both Helena and Maggie could itemise each different thing on the list from memory and their associated style details, be it ‘shoes with a bar strap’, or ‘Lisle’ stockings.⁶⁰

For girls like Maggie and Helena, the move from primary to selective education provided an opportunity to present their progression to the new and higher strata. Educational sociologist Jacky Brine argues that given the identity of the grammar schoolgirls was one of respectability, the uniform became ‘an expression of class movement’.⁶¹ Indeed, for Annette Kuhn, the visible effects of such identifiable clothing, provided proof that ‘as an eleven year old, [she] was cleverer, a cut above the rest’.⁶² Arguably, by showing aunty Annie her new uniform, Maggie was demonstrating her own version of class mobility and also that of her family.

In contrast to the unwavering adherence to the specified list described by Helena and Maggie, the same demands of Peg’s family warranted greater husbandry on behalf of her mother, ensuring only those items that could not be made at home were purchased. Describing the damaging effect of wearing handmade clothes at school, Peg told of the very visible distinction she experienced when compared to the uniformity of others:

⁵⁹ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶⁰ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶¹ Brine, Jackie. “Tales of 50-somethings: selective schooling, gender and class”, *Gender and Education*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2006): pp. 431-446, p. 437.

⁶² Kuhn, Annette, *Family Secrets*, p. 109

That was awful, having homemade stuff [...] mmm... not jumpers from the school shop [...] made you different'.⁶³

For Peg, the need to wear handmade jumpers came from her mother's efforts to manage the household budget, something that was non-negotiable. Marked by such 'visual signifiers' in terms of uniform type, Peg's ability to interact with peers was compromised by the social pressures encountered as a result of such nuanced class distinctions, a common feature in many grammar school recollections.⁶⁴ Peg's experience of 'different' echoes those of Jane Thompson whose autobiographical writing on women's classed-based experience of education recalled her own adolescent insecurities from a different shade of navy blue wool.⁶⁵ Gender historian Sally Alexander considers the stigmatising effect of inadequacy, when, marked by difference, you are seen by others as not quite meeting the standards expected.⁶⁶ Arguably, the burden of difference links back to Peg's earlier acknowledgement that the girls from 'better areas [seemed] to have... more'.⁶⁷ Though unable to verbalise what the 'more' signified, it is possible to understand how any insecurity felt through inappropriate standards of uniform would reinforce any supposed class weakness.⁶⁸ Sociologist Steph Lawler argues that the power struggles that are perceived to exist between working-class children in middle-class environments reflect a 'sense of lack'

⁶³ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁶⁴ Brine, Jackie. "Tales of 50-somethings", p. 436

⁶⁵ Jackson, Brian & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, p. 111. Thompson, Jane. 'Women, Class and Education', p. 20

⁶⁶ Alexander, Sally. *Becoming a Woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (Virago, 1994) p. 218

⁶⁷ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁶⁸ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

which is centred, not on money, but knowledge.⁶⁹ In this instance, being visually different accentuated any comprehension others may have of her situation in relation to their own, a factor that is explored in further detail later in the study.

Close listening to Peg's account revealed an emphatic appraisal of the conflict she experienced when the ostensibly mundane reliance on handmade clothing became unacceptable, creating a position of class differentiation between home and school life. This brief extract weighed heavy with the lasting emotion. In an effort to balance the trivial nature of such difference with the perceived stigma she experienced, the narrative was disrupted by introspection and moments of hesitation. Recalling the distress caused by the visible social difference, Peg appeared to relive the feelings of isolation she had experienced as a schoolgirl. I would argue that this lasting emotional response resulted from the conflicting legacy of the cardigan, as an item of homemade clothing was shamed by others who followed the uniform expectations. For Peg, the clarity of such memories was accompanied by the lasting sensitivities she felt from such classroom humiliation.

Aspects of visibility have, so far, focused on the need for conformity, meeting a level of expectation required for attendance at the grammar school. Less explicit, however, were the visible ideas of class included in the narrative that spoke of perceptions of aspirational inclusion rather than prescribed expectations. Born in 1941, Anna grew up an only child and lived in Witham, Essex. In contrast to those examples of class visibility shared within the earlier narratives, for Anna, the key driver to class awareness was aspiration. I asked Anna if she knew what class her parents would identify themselves as:

⁶⁹ Lawler, Steph. *'Mothering the Self'*, p. 110

My mother was very aspirational, but she didn't have, you know, she didn't have that much money. My father neither. But they had a way of looking very respectable.⁷⁰

Anna's explanation of class positioning illustrated her parents' recognised ability to alter their social status from one of economic weakness to one that presented an air of respectability. In this respect, regardless of any financial imbalance, they were able to create a feeling of acceptance and inclusivity among those whose societal values they aspired. Interestingly, this awareness of their ability to look 'respectable' hints at a possible aesthetic transformation necessary when mixing in alternative social circles.⁷¹ Moreover, without this aspirational motivation, the family risked association with those who were perceived to be less desirable. Anna later explained how this experience of visible disparity was replicated in her own adult life. When married to her first husband, Anna accepted that though they too had little money, they had a way of concealing any perceived inadequacies to secure acceptance:

We were never that rich, you know. But again, we were a bit like my parents. We seem to mix with everybody, but we were the, we were the Cinderella of the outfit.⁷²

As with the description of her parent's situation, Anna chose a highly visual and characteristic representation of class to identify her position in relation to those

⁷⁰ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷¹ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷² APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

around her. Through both narrative extracts, Anna's understanding of respectability reflected that of sociologist Beverley Skeggs, in that respectability was the apparent property of others but only the concern of those keen to be associated with it.⁷³ In contrast to those earlier narratives by Peg and Lillian who spoke of the stigmatizing effects of visual perceptions of class, Anna made no reference to experiencing such feelings. Indeed, for Anna, the visible presence of class disparity was seen to be something that, with the appropriate mindset, you could actively distance yourself from. Given the nature of this content and the possible effects of such differentiation, there was no evidence of anguish or injustice in the narrative orality. Indeed, Anna's explanation rationalised her family's situation whilst, simultaneously, presenting a deeper understanding of her own sense of self. Ideas of respectability return later in the study when, faced with the implications of a failed 11+, Anna's later-life perspective compared her own supposed intellect with others in her social circle.

Mentalities of class

In this final section the focus shifts from experiences of class through a sense of place or visible disparity to how class was conveyed by behaviour and the understanding gained by the socio-psychological influences that existed within the home and family. Though class mentalities are perceived through familial origin, they are not defined by prescribed barriers, but rather through a way of thinking as a result of power dynamics. For sociologist Elizabeth Bott, 'the ingredients or raw materials of class ideology are secured, not by socio-economic status, but through

⁷³ Skeggs, Beverley. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (Sage, 1997) p. 11

the primary social experiences'.⁷⁴ What is considered to be an appropriate opportunity and natural course for some, would be perceived by others as unattainable. This section examines the influence of parental aspirations to better understand how the words and behaviours of those whose role was to support and nurture were informed by society and the local community. Given that this study centres on the impact of the 11+ on an individual's identity, awareness of how education was socially prioritized and situated within the family is a contributing factor in the overall experience. Close attention is paid to four of the participants, Helena, Maggie, Lillian and Peg, whose narrations expressed awareness of, or demonstrated behaviour, that originated either through parental occupation, family aspiration or social interaction.

For Helena, class mentality originated from the omnipresent influence of the teaching profession within her life, not only as a child but as a working woman and as a wife. When asked at the start of our conversation to tell me about her parents, Helena replied:

Mum and Dad? Ok, Mum and Dad were both teachers.⁷⁵

Whilst this alluded to the likely prominence of education within the family home, Helena's opening remark unwittingly provided the dominant cultural script through which her narrative was constructed. Returning to the assertion by Beverly Skeggs that class differentiation was identified by a form of inscription, in the case of Helena

⁷⁴ Bott, E. *Family and Social Network*, p. 163

⁷⁵ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

and her family, that particular motif was forged through education.⁷⁶ Indeed, affirming their chosen vocation as a means of “telling me about” them suggested Helena’s parents’ shared commitment to the profession was also a core influence on her sense of self. Moreover, acknowledging this relationship with education underpins the level of attention within the family that was placed on academic attainment, something that is explored later in the study. Where proven intellect and reputational surety was the cultural script which shaped Helena’s life history, for Maggie it was the love of her family, and the certainty gained from a strong Catholic faith.

Born into a working-class family, Maggie’s father Jimmy was a bricklayer by trade, though as Maggie explained, there was more to the man than just his job. Her father was a well-read man, ‘he never went anywhere without a book in his pocket’.⁷⁷ Maggie remembered with much pride the views her father held regarding the opportunities made possible by the changing educational policies, and he believed the introduction of the Butler Act to be a good thing. Maggie recalled her father’s understanding:

“This is a perfect opportunity for any child of average intelligence to be able to get a decent education [...] and Maggie is average intelligence [...] well let’s see what happens”.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Skeggs, Beverley. *Class, Self, Culture*, p.12

⁷⁷ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷⁸ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

Voicing her father's positivity on the equality of opportunity, it is possible to understand how working-class fathers viewed the meritocratic intention as something that their young families should aspire towards. Given the level of the uncertainty experienced before and during the Second World War, it is possible to see how working-class parents became 'willing agents of social change'.⁷⁹ Historian Peter Mandler adopts the sociological term 'psychic mobility' to explain the agency of working-class families with regards to their own social mobility.⁸⁰ In this respect, familial aspiration and a mindset that was open to the new educational opportunities could enable those from working-class origins to rise above their inherited class position. Such psychological shift in attitude obscured any possible class boundary that may have been understood to pre-determine the interests or aspirations of Maggie's father and that of his family. Maggie spoke of her father's love of reading and his enthusiasm that this should be a shared activity:

I liked anything to do with reading you know. [...] but I liked it because my dad read poetry and he'd say, "Here come and read this." "Read this out", like... Hilaire Belloc and G K Chesterton [...] or "Read this passage out in this book" and I never thought... "Don't you think that's good?" "Yes dad." (laughs). Well, there was erm... when I was four apparently, he taught me this poem, *The Birds*, and I

⁷⁹ Todd, Selina. & Hilary Young, "Baby-Boomers to 'Beanstalkers': The making of the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain", *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2015): pp. 451-467, p. 452. For more information on the aspirations of working-class parents, see: Abrams, Lynn. *Feminist Lives: Women, Feelings & The Self in Post-War Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2023)

⁸⁰ Gambetta, D. *Were They Pushed or Did They Jump?* (Cambridge University Press, 1987) in *The Crisis of Meritocracy*, Mandler, P. p. 41

trotted it out for friends [...] not thinking anything about it.

“Maggie, say that poem, *The Birds* by Hilaire Belloc.” [...]

And I’d be four years old saying it and wouldn’t think

anything about it [...] but when you look back later you

think, wow [...] bricklayer’s daughter!⁸¹

In her examination of family stories, Leonore Davidoff argues that in the very act of sharing experiences with others it becomes possible to understand both the make-up of familial relationships and the ‘aspects of their past lives’ that they wish to emphasize.⁸² In this life history narrative, Maggie details not only her father’s awareness of such poetry and prose but also the intense pleasure he gained from having educated his own daughter to appreciate it alongside him. In contrast to the experiences of Margaret Forster whose love of reading was seen as a ‘weapon’ within the home, something with which to ‘absent’ herself from family life, for Maggie, it was a symbol of family unity.⁸³ Moreover, when telling this story, Maggie also recited *The Birds*, indicating perhaps that the recollection itself would have been incomplete if she had not fulfilled her task of reciting.⁸⁴

⁸¹ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived..

⁸² Davidoff, L., M. Doolittle, J. Fink, K. Holden, eds. *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (Longman, 1999) p. 14

⁸³ Forster, Margaret. *Hidden Lives: A Family Memoir* (London, Penguin, 1996) p. 183

⁸⁴ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.. The poem has been included within the footnotes as it was recited in full. Included in the narrative to evidence her father’s love of reading, there was a performance element to the recitation as if she was still following his instructions.

“When Jesus Christ was four years old, the angels brought him toys of gold. Which no man ever had bought or sold. And yet with these he would not play but made him small fowl out of clay. And blessed them till they flew away. To creasti Domine. Jesus Christ our child so wise, bless mine hands and, something mine eyes, still mine eyes or something. And bring my soul to Paradise.”

Maggie's sense of self can be seen to alternate within this extract, from the early interaction with her father as a young child, to the later-life reflexive understanding of her father's cultural appreciation. Arguably, the lasting admiration Maggie has for her father's ability to challenge the status quo, irrespective of his working-class identity, reflected a genuine sense of pride in his inclusive attitude to life's opportunities. Such apparent disassociation with stratified class behaviour was antithetical to Gina whose narrative of childhood centred on circumstance and omni-present class-based assumptions. In talking about the 11+ as a means of selection and the possibility of the grammar school, Gina shared her understanding of the process:

GC: I don't know if I really wanted to go there, but 'cause I would have straightway, thought of it as posh.

AL: And that would have excluded you?

GC: Yes. So, absolutely would [...] That's how I would have felt.

AL: And the 11+?

GC: Oh no [...] That was, that was for posh people. [...]

You know, the only people that passed were the people who... know that were posh.⁸⁵

Over sixty years have passed since Gina was at the point of moving from primary to secondary school. Whilst much will have informed her point of view in that time, it is possible to consider how, given her childhood situation, the grammar school may not

⁸⁵ GC, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

have been understood as an opportunity that was relevant to her.⁸⁶ What is interesting, however, is that Gina's remarks are based only on her own subjective assumptions, not through the words of family or teachers, as others in the study have shown. Indeed, stating 'I would have straightaway thought of it as posh', affirms that her current understanding of the selective opportunities has remained unaltered over time. Moreover, having retained such firm opinions, unlike those of Anna, Sandy and Jane whose 11+ experiences follow later in the study, it is likely that Gina felt no need to dwell on the exam outcome as it held little relevance for her.

Experiences of class mentalities within Maggie's narrative were not confined to the egalitarian possibilities for the individual but revealed too an awareness of the apparent equity of all girls in the school community, irrespective of family status.⁸⁷ Maggie acknowledged the different families whose daughters attended the school, and I was keen to hear if she recalled experiencing variations in opportunity as a result of perceived status between those who boarded and day girls:

No, I didn't feel that I had any less status. It's just that they did different things cos they stayed there all the time [...]
 You know, and they had to get... cos, I was in the hockey team. And to get in the hockey team you had to be good at hockey it wasn't that "oh you're a boarder, you're in", you know, so it was a level playing field.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Gina failed the 11+ and attended the Secondary Modern in the nearby town of Dorking. More information can be found within Appendix I, Participant Biographies.

⁸⁷ Maggie's grammar school was a boarding school. More information can be found within Appendix I, Participant Biographies.

⁸⁸ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

Though more detail regarding Maggie's school experience follows throughout the study, it is important to acknowledge the apparent ease with which this transition from primary to secondary grammar occurred. Indeed, in situating herself alongside the wider expectations of girls at the school, Maggie demonstrated her own positionality and how participation was based on measured ability rather than an assumed privilege. Moreover, through her inclusion within the school hockey team Maggie would likely have been part of a readymade cohort of friends, something which reinforced her sense of belonging and identity within the school community. Returning to her father's positive response to selective education policy, it is possible to see how such meritocratic assumptions translated to Maggie's own experience of school. Life history narratives are not a catalogue of memorable personal moments, but rather a dual perspective of life's past experiences and the associated meaning derived from the dominant culture and the nuanced ideals of family and community.⁸⁹ This familial assurance, a characteristic woven throughout her narrative continued to resonate with Maggie and inform her sense of self.

For Lillian, class mentality was shaped by the rigours of working-class respectability that defined an ordered home and a disciplined routine. These exacting standards differentiated her own home life from those of her friends. As an only child, Lillian explained how she never felt short of company and could make friends with apparent ease:

Yes, I never had any problems with other children. Um.

And although I was only child, or maybe because I was

⁸⁹ Anderson, Kathryn. & Dana Jack, "Learning to Listen", p. 11

only child, I found it reasonably easy to... um, rub along with people and to find somebody I could sit with. And, in fact, the person who my mum thought gave me nits was the one I, I liked best. [...] She was from the, the “other” council estate [...] um, yeah and I really liked her, and I went to her house quite a lot and she had a whole crew of brothers and sisters and various random relationships. But I really liked it there because it's a really comfortable home, there was lots of mess and lots of noise. And, you know, you didn't have to... *be perfect*.

AL: So, it was very different from your home?

Yes, yes, yes. I was I, I was *allowed*... one toy out when I was smaller, one toy out, at any, one time and if I'd finished playing with that, I had to put that toy away and then get the next one.

AL: And this was completely different?

Yes, this was, this is absolute chaos. And I loved it, yeah.⁹⁰

Contrasting behaviours between her own life and that of her friend evidenced both the ideological distance between these two ‘working-class’ families, and crucially, the associated emotional effects of such antithetical expectations. As an only child

⁹⁰ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

Lillian did go on to explain that this was not a critique of her family, indeed, ‘if my home had been chaos, I perhaps would have loved the *order* of somebody else's home’.

myself, I appreciated hearing such nuanced experiences of discipline versus spontaneity that best illustrated the apparent contrasts in homelife. Coming from a family that is centred around one child, the lives of those with many to consider appear more relaxed in their attitude. Indeed, through this understanding of clutter, Lillian's narrative depicted the contrasting behaviours acceptable within the two families. Lillian's use of language and tone of voice altered when she told this story, placing notable emphasis on the differing behaviours described by '*perfect*' and '*allowed*'.

As previously discussed, Peg spoke both of her life in the Cardiff suburb of S*****, and her awareness of class through the interaction with others at the high school. In the latter half of our conversation Peg disclosed a further insecurity she experienced, one that related directly her own identity, that of her family name:

I was Peg G**. The surname was G**, always wished I'd had a better, a longer name that would... [...] Isn't that silly? I was Peg G**, not Peg G**, I wanted to be... [...] 'Cause Peg G** always sounded so awful, (*laughs*) daft, isn't it? Looking.... looking back on it, didn't hurt me at the time, but even so now, just saying "Peg G**" sounds dreadful.⁹¹

Here, Peg explained how even the length of her name and, specifically, the sound of such a shortened form both identified and further weakened her sense of self. Amidst

⁹¹ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

the school community where those around her 'seemed to have... more', her diminutive surname highlighted Peg's feelings of inadequacy, and exacerbated her inability to belong, something that is explored later in the study.⁹² Arguably, as this sensitivity appeared to stem from the brevity of her name, however incongruous, this psychological "attack" on her identity was not within her control. When considering the idea of class mentalities, at the heart of this admission lay the concern that her name, and therefore she herself, were insufficient when among those who she perceived to have both better and more.

Examining the sense of place, the evident visibility and mentalities of class enabled narrators to better situate their experiences of difference in relation to their school, their friendship group and to the community in which they grew up. These life history narratives show how lives are informed by the early awareness of class disparity and have the power to influence long-term perceptions of aspiration and opportunity.

Stories of Gender

Ideological understanding

In this section, life history narratives are used to understand how prominent gender ideals determined potential opportunities or defined the expected pathways assumed to be best suited to young women in postwar Britain.

⁹² PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

Born in Suffolk in 1944, the eldest of two daughters, Jane's adolescence was shaped both by her mother's deteriorating health condition and her father's commitment to the family aspirations. Jane's father was the general manager of a local builders' merchants, and her mother was a teacher. (This occupational influence becomes apparent in the next chapter). Jane spoke openly of her mother's situation and the impact on herself as the eldest child:

By the time I was ten or eleven, she was not in good health, and ... it was a question of (*huge sigh*) ... going home and doing things. Cathy, my sister was six years younger than me. [...] And gradually I didn't take over the household by any means, but I did probably quite a few more things than ... I used to make the Christmas cake ... we had a huge garden, and the fruit needed bottling, and mother would sit there and give her instructions out, and I did it, um ... and gradually she became more and more ... I think possibly there was an element of mental illness in it, with the benefit of hindsight ... but, um, by the time I was doing "O" levels, because it was "O" levels then, um, she was spending an awful lot of time in bed. [...] Um, lady up the road used to come and help out a little bit.⁹³

⁹³ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

While this extract recalled her mother's involvement and apparent determination that her daughter should be taught the skills necessary for a useful adult life, it also detailed the additional workload placed on Jane as her mother became less able. Moreover, Jane's oral narrative revealed important aspects of the domestic calendar on which their rural life was founded. Having shared the early experiences through her teenage self, the perspective switched as Jane considered her own later-life analysis of her mother's condition. Early in the conversation, Jane spoke of her childhood interest in becoming a nurse and her father's determination that she should achieve this:

Apparently, at the age of three, I told the assembled family I was going to be a nurse. And that idea stuck with Father, and he fought tooth and nail for me to be able to do so, which I did. [...] So, I have a great "thank you" to him for that. Mother died about three weeks after I started my nurse training.⁹⁴

From the 1930s onwards and certainly with the introduction of the National Health Service, nursing, alongside teaching, was presented as a desirable occupational choice for young girls.⁹⁵ Notwithstanding their respected role in the workplace, both careers could be seen to facilitate the high-profile demands for women as effective

⁹⁴ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁹⁵ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, pp. 47-48

citizens in the reconstruction of postwar Britain.⁹⁶ Stephanie Spencer argues that careers in nursing and teaching were seen to offer a valuable training investment, better enabling those who wished to return to work after having children to re-join the workplace.⁹⁷ The potential of such gendered opportunity was realised by many secondary modern schools, including Jane's school which were keen to offer effective vocational training that would both broaden the career choices for their girls and enhance their reputation when situated alongside the grammar school elite, Jane described how the Head teacher:

...set up this pre nursing course attached to the West Suffolk Hospital. And we [...] did a preliminary training scheme, which was basically classroom based, um, anatomy physiology, even in those days, a little bit of psychology, believe it or not.⁹⁸

Though still very much part of the secondary modern system, such in-house training opportunities were not in isolation, but through a partnership with the local NHS hospital. Given their challenging circumstances at home, however, Jane's father's fervent commitment to his daughter's nursing aspiration was not without opposition. Jane recalled how senior members of the family believed, that in the absence of their

⁹⁶ Bowlby, J. *Maternal care and Maternal Health* (1951) Newsom, J.R. *The Education of Girls*. (1948) Newsom, J.R. *Half our Future* (1963) Spence, J.C. 'The Purpose of the Family' (1946) R. Titmuss (1958)

⁹⁷ Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education*, pp. 12-13

⁹⁸ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.. The Headmistress was to feature in the narratives of both Janet and her sister Cathy having played an influential role in their education journey, something that is explored in more detail later in the study.

mother, she would be better placed in the family home supporting her father and younger sister:

And my aunt, who also liked her own way, “That girl should come home and look after you” ... “She shouldn't be ...”, “You and Cathy ...”, “she shouldn't be there”.

Anyway, Father wouldn't have it. So, I did my nurse training

AL: But did you feel that you needed to come home and check on Cathy?

JL: No, I did not. I hate to say it, but I didn't.⁹⁹

Though Jane's recollections share details of her early ambitions and the response from her wider family, it is important to recognize how they are situated around the loss of her mother. Accepting that this would have been a period of huge change and emotional upheaval, the narrative focuses very much on the continuity within the family rather than the change as Jane's father ensured that any disruption was kept to a minimum and that his daughters' lives would not be further upended. Indeed, by her intentional 'thank you', Jane acknowledged her own lasting appreciation for her father's unwavering support.

Jane's adolescent experiences reflect a time when personal ambition through routes the of further or higher education was seen to hamper their expected future domestic careers as wives and mothers. Moreover, universities were an unfamiliar

⁹⁹ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

territory and rarely spoken about within the majority of families in this postwar generation.¹⁰⁰ Feminist historian Carol Dyhouse evidences the limiting assumptions of the Crowther Report (1959) with regards to adolescent girls' curriculum, in which the opportunity for young women to take a long-term approach towards their future career aspirations was overshadowed by conventional gendered interests and a general acceptance of the fragmented work experience.¹⁰¹ Such gendered implications were different for Anna whose social understanding was based around the lesser value of a girl's education in relation to that of a boy.

As detailed earlier in the chapter, Anna was the only daughter of a mother whose primary aspiration rested on the school destination, rather than any resulting qualifications she might achieve. In her own evaluation of their expectations, Anna spoke candidly about how her own school experience had been defined by gender:

And they'd be quite happy for me to leave they, they didn't really see me going on for future education. But I've always thought if I'd have been a boy, my father, being in education, would have pushed me. He pushed a couple of my cousins on quite well.¹⁰²

In contrast to the parents who were clearly identified as 'teachers' by Helena, Anna spoke of her father's 'involve[ment] in education' later in life, having worked as an

¹⁰⁰ Janet Parr, J. "*Women, education and Class*" p.32

¹⁰¹ Dyhouse, Carol. "Towards a 'Feminine', p. 308

¹⁰² APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

electrician after the war.¹⁰³ Interestingly, Anna identified her father not as teacher but as someone with professional involvement in the education sector.¹⁰⁴ This short extract demonstrated the differing experiences for girls in relation to their school careers when compared to those of boys, something that was evidenced among the working-class families in the 1960s study by Hannah Gavron.¹⁰⁵ Though Anna had faced a number of challenges in relation to her 11+, something that is explored later in the study, she nonetheless appreciated that had she have been born a boy, her father may have been in a position to help and support her further.

For Gemma's working-class family in Essex, employment for school leavers was also of paramount importance. However, rather than societal expectations, such intention was fuelled by her mother's own aspirations, for Gemma to achieve a job that would provide a sense of security and, crucially, a recognized status. Born in North London in 1947, the eldest of two daughters, Gemma and her family moved from the postwar London suburbs to the new housing developments in Essex. Gemma spoke at length of her mother's aspirations, both for herself as a young woman and for her family, having secured the opportunity of a modern new home and community some distance away from their north London origins. Such detachment was evidently both psychological as well as social, as Gemma recalled how as a young woman her mother had taken elocution lessons, 'to not speak with an Essex accent'.¹⁰⁶ Though there was little concern among the family with regards to the 11+ exam, opinions about life after school were very clear:

¹⁰³ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived. Anna's father got a job at a local technical college in Essex teaching electrical engineering to students and apprentices.

¹⁰⁴ Anna's father taught electrical engineering to apprentices at a nearby technical college.

¹⁰⁵ Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 86

¹⁰⁶ GW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May 2023. Unarchived

No, they were pleased. Yes, they were pleased, but they didn't ... My mom didn't want us to go to university. She wanted me to get a job in a bank or something like that. Something steady and straightforward. [...] And she just wanted me to be in a well-paying, steady job. Yes, I think she liked me going through school, because obviously that was, you know, prestigious. I'm getting good results. But she didn't see the idea of going to university.¹⁰⁷

Gemma's life history narrative revealed the complex intersections of class and gender. On the one hand the grammar school realized her mother's ambition through her daughter's elite educational opportunity, but like the experiences of Peg and her sister Susan, it was assumed such ability would be utilized in the 'steady' world of work rather than the unfamiliar route of university.¹⁰⁸ This neatly gendered aspiration reflects that of Carolyn Steedman whose own mother believed the grammar school education would provide both 'a good job and a man who would buy you a house.'¹⁰⁹ Historian Eve Worth charts how in the 'long 1960s' the expansion of the welfare state offered many new clerical roles for women in the workplace.¹¹⁰ In this period of social and economic transformation, women's roles were seen to move from that of 'conservative' social respectability, to one which the female self was 'remodelled by

¹⁰⁷ GW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May 2023. Unarchived

¹⁰⁸ GW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May 2023. Unarchived. Contra to her mother's advice regarding a sure and certain income, Gemma applied to Hull University and left her life in Essex to read Drama and Italian, something she later accredited to her time at the grammar school.

¹⁰⁹ Steedman, Carolyn. "Landscape for a Good Woman" in Heron, L. ed. (1985) p. 116

¹¹⁰ Worth, Eve, *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 41. 'Long 1960s' was defined as 1957-1973.

a discourse of opportunity and advancement'.¹¹¹ Arguably, for Gemma, the chance of advancement through university was an alternative route to her mother's safe option, one which resisted the 'mechanism of social reproduction'.¹¹² Despite their perceived cultural or social barriers to higher education, Peg spoke of her parents' pride at the positions their daughters secured through advantageous school experiences:

but my sister worked at the Inland Revenue, so it seemed like a good job. And, you know, my parents were proud that they had two daughters, both in the inland revenue. [...] So, it made them very proud. [...] They were able to say, you know, but I don't think they did say, [...] that their girls gone to grammar school, and both got good office jobs. And that was the generation, that was a generation thing.¹¹³

Remembering that Peg's father was a bricklayer, and that her mother had worked part-time in their local fish and chip shop, their daughters' securing such stable employment as a result of the grammar school education reinforced the intended political ideal of 'opportunity for all', irrespective of origin or situation. Indeed, this pride in achievement was something that could be recognized both at home by her

¹¹¹ Abrams, Lynn. "Liberating the female self: epiphanies, conflict and coherence in the life stories of post-war British women", *Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2014): pp. 14-35. Pp. 16-17

¹¹² O'Connor, H. & John Goodwin, "She Wants to be like Her Mum? Girls' experience of the school-to-work transition in the 1960s". *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2004): pp. 95-118, p. 105.

¹¹³ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

parents and more widely in their social community. However, this retrospective evaluation of the sisters' achievements somewhat challenges their parents' understanding of the grammar school experience, something which is explored later in the study, where failure to secure social belonging in a different environment setting compromised the academic performance.

The final section of this chapter explores the implications of patriarchy in the home and the effects of challenging relationships between daughters and their fathers that were seen to shape adolescence but also inform the female adult identity.

Patriarchy in the home

Born in 1954, the eldest of three children, Hazel grew up in a village in Essex. As the youngest of three brothers, her father concealed his true age in order to undertake his National Service early, working on the minesweepers in Derry-Londonderry. Describing her mum as 'grammar school material', Hazel explained how:

She was very good with her hands, she became a milliner,
[...] commuting to the West End, actually, mak[ing] hats
for Princess Alice.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

In contrast to Hazel's account of her father's work, the details provided about her mum shared not only the skills she acquired and the reputed quality of work, but also a belief that she too would have been considered as academically capable. After this brief explanation, however, and as if to encapsulate the parental dynamics, Hazel situated her mother's position in relation to her father and the consequences of that: 'intellectually, I don't think he was my mother's equal [...] and I kind of felt I paid for that'.¹¹⁵ This moment of self-reflexivity foreshadowed her eventual adolescent narrative content, something that becomes more apparent in the second half of the study where these earlier comments can be understood to shape her adult self. This statement emphasized the supposed intellectual division between her parents and perceived family structure, and significantly, provided Hazel with a crucial element through which to compose her narrative.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the brief and candid delivery suggested that although Hazel may not have previously considered her school experiences in relation to her father's attitude, she remains acutely aware of his life-long influence.

I asked Hazel if his awareness of such difference was ever made obvious, if perhaps her father ever appeared anxious in the company of his own wife:

HB: No, but my mum was very careful to ...

AL: Protect him?

HB: No. Careful to subjugate herself. Um, hide her intellect.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

¹¹⁶ For more information on narrative composure, see Summerfield, P. "Culture & Composure". Pg. 69

¹¹⁷ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

Acknowledging that her mother was 'careful' not to demonstrate her own intelligence, Hazel's narrative revealed a deeper appreciation of the imbalance that existed in the parents' relationship. Indeed, the gendered behaviours of Hazel's mother, whose visible demonstration of "substance" in the form of self-subjugation, rather than self-interest or ambition, align more with those of Honoria in Patmore's *Angel in the House*.¹¹⁸ Contrary to the desirable ideals of mid-twentieth-century companionate marriage, Hazel's narrative depicted a relationship in which conscious manoeuvring and intentional subservience by her mother aimed to alleviate her father's insecurities.¹¹⁹

Dominant gendered characteristics extended to her father's involvement in her everyday life. Hazel spoke of her father's insistence on driving her to school every day. Asked if she experienced feelings of isolation from friends in the village, Hazel explained:

It was a bit isolating. [...] Very much so. [...] Yeah.

Although if I'd gone on the bus ... there were a crowd that went on the bus in the morning, but I didn't do that either.

[...] In retrospect, my father was quite controlling.

AL: Was he trying to protect you?

HB: Maybe, maybe, but um, it did mean that I possibly didn't interact with others of my peer group that lived

¹¹⁸ Patmore, Coventry. *Angel in the House* in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Poovey, Mary. (Virago Press, 1989) p. 8

¹¹⁹ More information on companionate marriage can be found in, Finch, Janet. and Penny Summerfield "Social reconstruction and the emergence of the companionate marriage, 1945-59", in *Marriage, domestic life and social change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne (1944-88)* ed. Clark, David. (Routledge, 1991)

locally. [...] And once upon a time, I used to think that was, you know, jolly good of him. I didn't have to get up early for the bus. In retrospect, again, I think it was more control. But it was just so different. And it was a way from, I mean, it's not unusual for children to be bussed 5 miles now, but it was then. And I was the only one from the village that went to my school.¹²⁰

Hazel's experiences illustrated the challenges faced by both parents and children in the inevitable transition from primary to secondary. This extract demonstrates the complexity of life history source material. Oral narratives are not constructed in isolation, but rather they are informed by the many differing layers of subsequent experience.¹²¹ In an effort to evaluate her own experiences, Hazel switched her narrative from the past self to one in the present, attempting to understand both her father's actions and her reactions to them. Despite explaining her now adult feelings of her father's apparent dominant and controlling actions, when viewed instead through his role as a parent she provided a different appreciation. In stating, 'it was just so different', Hazel appeared to rationalise the situation some sixty years prior, offering herself an explanation for his obvious commitment.¹²² Of deeper significance, however, is the apparent regression into a younger self, with the fairy-tale construction 'Once upon a time', suggesting that the only possible way for Hazel

¹²⁰ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

¹²¹ More information on the presence of self-reflexivity can be found in, Katherine Borland, Katherine. "' That's Not What I Said": Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research", in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. Gluck, Sherna & Daphne Patai, eds. (Routledge, 1991), p. 63

¹²² HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

to appreciate this apparently selfless act is through a fictional lens.¹²³ Certainly, any attempt to re-evaluate her father's level of influence was, almost immediately, set firmly to one side.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed Gina's description of how any consideration of the 11+ and its role in secondary school selection became somewhat irrelevant due to her challenging family circumstances. As a result of her father's alcoholism, Gina's mother took the two children out of their home and moved to caravan to live with her 'lover'.¹²⁴ Gina spoke of his apparent disregard for them as children and the lasting implications that such a toxic form of dominance had on her adult sense of self:

He hated us from the beginning, particularly me. He pretended to care about my brother, which I think was *worse* for him, because it was all pretence. Where was me, it was like in the open.

AL: So that was difficult, growing up in that situation.

GC: Well, it was terrible, but you don't realize how terrible it is until you look back, or when you've got all the sort of, um, you know, repercussions from it, and you're doing things, and, right, you know... like any authoritative man...

*I'd be there.*¹²⁵

¹²³ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

¹²⁴ GC, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

¹²⁵ GC, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

In her expression, *'I'd be there'*, Gina revealed, both vocally and in the altered physicality, her inherent defensive reaction she felt when faced with moments of personal conflict or male confrontation. From her seated position, Gina moved to show an immediate defensive response to unwelcome behaviours. As detailed within the participant bibliographies, Gina's life history narrative was shaped both by the challenges faced in childhood and adolescence, and her life-long efforts to use them in a way that improves her adult sense of self.¹²⁶ In contrast to Hazel, Gina's narrative offered little detail or specific memories to better emphasize her experiences. What is striking, however, is her admission of the 'repercussions' or the continuation of effects from such experiences, especially those involving men in positions of authority. In their evaluation into the reliability of memory, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson explain how, through oral histories, the 'subjectivity of memory provide[s] clues about the meaning of experience, but also the ever-present relationship between the past and the present'.¹²⁷ Arguably, Gina's clues were evidenced in her defensive tone, her defiant stance and in her emotionally charged re-imagining of any future challenging confrontation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, life history narratives have revealed the nuanced experiences to result from the external stimulus of wider social structures and an understanding of

¹²⁶ See Appendix I Participant Biographies.

¹²⁷ Perks, P. & A. Thomson, "Critical developments: Introduction", in *The Oral History Reader* in, Perks, P. & A. Thomson, eds. (Oxford, Oxford, 2016) p. 4. For more information on the influence of past lives into those in the present, see, Giles, Judy. "Narratives of Gender, Class and Modernity in Women's memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain", *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2002): pp. 21-41 and Passerini, Luisa. "Work ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism", *History Workshop*, No. 8 (1979) pp. 82-108

how they continued to shape both the sense of self and adult identity. Social and cultural historian Timothy Ashplant argues that key themes or genres contained within oral narratives reveal the presence of outside influences within their resulting interpretation.¹²⁸ Arguably, such narrated experiences relating to structures of class and gender were shared, not necessarily as identifiable moments in time, but rather through the lasting meaning retained within their anecdotal stories. Life history narratives expressed a connectivity to community, a conscious differentiation between one home and another as a result of perceived values or behaviour, and lastly the weakened sense of identity to originate from a diminutive family name. Returning to the notion of intersections as a means of understanding how gendered experiences of education are informed by class and circumstance, though both from working-class families, the classed narratives of Peg and Maggie demonstrate the contrasting sense of self as a result of differing home and community values. Furthermore, recalling the contrasts between locality and associated behaviours it was possible to understand the very personal subjective response to class hierarchies that existed in the home.

Within the three overarching themes of place, visibility and class mentalities, narratives told of the perceived make up of their community and the expectations held within local society. Some interviewees understood these expectations to be non-negotiable, as secondary school type or higher educational opportunities were deemed either irrelevant or unnecessary. Where the school environment appeared alien to the community at home, the understanding of power dynamics contained within the life history narratives evidenced anxieties which later challenged their

¹²⁸ Ashplant, T.G. "Anecdote as Narrative Resource in Working-Class Life Histories" in *Narrative and Genre*. Chamberlain, M. & P. Thompson, eds. (Routledge, 1998) pp. 99-113

social cohesion. In this respect, where friendships were compromised through feelings of inadequacy, the repercussions were only realized in later life as adult identities were understood to have been shaped by the compromised relationships from past interactions.

As with the values and behaviours of class so prevalent in the narrative accounts, the effects of prescribed gender ideals can be seen to inform not only the eventual educational experience, but crucially, the views of others in relation to aspiration and opportunity. Moreover, the intersecting effects of class and gender were seen to shape subjective understanding of the individual experience as, over sixty years later, the implications of class and gender are better rationalized through their later life perspectives. Although nuanced in their explanation of opportunity and aspiration, commonalities in relation to adulthood and their role as women emphasize the overarching influence of wider state intention. Reinforcing the notion of conflict and change, a recurrent theme in historical analysis of the lives of women in postwar Britain, the majority of narratives suggested that experiences of meritocratic opportunity were welcomed but with a caveat that prioritized the dominant role of wife and mother over any long-term career ambition.¹²⁹ Alongside the perceived imbalance in educational opportunity or aspiration when situated against those for their male siblings was an awareness of the patriarchal structure that existed within the home and the effect it continued to have in their adult life.

Life history narratives have revealed how, for some, the intersecting macro structures in society shaped their understanding of their adult self, as women's

¹²⁹ See, Dyhouse, Carol. *Girl Trouble* (2013). Roberts, Elizabeth. *Women and Families* (1995)

experiences were influenced by ideals of class and gender. Arguably, it is the omnipresent relationship with such an over-arching influence that contributed to the very individual responses and their evolving adult identities. In the next chapter, the study moves to consider how parental influence and sibling hierarchy in the form of differing actions or emotional behaviours can be seen to inform an adolescent in relation to their own aspirations and, importantly, the sense of self that remains long into adulthood.

Chapter 3: Stories of Family

Introduction to the family

This chapter focuses on family relations, specifically the role of parents, both as individuals and as a combined relationship to understand how, through differing emotional reactions and behaviours, they inspired or limited their daughter's adolescent school experience. Additionally, in considering the relevance of familial structure, it asks to what extent the hierarchy within sibling relationships encouraged or hampered the individual's potential opportunity and achievement.

The home was of significant importance in postwar Britain. School curricula was dominated by skills of domesticity designed to equip girls for marriage and motherhood.¹ Ideals of British family life in the post-war years aligned with others of developed countries, emphasising the image of the 'small and contented 'normal' family', something that was deemed to be traditional, yet highly desirable.² Indeed, such was the belief in the nuclear household and continuous mothering, it was seen to be the much needed balm to the disruptive effects of war, where marriage and family would 'provide the foundations for a better life'.³ Moreover, by placing 'households above community' this redefined familial unit was centred on those who

¹ HM Government (1942) *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (The Beveridge Report) Cmd. 6404 (London: HMSO) p. 53

² Thane, Pat. "Family Life and "Normality" in Postwar British Culture", in *Life After Death: Approaches to the Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*. Bessel, R. & D. Schumann, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 198

³ Finch, Janet. and Penny Summerfield, "Social Reconstruction" p. 7. For more information on the concerns of juvenile delinquency, see, Bowlby, J. *Forty Four Juvenile Thieves: The Characters and home life*. (Balliere, 1946) in, Lewis, Jane, *Women in Britain since 1945* (Blackwell, 1992) p. 18

lived within it as much as on the structure itself.⁴ Though the idea of ‘home-centred’ encapsulated all members of the family, it was weighted towards the role of homemaker as the vast majority of young women were seen to aspire to the ideals of marriage and motherhood.⁵ Arguably, 1950s ideology continued to inform the girl’s secondary curriculum long into the 1960s and beyond. Focusing on the educational needs of those whose intelligence was seen to be less than average, John Newsom argued that whilst domestic skills may lack the appeal of other subjects, they nonetheless enabled girls to better understand how rewarding homemaking could be.⁶ For Dyhouse, this continued emphasis on gendered ideals contributed to the contradictory roles for women at the time.⁷ Indeed, these issues of workplace aspiration versus home and family obligations continue to inform the narratives of women’s lives some sixty plus years later.

In her landmark oral history study into the lives of working-class women as wives and mothers in the north of England between 1940-1970, Elizabeth Roberts revealed how with the physical and material increase in prosperity and health, emphasis was placed on the family as a social and emotional unit. Summarizing her findings, Roberts explained how, ‘families [had] become much more child-centred; parents on the whole closer to their children, less authoritarian [...] individual children probably received more parental attention than had any previous generation; parents were

⁴ Crow, G. “The Post-war Development of the Modern Domestic Ideal”, in *Home and Family. Creating the Domestic Sphere* Allan, G. & G. Crow eds. (Macmillan, 1989) p. 20 in Langhamer, C. “The Meanings of Home”, p. 341

⁵ Beaumont, Caitriona. “What Do Women Want? Housewives’ Associations, Activism and Changing Representations of Women in the 1950s”, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2017): pp. 147-162

⁶ Report of Central Advisory Council for Education, *Half our Future*, London, HMSO, 1963, pp. 135-6 in, Dyhouse, C, *Girl Trouble*. p. 128

⁷ Dyhouse, Carol. “Towards a ‘Feminine’ Curriculum” pp. 291-311

more likely to spend leisure time with them.’⁸ This chapter examines the experiences of such parent centred families within both the working and middle classes, but from the perspective of the child, to better understand the family dynamics and the lasting effects from an increase in influence and support.

Seminal sociological analysis considers the family to be one of the most important and influential formal associations. In his 1962 study into the lives of families and marriage in sixties Britain, Ronald Fletcher argued that, because of the relatively small numbers and the intimacy in which they shared each other’s company, ‘the family [made] more constant, concrete, intense and subtle demands upon its members’, than in any other kind of group.⁹ In stark contrast to those of Generation Z whose parental guidance in adolescence is often diluted by the unavoidable external influences of twenty-first century communication, the words and actions of parents sixty years ago to those among the “baby-boomer” generation were significantly important. Indeed, for Fletcher, ‘the family was, ‘an “educative” group of the most fundamental kind’.¹⁰ Given the concept of universal free secondary education through the Butler Act (1944), ensuring “opportunity for all”, Fletcher extends his line of argument to assert that, ‘parents of a modern families have informed awareness of educational provisions and the avenues and opportunities available to their children.’¹¹ In this respect, the education of children was not autonomous from the family, but rather it was anticipated that there would be greater involvement between school and home. Moreover, as Hannah Gavron argued, the family was key to the demands for success in an industrial society. For Gavron, the state was not

⁸ Roberts, Elizabeth *Women and Families*. p. 236 For more information on the notion of family-centred relationships see, Kynaston, David. *Family Britain 1951-1957* (Bloomsbury, 2009)

⁹ Fletcher, Ronald. *Britain in the Sixties: The Family and Marriage* (Penguin, 1962) p. 26

¹⁰ Fletcher, Ronald., *Britain in the Sixties*, p. 28

¹¹ Fletcher, Ronald., *Britain in the Sixties*, pp. 189-190

reducing the function of the family but demanded that it 'prepare the child in its early years [...] to receive an education and be receptive to it.'¹²

The 1960s saw an increase in sociological studies into the lives of families across both the working and middle classes.¹³ Research into the views and values of those living in specific regions sought to better understand changing attitudes to home and family life. Though not necessarily an accurate reflection of all British families, these studies nonetheless contributed to the wider social discourse of the period, in particular to the thoughts of parents when faced with decisions over their child's education. The views of modern families in relation to educational opportunity were included within Ferdynand Zweig's qualitative study into the lives and attitudes of working-class men living in affluent British industrial towns and cities.¹⁴ Zweig noted the obvious positivity with which fathers spoke regarding opportunity and life chances for their families, something that features within the narratives for this study. Answers such as: 'We want to give them a better chance than we had', or 'That is the finest thing – to give them every opportunity', suggest an aspirational step-change in the approach by parents towards the educational prospects for their children.¹⁵ As the life history narratives have already shown, notions of identity associated with family attitudes regarding educational opportunity provide an important dimension to understanding the 11+ experience. Critically, this chapter focuses on the familial contribution regarding educational opportunity to better understand the long-lasting effects on their adult identities. At a time when postwar parents among both working and middle classes, were believed to be 'highly

¹² Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 36

¹³ Young, Michael and Peter Willmott *Family & Kinship in East London* (2007). Brian Jackson & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (1986)

¹⁴ Zweig, Ferdynand *The Worker in Affluent Society: Family Life and Industry* (Heinemann, 1961)

¹⁵ Zweig, Ferdynand, *The Worker in Affluent Society*, p. 20

solicitous' of their children's educational opportunity, how influential were parents in the lives of these young women?¹⁶

Oral narratives are used to examine the nuanced relationships unique to each family, acting as internal mechanisms through which to influence, inspire, direct or constrain personal aspiration. As explored in the previous chapter, it is important to understand the role of internal communication, both conscious and subconscious that informs an individual's sense of self and identity. In their notable work on the history of the English family, social historians Davidoff et al express the view that the heart of the family should not be understood by the specific role held by each individual, but rather the nature of the relationships in which they existed: 'Familial relationships have always been implicitly structured around issues of power, dependency, service and protection'.¹⁷ In this respect, the family negotiates and asserts its own expectations based on a shared understanding of the norms and values it holds. Extending further this idea of internal negotiation within the domestic sphere, in his retrospective assessment of the family in postwar Britain, sociologist Chris Harris argues that whilst behaviours are informed by shared ideals, 'strength comes as a result of personal affection and loyalty arising out of the group [...] rather than as a result of affection of loyalty to a kin group'.¹⁸ Certainly, as is evidenced in these life history narratives, the strength of bond among family members informed both the level of influence and interviewees' resulting behaviour. Only by gaining an insight into the differing forms of communication, is it possible to understand the

¹⁶ Mandler, Peter. *The Crisis of Meritocracy*, p. 41

¹⁷ Davidoff, L., M. Doolittle, J. Fink & K. Holden, eds. *The Family Story*, p. 8

¹⁸ Harris, Chris. "The Family in post-war Britain", in *Understanding Post-War British Society* Obelkevich, J. & P. Catterall, ed. (Routledge, London, 1994) p. 45

nuanced reactions experienced when faced with the challenge of academic testing at the age of eleven years.

At the beginning of our meeting each narrator was invited to talk about her parents and to recall memories from her early family life. Reasons for this were twofold; to give interviewees confidence to speak without feeling pressured to find correct 'answers' that would contribute to the research, but, more importantly, to allow them to reveal, holistically, their personal sense of place and self. Life history narratives provide an opportunity to hear and understand the lasting effects of parental influence and the ways in which they continue to shape and inform the adult self. In their collaborative work, *Between Generations*, oral historian Paul Thompson and sociologist Daniel Bertaux examine the role of intergenerational transmission within families. Accepting the social context in which relations are developed, this notion of transmission is collective, 'taking place through a two-way relationship', thereby in the sharing of parental aspiration, children can decide what if any to make of their own.¹⁹ In her sociological study of the relationship between mothers and daughters, Steph Lawler argues that in the close nurturing process, the mother can be understood to rear a particular type of self in her daughter, one which reflects her own characteristics, as the identity of one is entwined in another.²⁰ Indeed, understanding how one 'is the holder of needs and the other, or mother in this case, is the meeter of those needs', such reliance becomes more than just influential, it is intrinsic to the mother-daughter relationship.²¹ Certainly, as this chapter later

¹⁹ Bertaux, D & P. Thompson, ed. *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories* (Transaction Publishers, 2005) p. 2

²⁰ Lawler, Steph. *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects* (Routledge, 2000) p. 1

²¹ Lawler, Steph. *Mothering the Self*, p. 3

illustrates, transmissions within the family prove hugely influential as they remain cemented in the life-long memories to bring the past into the present.

In feminist research, life history narratives are used to better understand and appreciate the structured subordination of women within everyday processes and relationships. In her extensive research into the lives of the “voiceless” women, whose experiences are often hidden from public discourse, feminist oral historian Sherna Gluck acknowledges the value that comes from understanding one’s ‘texture of life’, providing a deeper appreciation of the family and their early years.²² Rather than attempting to obtain knowledge from direct enquiry, greater understanding is gained by listening to the subtleties of experience that lie behind the narrative content. In this respect the women’s narratives reflected both the norms and values of society at the time but revealed too the highly nuanced familial expectations learnt through their own unique experiences of socialization.

Divided into three sections, this chapter on the stories of family explores the role of individual relationships with fathers, mothers and siblings to examine how the recurrent themes of guidance, aspiration and hierarchy were interpreted through the life history accounts some seventy years in the making. The study examines the role of fathers, who as breadwinners, were also perceived to hold a greater emotional interest in the family through the emerging home-centred society. Narratives reveal the conflicting notions of masculinity as traditional ideals were challenged by emerging versions of fatherhood in the home and family structure. This chapter then explores the differing representations and identities of the mother to better understand how they navigated and communicated the gendered function of

²² Gluck, Sherna. “What’s So Special about Women? Women’s Oral History”, p. 230

household management with the modern aspirational opportunities for their daughters. Educational aspiration was often understood through class ideals, rather than future aspirations, as young working-class girls were widely assumed to marry at an early age and place the needs of the family ahead of their own ambitions. Narratives express how the maternal nurture and support was often at odds with any long-held desire for the proven fulfilment of their child. Finally, this chapter considers sibling relationships within the family, to better understand the effects of hierarchy, inclusion and belonging and the sense of self and formation of the individual's identity in relation to differing educational outcomes.

Influential fathers

Influence by experience

When asked about her parents, Sarah pronounced her father as, 'very progressive, really [...] he really believed the 1944 Education Act was going to improve *everything* for *everybody*'.²³ Born in 1943, the eldest of two daughters growing up in Cambridgeshire, Sarah provided much information regarding her father's early life and how having had no formal education, 'he did a lot of evening classes and worked for the WEA, the Workers Education Authority', which focused on book-keeping skills and clerical roles.²⁴ Sarah recalled how her father was a principled man with a strong sense of self:

²³ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

²⁴ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived., there was a mis-remembering in the narrative, it should have been Workers Education Association. Sarah did not say if her father took courses provided by the WEA or worked for them taking the courses.

He was a conscientious objector, in the last war. He went through his tribunal, and he was sent away to work on a farm in the west country. But then he realised it wasn't like sort of man to man fighting, and bombs were falling on his family, so he joined the RAF.²⁵

At the end of the war, Sarah's father moved to a town in Cambridgeshire, where he met and married her mother, to take a up a role with the borough council as an administrator for the fire and ambulance service. Despite his challenging early years, Sarah's father was committed to the benefits of education, determined to secure the best possible opportunities for his daughters and, more importantly, to instil the value of intelligent thinking through open conversation. I asked Sarah how she became aware of her father's views on the Butler Act:

Well, I don't know, I maybe [...] I think he set a *pattern* for our life, really. And he's very easy to get on with, very intelligent, he read a lot. Um, hmm ... we did talk politics a fair bit at the mealtimes, [...] but not in a, you know, pounding the table kind of thing, just talking about what was going on. [...] He was just very compassionate and, but also very socialist and committed to things.²⁶

²⁵ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

²⁶ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

Acknowledging both the existence and establishment of their familial 'pattern', Sarah substantiated the role of her own family as that understood by Ronald Fletcher, 'within which the earliest and deepest pattern of sentiments, attitudes, beliefs, ideals and loyalties is established'.²⁷ In this respect, the influence Sarah acquired from her father, was communicated through his evident commitment to the set of values that would both guide and shape their family life. Reconsidering her awareness of his belief in the Education Act as stated at the beginning of our conversation, it appeared to have come, not by any direct pronouncement, but rather from his socialist understanding of education as an opportunity for all, as a means 'to improve *everything for everybody*'.²⁸ Sarah presented her father as a facilitator within the family, someone who, by his very nature, provided the safe space and structure in which his daughters would develop and grow, learning through their own experience and appreciation.

Close listening to the oral narrative further revealed the extent of Sarah's consideration in her description of her father. The delivery of this assessment evidenced a meaningful reflection of his character, as opposed to a well-honed 'headline' remark. In his psychoanalytical analysis of the subjectivities at play within the interview relationship, Michael Roper argues for attention to be given to the 'subconscious material' which contributes to the shaping of subjectivity within an individual's life history.²⁹ Certainly, Sarah showed a high level of respect for her father that recognised him as an individual, and not just as a parent. Leonore Davidoff attributes the family as the source in which subjectivity is constituted, a

²⁷ Fletcher, Ronald, *Britain in the Sixties*, p. 33

²⁸ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

²⁹ Roper, Michael. "Analysing the Analysed: Transference and Counter-Transference in the Oral History Encounter". *Oral History* 31, No. 2 (2003): pp. 20-32, p. 21 in, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* Thompson, P & J. Bornat, (Fourth Edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017) p. 240.

space in which, ‘formation of body and psyche, literally and symbolically, first takes place’.³⁰ Sarah’s reference to the ‘pattern’ set by her father, suggests awareness he provided a guide they followed, and that she retained his blueprint legacy for her own adult life.

For Sandy, paternal influence was experienced not through a pattern or shared ideals, but rather emotional connectedness to her father. Born in 1954, the youngest of three children, Sandy grew up in an Essex town. Though exploration into the effects of sibling relationships in relation to perceived ability follows later in this chapter, in this extract it is possible to see how the challenges she faced as youngest in the family, did not go unnoticed.

My dad was really good, because he, I, you know, I can remember him sitting me on the kitchen table *and* saying, you know, about anxiety. And... he didn't use that word, but he said, “you know, you get worried about things”. And, you know, he said, “and I do sometimes”, he said, “so I really do understand”. And I felt, I felt he did understand, even though he didn't specify, exactly.³¹

In voicing her father’s admission that he understood how she was feeling, Sandy’s voice altered to indicate the continued significance of this brief moment of emotional support. Moreover, her weakened tone at the mention of being ‘worried’ emphasised not only the sensitivity of his approach but also her continued feelings of insecurity.

³⁰ Davidoff, Leonore. *World’s Between: Historical perspectives on gender and Class*. (Polity Press, 1995) p. 229, in Thompson, P. & J. Bornat, *The Voice of the Past*, p. 241

³¹ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

In his assessment of anecdotes as a form of narrative in working-class life stories, social and cultural historian Timothy Ashplant argues that, far from masking the 'truth', the presence of characteristics such as hesitations, silences and transpositions from time and place are, 'personally revealing, both about the historical events and the current understanding of the speaker'.³² Certainly, through the disjointed explanation, 'because he, I, you know', it was evident that this was not a rehearsed story, but one that was understood only through the moment of sharing. Moreover, that this moment of empathetic understanding between Sandy and her father was emotionally difficult to put into words. Elizabeth Tonkin asserts that the value of historical narratives rests not in the ability of the historian to 'scan them for useful facts, picked out like currants from a cake, [but rather] the facts are so embedded that it directs an interpretation of them'.³³ For Sandy, this recollection was not just an awareness of her anxiety, but rather the confirmation of a mutually shared characteristic between father and daughter, which was underpinned by the hesitation. Indeed, Sandy's narrative revealed an intentional act to her father's conversation. 'He sat me on the table', suggests this was not a throw-away remark, but a deliberate attempt to share his understanding.³⁴

Hazel's narrative also demonstrated the lasting impact of her father's actions. As explored in the previous chapter, Hazel's life history narrative detailed her father's repeated efforts to manage, limit and reduce the interaction with the world outside their home, not only for her adolescent self, but also for her mother. As her narrative revealed, the lasting effects of her father's need for patriarchal dominance was the

³² Ashplant, T.G. "Anecdote as narrative resource" p. 9

³³ Tonkin, E. *Narrating our Pasts*, p. 6

³⁴ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

influential factor behind her self-protector adult identity. Acknowledging her mother's missed opportunity to become a grandparent, Hazel admitted:

I, I didn't oblige, um, and I wonder if part of me hasn't wanted another man there despite the fact, you know, it would be lovely to have company [...] has part of me never wanted a man there who can say "No"?³⁵

This voluntary evaluation revealed a questioning of the reasons behind her life-long status as a single woman, creating a moment of dis-composure within the narrative as her orality changed through pace and tone.³⁶ Acknowledging quietly that she did not 'oblige', Hazel paused both before and after her moment of 'wonder', at the possible reason for her single life.³⁷ In the eventual analysis, the changes in pace appeared to illustrate a lasting self-appraisal of Hazel's life choices in adulthood. Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame explores the significance of family ties in the process of progression between child and adulthood. Bertaux-Wiame argues that while the pathway between the two stages appears autonomous, 'the long arm of family connection may reach out at a later stage to exert a crucial influence on the path of an adult child'.³⁸ Arguably for Hazel, the connective 'long arm' was her lasting preference for a life as a single woman, with a strong intent to avoid repeating her

³⁵ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.. Though not a focus of the study, both HB and GC acknowledged how as a result of challenging relationships in their younger lives they chose not to be mothers themselves.

³⁶ For more information on dis-composure in oral narratives, see Summerfield, Penny, "Dis/composing the Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History in, ed. T. Coslett, C. Lury, P. Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography: Tests, theories, methods* (Routledge, 2000)

³⁷ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

³⁸ Bertaux-Wiame, Isabelle. 'The Pull of Family Ties: Intergenerational Relationships and Life Paths', in *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories*. Bertaux, D. & P. Thompson eds (Transaction Publishers, 2005) p. 39

mother's experience. Whilst not appearing frustrated by the path she chose, the narrative expressed a sense of regret at the impact of such a choice and the emotional implications of her single life. In her admission, 'I didn't oblige', Hazel showed an awareness of resisting the gendered expectations, which reinforces the view of Bertaux-Wiame, that our lives are rarely experienced as individual beings, but that we retain the influence of familial expectation and commitment long into our adult lives.³⁹ Arguably, for Hazel, through her decision to remain single she forfeited the dutiful expectation of a daughter to continue the family line. This self-evaluation was further realised in relation to the recent later life experiences of a close friend upon the death of her husband. Despite believing them very similar in characters, Hazel acknowledged how:

she obviously relied very heavily on him [...] it's well, I wouldn't say made me feel a superhuman, but I kind of think, "okay, what's the problem? You do this, this and this", but then again, I'm not grieving [...] I've learned not to ask for help because quite often help wasn't forthcoming.⁴⁰

Reflecting on her adult self and the lasting consequence of such dominant patriarchy within the family, Hazel considered her life as a single woman in contrast to that of a married friend and the lasting effects of an independent existence. Hazel's evident self-reliance shielded her from reoccurrence of the disappointment that she

³⁹ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁰ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

experienced in adolescence, and which is explored in further detail within the Stories of Achievement chapter. Though Hazel refrained from placing any direct blame on her father, her intentional avoidance of another man who might say 'no', demonstrated her preference for an independent life.⁴¹ Arguably, it is only through the muted inclusion of everyday experiences within life history narratives that it is possible to understand the lived effects of female subordination.⁴² Both recollections combine to illustrate a sense of self constructed on self-reliance and independence. Though Hazel did not openly challenge her decision to pursue her life as a single woman, by placing the insecurities experienced by her widowed friend at the centre of her narrative she can better reflect on the positives, rather than dwell on the absence of any companionate benefits.

Building on the work of Graham Dawson and the notion of narrative composure, Judy Giles argues that through the shared interaction between the teller and listener, 'narrators of life stories seek recognition that the stories they are telling are understood or identifiable within the present'.⁴³ As suggested within Hazel's narrative, though many years have passed since making that decision for self-reliance, the emotional implications of being single remain. Closer listening to these reflective moments, specifically, 'I wonder if part of me' and 'but then again', suggest this conversation provided an unexpected chance to voice the uncertainty she continues to experience.⁴⁴ Moreover, in assessing her own capabilities against those

⁴¹ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴² Sacks, Karen Brodtkin, "What's a Life Story", p. 88

⁴³ Giles, Judy "Narratives of Gender, Class and Modernity in Women's memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain", *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2002) pp. 21-41, p. 25. See Dawson, Graham. *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Routledge, 1994)

⁴⁴ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

of her friend, Hazel can be seen to evaluate her own identity as a single woman and the self-reliance she has secured through that experience.

Influence by endeavour

Influence in Maggie's family came through a direct action that fashioned its own familial model. Following a family holiday to a seaside resort on the northwest coast of England, Maggie described how her father 'moved us lock stock and barrel, with his five young children' from their home in Lancashire to a new life by the sea.⁴⁵ Her choice of words is telling. Unlike others in the study, this was not about moving house or a relocation necessitated through work, this was an intentional move towards a new life, one that would prove different to their previous life. Moreover, the narrative expressed no recollection of fear or anxiety experienced by her parents or siblings at a time of such significant upheaval. Believing, '[he could] just as easily be a bricklayer here, as [anywhere]', Maggie explained how her father forged a network of new friends who would help him secure local employment and a new home for the family.⁴⁶ For Maggie's father, change of this nature was not something to fear, but rather was viewed as a beneficial means to improve the life of his family, as Maggie acknowledged:

The educational, er, opportunities or work opportunities
were probably, be much the same, but he knew how good
it felt to be by the sea.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁶ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁷ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

As if to re-affirm that such a move was not reckless or undertaken lightly, Maggie explained how her father had spent his own childhood close to the sea, growing up on Walney island, near Barrow-in-Furness. In this respect, as head of the household, Maggie's father both considered and acted upon the value and benefits of an improved quality of life for the whole family. Acknowledging his awareness of the positive benefits of living close to the sea, Maggie's narrative revealed how her father understood his role to be more than a physical provider but demonstrated his consideration for the psychological well-being of his family. Indeed, such actions affirm the views of Laura King who argued that emphasis was placed on the 'flourishing of "family-orientated"', rather than domestic masculinity, in both cultural ideals and social practice'.⁴⁸ Sonya O. Rose argues for a plurality of masculinities, where male identities can be seen to vary through the influence of social and institutional settings such as workplace and family.⁴⁹ Acknowledging the complexity in masculine interpretations of fatherhood, given the re-domestication of men following their return from war, it is possible to understand how the family-orientated man was more socially acceptable than that of any domesticated identity.⁵⁰ The influence of her father's life-affirming action was not lost on Maggie but instilled a lasting legacy that she herself has shared within her own family. A belief in the close proximity of the coast as a life-enhancing environment in which to live continues to

⁴⁸ King, Laura. *Family Men: Fatherhood, & Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 156. With regards masculinities and companionate marriage, see: Tosh, John. *Manliness and Masculinities in nineteenth-century Britain: essays on gender, family and empire* (Pearson Longman, 2005). Finch, Janet and Penny Summerfield, in ed. D. Clark (1991)

⁴⁹ Rose, Sonya, O. *What is Gender History?* (Polity Press, 2010) p. 58

⁵⁰ Francis, Martin. "A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War", *Gender & History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2007): pp. 163-185. King, Laura. *Family Men*, (2015)

influence Maggie to this day, as our meeting took place at her home in a fishing village on the Portuguese Algarve.⁵¹

In contrast to the psychological motivations of Maggie's father and their relocation to the coast, the repeated upheaval experienced in June's family was due to career progression and her father's need to move with the demands of the business. Born in 1951, the eldest of three children, June was the only narrator whose father's occupation brought repeated change to the family:

I was born in South Wales. We moved to Gloucester and then we moved to Frome in Somerset. Then we moved back to Wales, then we moved to Devon. We have travelled round quite a bit. [...] he kept being moved, basically, and we just went with him.⁵²

June's father worked for a gentleman's outfitters based in South Wales and, having progressed through the business to become a regional supervisor, he was later sent as a trouble-shooter into the underperforming stores. Contrasting with the self-initiated actions of Maggie's father, a tradesman who believed himself capable to creating a family life in a place of his choosing, June's family was governed by her father's obligation to his employer and a commitment to his own career progression. Acknowledging this increasing level of responsibility, June's choice of language, 'and we just went with him', reflected the lived experience of her family's situation.

⁵¹ Following the decisions made during their early retirement, Maggie and her husband bought a second home for family holidays in the Portuguese Algarve. Over the past twenty-five years, they have lessened their need for a home in the UK and gained residency in Portugal which is now their main home.

⁵² JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

Certainly, June's narrative contained no evidence of frustration or anxiety at the upheaval but rather expressed the inevitable implication for her family. I asked June if she felt the repeated change of schools was problematic:

But my dad, every school I went to, *he always took me* if I was *new* to a school. So apart from going to the first grammar school, which I went with all the others, my father would take me in the first day, and I would have this little pep talk as we were going along, that, you know, "this is gonna be okay. You're gonna be fine". Um, "This is, this is an adventure. There's nothing to be scared of". I was, obviously. Starting a new school was obviously a bit scary, but he turned it into an adventure.⁵³

Aware that he was the cause of such familial upheaval, June took great care at this point to express the extent of support she received from her father, rather than lay any blame for the anxiety she may have experienced. Crucially, June's narrative revealed the tactics employed by her father, limiting the feelings of fear by altering her perspective on the new 'adventure' that lay ahead.⁵⁴ Though June experienced this differently to Maggie, June's father demonstrated an alternative form of influence, one which sought to alleviate his daughter's anxiety and replace it with a measured level of anticipation for the possible opportunities at her new school. I asked June if, given the repeated attempts her father made to encourage and

⁵³ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁴ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

reassure her through the process of change, he wasn't, in fact, attempting to reassure himself:

Absolutely, *absolutely*. Because, you know, it was *his fault* that we were moving around the country. But yes, he was. He was reassuring himself as well. Obviously, as a parent *now* you can appreciate that and understand it, but, yeah, poor guy, "oh, god, I got, these kids, I got to get settled in school", you know.⁵⁵

Attempting to recall her father's rationalizations to ease his daughter's anxieties, June acknowledged that he was to blame and that her fears were caused by his repeated relocations. Moreover, by ensuring she was sufficiently emotionally secure to deal with such change, he himself would gain strength from his ability to provide her with such reassurance. Such recollections of parental actions deepen our understanding of the child-centred family in postwar Britain as June's father ensured the needs of his daughter alongside his own preparedness for a new role. Laura King argues how in the years that followed the Second World War, childhood was appreciated to be a formative period, at time in which greater weight was placed on the value of emotional bonds.⁵⁶ Moreover, that fathers were 'seen to be a crucial influence in a child's moral and social development'.⁵⁷ In this instance, however, it is important to

⁵⁵ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁶ King, Laura, *Family Men*, p. 91

⁵⁷ King, Laura, *Family Men*, p. 91 For more information on twentieth-century masculinity, see Roper, Michael, *Afterlives of War: a descendants' history* (Manchester University Press, 2023) Francis, Martin. "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2002): pp. 637-652. Francis, Martin. "A Flight from Commitment", pp. 163-185

acknowledge the actions of a man who, in the early 1960's, was prepared to make the necessary adjustments to his working day to ensure his daughter was best prepared for hers. Certainly, these were not the times of flexible working patterns now common in the twenty-first century. His evident commitment to her emotional well-being revealed a man who was prepared to place the needs of his daughter ahead of any resulting disruption to his own life.

The narratives reveal how power dynamics within familial relationships were not always shaped by stereotypical patriarchal dominance, but came instead through fathers' insight, motivation, and rational understanding. Arguably, the influence of June's father was through his active encouragement to adopt a positive attitude towards moments of change and feelings of insecurity. By demonstrating his repeated reassurance ahead of each new school, June's father was both fulfilling his parental responsibility to consider her overall wellbeing, whilst subtly communicating the affirmation and respect for education he had received from his own father.⁵⁸ June's acknowledgement that, 'every school I went to, he always took me if I was new to the school', reinforced the psychological investment made by her father into her sense of belonging at school and his will for her to succeed, something that is further evidenced in chapter 5.

These extracts illustrate the interest, both through emotional connectivity and aspirational desire, that fathers of the 1950s and 1960s invested in their daughters. Arguably, examples of such committed paternal attention substantiates the evaluation by social and cultural historian David Kynaston that the 1950s father was

⁵⁸ June came from an academic family. June's paternal grandfather went to University in Oxford before eventually becoming a journalist. Her father's two aunts attended teacher training college, before becoming teachers themselves.

'significantly less old-school' than that of the previous generation.⁵⁹ Indeed, in an article entitled "The Home-Centred Society", Mark Abrams described how the good husband was evidently more domesticated, content to relax and socialize with his family at weekends and after work.⁶⁰ Acknowledging how ideas of patriarchy are more widely recognized through an imbalance of power, as illustrated in these narratives, however, patriarchal attitudes can also be re-imagined through nuanced representations of fatherhood.

The mother's role

Nurturing mothers

Unlike the close involvement of fathers, whose wider social understanding, familial aspirations and ideological mindset were to prove so influential to their daughters, recollections of maternal relationships tell of differing priorities, reflecting a nuanced understanding of their role in both the family and society. In contrast to the remembered emotional intimacy between fathers and their daughters, mothers were recognized more for their commitment to the gendered role of motherhood, downplaying aspirational opportunities for their daughters. Though focused on emotional well-being, a mother's attention was often compromised by the demands of her wider care-giving role and the needs of the family as a whole. Having received confirmation of her place at the grammar school, Lillian explained the response within the home:

⁵⁹ Kynaston, David. *Family Britain 1951-1957*. (Bloomsbury, 2009) p. 597

⁶⁰ Abrams, Mark. 'The Home-centred Society' in *The Listener*, November 26th, 1959, pp. 914-915

And then I just remember the, the, the business-like side of my mum, getting the *list* to the school uniform, and then, “right, now, we need to do ...”, and then my mum would take over on the practical side [...] And then my dad would just forget about it and go to work, and that be it.⁶¹

Lillian’s explanation of this gendered response further illustrates the description of ‘traditional’ in relation to her parents’ relationship as explored in the previous chapter on Stories of Class and Gender. In preparation for her move from primary to secondary education, the ideals of a companionate marriage, or ‘harmonious organic unit’ as described in sociological studies of the 1950s, depicted the father as breadwinner and the mother as ensuring the necessary socialization for their child within a modern society.⁶² Contrary to the prescribed ideological “soft” positioning of women, Lillian described her mother’s actions as being ‘business-like’, therefore undertaken with the appropriate rigor and effort required in her personal place of work. Moreover, the practicalities that related directly to her daughter’s educational opportunity were understood within the home to be her responsibility, something her husband had no need or place to be involved with.

Maggie was one of only two participants to consider their mum and dad through their unified relationship.⁶³ Affirming, ‘they had a lovely marriage’, she continued to explain the reason why:

⁶¹ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶² Parsons, T. & R.F. Bales, *Family Socialisation and Interaction Process*, (Free Press, 1955) in *Women in Britain since 1945*, p. 13

⁶³ SW also spoke of her parent’s relationship: ‘My mum and dad were lovely, really. They were very much in love all the way; all their married life, of obviously ups and downs’.

Possibly because of my dad [...] the priest at church told him not to waste his life. He'd reached the age of thirty, "either go and be a priest, or...", so, he looked around and found my mum and they were ... perfect ... for each other. So that was a *good* start.⁶⁴

Considering the significance of her parents to her own life, Maggie's explanation of their 'lovely marriage' revealed an interesting origin; one instigated through faith and the attempt to seek out someone suitable. Moreover, though anecdotal evidence enhances the meaning within the narrative, it is likely that this recollection is part of a wider family story, one which reinforces the lasting strength of unity between her parents. As explored earlier in this chapter, Maggie's father played a huge part in her life, and her recollections demonstrate the lasting importance of his role and the strength of their emotional relationship. But what of her mother? As in the narratives of many of the other women who took part in this study, maternal influence was consigned within the stereotypical maternal role, that of a quiet facilitator, tasked with managing the everyday family life. Maggie recalled their lives as young children in a seaside town in West Lancashire:

In the holidays we went to the beach every day. [...] my mum would come along at lunchtime on her bike [...] get out the loaf and butter and make us sandwiches and stay

⁶⁴ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

for a bit and then she'd say, "I'll go home and make your dad's tea".⁶⁵

Maggie's narrative echoes a 'golden age' discourse of childhood in postwar Britain, one in which children experienced unlimited freedom, secure in the knowledge that their mother was close by. Lynn Abrams describes how, through the stories shared and the language used, oral history can offer 'an entry point from the present into the culture of the past'.⁶⁶ This narrative extract recalls a moment when a child's life could be understood as innocent, simple, and spontaneous. Aside from the references to meals, there is no mention of time as a consideration. Crucially, I would argue that this recollection enabled Maggie to best depict the values of her family life. Unlike other narrative extracts in this study, there was no apparent reflexivity or late-life perspective offered, either on her mother's actions or her childhood in relation to her parenting experiences. Corinna Peniston-Bird argues that such memories of everyday life, or 'frozen narratives', appear resistant to change. Importantly, 'they are memories which define the self [...] and sense of identity over time'.⁶⁷ Given the maternalistic ideals which characterized her childhood experience, such evident values contained within the extract reveal the continued importance of family in her adult life today.

⁶⁵ MB 200523

⁶⁶ Abrams, Lynn *Oral History Theory*, p. 16

⁶⁷ Barber, S. & C.M. Peniston-Bird, eds. *History Beyond the Text* (Routledge, 2009) p. 109

Mothers with ambition

Moving away from the stories of mothers whose role within the family centred on the gendered qualities of nurture and support, it is important to recognize other characteristics of motherhood, for those whose commitment and attention was centred on aspiration and a sense of high expectations. Helena's life history narrative was first introduced earlier in the study, within the stories of class and gender. She chose the single word 'teachers' to describe her parents. This was not a typical reflection of the familial relationship, but illustrated succinctly their intellectual capability and chosen vocation, and provided the necessary context to their approach to Helena's schooling.⁶⁸ Helena's recollections of school started at a young age:

I remember going with my mum to have my name put down to the school and I remember she looked lovely she had a blue, funny the things you remember, blue blouse with white spots on.⁶⁹

Considering that enrolment for the primary school would have taken place in the academic year before she was due to start, this memory stemmed from very early in Helena's childhood. Recalling precise details of her mother's outfit, though 'funny' to Helena, is not without significance.⁷⁰ In this moment whereby, 'she looked lovely', Helena recognised the choice of outfit and its aesthetic suitability both to her mother

⁶⁸ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁶⁹ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁷⁰ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

and to the task at hand.⁷¹ Carolyn Steedman explains how the meaning secured through childhood memories are only reinterpreted later in adult life through the influence of changing circumstances.⁷² I would argue that for Helena, such late-life reinterpretation is shaped by her intergenerational relationship with education and the associated notions of aspiration and high expectation, as both Helena and her husband were also teachers.⁷³ Whilst the recollection reflects the lasting emotional connectivity between mother and daughter, it enables the relationship to be maintained despite the passing of time.

Reflecting too on the possible strategic decisions made by her mother with regards to the choice of outfit and her social position as a teacher herself, she would have been all too aware of the significance of the task ahead, and the registration of her first child into the education system.⁷⁴ This recollection introduced the intensely personal motivation Helena's mother maintained with regard to her daughter's school experience, something that featured throughout her narrative.⁷⁵ Jackson and Marsden described the implications of 'intellectual inheritance', as parents who had experienced secondary education assumed a direct association with the potential grammar school opportunities for children of their own.⁷⁶ For Helena, such 'inheritance' was later manifested through her mother's desire that she inform anyone who might ask of her nominated secondary school:

⁷¹ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁷² Steedman, C, *Past Tenses: Essays on writing, autobiography and history* (London, Rovers Oram, 1992) p. 22

⁷³ Helena and her husband were both teachers, as were her parents. More details can be found within Appendix I, Participant Biographies.

⁷⁴ For further discussion on social position, see Skeggs, B, *Formations of Class and Gender*, p. 11

⁷⁵ For more information on the idea of generational influence see, Barron, Hester. *Class of '37* (Metro Publishing, 2021) p. 4

⁷⁶ Jackson, Brian. & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, p. 210

“And be sure to tell people when they ask you where you go to school” my mum used to say, “St J*****’s convent -- direct grant convent school in Bradford”.

As an alumna of the school herself, Helena’s mother had her own personal reasons to acknowledge and share her daughter’s perceived capabilities. Maternal strategies in relation to education were also evident in the life history narratives of Jane. Born in 1944, and the eldest of two daughters Jane’s mum had been a teacher before marrying her father. Although further exploration regarding Jane’s 11+ experience will follow later in the study, it is important to situate her mother’s attitude to education and preparedness to better appreciate the aspirations she held for her daughter and the effect this had on Jane’s identity. Despite receiving a borderline outcome in her 11+ exam, Jane was invited to a selection interview to determine if she may indeed deserve a grammar school place.

now mother cottoned onto this, obviously, much more than I did, and she brought this tome “*The Water Babies*.” By Charles Kingsley. And I was to read that before I went for this interview. Blooming book! It was so big, it was off-putting. But anyway ... [...] She said, “they’ll, they’ll talk to you about what you read, and you must be able to tell them ...” And I ploughed my way through *Little Women*

and all the four others, and all these Arthur Ransomes',
and I thought I'd done enough, but no, Charles Kingsley!⁷⁷

Placing the breadth of reading to one side, this extract from Jane's narrative expressed not only the effort perceived necessary for interview success, but crucially, her mother's awareness of the need to coach her daughter. With the final result in doubt, her mother was only too aware of the importance of the interview and sought to act in a way that could bring about a positive outcome. Indeed, as this recollection suggests, the ability to present one's knowledge and understanding, even at the age of ten, was critical to the allocation of secondary school places. Jane's language and narrative orality conveyed the extent of effort that she was expected to make, but also her mother's professional understanding of the system and the necessary preparation for such an interview. What is absent, however, is any feelings of pressure that Jane may have been experienced as a result of this further layer in the process, something that features in the narratives of others in the study and continues to resonate within contemporary debates on selective education policy some seventy years later.⁷⁸

For Helena, educational associations with her mother was also problematic when she returned to take up the role of teacher at her primary school. As Helena explained:

⁷⁷ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷⁸ For further discussion on twenty-first century debates on selective educational experience, see: <https://comprehensivefuture.org.uk/new-website-gives-a-voice-to-anonymous-critics-of-the-11-plus/> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/4755270.stm>

Then my mum came to teach at the school. That was trickier because you didn't... I didn't like that because I didn't have a separate life, because inevitably whatever I did she would find out about. So, if I was naughty, if I was good - you know, whatever, so that was always followed up at home. Which it would have been in those days whereas today you might think we'll keep this separate.⁷⁹

Addressing the challenges faced by mother and daughter sharing the same educational space, the narrative altered from third to first person as Helena first considered the impact from a distance and then, more significantly, from her own perspective. The repeated use of 'I' emphasises the very personal implications felt by such close attention. There is a shift in the narrative construct from one shaped by her childhood perceptions of intrusion and the subsequent repercussions at home to the frustrating lack of independence and the omnipresent scrutiny from having to share her schooldays with her mother. Oral history research enables us to understand not only how particular moments or events were experienced, but the subjectivity or meaning contained within the later re-evaluation of such recollections. This extract offered multiple subjectivities as Helena negotiated her feelings as a child, daughter, and as a mother. Additionally, as a primary school teacher in her own working life, Helena's understanding would be further informed by her professional experience. In his influential study into the role of memory, Michael Frisch argues that, rather than just a method, it should be understood as an object itself. For

⁷⁹ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

Frisch, the memory is likened to a 'powerful tool', one which enables individuals to 'connect experience and its social context, how the past becomes the present, and how people can use it to interpret their lives and their world around them'.⁸⁰

Arguably, Helena's account reflected both the effect on her as a young child but also her understanding of acceptability some sixty years hence.

Helena's life history narrative was shaped around the aspirational influence and exacting standards of her mother. Helena acknowledged that as the eldest of four children she 'was the one paving the way for everybody else to come through'.⁸¹ In isolation, the three individual recollections explored within this section reflect all mother's priorities with regards to her daughter's positive school experience. For Helena, however, they signify the heightened level of expectation she experienced and the need to consider her mother's ideals. Towards the end of our conversation Helena recalled a moment at her mother's funeral, in which her godmother shared an appreciation of their relationship but from her own perspective, stating, "you were the first, Helen, you were special".⁸² Gender and family sociologist Janet Finch argues that the strength of kin relations are not just reliant on wider social or economic forces, but on the emotional bonds forged in the early years from special relationships within the family sphere.⁸³ In this respect, the emotional attachment between Helena and her mother was established ahead of her other younger siblings arriving. Though the relationship between Helena and her mother was

⁸⁰ Frisch, Michael. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (State University of New York Press, 1990) in Thomson, Alistair. 'Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1. (2007): pp. 49-70, p. 55

⁸¹ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁸² HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁸³ Finch, Janet. *Family Obligations and Social Change* (Polity Press, 1989) p. 224

exacting, for those like Anna who was an only child, the intensity of the maternal relationship could be understood as overwhelming.

As explored within the previous chapter, affirmation of any aspirational intent was, for Anna, explained through her mother's focussed interaction with others of a more desirable social sphere. Such intent was revealed by the complexity of Anna's eventual transfer to the technical school when aged 13. Whilst this analysis does not refer directly to Anna's 11+ outcome, it is important to situate the stark reality behind any school attainment:

And I think my mother wanted me to do well, and she, I think, going back to what school I went to, she wanted the right uniform.⁸⁴

In this respect, for Anna's mother, 'do[ing] well', meant showing her middle-class companions that her daughter was capable of gaining access to the same schools.⁸⁵ Crucially, this extract revealed the significance of the uniform, something which was apparent among the narratives in the previous chapter. This desire for social mobility reflects those of Jane Thompson, who wrote of the transference of maternal hopes and aspirations in relation to her own selective opportunities.⁸⁶ The dominant influence of Anna's mother features frequently within her life history narrative. Having shared some initial details about her 11+ experience, Anna reflected on their relationship:

⁸⁴ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁸⁵ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁸⁶ Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education*, p. 16

'I've been doing everything for my mother all my life, actually [...] I was always trying to please her but I never succeeded'.⁸⁷

Sociological examination of the effects of smaller families warned of the potential risks associated with the increased involvement by parents in the lives of their children. Writing in 1962, Ronald Fletcher described how through the burden of anxiety relating to the 11+ examination, children may experience an 'undue concentration of high expectation', something that is further explored in the following chapter on Stories of Failure.⁸⁸ Though her narrative was kept brief, something that differed to others in the study, Anna's use of, 'everything', 'all', 'always' convey her life-long attempts to both achieve and to please.⁸⁹ As these selected narrative extracts from Anna, Jane and Helena have shown, irrespective of their eventual 11+ outcome, mothers projected both their high expectations and their anxiety of reputational compromise to their daughters about education.

Sibling relationships

The chapter has, so far, examined details of parental bonds contained within the narratives. Accounts reveal the extent of parental influence and aspirations surrounding the 11+ experience but also provide a lens through which to better appreciate the complex feelings and meaning of such nuanced family associations. The focus now shifts to the intricacies of sibling relationships as attention is placed

⁸⁷ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁸⁸ Fletcher, Ronald. *Britain in the Sixties*, p. 149

⁸⁹ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

on the implications of perceived academic difference, a demarcation of 'them and us' that both establishes and affirms an individual's identity. As Davidoff argues, 'by designating who is excluded or marginal', it is possible to realize who we are, by acknowledging who we aren't.⁹⁰ However, this method of differentiation fails to express the subtleties of power relations that further affect the identities of those within the kin group. It is this disparity of power within sibling relationships, either by age, intellect or parental inference that shaped the narratives of childhood.

Further into our conversation Helena spoke of her sibling's school experience and the implications of their contrasting characteristics.

My younger sister who also went to St J*****'s college was much more academic than me, and much erm serious really. I mean I remember at one parent's evening they came back, and they said "well the same English teacher said she couldn't believe you were sisters you were so different. She said you were flighty". Flighty! So, I said "Oh". I didn't know what to say really cos I... I think what she meant was I don't apply myself which I probably didn't. I could be a bit distracted, a bit giddy. Connie was a bit head down. Much more serious. More intense. It was expected she would go to university. [...] I think she always has felt, and I think in some ways still does feel, a bit in my shadow.

⁹⁰ Davidoff, L., M. Doolittle, J. Fink, K. Holden. eds. *The Family Story*, p. 87

AL: So, she's either got to maintain your level (yes) or exceed it?

HG: Or exceed it. Yes. Yeah, that's right. Now a prime example of that is when I passed my driving test. I passed it second time, and she said 'well I'll pass mine first time' - and she did. [...] I got a Saturday job in Thornton's toffee shop smashing the toffee up in the back and she said, "Oh when I get a Saturday job, I'll get a job that's much better paid, much better job than that and much better paid". So, I think there was that kind of erm... I don't know. Wanting to be a bit better than me maybe. I don't know. Or maybe jealousy or whatever it is in siblings at that stage.

Helena's position as eldest child has continued to have a particular effect on her younger sister, both in relation to the family hierarchy and in a desire to demonstrate an alternative superiority through recognised attainment. Though parental reaction to Helena's 11+ success is examined later in the study, this awareness of her sister's early adolescent intent to be 'better' evidences the internal family struggles, as power relations were challenged by proven ability. Arguably, Helena's account plays down any likely emotional effect of such sibling defiance but nonetheless acknowledges its continued existence into their adult lives. In contrast to such tussles, the sibling hierarchy in Sandy's family was more intense and held lasting emotional implications.

Born in 1954, the youngest of three children, Sandy's narrative was shaped by her diminished position within the family, as the one who failed to succeed at the 11+

exam. Indeed, her perceived intellectual weakness was a means through which she was both identified and differentiated within her sibling group, therefore an omnipresent ingredient in stories of her early life:

I always wanted my sister's approval, and she knew how to press my buttons. And I was the giggly, noisy one, and she was always sitting in the corner reading. [...] And that's what it used to be. We used to share a bedroom, and I used to always be saying to Sam, "talk to me Sam". And she'd just be dead silent. And then I'd get so frustrated, but she wouldn't, and then I'd probably make a lot more noise, and then mum'd come in and tell me to be quiet. And, you know, so it went on. [...] 'Cause they, they treated me as if I was silly.⁹¹

On the surface, Sandy's narrative appeared to express a typical example of sibling interaction, with the younger sister anxious to gain the attention from her elder sibling and causing some necessary intervention by their mother. The way it was shared, however, suggested an alternative interpretation. Through her explanation of frustration at her sister's determined silence, Sandy's voice weakened to reveal the level of upset she experienced from such a harsh dismissal. Moreover, as this recollection drew to a close, Sandy's voice further altered to become little more than a whisper, which conveyed a sense of shame, both in her efforts to secure her

⁹¹ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

sister's attention and by her later-life realisation of this seemingly childlike behaviour. Despite her status as head girl and her inevitable 11+ success, Sandy's sister left school at sixteen, with an eventual move abroad. As the family dynamics altered, Sandy found herself having to defend her elder sister's sullen attitude and the challenging mother-daughter relationship. Acknowledging how her mum was disappointed, Sandy admitted that 'Sam didn't fulfil her capabilities'. This open admission of disappointment further evidenced the familial expectations regarding educational attainment and likely contributed to Sandy's life-long frustration at her own sense of self.

Further into our conversation, Sandy's narrative revealed that any hierarchical form of sibling control demonstrated by the elder sister was nothing in comparison to that of her brother. Older than Sandy by six years, she recalled how he was able to exert his dominance:

My brother definitely bullied me. [...] "You're thick". Mum and Dad never said that. My brother would have said that to me. My sister wouldn't have done. [...] No, he would have been unkind. Would have been unkind about it. Yeah. "Sandy, you're thick". [...] If we play Monopoly, I would actually not be, I wouldn't be allowed to play Monopoly. So, they'd be on the floor with all the Monopoly bits and everything. And (*muted laughter*), when I did eventually get to play, I was only allowed to **buy**, er, Whitechapel and Park Street (*sic*) (*laughter*) while **he** got Park Lane and Mayfair. Yeah, he wouldn't allow me to buy

it, even though, even though it was in the game. He was such a bully. [...] Because he wanted to be superior to me.⁹²

This extract is multi-layered in construct. On the one hand it revealed how, through the manipulated act of childhood play, it was possible to inflict and receive a lasting sense of inferiority and isolation, whilst on the other was the open acknowledgement of her brother's coercive behaviour. Sandy's description expressed both the verbal abuse, 'Sandy, you're thick', alongside the psychological method through which he demonstrated superiority.⁹³ In contrast to the earlier recollection between Sandy and her sister, where alteration in the orality of the narration demonstrated the level of embarrassment and upset felt as a result of the sisterly disregard, such emotional evidence is absent from the composition of this different experience. Indeed, the first few lines were spoken as short concise statements of 'fact', to express her brother's judgement of Sandy alongside the pre-meditated intent to limit her participation in the game, based only on his assessment of her diminished intellectual capacity. Aware of how petty such deeds would be considered some sixty years later, the presence of laughter, even muted, acted as a form of defence mechanism. However, notwithstanding her own grown-up perspective, by adding humour to the recollection Sandy alluded to her understanding of his behaviour and provided a means through which she could share without re-experiencing the harmful effect. She later revealed that her brother has been estranged from the family for many years. Though no details were offered, the earlier examples of his dominance in childhood and early

⁹² SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁹³ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

adolescence illustrated the challenging experiences that perhaps contributed to the situation.

Returning to the implications of sibling differentiation to result from selective education, as the youngest of three children and the only one to fail her 11+, Sandy admitted how her need for approval stemmed from her lasting feelings of inadequacy:

SW: But I was always doing what I ... had to do, and I always wanted [to] be... doing the right thing for my mum and dad and, yeah...

AL: that approval?

SW: Approval definitely. Definitely approval. [...]

AL: And do you think that stayed with you?

SW: Approval, yeah. Even now. Yeah, I would say so.

Approval... (*tut*) yeah... (*voice diminished*) Because, I was always, thought I was not good enough. [...] Never good enough (*voice diminished*).⁹⁴

Sandy's orality within this extract varied from her strong affirmation of the need for parental approval, to the whispered realisation of the personal reasons behind such demands. Moreover, it became apparent that attempting to verbalise her needs and feelings, Sandy was revisiting the effects of her perceived inferiority in relation to her elder brother and sister.

⁹⁴ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

Asked if she could explain those feelings in more detail, Sandy acknowledged that her 'never good enough' was understood in relation to her perceived performance at school, in comparison to her siblings.⁹⁵ In this respect, she felt obliged to compensate for any sense of disappointment her parents might have felt when compared to the success of her elder siblings. Encouraged to talk more about her lasting need for approval, Sandy affirmed how this insecurity was not confined to adolescence, but is something that continued to stay with her, 'even now'.⁹⁶ Long-held anxieties concerning her own abilities as a child were further complicated when, as a teenager, Sandy saw how her mum had altered her own recollections of those years:

Whereas with Mum, I was always ... hmm, wanting to make, yeah ... *(long pause and a swift intake of breath)*. I don't know. And then it was so strange, because as she got older, it was almost like I was this perfect little girl, "but she was *always so happy, always so happy, and so loving*". And so it was, it, like it wasn't real. That was how Mum and I, and that's how I spent my sort of older teenage years and adult life as this, '*could do no wrong*'. Because I could. Quite easily.⁹⁷

In contrast to the cohesive re-telling of her father's empathetic understanding, Sandy's account of the relationship with her mum appeared challenging to voice and

⁹⁵ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁹⁶ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁹⁷ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

tricky to re-visit. Any comfort she gained from her father's compassionate approach was complicated by her mother's reimagining of her childhood. Considering the earlier extracts that illustrated the challenging nature of the sibling relationship, it is possible to understand her mother's desire to re-imagine moments of the past as a means of repairing their fractured family.⁹⁸ Irrespective of motivation, however, Sandy's own subjectivity was compromised by the alteration of past experiences. In his evaluation of the family construct, sociologist Daniel Bertaux argues that irrespective of its unifying identity, each person holds a unique position within the family, resulting in differing definitions of relationships.⁹⁹ Arguably, Sandy's narrative revealed the complexities existing within her own memories of family when placed alongside those of her mother.

Where experiences of sibling disharmony in Sandy's family came through personal slights, heightened emotional anxiety and blatant exclusion, the differences between Sarah and her younger sister appeared superficial and far less emotionally harmful. Sarah was four years older than her sister. When asked if there was any apparent tension within the family because of her sister's failed exam outcome, she replied:

I think, with hindsight, only be, only my mother being very upset. [...] And I sort of put it down to the fact that she couldn't hand any clothes down to us because we had different uniforms, and we were so obviously different in

⁹⁸ Sandy has been estranged from her brother for the whole of her adult life.

⁹⁹ Bertaux, D. *between Generations*, p. 2

the town. [...] When we walked home from school, which we both had to do, through the high street, really, we wouldn't speak to each other, but ... it wasn't horrible. [...] You just didn't speak [...] Because people would be shouting out "grammar school snobs", and ... I'm trying to remember what we called the secondary modern, but I didn't, I mean, I don't, didn't feel I needed to do that.¹⁰⁰

Sarah's description of the sibling's secondary school experiences is situated around the domestic implications of different schools within the family, alongside the very tribal behaviours present in many towns across the country. Though closer attention is paid to familial reaction to the 11+ in the second half of the study, it is interesting that Sarah placed any disappointment experienced by her mother in relation to the 11+ as one of economics as opposed to perceived intellectual disparity. Of greater significance, however, is her awareness of the public antagonism between the two school types, and their conscious decision to limit the personal implications of such feelings by not speaking to each other. Whilst the narrative acknowledged that, as sisters walking home from school, they were 'obviously different', and therefore at an increased risk of being mocked, there appeared to be a mutual indifference to the effects of any public hostilities. Indeed, Sarah affirmed that this only really existed after school on the walk home, 'but then it doesn't seem to matter when, once you got home, or in the holidays'.¹⁰¹ In contrast to the very personal derision inflicted on Sandy by her brother, the actions described by Sarah appeared to be targeted, not at

¹⁰⁰ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

¹⁰¹ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

the individual, but at the school type. Forward-thinking educationalists in the 1930s, aware of proposals for tripartite educational provision, raised concerns that the enforced division would split the local community as well as the pupils.¹⁰² Though other participants acknowledged the differences between the two school types and the idea of separation, Sarah was the only one who recalled obvious friction in the town.

Aside from the economic implications, Sarah shared more about her mother's feelings with regards to her younger daughter's 11+ performance which offered an insight into the anxieties about the reputation of the secondary modern:

She didn't pass the eleven plus and my mother was really very upset about this, and I remember conversations, first of all, about whether I could help her, you know, with her homework and think, "no". And then my mother was sort of talking about seeing if they could afford a private school for her. But when I think about it, and I was thinking about this quite recently, she was a popular girl. She'd got a lot of friends, and none of them passed the eleven plus. They all went on mass to the secondary modern school.¹⁰³

This extract illustrates the complexity of selective educational policy. Though Sarah's parents were both white collar workers and likely aspirational middle-class, her father held positive views about the merits of the Butler Act. Despite this equitable stance,

¹⁰² Campbell, F. *Eleven-Plus and all that*, (Watts, 1956) p. 181

¹⁰³ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

however, it is possible to understand how with one daughter benefitting from a grammar school education, feelings about untested alternatives with reputational baggage would alter parental attitudes.¹⁰⁴ I asked Sarah if she could recall her sister feeling upset by having failed the 11+:

No. And I spoke to her about it. I said, “do you remember, um, how we didn't talk to each other, or, or did you feel, you know different?” She said, “no, never thought about it.”¹⁰⁵

This conversation challenges the concerns of family disharmony as a result of differing 11+ exam outcomes, as Sarah's sister appeared oblivious to any parental anxiety at her attendance at a different type of secondary school. Arguably, with the exam outcome affirmed and in the company of her peers, she had no reason to assume that she was in the “wrong” place. Indeed, given the many thousands of children who sat the 11+, this is a plausible representation of many families' experiences at the time. Sarah's narrative expressed a sense of parity in the sibling relationship. In contrast to others in the study, irrespective of the differing school destination, there appeared to be a mutual respect towards each other's differences. This was not possible for Hazel where intellectual capability defined by school type only reinforced the conflicting notions of gender within the family. Asked if she was close to her two brothers:

¹⁰⁴ Vernon, P.E. *Secondary School Selection*, p. 63

¹⁰⁵ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

No. Um, closer to the younger one than I am the middle one. [...] Um, the next one down didn't pass his 11+, so it was a secondary modern, grammar school stuff. [...] It was okay, until it transpired that my, but my middle brother wasn't gonna be as bright. [...] Um, and then the school rivalry came into play quite a lot. [...] Um, and my father was very much "my son, my son".¹⁰⁶

For Hazel, the 11+ was a marker that influenced the internal family dynamics. Whilst demonstrating her own academic ability, Hazel's positive 11+ outcome underlined the limited capabilities of others in the family. Accepting that this was not uncommon, indeed others in the cohort experienced similar mixed outcomes, for Hazel, any apparent sibling weakness became a slight on her father's masculine supremacy. Given what has already been shared by Hazel within the previous chapter on the Stories of Class and Gender, in relation to her father's dominance within the home, it is possible to understand his gendered response when faced with a challenge to the family structure.

¹⁰⁶ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

Conclusion

The first half of this study has examined the wider structures of class and gender through which the young lives of the narrators were founded. This chapter on the Stories of Family has evidenced the very nuanced influences of both parental guidance and sibling relations. For parents of the postwar generation, educational opportunity was not solely an affair of the state. Motivated by their own limited experience, there was greater involvement in the business of school across the class divide, as the opportunity of full secondary education for all offered increased social mobility to working-class children.¹⁰⁷ Narratives reveal the social transition from provider to mentor as fathers actively connected with their daughters' childhood lives. Contrasting with perceptions of fathers on the 'threshold of the family', rather than its centre, these life history narratives illustrated how fathers brought emotional engagement alongside the family security.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, as the extracts from Sandy and June showed, the meaning from such unconditional empathetic support continues to resonate throughout their adult lives.

Considering that experiences shared within oral history interviews reflect what continues to remain of value in participants' lives, the recollections of compassion and the sharing of coping strategies illustrate the depth of respect held within the father daughter relationship. Such close familial interaction contributes to the sense of self and eventual adult identity, something which can be understood in relation to the re-examination of school and adolescence. Recollections of relationships with

¹⁰⁷ Such enthusiasm among parents for educational opportunity was present in the narratives by Helena, Maggie, June and Sarah.

¹⁰⁸ Gillis, John R. *A World of Their Own Making: A History of Myth and Ritual in Family Life* (Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 179

mothers differed notably to those of fathers, focusing instead the necessary husbandry in relation to preparedness for school, both through uniform provision and in the appropriate behavioural standards that reinforced a gendered commitment to the task. Mothers were described as one of two types; either a seemingly invisible force, whose role was to maintain and preserve the family well-being, or one who actively sought a higher status for the family, whose opinion and motivation demonstrated the extent of influence they had on their daughter's behaviour and opportunity.

Sibling relationships were seen to play an integral part in the subjective understanding of their school experience, either through moments of personal recognition or by the notion of differentiation, having been "formally" identified either as more or less capable when compared to others in the family. Having now situated the social and cultural aspect of the narratives through a detailed exploration into the private and public environmental influences, the second half of the study places the 11+ and the moment of secondary school selection at its core to better understand the differing lived experiences of success or failure and the lasting implications on the sense of self.

Chapter 4: Stories of Failure

Introducing failure

This project now looks to the 11+ experience and the way in which the given outcome has become a crucial part of these women's life stories. The life history interviews that inform this study show that despite an overarching intention to allocate children to the most appropriate form of secondary education, the lived experience of such selection had far-reaching implications. This chapter on the stories of failure looks at three crucial aspects in relation to the Butler Act (1944); the idea of parity of esteem and deep-seated reputational inequalities between grammar and secondary modern schools that affected both parental aspirations and sibling relationships; the differing notions of selection through the 11+ process, illustrating the value attached to schooling within the home; and, lastly, the emotional responses to the 11+ and the life-long effects of a failed outcome. In order to understand the impact of the macro policy events on the micro human experience, this chapter asks three questions; To what extent did the structured differences between the two educational types manifest themselves within the attitudes of those who underwent in the selection process? Secondly, how did the lived experience of the 11+ act to influence the individual's sense of self in relation to the move from primary to secondary? And finally, what, if any, is the lasting emotional significance of the 11+ result, and why does it continue to exert a level of control on the individual nearly seventy years later?

Aside from bruised reputations, a further concern was the potential for limited life chances available to children whose attainment levels were steered via the

secondary modern route. Sociologist William Liversidge considered the relative influence of educational backgrounds as a means of determining occupational outcomes for children segregated at eleven years. For the pupils tasked with selecting both fantasy and realistic aspirations for future occupation, the study demonstrated that ‘the most potent force’ to shape their future expectations, was the ‘educational system to which [they] have been assigned.’¹ Moreover, whilst acknowledging the higher expectations of grammar school pupils, Liversidge affirmed that pupils involved in the study ‘are fully aware of the social implications of their educational selection.’² Upon confirmation of their 11+ outcome, therefore, and ‘consigned to the limbo of secondary modern’, any perceptions regarding limited opportunities were likely to take effect.³

In his 1953 study into the effects of intelligence testing for secondary school, educationalist Brian Simon describes the 11+ as a ‘parting of the ways’, with terms such as “success” or “failure” emblematic of the clear division that results from the exam.⁴ Arguably, this idea of division is not purely an academic divide, as there is also an emotional shift once children’s identities become forged by the score of a written test. Research into the effects of the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests consider the implications of emotional anxiety both in relation to the test but also to the final result. Sociologist Diane Reay and educationalist Dylan Wiliam argue that while individual responses varied, pupils ‘share a sense of an event which reveal

¹ Liversidge, William. ‘Life Chances’, p. 33

² Liversidge, William. ‘Life Chances’, p. 23

³ Laurie, Peter. *The Teenage Revolution* (Anthony Blond Ltd, 1965) p. 141

⁴ Simon, Brian. *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School* (Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1953) p. 19

something intrinsic about them'.⁵ Certainly, irrespective of the testing method, it is the early identification of a supposed underlying weakness that is the root of much anxiety, both for the child and for their family. As this study into the lasting effects of the 11+ demonstrates, the experience remains an influencing factor and shapes the sense of self long into adult life.

Sociological research in the 1960s into self-perceptions of ability and school achievement argued that educational testing provided individuals with a realization of their own ability with regard to school performance. The 1964 study by sociologists William Brookover, Shailer Thomas and Ann Paterson suggested that pupils who failed to achieve could be left with a 'lasting association of failure' that prevented them from ever having a positive outcome.⁶ The effects of failure as a result of school selection was the focus of psychological studies undertaken ten years after the introduction of the Butler Act. Philip E. Vernon argued that those allotted to secondary modern schools risked being 'dubbed failures at an impressionable age [...] with the result that any interest in further educational progress inhibited'.⁷ Whilst these areas of research suggested there was little opportunity of return from a poor level of performance, this study now examines the extent to which a failed 11+ result influenced the lives of those affected and their efforts to overcome it.

Considering the notion that the 11+ exam created a line in a sand, a "sorting hat" that forged a person's identity, it is possible to understand how the educational process and subsequent opportunity would play a critical role in an individual's sense

⁵ Reay, Diane. & Dylan William, "'I'll Be a Nothing": Structure, Agency and the Construction of Identity through Assessment', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1999): pp. 343-354, p. 343

⁶ Brookover, Wilbur, B., Shailer Thomas & Ann Paterson, 'Self-concept of Ability', p. 271

⁷ Vernon, P.E. *Secondary School Selection*, p. 63

of self.⁸ Divided into three sections, this chapter explores the failed 11+ in three respects: the lived realities of the result, including how it was received within the home; the lasting effects of failure that continued on into later adult life; and finally the how ideas of failure can be reimagined through positive experiences of schooling. Despite the rhetoric and the reoccurring 'lifetime sense of failure and thoughts about what might have been', this chapter is not wholly a bad news story, as there is more to the experience of failing the 11+ than the wider discourse would suggest.⁹

The harsh realities of failure

Sandy's narrative was shaped by her failure to achieve the 11+ and she was the only participant to detail the extent of nervousness experienced whilst sitting the exam itself. Notwithstanding being 'very anxious about maths', Sandy was also aware of her parents' trepidation at her pending selection process, as she acknowledged 'I don't think [they] expected me to pass'.¹⁰ Sandy's early perception of her parents' concern foreshadows any likely support or encouragement she may have received in preparation for the exam. Absent from school due to a bout of tonsillitis, Sandy was forced to sit the 11+ separately from those in her class, by herself in the head mistress's office. As her narrative revealed, exam content was not her primary concern on the day:

⁸ Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self* (1995)

⁹ Pearson, Helen. *The Life Project*, p. 60

¹⁰ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

My main concern was I used to bite my nails, and I was, I knew Miss Winston would pick up on that, and she would say, “Sandy G*****!” So, I was more interested in having my hands under my thighs than doing what I was meant to be doing. [...] I don't remember anything about the exam itself apart from being in her office.¹¹

Listening to this admission, it is possible to appreciate how the overbearing weight of concern at any possible admonishment would lessen Sandy's ability to concentrate on the exam. When asked if she was aware of trying to hide something that may displease, Sandy replied 'yes'.¹² As the youngest of three children, Sandy constantly sought approval, not just from her parents, but from her siblings. Though the issues relating to sibling hierarchy were explored in the previous chapter, it is important to recognise now, in her recollections of the 11+ experience, the depth of insecurity experienced by Sandy as a child, and the significant impact that it had on her ability to navigate challenging situations. Aware that she had failed her 11+, I was interested to find out how much she could remember about that time and what memories she felt able to share. I asked Sandy how she heard that she hadn't passed:

SW: I don't remember.

AL: You don't remember?

SW: Don't remember. No. Don't remember ... it was a

¹¹ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

¹² SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

long time ago.

AL: No kind of moment or anything? No big revelation?

SW: No. The thing I do remember is when I started the comprehensive, I was really unhappy. I didn't like it.¹³

As someone who has also experienced the lasting impact of failure at school, there is much to explore in this extract taken from Sandy's narrative. Whilst there is no assumption that Sandy can remember specific details from this moment and has chosen to omit them from her recollections, it is unlikely that she remembered nothing from what was such a significant moment in her life. Attempting to evidence the cause of Sandy's complex relationship with her own 11+ experience, it could be argued that she demonstrated an unwillingness to re-engage with the memory, something described by Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat as an 'unconscious repression'.¹⁴ In her assessment of the mechanics of memory, Luisa Passerini argues for greater consideration to be given to, '*corps à corps*, or our place in the construction of memory', and the effects of empathy between the listener and narrator.¹⁵ As explained in the Participant Biographies, Sandy's involvement came through her membership of the Women's Institute, which was how we got to know each other.¹⁶ Considering, therefore, our connected relationship, it is possible that Sandy chose to avoid re-opening the wound, preferring instead to protect herself from the emotional effects of such disclosure.

¹³ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

¹⁴ Thompson, Paul & Joanna Bornat, *The Voice of the Past*, p. 205

¹⁵ Passerini, Luisa. 'Memory', p. 195

¹⁶ See Appendix I, Participant Biographies.

Certainly, Sandy's recollection of the 11+ result is significantly different from those who achieved the 11+, irrespective of their eventual secondary school experience. Sandy's narrative, as a whole, is structured around her perceived inabilities, or failure to 'match' her siblings' seemingly effortless aptitude and assurance. Early childhood memories, discussed in the previous chapter, express the anxiety and distress that she experienced as a result of this 'difference'. This particular extract of the 11+ sits approximately 20 minutes into our conversation. Until that time, Sandy spoke openly, in a relaxed and easy manner, sharing many anecdotal memories which helped to explain the complex relationships existing in her family. There was, however, a significant change both in her tone and delivery of these few lines, contrasting greatly with what was spoken before and what came after. These memories were spoken very quietly. They were also uttered in a subtly defensive manner, as if attempting to close the subject down, preventing any further examination. Interestingly, Sandy's inability to offer any form of recollection appears to replicate that of a child when challenged by an adult about their regrettable actions. Crucially, this moment in the narrative was delivered with little emotional reaction, as if protecting herself from any possible anguish that might arise by revisiting the experience.¹⁷ The academic separation Sandy experienced in relation to her elder siblings was emblematic of their familial structure. Though mentioned only briefly in the narrative, Sandy's relationship with her brother was severed many years ago. It could be argued, therefore, that the 'assemblage' (to use Dodd's phrase) of the wider effects of Sandy's 11+ failure outweighed the impact of the result itself.

¹⁷ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

Sandy's attempt to block revisiting her experience of receiving the exam result could be likened to the effects of trauma. Whilst this may appear somewhat inflated in relation to a school exam, her failure to achieve the 11+ was a pivotal moment that "officially" differentiated Sandy from her siblings. Assessing the characteristics of trauma memories in oral narratives, Lynn Abrams argues that some people 'repress difficult memories' in an attempt to protect or survive challenging situations in their past.¹⁸ This idea of repression is echoed by Passerini, who argues that forgetting aspects of events suggests an element of suffering that continues to affect the sense of self.¹⁹ Repetition of the phrase 'don't remember' suggests a strategy adopted by Sandy to create a disconnect from the experience, a moment in her life that she no longer wishes to recall.²⁰ Acknowledging that my question echoed her original answer, she made no further alteration and remained fixed on the inability to remember that aspect of her 11+ experience. Historian Lenore Layman, describes the use of reticence within oral narratives as a method through which narrators limit the dialogue on subjects or experiences that remain uncomfortable.²¹ Though unable to affirm if Sandy's inability to remember was caused by a form of distortion, perhaps by the passing of time, or through her conscious decision to keep the experience closed, given her openness both up until that point and immediately after, the surety of denial suggests it is a moment in her life that she was reluctant to revisit.²²

Arguably, at this point, Sandy's apparent censorship altered the balance of power within our relationship and allowed her to take ownership of the conversation,

¹⁸ Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 93

¹⁹ Passerini, Luisa. 'Memory', p. 196

²⁰ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

²¹ Layman, Lenore. 'Reticence in Oral History', pp. 207-230

²² For more information on the effects of distortion in oral narratives see, Swindells, J. eds. *The Uses of Autobiography* (Taylor & Francis, 1995)

preventing any dis-composure from re-invigorating her emotional memories and altering her sense of self. Life history narratives illustrate how historical experiences shape subjectivities. This methodological feature is not exclusive to the meaning held by the narrator, but also the intersubjectivity that exists between both parties involved in the life history process. Sandy's reluctance to share further on how she learnt of the exam outcome would suggest it remains, some sixty years later, a very sensitive moment in her life. By limiting the opportunity for possible deeper exploration of how she felt at that time, Sandy avoids confronting any potential lack of understanding or appreciation on my part as to the impact of such an outcome.

There was no such self-censorship within Anna's narrative regarding the move from primary to secondary education, as she herself said, 'so when I said, I've had an 11+ experience, I've had an 11+ experience'.²³ Through the project recruitment process, I was aware that Anna had failed the 11+ and I was interested to hear how she received her exam result.

I think people got letters. And my mother met me in this playground. I think she was dinner lady at the time. She was just doing that at the time ... and she met me and said, "I saw you, and you saw me, and *oooh* failure, failure!" A big drama, big drama, it was. I was made to feel it was a **big** drama.²⁴

²³ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

²⁴ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

Unlike others in her class, Anna's mother had gained access to her 11+ result ahead of any letter that was sent to the home. In her recollection the words and sequence are somewhat reinforced by the highly dramatic performance with regard to her result. Moreover, it appears as if her recollection is a replicated version of one that her mother may have told. Recalling their shared acknowledgement of the result Anna physically performed their moment of interaction, as if to provide me with a better level of appreciation. Feminist oral historian Kathryn Anderson and psychologist Dana Jack discuss the need to focus in on the act of listening to gain the meaning behind the experience, in essence using the voice and the words spoken as a means to secure the individual meaning within the narrative.²⁵ Anna's strength of voice, yet simple choice of words clearly recounted her mother's feelings on that day. Moreover, they express only her mother's feelings, revealing none of her own. Repeated use of 'big drama' conveys both the scale of the response and the nature of delivery. Behind the palaver and emotional outpouring, however, there lies a small but not insignificant admission, 'I was made to feel it was a **big** drama'.²⁶ Though conscious of her mother's aspirations for her, it can be argued that until the 11+ results were actually announced Anna had little expectation that her mother would react in such a way. This judgement of failure was often difficult for parents to accept. Sociologist Clive Griggs argues that whilst the majority of working-class parents were able to accept the outcome, 'this was less true of articulate middle-class parents who [...] resented the judgement'.²⁷ As revealed within the first half of

²⁵ Anderson, Kathryn. & Dana Jack, 'Learning to Listen', p. 15

²⁶ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

²⁷ Griggs, Clive. "The Rise of Mass Schooling", in *The Social Contexts of Schooling*. Cole, M. ed. (Falmer Press, 1989) p. 63

the study, though Anna's mother was viewed as aspirational among her middle-class social circle, she had high hopes for her only child.

Remembering that the likelihood of securing a place within a selective school was approximately one child in every four, it can be assumed that news of this type was not uncommon.²⁸ Recalling the complexities within their relationship explored within the previous chapter, Anna's 11+ experience was centred on the expectations and reaction of her mother, as opposed to any desire or personal ambition she had for herself. Indeed, unlike others who actively sought entry to the grammar school, Anna did not appear to pursue any such aspiration but placed her mother's happiness ahead of her own, a recurring theme within her life history narrative. In contrast to her peers, however, who received their result in the privacy of the family home, Anna's was a very public affair, situated as it was in the school playground. Critically, what has remained with Anna is the extent and scale of the drama caused as a result of her failed outcome, the emotional distress experienced by her mother and, as she further revealed, the consequence this had on her younger self.

I honestly don't think I was ready to go to a high school or grammar school. I think I was a bit of a late developer, to be honest. But I still took it and failed. And I had the biggest sense of failure I've ever had in my life [...] cause my mother sort of got very melodramatic about it. [...]

²⁸ Carter, M.P. *School and Work*, p. 2 The proportion of grammar school places ranged from 10-40 per cent across the English education authorities, up to 60 per cent in Wales. For more statistical information on grammar school places see: Campbell, F. *Eleven-Plus and all that*, (Watts, 1956) Jarman, T.L. "Developments in English Education in 1959: The Year of the Crowther Report", *International Review of Education*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1960): pp. 231-234. Todd, Selina. *The People*. (2014)

Now, this was followed by me not sleeping and crying every night, and eventually my parents realized something was wrong, and so the outcome was the doctor recommended me to a child guidance scheme ... where they tried to sort me out. [...] Funnily enough, my mother took me to the Child Guidance Clinic [...] and we had to walk down the road to get the bus. And at the same time, all my friends were coming out of [...] County High, and I didn't speak. I didn't speak to any of them. These were girls I'd been at primary school with. My mother said, "you didn't speak, you didn't ..." I just couldn't bring myself to speak to them. I felt I was nothing.²⁹

Many of the accounts shared within this research situate the narrator in time and place, but none more so than this. Anna's narrative depicts the irony of the situation; having left the child guidance clinic only necessary from her 11+ anxiety, whilst her peers who secured a successful outcome left the gates of their grammar school. This recollection also demonstrated the sense of shame and inadequacy felt by Anna when she encountered these friends a few short weeks after the move from primary to secondary school. Anna's expression, 'where they tried to sort me out', reinforced the perceived role of child welfare at that time, and emphasised her own understanding that the form of anxiety she experienced was something that could be fixed.³⁰ Curiously, she spoke only of the attempt and not of any success. What is

²⁹ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

³⁰ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

evident, however, from her narrative is that the exam failure was not hers alone, it was also felt by her mother, keen to demonstrate her own social acceptance. Anna's choice of language in this extract was telling. Repeated use of, 'I was unable to speak' reinforced both her mother's telling of the event and the perceived distance that existed between Anna and her peers as a result of the selection process.³¹ Through the open admission of her inability to communicate, Anna conveyed her perception of a psychological barrier as well as a social barrier.

Psychological studies by Silvan Tomkins into the notions of affect experienced by individuals as a result of negative behaviour and events consider the characteristics of feelings such as shame caused by a sense of indignity, defeat, or alienation to be 'inherently unacceptable'.³² In this respect, through her attempt to limit the damaging negative affect of repeated public humiliation at the poor outcome of her 11+, Anna chose to withdraw or alienate herself from her previous friendship group. It could be argued that Anna acted in a way that would prevent a reoccurrence of the shame or humiliation she had already endured.

In sharing these experiences of disconnect that resulted from her failed 11+ exam, Anna described her feelings at the time. 'I felt I was nothing', expressed how she had been literally destroyed by the 11+ outcome, an experience for Anna that damaged her sense of self. Discussions on the effects of selective education policy document the implications of differentiation and isolation.³³ It is only through the nuanced recollections made possible through oral history research, however, that the emotional repercussions can be understood.

³¹ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

³² Wilson, E. & A. Frank, *A Silvan Tomkins Handbook: Foundations of Affect Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020) p. 60

³³ <https://11plusanonymous.org/tales-from-the-past>

The lasting effects of failure

Stepping away from the recollections of the 11+ result and the individual memories that are shaped around the feelings and responses of others, it is important now to situate these experiences of failure to better understand the emotional implications that continue to resonate within these women's lives. Reflecting on the effects of her own experience of failure, Anna explained:

I think in a lot of ways, the damage had been done on it. And I think for a long time in my life, I sort of underplayed myself. I felt a failure, I mean ... I, I, I was, I'm very good at acting my way out of it, but underneath, I was always feeling deep down, I hadn't really done what I should have done.³⁴

Anna's reflection expresses the sense of irreparable harm suffered as a result of the 11+ and how she felt that through the perceived loss of opportunity, she was somehow prohibited from fulfilling her true potential. In her admission, 'I felt a failure', Anna affirmed the effects on her identity, both as a young girl and on into adulthood. More significant, however, was Anna's acknowledgement of the conscious personal effort made to overcome the situation in which she found herself in. In 'act[ing] her way out', Anna revealed the falsehood that has continued on into adulthood and the need to mask her weakened sense of self in challenging situations.³⁵ Arguably,

³⁴ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

³⁵ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

Anna's life history is shaped by her 11+ result and her mother's anguish at the lasting implications. Through her final assessment, 'I hadn't really done what I should have done', Anna summed up her understanding of the situation by accepting the blame for her poor performance. The lasting insecurity of the 11+ permeates Anna's narrative account, leaving its mark on differing aspects in her adult sense of self. Despite her best efforts to put her adolescent experiences to one side, the feelings of self-doubt reappeared, reinvigorating the insecurities she felt over her past poor performance:

But the trouble is, a lot of my working life, the minute there was an element that I might have failed to deliver or do something as I should have done it, all those old feelings came back. I learned to control them.³⁶

In her explanation of this emotional response, Anna repeated her earlier assessment, 'I might have failed to deliver [...] as I should have done it'.³⁷ For Anna, a legacy of her failure to achieve the 11+ was her entrenched fear of getting it wrong and letting others down. Such is the perceived strength and impact of such fears, that Anna has conditioned herself to keep them at bay, to prevent them from having a disabling effect on her life. For my own part, as someone who also repeatedly failed to achieve whilst at secondary school, the fear of such recurring anguish was difficult to face. So much so, that even as my academic experience has progressed in later life, there remains a level of anxiety about the content of feedback, results

³⁶ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

³⁷ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

and eventual outcomes. Though I did not share details of my own feelings with Anna, the intersubjectivity that existed in relation to our shared experience of academic weakness may have facilitated her expansion into the hitherto unspoken personal repercussions.

Through her personal reflections, Anna expressed a heightened awareness of her situation in relation to others around her. Moreover, it could be argued that this is an aspect of her adult life that she has given much thought to, as mention was made to the extent of counselling undertaken in her adult life in order to limit her insecurities. Anna explained how, when among her social group, she experienced little diffidence, but rather an inordinate sense of self-belief:

[...] And yet, until my ... a lot of my friends and my friends' acquaintances are, are very well educated. And I've always been one of the crowd ... and I've kept up, because I know, if you understand, I can be as bright as they can be about a lot of things, you know. [...] I tend to be a lot more honest about my failings and just straight ... well, that happened. Now, it's all right. Where a few years ago I'd kept them very quiet. [...] So, but now I would talk about it more openly. It's, it's sheep and the goats, isn't it?³⁸

³⁸ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

As became apparent earlier in the chapter, Anna's recollections of her dramatic 11+ experience and her subsequent pursuit of a more acceptable form of educational opportunity were meaningfully expressed through anecdotal recollections, but as her oral narrative progressed to the subject of her adult life, she offered a deeper, more reflexive account of her adult self. Given the inferiority she experienced at the hands of the selection process, Anna took satisfaction in the intellectual belonging she felt among her adult friends. Indeed, when considering the familial desire for respectability recalled within chapter 3, Anna appeared reassured to be, 'one of the crowd', taking pride at being seen on an equal footing, no longer isolated for being identified as less capable than others.³⁹ Notwithstanding her perceived openness and obvious desire to limit the feelings of shame, by her own admission, 'I kept up', Anna revealed a hint of insecurity, a subtle reminder of both the differentiated status that she experienced and the effort it took to secure her place among the 'well educated' others.

In the long afterlife of her 11+, Anna spoke of her altered perspective to the selection process, a means perhaps through which to rationalize her experiences. Her use of the analogy, 'It's sheep and the goats, isn't it', suggested a broader understanding of the intention behind the Butler Act, as means to separate perceived abilities, or those 'who could grasp an argument [...] from those who were interested in things as they are'.⁴⁰ However, notwithstanding any attempt she took to distance herself, or move away from experiences that were over sixty years ago, Anna

³⁹ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁰ Jones, Ken. *Education in Britain*, p. 21

appeared to accept the underlying impact of an issue that those who were successful had no need to consider, that of admission and acceptance.⁴¹

The notion of shame and feelings of inferiority in relation to the 11+ is well documented, both historically by those of the postwar generation, but also by those who fail to achieve a grammar school education today.⁴² Following the move to comprehensive education, only a minority of local education authorities continue to offer selective education. Anna's narrative revealed how she would deliberately, 'keep very quiet' about the extent or nature of her failings, in the assumption that any admission would leave her vulnerable to further judgement.⁴³ As she explained, there was a fine line between feeling sufficiently comfortable to express her own personal insecurities, and have others reinforce them through additional scrutiny

Yes, I used to take jobs that were probably beneath me.

Not that I didn't enjoy them, but I didn't really strive. [...]

No, I know, I know there was lots of, there was a lot of opportunities where I could have gone for promotion, but as there was competition, I'd hold back.⁴⁴

⁴¹ www.11plusanonymous.org This is a campaign group that highlights the stories and experiences of those who have sat the 11+ since its inception.

⁴² Skipper, Yvonne. & Karen M Douglas, "The impact of a selective entry examination on children's feelings as they approach the transition to secondary school", *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (2016): pp. 945-961. This item of work can be found on

www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk This is a campaign group that argues against the intention of selective education policy in England and Wales, advocating for the provision of comprehensive schools for all children. The website invites contributions from those whose 11+ experience became problematic both as a child and in their adult lives.

⁴³ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁴ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

Having found herself looking for work when aged around fifty, Anna was offered the chance to work in a secondary school specifically to support children with special needs. She spoke of the numerous opportunities for promotion that could provide her with an additional level of responsibility, but explained how, when faced with the realities of competition, she felt too vulnerable to voluntarily put herself in that situation. In his 1965 study to differentiate between the mid-term and long-term effects of stratified educational provision, sociologist Glen Elder considered the implications of the sorting process that resulted from the 11+. Elder argued that failure in the 11+ exam was a 'cue for the lowering of expectations and evaluations of the student by others and by himself'.⁴⁵ As Anna's narrative revealed, the psychological effects of the 11+ outcome combined with her academic difficulties at the technical school created a poor sense of self and a legacy of insecurity. Unarguably, the importance of self-preservation remains a vestige of her 11+ experience, alongside her continued efforts to secure affirmation of her abilities:

I'm still trying to prove, in a funny sort of way, that I'm intelligent. I love, I love trying to do quizzes and things and crosswords and things. It's like I'm still trying to prove subconsciously ... I, I can do things. [...] I've, I've done it. I've done it. I've done it!⁴⁶

Some seventy years after sitting and failing the 11+ exam, in an attempt to erase the implications of such an outcome, Anna explained her ongoing need to prove her

⁴⁵ Elder, Glen, H. 'Life Opportunity and personality', p. 176

⁴⁶ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

intellect in any small way possible and challenge her misaligned identity. Repeated affirmation of these seemingly insignificant achievements evidences the damage inflicted on her self-esteem and the relentless effort necessary to make it right. Anna's closing comments to her oral narrative reinforced the legacy of disappointment that she inflicted not only on herself but on others too, specifically her mother, as a consequence of her failed result, and her conscious effort to prevent any reoccurrence:

So, I'm known ... I'm being very honest here. I'm known as someone who tries to please people. I try not to, but I can't help it. But I think I've always, I try to compensate... I may not, I may not have achieved much, but I'll be nice to you, you know.⁴⁷

This was a candid acknowledgement of the conscientious effort undertaken by Anna to cover up the assumed intellectual inadequacy that continues to linger. Such was the extent of psychological scarring inflicted by her 11+ experience that in adulthood Anna acts in a way that prevents the reopening of any emotional wounds. Through the autobiographical account of the search for his birth family, David Leitch describes the existence of a 'cultivated privet hedge around the borders of one's life' that preserves the secrets of closely held experiences of the past. I would argue that Anna's niceness and need to please is the hedge within which her intellectual frailties reside.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁸ Leitch, David. *Family Secrets* (Penguin Books, 1986) p. 48

It is important, also, to better situate this set of recollections within the methodological process of a life history study. The interview with Anna was shorter in length than those with other participants and she appeared keen to recall the suffering experienced as a result of the outcome, both in the immediate and later into her adult life. In this respect, it was possible to consider that Anna's willingness to participate was not motivated solely by the chance to contribute to the breadth of understanding within a research project, but also through the opportunity to share and explain. Returning to the key question of the 11+ as a means to signify or define an individual's sense identity, I asked Anna if having failed at 11, but succeeded later when she was 13, she would consider herself to be someone who failed or someone who achieved:

Now, achiever now, because I've done lots of things. I've organised things, I've been on lots of committees and things, and I see myself as an achiever now. But it's taken me a long time to feel like an achiever.⁴⁹

I would argue that irrespective of the level of trauma Anna recalled experiencing as a result of her failed attempt at the 11+, her adult life has been committed to securing a 'new' and more positive narrative to live by, one that shields her from the lasting effects of disappointment. Moreover, by her repeated affirmation of 'achiever', Anna asserted that any sense of positivity she now experiences is due to the effort made throughout her adult life to consciously move away from the stigma of failure.⁵⁰ This

⁴⁹ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁰ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

section has, so far, examined the lasting experiences of failure through the life of someone who, as an only child, was faced with rationalising her own feelings of disappointment with those of her mother. In contrast to Anna, moments within Sandy's life history narrative revealed how, as the youngest of three children, she had no choice but to process her own insecurities amid the close scrutiny of her elder brother and sister.

As her narrative progressed, Sandy offered considerable detail regarding the lasting implications of her 11+ result, not only in relation to the self-limiting perceptions she has of her own intellect in comparison to her peers but, more notably, the lifelong differentiation that continues to exist and challenge her sibling relationships. Aware of her participation in this study and a realisation that her 11+ experiences were valued, Sandy explained how previously unspoken 11+ anxieties had now become the subject of recent conversations:

The funniest thing was, oh, it was really funny because I had some friends yesterday, we were doing some sewing, and ... I was saying about, I said, about this, the 11+. And Rachel said to me, "I didn't pass the 11+" [...] So I said, "well, I didn't". And she said, and, and ... we both started *talking* about it. She said, "I've never spoken to anybody about this before, because I don't know many people that didn't pass!". She's a nurse actually as well. And it's really weird. 'Cause [Rachel's] brother and sister passed the 11+ and she didn't. And she said that she can remember being out with her mother and somebody saying to her,

“I'm really sorry you didn't pass the 11+”. And her mum said, “Why are you sorry? You're not, you don't say things like that”. But that is how a lot of people thought.⁵¹

For Sandy, what was ‘funny’ about this conversation was the extent of shared experience she had with Rachel, despite never having had any reason to speak about it before. Furthermore, this chat among friends suggests a sense of release for both parties, a willingness to share previously closely contained experience. A moment of this type within the narrative reflects the use of ‘descriptive excursions’, an extended anecdotal story that both amplifies and reinforces what has already been shared.⁵² Given that Sandy had already spoken of her 11+ result and the challenges she has experienced since, this conversation with Rachel emphasized her feelings of inferiority and isolation. It is important to consider too that both Sandy and Rachel were qualified nurses, with long and successful professional careers behind them. Despite their perceived failings at eleven, and their relegation to the secondary modern system, as young women they would have endured many more levels of testing and examinations to prove their candidacy for the role of nurses. Though Sandy’s narrative revealed this one aspect of their friendship that had remained unspoken her voice altered to express their mutual pleasure in ‘*talking*’, having been able to share her feelings with someone who would understand, someone for whom no explanation was necessary. In this respect there was a moment of commonality which, given the stereotypically low profile of those with an unsuccessful outcome, allowed the two friends to share and empathise with each

⁵¹ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵² Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 120

other's experiences. Rachel's remarks about not knowing others who failed reinforces the invisibility of such experience, a reluctance for those whose experiences were unpleasant, or damaging, to hide them away from further discussion. Certainly, as discussed within the introduction, there is a notable disparity in the numbers of participants with 'successful' stories, as opposed to those who were disappointed, which perhaps serves to reinforce the level of shame that remains despite the passing of time.

Sandy's narrative drew attention to a further aspect in relation to the 11+ and identity, that of public opinion and the reputational implications of a poor result. "I'm really sorry you didn't pass the 11+", emphasized the lasting sense of disappointment experienced by a failed outcome, whilst subtly affirming sympathy, or a sense of pity, at having only secured a place at a secondary modern school. This affirmation, in turn, emphasizes the rigidity of the two-tier system and the lifelong effects of selective educational opportunity. Where Anna spoke of kindness as a means to mask her insecurities, Sandy explained how she would voluntarily provide a disclaimer that clearly informed others of her diminished level of intelligence, to deter them from publicly challenging any inaccuracies she may express, as if confirmation of her failed 11+ would be a sufficient marker:

I said it at WI the other night – "because I didn't pass 11+".

Why did I do that? Because ... it was something I didn't understand, I was about to talk about... And I immediately ... sort of ... and I thought, afterwards, whether or not

because it's in my head, I don't know, very odd, a bit. I'm a bit weird.⁵³

In the recollection process, Sandy sought to understand the reason behind her recent actions and to question what underlies her immediate need to excuse any incorrect answer she might have provided. Her conclusion did not acknowledge the effect of the failed outcome on her subconscious, but instead Sandy chose to assume that this reaction was irrational, believing herself to be 'weird'.⁵⁴ This extract reveals a moment of discomposure resulting from the spontaneous need to disturb the narrative and attempt to understand her actions. In the process of re-telling, Sandy disrupted her own chain of thought to better comprehend this act of self-preservation. As Sandy's life history narrative later disclosed, her awareness of the effects of the 11+ was far from 'weird' but existed through her conscious acknowledgement of the emotional 'chip' she has held as a consequence of the exam outcome.⁵⁵ Given her open admission of such an emotional burden, I asked Sandy if she could talk a little more about her 'chip':

It ... undermines, yeah, yeah, a chip on a shoulder, a big chip, actually. Because I feel a fail ... I felt a failure, yeah. And that whole term, even in the documentation, the *pass* and the *fail* - it's a horrible word. [...] Pass or fail. And I think you always have that feeling. [...] And I'm very, very

⁵³ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁴ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁵ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

anxious in exams. I, you know, all my nursing exams every - and I've taken very, very many exams. [...] I want to cry actually. It's horrible. It's horrible, because you do feel that. It's that *fail*.⁵⁶

The most salient moment within this extract is Sandy's admission of failure and the emotional significance of such feelings. Certainly, through her recollection process and in 'wanting to cry', her emotions physically re-engaged as she spoke of the lived reality of the 11+ outcome, 'the *pass* and the *fail*'.⁵⁷ Curiously, at this point, Sandy alluded to the necessary 'documentation' used to affirm the exam result.⁵⁸ Remembering her experience of the exam and her inability to recall how she heard about the result, this minor mention may have been a reference to the communication received at home.

The effect of failing the 11+ for Sandy was very different to Anna's experience. For Anna, the sense of failure was not internalised in the same way but rather imposed on her by the anguish felt by her mother. The lasting significance of Sandy's exam result cannot be underestimated. In her use of, 'undermines', Sandy described the continuation of such feelings, a type of psychological obstacle or entrenched mindset which relentlessly acts to diminish her sense of self. At this point in the narrative, the emotional intensity behind Sandy's failed result appeared to take a hold, causing her to repeat the harshness of the dichotomous outcome. Though Sandy was prepared to speak of the obvious distress she felt at being labelled by

⁵⁶ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁷ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁸ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

such an outcome, the emotional impact limited any deeper explanation to the simple term of 'horrible'. The extent of such a hurdle can only be fully understood in relation to her nursing profession and the anxiety that has remained throughout her career. As Sandy herself confirmed, her parents were concerned about her approach to her work as a young girl, in comparison to the laidback confidence of her siblings:

I would be over diligent [...] Yeah, you know, I'd spend hours on things; hours on my homework to get it right and to submit it on time. And whenever mum would come in and say you know, 'you've done enough homework now'. [...] I think they were more concerned about my approach to my work because. And then she would [...] I can always remember her going to like, parents' evenings or anything like that. And I'd be anxious to know what was being said or anything. I don't know why that was. Yeah, that was approval, again, I don't know.⁵⁹

Akin to those experiences of Anna whose relentless pursuit of self-validation made her celebrate every opportunity of success, Sandy placed a heavy emphasis on making sure her work was correct, relieving any possible fear of failure. Arguably, she felt the need to demonstrate the extent of effort that she put into her work, to show how seriously she took the task at hand. Perceived within the family as being young and immature, her documented 11+ result would only have served to reinforce

⁵⁹ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

these perceived characteristics. For Sandy, the overarching issue that she has with her siblings is their refusal to acknowledge or understand the damaging effects of her very different educational experience. As with many of the highly personal and intimate aspects of the life history narratives shared within the study, significant memories link back to visual signifiers, moments of clarity that retain a lasting emotional connectivity:

I was laughing about it actually the other day with someone who also didn't pass the 11+, and I said, 'I can remember Sam and Jim going to the "*very expensive uniform shop*" and getting the blazers with the braid round the edge and the badge symbol on them'. And I was telling Sam [...] to Sam about this, she said, 'yeah, but you didn't have a blazer, did you Sandy?' It just, she ... see ... she winds me up. So, I said, 'no, I didn't!'⁶⁰

Feminist sociological studies assert the importance of the narrative turn, enabling people to make sense of who they are through stories of shared experiences, thereby gaining a deeper understanding 'of the relationship between childhood happenings and adult identity'.⁶¹ Sandy's narrative combines many different aspects of the selective education process; laughter over a shared failed experience, the visible status of the grammar school uniform, the absent blazer and finally, the ease

⁶⁰ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶¹ Scott, Sara and Sue Scott, "Our Mother's Daughters' Autobiographical inheritance through stories of gender and class", in *Feminism and Autobiography: Tests, theories, methods*, Coslett, T., C. Lury & P. Summerfield, (Routledge, 2000) p. 128

by which Sandy's sister can reignite such feelings of inferiority. The changing orality within the extract demonstrated both Sandy's awareness of the difference in status between her own secondary modern and the grammar school that Sam and Jim attended and the subsequent realities of experience behind the two school environments. Momentarily, Sandy skipped briskly through her words, as if to limit their significance, but paradoxically this only emphasised their meaning to her. Opening the recollection with memories of laughter was a poor sticking-plaster for the conversation it recalled. Though there was no evidence of malice or injustice in her voice, there was a hint of irony as she explained the status of the other party. Specific phrases, 'who also didn't pass' and 'see... she winds me up', were given the briefest of mention, but acted as reminders to Sandy of their importance in her ability to communicate the correct message.⁶² The significance of this recollection can be understood in two ways; the first being Sandy's acknowledgment that the friend shared the same failed outcome, and secondly, the bruising implications of her sister's throw-away remark that illustrates the long-term impact on her own subjectivity, at least within the family.

Grammar school uniforms were only sold through dedicated, specialist outfitters, renowned both for quality and high price. Attempting to explain the significance of the outing, Sandy altered her voice in such a way that the exclusive nature of the retailer was identified by the reputational high price tag, rather than the store name. The clarity of memory was further strengthened by her visual description of the braid and the school badge which evidenced both the school establishment and, subliminally, the necessary 11+ result to need one. Educationalist Brian Simon expressed the

⁶² SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

process of selection for secondary school as a point of “all change”, reinforced by the very visible differentiation of the school uniform, both in the local community, but more significantly, within the family group.⁶³ Sandy’s inclusion of this conversation affirmed her belief that her poor 11+ performance was not only confirmed by a failed mark, but also symbolically by the absence of a school blazer.

Within the previous chapter, Sandy situated herself emotionally and intellectually in relation to her elder brother and sister. Their recurring frustrations at her childish behaviour created a disconnect with those perceived to be mature and capable, who believed Sandy to be ‘silly’ or ‘stupid’.⁶⁴ This disconnect challenged their relationship as Sandy’s brother constantly brought up per perceived identity intellectual inferiority:

Yeah, it's quite ... it's very sobering, really. And the thing is that my, well, I'm not in touch with my brother now, but he would have just put me down constantly all the time, or say, you know, “What on earth, what on earth are you talking about?”, if I said anything about their education, my education. He probably would have said, “well, you wouldn't have made it at grammar school”, or something like that. And Sam says, “I don't understand it, why you have this inferior feeling?” [...] As that cousin said to me, unless you've done it, people don't understand. [...] My

⁶³ Simon, Brian. *Intelligence Testing*, p. 21

⁶⁴ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

sister says it's a habit with me. She said, "you've got to let go of this".⁶⁵

Sandy did not enlarge further on the reason why the family had lost contact with her brother. Certainly, any mention of their interaction only served to highlight his obvious disdain at her child-like behaviour and his belief in her sub-standard intellect. Of greater significance, however, is Sam's inability to accept or understand Sandy's feelings of inferiority. As someone who was 'head girl at Primary', Sam had surety in her own abilities and does not experience the damaging insecurities felt by her sister.⁶⁶ Though Sandy expressed her frustration at the educational differences between herself and her siblings, she did not state if her sister was any better qualified in adult life. Whilst feeling anger at the inadequacy of her secondary modern in comparison to Sam's grammar school, she made no mention of any lasting difference between them. Despite their close relationship, Sandy's lasting frustration is Sam's refusal to accept that her feelings of insecurity is anything more than an annoying habit, something from her childhood that, given the passing of time, she should have been able to distance herself from. I asked Sandy how she feels about such dismissive reactions to her behaviours:

Well, like it's not acknowledged. It's not acknowledged that it had quite an impact on me. But the thing about taking exams it's definitely had an impact throughout my life. Yeah, I just feel, I just feel inferior. Yeah, I feel inferior

⁶⁵ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶⁶ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

to people who went to grammar school. Yeah. Never ... not quite good enough. Not quite. I don't understand that. And then it will be because it's a habit. And it's not ... you see [...] And she said, "and yet, look what you do. Well, look what you have achieved. Look what you do. Look at the life you've got". It's, I don't know, it's a very odd thing Amanda, it's really weird.⁶⁷

Having talked in detail about the outcome of the exam and her lasting anxieties, Sandy affirmed both the seriousness of her feelings of inferiority and their debilitating effects, not only in relation to her two siblings, but within her wider company. Moreover, that she was unable to understand how her sister could only view such a mindset as habitual. Acknowledging the feelings of others who were unsuccessful at the 11+, Julia Pascal described the feeling as one which is difficult to articulate, but which affirmed 'that their new place in a secondary modern makes sure that for the rest of their lives they will feel secondary'.⁶⁸ Irrespective of Sandy's years of training and the skills and contribution she brought to her local community as a practice nurse, Sandy believed herself to be 'not quite good enough'. Even the attempts by her sister Sam to bolster Sandy's sense of achievement for her career and her life at home failed to resonate in the face of such a weakened sense of self.

This was the second time that Sandy had used the word 'weird' as a way of explaining her inability to understand or rationalise her behaviour in respects to her

⁶⁷ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶⁸ Pascal, Julia. 'Prima Ballerina Assoluta' in, *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, Heron, L. ed. (Virago, 1985) p. 32

feelings of inferiority. Arguably, she considered 'weird' to be less psychologically damaging as an unaccountable behaviour, rather than something abnormal that hints at a more fixed level of irrationality. Crucially, this expression of weirdness is a further indicator of a lasting effect of the 11+ inferiority that has remained with Sandy for nearly sixty years. Any attempt to understand the 'afterlife' of the 11+ experience for Sandy must acknowledge the obvious absence of any sense of achievement experienced through her successful pursuit of a nursing career, in contrast to the skillset she admitted to:

I was laughing with somebody the other day, and I said, 'you know, I can really lay up a tea tray very well, and I know how to iron a tray cloth, and I'm really good at the "rubbing in" method', you know. I mean, all of that sort of thing.⁶⁹

Arguably, Sandy's experience of failure related not only to her 11+ exam performance, but more notably to the lasting sense of inferiority she continued to experience as a result of the 'really useful knowledge' gained at the secondary modern, something that is discussed further later on in the study.⁷⁰ Though this recollection was spoken with humour, the irony in this personal assessment accentuated the reliance of self-deprecating humour as a way to mask the level of

⁶⁹ SW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷⁰ Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education*, p. 23

hurt or internal anguish she continued to feel as a result of what was acknowledged to be 'abbreviated schooling'.⁷¹

The final section of this chapter examines the experiences of those whose failed results reflected a very different outcome from those of Anna and Sandy. For Jane and her younger sister Cathy, the rigours of the 11+ were no less challenging but offered instead a pathway to success, high self-esteem and a lasting sense of positivity.

When a failed result is not a failed outcome

In this final part of the chapter the focus shifts to the experiences of two sisters, Jane and Cathy, whose recollections of early childhood featured within the previous earlier in the study.⁷² In their separate meetings the sisters provided a very different narrative to the conventional 11+ experience, and revealed how, unlike Anna and Sandy, a failed result was not necessarily a poor outcome. Furthermore, their experiences are not shaped around the extent of anxiety or lasting inferiority but rather challenged the binary association of the pass and the fail, the good news versus the bad. Jane sat her 11+ in January 1954. I asked her if she recalled having any awareness of the exam she was about to take and its purpose?

I think we all realized that it was to get a place at the
grammar school, but I don't think the **significance** of the

⁷¹ Central Advisory Council for Educations (England), 15 to 18 (Crowther Report) (London, 1959) in Todd, Selina. *The People*, p. 223

⁷² For more details, see Appendix I, Participant Biographies.

grammar school had been explained to the class. [...] I remember my mother, erm, was some ... “you will, you, you should try and get there”. That's about all she did say. Um. But I know one or two of the boys in our class were.... Um, perhaps more uptight than I'd seen them. [...] But there was certainly no family pressure put on me. No, there wasn't.⁷³

Jane's awareness of the level of insecurity felt by some of the boys in her class echoed those by Helena who spoke of the distress experienced by her friend George at the implications of his failed result.⁷⁴ The inclusion of this recollection, however, signifies perhaps, her understanding of a gendered divide in educational expectation and how the opportunities for boys who missed out on a grammar school place would be compromised. The notion of 'significance' with regards to school selection is difficult to measure within a study of this nature.⁷⁵ Though the participants were encouraged to share their 11+ experience, their perceptions are altered both by the passing of time and external influences in their adult lives. Jane's appreciation of selection came through her mother's guarded advice that she 'should try to get there', which suggested her understanding that the grammar school outcome would be more favourable.⁷⁶ Furthermore, given that Jane had little awareness of any obvious pressure in relation to her exam performance, her mother's view may relate more to the gendered aspirations she held with regard to her daughter's life chances.

⁷³ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷⁴ More details of this will follow in chapter 5, Stories of Achievement.

⁷⁵ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷⁶ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

In the previous chapter Jane spoke of the extensive preparation her mother had put in place ahead of her interview for selection. I asked Jane what, if anything she could remember about her 11+ exam:

I remember so very little about the exam. I have to be honest; I do remember the interview simply because mother went and bought a hat. I could never understand the significance of buying a hat for my interview. [...] I remember going, we actually went to [...] what was then the county grammar school, for these interviews, Mother came too [...] And I, I was interviewed on my own and I seem to have a vague recollection of three people, um one was... a very, very softly spoken gentleman. I quite liked him. I can't remember the women, but they asked me about, um, about my friends, about, um, what books I read, and did I, ... did I see anything in *Little Women* that was like me?

AL: What did you say?

JL: I don't remember, but that was quite a deep question for a ten-year old⁷⁷

Whilst Jane's recollection imparted both details of the subjects under discussion and the construct of the panel, more importantly for this study, Jane was able to revisit

⁷⁷ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

that moment and remember her feelings towards members of the interview panel as individuals and their approach to her secondary school application. This extract demonstrated Jane's reflexive attention to the original question she was asked over sixty years ago. As a woman, now in her late seventies, revisiting the challenges faced by her 10-year-old self, Jane provided a later life perspective with regards to any similarities between herself and the characters portrayed in *Little Women*. Attempting to find meaning or resolution from her 11+ experience, Jane appeared now to consider such line of questioning irrelevant or un-necessary.

Jane's life history narrative drew attention once more to the very gendered notion of clothing as a visual signifier of experience and emotion. Though she failed to see the significance of her mother's new hat, as feminist sociologist Beverley Skeggs has argued, women are very aware of the recognitions of others and, more significantly, that such recognitions 'do not occur without value judgements'.⁷⁸ As other experiences within the study have shown the inclusion of clothing within narratives provides an emotional stimulant to the meanings they hold.⁷⁹ Whilst Jane could not see the significance of a new hat, her mother was in no doubt of the importance of respectability, both of the family and as a means to emphasize their suitability as a grammar school parents. In further contrast to the sense of failure felt by Anna and the reputational impact on her mother, Jane's open acknowledgment of her mother's reaction was more pragmatic, perhaps resulting from her understanding of the selection process as opposed to any personal disappointment she may have felt:

⁷⁸ Skeggs, Beverley. *Formations of Class and Gender*, p. 11

⁷⁹ These feature across the study and are associated with handmade items of uniform and recollections of clothing worn on the day of the exam.

Well, I-I was told I had failed, and I would be going to [the] Secondary Modern school, end of story. So off I went. [...]
 I think I must have had a letter. [...] but I think possibly I was also told quietly at school. [...] I think mother was disappointed. But equally, (sighs) you got on with life, you know?

AL: were you disappointed?

JL: I suppose I was cross because I hadn't passed, but equally, I think ... I was more excited to be going to a new school, whatever it was.⁸⁰

This was the first mention of the 'failed' outcome. Until this point the only affirmation of her borderline situation was that she 'hadn't passed and hadn't failed'.⁸¹ It could be argued that such balanced understanding has limited any risk of feeling judged or measured. Notable through Jane's narrative, however, unlike that of many of the other narrators, there is no evidence of upset as a result of a disappointing outcome. Instead, Jane acknowledged only her own sense of excitement at the prospect of secondary school, despite feeling frustrated at the eventual interview decision. In contrast to the lifelong implications of anxiety and inferior sense of self expressed by Sandy and Anna, failure to achieve a place at the grammar school was, for Jane, an aspect of her life that would be put to one side, therefore alleviating her from any lasting stigma.

⁸⁰ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁸¹ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

Six years later, when her younger sister Cathy embarked on her own 11+ journey, the family construct was challenged as, by that stage, their mother was seriously unwell. Born in 1951, the youngest of two daughters, Cathy had very fixed memories of her 11+ exam and the classroom organization that was geared towards those who were deemed capable of a place at the grammar school. Aware that academically she was considered among the top four pupils, Cathy recalled feeling little concern as to the significance of this:

You might move, I think I was within the first four, [...] But again, I don't think, this is sort of looking back on it, and I don't think I was aware that of the significance of it. [...]

Um, the actual test was sometime in the spring, I want to say, February, March time. [...] And it was taken... [...] on a Saturday at the [...] Secondary Modern School. [...] So, we didn't take it at the primary school ... We went and sat in a huge hall.

AL: How did you feel about that? Do you remember?

CH: I can visualize it, I, I really can visualize it... sort of separate, separate desks and rows and columns of desks and you sort of sat given these papers.⁸²

Cathy's 11+ experience echoed those of Helena and Maggie where, within a secondary school environment, they joined children from other schools to sit the

⁸² CH 170523

exam. The rigidity of formation, so very different to the nurturing primary school setting, remained in her memory. Certainly, Cathy's visualisation of the very separate positioning emphasised the serious nature of the exam and the notion that each child was being examined on their own individual performance. I asked Cathy if she could remember having any understanding of the exam being used as a means of selection:

I think I was aware of that, but then you've got no idea of what those schools would like. [...] I mean, it was just a moving on process, so you weren't really aware of what going to the grammar school meant or going to ... The other thing was, of course, the secondary modern was literally up the road, so we at least knew what that building was like from the outside. Um, the other building, we, I don't know, we didn't go along Northgate Street.⁸³

Despite the wider discourse about the selection process and the implications of the Butler Act, as Cathy's narrative revealed, for many children there appeared little real awareness of the consequence of the exam, it was just a means through which to move from primary to secondary school. I asked Cathy if she could remember any sense of pressure from either parent in anticipation of this transition:

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I don't think so. And certainly, um, there wasn't any sort of pressure from Mum and Dad saying, "we went to the grammar school; therefore, you've got to get to ..." I don't remember anything like that at all. I don't remember them really, sort of discussing it in my presence.

AL: So there certainly wasn't pressure?

No, no, no. [...] There might have been expectation, or, I don't know, with Dad, not necessarily expectation, but willing you to, to do... I think his attitude was ... as long as you do as well as you can. That's, that's what he would ask for. [...] I don't remember getting the results. [...] I don't, but obviously did, and I'd "failed" in inverted commas.⁸⁴

Given what we have already heard through Jane and her borderline result which necessitated an interview to determine if she was sufficiently qualified for a grammar school place, it is notable that, six years later, Cathy was unaware of any heightened anxiety within the family with regards to her turn at the 11+. Though young herself when her elder sister sat the exam, it is possible to assume that her parents would be all too aware of the risk of another disappointing outcome. Both women recalled the same gentle support they received from their parents and an evident lack of pressure with regards to the result. Though Cathy's failed experience was perceived to be somewhat temporary, her recollection is no less interesting, as arguably, she

⁸⁴ CH 170523

reflected a very different understanding. Unlike the damning upset felt by Anna, Cathy's association with the failed result was expressed with a sense of personal disconnect, more of a necessary clerical judgement than as a result of poor performance. Arguably, the affirmation of her 11+ result with 'inverted commas' suggested it was short-lived and, unlike Anna and Sandy, something that was not to be taken as a judgement of her ability.⁸⁵ Cathy's orality altered in her admission of the "failed" result, as an injection of suppressed laughter served to emphasise her fleeting association with the unfortunate outcome.⁸⁶ Though Cathy shared the fate of her sister and that of Sandy and Anna, there is a marked difference in her sense of self, caused by her subsequent reassignment to the grammar school and, latterly, her degree conferral from the University of East Anglia. In this respect, her 11+ result appears not as a marker on which her identity is shaped, but rather a brief inaccuracy that was promptly recalibrated.

The move from primary to secondary school coincided with some challenging times for the family as Cathy's mum was taken into hospital during the summer holiday. I asked Cathy what she could remember about her move from secondary modern to the grammar school:

At the end of that first term, there was obviously communication with, with Mum and Dad, particularly Dad, because Mum, at that time, um, she'd had an operation in the summer and went to convalescent home in sort of September time. [...] So, when I started the new school,

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⁸⁶ CH 170523

um, so Dad would have dealt with communication, really. And I was offered, um, to go and have an interview with [...], um, the head teacher at the grammar school. [...]. Obviously [our headteacher] thought that I was, should have passed. [...] And you know, that, that's the opportunity that she gave me.⁸⁷

Some six years after Jane's interview for the grammar school, her sister Cathy's experience was far less anticipatory. There was no mention of preparatory reading or sartorial considerations, rather this was a chance for Cathy to meet the new head and to confirm her suitability for a place at the school. 'That's the opportunity she gave me', emphasised, for Cathy, an understanding that she had been recognised as being in the wrong place, a way to make good the infallibility of the selection process. Moreover, that her headteacher considered it her duty to make sure pupils received the education most appropriate to their abilities. Additionally, Cathy's narrative also alluded to a working partnership between the two school principals, facilitating an ease of movement between the two school institutions in the Suffolk town where an allocation error was perceived to have occurred. In contrast to the reputational demands of Anna's mother and her desire for a more acceptable educational status, this administrative exercise in school selection demonstrated the Ministry of Education's intention that local authorities ensure the possibility, 'without difficulty, [of a transition] from one type of secondary education to another.'⁸⁸ The

⁸⁷ CH 170523

⁸⁸ Ministry of Education (1947) p. 24

wider effects of Cathy's movement between schools and the impact on her identity as a young teenager will be examined in more detail later in the study, within the chapter, *Stories of Belonging*.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the very real effects of selective education from the perspective of those judged to perform less well in the 11+. Nuanced narrative accounts revealed the lasting implications of the tripartite policy and the depth of feeling within the family regarding the most appropriate form of educational opportunity. It is important to acknowledge too the lifelong issues that arose from the failed experience, those of shame and insecurity, something which may have been a factor in the lower response rate of participants in comparison to the involvement of those who had achieved. Hidden within the bad news stories, however, are those for whom secondary modern education was not only appropriate for their attainment levels but was a place in which they were encouraged to flourish. Sadly, for those whose parents or siblings expressed feelings of derision and disappointment within the family, these life history narratives highlighted how the afterlife of a failed result cannot not be underestimated. Though it is possible to argue that these feelings can be attributed more to the dynamics of the family as opposed to the 11+ itself, the fallout nevertheless hinged on the selection process. The emotional impact of a failed result has not diminished, but continues to remain in such a way that, even in later adult life, the lives of those perceived to be of a lesser intelligence is hampered by self-doubt and, for some, a need for self-reconciliation.

Use of the life history method as a way to delve gently into such 'historical' moments provided these four women with an opportunity to voice both feeling and understanding about their own experiences of the Butler Act. In the next chapter, *Stories of Achievement*, the narratives of those assumed to have secured a "good news" story will come into focus. Whilst many more participants came forward, their own ideas of success and the opportunities gained through a place at the grammar school demonstrate the considerable variations in experience.

Chapter 5: Stories of Achievement

Introducing achievement

Achievement brings with it a positive subjectivity, secured by an enhanced sense of self and by the reactions of others. As a requisite of the Butler Act (1944), the 11+ exam became the method in postwar Britain through which to determine a child's success and failure. Indeed, such determined outcomes were informed not only by the mark on a test paper, but by the subconscious values and aspirations present within the family and community. Achievement, however, is a complex idea to quantify, one which risks creating an identity through which people can express their own experiences.¹ Narratives produced in this project speak of achievement as a method of identification, one that differentiated those whose intellectual insecurities are reinforced only by the apparent success of others. These narratives challenge the perceived dichotomy of success and failure, revealing the nuanced appreciation of what is meant by a sense of achievement. This chapter questions how the idea of achievement is informed not only by the outcome of a written test paper but, crucially, by the subjectivity and influence of those closest to those who passed. Moreover, it shows that perceptions of achievement can be pre-determined by the social obstacles of gendered expectations.² It demonstrates how status and reputation, prominent within any discourse associated with the selective policy of the

¹ Crane, Jennifer. *'Gifted Children' in Britain and the World: Elitism and Equality Since 1945* (Oxford University Press, 2025) p. 9

² Arnot, Madeleine. "State Education Policy and Girls' Educational Experiences", in *Women in Britain Today*. Beechey, V. & E. Whitelegg ed. (Open University Press, 1991)

Butler Act, were active elements in the minds of family and local communities.

Having seen, in the previous chapter, the effects of failure on an individual's sense of self, the emphasis shifts to those experiences of success to better understand the subjective meaning of achievement and how it continues to inform an individual's identity.

Ideas of achievement were challenged by the over-arching policy objectives of selection and differentiation. Mary Evans, who described the feelings of others among her own grammar school cohort as 'particularly blessed', suggests not only that any other outcome would have been undesirable, but that by passing the 11+ they received a form of endorsement ensuring an elevated educational opportunity.³ Arguably, irrespective of how successful each grammar school was, their 'contribution to the character, reputation and strength of this country', ensured that as an entity their status was politically endorsed and secured.⁴ Expressions such as, 'I got there!' reinforced the idea of the grammar school as an aspirational destination, 'a special place' for the selected few.⁵ The link between achievement and reputation was felt by individuals who attended them. Narratives expressed a heightened level of recognition that came from a successful outcome of the 11+, both academically and reputationally, identifiable by a perceived level of intellectual capability.⁶ This newly identifiable status was not easy to navigate. Through their own subjective understanding of achievement, the problem of reputation was further complicated by

³ Evans, Mary. *A Good School*, p. 26

⁴ 'Minister's Assurance to Grammar Schools', "No Assassination Intended" in *Schoolmaster*, 7th January 1955

⁵ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

Middleton, Nigel & Sophia Weitzman, *A Place for Everyone: A history of state education from the eighteenth century to the 1970s* (Gollancz, 1976) p. 194

⁶ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

the 'accepted definition of success'.⁷ In this respect, perceived inadequate performance at secondary level was considered to be a waste of the opportunity, indeed, as this chapter shows, failure to achieve after passing the 11+ was believed to be worse than failing to pass.

Post-war educational policy resulted in two opposing experiences of the 11+ exam; success meant access to schools where uniform was non-negotiable and where pupils sat publicly recognised exams that led to higher educational opportunities. As already explored, the outcome for those who did not achieve usually meant no uniform, limited academic qualifications and an assumption of poor life chances.⁸ Oral narratives that look beyond the discourse of pass and fail illustrate, however, that achievement was not exclusive to those who secured success, and they therefore challenge the misconceptions of secondary modern education as of a second-class standard.

This chapter now examines three critical aspects within the 11+ experience, questioning the lived experience of the 11+ result as a means to inform or select the most appropriate form of secondary education. The first focusses both on the level of preparedness ahead of the exam and the lasting recollections from sitting the 11+. Preparedness, in this instance, is not limited to ideas of pre-selection within primary schools and familiarity with exam structure and content, but asks of the awareness, if any, to the level of expectation within the family and the perceived implications of the outcome. Secondly, with regards to the outcome, the study explores how achievement was recognised in the home and asks to what extent such emotional responses continue to inform or shape the 11+ experience. Lastly, the chapter draws

⁷ Todd, Selina. "Class, experience and Britain's twentieth century", p. 497

⁸ Liversidge, William. 'Life Chances', pp. 17-34.

attention to the complex understanding of achievement, by exploring the differing ways it is assumed and its continued effects on the construct of an individual's identity.⁹

The Exam – preparedness and experience

Memories of experiences relating to the 11+ drew attention to the varying operational arrangements necessary for the examination within their respective local authority. Mention was made in several accounts about how children were required to leave the familiarity of their own school surroundings and taken to a larger school where they sat the exam alongside other pupils from the local community. Memories of this nature affirm the different reactions to the challenges faced in unfamiliar surroundings. I asked Helena what she could remember about taking the 11+ exam:

It was winter 'cos I can remember I was wearing a pinafore dress, and my mum had bought me a new stripey jumper to go underneath it. I think it was probably February, March, maybe, 1964 and we went, four girls all went. The headmaster took us to another school [...] We'd done these, erm, practice papers for weeks before we went [...] I think everyone to begin with, is my memory, and as the weeks went on I seem to remember a group of

⁹ Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self*, p. 113

us being taken by the headmaster to carry on doing these papers but not everybody, is my memory, and then when we got to this school it was a big room with lots of other children, from other schools, I presume, and we did English, Maths and general knowledge paper in the morning, then we must have had lunch.¹⁰

Interestingly, Helena's introduction to her exam experience revealed not only of the time of year that it was taken, but more importantly, a visual image of what she was wearing. Found within many of the narratives, details of clothing worn at pivotal moments provide hitherto unexplored sensory memory and emotional resonance to the notable events in the women's young lives. Given what we have already learned about Helena's family earlier in the study, and the importance of education within the home, the very mention of a 'new stripey jumper' worn for the exam reinforces the parental commitment to a significant moment.¹¹

As the eldest daughter to teacher parents, anxious to demonstrate her capability, Helen's description of the exam experience is heavily informed by the structure of the day and the tasks that were expected. Additionally, Helen's narrative provided an insight into the preceding selection for the 11+ undertaken at her primary school, as children were whittled down to those for whom exam success was anticipated. Only four girls from her class sat the exam. Affirming the idea of streaming, Helena spoke of how those of similar abilities were sat together:

¹⁰ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

¹¹ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

But when I look back and think of how we were, where we sat in the class, I guess, we were kind of streamed within the class. But I kind of think that all the children that I did.. we did go off, and all sat near me and the children who didn't, sat ... at the other side of the room.¹²

AL: And do you think it made you feel any [...] more capable or more important?

HG: It might have done. I don't know about important, but I certainly felt that I... Well, I don't know if clever is the word but that I could **do** things. Yeah, yeah.

AL: That would have made you feel good.

HG: Yeah. I think it did. You knew that you were doing things that were perceived to be harder or more challenging or (yeah) better in some way than some other children. Yeah.¹³

Though cautious not to over-estimate her ability in the primary classroom, Helena's account gave a clear picture of the class layout and an understanding that she was among the few who were selected to work at a different level than the other children. Indeed, in describing the physical division between the few that took the 11+ and those who sat, 'at the other side of the room', Helena's orality altered to a softer, respectful tone, likely due to the sensitive content of her explanation and her

¹² HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

¹³ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

academic position in relation to them.¹⁴ This visible division through ability, creating a 'school[s] within a school', was recalled by others in the study.¹⁵ Similarly, though with less sensitivity, Sarah explained in a more matter-of-fact manner the structure of her primary class:

I enjoyed school. [...] I realized afterwards that the class was divided, I suppose, about in half, and really the ones who were going to pass eleven plus probably got all the teaching. [...] And the other half, they weren't ignored, but they weren't pushed the same way. [...] And I was always up there near the top of the group. There were two boys I was always desperate to beat.¹⁶

Helena and Sarah experienced division within the classroom and were conscious of their place at a higher level though they communicated this with differing meanings. Though neither made any judgement, it was clear that as a retired teacher herself, Helena's narrative was spoken with compassion. Such narrative construct reflects the changing perspectives as the present life is informed by past experience but also signals a form of 'value judgement', as narrators seek to make sense of those early experiences in relation to their own later adult identities.¹⁷ Both women were aware of the need for such an arrangement, but, for Helena, the sensitivity with which such actions should be implemented reflected the experiences gained within her adult

¹⁴ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

¹⁵ Simon, B, *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School* (Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1953) p. 11

¹⁶ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

¹⁷ Chanfrault-Duchet, Marie-Francoise. "Narrative Structure", p. 77

self. Interestingly, though Helena was reluctant to express any awareness of her perceived ability at aged eleven, receiving work that was more challenging provided a lasting sense of satisfaction. I asked Helena if she felt under any pressure to pass her 11+:

HG: Yeah, I think I did. Yeah. I think I remember worrying about not passing.

AL: What would have been the outcome if you hadn't passed?

HG: I don't know. I dread to think really, erm, I don't know to be honest. I think I would have been made to feel that I'd let my parents down - and myself - and that, you know, life chances wouldn't be so good, probably if you got into the secondary modern, as it was then.¹⁸

Much of Helena's life history account reflected the level of expectation from the position she held within the family as the eldest daughter, and an obligation to behave accordingly. Returning to the close analysis into the family construct that featured in the first half of this study, it is important to acknowledge how, at this transitional point from primary to secondary, Helena was mindful of the need to pass her 11+ and the possible reputational damage to the family name had she been one of those identified as having failed. In this respect, though the family situations differed significantly, Helena's underlying anxiety matched the enormous sense of

¹⁸ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

disappointment felt by Anna's mother upon receipt of her daughter's 11+ result. This extract revealed too an acute awareness of the 'potent force' affecting life chances so described by William Liversidge and her internal anxiety to protect her parents from such reputational shame.¹⁹ Moreover, to the young Helena, failure to succeed at the 11+ could result in lasting damaging consequences to her own adult life. Unlike other source material, oral narratives are understood to be 'triangulated' between past experience and the present remembering and when shared through interaction hold memories that are not fixed from a given point in time.²⁰ It is therefore impossible to know if Helena's reference to the likely effects on her life chances came as a result of going back to the mind of her eleven-year-old self, or through the values and knowledge she has secured through other later life influences. Though admitting that she didn't 'know' the likely response from her parents', Helena's lasting understanding of their expectations was sufficient to inform her belief in the implications of a disappointing outcome.

Unlike for others in the study, Helena's 11+ exam was a two-part process, with an interview scheduled for after lunch. During the interview Helena was questioned, among other things, about the type of books she read and her awareness of the JFK assassination. When asked for details of her favourite pop group, Helena recalled how she knowingly compromised her response to better represent her appreciation to the panel:

I remember she asked me about [...] my favourite pop group, which was the Beatles, and "who's your favourite

¹⁹ Liversidge, William, *Life Chances*, p. 33

²⁰ Frisch, Michael, *A Shared Authority*, p. 188

Beatle” - Paul McCartney. And she asked me **why**, and I liked him really because he was the best looking, but I thought, even then, I thought I better not say that and I said, “because he’s the best singer”. Must have thought even then that it was a bit superficial (laughs).²¹

Though Helena gave no indication that the interview was arduous, or in any way intimidating, the narrative suggested that Helena’s perception of the selection criteria for grammar school was not based on exam performance alone, but also through her ability to provide an expansive answer that best demonstrated her supporting cultural capital. It can be argued that with two teachers for parents, Helena would have gained from any disposition towards the most suitable methods of musical appreciation. As Bourdieu argued, a child’s academic performance is not reliant on natural aptitudes but is influenced by their access to cultural capital.²³ Maggie sat the 11+ exam at a nearby secondary school, but unlike Helena’s somewhat operational account of the venue and set-up, Maggie retained strong memories both of the scale of the building and the apparent opportunities that lay ahead:

We all assembled in this gym and “ooh” I thought, “wow, this looks good. I wish I could have a go on one of those

²¹ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

²³ Bourdieu, P. “The Forms of Capital”, in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*. Richardson, J.E. ed. (Greenwood Press, 1986); 241-258 Translated by Richard Nice, in: Halsey, A.H. et al ed. *Education, Culture, Economy and Society*. (Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 47. Bourdieu uses his theory of cultural capital to explain how inequalities in academic success can be related to different social classes.

ropes”, you know! (laughs) But it was a big... It was the only big room we could all meet, and then we went and did the 11+.²⁴

Whilst these contrasting recollections from Helena and Maggie reveal some of the necessary mechanics concerning the exam day, they also illustrate the differing attitudes towards the 11+ and the subtle familial influences present in their narratives. Listening to her account and certainly in watching the recollections unfold, Maggie presented a distinct sense of self at that young age, seemingly able almost to re-experience the heightened anticipation she felt on the day. Lynn Abrams argues that in any oral history narrative, individuals subconsciously select and arrange the best memories that offer meaning and significance of the specific event or experience.²⁵ Not to detract from Maggie’s desire to pass the 11+ and secure a place at the grammar school, the dominant themes that run throughout her narrative are of optimism and opportunity. Certainly, as detailed in the Stories of Family chapter, her father’s enthusiasm for his daughter’s education left a lasting impression, a characteristic she seemed to have inherited. Contrast this evident positivity from Maggie, a child who achieved, with the heightened anxiety of Sandy, a child who failed, such antithetical accounts reflect the indelible moment experienced by thousands of schoolchildren across England and Wales. Whilst the family make-up was different, Maggie and Sandy were girls with similar working-class backgrounds. What is notable, however, in relation to their 11+ experience, are the subliminal messages, one of conviction and the other of anxiety, that proved so influential.

²⁴ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

²⁵ Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 51

In preparation for our meeting and in the initial unrecorded conversation about the nature of the study and the effects of the selection process, Maggie described the 11+ as ‘the best thing that happened’ to her.²⁶ Towards the end of our meeting I returned to this remark to ask why she thought that to be the case: ‘Because it opened ... it was an opening into the world’.²⁷ Though Maggie did not attribute her grammar school place as the specific vehicle with which to “open up her world”, like Helena, she nevertheless feared the consequences of failure in her 11+:

I really did want to go to the grammar school. Definitely wanted to. I don’t know. Maybe I was frightened I might have to work on the dock and cut fish up or something.²⁸

In this statement, Maggie appeared to present the only two possible outcomes of the 11+; one in which the world is your oyster, with the opportunities for the taking and the other which led only to an unpleasant job in an undesirable environment. Her understanding of the risks associated with poor performance at school was not unique. Educationalist Jane Thompson describes her mother’s retort when she asked if she could leave her grammar school at fourteen: ‘it’ll be stacking shelves in Frank Dee’s for the rest of your life’.²⁹ Accepting that these warnings are not representative, they illustrate the counsel given to girls who might lose focus or underperform and, more alarmingly, the reputational scare-mongering about the life-limiting education at a secondary modern school. Addressing her own 11+

²⁶ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

²⁷ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

²⁸ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

²⁹ Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education*, p. 17

experience, Maggie spoke candidly about her chances of success, confident in her literary strengths but all too aware of the risks that the mathematics paper held:

And I knew, like the Englishy stuff was ... a doddle, but the maths, I was worried about, because I wasn't that good at maths, and I thought "if I fail my 11 plus it'll be because of the maths." There was English, intelligence and maths [...] Intelligence and English I was fine with, but the maths ... you know. My dad would try and help me because he'd been to night school and done things, but I wasn't really interested, that was the problem.³⁰

Of the fifteen women interviewed, Maggie was the only one to proffer an overview of her ability. More significantly, however, she was able to express that her weakness in maths was due to a lack of interest, rather than of aptitude.³¹ In this respect, Maggie assumed a level of accountability in the event of an unsuccessful outcome. Of further interest is Maggie's inclusion of 'you know' as a way to connect my understanding to hers via our shared gender construct. Kathryn Anderson & Dana Jack advocate the need to 'listen in stereo' as means to better appreciate both the dominant and muted perspectives within an individual's narrative.³² Returning to Maggie's explanation for her lack of interest in maths, whilst the dominant voice was her admission, the muted voice held within the narrative suggested there is no need for further explanation,

³⁰ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

³¹ For more information on mathematics in girls' secondary school curriculum, see Ollerenshaw, Kathleen, *Education for Girls*. (Faber & Faber, 1961) p. 82

³² Anderson, Kathryn. & Dana C. Jack, 'Learning to Listen', p. 11

shared as it was to another woman, it could be assumed that I share the same level of disinterest in maths as a subject. As explored in the Stories of Family chapter, Maggie's love of English was learnt from her dad, genuine in his desire to share his enthusiasm for the written word. Furthermore, in telling of her father's own efforts of self-improvement, this extract reinforced the value of the education she experienced and a belief that the commitment to learning was of benefit to her as a person and to those around her. In the next section of this chapter, the emphasis shifts from the experience of the exam to the receipt and acknowledgement of the 11+ result, as the narrators share the effects of success on themselves and their families.

The recognition that comes from success

Motivations have, so far, concentrated on the grammar school as a destination with a reputation for academic rigour and the likelihood of better opportunities. For Peg, however, the motivation came from her elder sister's success. Unlike Helena and Maggie who were the eldest in the family, as the youngest of two daughters, Peg was eager to replicate the success achieved by her older sister Susan: 'Susan had done well, Susan had got there'.³³ Arguably, these eight words encapsulated the discourse surrounding selective educational policy and the meritocratic aspirations of those in working-class communities.³⁴ Furthermore, Peg's affirmation that her sister had got 'there', illustrates the idea of a grammar school as a destination, something to be aimed for.³⁵ When asked if she could remember where the pressure came

³³ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

³⁴ Roberts, Elizabeth. *Women and Families*, p. 169

³⁵ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

from, Peg confirmed it was from herself and her desire to achieve in the same way as her sister:

PL: I think the pressure came from, [...] from me, yeah.

AL: because you wanted to achieve what your sister had?

PL: Yes, yeah, very much so.³⁶

For this family living in a working-class suburb of Cardiff, the high school was seen as an aspirational destination, and not only because it was selective. Though there were differing levels of grammar school in the area, as Peg explained, 'Cardiff High was the top one'.³⁷ In this respect, the pressure Peg experienced related not only to passing the 11+, but to pass in such a way that equalled her sister, gaining access to the best school in the city. The importance of the 11+ within Helena's family was explored earlier in the chapter where she expressed feelings of anxiety and the possible consequences of a failed result. I asked Helena if she could remember the events that surrounded the exam outcome:

Yes. So, I remember that... we got a letter to the home which said you've passed the 11+ and you've been granted a place at St J*****'s College Bradford which was significant 'cause that was the school my mum went to. [...] So, I got this place at St J*****'s College Bradford. So

³⁶ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

³⁷ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

that was... It was... my parents were pleased but I feel
that it was expected.³⁸

Though Helena made no further mention of any perceived level of expectation held by her parents, remembering that they themselves were teachers and familiar with the education system, it could be assumed that they were also well placed to both support and inform Helen of the process and the purpose of the 11+. It is likely that through her use of the word 'expected', rather than hoped or anticipated, Helena would have been in no doubt as to the aspirations within the family and how she should set the required standard.³⁹

This recollection of the 11+ result is interesting for two reasons; firstly, because it confirms the positive family reaction and her open admission that the result did not come as a surprise, but secondly because she aligns her 11+ success to the historical achievements of her mother. Helena's inclusion of her mum as an alumna of St J*****'s College situated her obvious pleasure in the academic recognition alongside that of satisfying her mother. Similarly, though for different reasons, reference to her mother can be likened to Anna whose failed outcome was situated alongside her own mother's disappointment. In succeeding at the 11+, Helena not only achieved a place at the grammar school but, crucially, realized the high level of expectation set by her mother.⁴⁰ The aspirational intensity of this mother-daughter relationship explored within the earlier chapter on Stories of Family, reflects the

³⁸ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

³⁹ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁴⁰ Further information relating to the effects of mother and daughter relationships regarding educational aspirations can be found in, Holly, Douglas. *Society, Schools and Humanity: The Changing World of Secondary Education* (Paladin, 1971), Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education*. (2000) and Young, Michael. & Peter Willmott, P, *Family & Kinship in East* (1957)

apparent 'educational inheritance' as Helena followed not only her mother's intention, but also her footsteps.⁴¹ In this respect, class identity was reinforced through the legacy of professional status. Lastly, while this narrative extract recalled the moment Helena received notification of her result, it also evidenced the lasting reverence to which the school is held. Helena's repeated reference to the school by its full name demonstrated not only the esteem in which it was held within the family but the permanence of such status.

Having acknowledged her receipt of the 11+ result, Helena continued to explain how her achievement was shared among the family as a whole:

But then the next day my dad came home from school and made, er, my sisters... and then my mum and he had this box, a rectangular box, and kind of presented me with this and opened it for me and inside was a Parker pen as a reward for passing the 11+ and that felt significant, because, it was not the type of thing that happened in our family.⁴²

In the act of recollection, Helena physically altered her seating position enabling her to effectively demonstrate this special memory whilst allowing me to better appreciate the way the gift was given and her reaction at receiving it. This shift in position gave notice of a performance. Some have argued that the presence of performance within oral history narratives suggests a 'heightened mode of

⁴¹Jackson, Brian & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, p. 210

⁴² HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

communication'.⁴³ Socio-linguist Richard Bauman argues that performance as a distinctive means of communication is 'lifted out to a degree from its contextual surroundings and opened up to scrutiny by an audience'.⁴⁴ Returning to the presentation of a pen by her parents, Helena's use of performance provided an alert to me, the audience, of both her newly elevated status within the family and the value with which her parents regarded academic achievement. Notwithstanding the change in position, her tone of voice altered to replicate the heightened anticipation felt some sixty years ago, therefore repeating the experience itself through a form of self-dramatization. Writing on the effect of dramatization within oral narratives, Lynn Abrams likens it to a form of "place-making" [...] where the remembering process conjures up [...] a picture of how things might have been'.⁴⁵ In this sense, performance brought authenticity and meaning to Helena's recollection, whilst sharing a heightened emotional resonance of this moment in her life history narrative.

The choice of gift is not without meaning. The fountain pen symbolizes progression, from pencil to ink and a moment of transition to this next stage in life. Unlike the well-documented offer of a bike through which to incentivize success at the 11+, the pen relates directly to the work Helena would undertake at school, which both recognizes and consolidates her move to secondary education.⁴⁶ Moreover, as

⁴³ Bauman, R. *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments: A Communication-centred Handbook* (Oxford, 1992) p. 41 in Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 132

⁴⁴ R. Bauman, R. "Performance", p. 44 in Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory* p. 133

⁴⁵ Abrams, Lynn. "Story-telling, Women's Authority and the "Old Wives Tale": 'The Story of the Bottle of Medicine", *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (2012): pp. 95-117, p. 108

⁴⁶ Further examples on the use of gifts, often in the form of new bikes, can be found in Vernon, P.E. *Secondary School Selection, a British Psychological Inquiry* (London, Routledge, 1957). Kuhn, Annette, *Family Secrets* (1995) and <https://11plusanonymous.org/>

a notable brand, the Parker pen demonstrated a level of investment made by her parents to acknowledge their daughter's achievement.

In contrast to the demonstrative celebration of status and achievement, Hazel shared experiences of submission and discretion. Hazel's gendered experience within the family became more significant at this transitional point in her life. Irrespective of any feelings of personal satisfaction she may have experienced at having passed her 11+, Hazel's family did not openly affirm her ability or suitability for a place at the grammar school but rather presented it as a moment to put others first. When asked about the reaction of her parents to her 11+ success, Hazel explained:

It was okay, but I remember my mum saying, when I passed the eleven plus, (*whispered*) "don't make an issue of it". Because I was the only, I was the eldest girl in the family. In fact, I was the only girl on that side. Um, on my mother's side, my elder cousin was male, hadn't passed, and it was ... "don't make an issue". And on my father's side, I had an older female cousin, and she hadn't passed. So, it's very much case of, you know, "don't, don't get, oh, don't get too big for your boots".⁴⁷

This life history account provides hitherto unexplored historical material regarding the perceived need for discretion rather than open appreciation in some families. Close reading of the narrative revealed the obvious need to limit any open

⁴⁷ HB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

acknowledgement of her ability or of her success, either to herself or her wider family. Repeated use of “don’t” reinforced the idea that this was an instruction and not a suggestion. The need for such sensitive handling also offers the view that this was a long-term request rather a momentary instruction or, quite possibly, advice against any obvious demonstration of her intelligence that might accentuate the perceived weaknesses of her siblings and cousins. Of further interest, however, is that this was not a joint message from parents anxious to suppress their obvious delight at their daughter’s achievements in protection of others, but rather it was delivered by one female family member to another, maternal guidance on how best to negotiate her place within that particular family structure. Crucially, by diminishing focus on the successful outcome of her 11+, Hazel was obliged to compromise her own level of self-esteem to protect that of others. In this respect, there has been a trans-generational or continuation of the subordinate female role.

Two features within Hazel’s narrative warrant further exploration to better appreciate the emotional connectivity to the 11+ experience and the sense of self resulting from such an experience: the use of autobiographical memory and the alteration in orality to reconstruct the conversation with her mother. W.F. Brewer describes “recollective” memory as relating ‘to a specific episode from an individual’s past [...] relating to information about place, actions, persons, objects, thoughts and affect’.⁴⁸ In the recollections of her 11+ experience, Hazel exposed the ever-present conflicts regarding gender ideologies that existed within her family. Through her achievement at the 11+, Hazel demonstrated that her academic intelligence was

⁴⁸ Brewer, W.F. cited in *Autobiographical Memory: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives*, Thompson, C.P., J.J. Skowronski, S.F. Larsen and A.L. Betz eds. (Routledge, 1998) in Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 86

perceived as being not only above her male siblings, but also her father. As was shown in the Stories of Class and Gender chapter, such consideration for patriarchal superiority was an evident theme in the construct of her parents' relationship. Mindful of protecting her husband by consciously avoiding any outward demonstration of her own intelligence, Hazel's mother subjugated her own abilities for the sake of her marriage. In this respect, for Hazel, the 11+ became a marker that affected the whole family. Whilst it demonstrated a measure of her academic ability and served to allocate her to the most appropriate secondary school, it was also a permanent reminder that reinforced the limited capabilities of other male members of the family. Such gendered responses were not unique. Assessing the reaction to her own educational experience, Irene Payne argued it was not so much a question about girls gaining an education, but rather the education of a boy was considered to be of a higher importance. As Anna explained within Chapter 2, Stories of Class and Gender, education for girls was only assumed to reach the minimum requirement; had she been a boy she might have been pushed on further.⁴⁹

When asked if she could remember receiving the result of her 11+, Maggie's narrative revealed a very different situation, one which depicts familial anticipation and a public announcement of the result:

Yeah. Because it would be in the *Chronicle*. Before you got to know by post, it was in the local paper that came out on a 'Thursday'. And I could see... this is... that you know how good, how well brought up you are, we could

⁴⁹ Spender, D. & E. Sarah, eds. *Learning to Lose*, p. 13

see...my mum said "That's er... I can see the Chronicle's there." the night before. In a big bale, all taped up outside the shop. Could've gone and looked but we didn't, because you didn't kind of do that kind of thing, did you? [...] We all knew the paper was there, and I had to go to bed. I could see the shop.⁵⁰

Whilst others have provided much detail as to how their 11+ result was received, little has been shared on the necessary waiting. Maggie's account also situated her 11+ experience at a specific moment, one where communication of such events was also featured in the local press. Maggie's level of anticipation was further intensified by the proximity of the shop and her ability to see the newly delivered edition waiting to be opened the next morning. Accompanying this nuanced 11+ account, Maggie's narrative expressed the standard of behaviour expected within her family, and the need to always respect and adhere to it. Such a defined moral code aligns with the findings of Elizabeth Roberts, whose post-war families conformed to the class expectations set by the previous generation, 'to do as their parents told them [...] to be honest and respectable and not to bring shame on their families'.⁵¹ Any attempt to obtain a copy of the paper whilst it lay bundled outside the shop across from their home would have been unlawful. Like every other family, Maggie and her parents had to wait for the news.

Close listening to the sense of self evidenced in Maggie's narrative, suggests that this shared behaviour learnt in childhood is a value that remains to this day.

⁵⁰ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵¹ Roberts, Elizabeth, *Women and Families*, p. 159

Moreover, in sharing memories now stimulated through her involvement in this project, Maggie assumed my understanding of her anticipation and my awareness of the need to follow the rules. This obvious inter-play between the two parties reflects the work of Peter G. Coleman, who considers the role of the stimulus (or researcher) in life history research as someone who emboldens the participant to share 'what they perceive to be of interest to the audience'.⁵² As Maggie is my husband's aunt, it is likely that in sharing family values important to her, she was reinforcing those understood by myself.⁵³

Ideas of family cohesion can be further evidenced in the narrative, as Maggie spoke of a collective anticipation of her 11+ result; 'we all knew the paper was there, and I had to go to bed.'⁵⁴ Though the exam result was for one individual, in this instance the experience was shared within the family. I was interested to learn what Maggie remembered about how she felt, knowing her name would be in the paper, but being forced to wait until morning before seeing the result:

Yeah, I just felt.... just how I'd felt since I took the exam really you know - trying to think "well whatever happens it happens. I do hope I pass." I didn't feel any pressure from my parents you know. [...] That I would be... some of my friends would say "I am getting a bike, if I pass my 11+, I'll get a bike!". There's no way I would get a bike. It wasn't

⁵² Coleman, P. "Ageing and life history": p. 121. See also, Coslett, T., C. Lury & P. Summerfield, eds. *Feminism and Autobiography* (2000)

⁵³ For more information see Appendix I, Participant Biographies.

⁵⁴ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

about that. I wanted [...] that education [...] and then luckily my name was in the paper.

AL: So that morning who brought the paper home?

MB: I don't remember that. Probably one of my brothers - I'd be too frightened.

AL: So, you wouldn't have opened it yourself?

MB: No [...] No. And then somebody... "You've passed! Your name's here!" [...] I think there were 6 of us in our class of ...well of course there were boys as well, weren't there. But 6 girls went on to the grammar school.

AL: What were your mum and dad's reaction?

MB: Yeah, well, they were thrilled to bits of course.⁵⁵

This extract is telling; not only of Maggie's desire to pass and secure a place at the grammar school, but that her motivation was centred around the education itself, not a special gift or reward for achievement. As we learnt in the earlier account, Maggie's enthusiasm centred on the possible opportunities available to her at secondary school, having recalled her eagerness to make the most of them. Maggie's recollection described an egalitarian approach within the family structure. Unlike the staged presentation of the special pen awarded to Helena in front of her siblings, the celebratory moment described by Maggie appears to be spontaneous and shared equally by the whole family.

⁵⁵ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

Despite the obvious excitement, Maggie's narrative demonstrated a level of rational thought by her younger self, 'trying to think "well, whatever happens, it happens"'.⁵⁶ Oral narratives are unlikely to contain the factual account of any given experience as the passing of time and individual subjectivity can alter and distort the content within personal recollections. Scholarship advocating the importance of interpretation over truth puts greater emphasis on the meaning behind the experience, rather than the event itself. Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson argue that the existence of 'faulty memories' within women's narratives often provide 'the most telling parts of oral history'.⁵⁷ Maggie's explanation of the feelings linked to the 11+ express a level of acceptance that, as a girl of eleven, she would need to have in order to shoulder the outcome. Moreover, as the eldest child within the family, Maggie's recollection illustrates an acute awareness of the necessary self-control required to limit the potential emotional fall-out.

For Maggie, receipt of the 11+ result was very much a shared affair, with the family in full attendance. Though June's mum and younger siblings were at home for the exam result, her father was away on business. I asked June if she could remember receiving the result from her 11+ exam:

I do. I remember it very clearly, actually, [...] because I got a telegram. My father was working away from home. [...] There was a letter came in the post. How my father knew, he must have telephoned to find out how I'd got on. Or my

⁵⁶ MB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁷ Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Florence & Natalie Thomlinson, "Vernacular Discourses of Gender Equality in Post-war British Working Class", *Past & Present, A Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 254, No. 1, (2022): pp. 277-313, p. 282

mother telephoned him. And I had a telegram from my dad, which I kept for years and years and years, because it's the only one I ever had. He was really pleased [...] yes, yes, he was pleased.⁵⁸

Although I was previously aware of June's 11+ result, obtained through the participant information sheet ahead of the interview process, it is notable that June's recollection does not detail the outcome itself but, instead, the positive result is symbolised by the telegram. Certainly, listening to June recall the events surrounding her 11+, receipt of the telegram is hugely significant, not only because of what it represents, but importantly that it came from her father. Linking this recollection to the relationship details that featured in the first part of the study, it is possible to understand why the telegram remains emblematic of her 11+ success. Whilst this could be seen as a further example of the 'celebratory' moment, similar to that of Helena, and the Parker pen, the emotional significance of this telegram is very different. Asked how she felt at receiving the telegram, June replied:

Um, well, it was very exciting. I'd never had a telegram before, and, um, yeah, it was a treasure! And I felt very proud of having this bit of paper. I had no idea of the implications of having passed the eleven plus; what that was going to, you know, be like, how it was going to look, just gonna go to a different school and you know...⁵⁹

⁵⁸ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁹ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

By her description of the telegram as a 'treasure', it is apparent that to June, this was something of huge sentimental value.⁶⁰ Moreover, as a treasure, June emphasised the lasting emotional significance experienced by such immediate communication and which demonstrated the level of interest felt by her absent father. Aside from the delivery method, the telegram provided June with visible reinforcement of his support for her education and his obvious delight at her success.

For some of the participants, pride and delight associated with the 11+ were far less demonstrative, expressed instead through calm support and minimal expectations. For Lillian, any feelings of parental satisfaction at her 11+ result came through her subconscious understanding of their reserved and uneffusive approval. Asked if she could recall her parents' reaction to her 11+, Lillian replied, 'no, I mean, I'm sure they were pleased.'⁶¹ Unlike the detailed recollections and immediate affirmations of relief and pride accorded to Helena, Maggie and to June, Lillian took time to consider her answer, as her recollection was of their understanding rather than their sentiment:

Um, they tended to take the attitude of, "well do your best", you know, and then "that's good enough for us".
"Just, just do your best, try your hardest". And then, that's
it.⁶²

⁶⁰ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶¹ LW 200523

⁶² LW 200523

This uncomplicated approach taken by Lillian's parents saw achievement not as something to be measured by the outcome of the exam but was recognised rather in the assured understanding that their daughter would have tried her best. Lillian's narrative portrayed a clearly defined familial structure with regards to parental roles, responsibilities and wider expectations of behaviour. In contrast to those whose narratives of expectation, aspiration and influence have been explored so far, Lillian's stories of achievement were shaped by her unexpected success at the 11+ and her self-perception of her own limited capabilities. Asked if she recalled feeling worried about the 11+ exam:

But no, no. And I wasn't worried by the eleven plus [...] not at all. I didn't think I was particularly clever. I'm not. But I, I didn't think, I wasn't expecting to pass to be honest. [...] The thing I remember about that day, cause my best friend across the road, she went to a different school to me. [...] And that other school was considered to be a better school, better primary school. Um, and I remember we sort of met, because her house was directly opposite ours. I remember we met in the middle of the road, um, and we were dancing up and down 'cause we both passed, and we were going to be both going to the same school.⁶³

⁶³ LW 200523

Lillian was one of the few participants who spoke of the association of her 11+ result with that of her immediate peers. Arguably, Lillian's experience of the 11+ is centred not on any apparent success at her own ability, but rather on the opportunity to attend the same secondary school as her best friend. Though the effects of selection and differentiation are explored in the final chapter, it is important to acknowledge now how 11+ experiences can be understood through cemented friendships and the fear of isolation. Clearly, for Lillian, this recollection of 'dancing up and down in the middle of the road', far outweighed any prescribed measurement of her academic abilities.⁶⁴ As an only child, Lillian experienced no hierarchical status within the family and no siblings with which to anticipate, share or negotiate the outcome. In contrast Helena and Maggie, Lillian had little expectation of success and therefore recalled no concern as to the outcome. Notwithstanding her ability to secure a place at the grammar school, Lillian's understanding of the 11+ appeared to be more about the process of selection, rather than as a means to determine her level of intelligence. Certainly, she had an awareness of her own abilities that was challenged by the outcome of the exam.

In the chapter so far, emphasis has been placed on the preparation and outcome of the 11+ and the immediate effects of academic success, both for the individual and for their family. The focus now shifts to consider the different perceptions about experiences of achievement and their relationship to the 11+ exam.

⁶⁴ LW 200523

Experiences of achievement

For the selected few, achievement at the 11+ brought entry to the grammar school, an elite educational institution recognised for high performance and a rigorously disciplined approach. Indeed, this was much more than mere progression from primary to secondary education. Achieving a place at the grammar school demanded a high work ethic, adherence to rules and loyalty to the school values. In many respects, achievement granted entry into an alternative and unfamiliar society, one which took time to understand and to connect with. The behavioural demands and expectations within the grammar school regime were not focussed solely on discipline but were later understood to consolidate identities of gender and class.⁶⁵ Considering her unexpected success at the 11+ and her move to the High School, I asked Lillian how she felt about going:

Um. It was ... (*long pause*) it was weird, because it was all girls for a start, um. And there was an *awful lot of rules*.
 [...] And it was things like, um, silence in the corridors, and the school was built on a square, and there was some black and white tiles, which is where, the head mistress and her deputy, who was her cousin, their offices were and where the school secretary was. And the black and white tiles were outside that, the school hall was in the middle, and then the corridors were all the way round, um.
 And you were not allowed to cross the black and white

⁶⁵ Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education*, p. 21

tiles. [...] And it was silence in the corridors, single file, um, skirts down to the knee, as in, you knelt down on the floor and the skirt touched the floor. If they didn't, you were in trouble.⁶⁶

Acknowledging that there is little explanation as to how it felt to move from primary to the high school, it is possible that Lillian mis-heard my question. However, as her recollection progressed, it appeared likely that she opted for a different way in which to re-tell her experience. Unlike other experiences shared within her life history account, Lillian took a good few moments before answering this question. Whether as a result of the long pause, or as a practised method through which she secured a deeper meaning, Lillian chose four distinct aspects of place, hierarchy, navigation and discipline to best describe her high school, though rather as a spectator than as an active participant. Beginning with a visual description of the school to better explain the implications of controlled movement, Lillian recalled the chain of command and the school's efforts to uphold modes of behaviour and presentation. Responding to my curiosity about the skirt hem length, Lillian replied:

Yes, yes, yes. When you first got there, yes, to check your skirt. Yes, yes. They left it for a little while, till people got a bit comfortable, and was starting to, sort of, tighten things up a bit. And then it was, down on the floor after assembly, um. And if you're in trouble, you, there was a row of chairs and black and white tiles, and that's where you sat waiting

⁶⁶ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

for your interview with the head teacher. [...] And that's where the punishments were doled out. So, if you're on the black and white tiles, you were really in trouble⁶⁷

Lillian's recollections of grammar school experience are not exceptional. Indeed, they affirm stereotypical ideas of life at a grammar school in the 1960s; that of strict hierarchical structure and a rigid enforcement of codes relating to the standard of personal dress.⁶⁸ What makes these experiences unique, however, is the lasting effects of such a regime and the way these experiences were voiced. In contrast to both Maggie and Hazel, whose grammar school experience was centred on their own involvement and participation, Lillian's repeated use of 'you' suggests an altered outlook, one which attempted to distance herself from re-visiting the effects of such significant gendered demands.⁶⁹ Though Lillian offered no later-life perspective, phrases such as 'tighten things up' and 'down on the floor after assembly' were spoken quickly, leaving no opportunity for emotional re-engagement. Alessandro Portelli describes how the 'shift in velocity' within oral narratives indicates a deep subjective meaning to the experience, even if none is made specific.⁷⁰ Considering Lillian's succinct explanation of the public enforcement of rules regarding skirt length, it is likely that this had a greater personal impact than she chose to reveal.

⁶⁷ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶⁸ Further examples of demands and expectations regarding grammar school uniform can be found in, Evans, Mary. *A Good School*. (1991) Hoggart, Richard *The Uses of Literacy* (2009), Ingham, Mary. *Now We are Thirty* (1981), Kuhn, Kuhn. (2002 (first published 1995)) Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education*. (2000), Steedman, Carolyn. *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986).

⁶⁹ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷⁰ Genette, G. *Figures III*, (Paris, Seuil, 1972) in, Portelli, Alessandro. "What makes oral history different", in *The Oral History Reader*. Perks, R. & A. Thomson, (Routledge, 2016) p. 51. Alessandro Portelli uses terms defined by Gerard Genette to demonstrate the use of distance or perspective as a method used by the narrator in relation to their story.

Achievement at the 11+ is not solely defined by the expressions of relief and celebratory experiences that dominated the earlier narratives. Success for some was unremarkable as, in many cases, it was anticipated. Wren recalled very little of her 11+ experience, either about the exam or the outcome, but instead expressed her understanding that she had fulfilled a familial expectation, 'I don't think there was any question that I wouldn't pass'.⁷¹ Born in 1952, the eldest of four children, Wren grew up in Buckinghamshire. Juxtaposed to the aspirations shared by the families of Helena, June and Maggie, Wren's middle-class parents had altogether different expectations on views about the role of education:

I think they wanted us to have an education, up to a point.
[...] I think they were still of the generation, that I would
get married and have children. [...] They expected us to
do well at school. They expected good results, and we
delivered.⁷²

Clearly, academic attainment was important, but rather than as a springboard to further educational opportunities, it was understood to provide a necessary foundation on which to build an independent life. Wren's experience of attitudes to education aligned with sociologist Hannah Gavron's description that though middle-class parents were more 'education conscious' than their working-class counterparts,

⁷¹ WK, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷² WK, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

they were less concerned about the educational outcome for girls.⁷³ Indeed, when asked if her parents held aspirations for their children, Wren replied:

No. they really didn't [...] I don't think they were particularly aspirational people. [...] As long as, you know, I was earning enough to keep myself and I was comparatively happy, I think they were, they were ok.⁷⁴

As one of the younger participants in the study, Wren left school at a time when employment opportunities in the clerical and retail sectors were plentiful. As detailed within the introduction, young women of the postwar generation experienced a greater sense of freedom, able to carve out a period of independence ahead of their eventual marriage and family responsibilities. In contrast to those for whom the 11+ was believed to offer otherwise unattainable advantage, Wren's narrative was shaped, not by any achievement secured by the exam result but by an understanding that her education would sufficiently equip her for gendered adult life. Interestingly, this view was not confined to her family but appeared commonplace among her peers at the north London grammar school:

The majority of my school, of my friends left at sixteen.
Thinking about it now. [...] And yet we were, a lot of us

⁷³ Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife*, p. 76

⁷⁴ WK, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

were in the top set. And yet we left. [...] In fact, none of my close friendship group went on to university.⁷⁵

Reflecting on how education affected the lives of young girls in the second half of the twentieth-century, sociologist Madeleine Arnot looks beyond equality of opportunity, to consider instead the structural obstacles of ‘family culture and its gendered definitions’.⁷⁶ Acknowledging that Arnot’s focus was not directly linked to the 11+, it nonetheless reflects the importance of familial expectations within home and community as a means of shaping the views of girls to their time at school. Wren’s parents had clear expectations regarding hard work and a need to perform well, believing that educated young adults would make independent and contented individuals. When Wren, was sixteen, the family moved from their home in north London to Cambridge, thwarting her personal ambition:

Because I wanted to go to art college, and they stopped me, whereas I could have. I mean, [...] my uncle lived in London suburbs; they had friends who lived. I could have, stayed, but I didn’t. And you know, my mother always said, “you never forgave us for that, did you”? And I said, “no, because there was no reason why I couldn’t have stayed behind”.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ WK, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁷⁶ Arnot, Madeleine. “State Education Policy”, p. 137

⁷⁷ WK, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

A year after their move to Cambridge, and then aged seventeen, Wren returned to London to work in a retail environment that complemented her passion for art and design. Though the level of frustration remained, Wren conceded that this was non-negotiable for her parents:

No, absolutely not. You're not staying behind at 16 years old. You're not staying behind, which I can understand, in a way. But, you know, you think, but the opportunity was there, and it wasn't there later.⁷⁸

Listening to Wren's life history account, it is possible to appreciate both her obvious teenage frustrations alongside the wider needs of the family and their move away from London. Indeed, the strong sense of self that Wren revealed was momentarily compromised as, in later adult life, she 'understood' their point of view. This moment of self-reflexivity shows the complexities that continue to exist within oral narratives, as the recollection of a sixteen-year-old self becomes one of rationalised adult acceptance, only possible through the passing of time. For Wren, the sense of achievement she experienced came, not from the assumed success at the 11+, but by the eventual self-fulfilment that satisfied her late adolescent aspirations. Unlike Wren, however, whose aspirations of further education were thwarted at sixteen, Gemma secured a place at university, against the wishes of her mother.

Gemma was under no illusion as to what achievement meant to her mother; it represented security and recognition. Contextual details within the Class and Gender chapter revealed her mother's aspirations that the family move away from war

⁷⁸ WK, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

damaged London to a new home in Essex. Admitting that both Gemma and her parents ‘assumed that [she] would pass’ her 11+, her successful outcome was well received and provided a pathway to security:⁷⁹

She liked the idea of me going through the school because, obviously, that was, you know, prestigious. I’m getting good results. But she didn’t see the idea of university. [...] She just wanted me to do something in a well-paid, steady job’. “Why don’t you go and work in a bank?”⁸⁰

Gemma explained how there was little understanding in the family of university or higher education, ‘it’s something that wasn’t really on her radar’.⁸¹ Her mother’s advice prioritized financial security and the need to secure a well-paid job, like those within a bank. Such class-based aspiration was also experienced by Peg, whose mother aspired to the enhanced status possible from a clerical role with the Inland Revenue, rather than Peg’s ambition of Marks and Spencer. Gemma was in no doubt of her mother’s long-held aspirations as this message was repeated on three separate occasions in her life history account. However, achievement for Gemma was complex. Though academically capable of gaining a place at the grammar school and progressing on to university, lack of awareness within the family meant that this form of achievement was not deemed necessary. I would argue that as

⁷⁹ GW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May 2023. Unarchived

⁸⁰ GW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May 2023. Unarchived

⁸¹ GW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May 2023. Unarchived

Gemma's family had any no previous association with university, it is likely that their unfamiliarity was shared by other families.

Though Gemma spoke little about the positive effects she experienced as a result of the 11+, she did admit that: '[she] probably wouldn't have gone to university if I hadn't gone to grammar school'.⁸² Despite her mother's indifference towards higher education, university provided Gemma with the opportunity to leave home and forge an independent life for herself, one that was far removed from her mother's gendered aspirations of security and status.

Success at the 11+ and entry to the top grammar school in Cardiff has, for Peg, resulted in conflicting views of her own level of achievement which have continued to affect her later-life identity:

When we had job fairs, [...] you know, all, people came in those days, you know, into, into the school [...] I would have liked to have been a supervisor in Marks and Spencer, because Marks and Spencer was a really good firm. [...] And to be a supervisor to be, you know, important. [...]

AL: What made you think you'd like to be a supervisor at Mark and Spencer?

PL: I-I don't know. It's just something that you go into the shop, the lovely clothes, the lovely surroundings and freedom, I think.

⁸² GW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May 2023. Unarchived

AL: And did you think that from when you were 16?

PL: Yes, but it was a case of em, “oh, five years at Cardiff High School for girls, and, sorry, nine and a half O-levels, and work in a shop? No”.⁸³

AL: So, who said that?

PL: I don't know that anything ever said it.... I can't remember anybody ever saying it. [...] All those, all those O-Levels. Look, they never actually said, “Look what we've done for you”, or “Look what we've gone without to get you all the uniform, all the things”. But that was definitely the feeling, or, you know, “All those O-levels, and you work in shop!” But that was the ...⁸⁴

The extract spoke of a moment of personal sacrifice, not only for Peg, but also her sister, having placed personal ambitions to one side to fulfil instead the unspoken obligation to her parents. Arguably, her desire to work at supervisor level, demonstrated an awareness of her own potential, elevating her above the stereotypical retail occupation of shelf-stacker. Though not linked to any specific parental advice, Peg knew subconsciously through the firmness of the ‘No’, that any ambition she held for a career in Marks and Spencer would be inappropriate for someone who had received their education at the grammar school.⁸⁵ Clearly, it was

⁸³ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived Peg explained that the half O-level she referred to was as a result of her inability to achieve all three component parts. Peg gained her part qualification in arithmetic.

⁸⁴ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁸⁵ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

assumed that such an academic education, even one that did not lead to higher educational opportunities would be wasted in a retail position. The life history account revealed an awareness of aspirations and expectations within the family without affirming ownership to either parent. This extract brought a disruptive element to the oral narrative as Peg appeared to express the words and views of others despite being unable to confirm if they were ever spoken at all. Arguably, what Peg was trying to share related more to a general expectation among the working-class community of which they were a part, rather than a direction from within the family. Indeed, as she latterly affirmed, 'look they never actually said [...] but that was definitely the feeling'.⁸⁶ Irrespective of the origins of the sentiment, apparent within the narrative is the unequivocal value of the grammar school education and the elevated aspirations of those whose children were fortunate enough to gain a place. Prohibited from seeking work at Marks and Spencer, Peg followed her sister Susan into a clerical position:

I went to work in the Midland bank and then went to work in the Inland Revenue. Horrible!! (*much laughter*) I had no skills. [...] Nine and a half O-levels and no common sense! Girls who went to the secondary modern learned how to do shorthand and typing. They had skills I didn't.⁸⁷

Continued emphasis of her grammar school qualifications reinforced how the frustrations experienced over fifty years prior to the interview continued to influence

⁸⁶ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁸⁷ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

her mindset with regards to her identity as a grammar-school girl. Despite five years at the high school, Peg left with qualifications that would not translate into the skills necessary for the world of work she was expected to enter. In contrast with those who were not selected, for those girls who attended the secondary modern schools and learnt shorthand and typing, Peg's nine and half O-level's hold complex emotions. Though exasperated at their apparent futility when entering the job market, Peg's repeated message suggests an alternative perspective, one that considers the value of her achievement to be far from insignificant, indeed, as she earlier revealed, these nine and a half O-levels were 'hard fought'.⁸⁸ Asked if she identifies as a grammar-school girl, Peg replied, 'yes, I'm proud of that'.⁸⁹

I just feel I got a, a good education, which I was lucky to get. [...] Didn't really prepare me for, for life, because it was very much, [...] there was three classes in the school, A, B and C. At the grammar school, the C-stream was the high stream. [...] I was in the A.⁹⁰

In this instance, the meaning behind Peg's school experience appeared to be informed by stratified status and attainment. Situated in the lowest of the three streams appears to have limited the scope of opportunity available. Indeed, for Peg, the thorny issue of identity in relation to her success at the 11+ and eventual academic achievement at the grammar school is challenged by her dissatisfaction at

⁸⁸ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁸⁹ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁹⁰ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

the eventual contribution to her adult life. Placing the contextual evaluation gained from earlier chapters in the study to one side, I asked Peg if she would identify as someone who had achieved:

No [...] Because of never really fitting in. I'd, I'd have achieved if I'd have been part of ... [...] By passing the eleven plus, going where I went. I'm proud to get nine half O-levels. I'm, I'm... keep dropping that in the conversation. Ha, ha! [...] It's my only achievement. No, it's become a bit of a joke really. [...] Not a joke, But, yes, it's the nine and half O-levels, no common-sense bit, *(laughter)* [...] No, I'd have achieved more if I'd ever, ever felt like I was part of the, the education group. [...] I got a good education, but I wasn't really part of it.

AL: But you don't see yourself as an achiever

PL: No, Because I've not done anything with it.⁹¹

In this extract, Peg's narrative expressed a further level of disconnect that she perceived to have existed between herself and the wider school community, something that is explored in the final chapter. Indeed, Peg's place among those in the lower set excluded her from feeling 'part of the education group', which in turn hampered any notion of personal achievement.⁹² Peg's oral narrative spoke of the issues experienced by those who fail to achieve the potential opportunities that the

⁹¹ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁹² PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

grammar school was believed to offer. Though not explicitly addressed, Peg's life history revealed the specific challenges experienced by working-class girls in relation to their middle-class counterparts. Despite her proven academic ability, experiences of achievement could only be realised through social opportunities that she did not have access to. For Peg, getting a good education was not the same as being part of the 'education group', and replicated the earlier identification of her own 'good' community of S***** when compared to others perceived to be 'better'.⁹³ Despite passing the 11+ and gaining nine and a half O-levels, Peg did not perceive herself to be socially or academically equipped for higher education. Arguably, this sense of separation continues to influence how Peg perceives her 11+ success and its complex contribution to her sense of self.

Life history narratives challenge the idea of the pass and fail dichotomy. The varied ways in which achievement is understood reveal how, despite being in receipt of an unsuccessful exam outcome, the subsequent experience was far from one of failure. Indeed, in the case of Jane, it is possible to consider her time at the secondary modern to be more positive than that of others who were deemed to have achieved at eleven. Contrasting with those whose life history narratives conveyed a sense of achievement through their 11+ performance and the immediate entry to selective education, Jane's experience brings an alternative perspective, one which links directly to the issue of self-identity in relation to the 11+ exam.

In the previous chapter, Jane spoke of her borderline 11+ result and the interview necessitated from such an outcome, believing that she had 'neither passed, nor failed' the 11+.⁹⁴ As both Jane and her sister Cathy explained, the school

⁹³ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁹⁴ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

headmistress took her position very seriously, appearing to ignore any external 'noise' regarding the reputational status of both the school and the supposed sub-par pupils in attendance:

Oh, she was push, push, push, and all, and she really **did push**. Um, I mean, what did I take? Six, seven, seven O-levels?! And I had... um... we had a chance to have a go...at "A" level zoology, um, which was *fascinating*, because we had to go to London School of Zoology to take the exam. It was a day out. I mean, I don't think I passed, but I don't think we had any hope in hell of passing, with the benefit of hindsight. But, um, I mean, these, these O-levels she was pushing. [...] But I remember she would make us go and study individually... to revise, because "You have got to pass these exams, and you've got to pass them properly". [...] They were graded. [...] They were graded numerically, I think. And a 'one' was the best. "And I want you all to have threes or fours, and nothing less."⁹⁵

Jane's commitment to effort is expressed within her life history account. Whatever the school may have lacked in reputational status, this was not going to hamper to the success of its pupils. It could be argued that, given the mindset and ambitions of

⁹⁵ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

the Headmistress, the girls were given no cause to dwell on the effects of the 11+ exam, indeed there was no barrier to the aspirations she instilled. Certainly, apart from her attempt at zoology, the absence of any diminished level of performance suggests the 11+ outcome left no lasting insecurity. Jane's description of the headteacher revealed a woman for whom hard work and commitment to effort would secure an appropriate and valuable education, irrespective of the school type. The ethos of this secondary modern school challenged the wider discourse on the subjective notion of 'parity of esteem' and the perceived academic weaknesses of those not selected, refusing to believe they had nothing to work with or so little to achieve.⁹⁶ Of prominence in the narrative was the evident commitment of its headteacher. Though some sixty years later, Jane's school experiences were shared with great clarity and emotional energy. Her repeated use of 'push' reflected the heightened level of expectation placed on the physical application to the task as opposed to any passive form of encouragement.⁹⁷ Aside from high aspirations, Jane revealed how the headteacher not only focussed on the desired attainment level, but was acutely aware of the skills necessary for young girls to join the workplace as contributing members of society:

And then our Headmistress, God bless her. Um, she had already set up at that school a sixth form, um, [...] but she had set it up with, she got typewriters and Pitman shorthand. And so, you did this course alongside your O-levels. And she also set up this pre-nursing course

⁹⁶ Relly, Susan James. "The Political rhetoric of parity of esteem", *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (2021): pp. 513-528, p. 517

⁹⁷ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

attached to the West Suffolk Hospital. [...] But not one of us went to the West Suffolk. Unfortunately, we all went elsewhere. [...] Um, but she had these grand ideas for us all. And she, she... “there are other hospitals in the area, you know, girls, there’s the Norfolk and Norwich, there’s Addenbrookes. There’s some, well, there’s the London hospitals, of course”.⁹⁸

Eve Worth wrote of the ‘occupational transition’ evident in postwar Britain as a result of expansion in both the state and service sector.⁹⁹ Clerical roles for young women brought a form of mobility that sidestepped the traditional educational qualification. Arguably, the progressive stance by the school head regarding the aspirations of her girls, widened both their skillset and their horizons. Situating Jane’s educational opportunities at the secondary modern alongside those shared by Peg, it is possible to understand why the 9 and a half O-levels she achieved at the grammar school appeared to lack both relevance and skills necessary to secure a job.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, they underscore the efforts of the secondary modern system to evidence their parity to the grammar system in the face of much criticism. Indeed, Maggie’s fears of ‘cutting fish on the market’ should she not succeed in gaining a grammar school place, only served to highlight the extent of scaremongering that existed. In this life

⁹⁸ JL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, June, 2023. Unarchived.

⁹⁹ Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 42

¹⁰⁰ Peg’s concern of the relevance her school qualifications would have in the working environment replicate those moments of ‘drifting’ that were evident in the work of Eve Worth and described by Selina Todd in, Todd, Selina. *Young Women, Work and Family in England, 1918-1950* (Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 115. Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 43

history account of the secondary modern experience, however, Jane's school environment was one in which education was treated seriously and where young girls were required to work hard and to strive for life-enhancing skills. Certainly, Jane gave no indication of experiencing a weakened sense of self as a result of her borderline 11+, but rather a deep appreciation for the best possible opportunities. Jane's sense of achievement came from the fulfilment of a childhood ambition.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter on the Stories of Achievement has presented a focussed perspective of the 11+ experience, specifically ideas of preparedness, prestige and recognition. Through the use of qualitative research into the experiences of those who sat the 11+ exam, this study has revealed how ideas of achievement are not exclusive to those who were deemed successful, but rather they enable new attention to be placed on other variations of attainment. Furthermore, though perceived as being positive, success is not without an emotional response as the sense of self is re-evaluated in the move from primary to secondary education. Oral narratives emphasise the complexities of the 11+ and the lived experience of a pass or a failed outcome, both for those who sat the exam and for those whose aspirations and expectations frame the subjective meaning. Life history narratives bring a nuanced appreciation of the alternative definitions providing subjective meanings to experiences of achievement that are only evidenced within the interaction of an oral account; the lasting effects of achievement on the individual and her family, the challenges that come from unfamiliar environment and society

and the ideas of success that appear to hold more value than the mark on written test paper.

In this life history study, common themes were explored with each of the participants, though as examined thus far, their individual subjectivity defines their personal narrative content. As feminist historian Joan Sangster argues, women alter the agenda to best suit the story that they wish to share and the memories that hold the most meaning.¹⁰¹ Given that this study questions the effects of the outcome of the 11+ on an individual's identity, and considering too the dominant themes contained within their recollections, it can be argued that school achievement and the resulting parental reaction was of significance importance, both as young girls at the time and on into their later adult lives.

In the final chapter of the study attention moves away from the supposed binary issues of success and failure, disappointment and achievement to consider instead the notion of belonging, and how, as a result of the selection process and irrespective of the outcome, the women as young girls negotiated their pathway through secondary education and on into adult life.

¹⁰¹ Sangster, Joan. "Telling our Stories: Feminist debates and the use of Oral History", *Women's History Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (1994): pp. 5-28, p. 6.

Chapter 6: Stories of Belonging

Introducing belonging

The tripartite educational policies of the Butler Act (1944) sought to align each child to 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 to which they were allocated. This chapter explores differing notions of belonging and how the effects of passing or failing the 11+ exam influenced, and still continues to inform, women’s adult lives. 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.

Sociological understanding suggests that belonging is structured on social inclusion, inhabiting an environment in which to flourish with and alongside others.¹ Research associating recognition with personal self-worth argues that belonging signifies an acceptance by others, whether in relation to family, friendship, or school community.² Social and cultural historian Carolyn Steedman explains marginalisation through an inability to belong, as ‘a terrible exclusion, an exclusion from the experience of others.’³ As the interviews in this study suggest, belonging at secondary school required more than simply passing or failing the 11+. Belonging is

¹ Mason, A. *Community, solidarity and belonging* (Cambridge University Press, 2000)

² Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J.B. Bailie (George Allen and Unwin, 1931) pp. 228-40 in, *Community, solidarity and belonging*, p. 52

³ Steedman, Carolyn. *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p. 17.

experienced through notions of class and gender and perceptions of inequality through differentiation. This chapter argues how, for the recipients of those post-war policies that promised ‘an opportunity for all’, the ability to belong in their selected secondary school relied on more than just the outcome of an academic test. 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.

Belonging is a recurring theme within the narratives, encompassing different individual understanding and experience in relation to selective secondary education. Cultural geographer Daniel Trudeau associates the notion of belonging with that of place-making which ‘represents the internal, personal and subjective view of social space’.⁴ In this respect, 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. Acknowledging the significance of class and community as contributing factors towards securing a level of belonging, sociologist Darren O’Byrne argues for an understanding of the necessary “ingredients”, among which, ‘solidarity, close-by family and social networks, and shared lifestyles’, provide individuals with a level of commonality.⁵ Thus, in any experience of movement or change for a young adolescent, securing a personal sense of belonging to that new environment is shaped not only by the voices and actions of close family members, but also from the wider ‘homophilous

⁴ Trudeau, Daniel. “Politics of belonging in the construction of landscapes: place-making, boundary-drawing and exclusion”, *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2006): pp. 421-443, p. 17.

⁵ O’Byrne, D. “Working-class culture: Local community and global relations”, in *Living the Global City: Globalisation as local process*. Eade, J. ed. (Routledge, 1997) p. 75 in *Moving Histories*, Rogaly. Ben & Becky Taylor, p. 15

relationships'.⁶ Seen through the proverb, 'birds of a feather stick together', homophily explains how relationships are shaped by similarity, or the commonality of experience that stems from demographic characteristics, such as class, gender and education.⁷ As this study will demonstrate, the concept of homophily, formed through family and friendships has a significant impact on the experiences of belonging held within women's 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 throughout the whole life course.⁸ 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. New choices and the challenge of integrating with a new group of friends can result in people having little in common with those they once shared their time with.

The perceived existence of any form of barrier, one that acts to prevent such integration, creates a lasting disconnect which hampers any sense of belonging. As Mary Healy argues, 'belonging is at heart *relational*, it is about the self *with* others'⁹ Matters of belonging shared in the life histories reveal the emotional significance of these friendships that continues to remain and influence the self in later life.

Guibernau explains how belonging 'fosters an emotional attachment [...] prompting an expansion of the individual's personality [...] providing access to an environment

⁶ Vincent, C., S. Neal, H. Iqbal, eds. *Friendship and Diversity: Class, ethnicity and social relations in the city* (Springer International Publishing, 2018) p. 5

⁷ McPherson, Miller., Lynn Smith-Lovin and James M Cook, "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27, (2001): pp. 415-444, p. 417

⁸ Spencer, Liz & Ray Pahl, *Rethinking Friendship: Hidden Solidarities Today* (Princeton University Press, 2006) p. 88

⁹ Healy, Mary. "Belonging, Social Cohesion and Fundamental British Values", *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (2018): pp. 423-438, p. 428-429.

in which they matter'.¹⁰ Moreover, that 'self-identity is constructed through belonging and through exclusion – as a choice or as imposed by others'.¹¹ Identifying 'love, resistance, acceptance and rejection' as being connections of belonging, Morwenna Griffiths argues for the existence of an 'invisible college', to incorporate work, shared values and intellectual interests, that are 'defined by membership, where individuals choose to belong, or feel that they belong'.¹² When considering the central theme of identity in relation to the 11+ exam, any emotional experiences in adolescence that appear to enhance or weaken the self-esteem could create an internalized legacy that continues to shape an individual's sense of self long into the future.

A critical aspect of school belonging comes from the feeling of confidence experienced in the strength and certainty of friendships at school. 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, by 'shared characteristics and personal qualities'.¹⁴ This study argues that, as a means of selecting educational destinations, the 11+ created unfamiliar environments in which young girls would accept or resist the experience of belonging.

¹⁰ Guibernau, Monserrat. *Belonging: Solidarity and Division in Modern Societies* (Polity Press, 2013) p. 28

¹¹ Guibernau, Monserrat. *Belonging: Solidarity and Division*, p. 26

¹² Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self*, p. 86

¹³ Asher, Steven. R. and Molly S. Weeks, "Friendships in Childhood", in *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*. Vangelisti, A. & D. Perlman, ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2018) p. 119

¹⁴ Vangelisti, A. ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships* p. 121. For more information on friendship and belonging, see Charnock, Hannah. "Teenage Girls, Female Friendship and the making of the sexual revolution in England, 1950-1980", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (2020): pp. 1032-1053.

This chapter therefore considers the external influences that fostered or challenged a feeling of belonging, as existing identities and relationships merged 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, could 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 the mutual beliefs and values, could damage the educational opportunity.

Moving away from the clearly defined recollections of the 11+ that featured within earlier discussions of the life history narratives, this chapter now examines the notion of belonging which provided the subconscious framework on which participants' secondary educational experience was supported. Close analysis focuses on the three registers of belonging: through opportunity, intellectual capability and emotional connectivity. This chapter considers the policy of 'opportunity for all' and the lived experiences that challenged or reinforced equity of access. Secondly, how the outcome of the 11+ exam realised or compromised the expectations of intellectual belonging within the secondary school. Lastly, this chapter examines the emotional belonging secured through family and friendship to understand how values and beliefs held within the family can influence a child's ability to fit-in to a new secondary school environment? Accepting that eligibility was secured through an academic examination, this chapter explores the hidden obstacles such as 'cultural capital' that influenced any genuine sense of belonging. Finally, attention is given to the nature of the 11+ as a means to determine secondary education, examining the lasting effects that arose from a sense of un-belonging in either grammar or secondary modern schools.

Belonging through educational opportunity

Maggie was the eldest of five children in a working-class family. Despite having little formal education himself, as discussed in chapter 2 of this study, Maggie understood her father's views on educational opportunity and the chance of a 'decent education' for his daughter.¹⁵ Maggie recalled how her father was, 'highly delighted when [...] the opportunity came for ordinary, anybody to go to grammar school'.¹⁶ Maggie's sense of belonging was influenced by her father's enthusiasm for and belief in the 'opportunity for all' policy, that promised the most appropriate form of free secondary education for each child, irrespective of their situation. Certainly, her altered explanation of the change in entitlement, from 'ordinary' to 'anybody', revealed her awareness of the intended move away from differentiation by class.¹⁷ It is this overarching certainty in equality of opportunity that supported Maggie through her grammar school experience, believing that whilst she may be of a different class from others around her, success at the 11+ demonstrated her entitlement to a place there. Maggie's move from primary to grammar was no less a shift than that experienced by Peg, both girls originating from staunchly working-class environments. Explaining the events leading up to her move to secondary school, Maggie recalled the need to travel to school, and the support promised from church friends who were in a similar situation:

¹⁵ MB 230623. Maggie was not the only participant to share her father's feelings. Describing her father as a progressive, Sarah also spoke of her father's enthusiasm for the 11+, believing 'the 1944 Education Act was going to improve everything for everybody'. SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

¹⁶ MB 230623

¹⁷ MB 230623

So, I could go to Leyton Hill on the tram like some, [...] because we were very ... we went to church. We were very devoted Catholics and so you met other families walking along to church who, you know, "If you go to Leyton Hill, Alice will take you, show you how to get there." So, you knew.¹⁸

This anecdotal recollection emphasises the assumed level of support available to Maggie in her move from primary to secondary school. 'Alice will take you', conveys a sure and certain arrangement, alleviating potential worries or feelings of vulnerability.¹⁹ 'So, you knew', reveals the emotional reassurance Maggie gained through that natural assumption.²⁰ The use of anecdotes in oral narratives provide a level of meaning attached to the memory, 'privileg[ing] orality over written texts.'²¹ This extract demonstrates not only the importance of Maggie's faith as a means to instil a strong sense of spiritual belonging, but that its active presence in her everyday life provided assurance and connection with those around her.

Arguably, such beneficial support was reinforced in the short pause Maggie took before explaining her relationship to the catholic church. In situating her relationship with the school, Maggie was obliged to clarify her family's commitment to their faith. As her narrative showed, 'because we were very ... we went to church. We were devoted Catholics', demonstrates the likely internal conflict Maggie experienced in

¹⁸ MB 230623

¹⁹ MB 230623

²⁰ MB 230623

²¹ Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 28

regard to how much of herself to share.²² Arguably, as the extract reveals, Maggie allowed herself two attempts at explaining, before her final settled assertion of the family's devotion to the Catholic faith and one which best represented her sense of self.

Though Maggie's secondary school was the local Catholic grammar, it was also a boarding school. She recalled how there was a mix of girls at the school, those whose fathers were in the services, and some from farming families, very different situations to hers. I asked if she ever remembered feeling any different to them, was she aware of issues of unfairness due to differing status among the pupils?

No, only that I felt a bit sorry for them that they couldn't go home at night, you know because some of them were obviously homesick to begin with. [...] No, I didn't feel that I had any less status. It was just they did different things 'cos they stayed there all the time. You know, and they had to get ... 'cos, I was in the hockey team. And to get in the hockey team you had to be good at hockey, it wasn't that "oh you're a boarder, you're in", you know, so, it was a level playing field.²³

Akin to Monserrat Guibernau's explanation of belonging, where individuals develop in an environment in which they matter, Maggie's narrative expressed a perceived level of equality among the pupils, certainly a meritocratic ethos in the school

²² MB 230623

²³ MB 230623

regarding the selection for participation in extra-curricular activities.²⁴ Returning to the assertion made by Maggie's father that the grammar school was the 'perfect opportunity for any child', her participation suggests she took full advantage of what the school could offer. Of further interest, however, is Maggie's emotional awareness of the boarders' enforced separation, as if by being able to return home to her family each day, she was in a more fortunate position than they were. Maggie's sense of self was structured on the certainty and security she gained through her family.

The 11+ exam result was a method through which to prescribe the most appropriate form of secondary education for a child's perceived level of intelligence. As with her elder sister Susan, success in her 11+ exam awarded Peg a place at the top grammar school in the area. In contrast to the obvious belief in the system expressed by Maggie's father, such familial confidence is absent from Peg's grammar school experience. Remembering that her parents were thrilled at her 11+ result, Peg acknowledged '[they were] terrified because of the schools'.²⁵ Unlike the surety expressed by Maggie's father regarding selection at 11, Peg's experience appeared to be affected by her parents' heightened anxiety about the expectations of the grammar school, both academically and, more importantly, socially. When asked about any involvement her parents had with the school, Peg explained that her mother went once or twice, for parents' evening:

Dad never came. Never came to a parents evening. [...]
He just wasn't that sort of man. He went out and brought
the money in and, yeah, he didn't get involved in... in, in

²⁴ Guibernau, Monserrat. *Belonging: Solidarity and Division* (2013)

²⁵ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

those sorts of things at all. Now, mum did. Mum came, but she ... felt very out of place. [...] And I felt embarrassed. I can remember feeling a little bit embarrassed for her. [...] Hmm, hmm ... just the one, the one time [...] not *embarrassed* for her, because there was nothing wrong, you know, she was, and she was a lovely lady, but she.... Yeah, we felt ... out of place even then.²⁶

Whilst this extract reinforces the heightened effects of class within the family construct, factors examined in the first part of the study, it nonetheless served to explain the immediate response of terror felt by Peg's parents at the prospect of a second daughter attending the grammar school. Already aware of the very personal level of disconnect they experienced at Susan's attendance, the obvious effect of such emotional discomfort was very evident to Peg as a teenager. Close attention to the construct of Peg's narrative reveals the emotional reaction she herself experienced, when faced with her mother's obvious unease, both at the time, and now as a mother herself. Having acknowledged her own feeling of embarrassment, the contemplative 'hmm, hmm' allowed Peg to take a moment to reflect on the impact such feelings had on her at the time and accept their continuing presence in her recollections.²⁷

As discussed earlier in the study, Peg grew-up in a staunchly working-class suburb of Cardiff. The bus journey she took each day with her sister Susan not only took them into the city centre but transported them from the community in which they

²⁶ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

²⁷ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

felt safe and secure to the unfamiliar environment of the grammar school. As Peg explained:

I was terrified that first day [...] I stood in a corner in my brand- new school uniform, terrified. My sister, sort of, walked me in and then went off. And I remember standing in the playground and there was another girl that was terrified as well. So, we do, we did become friends [...] I wasn't, I didn't have a lot of confidence ... I was ... I wore glasses, National Health ones. I wore glasses, erm ... I was quite shy, just not enough confidence in myself really.²⁸

In the process of remembering those very first moments at her new secondary school, Peg provides a very candid and visual account of her first day, which proffers the level of fixedness contained within in her childhood memories. The repeated use of 'terrified', not only replicates the feelings experienced by her parents, but it also reinforces the increased level of anxiety and trepidation experienced in the move away from primary education.²⁹ Pertinent recollections within Peg's narrative, specifically, 'I stood in the corner' illustrate the harsh disconnect she experienced, as a child from a working-class home was repositioned into surroundings that were socially unfamiliar.³⁰ Feelings of extreme loneliness and isolation are further

²⁸ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

²⁹ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

³⁰ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

emphasized by her sister's swift departure from the playground on the first day. Richard Hoggart viewed individuals susceptible to moments of uncertainty as, 'anxious and uprooted' because of such challenging transitions.³¹ While Hoggart's observations are shaped by his own social status, they nonetheless describe the level of disjuncture experienced by many in the move from primary to grammar school.

Child psychologist Gary Ladd argues that children's ability to create and nurture meaningful friendships is reliant on the 'formative experiences and personal characteristics that they "bring" to school'.³² Considering the other aspects of Peg's narrative relating more specifically to class and her achievement of the 11+, it is possible to consider that her holistic experience of belonging secured through the community at home only fortified her working-class boundaries, leaving her impenetrable to the middle-class expectations of the grammar school. Accepting the significance of the memories that were shared, it is possible to gain a greater understanding of their meaning through the cultural context in which they were situated.³³

Peg's description of the anxiety experienced on that first day at grammar school did not focus solely on the isolation in the playground, the narrative also includes a form of explanation as to why she was anxious and fearful. Peg's heightened apprehension was related to her appearance, 'I wore glasses, National Health ones'.³⁴ Crucially, Peg openly acknowledged that her glasses contributed to her

³¹ Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy* p. 263

³² Ladd, Gary. W. "Having Friends, Keeping Friends, Making Friends, and Being Liked by Peers in the Classroom: Predictors of Children's Early School Adjustment?" *Child Development*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (1990): pp. 1081-1100, p. 1095

³³ Roper, Michael. *Afterlives of War: a descendants' history* (Manchester University Press, 2023) p. 10

³⁴ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

feelings of insecurity which impacted on her self-confidence. Moreover, by stating they were National Health glasses, she reinforced not only the potential challenges she faced as a child with sight limitations, but also the possible perception of class differentiation through her visible reliance on state support. In her examination of the sense of self contained within life stories, Charlotte Linde argues that ‘the very act of narrating creates the occasion for self-regard and editing’.³⁵ In this respect it is possible to see a distinction between the narrator, in this case Peg who is telling her story and the protagonist, the younger Peg, whom the story is about.

This act of self-reflection is a form of reflexivity, as the individual provides an accompanying explanation for a feeling or behaviour they faced at a certain moment in their life.³⁶ Looking back on the experiences of her younger self, Peg associated her lack of confidence and personal insecurities to her very visible differentiation, which only served to reinforce her perceived inferiority to those around her and her inability to forge lasting associations. Describing the need to have handmade clothes at school clearly caused a lasting level of anxiety, ‘that was awful, having homemade stuff [...] mmm... not jumpers from the school shop [...] made you different’.³⁷ This remark weighed heavy with emotion as, in the sharing process, Peg appeared to relive the extent of shame she experienced and continues to feel in regards such differentiation. Such emotional attachment links to the work of Douwe Draaisma and Ute Frevert whose understanding of ‘real-time emotion’ explain the lasting permanence of humiliation.³⁸ Listening to the interview it would appear that this was

³⁵ Linde, Charlotte. *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 105

³⁶ Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. p. 39

³⁷ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

³⁸ Draaisma, D. *Why Life Speeds Up as You Get Older* trans. by Arnold and Erica Pomerans (Cambridge University Press, 2004) Frevert, Ute. *The Politics of Humiliation: A Modern History*, trans. by Adam Bresnahan (Oxford University Press, 2020)

a moment of realisation, when insignificant normalities became unacceptable and created a position of differentiation between school life and home life. Arguably, in taking the opportunity to revisit moments from her past and in the process of subconscious re-evaluation, Peg presented a compassionate understanding of herself as a young girl at a time of significant challenge.

Intellectual belonging

In contrast to Peg and Susan's lack of ability to alter the level of comfort they felt, Sarah's account demonstrates an acute sense of belonging and an ability to take ownership of it. For Sarah, success at the 11+ confirmed an assumed level of academic ability that was anticipated by her parents resulting in a place at the local grammar school. Confident of this natural progression from primary school, Sarah's experience of belonging was brought into sharp focus when, after three years of secondary school, there was a move to establish two streams within the fourth form:

But then we did the first three years at the grammar school, 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.³⁹

³⁹ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

In this extract, Sarah appeared to recognise not only that she had allowed a level of complacency to hinder her performance but, unless action was taken, she would be placed in a stream that she knew did not match her real capability, and in which she did not believe that 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 immediate action or face the consequences.⁴⁰ Sentiments such as 'end up' and 'that's not my place' reinforce her awareness of the difference between the two streams, her obvious rejection of the general level and, more importantly, her refusal to belong there.⁴¹ Arguably, Sarah's strong sense of belonging came from a level of certainty in her own abilities, and the risk of being perceived as anything other provided sufficient impetus to ensure her place in 4S. Through repeated emphasis that she 'did' alter her mindset and gained recognition for her achievement; in doing so, Sarah affirmed both her motivation to the task and the lasting satisfaction at the outcome. At the high school in Stoke-on-Trent, Lillian's experience of intellectual belonging came from the competition she encountered and a heightened awareness of her own position in this changed regime as being 'not one of the brightest'.⁴²

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, you know, 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

⁴⁰ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

⁴¹ SB, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, January, 2024. Unarchived.

⁴² LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

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, because also, we were streamed for maths, English and French as well, I think, and you dropped Latin as well after the first year, if you couldn't quite manage it. So, then it, it all got a bit competitive, and [...] you started to be labelled by this point.⁴³

This altered 'label' was not without effect and challenged the sense of achievement gained from her unanticipated 11+ success. Identified as needing to be within the bottom stream, Lillian was cast adrift from her safe and somewhat invisible place within the middle. Separated from her close friends, Lillian found herself in a class disrupted by 'the kids who least wanted to be there'.⁴⁴ Perceived now by others to be in the stream that best matched her academic capabilities, Lillian's sense of belonging was further compromised by her incompatibility with many in her class and the resulting disruption that they caused. Asked if she felt able to challenge or accept the situation, Lillian 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.'⁴⁵ Recent work by social historian Selina Todd has considered the 'golden age' of social mobility by arguing that of the relatively few children from working class families to

⁴³ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁴ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁵ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

achieve a place at a grammar school, many found it to be a difficult experience.⁴⁶

Though saddened by the outcome of her proven poor performance, and unlike the self-determination expressed by Sarah, Lillian's narrative conveyed a feeling of acquiescence, believing the school report to express an unchallengeable account of her academic ability. Recalling experiences of class and familial expectations that featured in the first half of the study, Lillian's 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'.⁴⁷ Whilst not lessening any pleasure at her 11+ success, with little or no expectation for Lillian's future career choices, there was no reason to challenge any feelings of disconnect she experienced at the grammar school.

In the latter part of our conversation, Lillian acknowledged that she had never experienced any sense of belonging at school, 'I never thought I was clever enough'.⁴⁸ 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'.⁴⁹ Returning to the notion of belonging as a sense of place-making, Lillian's repeated use of 'middle' within her narrative, as a means of expressing her preferred position within the school year group suggests an awareness that this would not be acceptable, and that any sub-par performance would only damage or limit her ability to feel fully part of the school community. Lillian was not alone in experiencing

⁴⁶ Todd, Selina. *The People*. (2014) in de Ballaigue, Christina., Mills, Helena. & Eve Worth, "Rags to Riches? New Histories of Social Mobility in Modern Britain" – Introduction, *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2019): pp. 1-11, p. 2

⁴⁷ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁸ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁴⁹ LW, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

feelings of insecurity and isolation as a result of her disappointing level of attainment. For Anna, however, the level of disconnect was further exacerbated by her inability to belong in either selective or non-selective schools.

In the intricate and often candid recollections of her 11+ experience, Anna raised a further challenge in relation to selective education. As someone who failed the 11+, but passed the entrance exam two years later, Anna recalled the intellectual and emotional barriers that prevented her from gaining any genuine sense of belonging. Recalling her early experience at the secondary modern:

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.⁵⁰

In this example, the conflicting notion of belonging is apparent. Reputationally, certainly among middle-class parents, secondary modern schools were considered to be the educational home for those who failed. For Anna’s parents’ messages of this nature only reinforced their belief that she was in the wrong school. Aware of her poor performance at the 11+ and the self-imposed distance she maintained from her primary school friends, Anna was perceived to be ‘very bright’ at the secondary modern, arguably, a place in which to grow and flourish.⁵¹ Though Anna felt able to make new friends among her peers, the overarching influence of her parents’ social

⁵⁰ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵¹ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

relationship with a number of her teachers provided 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’.⁵² Anna’s parents, specifically her mother, had high aspirations and sought in middle-class professional society. Anna’s attendance at the secondary modern weakened her mother’s social status, damaging her own chance of a full membership within a more desirable society. Though not explicit within the narrative, Anna acknowledged that though her mother wanted her to do well, ‘she wanted the right uniform’.⁵³ Crucially, in this instance, the issue of belonging related not only to Anna, but, more importantly, to her parents. Positive affirmation, even speculative, was sufficient reassurance that their daughter was perceived to be too clever for the school she was in. As Anna admitted that messages of this type ‘didn’t really help’ her situation, and it seems that she was only too aware of her mother’s revulsion at the secondary modern and her intense desire for a move to a selective school.⁵⁴

In contrast to other participants in the study, though anxious to share the 11+ ‘trauma’ and the resulting confusion regarding the most suitable school for her abilities, Anna appeared to be acutely aware of the long-term impact that that these conflicting messages caused her:

Being told that you were somewhere, which wasn't the
right place for you, actually, because you, you know, other

⁵² Arnot, Madeleine. “State Educational Policy and Girls’ Educational Experiences” in *Women in Britain Today*. Beechey, V & Whitelegg, E, eds. (Open University Press, 1991) p. 146

⁵³ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁴ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

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.⁵⁵

The extent of repetition in this brief extract indicates the recurring messages Anna received about her suitability for the secondary modern. Whilst she did not dismiss these views as unwelcome, the constant reiteration that she was singled out for not being in the 'right' place established and reinforced a feeling of disconnect between herself and the school.⁵⁶ 'You're better than that', epitomises the supposed reputational damage caused by the inaccuracy of the selective process.⁵⁷ Anna was perceived to be in the wrong school as she was believed to be 'better' than the expected cohort.⁵⁸

The family's quest for academic certainty continued. Two years into her time at the secondary modern, Anna sat and achieved the 13+, gaining a place at the Northeast Technical School in Colchester. Anna's narrative exposed the bitter-sweet outcome for this academic success story:

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...

⁵⁵ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁶ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁷ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁵⁸ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

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.⁵⁹

Anna'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 different to the others, and, in this instance, expressions such as, "I wasn't", illustrated an awareness of being different, academically unprepared when compared to those who had been at the technical college for two years.⁶⁰

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] extraordinary difficult to jump from one to the other'.⁶¹ Reporting on the allocation of primary school leavers to secondary education, Alfred Yates and Douglas Pidgeon acknowledged the difficulties that existed with regards to moving children who were believed to be in the 'wrong' school. Yates and Pidgeon accepted the importance of a swift resolution but argued that any necessary 'merit reconsideration' required sufficient time for appropriate teacher appraisal.⁶² Though Anna had achieved the desired grade to gain a place at the technical college, she lacked the necessary rigour to maintain the expected level required. Her obvious need to appease her parents and affirm the views of those

⁵⁹ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶⁰ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶¹ Simon, Brian. *Intelligence Testing*, p. 21

⁶² Yates, A. & D.A. Pidgeon, *Admission to Grammar Schools: Third Interim Report on the allocation of Primary School Leavers to courses of Secondary Education* (Newnes Educational Publishing Co. Ltd, 1957) p. 17

among their society was evident. 'And everybody was so pleased, you know, that I'd managed to pull it off', suggests that her motivation for a more acceptable outcome was centred on the happiness of others, rather than any personal satisfaction Anna could gain from such a transformative achievement.⁶³ When asked of her parents' reaction, Anna 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.'⁶⁴ Recalling the traumatic circumstances around her failure of the 11+, explored earlier in the study, I asked Anna if, following her evident success at thirteen, she remembered feeling any increase in her self-esteem at this 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.⁶⁵

Sadly, for Anna, any attempt to secure a purposeful sense of belonging during her secondary school years was thwarted by the influential ideals of class held by her parents. Explaining how they saw no need for her to pursue any form of academic progression after the year 11 equivalent, Anna 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, that was ... it didn't matter if I achieved anything more'.⁶⁶ Anna's narrative

⁶³ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶⁴ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶⁵ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

⁶⁶ APP, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived.

encapsulates the complexity of the 11+ experience and the controversial notion of opportunity for all: the defining result, the apparent mis-match situation, parental aspiration, and the repeated emphasis on the experience of not belonging.

Notions of belonging have, so far, placed emphasis on the individual and her experiences of personal connectedness with regards to her school environment, society, and friendship groups. Contained with the oral narratives, however, are examples of institutional belonging, illustrating the necessary obligation or sense of duty that influenced the level of connectedness or resistance felt by the pupil to their school. As explored earlier in the study, Helena passed the 11+ and was awarded a place at St J*****'s College, Bradford. In the recollections of her time at the grammar school, Helena explained how, in the face of unacceptable behaviour, there was a need to preserve and uphold the reputation of the school, not only by academic superiority, but aesthetic discipline:

I don't know what had gone wrong, but somebody had misbehaved in the town, and we had to have another assembly about it, and he, [the form teacher] and I remember his words, he said: 'This is not acceptable behaviour [...]. You are the *cream* of the girls in Bradford. Well, I remember my friend [...] said to me 'what a snobby thing to say!'⁶⁷

⁶⁷ HG, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

Helena's experiences of belonging through association with the school reflects those of Mary Ingham, who described being 'creamed-off [and] set apart'.⁶⁸ Accepting that the school reputation was 'ironed on, the moment you donned the distinctive uniform', any evidence of inappropriate behaviour would demonstrate a lack of respect for their school community as a whole and weaken any possible notion of belonging.⁶⁹ Certainly, the remarks made by her teacher to the pupils in the mid-1960s both echo and reinforce the elitist sentiments of Murial Spark's *Miss Jean Brodie*, published in the same decade.⁷⁰ In his overview of postwar British society, social and cultural historian Dominic Sandbrook argues that grammar schools 'were devoted to the ideals of middle-class respectability, and their pupils taught to see themselves as an elite'.⁷¹ Whilst Helena's friend viewed the perceived differentiation to be 'snobby', no further comment was made to challenge or reject such a claim. Arguably, there was a required level of understanding and compliance regarding the necessary standards that entitled girls to experience a proper connection. Though Peg too was aware of the need for compliance and an obligation to demonstrate a high level of respect to those in authority at the high school in Cardiff, after five years attempting to feel part of the school community, she chose to express a sense of her own identity.

Early in September, ahead of the new school year, the previous fifth form were invited back for the presentation of their GCE certificates:

⁶⁸ Ingham, Mary. *Now we are Thirty*, p. 51

⁶⁹ Ingham, Mary. *Now we are Thirty*, p. 52

⁷⁰ Spark, Murial. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Macmillan, 1961)

⁷¹ Sandbrook, Dominic. *Never Had It So Good*, p. 423. Further information on elitist connotations of grammar school see, Worth, Eve. *The Welfare State Generation*, p. 32

Yes, yeah, I-I can even see myself, the dress I had [...] we all sat separately. The girls who had left, who had been queuing up to have our certificates presented, had to be called and to go up on stage and shake [the Head's] hand, and....and curtsey, to say, thank you.⁷²

Peg explained how the girls destined for higher education, who intended to remain for the sixth form, sat on one side of the hall dressed in their new uniforms, whilst those who were leaving sat separately, wearing their home clothes. Peg chose this moment to demonstrate her resistance to the values associated with the grammar school community:

And the only time I didn't do it was, I went back to get my GCE certificate. I thought, I will, I-I won't do it. And I can remember going there and everybody walked on the stage, and everybody walked along, curtseyed to [the Head], and I didn't. And I'm still proud of that.⁷³

Peg's recollection of the event detailed how, on this one single occasion, she contested the alien expectations of a community that she did not feel part. Certainly, in this brief account, Peg appeared to reinforce her isolated position by identifying both herself and her very individual actions as quite separate from and different to those of the other girls.

⁷² PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁷³ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

Whilst the narrative provided an image of the physical distance between the two parties, it also highlighted the psychological imbalance between her two worlds, 'everybody' vs the solitary Peg. This independent stance demonstrated her minority position as one of 'the only girls from S*****', as explored in the first half of the study.⁷⁴ This example of the effects of class consciousness raises the question of authenticity and the conflict experienced by those whose values and behaviours are challenged or enforced by external influences. Madeleine Arnot explains how, 'when confronted with an alien culture which bears very little relation to her everyday life, the effect [on a child from a working-class family] can be rejection of the school ethos'.⁷⁵ Ken Jones argues that conflicting cultural processes resulted in an erosion of children from working-class families, 'sieved out' through an unfamiliarity with the predominantly middle-class school values.⁷⁶ Certain of her own class status and the sense of belonging to the community in which she grew up, Peg's obvious refusal to demonstrate a show of respect towards the school and its values highlights the 'inauthentic nature of such practice'.⁷⁷ In this respect, Peg sought to act in an unaffected manner, rather than meeting any demand from a community in which she felt little connection.

In her study into the long-term impact of class and educational opportunities for girls, educationalist Gillian Plummer argues that experiences of resistance in school settings are caused by a reluctance to surrender working-class values, to act in such a way that assimilates to those of the school community:

⁷⁴ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

⁷⁵ Arnot, Madeleine. "State Educational Policy", p. 136

⁷⁶ Jones, K. *Education in Britain*, p. 60

⁷⁷ Jones, Ben. *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth Century England*, p. 64. Additional information in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good* (2005)

It is when pupils feel unable to express themselves in school, or feel a wide gap between the values of home and those of school, that disenchantment and alienation are likely to set in.⁷⁸

As Peg's narrative reveals, her experience was shaped by a combination of class based influences that altered her mindset about the status of the girls' high school. For Peg, the sense of disenchantment at her grammar school experience came not only through her inability to feel that she belonged, but, as discussed in the earlier chapter on achievement, by her frustration at the lack of any useful skills through which to demonstrate her capabilities. Belonging and sense of self came, not from any connection to the school but from her home, her family, and her community.

Considering now her reason for including this event within her narrative, and the subconscious intention to show a different perspective from that of the working-class girl submissive to the impact of selective education policies, it is possible to understand how stories become, 'part of the process of self-formation'.⁷⁹ A significant theme within Peg's life history narrative is the impact of class differentiation, which was further exacerbated by her entry into the top grammar school for girls in her area. The inclusion of this defiant act demonstrates a different viewpoint from that of a powerless individual, to one in which she revealed a strong personal sense of

⁷⁸ Plummer, Gillian. *Failing Working-Class Girls* (Trentham, 2000) p. 174. Hughes, D. "Social Class and Educational Disadvantage: Are the Schools to Blame?" in *A New Agenda for Policy and Practice in Scottish Education*, (Practitioner mini paper 12, SCRE in association with the Educational Institute of Scotland), Brown, S. & S. Riddell, in, Plummer, Gillian. *Failing Working-Class Girls*, p. 173.

⁷⁹ Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*, p. 36

agency, re-gaining control over her thoughts and actions. Whilst this challenged the central theme of isolation that arose from differentiation by selection, she retained the strength of determination necessary to exhibit her own personal rebellion.

Emotional belonging

Having explored the notion of belonging in relation to the transmission of messages and viewpoints shared by parents, and the idea of qualification as a tool to certify or validate the reason to belong, this final section will explore 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.⁸⁰ Differentiation identified through the selection process risked jeopardising the easy relationships forged at primary school. Socio-scientific 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. Inability to experience such belonging places at risk adolescents' 'developmental need for relatedness'.⁸¹ Having listened to her primary school recollections and her selection for grammar school, I asked Peg if the outcome of the 11+ had any lasting effect on her friendship group:

⁸⁰ Healy, Mary. "Belonging, Social Cohesion and Fundamental British Values", p. 428-429.

⁸¹ Hamm, Jill. V. & Beverly S. Faircloth, "The Role of Friendship in Adolescents' Sense of School Belonging", *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, No. 107 (2005.): pp. 61-78, p.61.

PL: 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.

AL: When you changed schools?

PL When I changed schools. Hmm ... We.... we had a friendship group. There was [a friend] around the corner, em, when we took the 11+ I went, I can remember going round to her house to ... to go down to school, and her mum gave us a piece of coal for good luck to put on our desks. Erm, there were four of us, two, two Pegs' and two Jans'. 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?!⁸²

Peg's narrative reveals a harsh separation caused by the move away from primary school and 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. Certainly, in her earlier description of that first day at the grammar school and the extreme sense of isolation she experienced in the playground, the absence of anyone with which to share her feelings reinforced the level of disconnect she suffered. In her closing statement, 'I don't know why?!' Peg questioned, with a palpable sense of disbelief, how this neat band of girls, each sharing a name with

⁸² PL 170423

another, could just dissolve.⁸³ Whilst her narrative demonstrated an ability to forge bonds having established a strong sense of belonging within her local community, the friendship dissolved and faded away once the common experience of school was weakened. Despite all still living in their close neighbourhood, Peg never saw the girls again. I asked Peg 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, because two of them went to the same school, two of them passed for the same high school, which wasn't [the] High [...] so they became a friendship of two. So, I wouldn't have fitted in anyway. That's all I can remember, really. But I do remember, yeah, yeah, I lost that ... the four of us used to have a little gang in [a friend's] house around the corner, in... in the coal shed, I remember. It was that sort of, that sort of area.⁸⁴

This narrative extract explained the extent of loss experienced by Peg, both emotionally and physically. Notwithstanding the enforced division as a result of their varying outcomes of the 11+, Peg's isolation was further cemented by her subsequent exclusion from her friend's coal shed. Whilst petty childhood differences often create a temporary interruption to individual friendships, the level of

⁸³ PI 170423

⁸⁴ PL 170423

marginalisation experienced among her own society was not insignificant. Returning to the details of Peg's selection for the high school which featured in the earlier stories of achievement, aware of the differing layers of grammar school in her area, Peg acknowledged:

how you passed the 11+, depended what grammar school you were offered. [...] Because there are about four or five in Cardiff, and [the] High was the top one.⁸⁵

Though her two other friends gained grammar school places, their level of achievement was lower than Peg's which resulted in their admission to a different school, lower in the hierarchical school structure signifying, therefore, the problems associated with a further layer of separation. Peg's account confirmed 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, Peg replied only 'Mm', remembering, perhaps, the level of sadness she experienced at the time and the unexpected nature of such separation.⁸⁶ Re-visiting the notion of discomposure in oral narratives, it is possible to see how the research frame in which our meeting was structured, was temporarily disrupted by Peg's specific frame of memory.⁸⁷ Through her process of recalling the 11+ exam result and school allocation, Peg appeared to be momentarily distracted by her memories of that lost friendship and the impact of such change. Contrasting with others in the

⁸⁵ PL 170423

⁸⁶ PL 170423

⁸⁷ Summerfield, Penny. "Dis-composing the subject", p. 94

study, whose narratives also reflected a strong awareness of pecking order in the school system, Peg's recollections expressed the unsettling personal conflict she experienced as a result of her selection. As we learnt earlier in the study, Peg's obvious delight in the success at the 11+ which matched that of her sister Susan, became problematic once her friendship group diminished. In their examination of transgressions in friendship expectations, 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'.⁸⁸ Certainly, the effect of this friendship cessation that resulted from the division at 11, remained very much in the present for Peg, affirming the lasting emotional impact felt by the sudden loss of certainty.

Friendship vulnerability was also experienced by Cathy, through her move from the secondary modern to the grammar school. As explained earlier in the study, though originally marked as having failed the 11+, after only one term at the secondary modern, Cathy was re-assigned to the grammar school. As she spoke of her feelings regarding the change between schools and her ability to fit in as a late comer, Cathy recalled the unexpected reaction of a friend's parent:

What you might be more interested in, is the, um, the other friend, well became a friend, um who lived in Newmarket Road, who I'd known at the primary school,

⁸⁸ MacEvoy, Julie Paquette. & Steven Asher, "When friends disappoint: Boys' and Girls' responses to transgressions of friendship expectations", *Child Development*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (2012): pp. 104-119, p. 113

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.⁸⁹

There is significant research on the effect of broken friendships and the subsequent community divide caused by selective education and this extract offers a sense of the harsh messages received by children whose parents were keen to create a sense of distance from those they once played alongside. 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'.⁹⁰ The wider implications of the 11+, therefore, can also be understood as a vehicle to affirm the most appropriate 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, the structural power relations existing within the personal communities, 'become sutured into the friendship relations'.⁹¹ Certainly, in her re-calibrated status as a grammar schoolgirl, Cathy 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 Cathy spoke softly throughout our meeting, having approached each aspect of the conversation with measured consideration, there was, at this juncture, an

⁸⁹ CH 170523

⁹⁰ Spencer, S, *Gender, work and education in Britain in the 1950s*, p. 193.

⁹¹ Vincent, C., S. Neal, H. Iqbal eds. *Friendship and Diversity*, p. 8

audible change in her orality. In recalling the conditional nature of their friendship, specifically, 'we were allowed ... to play', Cathy's speech slowed down in pace and became far quieter.⁹² Arguably, in the process of remembering, Cathy attached some level of emotional response to the unexpected actions of her friend's parent which reflected the controlled anger experienced many years ago.

Accepting that oral histories can capture untold experiences about the past, though not considered to provide the 'truth' they, nonetheless, supply the meaning to an individual's experience. Given the manner in which this recollection was shared, and the gentle hint of sarcasm in her voice, it is possible to understand how it continues to retain such significant meaning for Cathy, vocalising the conditional implications on her childhood friendship and the fragile nature of their shared belonging. Notwithstanding the eventual re-evaluation that resulted from Cathy's newly amended status as a grammar-school girl, her assertion that, 'all was forgiven', suggests that by failing to pass the 11+, she was perceived to have committed some form of crime that, once corrected, enabled an automatic reinstatement of their friendship.⁹³ In their study of 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'.⁹⁴ In view of the level of intrusion by the friend's mother, any sentiments of trust, worth and acceptance that existed between the two girls were subject to consent and conditions. I asked Cathy if she was aware of a conscious separation of friends caused by the change of school:

⁹² CH 170523

⁹³ CH 170523

⁹⁴ Hamm, Jill. V. & Beverly S. Faircloth, "The Role of Friendship in Adolescents", p. 63.

CH: 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?

CH: Appalled, I'm absolutely appalled that people could have, that an exam can ... segregate your friendships.

[...] I just think that's awful.⁹⁵

Whilst this extract helps to illustrate the fragility of adolescent friendships and their reliance on continuity and shared experience, 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, Cathy’s narrative is shaped around two strands; the inability of friends 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. What became increasingly evident, however, not only from the childhood experience but from the construct of her life history narrative as a whole, is the lasting sense of injustice and unfairness felt at such actions. Given what was shared earlier in the study about the tragic loss of her mother around the time she was due to move to the grammar school, this example of stoic acceptance and continued resilience appears fundamental to the overarching narrative framework. Through his exploration into the process of narrative construct in life histories, Peter Coleman argues that to better appreciate the content of an individual’s account, it is important to place their story alongside the recognised

⁹⁵ CH 170523

frameworks to provide shape and understanding.⁹⁶ Born in 1951, a post-war baby boomer, Cathy will have been informed of the wider social values and behaviours of the period. 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’.⁹⁷ Though understandably hurt by their breakdown in friendship, Cathy’s account aligns emotionally with her parents’ generation, suggesting instead a stoic approach to difficult situations and a calm and rational response in times of upset.

In contrast to the challenging experiences of friendship as a result of isolation or separation faced by Cathy and Peg, though aware of their existence, school and community differentiation appeared to have little impact on June. Irrespective of their similarities in circumstance, June appeared more accepting of the differing outcomes of friendships and seemed somewhat oblivious to the very real implications of differentiation. As someone who passed the 11+, I asked June if she was aware of any difference as she entered selective education:

We were posh. We were posh, because our masters wore gowns. Yeah ... we were posh. It was a bit, like that. But, as I said, because, where we lived in Newton Abbott, I had friends that went to the girls’ secondary modern and the boys’ secondary modern as well. Um, they were still, they were still people. They were still my friends. [...]

When I used to go and play, or we would be out all the

⁹⁶ Coleman, Peter. “The past in the Present”, pp. 50-59

⁹⁷ Abrams, Lynn. “Transforming Oral History Through Theory”, in *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Thompson, Paul & Joanna Bornat, p. 135.

time in the road, playing, doing something, all of us would mix as one, you know, as one group. It wasn't, oh, I go to grammar school, therefore I can't play with you. Because, we didn't have that, it's – so, we weren't posh. It was, we were just normal.⁹⁸

June's sense of belonging appeared to be focussed on the person rather than the qualification, but arguably this was through the perspective of someone who passed the 11+ exam and unlike Peg shared little or no insecurities. The narrative is complex however, because having recognised the reputational differences that were perceived to exist between the two school types, openly acknowledging that those at the grammar were understood to be 'posh', June attempted to quell such differentiation and emphasised instead the continuity that existed through 'normal' friendship and play.⁹⁹ Though not boastful about her status as a grammar school girl, her repeated declaration of, 'we were posh' certainly reinforced the perceived elitist status of the grammar school pupil.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, June's orality altered after the calm and measured assessment of her school status, to become lighter in tone, more conversational in construct. Awareness and aspirations held within the family regarding the merits of a grammar school education shaped June's understanding of its meaning but appeared to be disguised when situated alongside the assured experience of belonging she shared within her community. Paying close attention to the obvious examples of equality through inclusion, 'all of us [...] mix as one [...] in a

⁹⁸ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

⁹⁹ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

¹⁰⁰ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.

group', the narrative suggests a sense of self that was intentionally constructed on the person as an individual, rather than any externally prescribed marker and contrasted to the disrupted experience recalled by Cathy.¹⁰¹

As the narratives in this chapter have demonstrated, securing a lasting sense of belonging through friendship at school was far from straightforward. Peg spoke extensively about the damage inflicted on her primary friendships by her move away to the grammar school and the disconnect she experienced once there. I asked Peg if she had managed to create 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 16 after... 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.¹⁰²

Unlike the obvious emotional solidity of the 'school group', her experience of belonging at the high school appeared fragile, held together only by their shared feelings of insecurity amidst the wider school community.¹⁰³ Certainly, the assured sense of belonging changed from a band of four with much in common, to three

¹⁰¹ JJ, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, May, 2023. Unarchived.. Cathy explained how a friendship that was broken when she was first allocated to the secondary school was reinstated when she was moved to the grammar school.

¹⁰² PL 170423

¹⁰³ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

individuals, 'stuck together' by a shared feeling of loneliness and the fear of further isolation.¹⁰⁴ Echoing the experience of that move away from primary education, as Peg's time at the grammar school came to an end so too did her friendships. Though both extracts express the finality of such friendships, 'I never saw them again or heard from them again', unlike the feelings of disbelief she experienced when eleven, there appeared to be no surprise to this repeated loss in her late adolescence.¹⁰⁵ Whilst accepting that this parting of the ways was caused by the natural departure from school and a move towards her adult life, her recollection reinforces the extent of isolation she experienced in this transitional period.

Further into our conversation, I asked Peg if she ever felt like she belonged at the grammar school:

PL: Never felt I belonged the whole time I was there.

AL: Did you not?

PL: No. And talking to my sister [...] she felt the same way.¹⁰⁶

As previous accounts have illustrated, Peg's inability to feel any sense of belonging whilst at the high school was not caused by any lack of desire or personal ambition, certainly, she distinctly recalled expressing her intention to follow in the success that her sister Susan had achieved by passing the 11+. Peg's life history narrative reflected a 'site of struggle', as experiences of isolation were compounded by the

¹⁰⁴ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

¹⁰⁵ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

¹⁰⁶ PL, interviewed by Amanda Lavelle, April, 2023. Unarchived

harsh separation at eleven.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, her fragile friendships at the grammar school and the feelings of alienation resulted from the insurmountable effects of class differentiation. Irrespective of the proven intellectual suitability, the apparent socio-economic distance between their family and others in the school community appeared too huge for either Peg, or her sister Susan, to overcome. As Stephanie Spencer argues, 'not "fitting" with a school was more to do with class differences than intellectual capacity.'¹⁰⁸ Given that secondary education is structured as a five-year course, Peg's evident awareness of the lasting incompatibility confirms the potential emotional impact on a young girl acutely aware of her own personal insecurities.

Feelings of isolation from life outside the 'magic circle' were not uncommon among those girls for whom the academic testing appeared more straight-forward than their leap into the unknown world of the grammar school.¹⁰⁹ 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 from 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.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Simon, Brian. *The State and Educational Change*, p. 67

¹⁰⁸ Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education*, p. 168

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, Jane. *Women, Class and Education*, p. 18

¹¹⁰ Walkerdine, Valerie. "Dreams from an Ordinary Childhood", in *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, Heron, L. ed. (Virago, 1985) p. 74

This succinct evaluation of the impact experienced through the effects of selective education policy explains the ‘thrilled, but terrified’ emotional reaction by Peg’s parents to their younger daughter’s ascension into the top local high school.¹¹¹ Accepting their obvious feelings of delight and pride at the notable achievement, their social disconnect from the grammar school community fashioned a vulnerability that affected the emotional security of the whole family.

Conclusion

The three registers of belonging explored within this chapter illustrate the challenges faced as a result of differentiation by selection. Though the tripartite policies of the 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 written school exam. Life history narratives have revealed both the lasting effects of the 11+ experience on the individual nearly seventy years ago and the often conflicting sense of self they continue to negotiate in their later adult life. Though small in number, these life history narratives nonetheless extend the work of Stephanie Spencer whose oral narratives sought to place the stories of individuals against the dominant post-war education narrative.¹¹² Indeed, heartfelt stories of success and failure are continually relied upon to challenge or defend the

¹¹¹ PL 170423

¹¹² Spencer, Stephanie. “Reflections on the ‘site of struggle’: girls’ experience of secondary education in the late 1950s”. *History of Education*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2004): pp. 437-449

need for grammar school expansion.¹¹³ 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.¹¹⁴

Girls' experiences now retold through the lives of their adult selves share 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 left marked impressions and feelings of insecurity that remained on into adult life. Whilst acknowledging the many differing perspectives to the ideas of belonging, 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.

¹¹³ <https://11plusanonymous.org/tales-from-the-past>

¹¹⁴ Walkerdine, Valerie. "Dreams", p. 74

Conclusion

Why this research and why now?

This research is significant because it reveals the long-term emotional impact of the 11+ on the ordinary lives of young girls that continues to shape their adult attitudes towards ability, opportunity and aspiration. Unique to this feminist study, women shared openly the expectations of both family and school in relation to the 11+ and the very personal implications they experienced when failing to reach the desired level of attainment. Irrespective of the exam outcome, each narrative account expressed feelings held not only by themselves but, more rarely, the reactions of others which continue to resonate and contribute to their own later life understanding of academic ability and success. Whilst the selective educational policies of Rabb Butler created opportunity for social mobility, for many, the legacy of anguish and disappointment as a result of their perceived second-class identity remains fixed and continues to inform their sense of self.

² Young, Michael & Peter Willmott, *Family & Kinship in East London* (2007). Gavron, Hannah. *The Captive Wife* (1968). Jackson, Brian. & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (1986)

³ Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education* (2005). Worth, Eve, *The Welfare State* (2021). Carter, Laura. "Experimental' secondary modern education in Britain, 1948-1958". *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2016) pp. 23-41, p. 24

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/sep/22/liz-truss-politicians-and-experts-criticise-grammar-schools-plan>

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/aug/23/argument-for-grammar-schools-selective-education-theresa-may>

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/nov/11/boris-johnson-backing-grammar-schools>

⁶ ed. The Personal Narratives Group, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989) p. 19

⁷ For more information on interpretation as a method of historical research see, Frisch, Michael. *A Shared Authority*. (1990). Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing Women's wartime Lives*. (1998).

Tinkler, Penny., Stephanie Spencer & Claire Langhamer, "Revisioning the History of Girls and Women in Britain in the Long 1950s", *Women's History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2017): pp. 1-8.

Unlike contemporary methods of educational assessment in England and Wales, specifically GCSE and A Levels, the 11+ is the only examination whose dichotomous outcome has left an identifiable legacy on the lives of a generation of children in postwar Britain. As this research has demonstrated, issues relating to selective education are not confined to the rights and wrongs of political will and perceptions of inequality but rather had deep impacts on the individuals who experienced that system of schooling. Historical analysis of the Butler Act (1944) is dominated by the grammar school boy-made-good narrative, particularly through the cultural representations of 'Angry Young Men', which leaves girls' experiences hidden and unexplored.⁸ By shifting the focus now to the voices of women, it is possible to understand not only their own account of the 11+, but of their eventual adult selves as a result of selective education policies. Themes of liberation and constraint were evidenced within a selection of the narratives through their early awareness of gendered ideals and the associated interrupted working life. Indeed, the focus of this study was not to assess the policies of the Butler Act and the intentions of selective education but to open up the discourse of the 11+ and consider the identities of those whose early adolescence was shaped by the outcome of a written exam.

Life histories

For more information on the benefits of self-reflection for the participant see, Gluck, Sherna. "What's so special about Women? Women's Oral History", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol.2, No. 2 (1977): pp. 3-17. Echevarria-Howe, Lynn. "Reflections from the Participants: The Process and Product of Life History Work", *Oral History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1995): pp. 40-46

⁸ Laing, Stuart. *Representations of Working-Class Life*, p. 62.

Life history methodology used in this thesis has contributed significantly to our understanding of girls educational experiences and the effects of the 11+ on their identity and sense of self. With the opportunity for self-reflection, women in this study spoke candidly of their experiences of selective education, providing a valuable insight into the perceived aspirations and opportunities for girls when situated within the context of class and gendered expectations. These original findings reveal the hitherto unexplored feelings regarding transition from primary to secondary schools and the lasting effects of differentiation and selection. Emotionally charged, these life histories tell of disappointment, isolation and inequality in relation to their time at secondary school and provide a necessary insight into the understanding of what it means to be separated and marked by your perceived ability when aged 11 years old.

Oral history is widely recognised as a conduit to securing meaning, a method through which to explore the remembered past from historical experience.⁹ In the process of selecting their recollections for this study into the effects of the 11+, the narrator was likely to choose moments from her life that have retained a significant connection. Indeed, anecdotal evidence brought emotional resonance to the fore, as narratives revealed how the smallest details remain fixed within their memory. Certainly, in this particular study, inclusions of the pen, the 'foreigner', the *Water Babies*, the handmade uniform, the big drama and the blazer, were among the highly personal ingredients that contributed to women's very individual experiences of the

⁹ Passerini, Luisa. 'Memory', *History Workshop*, No. 15 (1983): pp. 195-196. Portelli, Alessandro. 'So much depends on a Red Bus or, Innocent Victims of the Liberating Gun', *Oral History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, (2006):, pp. 29-43. Spencer, Stephanie. "Reflections on the 'site of struggle': girls' experience of secondary education in the late 1950s". *History of Education*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2004): pp. 437-449, p. 443

11+.¹⁰ Objects and moments such as these express the experiences of aspiration, expectation, effort, disconnect and differentiation in relation to the transition from primary to secondary school. This use of life history methodology for the study of the 11+ challenges the dichotomous themes of pass vs fail, inferior vs superior, selection vs exclusion as experiences revealed how a decision that was made when they were just 10 years of age and the reaction to it have remained on into their adult lives.

Narratives told of the internal pressures felt with regards to the 11+, not only for those whose parents' sought success, but interestingly by those who described a level of expectation, and an assumed place within the grammar school system. These expectations revealed an alternative dynamic to the simplistic notions of pass or fail, as hopes within the family contributed to anxieties of performance and outcome. Moreover, accepting that much analysis is offered on the pressures for those who secured access to an unfamiliar environment within the educational elite, the feelings of those for whom grammar school was an accepted destination highlighted a further issue in the debate on selective education.

In the effort of sharing their life histories, the emotional connectivity to their educational experience was central to the narrative. As the listener, such meaning was not only shared through content, but also in the manner of telling. Memories appeared re-energised in the process of self-evaluation, shared in ways that reinforced their continued relevance today. Indeed, for those women who passed and for those deemed to be unsuccessful, the depth of feeling that remains connected to the 11+ was apparent not only within the immediate reactions of others but through their own subjectivity in relation to the outcome. Qualitative analysis exposed the

¹⁰ These examples featured in the narratives of HG, MB, JL, PL, APP and SW.

fragility behind the result, how those once hidden within a class cohort could experience a vulnerability once evidenced through their weakened performance.¹¹ Notwithstanding the need to re-visit experiences long in their past, life histories gave voice to the inherent ideals and values of held by parents for their families. Whilst acknowledging that this research focussed on the effect of the exam outcome, the intense emotional resonance to the implications of failure was understood to shape everyday life, either by excusing perceived ignorance or through determination to challenge the stigma and redress their sense of self.

Life histories themselves proved to be rich sources of identity, as 'interceptors of their own pasts', the notions of home and family life were woven through each individual's experiences.¹² Such interception appeared to come through two differing approaches, that of explorer or conserver, depending on the individual mindset and the fixed nature of the sense of self.¹³ For those like Helena, Maggie and June, such was the certainty of their place in relation to their family, community and social understanding there appeared little need to seek a deeper understanding of past experiences. However, such internalised identity appeared challenged by Hazel, Sandy, Anna and Gemma who actively interrogated moments in their past and the necessary self-reconciliation that had taken place since.

Acknowledging that this research is situated around a dialogue between the narrator and myself as interviewer, it is important to recognise the inherent characteristics of intersubjectivity that have shaped our conversation. Aside from the similarities in gender and class, my own subjective feelings about experiences at

¹¹ Examples of this featured in the narratives of APP and LW.

¹² Summerfield, Penny. *Histories of the Self*, p. 128

¹³ Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, pp. 18-19.

school have likely informed the line of enquiry. Mutual understanding of failure and the emotional reactions that are manifested within experiences of disappointment are hard to overcome. Indeed, whilst they may diminish over time, they can leave behind a marker of lasting insecurity. Interestingly, experiences of failure were not confined to those who failed the 11+ but also featured among those whose narratives were viewed as “good news” stories. Arguably, the stigma of insecurity can be understood as a characteristic of both 11+ outcomes as the failure to perform to an expected level threatened those who were perceived to stand above the masses.

The Question of Identity

A key finding critically linked to the 11+ experience was the idea that belonging and identity are connected through education. Encapsulating a sense of entitlement, achievement, irrelevance, aspiration or status, the ability to belong or connect with their secondary school both personally and through their relational contexts of family and community was fundamental both to their educational journey and to their sense of self. For many women in this study, such achievement and attainment could only be fully realised through the sense of belonging they felt within the school society. In this respect, academic progression was compromised by the realisation of difference and the stigmatising class based isolation they experienced. Narratives explored within thematically led chapters expressed significant insights into the notion of achievement or failure, but arguably it is the smaller ingredients that provided an influential contribution to the sense of self. Returning to the work of Morwenna Griffiths, for whom a person’s identity could be likened to that of a web, with many fine threads woven around a central point, it is now possible to visualise how each

individual memory is entwined within the highly personalised 11+ experience.¹⁴ Irrespective of the result, recollections that symbolized ideas of differentiation included handmade uniforms, loss of friendships, and lack of blazer; each contributed to the feelings of isolation and difference, yet all added towards the construct of identity.¹⁵ Similarly, the verbal cues from parents with a vested interest in their daughter's educational journey, be it through a pattern, a sense of belief in the system, a need for the right uniform, feelings of anxiety, telegrams, written messages or familial ideals, were all part of this unique understanding of the 11+.¹⁶ Recognizing that identity is not fixed, but free forming, the effects of such experiences can be seen to shape the individual's response to their own educational journey.

Though straightforward in its execution and in possession of a clear and purposeful intention, the 11+ exam left a complex legacy on those whose lives were founded on either a "pass" or a "fail". Attempting to answer the overarching question regarding the impact on an individual's identity as a result of the outcome is challenging. Whilst stories of success or failure are a critical part of the study, these narratives illustrated the many variances situated in the dichotomous situation. In their study into the education of working-class children and the role of selective schooling, Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden described the stratification at eleven years as something that would be 'preserved and confirmed in adult life'.¹⁷ Whilst this was evidenced in many of the narratives in this study, for both Peg and Anna however, despite different 11+ results, their life history expressed candid assessments of their own 11+ experience and the contradictory effects on their sense

¹⁴ Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Self*, p. 93

¹⁵ These examples featured in the narratives of PL and SW.

¹⁶ These examples featured in the narratives of SB, MB, APP, PL, JJ, JL, GW.

¹⁷ Jackson, Brian. & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, p. 213

of self. Notwithstanding Peg's success at the 11+ and the delight in matching her elder sister's performance, it was the absence of any sense of belonging and perceptions of otherness whilst at the grammar school that prevented her from identifying as someone who had achieved. For Peg, achievement was not merely about the result, but about her place in the school community, something she felt unable to secure. Such obvious interaction with perceived socio-structural barriers reflect those described by Steph Lawler for whom the wider mechanisms of socialisation such as education could be understood to inform the sense of self.¹⁸ Conversely, having failed the 11+, such a marker on her identity was something that Anna has continued to challenge. Indeed, despite the difficulties experienced at both school types, Anna's conscious effort to redress the verdict and the associated misconceptions about her intellect, have enabled her to identify outwardly as someone who has achieved. Importantly, as a result of this altered mindset, Anna's sense of self was not weakened by the 11+ but strengthened by her own self-determination.

At the start of the study, I highlighted the notion of an 'assemblage', as a way of visualising the patina of experience that makes up people's lives.¹⁹ This layering process can also be used as a way to further understand the formation of identity. Though acknowledgement has been given to the 11+ result and the reactions surrounding it, so too must the passing of time and the influence of changing lives. Whilst the life history approach has brought a deeper appreciation as to the effects of the 11+ exam, it must also allow their experiences as wives, mothers and grandparents into the construct of the sense of self in later life. Accepting that life

¹⁸ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, p. 19

¹⁹ Dodd, Lindsey. "The Disappearing Child", pp. 37-48

histories are captured at a particular moment in time, the recollections assembled within and not shared in isolation but are shaped through lived experience and the subjective meaning acquired at that stage in life.

The 11+ Outcome, then and now

This research confronts the idea of 'parity of esteem' that was understood to exist between the two educational pathways of grammar and secondary modern, whose assumed reputations created differing identities both for the school and the pupil. Whilst narratives spoke of the class based expectations regarding the outcome of the 11+, they also revealed the very nuanced understanding of aspiration among families, one which challenged the well-worn assumption that the secondary modern curriculum could only deliver second rate opportunities. Recognised as a critical intention of postwar policy, parity of esteem can, however, be seen to exist in society today as entrenched notions of ability and entitlement are seen to influence opinions regarding academic pathways in relation to a more desirable or aspirational higher educational establishment.

In planning this study, it was hoped to have a reasonable balance between those who passed the 11+ exam and those who failed. Statistically, approximately one in four children went on to attend the grammar school, depending on where in the country they lived.²⁰ From the recruitment methods used for this study, only 4 of the 15 participants failed the exam, against a national average of 3 in every 4. As with other qualitative studies into the 11+ experience, it appears common that those with a successful outcome are more likely to get involved.²¹ Which begs the question, did

²⁰ For statistical analysis of the 11+ see, McCulloch, Gary. *Failing the Ordinary Child*, (1998).

²¹ Spencer, Stephanie. *Gender, work and education* (2005). Worth, Eve, *The Welfare State* (2021).

those who went on to secondary modern schools believe that their experience was less interesting, lacking the value or esteem of those more capable grammar school counterparts or perceived perhaps to be so commonplace that it did not warrant any exploration? Moreover, were the memories of such experiences more difficult to compose? Similarly, what made those with “good news” stories keen to share them? Whilst these factors were of consideration early in the research, it is only at the point of evaluation that the varying psychological interpretations of the 11+ experience were seen to be used as a form of self-reconciliation, irrespective of the exam result. Though reliant on a relatively small sample, the life history narratives in this study illustrate how any generalised assumptions about the 11+ process risks undermining the impact of those experiences, regardless of their eventual secondary school destination.

As both a marker of differentiation and a perceived indicator of ability, it was accepted that the narrators would place a significant emphasis on the exam itself and their eventual outcome. In the communication of potentially life-affirming information, the variations in how the outcome was expressed revealed the level to which the result had been internalised, something that was more evident in those who failed. Expressions such as ‘you failed’ appeared to inflict a greater sense of personal injury than the admission that, ‘I did not pass’. In this respect, by subconsciously avoiding the word “fail” it is possible to understand how the emotional implications of a disappointing result could be contained. Conceivably, though the outcome remains the same, it is the associated mindset that can be understood to shape the individual’s sense of self. In contrast to these internalised mechanisms and often solitary experiences, however, the recollections of those who passed were shared among family and friends. Newspaper announcements, gifts of recognition and

dancing with friends were all integral to that sense of achievement.²² Arguably, it is the outwardly differing responses that gives emphasis to the individual meanings of success or failure and contributed to their adult identities. A further aspect of this exploration in the effects of the 11+ was the absence of any obvious judgement about the selective education policies of the Butler Act that they had experienced, either from those who passed or failed. Mention was made, however, with regards to the benefit of such a system that provided an opportunity for all, rather than just the few. Though a number of the women spoke of their own children's comprehensive experiences, it was not with any appraisal or comparison with their own and reflected perhaps how those landmark policies of the postwar era had been consigned to the past.

Placing the result to one side, life history narratives also provided a wealth of contextual detail to the 11+ experience, specifically the intersecting class and gender ideals held within the narrator's family and their local community. Indeed, as the extracts featured within the chapters have shown, common themes of liberation and constraint were evidenced as this 'opportunity for all' was assumed to include girls, but only to a certain extent. Education was deemed important within the majority of families although, for some, this meant only up to the school leaving age with little need for further progression. Differing family assumptions that ranged from the sufficiency of school education, university as an unfamiliar destination and lastly something that just wouldn't be possible, expressed the understanding that it was time to move away from adolescence and assume their adult lives from within the

²² These examples featured in the narratives of MB, HG, SH and LW.

workplace and on into the domestic sphere.²³ For some working-class families, those who would be understood to be the 'willing agents of social change', education was seen as a gateway and an opportunity for class movement.²⁴ Despite their differing experiences, however, a number of the narratives revealed the satisfaction and pride felt by parents at the enhanced employment opportunities for their daughters as a result of their grammar school education.²⁵

This life history research provided an additional insight into the 11+ experience, that of insecurity, something that was to resonate both among those who passed and those who did not. Given that the 11+ exam was understood to be a marker of ability, it is not surprising that among those who were unsuccessful some were left with feelings of self-doubt about their capabilities. Of greater interest, however, were the concerns among those who passed about their performance levels and any marked weaknesses they displayed whilst at the grammar school. The function of streaming in schools became more evident at secondary level and proved to be an indicator of their performance in relation to their peers, but also their likely destination.

Interviewees shared feelings of vulnerability as their previously comfortable position within the primary cohort was challenged by the rigours of grammar school demands. Notwithstanding the effects of internal stratification and likely opportunity, streaming was also seen to stimulate an individual's awareness of their own position and affect change to protect their self-identity. Among those who passed the 11+, several spoke of the assumption or expectation within the family that they would secure a place at

²³ These examples featured in the narratives of WK, GW and PL.

²⁴ Todd, Selina. & Hilary Young, "Baby-Boomers to 'Beanstalkers': The making of the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain", *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2012): pp. 451-467, p. 452
Examples of this featured in the narratives of MB, SB and GW.

²⁵ Examples of this featured in the narratives of PL, MB, and GW

the grammar school.²⁶ For one, however, came the admission of the potential fall-out and level of disappointment within the family should she have failed to achieve.

Indeed, such retrospective understanding revealed a certainty to the existence of pressure, even though it had not been shared within the main 11+ recollection.

To conclude this thesis, the 11+ is synonymous with the ideas of success and failure as a means of identifying individual's educational destinations. This research challenges that theory by considering instead the wider influences of class and gender, community and family which frame the responses to the exam outcome and contributed to the sense of self and adult identity. Life history narratives enabled women now in their seventies to situate their 11+ experience alongside the contextual framework of their home, family and local community. Recollections were vivid and heartfelt, showing that their sense of self was shaped by more than just the outcome of a written test paper.

²⁶ Examples of this featured in the narratives of HG, WK, GW, HB and SB.

Appendix 1: Participant Biographies

- Cathy (CH interviewed: 17/05/2023) Born 1951 in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. The younger sister to JL, CH attended St Edmundsbury primary school, followed by the secondary modern. Cathy changed schools after one term, moving to County Grammar School for Girls in Bury St Edmunds and left school when aged 18. Cathy was recruited through the U3A.
- Gemma (GW interviewed: 22/05/2023) Born 1947 in Tottenham, North London. The eldest of two children, GW attended All Hallows primary school in Tottenham and Moulsham Junior School in Chelmsford, before moving to the County High School for Girls. Gemma left school when aged 18. Gemma was recruited through the U3A.
- Gina (GC interviewed: 17/05/2023) Born 1947 in Mickleham, Surrey. The eldest of two children, Gina attended Mickleham primary school before moving to the secondary modern. Gina left school when aged 16. Gina was recruited through the U3A.
Gina had undergone a period of counselling to assist with her challenging childhood experiences. As a returning adult learner, Gina worked to achieve a degree in psychology.
- Hazel (HB interviewed: 19/04/2023) Born 1954 in West Horndon, Essex. The eldest of three children, Hazel attended Oglethorpe primary school and West Horndon primary school, followed by the grammar school. Hazel left school when aged 18. Hazel was recruited through the National Organisation of Women's Groups.
- Helena (HG interviewed: 26/04/2023) Born 1953 in Pudsey, W. Yorkshire. The eldest of four children, Helena attended St Joseph's primary school, Pudsey, followed by St J*****'s College, Bradford. Helena left school when aged 18. Helena was a colleague at a previous workplace who was approached about the project because she met the necessary age criteria.
- Jane (JL interviewed: 01/06/2023) Born 1944 in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. The eldest of two children, Jane attended Victoria infants school followed by the secondary modern and left school when aged 18. It was only through my meeting with CH that she suggested her elder sister (JL) may like to get involved.
- June (JJ interviewed: 10/05/23) Born 1951 in Bridgend, South Wales. The eldest of three children, June attended Litchard primary school, followed by grammar schools in Wales and latterly in Devon. June left school when aged

17. June was approached by me about the project because she met the necessary age criteria.

- Lillian (LW interviewed: 30/05/2023) Born 1951 in Stoke-on-Trent. An only child, Lillian attended Chell junior school in Stoke-on-Trent, followed by Brownhills High School, Tunstall. Lillian left school when aged 16. Lillian was recruited through the U3A.
- Maggie (MB interviewed: 20/06/2023) Born 1947 in Nelson, East Lancashire. The eldest of five children, Maggie attended primary school in Fleetwood, followed by Layton Hill Convent in Blackpool. Maggie left school when aged 18. Maggie is a member of my extended family and was approached because she met the necessary age criteria.
- Peg (PL interviewed: 12/04/2023) Born 1948 in S*****, Cardiff. The youngest of two children, Peg attended S***** primary school followed by the grammar school in Cardiff. Peg left school when aged 16. Peg was recruited through the National Organisation of Women's Groups.
- Anna (APP interviewed: 12/04/23) Born 1941 in Witham, Essex. An only child, Anna attended Guithavon Church School, Witham, followed by the secondary modern and The Gilbert School in Colchester. Anna left school when aged 17. Given her willingness to share the extent of counselling she has had over the years, it is possible she assumed that this process would have a cathartic benefit or sought to use our conversation as a way to help with the healing process. Anna was recruited through the National Organisation of Women's Groups.
- Sandy (SW interviewed: 18/04/2023) Born 1954 in Benfleet, Essex. The youngest of three children, Sandy attended New Thundersley primary school followed by the comprehensive school in Benfleet. Sandy left school when aged 16 for sixth form college. Sandy was recruited through the Women's Institute.
- Sarah (SB interviewed: 17/01/24) Born 1943 in Huntingdon, Cambs. The eldest of two children, Sarah attended Huntingdon County primary school, followed by the grammar school. Sarah left school when aged 18. Sarah was recruited through the Women's Institute.
- Stella (SH interviewed: 10/05/23) Born 1953 in Watford, Hertfordshire. The eldest of 3 children, Stella attended Kingsway primary school and Watford Technical High School. Stella left school when aged 16. Stella was recruited through the U3A.
- Wren (WK interviewed: 18/04/2023) Born 1952 in Pinner, North London. The eldest of three children, Wendy attended Reddiford School, Pinner before

moving to Kingsbury High School, North London. Wren left school when aged 16. Wren was approached by me about the project because she met the necessary age criteria.

Important to add for those participants who were known to me, that I had no prior awareness of their 11+ result or education journey, this only came to light in the participant information sheet.

Appendix 2. Participant Information Sheet

'Much more than just a result' using Life History Research to Understand the Influences of the 11+ on Schoolgirls: 1955-1965

You are being invited to take part in an oral history project centred on the experiences of women who sat the 11+ exam between the years 1955-1965. The research is being carried out by Amanda Lavelle, a Postgraduate Research Student in the Department of History at the University of Essex. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and thank you for your interest in this project.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to understand how the outcome of the 11+ exam, taken by children at the age of 10, can have long-lasting influences on their adult life. A key aspect of this project is to understand how the selective education process, policy at that time, can remain part of a person's 'make-up', many years after the event.

Why have I been invited to participate?

Your experiences will be an important contribution to this project. Your interview will be included in a collection of approximately fourteen other women who took the exam between 1955-1965.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from this project at any time for any reason without explanation or penalty. It is up to you to decide whether you wish to take part in this project. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to provide written consent via a form supplied by this project.

If you wish to withdraw, restrict or have any concerns about the project, please contact Amanda Lavelle, a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you decide to take part in this project, you will be invited to take part in an interview that will last approximately 1 hour and will be audio recorded. The interview is an opportunity for you to talk about your experience of the 11+ exam and how the impact of the result continued to influence your life. Interviews will be conducted at a time and place convenient to you.

The interviewer, I, Amanda Lavelle, will then upload the recording to an encrypted hard drive for access for my research and a second digital copy will be securely stored via Box storage, supplied by the University of Essex. You will be offered the opportunity to receive a digital copy of the audio-recording.

What happens to the data collected?

Your information will not be used without your consent, and you can inform us how you would like it to be used through the recording information form.

After the interview is completed, the interviewer, Amanda Lavelle, will upload the recording to an encrypted hard drive which will only be accessible by the researcher. Hard copies of the consent form will be uploaded onto www.box.com alongside the recordings.

Your personal data

This project is compliant with GDPR and will only use your data as specified by yourself, as the participant, once informed and unambiguous consent has been freely given through the signing of the consent form for this project. For more information about how the University of Essex ensures that your data is protected in research activities, please visit:

https://www.l.essex.ac.uk/records_management/policies/data_protection_and_research.aspx

The information and security policy of the University of Essex is accessible via

https://www.l.essex.ac.uk/records_management/documents/information-security-policy.pdf

The University of Essex is the Data Controller for this project and is responsible for the protection of the personal information that this study is collecting about you. If you wish to contact the University of Essex about your data protection rights, please contact Sara Stock, University Information Assurance Manager, dpo@essex.ac.uk

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you decide that you would like to take part in this project, please contact myself, Amanda Lavelle via email (a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk) with details of where and when you sat the 11+ exam. I will then contact you for further information and to make suitable arrangements for the interview.

What information will be collected?

The information that you will supply in this project will be stored securely and in compliance with GDPR. Your personal information, such as name and preferred contact details, will be collected to organise the interview and to send a digital copy of the recording after the interview is completed and copies of the output of this project upon completion. At the beginning of the recording, you will be asked to state your full name and date of the birth. If you are at any point uncomfortable with any of the information disclosed during the interview, please say or signal the researcher, Amanda Lavelle, and the recording will be paused to address any concerns that may arise. If you have any concerns following the interview, please contact the principal researcher, Amanda Lavelle, in the first instance.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Your contribution to this project will be important to the research of the principal researcher, Amanda Lavelle. The results of the research by Amanda Lavelle will form part of the PhD thesis that, upon completion, will be held digitally:

<http://repository.essex.ac.uk/>

For your contribution to this project, you will be offered a digital copy of the completed thesis.

Will my information be kept confidential?

After the interview is completed, you will be sent a digital copy of the recording once the interview has been summarised and reviewed to ensure compliance with GDPR requirements. You will also be offered a copy of the main output of this project, the PhD thesis, upon completion. Your data will be uploaded onto an encrypted hard drive for the use of the researcher, Amanda Lavelle. An additional copy of all data will be uploaded to Box for secure storage. Digital copies of data used by the researcher, Amanda Lavelle, held on the encrypted hard drive and Box secure storage will be destroyed after the completion of this project, which is estimated to be in 2025.

If you have any concerns over the nature or content of your interview, please contact Amanda Lavelle, a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk

Who is funding the research?

This research is funded by the researcher, Amanda Lavelle.

Will I be paid for participating in this research?

There will be no payment for participating in this research.

Who has reviewed the study?

Approval for this project is pending with the Humanities Ethics Sub-Committee at the University of Essex.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study or you have a complaint, in the first instance please contact the principal researcher of the project, Amanda Lavelle, using the contact details below. If you are still concerned, you think your concern or complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction or you feel that you cannot approach the principal researcher, please contact the departmental Director of Research in the Department of History, which is responsible for this project, Professor Lucy Noakes (l.noakes@essex.ac.uk). If you are still not satisfied, please contact the University's Research Governance and Planning Manager, Sarah Manning-Press (sarahm@essex.ac.uk). Please include the ERAMS reference which can be found at the foot of this page.

Details of the Researcher and Research Team Members

Principal Researcher: Amanda Lavelle, Postgraduate Research Student, Department of History, University of Essex, a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk

Supervisor of Research Student: Prof. Lucy Noakes, Professor, Department of History, University of Essex, l.noakes@essex.ac.uk

Supervisor of Research Student: Prof. Tracey Loughran, Professor, Department of History, University of Essex, t.loughran@essex.ac.uk

Appendix 3. Research Questionnaire

Research Title - 'Much more than just a result' using Life History
 Research to Understand the Influences of the 11+ on
 Schoolgirls: 1955-1965

Name	
Age	
Date of Birth	
Number of Siblings	
Where did you attend primary school?	
Roughly when did you sit the 11+	
Exam outcome – Pass or Fail	
Secondary School	
School Leaving Age	

Appendix 4. Ethics

TH2223-0230: Mrs Amanda Lavelle

Date Created	11 Oct 2022
Date Submitted	06 Nov 2022
Date of last resubmission	15 Nov 2022
Academic Staff	Mrs Amanda Lavelle
Category	Postgraduate Research Student
Supervisor	Prof Lucy Noakes
Project	'Much more than just a result' Using Ilfe History Research to understand the influences of the 11+ on schoolgirls: 1955-1965
Faculty	Arts and Humanities
Department	History
Current status	Signed off under Annex B

Ethics application

Project overview

Title of project

'Much more than just a result' Using Ilfe History Research to understand the influences of the 11+ on schoolgirls: 1955-1965

Do you object to the title of your project being published?

No

Applicant(s)

[Mrs Amanda Lavelle](#)

Supervisor(s)

[Prof Lucy Noakes](#)

Proposed start date of research

02 Jan 2023

Expected end date

31 Oct 2025

Will this project be externally funded?

No

Will the research involve human participants?

Yes

Will the research use collected or generated personal data?

Yes

Will the research involve the use of animals?

No

Will any of the research take place outside the UK?

No

Project details**Summary of the project**

This project will involve conducting oral history interviews with approximately twelve to fifteen women, born 1945-1955, who sat the 11+ exam between the years 1955 and 1965. The purpose of these interviews is to record the first hand narratives of the long-term impact on their lives

following the outcome of the exam, irrespective of whether they passed or failed. The aim of the research is to understand the effects that a school exam, taken at the age of 10 to determine the secondary education deemed to be most suitable, can have on the life of an individual.

Participants will be asked to take part in a recorded interview for around 1 hour, at a time and place that is convenient with them. Guidelines will be monitored and adhered to throughout the research process. Interviews will be used alongside other primary source material, such as the personal writing held within the Mass Observation archive and selected autobiographical work from contemporaries with shared experiences.

Research project proposal

Will the participants, either the subjects or the investigators, be involved in any activities that could be considered to be unlawful in the UK?

No

If the project is being undertaken outside the UK, will the participants, either the subjects or the investigators, be involved in any activities that could be considered to be unlawful in the country overseas?

No

Participant details

Who are the potential participants?

Approximately 12-15 women aged between 65-80, who took the 11+ exam in an English school between 1955-1965.

How will they be recruited?

Participants will be recruited primarily via contact with women's organisations within Suffolk, in particular, The WI, Townswomen's Guild. In addition, recruitment will be made using personal contacts.

Recruiting materials

Will participants be paid or reimbursed?

No

If yes, please provide details and justification for this payment.

How much will the participants be paid?

£ 0

Could potential participants be considered vulnerable?

Yes

If yes, please explain how the participants could be considered vulnerable and why vulnerable participants are necessary for the research.

As the participants I will be recruiting will be retired, there is minimal risk that some potential participants will be advanced in age or suffering from mental or physical health issues. Potential increased risk from Covid-19 will also be taken into consideration. Additional care will be taken in the process if participant volunteers could be considered vulnerable.

Could potential participants be considered to feel obliged to take part in the research?

No

If yes, please explain how the participants could feel obliged and how any possibility for coercion will be addressed.

Will the research involve individuals below the age of 18 or individuals of 18 years and over with a limited capacity to give informed consent?

No

Is a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check required?

No

If yes, has the DBS check been completed?

No

If your project involves children or vulnerable adults but does not require a DBS check, please explain why.

Informed consent

How will consent be obtained?

Written

If consent will be obtained in writing, please upload the written consent form for review and approval.

If consent will be obtained orally, please explain why.

Please upload a copy of the script that will be used to obtain oral consent. If no script is available to upload please explain why.

Who will be obtaining and recording consent?

The named researcher, Amanda Lavelle

Please indicate at what stage in the data collection process consent will be obtained. Consent will be obtained from participants before the recording of the interview with the 'Participant Information Sheet' and 'Consent Form.' It will be made clear to the participants that they can withdraw from the research at any point, should they wish to do so. Participants will be offered a copy of the audio recording upon completion of the study.

If informed consent will not be obtained, explain why.

Please upload a participant information sheet.

Have you reviewed the information provided by the REO on participant information and consent?

Yes

Confidentiality and anonymity

Will you be maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants whose personal data will be used in your research?

Yes

If yes, describe the arrangements for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.

Reference will only be made to pseudonyms of the participants within the study, their names will be changed to ensure and maintain anonymity throughout. The Participation Consent forms will be held securely through the University of Essex via Box.

If you are not maintaining anonymity and confidentially, please explain your reasons for not doing so.

Data access, storage and security

Describe the arrangements for storing and maintaining the security of any personal data collected as part of the project.

I will be responsible for recording the interview and stage of data while continuing my research. Interviews will be recorded either as an MP3 file on iPhone, or as a wav file via a digital recorder. After the recording is completed, recordings will be transferred onto an encrypted hard drive that I will continue to use for my research. Scanned copies of both the before and after consent forms will be stored on the hard drive. A copy of these files will be uploaded onto the www.box.com storage. Upon completion of my research, I will wipe the encrypted hard drive and Box storage of my personal copies of the data.

Please provide details of all those who will have access to the data.

Only myself, Amanda Lavelle, as the researcher will have access to the data.

Risk and risk management

Risk Assessment documents

Are there any potential risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants or subjects associated with the proposed research?

Yes

If yes, please provide full details and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place to minimise the risks.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, some interviews may take place over Zoom to minimise the risk of exposure for participants and the researcher. The situation will be monitored as the project progresses and will adapt accordingly dependant on government and university guidance. Any concerns will be discussed with participants before the interview.

Are there any potential risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to the researchers working on the proposed research?

Yes

If yes, please provide full details and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place to minimise the risks.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, some interviews may take place over Zoom to minimise the risk of exposure for participants and the researcher. The situation will be monitored as the project progresses and will adapt accordingly dependant on government and university guidance.

Are there any potential reputational risks to the University as a consequence of undertaking the proposed research?

No

If yes, please provide full details and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place to minimise the risks.

Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of the reviewer(s) of your application?

Other documents

Attached files

Essex Research

Proposal.docx

Participant

Proposal.docx Consent

Form.docx

Participant Info

Sheet.docx Risk

assessment.do

Research Study

‘Much more than just a result’

Using Life History Research to understand the influence of the 11+ exam on schoolgirls: 1955-1965

As part of my History PhD with the University of Essex, I shall be undertaking Life History research into the lives of women who sat the 11+ exam in an English primary school between 1955-1965.

I am keen to hear from members of your organisation, now aged approx. 67-77, who would like to share their experiences with me as part of this research. The only essential criteria for involvement is to have sat the 11+ exam whilst at primary school in England. The outcome of the exam is immaterial. I anticipate interviewing between 12-15 individuals, as any more would widen the scope of the project.

The research process will involve a series of informal recorded interviews, which will take place at time and venue that is most convenient to the participant. As a form of historical methodology, Oral testimony is a wonderful way to access the nuanced experiences of those whose lives are not normally documented.

If you think that you are interested or would like some more information, please do not hesitate to contact me on the email detailed below.

Many thanks, in advance, for your support and interest, it is much appreciated.

Amanda Lavelle a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk

Oral History Participation Agreement

Consent Form

Research Title - 'Much more than just a result' using Life History Research to Understand the Influences of the 11+ on Schoolgirls: 1955-1965

Research Team: Amanda Lavelle

When you sign this form, you are agreeing to take part in the interview and allowing us to store and make use of your personal data now and in the future in order to administer and archive your interview.

1. **I confirm that I** have read and understand the Information Sheet dated 15/11/22 for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I understand that any data collected up to the point of my withdrawal e.g. will be destroyed; cannot be withdrawn because it cannot be identified.
3. I understand that, due to the nature of the interview used in this research, it is important to consider the health and well-being of the participant. Interviews will only take place if the participant is well and willing to proceed.
4. I understand that the identifiable data provided will be securely stored and accessible only to the members of the research team directly involved in the project, and that confidentiality will be maintained.
5. I understand that my fully anonymised data will be used for the research thesis.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

Your agreement to take part

This Agreement is made between The University of Essex (“the PhD Research Study”) and you (“the Interviewee”, “I”):

Your name

Your address

.....

Your email

Declaration

I hereby agree to take part in an interview for the University of Essex PHD Research Study. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participation Information Sheet provided and understand how my personal data will be used and stored for the purposes of this project.

By the Interviewee:

Signed:

Name in block capitals:.....Date:

'Much more than just a result' using Life History Research to Understand the Influences of the 11+ on Schoolgirls: 1955-1965

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in an oral history project centred on the experiences of women who sat the 11+ exam between the years 1955-1965. The research is being carried out by Amanda Lavelle, a Postgraduate Research Student in the Department of History at the University of Essex. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and thank you for your interest in this project.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to understand how the outcome of the 11+ exam, taken by children at the age of 10, can have long-lasting influences on their adult life. A key aspect of this project is to understand how the selective education process, policy at that time, can remain part of a person's 'make-up', many years after the event.

Why have I been invited to participate?

Your experiences will be an important contribution to this project. Your interview will be included in a collection of approximately fourteen other women who took the exam between 1955-1965.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from this project at any time for any reason without explanation or penalty. It is up to you to decide whether you wish to take part in this project. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to provide written consent via a form supplied by this project.

If you wish to withdraw, restrict or have any concerns about the project, please contact Amanda Lavelle, a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you decide to take part in this project, you will be invited to take part in an interview that will last approximately 1 hour and will be audio recorded. The interview is an opportunity for you to talk about your experience of the 11+ exam and how the impact of the result continued to influence your life. Interviews will be conducted at a time and place convenient to you.

The interviewer, I, Amanda Lavelle, will then upload the recording to an encrypted hard drive for access for my research and a second digital copy will be securely stored via Box storage, supplied by the University of Essex. You will be offered the opportunity to receive a digital copy of the audio-recording.

What happens to the data collected?

Your information will not be used without your consent, and you can inform us how you would like it to be used through the recording information form.

After the interview is completed, the interviewer, Amanda Lavelle, will upload the recording to an encrypted hard drive which will only be accessible by the researcher. Hard copies of the consent form will be uploaded onto www.box.com alongside the recordings.

Your personal data

This project is compliant with GDPR and will only use your data as specified by yourself, as the participant, once informed and unambiguous consent has been freely given through the signing of the consent form for this project. For more information about how the University of Essex ensures that your data is protected in research activities, please visit:

https://www.l.essex.ac.uk/records_management/policies/data_protection_and_research.aspx

The information and security policy of the University of Essex is accessible via

https://www.essex.ac.uk/records_management/documents/information-security-policy.pdf

The University of Essex is the Data Controller for this project and is responsible for the protection of the personal information that this study is collecting about you. If you wish to contact the University of Essex about your data protection rights, please contact Sara Stock, University Information Assurance Manager, dpo@essex.ac.uk

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you decide that you would like to take part in this project, please contact myself, Amanda Lavelle via email (a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk) with details of where and when you sat the 11+ exam. I will then contact you for further information and to make suitable arrangements for the interview.

What information will be collected?

The information that you will supply in this project will be stored securely and in compliance with GDPR. Your personal information, such as name and preferred contact details, will be collected to organise the interview and to send a digital copy of the recording after the interview is completed and copies of the output of this project upon completion. At the beginning of the recording, you will be asked to state your full name and date of the birth. If you are at any point uncomfortable with any of the information disclosed during the interview, please say or signal the researcher, Amanda Lavelle, and the recording will be paused to address any concerns that may arise. If you have any concerns following the interview, please contact the principal researcher, Amanda Lavelle, in the first instance.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Your contribution to this project will be important to the research of the principal researcher, Amanda Lavelle. The results of the research by Amanda Lavelle will form part of the PhD thesis that, upon completion, will be held digitally:

<http://repository.essex.ac.uk/>

For your contribution to this project, you will be offered a digital copy of the completed thesis.

Will my information be kept confidential?

After the interview is completed, you will be sent a digital copy of the recording once the interview has been summarised and reviewed to ensure compliance with GDPR requirements. You will also be offered a copy of the main output of this project, the PhD thesis, upon completion. Your data will be uploaded onto an encrypted hard drive for the use of the researcher, Amanda Lavelle. An additional copy of all data will be uploaded to Box for secure storage. Digital copies of data used by the researcher, Amanda Lavelle, held on the encrypted hard drive and Box secure storage will be destroyed after the completion of this project, which is estimated to be in 2025.

If you have any concerns over the nature or content of your interview, please contact Amanda Lavelle, a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk

Who is funding the research?

This research is funded by the researcher, Amanda Lavelle.

Will I be paid for participating in this research?

There will be no payment for participating in this research.

Who has reviewed the study?

Approval for this project is pending with the Humanities Ethics Sub-Committee at the University of Essex.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study or you have a complaint, in

the first instance please contact the principal researcher of the project, Amanda Lavelle, using the contact details below. If you are still concerned, you think your concern or complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction or you feel that you cannot approach the principal researcher, please contact the departmental Director of Research in the Department of History, which is responsible for this project, Professor Lucy Noakes (l.noakes@essex.ac.uk). If you are still not satisfied, please contact the University's Research Governance and Planning Manager, Sarah Manning-Press (sarahm@essex.ac.uk). Please include the ERAMS reference which can be found at the foot of this page.

Details of the Researcher and Research Team Members

Principal Researcher: Amanda Lavelle, Postgraduate Research Student, Department of History, University of Essex, a.lavelle@essex.ac.uk

Supervisor of Research Student: Prof. Lucy Noakes, Professor, Department of History, University of Essex, l.noakes@essex.ac.uk

Supervisor of Research Student:



File name:	Amanda Lavelle Ethical Approval		
Risk assessment	ETH2223-0230	Version number:	V2

Risk assessment

Description of activity / area being assessed	Research proposal - 'Much more than just a result' using Life History Research to Understand the Influences of the 11+ on Schoolgirls: 1955-1965 Oral History Research Interviews. Fifteen participants		Location	Interviews to take place in the participants homes, at a time and date that is convenient to them.
Manager responsible	Primary Researcher: Amanda Lavelle	Signature & date	AJ Lavelle 15/11/22	
Assessed by (name & role)	Supervisor: Prof. Lucy Noakes	Signature & assessment date		

Hazard (H) hazardous event (HE) consequence (C)	Who might be harmed	Current controls	Current risk LxC=R	Additional controls needed to reduce risk	Residual risk LxC=R	Target Date	Date achieved
Life History Interview for Research project with primary researcher and participant Meeting	Participant	Advance notice of interview to ensure both the health and well-being of the participant is considered. (consequence = low)	Low	As the participants I will be recruiting will be retired, there is minimal risk that some potential participants will be advanced in age or suffering from mental or physical health issues. Potential increased risk from Covid-19 will also be	Low		

Consequence	Catastrophic	Medium	High	Very High	Very high	Very High
	Major	Low	Medium	High	High	Very High
	Moderate	Very low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
	Minor	Very low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
	Insignificant	Very low	Very low	Low	Low	Low
	R = LxC	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Fairly likely	Likely	Very likely
Likelihood of hazardous event						

Hazard (H) hazardous event (HE) consequence (C)	Who might be harmed	Current controls	Current risk LxC=R	Additional controls needed to reduce risk	Residual risk LxC=R	Target Date	Date achieved
				taken into consideration. Additional care will be taken in the process if participant volunteers could be considered vulnerable. (Consequence = low)			
Life History Interview for Research project with primary researcher and participant Discussion	Participant	The participant will be aware ahead of the interview that the subject matter is based on their educational experience. (consequence = low)	Low	The nature of life history interviews means that other aspects of a participant's life may form part of the discussion. There is a risk of emotional content.			

			<p>Interview can be stopped at any point, to consider the participant's needs. The participant has the opportunity to withdraw from the research, should they feel the need to do so.</p> <p>Should any participant require support or advice due</p>		
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Hazard (H) hazardous event (HE) consequence (C)	Who might be harmed	Current controls	Current risk LxC=R	Additional controls needed to reduce risk	Residual risk LxC=R	Target Date	Date achieved
				to re-emerging emotional anxiety, I would direct them to the following services: www.ageuk.org.uk www.mind.org.uk (consequence = low)			

Add more rows if needed

Periodic Review

Review date:					
Review by:					
Signed:					

If there are changes, please save assessment as a new version and arc

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