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The value of higher education: a temporal analysis from Mass Observation

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Abstract

Higher education in the UK has experienced unprecedented levels of expansion over the last 50 years. This expansion has been underpinned by political and social discourses that expound its value to the social and economic prosperity of the country and more recently, towards the delivery of social justice and the social mobility of individuals. Higher education institutions are channelling increasing amounts of resource into supporting these discourses, largely around widening participation and fair access agendas. In juxtaposition, changes to funding models, including the cessation of maintenance grants and increasing charges for tuition fees, are placing significant financial burdens on graduating students, calling into question just how achievable these agendas can be.

This research seeks to understand if there is a disparity between the social value and benefits that governmental and institutional discourses claim for going to university, and how individuals perceive the value of a contemporary degree. To do so it draws on the narratives of a panel of over 100 volunteer writers submitted as a qualitative survey on their opinions of and interactions with higher education. Drawn from all over the UK, these writers are participants in the Mass Observation Project, an in-depth, qualitative survey of everyday life in Britain established in 1936. The empirical research is embedded within biographical narrative methods, and seeks to create a landscape of perceptions of the social value of a university education and how these are embedded within people's life stories.

Using the depth and retrospective opportunities provided in the qualitative narratives of Mass Observation allows this research to provide a more nuanced understanding of both the long-term impacts of higher education on individuals and how perceptions of its social and economic value have changed over the decades. It suggests that the ability to derive the greatest benefit from going to university is embedded within social backgrounds and therefore ensuring equality is far more complex than simply providing an opportunity to access higher education. This thesis also illustrates how the use of longitudinal and qualitative methods of research can provide alternative viewpoints that should be considered when creating policies that will ensure the greatest benefit to providing value and equality within higher education.

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All quotes from the Mass Observation Archive are reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex.

Introduction

Higher education has long been recognized as a tool to enact transformations in society by enabling individuals to improve their own life conditions and empowering them to make a contribution to wider society by enhancing the social and economic welfare of nations (Byrom, 2009; Hinton-Smith, 2012). In recent years the rationale for increasing and diversifying access to higher education has been explicitly underpinned by a call for a fairer society that is attained through the enactment of social justice. Legislation such as the Equality Act 2006 and political rhetoric such as the policy paper *Social justice: transforming lives*, published in 2012 by the Department for Work and Pensions suggested that education is a fundamental tool in transforming the lives of people with 'multiple disadvantages' by giving them the support they needed to 'turn their lives around' (DWP, 2012). Launching the publication of the Higher Education and Research Bill in May 2016, the Minister for Universities and Science described universities as 'engines of economic growth and social mobility' that can 'boost the economy and extend aspiration and life chances for students from all backgrounds' (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2016). To fulfill these goals, higher education has needed to evolve from what was once the preserve of an elite few into a sector that can deliver these changes. Accordingly, higher education in the UK has expanded to support developments in the economy and in industry as well as opening up the opportunities that a university education can provide to a much broader range of the population.

This 'widening participation' has had a significant impact on the shape of higher education over the last 50 years, in particular by shifting participation from an elite few to a larger mass of the population. While only 8.5 percent of young people attended university in 1962, this number had risen to 49 percent by 2015/2016 (Ross, 2003; Department of Education, 2017). The sector's expansion was initially based on a need to fill gaps in research and industry that were identified after the Second World War by specializing in new subjects that would support British productivity, but gradually the discourses began to shift towards the promotion of fairer access (Shattock and Berdahl, 1986; Ross, 2003). Policies from the 1960s began to focus on

widening university participation to groups that were identified as not being traditionally represented in the student demographic, including women and ethnic minorities. In more recent years, the discourses around widening participation have shifted again, moving away from ensuring equity across potential participating groups to the need to enable social mobility. This subtle change in political rhetoric has refocused the discourses towards seeing higher education as a route to 'earning rather than learning' (David, 2012, p.33), representing a significant shift in the perceived value of higher education that places more emphasis on benefits to the individual. The implications of funding a greatly expanded sector in economically challenging times are also a significant driver in this change, particularly as individuals are increasingly responsible for this funding. The introduction of tuition fees in 1998 and the subsequent cutting of centralized financial support have resulted in a need to justify the cost of a degree to individual students, particularly those from less prosperous socio-economic backgrounds. The expansion of higher education could be said to have become a victim of its own success, as its funding solutions are potentially detrimental to encouraging a diverse population to participate.

The rising costs of going to university, most recently estimated at around £50,000 per undergraduate (Coughlan, 2017), places the value of higher education to individual participants in sharp focus. In its most recent survey into higher education, the 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) found that only 28 percent of respondents felt that getting a degree represented good value for money; a further 18 percent felt it depended on the degree whilst the remaining 51 percent felt it was not worth the cost (Ormston and Paterson, 2015). The BSA Survey also found that respondents who were graduates were more likely than non-graduates to feel that there were currently too many people studying for degrees. Younger people thought degrees presented the least value for money and that opportunities should be increased, whilst older respondents felt a university education was good value but that there were too many places available.

The findings of the BSA provide a sobering insight into how university level education is currently viewed by the wider population, calling into question whether access

pathways to the sector are truly fair across different groups. Given the level of investment that an individual makes when going to university, I believe that it is important to understand how these values influence choices made around higher education, as well as the impact that participating has on an individual's life. A sound understanding of these perceptions and impacts can help ensure that the sector is designed to deliver opportunities that are fit for purpose and provide the best outcomes for the investments made in it by society and by individuals.

In order to achieve this understanding, we need to gain an insight into the way that individuals perceive the value of higher education in their own lives and to society as a whole. The statistical findings of the BSA surveys demonstrate trends, but they are not able to help us understand the more complex issues that are influencing these trends, nor are they able to take into account the longer-term impact of higher education on individual lives. In a future in which it seems inevitable that going to university will require significant personal and social investment, we need to understand what might drive an individual to invest in higher education. We need to develop an insight into what creates and what depreciates value in both the short and long term in order to design a sector that can adapt to the demands of increasing constraints on public sector funding.

My interest in this area is both professional and personal. I have worked in professional services within higher education for nearly 25 years and over this period I have witnessed many of the changes detailed in this thesis at an institutional level, as well as their impact on the many students that I have supported and encountered in this time. I have become increasingly aware of my own fortune at having been able to go to university at a time when I received a maintenance grant and my tuition fees were fully paid. I first went to university in 1991, a point at which undergraduate numbers began to grow even more significantly than previously and students began to have to cover their own cost of living. I have often questioned what the value of the first undergraduate degree has been to my life in terms of my career, economic status and social life. As the first in my family to go into higher education, I have wondered if my choices and experiences, as well as my ability to benefit from going to university,

would have been different had I come from a background more familiar with higher education.

My interest in how university impacts lives and whether this changes according to era of attendance led me to undertake a small empirical research project as part of an earlier module in this Doctoral programme (Courage, 2014). I interviewed three women, all of whom were the first in their family to go to university, and each of whom represented a different era in higher education: 1960s, 1980s and 2010s. Each woman drew upon many different aspects of her life when considering how university had impacted her, making me recognize how deeply embedded their experiences were in their lives. I recognized that as their lives evolved, so too did the value of their university education with aspects coming into and out of focus according to the part of their life on which they were reflecting. Developing this idea further, I wanted to draw on the Mass Observation Project, a large collection of life writing gathered since 1981 and characterized by its qualitative and longitudinal nature. Mass Observation's content would give me the opportunity to extend my empirical study further by looking at life writing by a broader range of individuals with a range of ages that cuts across generations, the in-depth nature of which could provide a more nuanced perspective to the trends revealed in the BSA Survey.

Mass Observation

Founded in 1937, Mass Observation is an independent organization with the objective of recording everyday life in Britain. The archive of data that it has collected over the years is now in the care of the University of Sussex, housed as part of its Library Special Collections and known as the Mass Observation Archive. Since 1981, Mass Observation has largely concentrated its data collection efforts on the Mass Observation Project working with a panel of volunteer writers to collect a 'people's ethnography, collective auto/biography and social commentary' (Sheridan et al, 1993, p.16). Questionnaires are sent out to the Panel three times a year covering a variety of themes. Over 5000 volunteers have participated in the Project since 1981, some responding to just one or two Directives whilst others have written almost continuously since 1981. The writing of the Mass Observers is purposefully biographical, written with a view to being

researched, rather than the often-fragmentary remains of ‘naturally occurring’ documents (Silverman, 2001; Mcleod & Thompson, 2009). In this sense, the analytical methods that can be used are much more akin to those used on oral history or interview scripts than those of analyzing correspondence or fragmentary texts.

The questionnaires, termed Directives by Mass Observation, normally contain three themes that can range from requests to comment on current affairs and world events through to the minutiae of daily life such as intimate relationships or personal beliefs. The Directives are formulated by Mass Observation Archive staff, often in partnership with academic researchers who commission the Archive to gather data on specific subjects, themes or events. The questionnaires (see Appendix A) adopt a lightly structured approach, akin to the semi-structured interview method that utilizes an interview guide to cover specific topics but with the flexibility to allow the interviewee freedom to express how they frame their own understandings of the topic (Bryman, 2008; Kvale 1996). Mass Observers are encouraged to write as much or as little as they wish, as long as they write something and are reassured that they are not to ‘worry about rambling or going off at a tangent’ (Mass Observation website, 2016). Using a semi-structured approach ensures that this freedom of expression is balanced with the focus required to undertake my research.

Research questions

In seeking to ensure that higher education policy is designed to maximize benefits to individuals and to society as a whole, I believe we need to take a more nuanced approach to understanding what these benefits might be. Taking a quantitative approach to evaluating success relies on measures such as numbers of applications or graduates, and figures relating to post-university employment. Such an approach is not able to help us understand the subtler social, economic or cultural impacts on an individual’s life and the value that they accordingly place on higher education. I believe that understanding this value can help shape meaningful and impactful ways of influencing a successful sector.

My research has therefore been based around the following research questions:

-
- How is value perceived in terms of higher education?
 - What creates this value for individuals?
 - What does this value comprise?
 - What does this value mean to individuals?
 - Is this value informed by class and background?
 - Has the perceived value of higher education changed?
 - Has it been affected by changing policy discourses?

Value is in itself a term that is inherently personal in its interpretation and can therefore carry multiple definitions. It is for this reason that I find it a useful word to use in the context of these research questions as it allows for variation and difference amongst and within individual accounts. Where one may define it as purely economic, another may identify with self-worth. For some it may be embedded within the realms of feeling and emotion, whilst for others it can lie in tangible or practical assets. I have therefore purposely framed these questions in terms of value to allow for complexities to be revealed where they exist.

In addition to these questions, this research has allowed me to explore the methodological implications of using a data source such as Mass Observation to provide a qualitative and longitudinal insight into an area in which policy design is largely based on quantitative data. In addition, this thesis demonstrates the potential of using data sets traditionally associated with historical study to inform contemporary policy by the application of sociological biographical narrative methods.

This thesis will begin by looking at the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that I have used to frame my research, in particular the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The second chapter will examine the historical and political contexts of higher education since the Second World War, informed by an extensive literature review previously undertaken as part of the Critical Analytical Study module of this Doctorate. The following two chapters will concentrate on my empirical research, beginning with my analysis of responses to a Directive sent out to the Mass Observation Panel in Spring 2016. The breadth of these responses will provide a landscape of opinions and experiences against which I will undertake a more detailed study of four specific individuals, mining

the depth of their writing for Mass Observation to create a portrait or vignette of their lives. These vignettes will focus on the individual's relationship with higher education and its explicit and implicit impacts on their subsequent lives. The thesis will conclude with a reflection on the findings of my empirical research along with an analysis of the methodological techniques that I have used. It suggests that the use of biographical narrative methods provides access to more nuanced understandings of the value higher education and how it can be shared within society.

Chapter 1: Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

In this chapter I outline the frameworks that have shaped my empirical study, forming the basis for the methods of analysis detailed at the beginning of Chapters 3 and 4, and providing the methodological lenses through which I have contextualized my findings.

These frameworks compliment Mass Observation's enduring belief in the research value of narratives of individual experience and as such this chapter begins by looking at the theoretical placing of biographical methods within social science, and in particular in relation to the qualitative life writing available in the Mass Observation Project. The chapter will then continue to look at the conceptual frameworks I have used to frame the application of this biographical theory. Drawing on Bourdieu's theories of capital, field and habitus has allowed me to place the narratives of Mass Observers into a wider social context, particularly relevant to the in-depth vignettes of Chapter 4. I have also been interested in the interaction of identity and higher education, especially in relation to social class, and as such the final part of this chapter will look at conceptual frameworks relating to both of these.

These frameworks contribute to the feminist, social constructivist approach that I have applied to my research. The biographical nature of Mass Observation lends itself to a feminist approach with its emphasis on personal experience and understanding as underlying behaviours and actions (Stanley, 1992). The idea of feminist research being 'deeply and irrevocably connected to a re-evaluation of 'the personal'' that accepts the 'essential validity of other people's experience' (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p.21 & 22) give life writing narratives such as those found in the Mass Observation Archive a prime position in feminist research opportunities. The feminist approach to positioning the researcher within the research in a way that both recognizes and utilizes their presence in the work enables me to reconcile some of the ethical unease I discuss on p.48 by encouraging me to place myself within my interpretations. Underlying many of the responses drawn upon in my research for this thesis has been the role of gender and how it influenced the experiences individuals in relation to education. Although

this thesis does not concentrate on gender difference specifically, adopting aspects of feminist epistemologies allows me to conceptualize differences between and within groups and to look at the 'micro-power relations that shape the intricate dynamics within [classrooms]' (Burke, 2002, p.59). In the context of higher education research, I have drawn inspiration from Reay and Burke, both of whom have used feminist epistemologies to examine notions of difference and exclusion within the areas of application and experience of university (2002, 2012; Reay, 1998, 2004).

These narrated experiences are both affected by, and are reflective of societal changes in time and place, using social meanings to understand the individual *and* to reflect on wider society by enabling us to move 'between the changing biographical history of the person and the social history of his or her lifespan.' (Plummer, 2001, p. 39).

The place of biographical narrative in social research

The increasing use of biographical methods such as oral history interviews or autobiographical life writing in social science reflects a post-structural shift in methodological understandings towards the use of personal accounts as a way of recognizing the importance of individual agency and being able to reach sections of society that are not reached by formal survey (Chamberlayne, Bornat & Wengraf, 2000). Biographical narrative lends itself to post-structural understandings and feminist, social constructivist epistemologies, with the use of biography in social science assuming an ontological position that understands 'individuals have agency, that biographies make society and are not merely made by it.' (Rustin, 2000, p.46). Biography can therefore be used to witness the way language and discourse position and construct people in terms of how they perceive and understand the world (Merrill and West, 2009).

Life narratives have become increasingly recognized as a valid tool as Western Society moves away from the study of grand narratives into that of individual or 'small' narratives (Goodson, 2013). The valorization of individualized narratives is reflected in the rising proliferation of local and family history projects around the UK, the wider importance of which is recognized through funding by national bodies such as the

Heritage Lottery Fund. The change in scale of narrative is sometimes described as reflecting changes in global economy in which individualization is a valued commodity, with politicians drawing on their own 'narrative capital' to legitimize their worthiness to hold power with varying levels of success (Goodson 2013). Narrative capital draws upon the individual's background and life experiences as a social and cultural production in which life stories are 'intimately connected to cultural locations, to social position and even social privilege as well as to historical periods' (Goodson, 2013, p.25). This concept highlights the increasing value of biographical narrative as a way of forming or challenging legitimacy in different aspects of society, but exactly how can biographical narrative allow us to do this?

In her study of auto/biography (1992) Stanley poses the question: does biography provide us with a microscopic or kaleidoscopic view of a life? Conventional approaches to using biography as a microscope through which 'the more information about the subject you collect, the closer to 'the truth' – the 'whole picture' – you get' (Stanley, 1992, p.158) can be replaced with a feminist perspective that allows us to experience a new kaleidoscopic effect so that, 'each time you look you see something rather different, composed of the same elements, but in a new configuration' (Stanley, 1992, p.158). By taking into account the complex relationships between the subject, biographer and/or researcher, interpretations can shift and change. Auto/biographical narratives can therefore be used to reveal the extensive complexities and interactions of individual identities and wider societies. The act of creating autobiography to narrate one's life experiences contributes to the formation of an individual's identity, as they take the opportunity to interpret their own lives through memory, experiences and understandings by pulling interpretations of the world around them to 'form an overall 'plot'' (Lawler, 2014, p.43).

Mass Observation data is often described as autobiographical in that Observers are encouraged to draw on their life experiences to respond to thematic questions. Their writing is often a blend of autobiography and biography, centred on accounts of their own lives as well as drawing on the life experiences of those around them. By understanding that biography and autobiography share the same epistemological,

theoretical and technical issues, the same analytic apparatus can be applied to both (Stanley, 1992), making the interpretation of the Observers' blended auto/biography possible.

[Applying biographical narrative methods to Mass Observation](#)

Applying these theoretical approaches to Mass Observation also helps address some of the criticisms that arise when using any substantial qualitative data set in social research. In addition to the general discussions around qualitative data, Mass Observation is somewhat unusual in its position as an archive, in that it collects data for reuse by others from the outset, rather than for its own analytical purposes. This results in interesting issues around the unique relationship between the researcher and the researched which I will examine in more detail in Chapter 3, but for now I want to concentrate on issues that apply more generally to qualitative data.

Perhaps the most persistent criticism that has been levelled at Mass Observation over the years is a lack of demographic representation within the Project's volunteer Panel, issues in common with any project based on volunteers and self selection. Indeed the use of the term 'Mass' implies some sort of UK wide demographic representation that could be misleading (Pollen, 2013). Mass Observation collects a limited amount of biographical data from its Observers: age, occupation, marital status and location; all other demographic characteristics such as class, religion or ethnicity must be inferred from the writing itself. Even though the Panel is roughly representative of the UK's regional, age and gender demographics, the profile of the Mass Observers who are most active and whose participation endures longest tends to be older women. As with other self-selecting samples, representation will always be an issue as the process of volunteering requires individuals to be willing, able and available to participate. The previous Director of the Project, Dorothy Sheridan, has addressed this issue by arguing that the discomfort in the use of self-selected groups was symptomatic of sociological beliefs in what constituted 'scientific' research, an issue that historians were seemingly untroubled by (Sheridan 1996). This suggests that borrowing methodological processes from other disciplines could be a productive tool that can open up new avenues of research, for example the use of case study methodologies that deal with disparity

within the writers by recognizing their participation in the project as a point of unity (Purbrick, 2007). In addition, by concentrating efforts on the demographic information of who is writing rather than who is not writing, we can celebrate the populations that are represented and appreciate the alternative vantage points that exist within the Panel (Lindsey and Bulloch, 2014; Kramer, 2014).

The issue of representation also causes some to question how the experiences of a few can be extrapolated to apply to the many. To address this, we need to understand that these narratives are not simply created in isolation but draw upon other existing narratives and with specific audiences in mind so can be viewed as evolving constructions and interpretations (Lawler, 2014; Plummer, 2001). In turn, Mass Observation's volunteer writers participate in a project that is most likely to have an academic audience and as such researchers need to be conscious of how this might affect the narratives being submitted. Plummer (2001) deals with this by drawing on Portelli's understanding that even though we know that life stories are not objective or impartial, or sometimes even factually correct, the interpretation the individual gives to their narrative illustrates their understanding of a situation. A single event may result in multiple narratives that highlight different opinions, beliefs and understandings given by each individual offering their interpretation. Rather than seeing this as an obstacle to overcome, Plummer allows us to see it as giving value to understanding the messiness of an individual's life; understanding the ambiguities that exist within an individual's life as 'the need to see experience and life as a fluctuating praxis, always in flow and ever messy' (2001, p.40). The techniques employed in life history are 'peculiarly suited to discovering the confusions, ambiguities and contradictions that are played in everyday experiences' (Plummer, 2001, p.7, p.40), reinforcing the belief that biographical narratives are a way of understanding a society in terms of the individuals that it comprises, the role of agency within the individuals' lives and the use of life histories to 'focus on the micro level and subjectivities of lives' (Merrill and West, 2009, p.61).

The depth of this data is enhanced by the fact that Mass Observers retain their anonymity, being identified by researchers solely through an alphanumeric coding

system. This anonymity encourages the writers to be open and detailed without the possibility of being identified allowing them to write more freely (Sheridan, Street & Bloom, 1993) and in keeping with Mass Observation's original ethos during the Second World War of allowing writers to reveal their true feelings at a time of conflict without fear of reprisal.

Mass Observation also affords the potential for longitudinal study. Qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) is recognized as a valuable way of undertaking research that is 'attentive to temporal processes and durational phenomena' (Thomson and McLeod 2015, p.243). Navigating through the temporal pathways that are presented in QLR allows us to highlight the complexities and variations of people's lives, acknowledging the 'messiness' of people's lives as different aspects of their identity and experience intertwine to create complexity (Plummer, 2001; Hall, 2000; Fraser, 2003). The ability to use research data that reflects the temporal changes in a life over a period of time enables all of these complexities to be seen by watching how they develop and interact with each other over time and placing them into the wider social context of that particular time. Mass Observation's intensely personal narratives are archival data that has been built up over long periods of time. They are experiences that can be situated at specific points in history and are therefore invaluable in creating opportunities for longitudinal research. For those individuals who have written for Mass Observation over a longer period of time, the ability to dip into their lives at specific points can illustrate how lives have been experienced and the evolution of their understanding.

The freedom that Mass Observation allows a respondent in terms of stressing the aspects of their lives that they feel to be important, appeals to my feminist epistemology. However, in order to transform this from a narrative into an interpretation, I require an approach that enables the integrity of the life story to be held whilst I layer my interpretation upon it. I am also seeking ways of acknowledging my own experiences and understandings within the interpretation that I create, using self-reflexivity to situate myself within my own research. In order to develop this reflexivity, I have found it useful to appropriate a psychosocial approach to situating

myself within my research using a biographical-interpretive method suggested by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). In the following section I will briefly outline this particular approach in reflecting on my own position in my research.

As a social constructivist, I am conscious of how my own position influences my understandings and interpretations of the data that I work upon. Adopting a self-reflexive awareness of my own position will help me account for the nuances I apply to understanding the data; the interpretations that I make are therefore a subjective co-production between researcher and researched (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). This approach involves conscious reflection on how the researcher feels as they examine data; acknowledging their response to the data as part of their analysis and understanding whether this affects their interpretation. Identification with a subject might result in the projection of one's own experience onto their narration, influencing assumptions about what they may have felt or believed. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) describe this as developing an understanding that is 'etched' into their own subjective experience, when in fact it cannot assume the subject would have experienced the same feelings as they would have done in that situation. The introduction of the researcher to the narratives also brings another biographical dimension to the data, as the interpretations brought by each new research question produces its own third-party narrative. As I read the Observers' narratives I compose my own a biography of their lives influenced by my own set of assumptions and life experiences.

Stanley (1992) provides further insight on the influence that the researcher has on research, or in her case as a biographer on the creation of a biography. She argues that biographies are not created in 'self-sealed units', but they both inform and are informed by the life of the biographer. She cites her own work on the Yorkshire Ripper, Peter Sutcliffe, as an example of how her work was informed by her feminist understandings that led her to assume a sympathetic position towards Sutcliffe's wife. Stanley acknowledges that her assumption that these sympathies would be welcomed was incorrect, with her work ultimately being rejected by Mrs Sutcliffe. This situation serves as a useful example of how we place ourselves in the creation of biography, and how these placings need to be acknowledged.

Frameworks for understanding

The rich, qualitative and in-depth nature of Mass Observation responses are often associated with Geertz's concept of 'thick description' in that the writing allows the researcher to immerse themselves into the complexity of the societies that are represented (Pollen, 2013; Purbrick, 2007; Sheridan, 1996; Stanley, 1981). Geertz suggests that in our use of epistemological frameworks to interpret the actions of observed subjects, we move beyond merely seeing to understanding (albeit within our own research context). By applying a theoretical lens to a 'thin description' we create a 'thick description', demonstrating an understanding of the contexts and meanings that underlie or inform the actions we are observing. From these thick descriptions we can state,

...as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found, and beyond that, about social life as such. Our double task is to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts, the 'said' of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis ... (Geertz, 1973, p.27).

The theoretical lenses that I have chosen to form my understandings of the data allow me to conceptualize the way in which individuals interact with their communities, how they are positioned within society and how this positioning evolves and develops through those interactions.

Bourdieu and theories of habitus, field and capital

Pierre Bourdieu's work has been used by various researchers looking at higher education in the context of discourses on equality and diversity, some of whose works I have drawn upon significantly in contextualizing Mass Observation data later in this thesis. His concepts of habitus, field and capital provide the platform that underpins my interpretation of the experiences narrated by my four case studies in particular, helping me understand how they construe value and the ways in which their upbringings have consciously and unconsciously influenced their life stories.

Habitus is defined as a social place in which distinct dispositions exist in the form of practices, principles and tastes (Bourdieu, 1998). The dispositions found within each different habitus act as distinguishing characteristics or codes of conduct, that dictate

what is seen as right or wrong, tasteful or vulgar, within that specific habitus. These dispositions are embedded and often embodied within the individuals who inhabit that particular social space meaning that a habitus comprises a 'universalizing mediation' of practices that become second nature to individuals. It creates an unconscious framework through which actions and understandings are accepted as reasonable without any explicit reasoning as to why (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998). Society as a whole contains different 'fields' or social spaces where interactions take place, often between agents with differential positions of power and means, resulting in some being in a better position to 'play the game' (Bourdieu, 1998; 2004; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Higher education can be viewed as such a field, a place in which some individuals have a greater understanding of how to play the game through knowledge acquired from the experiences of those around them, whilst others have no knowledge of the field and therefore do not come with the same advantages of prior knowledge. As a field, higher education possesses its own language, values and processes that can appear alien or familiar to an individual depending on their background, whilst higher education is itself in a position of power to accept or reject capitals that are brought to it by individuals.

Capitals are the resources or currencies that are possessed, accumulated and exchanged within different fields (Bourdieu, 2004). Capital is identified in economic, social, cultural and symbolic forms, each relating to power and identity, and hence to notions of class. Economic capital has the power to purchase, it can be exchanged to benefit its holder with commodities or indeed to purchase ingress into other forms of capital, such as social and cultural. Social capital is formed of networks, interconnected relationships that can be exploited to get on in an individual area. Cultural capital can be embodied as 'long lasting dispositions of the mind and body'; objectified in the form of goods or activities that claim some sort of cultural value, or institutionalized in the form of qualifications, honours or awards (Bourdieu, 2004, p.17). Finally, symbolic capital is created when a particular space or field recognizes and valorizes the worth of the economic, social or cultural capitals. In instances where the field does not see them as legitimate or worthy, the particular individual or group possessing the

unrecognized capital is subjected to symbolic violence. Misrecognition can be formed by power dynamics between groups or classes where certain groups are dominant through recognition of their tastes and values as legitimate (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Symbolic violence is thereby enacted when a group or class that is dominant within a particular field (often the traditional dominant inhabitants of that field) misrecognizes the capitals of new arrivals as invalid and therefore upholding their own validity (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Burke, 2012). The notion of symbolic violence is an important one in understanding how higher education is sometimes seen as a tool through which power dynamics are reproduced, often to the detriment of a particular group. Perceptions of university as a middle or upper-class stronghold are prevalent, as demonstrated by well-publicized policies that seek to widen the sector to other groups, often within discourses of social mobility. Critics of these discourses have argued that rather than valorizing the capitals that newcomers bring to the field, these discourses can serve to reinforce the dominance of upper and middle classes values as newcomers are expected to adapt to dominant culture in order to be accepted (Burke, 2012).

Bourdieu has been used in the context of higher education by several researchers whose studies I examined in more detail in the Critical Analytical Study module of this Doctorate (Courage, 2015). In particular, the work of Penny Jane Burke and Diane Reay has significantly influenced how I have framed my own thinking in researching this thesis.

Reay's studies on the influences of school and family backgrounds of young people in relation to university, use Bourdieu's theories of capital, habitus and field to conceptualize how choices are formed in relation to higher education.

In comparing the experiences of students from six socio-economically diverse educational institutions around London, Reay and her colleagues demonstrated how institutional habitus could interact with family habitus, and the effect of different levels of capital on this interaction,

The two schools [state and private] were responding differently to similar kinds of students, which suggests that institutional habitus is having an impact over

and above family background influences. In a sense the school is doing its job. For many parents this kind of preparation and channeling is what they are paying for. Economic capital is converted in cultural, social and symbolic capital. (Reay, David & Ball, 2005, p.53).

Burke uses Bourdieu to think 'in critical ways about processes of exclusion and relations of power and difference in higher education fields.' (2012, p.40). This is demonstrated in her work with McManus (Burke, 2012) that looked at the undergraduate admissions process of a London based Art and Design College. There were several examples of the symbolic violence that comes into play when individuals encounter an unfamiliar field in which they have yet to learn the rules of the game. Burke and McManus's observations of the interview process revealed the inbuilt subjectivities and assumptions of valid capitals that the academic interviewers brought to the process. When faced with a non-traditional student, in this case a young black woman whose artistic interests and fashion sense were heavily influenced by hip-hop culture, the interviewers would not recognize this as a valid form of capital. The symbolic capital that this (and other applicants) were bringing to the field was not being recognized and they themselves were either unwilling or unable to 'crack the code' of language, knowledge and practice that could unlock the door to this unfamiliar field (Burke, 2012).

The ways in which power is exercised by individuals and institutions in relation to higher education formed a large focus in my Critical Analytical Study (Courage, 2015) and continue to be evident in the narratives returned by the Mass Observers examined later in this thesis. By drawing on Bourdieu to conceptualize how the women in her studies interact with social class, Skeggs (1997, 2004) is able to demonstrate how the balance of power is informed by an individual's ability to convert their capitals. She uses him to 'expose[s] the lack of equivalence between people and their problems of exchange' seeing the conversion into symbolic capital as 'central to understanding power and inequality' (1997, p.16 & 17). These concepts have informed in particular, how I have interpreted the life stories of four Mass Observers detailed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Identity

Although Bourdieu's work addresses many aspects of understanding a life through its narration, I have drawn on other methodological lenses to view how identity is conceptualized. Whilst Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital can help me understand the interactions of the individual and the society around them, I am also interested in the role of identity within these interactions. The way in which a person's identity both informs and is informed by that society is fundamental to understanding how individual agency is also a mechanism for gaining value from its interaction with higher education. Considering identity allows us to combat some of the more deterministic facts of Bourdieu's theories by empowering an individual to change the course of their life.

The volume of work written on defining the term 'identity' demonstrates both the fluidity of the term itself and the state that it attempts to describe. In the way that an individual's identity may shift according to the company, environment or time that they are in at a given point, epistemological understanding of identity will move according to the context, and discipline under which it is being examined (Lawler, 2014; du Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000). From my social constructivist standpoint, I see identity as created from within the individual through their perceptions and interactions with the world around them. As an individual comes into contact with different environments and discourses through their life their identity will shift and evolve, gathering up strands of different aspects of their interactions to entwine into their own identity. They may consciously or unconsciously choose to adapt, adopt or reject different aspects of what they interact with, but with each type of reaction, a strand of identity is forming. I have drawn on the work of Stuart Hall to develop my understandings, in particular his assertion that identity is constructed within sites or institutions of discourse (such as class and higher education) which can act as arenas in which difference is constructed. Hall's evaluation adopts a discursive approach to identity, seeing it as an on-going construction process, or career, that is never completed and that is constructed through and not outside 'difference' so that, 'throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and

attachment *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected' (Hall, 2000, p.18).

The notion of the difference between 'fitting in' or being the 'other' within higher education is an important one in my study as I am interested in comparing the aspirations, perceptions and experiences of people from different backgrounds. Hall suggests that identity is constructed through difference and the way individuals belong or are excluded from aspects of society contributes to the creation of boundaries that can engender strong group identities such as social class structures.

[Identities are] produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power and are thus more the product of marking of difference and exclusion, that they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity – an 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation. (Hall, 2000, p.17)

In the context of higher education, the institution has a position of power that interacts with the group identity an individual has constructed and depending on what that identity is can result in a sense of belonging or exclusion. I suggest that an individual may choose to adapt or evolve their identity to complement what they encounter in higher education to derive a benefit from the powerful symbolic capital it can bestow.

Hall's ideas work well with the longitudinal nature of Mass Observation's data. The potential to track an individual through their writing over a period of years can potentially reveal the ongoing construction process of identity as their life moves through time. Within the data, I found examples of belonging and non-belonging in the context of the different classed, raced and gendered experiences of going to university, all of which can be explored using Hall's concept of identity construction through difference and Fraser's work on mis-recognition (Hall, 2000; Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

Intersectionality and social class

I am also highly conscious of needing to understand an individual as being influenced by many intersecting factors, including ethnicity, gender, and age (Crenshaw, 1991). As part of Hall's ongoing process of construction, the different strands of an individual's identity intersect each other, developing, shifting and receding at different rates and points in this process. The result is an intertwining of aspects of social identity such as ethnicity, gender, age and class that reflect and are mediated by each other (Burke, 2012; Reay 2002). The concept of intersectionality is addressed in different ways by different theoretical standpoints but is essentially embedded within feminist epistemologies to understand the ways that different socio-cultural categories such as gender, age and ethnicity intersect with each other and produce social inequalities (Lykke, 2010). It was originally used by Crenshaw to understand the relationship of ethnicity and gender to inequalities within the field of law. She asserts that intersectionality has travelled from its groundings in Black Feminism to other disciplines and discursive protocols to help modify how various social dynamics such as race and gender are conceptualized and intertwined (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). Crenshaw and colleagues suggest that it is seen as an 'analytic sensibility' that encourages researchers to adopt:

...an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference in its relation to power. [...] conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by the dynamics of power. (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013, p.797)

Intersectionality is therefore a mechanism through which I am able to acknowledge the dynamic interactions within different aspects of an individual's identity. It disrupts assumptions of homogeneity in the experiences of groups who may traditionally be distinguished by essential characteristics such as gender or ethnicity. In the context of this thesis, the recent shift in widening participation discourses from equality to social mobility concentrate my interest towards social class, but I acknowledge that other facets of an individual's identity will invariably mediate experience. Keeping the concept of intersectionality in mind, I now want to concentrate on some definitions of

social class that will underpin my analysis, particularly in relation to the four in-depth studies later in this chapter.

I have used social class to underpin these four studies as many contemporary discourses around higher education are centered on opportunities for social mobility. In order to test the validity of those discourses I need to define how social class is enacted and recognized in order to recognize if, how and why an individual's placing in society has changed. The way in which social class is used in sociological study is defined by the methodological frameworks of the researchers and as such I have drawn upon works that align with my own feminist positioning. Savage (2000) provides a useful overview of the ways in which the use of social class as a tool for sociological analysis has developed over the last few decades, following its evolution from the Marxist and Weberian link of class to production and struggle, to the contemporary view of 'class as a particularly important concept to understand the dynamics of social life' (2000, p.8). This change in view reflects a re-ignition of interest in social class analysis as a sociological method in recent years (Savage, 1997, 2015), particularly in terms of its use by feminist researchers (Lawler, 1999).

Skeggs (1997) demonstrates this development by re-nuancing class 'to show how it is a major feature of subjectivity, a historical specificity and part of a struggle over access to resources and ways of being.' (1997, p.7). In her longitudinal study of a community of working-class women, she recognizes class as being 'central to the young women's subjectivities' (Skeggs, 1997, p.74), a concept repeated in Lawler's (1999) own observations of a group of seven British white women who were born into working-class families but now defined themselves as middle-class. The narratives Lawler's subjects produced 'inscribe[d] class as a part of the self, rather than some external marker attaching to indicators such as employment or housing.' (1999, p.19).

The re-invigoration in using class as a tool for sociological analysis has been further attested to by the interest raised by the work of Savage et al (2013) on the Great British Social Survey that redefines social classifications to reflect contemporary British society, thereby illustrating the relation between class and historical specificity. The work of Savage, Lawler and Skeggs cited above, has had a significant influence on my

understanding of social class and the way that I use it in Chapter 4 when I take an in depth look at four individual Mass Observers. Each of these researchers draws heavily on the theoretical concepts of Bourdieu to conceptualize how class differences are produced and performed.

The concept of economic, social and cultural capital has been used to identify and measure differentiations between social classes (Savage et al. 2013; 2015). Savage considers class cultures to be rooted in difference rather than collectivity; differences that are so encoded in a person's identity and attitudes that they affect self-worth and awareness of others (Savage, 2000). His use of Mass Observation to elicit a large number of qualitative life narratives, provided him with the subtleties of language and reflective opportunities that revealed these implicit understandings of class differences, highlighting the usefulness of qualitative life writing in this field (2007).

The notion that class identities are not only found in practices but also in how individuals think and feel about those practices, is also recognized by Reay (2005) who understands class as being lived on a conscious and an unconscious level. She describes a 'psychic landscape of social class' (2005, p.912) that should be considered alongside practical identifiers such income, leisure activities and spectrum of social contacts, all of which are used by Savage et al (2013) in their analysis of contemporary social classifications. Skegg's (1997) work with a group of working class women also demonstrates this notion of implicit and individualized class identity and demonstrates how this can be consciously acted upon. She perceived a performative process of dis-identification from a collective working class identity that had been central to defining what institutional, educational and domestic opportunities were available to them. This performativity 'always occurred against a backdrop of power relations, in specific arenas, in which values could be consolidated, investments made and capitals lost and/or enhanced.' (Skeggs, 1997, p.165). I highlight these points as they demonstrate subtleties that need to be taken into account when understanding the nuances of value, something that the combination of the in-depth data provided in the Mass Observation Archive and a psychosocial approach to biographical narrative methodology are well positioned to reveal.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the main theoretical concepts and frameworks that I have used to explore my research questions. They provide a framework for understanding how the value of higher education to a person's life might be recognized in terms of whether it might be an enabling or a prohibiting agent according to how an individual encounters it. The depth and breadth of Mass Observation data allows me to exploit the richness of biographical narrative to provide a nuanced understanding of the value of education to individual lives and I will draw on this later in this thesis when focusing on my empirical research (see chapters 3 and 4). Before approaching the empirical analysis, the wider context of higher education in England and Wales needs to be understood. The next chapter will undertake a review of the dominant discourses in this area to create a context against which the Mass Observation data can be read. These discourses have been critically reviewed in light of the frameworks outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Historical and higher education concepts

My focus in this thesis will be on changing perceptions of the value of higher education and how this may have been affected by policy discourses over the last few decades. I will concentrate on the social and policy changes that have occurred in higher education during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the UK, predominantly within the English and Welsh education system, as it is against this background that many Mass Observers experienced higher education in some form. I will then look at some of the dominant discourses that have surrounded the sector over the last few years to explore how these have affected the value that Mass Observers put on higher education.

The political rationale for increasing the number of students in higher education is underpinned by a belief that it enables individuals to improve their life conditions, empowering them to contribute to the benefit of wider society in terms of the social and economic welfare of the nation (Byrom, 2009; Hinton-Smith, 2012). From the perspective of economic development, expansion of the sector after the Second World War sought to fill the gaps in British research and development, whilst the shift in emphasis from a manufacturing to a knowledge economy in more recent years has refocused the delivery of learning in the university sector (Ross, 2003; Hinton-Smith, 2012). The investment that has been required at a national level to develop the sector over the last few decades indicates the value in which it is held as a tool to enhance national success. However the changing discourses around funding higher education resulting in higher tuition fees may affect its perceived value at an individual level. Although I acknowledge the importance of discussions on university contributions to the nation's economic prosperity, I will be focusing on the discourses around the contribution higher education makes to social welfare, in particular what is termed as social justice. This reflects my interest in the interaction of social class and education and the nature of the Mass Observation data that concentrates on the social values of the university sector.

In order to give a context to the Mass Observation narratives that I will be using to understand these interactions in the latter part of this thesis, the following section will begin by outlining the historical picture of participation and then go on to examine discourses related to the value of university education.

The historical contexts

Demographics of participation

The overall number of undergraduate students graduating from university in the UK has risen consistently since the Second World War with the largest increase taking place in the last 25 years (See fig.1). These increases reflect changes in government rhetoric around social development and justice producing discourses that recognize the potential value of higher education to benefit nation and individual (Byrom, 2009).

Fig. 1: Undergraduate degrees awarded, (taken from Bolton, 2012, p.20)

Year	Men	Women	Total
1920	3,145	1,212	4,357
1960	16,851	5,575	22,426
1980	42,831	25,319	68,150
1990	43,297	33,866	77,163
2000	109,930	133,316	243,246
2011	153,235	197,565	350,800

The field of universities has traditionally been dominated by a handful of institutions and populated by a narrow section of society, namely white men from the upper middle and upper classes (Silver, 2003). By the beginning of the twentieth century this picture had not changed with students stereotyped as 'Bachelor boys' and identified as the 'young, white, privileged, able-bodied European male' (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p.296).

Between 1928 and the end of the Second World War, only 10 percent of boys within the average university age cohort went to university of whom only 1.4 percent came from manual backgrounds, whilst data for other minority groups is tellingly absent (Reay et al 2001; Ross, 2003a). Students from these manual backgrounds or lower socio-economic classes are amongst four groups noted as being traditionally less well represented or even excluded from participating in higher education, the other three groups being identified as women, mature students and students from ethnic minorities (Tight, 2012). From these four groups, women have experienced the greatest growth in participation, rising from just under 25 percent of the undergraduate population in 1920 to 57 percent by 2010 (Bolton, 2012), whilst ethnic minority groups have also increased to the extent that the demographic proportion of this group in higher education is more than double that of white students (Connor et al, 1996b; Tight, 2012). Despite the apparent success in attracting more of these two groups to participate, closer analysis reveals a persisting inequality in *how* they participate and *what* they gain from doing so. There is an uneven spread across subject areas for both women and ethnic minorities, whilst students from the latter group are also less likely to attend elite institutions (Parry, 2010; Connor et al, 1996a, Tight, 2012; Boliver, 2013). Students from ethnic minorities tend to attain lower levels of degree performance and whilst women may attain equivalent grades they have fewer prospects in terms of progression to academic leadership, therefore less opportunity to influence change (Richardson, 2008; Connor et al, 1996b; Dyhouse, 2006; Morley, 2013). Mature students enjoyed increased participation due to institutional changes outlined in the following pages, but recent changes to funding have threatened these opportunities, leading some to see participation from this group as of the most concern in terms of equality (Grove, 2015; Shaw, 2013).

Over the next three sub-sections I will examine the major policy shifts that have taken place and look at the effect on accessibility and participation. These are the policy backgrounds against which the Mass Observers, in particular the four detailed studies that I shall report on later in this thesis, have interacted with higher education.

The new foundations of the twentieth century (1900 – 1960): expansion for prosperity

Although the largest increase in student numbers has been concentrated in the years after the Second World War, it is worth briefly looking at the changes in the sector that took place in the first half of the twentieth century as these changes suggest the historicity of notions of value in higher education. The most significant factor influencing this increase was the establishment of the ‘redbrick’ universities in the early years of the 1900s, often in industrialized towns and cities such as Birmingham and Sheffield, that enabled more people to enter higher education. Whilst traditional institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge had served an elite intellectual and social class from around the country, these new redbrick institutions sought to serve the requirements of their local area. Largely endowed and supported by local businessmen and professionals, their objective was to serve the requirements of the local area in order to provide opportunities for social advancement for local young men and to support the industrial and economic growth of their region (Ross, 2003). In addition, the provision of state bursaries for university places increased during this period, supporting 38 percent of undergraduate places by 1938, and enabling young people with ability but lacking in means to attend university (Ross, 2003). Despite this, higher education remained the preserve of an elite, albeit a slightly widened profile, with numbers of participants standing at only 8.5 percent of the population (Reay et al, 2001; Burke 2012).

A new wave of university institutions was established following the Second World War, with the intention of specializing in areas that had been identified as weaknesses in the UK’s research profile (Shattock & Berdhal, 1986). These universities, often described as the ‘plate glass universities’, were established throughout the 1960s and included institutions such as Essex, Warwick, Lancaster and Sussex that, although built as campuses close to cities, lacked the local or regional ties that had been a feature of the ‘redbrick’ universities.

The Robbins Report into the Binary System(1961-1980s): expansion for equality and diversity

The establishment of these new institutions occurred almost simultaneously with the publication of a report by the Robbins Committee in 1961. The Committee was

established to review full-time higher education in the UK in light of national needs and to suggest if any changes were required, particularly in terms of new types of institution (Robbins, 1961). Amongst its findings the report highlighted the inequalities that existed in terms of who participated in higher education, including women and students from lower socio-economic groups (Dyhouse, 2006; Greenbank, 2006) and suggested that increasing access to all individuals who had the ability and qualifications to go to university would bring economic and social benefits (Ross, 2003; Silver, 2003). In addition to the aforementioned new universities that were being established in the 1960s, the incoming Labour Government of 1962 gave the go ahead to establish over 30 polytechnics that would have the power to grant degrees. This heralded the commencement of the 'binary system' in which the new polytechnics would offer a different kind of locally controlled higher education that would encompass part-time and vocational learning and offering an opportunity to many more individuals from under represented sections of society to enroll in higher education.

The effect of these changes was to significantly increase the number of students in the sector, transitioning higher education from elite to mass participation (Scott, 1995). Whilst numbers from the four major under-represented groups increased, it was women who benefited the most, seeing an almost three-fold increase (See fig.1). Until the late 1980s, the state paid students' tuition fees in full whilst living costs could be covered by means-tested maintenance grants, a scheme that served students well but increased pressure on the state. As student numbers continued to rise through the 1980s, Conservative government rhetoric suggested that, as the beneficiaries of their education, students should be expected to contribute financially (Hutchings, 2003). In 1990 the level of maintenance grants was frozen and loans were introduced for students to subsidize their living costs with the size of loan available to individuals increasing to match the decrease in grant size.

'Massification' of higher education (1990s and 2000s): the promise of social mobility

This change in financial support for undergraduate students coincided with another major transition. The 'binary system', in which universities and polytechnics had co-

existed to provide a wide range of options in higher education, ended in 1991 as polytechnics began to be awarded university status, becoming known as the 'post 1992' universities. In the years preceding the 1992 changes, polytechnics had gradually been moving away from their original focus on offering vocational and part-time courses and began to increase their offer of full-time and postgraduate courses in line with universities (Ross, 2003).

The Dearing Committee was established in 1996 to look at how all aspects of higher education needed to develop to support the requirements the UK would face over the next 20 years. Endorsing many of the principles of the Robbins Report, it recognized that expanding the sector would lead to a requirement for more flexible and accessible ways of delivering higher education to a more diverse student population (Parry, 2010). The incoming Labour Government set out an agenda that sought not only to increase student numbers but also to widen access to a more diverse population (Greenbank, 2006), and laid out their intention that by 2010, 50 percent of young people would attend university (Blair, 2001).

This marked the beginning of a more actively open agenda in terms of expanding opportunities of access to groups that were underrepresented, recognizing the challenges of recruiting from these groups at a time when the costs of going to university were increasing year on year. To counteract these challenges, the Higher Education Act of 2004 established the Office for Fair Access (now the Office for Students) to ensure that the introduction of tuition fees would not deter students from attending university. Under the Act, universities were required to commit to programmes of inclusion in order to maintain their ability to charge higher rates of tuition fees. Programmes such as the Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) funded AimHigher scheme that ran between 2004 and 2011, were established to work with young people from under represented groups to encourage awareness, aspiration and attainment (HEFCE, 2012). In more recent years university institutions have themselves developed and delivered their own schemes, often termed as 'widening participation'. In my own institution at the University of Sussex, the Widening Participation team engage with schools and colleges in the region to provide

‘a responsive and inclusive programme, which aims to provide young people with the insight to make informed choices about their future’ (University of Sussex, 2017 <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/about/access-to-education/>). In addition, a ‘First-Generation Scholars’ programme has been established to ‘introduce young people to higher education, to raise aspirations and attainment, and to help make sense of choices around higher education.’ (ibid). The scheme also provides financial help to students from low income households who come to Sussex to study for an undergraduate degree (See <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/University%20of%20Sussex%201617.pdf>)

The effect of all of these programmes has been to increase the numbers of undergraduate students attending university, as illustrated in fig. 1. However closer analysis of this participation reveals continued disparities. Although women have experienced the greatest growth in numbers, rising from 25 percent of the undergraduate cohort in 1920 to 57 percent in 2010 (Bolton, 2012), disparity across degree courses taken continues with an unequal proportion of either sex across subject areas (Parry, 2010). Men continue to dominate engineering, technology and computing whilst women cluster around social sciences, education and subjects allied to medicine (Connor et al. 1996a; Tight, 2012). Numbers of students from ethnic minority backgrounds have also grown significantly however there is a disparity in their academic attainment which is lower on average, whilst students tend to cluster around certain subjects and attend local post-1992 universities rather than ‘elite’ institutions (Richardson, 2008; Boliver, 2013; Gilchrist, Phillips & Ross, 2003; Connor et al. 1996b; Tight, 2012). Numbers of mature students increased with greater flexibility of study opportunities provided initially by polytechnics and then by access to HE courses. However concerns have been raised about the impact of rising tuition fees on these students who are more likely to have family and financial commitments outside of their studies (Grove, 2015; Shaw, 2013).

Financing the expansion of higher education has resulted in major changes for participants from all backgrounds and demographic groups over the last twenty years. Students are now required to pay tuition fees and are no longer entitled to the same

system of grants and loans available to their predecessors. Recent reports suggest that debts incurred by the poorest students are as much as £57,000 (Coughlan, S. BBC, 5/7/2017). The impact of these financial burdens is still developing and trends in applications are being monitored. Although applications have continued to increase since the introduction of the higher level of fees in 2012, including from students living in 'disadvantaged areas', the most recent Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) statistics for entry have noted a 4 percent decrease in applications, indicating that more time is needed to understand the real impact (UCAS, 2017). There is already evidence of a marked decrease in the number of applications from mature students, a group traditionally identified as under-represented and therefore of concern in terms of promoting fair access to higher education (UCAS, 2017; OFFA, 2017). This is perhaps due to the introduction of tuition fees or the impact of the government's withdrawal of funding for equivalent or lower qualifications from 2008/9, affecting those that may have returned to undertake a second degree.

I have briefly outlined the major changes that have occurred in higher education over the last few decades, a period that encompasses the generations represented with the Mass Observation Panel. Whilst these interventions have succeeded in raising the numbers of people who participate in higher education, for some commentators they are also tools of differentiation and stratification (Burke, 2012) that polarize experiences and continue to marginalize 'the other' from the established institutions of educational power. The next section of this chapter will examine research that identifies how these differentiations are enacted.

[Higher education concepts: what is the value of higher education?](#)

The final part of this chapter comprises a review of some research studies that have looked at equality and fair access in the context of social mobility and class, revealing how marginalization and 'otherness' can manifest itself within higher education. These studies provided me with useful indicators of the themes that I wanted to investigate further within the Mass Observation data, and have helped me to frame my findings within a wider field of research.

Enabling access to university to increase possibilities of social mobility for disadvantaged individuals is a compelling hypothesis in terms of understanding the value of higher education. However these studies reveal that it masks a far more complex and nuanced situation. The political identification of social mobility as a solution to social exclusion is too simplistic, one that Payne (2012) identifies as ignoring the sociological 'account in which it is almost inevitable that there will be winners and losers [...] into bland reassurances that *everybody*, especially those currently advantaged, can be winners, provided the right policies are in place' (p.57). My own review of literature around widening participation, undertaken within the Critical Analytical Study module of this Doctorate (Courage, 2015), concluded that ensuring wider participation is about more than creating opportunities for non-traditional groups to enter university. To use a Bourdieusian analogy, I discerned that for some individuals from these groups, getting to university is only the first of a number of 'struggles' that they encounter as they enter the field. I was particularly interested in how these struggles manifested, as I believed that Mass Observers would provide examples of those who had flourished in higher education, as well as those who had struggled. As I will explore in the rest of this chapter, the recognition or misrecognition of the capitals brought to the field impacts how individuals experienced going to university, and therefore the value that they both perceive *and* gain from participating or not participating.

As I highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, higher education is currently seen as a tool to encourage social mobility for individuals, particularly those from lower socio-economic groups. However, the barriers that need to be overcome by such groups are often themselves the product of a sector born of higher socio-economic values and aspirations. Routes to higher education are often more easily paved when the advantages of higher levels of economic capital can provide access to higher attaining schools, often in the private sector, enabling easier access to elite universities and better career prospects (Payne, 2012; Reay, David and Ball, 2005). In tandem with this economic advantage, students from the middle-classes are more likely to come from university educated families, or schools that encourage and aspire to participation in

higher education (Reay, David and Ball, 2005). Alongside the potential lack of encouragement, working-class students may also encounter higher education as a field in which their social and cultural capitals are not valued as highly as those of their middle-class counterparts (Burke, 2012).

As a social institution that has largely been created and maintained by middle-class participants, higher education could be seen to be an institutional tool that can 'regulate interaction according to parity-impeding cultural norms' (Fraser, 2000, p.114). Such a tool can be used as symbolic violence that denies status and power to those that the institution (or the class that maintains it) constitutes as comparatively unworthy of respect, thereby rendering or misrecognizing the capitals of others as invalid (Skeggs, 2004). In terms of social class, the infliction of symbolic violence in this way serves to 'estrangle the working classes from any sense of personal worth or feelings of value if they remain as they are' (Reay, 2005, p.666). Within the essentially middle-class field of higher education, this means that middle-class students will immediately enjoy a greater synergy with what they encounter when they arrive at university. They are far more likely to be able to understand how to play the 'game' and therefore have the potential to gain the quickest and the greatest profit from the experience (Bourdieu, 1992). They are a 'fish in water' that 'does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127).

Within this framework, we can see that an institution that is embedded within middle-class norms could fail to recognize the value of the social and cultural working-class capitals. Rather than liberating and enhancing the worth of a working-class student this lack of recognition can bring them into conflict with what university represents, thereby influencing their view of how they fit into higher education (Archer, Hollingworth & Halsall, 2007). This misrecognition of the value of working-class capitals can result in alienation from or rejection of the system and acts of self-validation. Performative attempts to valorize identity through working-class style and taste can be a purposeful demonstration against the middle-class values that are encountered as being 'not being for the likes of us' (Reay, 2001; Archer, Hollingworth

& Halsall, 2007). Burke (2012) provides a telling example of how institutionally embedded misrecognition directly impacts undergraduate admissions. An observational study of an undergraduate art and design course admissions processes revealed that applicants from traditionally under-represented groups, in this instance ethnic and socio-economic class, were immediately excluded, marginalized and misrecognized. The symbolic capitals, particularly in terms of artistic taste and personal appearance that they brought to their interviews were not recognized as legitimate forms of artistic integrity by the interviewees/institution (Burke, 2012).

These examples demonstrate how despite discourses of social justice through fairer access, the inherent white, middle-class characteristics endure within the system of higher education. They also suggest that the role of higher education in terms of improving opportunities for social mobility may be more difficult to achieve than simply making university accessible. Perceptions of value in undergraduate higher education are inextricably tied to the maintenance of cultural-norms that are defined and performed by the middle and upper-classes, norms that other groups may encounter as alien, but that have to be adapted to in order to get on. The studies that I will draw upon for the rest of this chapter demonstrate the way in which I believe that despite attempts by institutions to widen participation in university, inequalities are still deeply embedded within higher education that affect the value individuals place on interacting with it. They illustrate the differences that lie *between* and *within* (inter- and intra- differences) the habituses of different institutions or social groups (Reay, David & Ball, 2005) and provide a context of principles against which the Mass Observation Panel's responses can be read.

Hierarchy and difference within the system

Perhaps one of the most evident differences is the inter-institutional hierarchy that exists within the UK's university sector. Within the UK, certain universities predominate in terms of reputation and tradition meaning the kudos of attending Oxford or Cambridge can outweigh the benefits of better course provision at a newer, post-1992 or MillionPlus (Association for Modern Universities) institution. The endurance of a university system that gives older universities the advantage of

‘resources, residence and the networks that led to the most influential jobs and to privilege’ (Silver, 2003, p.65) demonstrates the way that power reproduces itself and suggests how this hierarchy of institutions perpetuates. Institutional reputations are enforced by formal groupings such as the Russell Group, an association that identifies itself as comprising ‘the leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector’ (see: <http://russellgroup.ac.uk/>). Becoming a student at such a university confers a ‘symbolic logic of distinction’ upon them, the scarcity of which increases the symbolic capital that can be acquired through membership (Bourdieu, 2004).

The position of an institution in this conceived hierarchy therefore influences the value that it is perceived to hold and the impact that value will have on a person’s life course. It can also influence the type of student who applies, either as a result of self-selection or institutional selection (Hinton-Smith, 2012), thereby influencing the opportunities that students from different backgrounds may have to take advantage of those values. Savage and Wakeling (2015) discovered marked stratifications of employment outcomes according to which university was attended, remarking on the clear link between the entry to elite positions from certain high-ranking universities. An understanding of the implications of this was demonstrated by the working-class participants in Louise Archer’s 2003 study of perceptions of the value of going to university. Both potential applicants and non-participants recognized differential value between types of degree and institution and related it to concerns around the economic risk of going to university. Although for some the outlay in fees and loss of potential income whilst at university could be seen as an investment in higher potential salaries after graduating, others saw the significant increase of graduates in the job market as increasing the risk of not getting a good job. A degree alone was no longer enough to secure the employment that would justify the financial risk of going to university (Archer, 2003).

The social values of going to university can also polarize under-represented groups, the intra-differences that can exist within social groups. For some working-class applicants

it is an opportunity to 'better' themselves by 'leaving disparaged, deficit class identities and achieving an idealized 'middle-class' lifestyle' (Archer, 2003,p.126), upholding the dominant social mobility discourses. For others, the sense of misfit that they anticipate they would experience writes off even the consideration of going onto higher education (Reay, David & Ball, 2005). Students from lower socio-economic classes may therefore self-select out of applying to elite institutions, preferring institutions that make them feel less like a 'fish out of water'.

The experience of students at university is important in understanding the value that they hold in higher education. Motivations of attending and the way that an individual experiences university form and are formed by identity. How individuals deal with both academic and social situations at university will influence the value they gain from participating. From studies reviewed within my Critical Analytical Study (see in particular Crozier et al, 2008; Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2010; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009, 2010) and the responses to Mass Observation, I have been able to recognize individual reactions to the environments they encounter when they go to university as adoption, adaption or rejection. For some it is the desire to escape from their background whilst for others it is the opportunity to attain a form of social transformation. Finally, some working-class participants choose to 'cope with participation by attempting to come out untouched and unchanged by HE culture' (Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p.179), taking advantage of any economic benefits of being a graduate but retaining a strong sense of their class identity.

For those working-class students that seek the 'idealised middle-class lifestyle' (Archer, 2003) this may be the opportunity to acquire those capitals that can make it so, through a 'labour of inculcation and assimilation' (Bourdieu, 2004, p.15). A working-class student entering a traditional or elite university may finally see the coming together of their academic identity 'without being ridiculed as odd which has been their experience at comprehensive school' (Crozier et al, 2008, p.174). It may even give them the opportunity to escape their background by deliberately making choices about friendships and activities that contrast with their background (Stuart, 2012). Others may encounter it as a 'field of struggles' in which working-class aspirations to

become 'legitimate' may struggle with middle-class hegemony (Loveday, 2015). Alternatively, some may enjoy the academic opportunities of university, but feel out of place in the social milieu of more elite universities, choosing to draw a boundary between themselves and the middle-class institution (Crozier, et al, 2008; Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Finally, there are those that reject it altogether through refusing to participate. While the majority of middle-class students may be expected to be 'fish in water' I have found examples in Mass Observation of students who struggled to assimilate, or even consciously chose to reject aspects of the middle-class lifestyle in which they were brought up (see Chapter 3, Sarah's life story).

Summary

This chapter has discussed how perceptions of value in higher education can vary and be affected by inter and intra differences of habitus. Differential value is based on more than an institution's quality of teaching or an individual's capability of achieving the appropriate grades. Values are embedded, and need to be recognized, within the subtle differences that are simultaneously produced and perpetuated by enduring inequalities. This issue becomes even more pertinent as we witness the increasing financial cost of going to university that risks placing it outside of the reach of students from lower socio-economic groups. Whilst the development of the sector through the changes in policies and programmes outlined in this chapter may be hailed as an attempt to render this more affordable, affordability is a far more complex concept that needs to take into account fairness and the creation of an equal playing field for all classes.

It has also problematized the notion of social mobility and higher education. The examples of research that I have referenced suggest that political discourse uses a one-size-fits-all model of social mobility that is based on assumptions of universal aspirations towards white middle-class values. Although politicians may use social mobility as a guiding principle to help 'the talented to the top', an alternative interpretation could be, 'equality is dead; long live sharp elbows' (Todd, 2017). This all suggests that a more nuanced understanding is required of how the value of going to university is perceived, and how in turn this might influence or challenge definitions of

social mobility. The next part of this thesis will concentrate on Mass Observation responses, drawing on the experiences and opinions of the Panel of Observers to understand a little more of how the value of higher education is recognized and affected by the complexity of real lives.

Chapter 3: Engaging with Mass Observation- Spring 2016 Mass Observation Directive on higher education

Having established the conceptual and contextual standpoints of my study, the following two chapters of this thesis will concentrate on my empirical research using the Mass Observation Archive. My research comprises of two elements with the objective of exploiting the opportunities of using the breadth and depth of data offered by Mass Observation. I began by drawing on a single theme across a breadth of 137 responses to create a landscape of opinion and perceptions on the value of higher education and then followed this by drilling down into the depth of a sample of four individual lives to give a deeper and more substantial insight. These two routes into using the qualitative data collected allowed me to ‘map the woods’ and ‘chop the trees’ (Silverman, 2013). ‘Mapping the woods’ relies on finding key passages in texts to highlight relevant and repeated points as a ‘scatter-gun approach of simply quoting favourable sentences’ (Silverman, 2013, p.63) that can provide highlights of what substantive phenomena are being revealed. ‘Chopping the trees’ takes a more detailed approach, that looks at the shifting relations and interactions within the texts to produce a ‘fine grained, sequential analysis’ (Silverman, 2013, p.62). These two definitions provide an excellent illustration of my own approach to analyzing Mass Observation data in this study. I initially used the 137 responses to the Spring 2016 Directive to ‘map the woods’ and reveal a landscape of phenomena as experienced and understood by the Panel of Observers. I then was able to ‘chop’ into selected trees in the form of four individual panelists to drill into the depth of the writing across their responses to different Directives to develop a more fine-grained understanding of their interactions with higher education.

This chapter will begin by discussing how the data was gathered with consideration of the methodological and ethical issues that arise when using Mass Observation. It will then map the landscape by analyzing the Spring 2016 Directive and then go on to undertake the in-depth study of four Observers.

Constructing the Spring 2016 Directive

This study has taken a two-pronged approach to analyzing the data available in Mass Observation by starting with a 'broad brush' of qualitative data gathered from a large group. This large amount of qualitative data gained from the mass of Observers facilitated my in-depth study of four individuals by suggesting themes to explore in further detail. I had originally intended to draw on two Directives for my first stage analysis, the first having been issued in 2004 and entitled 'Going to University' and the second being the one that I commissioned in 2016 on 'Higher Education'. The purpose of commissioning the second Directive was to gauge changes in opinion as a result of the significant changes in discourses around widening participation in higher education and funding policy over the twelve-year period. In reality, the data available was too large for the scope of this thesis in terms of analysis. I also found that the questions asked and responses given in 2004 focused largely on the introduction of the 'top up fee' for undergraduate courses, meaning that the responses were largely related to the financial value of a degree to the exclusion of social or cultural benefits. Instead I used the responses to the 2004 Directive to help me formulate the kind of questions that Observers were most likely to respond to, and to pick up themes that I could look out for in the 2016 responses.

The 2016 Spring Directive on higher education was designed in collaboration with Mass Observation staff and based on my extensive experience of managing the Mass Observation Archive. Although I was working with close colleagues who I manage in a professional capacity, on this occasion I undertook the role of collaborative researcher. This afforded staff a unique insight into the entire lifecycle of using a Directive by allowing them to view the whole process from point of commission to end of research. Rather than being a critical friend, I could become a critical insider, or a not-so-secret shopper.

Despite the benefits that this role afforded, it also produced a slight ethical tension in that my position could allow me to access information not normally made available to researchers. I therefore undertook to only use tools available to all other researchers in the form of an open access and anonymized database of Mass Observers available

at <http://database.massobs.org.uk/>. As detailed in my ethical clearance (see Appendix C), all Mass Observers are assigned a unique alpha-numeric code by the Archive staff, and it is this that researchers are able to use to track other writing by the same Observer. I considered the use of Mass Observation data as low risk, in part due to the anonymization system that it uses, but also due to the consent that volunteer participation carries. Each of the Mass Observers is aware that their writing will be accessed by researchers in projects for which the Observers will not always know the objectives of. They are therefore able to write as little or as much about their lives, being in complete control of how much they choose to reveal to the researcher.

Further information on these systems, is available in Appendix C but I also want to take the opportunity to briefly reflect on a tension that I experienced in the relationship between researcher and researched whilst undertaking the in-depth studies of four Mass Observers. As with other empirical studies, I experienced a shift from the research participant initially holding the power through their narration to myself as I layered my own interpretation and assumptions about their lives onto their narrative. Despite my use of legitimate disciplinary methodologies and theoretical lenses, I experienced a sense of unease in being unable to return to the subjects to check, or indeed account for my interpretation of their lives. I am aware that this is not an uncommon issue in social science research and as such have looked to methods or self-reflexivity utilized by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) that recognizes the contribution their own experience and knowledge makes to their interpretations of the lives of others.

Through my years of working with Mass Observation I have a deep understanding of how the Archive needs to translate researchers' questions into Mass Observation questions, but prior to undertaking the process as a researcher myself, I had not appreciated the affect that this translation would have on my thinking and questions. Likewise, despite having told researchers for many years that they might have to allow the data to form their questions rather than the other way around, it was not until I was faced with this situation for myself that I could fully understand the frustrations and opportunities that this would afford. Before looking at the responses themselves, I

want to spend some time examining the process and unpicking how this affected my research.

Relationships of co-production

The production of qualitative data is a process of co-construction between researcher and researched that requires the active and willing participation of researched subjects to respond to the position of the researcher (Mason, 2002). Qualitative methodologies therefore require the researcher to take their own position into account as the 'process of knowing and designating the other is always made through a reference to the self' (Skeggs, 1997, p.19). The longitudinal research on working class women that Skeggs undertook over a twelve-year period illustrated how changes in her own life as well as the lives of those she was studying shifted their relationships *and* her perceptions. These changes shaped the data and caused her research methodologies to evolve as the twelve-year period moved on. The creation of qualitative data should therefore be regarded as a form of collaboration between researcher and subject, sometimes with a blurring of the two roles as the researcher turns the focus on themselves through the practice of reflexivity.

It is the success of such collaboration that is fundamental to the use of Mass Observation as it becomes a third element in the researcher-researched relationship. This three-way relationship is often described in the context of a researcher collaborating with Mass Observation to commission a Directive in their particular research interest which is also relevant to other researchers who may use data from Directives previously commissioned. Mass Observation terms its work with researchers to devise Directive questions as 'collaboration', and collaboration lies at the heart of Mass Observation's ability to collect data. It collaborates with its researchers (Directive Commissioners) to devise the questionnaires; it collaborates with its writers to elicit responses to those questionnaires. It relies on the Panel of writers to contribute their time and writing, whilst the researcher relies on Mass Observation to act as the data collector and intermediary between themselves and the Panel. A further line of connection flows between the researcher and the writers as each negotiates with each

other via Mass Observation, completing a triangle of negotiated relationships (Kramer, 2014; Shaw 1998).

Composing the Directive

The most obvious line of negotiation lies with Mass Observation negotiating the relationship between the writers and the researcher, particularly in the context of commissioning a Directive. As a researcher approaches the Archive with a suggestion of a theme that pertains to their research, staff will ascertain whether the subject is appropriate, that is to say, whether it is not too similar to a recent subject. They will then take the researcher's questions and convert them into Mass Observation's own style of colloquial text that avoids closed questions (Sheridan, Street and Bloome, 2000). My experience echoed that of Kramer (2014) who reflects that rather than being able to use pre-formulated questions that related directly to her own research questions on family history, Mass Observation worked with her to co-write questions that would protect the established characteristics of these relationships and be broad enough to allow all Mass Observers to relate to the topic in some way even if they had no interest in family history. Although my original research questions focused on the experiences of those who had attended university, in designing the questions I was aware that I needed to ensure the theme could be relevant to all Panel members, even if they had little knowledge or experience of HE. Even the wording of questions had to be carefully considered, for example, I had originally asked what influenced people's choices as to whether to go to university or not. Academic colleagues pointed out that some Mass Observers may not have had any choice in the matter and therefore I should reconsider the use of the word 'choice' itself. This contributed to the reformulation of my own research questions in that I realized the potential Mass Observation could afford me in including the perceptions of non-participants in higher education alongside those who have participated.

Having worked with staff to translate my research questions into a Mass Observation Directive, the Directive was sent out to 418 panel members in April 2016 (see Appendix A). The Directive was formed of three parts, with Mass Observers being asked to respond to questions on Social Mobility, Higher Education and the EU

Referendum that was due to take place in June 2016. The proximity of social mobility to my own research interests initially caused me some concern in terms of over-doing the subject of social class with the Mass Observers in the first theme meaning they would be less likely to respond to the second. This was resolved by my working with the researchers commissioning the social mobility questions as we commented in turn on each other's questions, making suggestions and allowing us to see how we could draw on each other's questions for our own needs. For example, the questions on social mobility provided the Mass Observers with the opportunity to look back on the class status of their parents and grandparents and to consider where, if anywhere, mobility had taken place and why these changes may have taken place.

Responses to Directives can continue to be submitted for some months after they have been issued, and so I decided to create a cut-off date, responses received after which date would not form part of my overall analysis.

Construction of sample

Of the 418 members of the Mass Observation Panel, 148 received the Directive by post and 270 by email. By the point of analysis in July 2016, 137 responses had been received and it was on these responses that I concentrated my analysis. Fig. 2 provides statistical information on the demographics of the Mass Observers who responded in comparison to the whole Panel.

Fig. 2

	Whole panel Spring 2016	Responses received Spring 2016
Female	253	88
Male	165	40
Gender not given	6	6
Birth cohort:		
1920s	12	3
1930s	35	19
1940s	51	25
1950s	48	23

1960s	66	20
1970s	96	23
1980s	98	12
1990s	40	4

Of the 137 Mass Observers, 85 had participated in some form of higher education, 50 had not and two did not state either way (see Fig.3). Even within this small sample, a trend emerged showing an almost equal number of participants and non-participants until the 1960s followed by a large swing to a majority of participants from the 1970s onwards reflecting the trends towards the increasing availability of access to HE that are outlined in Chapter 2.

Fig. 3

Birth cohort	Participated in HE	Did not participate in HE
1920s	1	2
1930s	8	11
1940s	13	12
1950s	14	10
1960s	11	9
1970s	19	4
1980s	11	1
1990s	4	0
DOB not given	5	3

How they responded

Before going on to analyze the responses themselves, I would like to spend some time reflecting on the nature of the Mass Observers' writing. Issues of representation have been covered earlier in this thesis (see p.12) and inevitably these are highlighted within the writing: the responses are highly literate, generally well written and the

writers appear to take pleasure in the act of composing and writing their responses. Most responses demonstrate a high awareness of general and current affairs and the writers are confident to give their opinions and, on the whole, to relate their experiences with a candid and open expression. The writers contributed a combination of personal experience and social commentary, reflecting the nature of the questions in the Directive that asked them for comment on contemporary values of higher education as well as asking them to relate personal experiences where possible.

On the whole, although their responses were framed by the questions, as Kramer (2014) also notes from her own experiences of designing a Directive, the writers appear to have used the questions as prompts rather than answering a question directly. For the researcher, this means that responses often need to be unpicked to apply them to specified research questions, whilst some questions may go unanswered altogether. Unlike face-to-face semi-structured interviews, there is no opportunity to ask for clarification or revisit the question. However the freedom of response that a Mass Observation respondent is allowed means that research 'golden nuggets' can be revealed through off-topic 'autobiographical stream-of-consciousness riffs and tangents' (Lindsey and Bulloch, 2014, p.9). My own reading of the responses resulted in several new themes or aspects of the topic that I had not considered. These included the relationship of disability and education, perceptions of motherhood and being a graduate and the comparative experiences of mature students in higher education. These issues and others, contributed to the 'thick description' of my understanding of the topic from the multifarious standpoints of the Mass Observers.

Reading through the responses, I was conscious of the different ways in which individual writers approached the task of responding. I sensed that their motivation for participating in Mass Observation was reflected in the way in which they approached the composition of their response. For an Observer, writing for Mass Observation could be seen as writing for a black hole however, the writers demonstrate a faith in the project and a relationship with the Archive that allows them to be connected with others as well as being representative of society (Shaw, 1998). The volunteer writers may have many different reasons for participating, either as a form of social

consciousness, a need to be part of a larger movement, a validation of their opinions, for posterity or as a form of therapeutic practice (Summerfield, 1984; Pollen, 2014). Previous studies of Mass Observation writers and their writing (Pollen, 2014; Sheridan, 1993; Shaw, 1998) identify a range of approaches: some writers wish to contribute to knowledge for contemporary research, whilst others desire to set down a record of the everyday for the future historians. Pollen (2014) identifies a strand of writers who claim to write without any regard to the reader, citing the therapeutic opportunity afforded by MO to express oneself freely in ways that may not be possible elsewhere. For those that do write with their reader in mind, the position of MO as a longstanding project situated in an academic institution is cited as an important factor in providing validation for both their writing and their opinions (Pollen, 2014). These different approaches mean that my role as researcher could be positioned in different ways according to what motivates each individual writer. Given the number of writers involved this would be difficult to take into account when examining the Directive as a whole and I have therefore reserved consideration of these motivations for the in-depth study of four Observers.

Reading through all of the responses I was struck by an unexpected trend in how people responded according to the length of time they had participated in the Mass Observation Project. I sensed that writers who had contributed for at least 15 years tended to write less self-consciously, almost in a habitual pattern of responding to a Directive. Responses often felt more immediate and less considered, and in many instances tended to be shorter. Discussion with Archive staff confirmed this tendency and suggested that many of those who have participated for over 20 years were now older people, many of whom were over 80. Some of these writers reported that they found the act of writing/typing increasingly difficult, whilst others commented on the fact their lives no longer brought them into contact with as many people and as such they felt they had less to contribute on subjects they felt relevant to younger people. Archive staff also suggested that for some long-term Mass Observers, there was a sense of having 'done this all before', and perhaps they had an expectation that researchers would see the depth in their whole body of work rather than a detailed

response to a single directive. This was by no means a universal trend, with some older, long-term writers contributing in-depth responses to this specific Directive which did have implications on my decision process when choosing individual writers to look at in more depth. I will expand upon this later in this chapter when looking at methods of selection.

I finally want to make a brief reference to Mass Observation's policy of anonymity that affords its writers the opportunity to write openly and subjectively, a factor reinforced by its remote modes of communication via post and email (Sheridan 1993). Whilst this is invariably a useful tool for subjects of a more intimate nature that have been covered such as close relationships, sex or domestic violence, I sensed that it did not have a significant impact on responses to this particular Directive. Although some of the responses did reveal very personal aspects of lives, including troubled relationships or sexual and political identities, the questions did not explicitly seek these aspects and I did not feel that the narratives would have been any less revealing had people been identifiable or indeed if the questions had been undertaken in a face-to-face interview.

Method of analysis: 'mapping the woods'

In order to map out the landscape from the writing across the Spring 2016 Directive, I chose a method of analysis that would complement my social constructivist stance, ensuring the data was allowed to reveal its phenomena rather than subjecting it to the imposition of pre-assumed themes (Silverman, 2011; Kvale, 1996). In light of this, I adopted elements of constructivist grounded theory that recognized the data I was reading as being temporally, spatially and socially located whilst simultaneously being aware of my own interpretations being informed by my experiences, understandings and observations of the world around me (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011). With this in mind, a coding method was required that would enable the texts to reveal themes, so that the emergence of repeated themes could allow connections to be made across transcripts, enabling the individual stories to blend into a collective one (Richards, 2005; Merrill & West, 2009).

I therefore drew on Goodson's (2013) method of 'bathing in the data', reading and re-reading responses to immerse myself in the narratives from which I began to generate

initial codes or topics that were collated into general themes (Goodson, 2013; Rapley, 2011). This thematic analysis using topic and analytical coding techniques enabled me to distinguish the ways in which the Observers construct their perceptions and describe their experiences of higher education, and in turn, how these are assigned value. I was therefore able to identify dominant themes that were represented across the Panel of Observers that might reveal demographic or temporal patterns amongst the narratives that responded to changes in discourse over the last decades. These narratives became typifications of *what* values might be perceived by individuals, providing a basis for the analysis of four individual life stories that would illustrate *why* and *how* these perceptions were created.

I began by reading through the 137 responses that had been received by the cut-off date for my research purposes. I compiled a spread sheet of all Observers who had responded to the Directive, inputting demographic data drawn from the Mass Observers Database (<http://massobs.geodata.soton.ac.uk/>), and adding in a column that defined whether they had attended university or not. For the purposes of this research, I defined participating in higher education as having attended either university or polytechnic in order to attain a traditional Bachelor's degree. I did not include those who had undertaken foundation courses but did include those who had attended Teacher Training College as experiences were akin to what would become degree level courses.

I made an initial read-through of each of the responses to see if any patterns or generalized themes were evident that would contribute to my research questions, noting themes and copy and pasting relevant quotes to support these themes against each individual's number (see Appendix B for example). I chose to undertake this process manually, rejecting the opportunity to use computer-generated coding equipment such as MAXQDA for two reasons. The first is the practical requirement for the data to be transcribed in order for it to be processed for analysis by a computer programme. Although increasing numbers of responses are being sent into the Archive electronically, those for the earlier Directives are largely hand or type written, having been sent to the Archive in hardcopy. It was not within the time allowances of my

thesis to transcribe these responses and, whilst I could limit my study to only those that could be read mechanically, limiting the data in this way did not fit with my research ethos. The second reason for rejecting such mechanisms related to the potential to reduce complex and nuanced uses of language to computer-generated codes. The reductive nature of coding can deny the opportunity to recognize the ‘messiness’ of people’s lives, messiness that is only revealed by reading into the implicit details within responses (Plummer, 2001; Pollen, 2013).

Reading and re-reading the responses with my initial research questions in mind and with a view to any further research questions that may be generated, I identified four distinct strands under which various topics were falling:

- The meaning and value of higher education
- How Observers made choices in relation to higher education and what affected these choices
- What experience Observers had of higher education
- Perceptions of the difference going or not going to university may have made to their life

Against each strand, I listed relevant extracts from the responses (see Appendix B for a sample). This left me with an extensive set of data extracts to which I applied a modified version of Kvale’s (1996) condensation technique that allowed me to encapsulate each extract into a phrase that could then be given a code, such as ‘difference to life’. These codes allowed the extracts to be grouped with each other and patterns relevant to my research began to emerge. The Directive gathered material that could be used beyond the scope of this thesis that concentrates on perceptions of value and areas that merit further research in the future. Of particular interest to me were:

- How choices were made in relation to higher education and how these were informed or influenced;
- The differences in the experiences and effects of higher education between students entering university in their late teens and those who access in

alternative ways, either as mature students, distance learners or through Access to Education courses;

- The changing expectations of female graduates through the generations, including the impact of motherhood.

For the purposes of this thesis however, my analysis will concentrate on the value of higher education amongst the Mass Observers. To do so I have gathered information from the responses to the overt question on value as well as from the experiences that the Observers have narrated. The following section will outline some of the major themes that emerged from the Directive responses, illustrating these themes with quotes from the Observers' narratives and deciphering what perceptions are held on the meaning and value of higher education.

Findings

The in-depth nature of Mass Observation responses provides the opportunity to unpick meanings in more detail and across a range of people from different backgrounds and with different life experiences to create a broad landscape of opinion. This range enabled me to encompass the opinions of graduates and non-graduates alongside each other to compare how higher education was valued. The Directive questionnaire was constructed to allow both participants and non-participants the opportunity to tell their experiences as well as providing questions that would be common to the experiences of both groups. I wanted to understand how value was constructed and perceived and whether this is affected by experience or consumption of the discourses around the field. I wanted to understand if temporal changes were evident across the generational range of Mass Observers or were responses seated in contemporary discourse. Unlike another similar project undertaken by Stuart (2012) that looked at the longitudinal effects of higher education on first-generation students now working in the university sector, the majority of Mass Observers in my sample had little if any current connection with higher education. Their opinions of contemporary higher education would therefore be more likely a reaction to discourse, policy and the experiences of current students as much as their own experiences.

Having sifted through the data produced in the Mass Observation Spring 2016 Directive on higher education, I began to draw parallels between the opinions and experiences narrated by the Observers and the discussions around research studies that I outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Of interest to me was how these parallels existed despite the apparent disparity between the backgrounds of the Mass Observers and many of the subjects of these other studies. Many of these studies tend to concentrate on how marginalized groups experience higher education (Archer, 2003b & 2007; Burke, 2002), with work with 'traditional' groups being undertaken to demonstrate the contrast of experience rather than to understand it for itself (Crozier et al, 2008). Using responses from Mass Observation gave me the opportunity to look at such a group for what they could tell me about themselves rather than how they contrasted with those from marginalized groups. On my first reading of the responses, the complex issues of misrecognition and 'othering' that were central to other studies (Burke, 2002, 2013) were not particularly evident. However, as I immersed myself further into the data by re-reading the responses and re-visiting the emergent themes, I began to recognize examples of how various forms of misrecognition were experienced by Observers but not always in ways that would be expected.

Before looking at the Spring 2016 Directives in more detail I want to make some general observations. Mass Observation responses defined the value of higher education in two distinct ways, taking a macro view of the field as a whole and its impact on society at large and then a micro view of the value to the individual. As I read through the responses I gained a sense of external and internal values, tangible effects and intangible developments. The external values featured judgments on policies of expansion and the effects of having more graduates and more award-bearing institutions in society, whilst they were more likely to draw upon their own observations and experiences when judging what they perceived as the quality of different courses and institutions.

On the whole, the Panel valued higher education but they made significant criticisms of the dominant discourses around the benefits of broadening access to university education. Observers only referenced Government policy explicitly on a few occasions,

mainly in relation to the pledge to raise student numbers to 50 percent of young people made by the Labour Government in 2000, but the effect of increasing participation was considered throughout many of the responses. Whilst contemporary policies of expansion came under particular criticism, I was surprised at how little reference was made to the positive aspects that such changes were supposed to enact, for example the affordance of social justice. Few Observers made any direct reference to arguments on the transformational opportunities or potential for social mobility although several did observe how their fortunes had been or would have been different if they had gone to university.

The similarity of viewpoints that cut across the generations was also unexpected. Whilst I had expected that older Mass Observers may perceive less value in contemporary education, this view was actually reflected by members of each generation leading me to suspect that values were far more embedded within class habitus than generational norms. One of the most striking generational differences lay in the fundamental decisions around going to university. Many of the older generations, particularly women in their 60s, 70s and 80s commented on how going to university was not common in their generations, including one retired shop manager who stated that 'Being born at the start of 1930, going to university was never mentioned. Our only thoughts then were to reach 14 and go to work for money' (H260). In contrast, students going to university from the 1980s onwards were increasingly likely to state that it was taken for granted that they would apply regardless of their social background. This included a 42-year-old NHS worker who wrote, 'although no one in my family had been to university, I'd always thought of myself as clever and it never occurred to me that I wouldn't [go]' (D5157). As well as reflecting the growing number of places available at university in recent years, this may suggest a gradual shift in normative expectations, but as some of the in-depth vignettes will illustrate in Chapter 4, even if the rules are changed to encourage an individual to enter the field, their habitus may still limit the advantage they can gain from the experience (Savage, 2000). Finally, despite having a significantly different demographic profile to the young working-class participants in Archer's work (2003;

2007), the Mass Observers shared many of the concerns expressed in the earlier studies.

I will begin to relate my findings by focusing on the macro view of the value of university relating to the broader social issues and values. Within the narratives there was a tendency to consider the state of contemporary higher education along four main themes: academic ability of students; quality of courses; quality of institutions and finally, effects of increasing numbers of graduates on the job market.

I will then move onto the micro view that takes into account the values that are perceived at the level of the individual. It is these observations in particular that provide the landscape of themes against which the in-depth vignettes in Chapter 4 will be set within.

The state of higher education: academic ability

Whilst Observers welcomed the opportunity for all who were *capable* of going to university to do so regardless of background, many queried the logic of the aforementioned Labour Government pledge that 50 percent of young people would participate in higher education, largely based in a belief that this was a far higher proportion than those that were academically able. An 85-year-old chemistry graduate felt that the distribution of intelligence showed that a much smaller percentage than 50 percent had the capacity to benefit from HE, meaning that ‘social engineering motivated by party politics’ had ‘debased the currency’ (M1395). Another octogenarian echoed her view by stating that, ‘common sense understanding of the nature and distribution of intelligence [means] we must have large numbers of people at university who are just not suited for advance academic work’ (B2710). Because of this increase in student numbers, many Observers perceived a devaluation in the quality of standards required to enter university in order to accommodate a broader range of student ability. This view was encapsulated by a retired civil servant who believed that ‘A’ Levels were far more rigorous and challenging when she was young leading her to wonder how much contemporary student work is original and how much lifted from the internet (F3409). As these rather cynical views were normally presented as opinion and no personal evidence was provided, I have assumed that the

vast majority of opinions had been formed through repeated media coverage relating to exam standards over the last few years. Articles in the popular press have contributed to diminishing public confidence in the system, for example stories of the mismatch in Maths standards between 'A' Level and degree (Willis and Paton in *The Telegraph*, 2009); exam board confusions (Adams in *The Guardian*, 2015) and criticism against dropping subjects such as Art History and Statistics from the national curriculum (Weale, 2016).

One Observer did provide evidence based on his own experiences of being an administrator in a university that had transitioned from a polytechnic in the 1990s, writing that he and his colleagues saw,

...a significant amount of students who were not particularly academic and had either drifted or been pushed into higher education by aspirational parents; there were no fires of intellectual curiosity burning under them' (B3227).

A link with problems in university retention was made by a retired teacher who expressed concerns about undergraduates being recruited who were not able to cope with the standards expected and would therefore drop out of their studies too soon. (F3641).

Some Observers drew on their own experiences in their working lives to comment more generally on the quality of graduates, including a 56-year-old unemployed administrator who recalled,

... a young woman employed on the basis that she had a degree in Latin. One of the old hands on being informed of this replied 'what f-----g use is that!' I have to say that on seeing reports and statements she had prepared I think she would have used her university education better in learning to communicate in English. (F5629)

As a non-graduate, he expressed resentment towards graduates such as this young woman, who were employed directly from university into supervisory positions. He observed that such positions would previously have been filled through the promotion of individuals who gradually built up experience on the job (F5629).

The idea that ‘opportunity for all is good, but the right opportunity’ (R2144, 80, retired teacher) was expressed repeatedly across the generations represented in the Panel. Experiences of low self-esteem in life as a result of being considered ‘too dull and stupid’ to go to university in the 1960s, led one Observer to state that,

...everyone should be valued for the contribution he can make to society [...] I’ve often thought that if everyone had a Degree, who would want to empty your dustbin, clean the public toilets or do other ‘menial jobs’ without which society cannot function?’ (S5772)

Similarly, a retired teacher felt that there was too much contemporary concentration on going to university, ‘What would we be without builders and plumbers etc. and why do you need a degree to be a nurse?’ (P1009). Instead, she and many other Observers commented on the benefits of apprenticeship schemes, which might be more appropriate for some students. One graduate of the 1980s, a former financial strategist turned freelance researcher, felt that an apprenticeship would be more suitable for many young people today rather than ‘saddling themselves with large student loans’ leaving more resources available for ‘the more academically gifted’ and universities freer to pursue research rather than focus on teaching to accommodate the range of abilities (G4373).

Many Observers perceived a depreciation in the quality of degree courses and the institutions that provided them, particularly in relation to the need for institutions to accommodate a wider range of student abilities. The next two parts of this chapter will concentrate on these aspects.

The state of higher education: Courses

There was a perception aired across the Panel that university degrees had been altered in order to accommodate the wider range of student ability that many Observers felt came with expanding numbers. The introduction of courses described by some of the Panel as non-traditional or ‘soft-option’ degree subjects came under particular criticism when compared to ‘traditional’ subjects such as History or English. A retired library assistant felt that,

...some of the subjects that they are studying are not the greatly academic subjects that were previously studied at this level. I don’t think some of these

degrees are considered as 'valuable' as the more rigorous academic ones' (H2639)

This sentiment was expressed by graduates and non-graduates across the generations represented in the Panel, including current students. Media degrees were often presented as an example of a 'soft subject' alongside others such as childcare, beauty and sports studies, all of which received criticism from Observers. One retired 66-year-old non-graduate wrote that 'a degree can be obtained in almost any subject from hairdressing and beauty therapy to the music of the Beatles' (S5772), whilst a retired teacher and English graduate described them as 'worthless degrees being peddled' in order to delay unemployment statistics by a few years (M3412). My initial reaction to the tenor of these responses was to understand them in the context of nostalgia, a rose-tinted view of past standards of education, however even younger members of the Panel were critical of many contemporary subjects. One of the youngest Mass Observers, a 22-year-old undergraduate student commented that 'there are some degrees that it would probably be more beneficial to go straight to employment and work one's way up' citing TV production or fashion photography as examples (M5770).

The balance of work experience versus a degree education was particularly commented on by Observers in relation to vocational professions. The requirement of a degree to undertake jobs such as nursing and policing raised anger amongst Observers who perceived it as replacing the on-the-job training that was traditionally associated with these roles. The need for a degree in nursing studies was seen as detrimental to the profession with one retired journalist believing that it had a direct effect on patient care as 'nurses with degrees are reported as not reckoning it's their job to feed patients or deal with bedpans.' (W633). A 69-year-old retired banker felt that the requirement for a degree meant 'the true carers are being barred, and a generation of paper pushing, career minded administrators are being created' (S3035).

The generational span of Mass Observation was able to demonstrate that differential value in subjects has in fact existed for decades. M1395, a retired research chemist described her father's reaction when her sister expressed a wish to study modern languages at university in the late 1940s. He overturned her choice in favour of a 'hard science' degree stating that the former could be done in her 'spare time'. Several other

Observers from this generation also described how they were pushed towards teacher training courses rather than university degree subjects such as History or languages, largely to ensure that they would gain suitable employment in return for their investment (P1009; W729). Many of the older Observers wrote about newer subjects with an element of suspicion in that they challenged the acceptable norms of previous generations.

As with the responses on the worth of a degree, I found it difficult to find any reason at the root of these opinions as no Observer referenced any direct experiences that may have influenced their opinion. Archer's studies do not reference a value differentiation between subjects, focusing instead on institutional value (Archer, 2003b; 2007). It may have been beyond the scope of her study, but could also indicate attitudinal differences between socio-economic and/or ethnic groups; a comparison between Archer's ethnically diverse working-class participants as opposed to the predominantly white and middle-class (socially if not always economically) Mass Observation panel.

Given that few in the Panel were able to cite direct experience to evidence the negativity with which less traditional courses were viewed, many of the attitudes expressed appeared to reflect popular and political discourse delivered through media channels. Recent political discourse around education has reinforced the perception that the rigor of education needs to be improved with changes to the national curriculum being introduced to provide a 'stock' of knowledge in traditional subjects, and as such has permeated much media debate and discussion. A brief search of newspaper archives demonstrates the persistence of discourses that denigrate the 'new', often composed by the established educational elite. An article from the *Guardian* in 2010 demonstrates this: the then Headmaster of the elite Harrow School, Barnaby Lenon, criticized the effect 'worthless' qualifications would give students from deprived backgrounds, claiming that state schools risk producing students like 'those girls in the first round of the X Factor'. He stated that these schools were short-changing pupils by leading them to believe that 'high grades in soft subjects' and going to any old university to read any subject were the route to prosperity'; in comparison subjects such as science and modern languages were deemed to be tougher subjects

(Williams, 2010). Lenon's statements provide an excellent example of how misrecognition serves to invalidate capitals; his identification of 'those girls' labelling them as an 'other' that goes against discourses of respectability, and pathologizing their working-class identity into a negative value (Skeggs, 1997).

The state of higher education: Institutions

One area in which the Mass Observers and the working-class participants in Archer's studies did agree was the perception of a differential value in higher education institutions. Both groups recognized a distinct hierarchy of institutions that placed Oxford and Cambridge at the top and more recently established universities lower down. The result was a perception that the value of a degree was directly linked to the placing of an institution within the hierarchy. Archer's participants recognized that employers were aware of this hierarchy through league tables and reputation meaning that going to a 'lower ranking institution would compromise the value of a degree' (Archer, 2003b, p.130). This opinion was shared by many of the Mass Observers, regardless of their generation, including one 20-year-old undergraduate who wrote, 'a degree from Oxford still holds far more weight in terms of its reputation and value, in my opinion' (W5345). This opinion was shared by a retired social worker who graduated from Leicester University in the early 1970s who felt that 'a degree in a soft subject from universities with poor reputations is probably worth very little' (T2004), whilst a 65-year-old market researcher referenced the value associated with Russell Group institutions, noting that 'it's no longer enough to have a degree, employers often rule out degrees from lesser colleges/universities in favour of graduates from the more traditional ones' (H5741). Statistical evidence reinforces many of these opinions, with evidence that elite universities, led by Oxford, Cambridge, LSE and Imperial College enable their alumni to enjoy greater economic security through higher salaried employment, and providing opportunities to enter elite positions in society (Wakeling & Savage, 2015).

Both the Mass Observers and Archer's participants remark on the relationship of this hierarchy to social class and social mobility suggesting a universal, cross-class recognition of the effect of institutional differences. Archer (2003b) drew on the work

of Reay based within the theory of Bourdieu, to identify a sense of deficit portrayed by some of her participants when discussing the quality of institutions, 'grounded within notions of what is acceptable for 'people like us'' (Archer 2003b, p.129). Elite institutions and those perceived to be higher up the hierarchy, often identified as 'leafy' campuses were seen as out of reach to working class students who instead were left with the options of,

...the 'sad', 'concrete' inner-city universities, without trees and catering for 'working-class' and minority ethnic student populations. (Archer, 2003, p.129)

The benefits of salary and social position afforded by attending 'elite' institutions were less likely to be available to these students, in turn affecting opportunities of social mobility that dominant discourses would suggest are made possible by attending university.

This theme was reflected within the Mass Observers' responses, suggesting that the notion of 'other' in relation to elite universities is not restricted to working class participants. One Observer describes how she felt pushed by her school to apply for an Oxbridge place in the late 1990s as it recognised the value of using student destinations as a way of maintaining its own league status (H5845). She resisted this pressure and applied to a 'redbrick' university instead feeling that, 'although I had the grades to get me into either [Oxford or Cambridge] university I knew I definitely did not want to study at either universities [sic] as I believed the kind of students who would be attending there would be a higher socio-economic class to me and we would have no common interests' (H5845). The reputational status of institutions appears to have an enduring influence across generations as reflected in the decisions Mass Observers made about their own higher education. Two Observers whose undergraduate experience was separated by nearly forty years, both described how their decisions were influenced by the status value of 'redbrick' universities in the 1970s and the 2010s, both successfully completing degrees at Manchester and Birmingham (B5702; B5725). Perceptions of value are tied into expressions of loyalty and pride in institutions, often framed in affectionate memories of friendship and activities. Observers who attended institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge and Durham described establishing life-long friendships and attending reunions; one Cambridge

graduate wrote of his ongoing consultative role in the alumni organization of his college. The kudos of attending a university was encapsulated by a retired teaching assistant who, perhaps with slight disingenuousness, took pride in the fact that having graduated from Wolverhampton Polytechnic in the 1970s, she was now able to claim that she was a university graduate following its conversion to a university in the early 1990s (S2207).

For many Mass Observers, the conversion of polytechnics in the early 1990s that had given S2207 so much pride was actually deemed to have had a detrimental effect on the sector as a whole. The rise in numbers of Higher Education Institutions as a result of the 1992 changes and subsequent expansions exacerbated the variation in value across the sector. Several explicitly referenced the conversion of polytechnics and colleges of further education into universities in 1992 as having a detrimental effect on the quality of degrees but also the removal of opportunities for those who benefited from the learning formats these types of institution had provided. This was observed by two Mass Observers who are currently working at different UK universities who agreed that polytechnics had provided alternative but valid routes of tertiary education that suited different types of learner; although the changes in 1992 democratized higher education, they also meant universities had to cater for an even broader range of learners, often to the detriment of the value of the degree and the learner experience (R5682; S4002). A 76-year-old housewife valued higher education greatly despite not having wanted to go to university herself, feeling that polytechnics had worked well for many as a 'halfway stage of providing more education than school but less than a university' (R1025). She believed that polytechnics had not changed the level of education they provided upon their conversion to universities, resulting in degrees being awarded for lower standards of work and thereby further exacerbating the differential value of a degree according to which institution was attended. Conversely, some believed that pre-1992 universities themselves had had to lower their standards in order to accommodate a wider range of learner abilities as more and more students needed to be catered for (S4002). The overall outcome was summed up by a retired science teacher as the 'kudos of a degree being somewhat diluted'

(R4526). Those that saw these changes as detrimental attributed blame at a sector and government level. A retired train driver felt that universities were simply putting on more and more courses to make money from the fees (M4463), whilst a 50-year-old civil servant blamed successive governments for appearing to ‘care about giving children the opportunity to better themselves [...] In reality they have dumbed down the exams that qualify students to go to university.’ (E5014).

Although the general opinion of the Observers ranged towards the negative effects of expansion in the sector, this was not a universal stance and several writers applauded the widening of opportunities for people to get a university education, concentrating on the benefits to the individuals. This is exemplified by a 76-year-old male artist, who did not go to university himself but observed his own changing opinion:

I thought that the more universities there were would detract from the very meaning and value of a ‘degree’, and that somehow university education was being downgraded. I no longer think I was right.

The profusion of universities allows more people to achieve their ambition and expand what ability they have.’ (P3209).

The state of higher education: Too many graduates?

Another significant theme that arose for Observers was the number of graduates that were being produced as a result of the 50 percent target pledged by Tony Blair’s government. The general consensus was that the increase of graduates on the job market was not matched by availability of suitable jobs, thereby devaluing the degrees they held. When combined with the financial burdens of attending university in the 21st century, many Observers questioned whether there was any value to employment. Although the Observers drew on personal experience to evidence their opinions it should be noted that, by co-incidence, they would have been responding to this Directive around the same time that a slew of media stories was issued largely relating to the publication of graduate labour market figures by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in May 2016. Headlines such as ‘Graduates stuck in pay freeze permafrost’ (Coughlan, 2016) appeared on the BBC website and articles such as a *Guardian* editorial from May 2016 commented on the mismatch between the rising

number of graduates and the limitation of graduate level jobs (*The Guardian*, 2016). Although it must be taken into consideration that such reports may have influenced the inclusion of this aspect of value, it appears to have triggered narratives that provide pertinent evidence of the effect of increasing graduate numbers.

With an increase of graduates on the employment market comes an increase in competition for the best jobs, but many Observers perceived that competition was now greater in gaining any type of graduate level employment. Indeed, one civil servant felt that ‘the laws of supply and demand mean that wages can fall where there are more graduates than jobs’ (E5014), thereby affecting the earning power of having a degree. Several writers commented on the need for something more than just a degree to mark individuals out, often in the form of additional qualifications. A retired librarian commented that a degree is now a basic requirement for many jobs and ‘you have to have a PhD to get above ground level’ (H2637) a view reinforced by the experiences of a current 22-year-old Masters level student whose motivation for continuing into postgraduate study was the need for something extra to stand out from his peers (S5780). Returning to undertake her PhD in the 2000s following an undergraduate degree in the 1980s, one current student described the increase in postgraduate study as a revolving academic door stating, ‘it was becoming palpably clear that the BA had lost its currency in a staggeringly short time and the MA was now the level of the BA I had undertaken.’ (G4566).

Time and again I read evidence of graduates from the 1990s and earlier basing their choice of degree subject on interest alone in the belief that simply having a degree in any subject would be enough to pursue a graduate level career. Indeed, the experience of many of my university peers from the early 1990s demonstrated this, my own course at the University of Durham in Ancient History and Archaeology being a prime recruitment area for management accountants. The Mass Observation responses demonstrated that from the mid 1990s onwards, there was a shift, perhaps even a watershed moment, towards understanding that the subject choice would have a significant impact on employment opportunities. For example, despite gaining a good degree in geography at a ‘redbrick’ university in the early 2000s, a 36-year-old

failed to find a graduate level career until she studied for a second degree in midwifery which left her questioning the value of her first, non-vocational degree (H5845). The increase of graduates meant that some Observers had been forced to take non-graduate level employment. One local government contractor who graduated as a mature student in the 1990s compared his experience with that of his Uncle who graduated in the late 1960s stating that 'he was sought after job wise as it was very much the minority who had such achievements. When I graduated in 1998 it was almost the other way round!' (M5198). An administrator who graduated in the late 1980s admitted that in some jobs he had not told colleagues that he had a degree as he was 'ashamed to have had a university education and be doing that sort of job' (B3227) whilst a 66-year-old graduate explained how despite her 33-year-old son having a degree in computing he was now unemployed and depending on temporary work as a dustman (S1399).

Other graduates amongst the Observers described how the increase in numbers devalued their own sense of achievement including one library assistant who had been the first in her family to get a degree. She describes the day she received her degree from the Open University as the proudest of her life, an achievement that was soon diminished by colleagues in her first library job who told her a degree was not worth the paper it was printed on as everyone had a degree now. She stated that she now felt 'it doesn't mark me out as different from anyone else – it's like a tattoo, everyone seems to have one.' (C5706).

Given the recent political debates on higher education tuition fees there were fewer references to these discourses than I would have expected however, in many cases the financial cost of attending university was mentioned. Several of those who had graduated in previous decades referenced the maintenance grants that they received, or stated that they would now be less likely to attend today. As one 45-year-old male graduate put it, 'If I had a child now, I'd of course encourage them to study as much as possible but better to be doing an apprenticeship of some sort than to be an out of work graduate' (M5198). Some Mass Observers made reference to the financial commitment of attending university that necessitated taking any available job on

graduation in order to help pay off their debts, something that a retired civil servant deeply regretted as contemporary graduates were unlikely to take less well-paid jobs that would build on their qualification (L1991).

Commentary on opportunities for personal development

It is fair to say that the Mass Observers demonstrated a certain amount of cynicism in regard to the value of a contemporary university education to employment and economic prosperity. A far more positive value was associated with higher education in terms of personal development and the benefits that going to university could give an individual beyond economic and employment advantages which were often contested. Responses from both graduates and non-graduates repeatedly referred to how higher education could contribute to individual development with the idea of university as a place that prepares attendees for their future lives. Themes covered included developing self-confidence and independence, escaping to a new life and creating new identities. The opportunity to develop social and cultural capital was often celebrated but interestingly few mentions were made of its contribution to the development of economic capital; perhaps an example of British reticence, or a belief that discussing financial benefits could be considered gauche as participants in a Project based in a Higher Education Institution? The final part of this chapter will examine the self-development Observers noted as benefits of going to university.

Developing the independent 'self'

The opportunity to develop themselves as an independent person was often cited by Observers as one of the greatest benefits when recounting their experiences of going to university. Meeting people from other backgrounds and localities gave confidence to graduates who may not have experienced much beyond their family, school and local neighbourhoods, making it easier for them to move on into the diversity encountered in the world after graduation. This was an experience that cut across the generations of graduates, being cited by those from every cohort represented. A female graduate of the 1940s and a male graduate of the 1980s both relished broadening horizons and meeting people with different ideas that would challenge those they had learnt from school (P1282; S3379), whilst thirty years later, a current

undergraduate was still experiencing the same opportunities. Coming from a middle-class family and having attended an independent boarding school, he admitted that before arriving at university he did not even know anyone that was publically out as gay, but by mixing with other students from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds he found that he was 'breaking down barriers or preconceived notions' to meet other 'kinds' of people; (M5770). University gave one female undergraduate a taste of new regional and cultural differences as she moved from a strict convent school upbringing in London to a university in the midlands:

Many of the students were from the north – different again. I remember watching in fascination as some lads ate 'chip butties' and Les in our flat came from Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire and horrified us by eating platefuls of tripe doused in vinegar!' (S2207)

A graduate from the 1990s described his university years as his happiest, writing that he 'lived in a rarefied bubble like an adult child with the first taste of independence from my parents' (G4296). A retired Observer reflected on her time at Leicester University in the late 1960s as the start of her life as an independent adult, acknowledging that her degree not only gave her a faster route through her profession as a probation officer, but also the 'self-confidence to go for that sort of job' (T2004). Similarly, a retired clergyman attributed the development of his social confidence and validation of his professional identity to his university years, enabling him to mix in social circles he had found quite daunting as a younger man (B2710).

These new experiences enabled graduates from all generations to develop their social capital and for some Observers, this meant the opportunity to finally find the networks they felt they belonged in. Reflecting the coming together of learner identities described by Crozier et al (2008), several Observers related how university allowed them to experience a sense of belonging, either socially or academically, which had been missing in their lives. For others, it provided the opportunity to finally fit in having sensed social and academic mismatches with their backgrounds. Despite not knowing what to expect from the reputation of an intellectually rigorous and socially elite institution, a Cambridge graduate from the early 2000s recounts that 'I found my 'people' at the university, which was the first place that I ever fitted in' (S5767). The

life changing opportunity that university could provide is poignantly illustrated by G4296, a graduate from the late 1990s. University allowed him to find his own identity as a gay man who had previously been 'unhappy for a long time in a group of very straight, laddish friends'. Going to university had provided both these graduates with the opportunity to become a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989), finding a sense of belonging and a better 'fit' and changing the course of their lives. For S5767 it established an academic route for her life course, resulting in an academic career in high ranking UK universities and financial security that had been missing in her childhood. G4296 has gained less in terms of social mobility, but attributes university to giving him much more than a formal education as it allowed him to 'find' himself. The reflective nature of Mass Observation also allowed some Observers to reveal the alternative ways that university allowed them to find themselves, for example going to Bangor University in the mid-1990s allowed C5716 to identify the kind of person she *did not* want to become.

...I met a lot of people I definitely didn't want to be like [...] when I left Bangor I had a well-defined dislike for a lot of the people – my peers – that I'd met because they had a sense of entitlement I couldn't understand. And there were ridiculous conversations about how wealthy you were [...] or how 'Northern' or 'Southern' you were, in other words, how working-class or middle-class you were. I remember getting asked very early on by one of the girls on my corridor, whether I said 'breakfast, dinner and tea' or 'breakfast, lunch and dinner'. I was completely non-plussed by that for the longest time. (C5716)

Despite her dis-identification with her peers, going to university allowed C5716 to experience upward social mobility, moving away from her working-class mining family roots to become a chartered accountant. Nonetheless, I find her identification of the embodied way in which she encountered class identity differences fascinating, along with her reaction against them.

Routes to another life

Many Observers recognized going to university as an opportunity to open new routes in their lives. Some were looking for a more interesting future, for example a charity funding development officer who looked back on her experience at university in the early 1990s as 'the key to my freedom. I thought those who didn't aspire to this were doomed to a life of drudgery behind a shop till or something' (W3994). For others, it

was seen as a route away from unsatisfactory lives, including an administrator who saw going to university in his early twenties as ‘an escape from the boredom and frustration of a job and colleagues I didn’t much like’ (B3227).

Going to university was much more of a conscious escape route from an unhappy life for some Observers. For them the value of higher education was that it provided them with a route away from troubled home lives, or what Archer recognized in her participants as the opportunity of escaping from deficit working class identities’ (2003, p.127). A freelance reward consultant described her arrival at university in the early 1990s as ‘a lifesaver to me. I was very unhappy in my high school/home/the town I was in at the time, and going to university at that time was the easiest way I could leave home.’ (B5567). Others describe the struggle they had to be able to achieve this escape. A retired journalist who I will look at in more detail in the next chapter, related how university was the only route she could use to flee an extremely troubled relationship with her mother in a way that would be socially acceptable in the 1960s (W633).

Even though values of social acceptability had changed considerably by the 1990s, and university attendance far more common, family circumstances still continued to have a powerful influence for some Observers. A library assistant credits her graduation in the 1990s with turning her life around. On leaving school she spent six months working in a hairdressing salon, having been forbidden to apply to university by her father before realizing she needed to get away. As her father, who she describes as exceptionally controlling, thought higher education was a waste of time she had no support available at home but managed to apply by seeking help from her old A-level teachers. She eventually gained a place at Bangor University and even though her father was eventually reconciled to the idea of her getting a university education, she still felt that university had allowed her to escape an ‘unbearable’ home life (C5706).

The narrative of another graduate contrasts with those of most of the Observers who went on to university straight from school, providing a poignant illustration of the transformative potential university can have. Having left school at 15 without qualifications, one 45-year-old described how he found himself in prison in his early

twenties where he discovered the education department and took some basic exams. This sowed the seed of aspiration for him and after a few years he embarked on an access course leading to his acceptance on an undergraduate course (M5198).

What could have been

Mass Observers who had not been to university used the Directive to reflect on how it may have affected their lives and identity had they chosen to or been able to go. A 63-year-old had not been able to go to university as she had to become a carer for her invalid mother. She reflected that a university education could have been a means of getting a dream job and showing people that you have worked hard so that 'you and your family can feel proud of what you've done' (T534). In a similar vein, a retired hairdressing tutor declared that had she been able to go to university she would have valued the experience of 'freedom, self-discipline, comradeship, building relationships, plus the qualifications and meeting top people – professors in your subject.' (R860). Although these two Observers appreciated what value higher education could bring, neither regretted not going on to university, unlike a retired social-care manager who felt moving away from his parents and his 'very narrow environment' would have given him the opportunity to mix with people from different backgrounds, 'making connections with people from all over' (A3623).

The theme of escape was also apparent in the narratives of some non-graduates, although taking a different route. A desire to escape the boredom and frustrations of school resulted in some not wishing to continue into higher education, sometimes leading to regret for the missed opportunities university may have provided. One retired civil servant (O3436) recounted how she could not wait to leave school in the early 1970s, wanting to get a job so that she could leave an unhappy home. She looks back on this with regret seeing her decision as foolish in that had she managed to stay a couple of years more she might have left home to go to university and states that 'I think I would have had a much happier young life had I done so'. A sense of being the outsider at school encouraged another Observer to drop out of education in the late 1980s during his A levels. Having felt like an intellectual and social outsider as a working-class boy in the middle-class environment of his strict Catholic school he

decided he had had enough. He went on to become a micro-electronics engineer but feels that his life could have taken a different road had he gone to university. He recalls that 'Back then I didn't even consider myself intelligent enough to go to a Grammar School never mind university. It has impacted my life greatly because I now know if I had worked harder I would have been as good as all the others in my school that did go.' (L5642). A lack of career advice and support from school was the reason a 50-year-old civil servant gave for not going on to university after his A-Levels. Although he wishes he had attempted going to university, he appreciated how not going had forced himself to develop in other ways through travel and reading. Drawing from his response on social mobility he stated:

For a number of years after starting work I was often asked which university I had attended. This question made me feel inadequate until I reached an age when I realised I was competing with graduates and performing as well or better. Until this ceased to be an issue I always felt that I was somewhat looked down upon.

(E5014, Spring 2016: Social Mobility Directive)

These responses demonstrate the way Observers recognized the value of higher education as a space for personal transformation. Many Mass Observers used it to enable their agency to disrupt elements of their habitus. In this context, drawing on Bourdieu's use of a battlefield to illustrate how an individual encounters a new field, higher education can be likened to a battleground upon which an individual has to negotiate new competition and conflict, adapting and evolving their behaviour and become active agents in terms of how they exchange and develop their capitals (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Summary

Whilst these narratives align to some extent with dominant discourses on the transformational potential of higher education that underpins government policy (DWP, 2012; Higher Education and Research Bill, 2016) they also indicate a far more complex situation. Whilst dominant discourses concentrate on encouraging social and economic aspiration through widening participation, Observers critique the effectiveness of these policies in achieving their aim of economic prosperity, stating

that increasing access to higher education devalues a degree with significant consequences to individual students. The Observers' concerns, often based in real life experiences, question the discourse of widening participation as a route to a fairer and more mobile society with the narratives suggesting that an increase in graduate numbers simply makes it more difficult to benefit from employment opportunities and economic gains. The rise in graduate numbers from different socio-economic classes may also be responsible for some of the findings in Savage et al's (2013) class survey in which new class definitions have emerged. They identified a class known as 'emergent service workers', often service sector workers with modest economic capital but high social and cultural capital. Although graduates do not dominate the group, those graduates who are within it tend to come from 'well known universities specializing in arts and humanities' and often living in university towns (2013, p.241). The observations made by the Panel suggest that this may well be one of the results of increasing graduate numbers.

The beneficial transformations recognized by Observers were often much more internalized, relating to developing identities and a sense of place in society rather than to social mobility or economic gains. This could reflect the Panel's tendency towards a middle-class profile, with middle-class students often placing more emphasis on the social side of university (Crozier et al, 2008) and therefore more likely to note the impact on their self-identity. Given how education reproduces the privileges that shape it (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), middle-class students are more likely to find familiarity in the educational habitus they encounter at university leaving them more time to concentrate on developing their social identity. Crozier et al (2008) draw on Bourdieu's theories of 'field' and knowledge of the 'rules of the game' (1990) to argue that,

The university provides 'the field' in which to enhance their privileged selves and extract greater value, not just knowledge of their subject but also in terms of social and cultural capital. (2008, p.175)

I found it interesting that although comment was made on the quality of institutions, this was rarely associated with classed differences other than a few comments about socio-economic privilege at Oxford and Cambridge. The clustering of students from

non-traditional groups, in particular ethnic minority students from lower socio-economic groups to newer institutions was not noted at all, perhaps symptomatic of the demographic of the current panel that has little representation from ethnic minorities. Quite a few Observers, mainly women, related their experiences of going to university as a mature student, often studying with the Open University. Whilst I believe there is significant further work that can be undertaken on their responses, in the context of this thesis it suffices to say that each valued the opportunity highly, particularly given the circumstances of family and work commitments that often accompanied their studies. What was implicit within many of the responses however was a sense of belonging and identification with certain types of institutions, or what Reay, David and Ball describe as 'knowing one's academic place' (2005, p. 91), suggesting that habitus directed choices and experiences in terms of higher education.

The landscape that the Mass Observers create is one of contrasts. It illustrates the idiosyncrasies around understanding what value is and how individuals derive value from higher education. Their reflective narratives allow these complexities to be demonstrated in a way that a simple, non-narrative survey would miss. Having used the breadth of responses to the 2016 Directive on higher education to create this landscape, I will now seek to exploit the opportunity Mass Observation gives to look at the depth of writing. To do this I will concentrate on four individual Observers, drawing upon all of their writing for Mass Observation to take a more in-depth study of how higher education has affected their lives.

Chapter 4: Engaging with Mass Observation - Observer Vignettes

The Panel responses reflect a variety of different experiences and opinions that can inform perceptions of value, providing me with an insight into what these are. This Chapter will look more closely at how an individual's background and own experiences of university inform their perceptions of value and how this might be affected by contemporary discourses. By combining the wide range of subject areas covered by Mass Observation with the long-term participation of some Observers, I am able to draw upon both a breadth and a depth of life writing to construct *Gestalts* (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), meaning frames through which we can examine and understand the wider picture of an individual life to understand how higher education has affected that life. This method acknowledges the fact that a life is made up of many individual yet interacting strands that need to be seen as a whole in order to fully understand the intricacies and the meaning of each individual part. *Gestalts* are facilitated by using four interviewing principles: using open questions, eliciting stories, avoiding 'why' questions and following Mass Observers ordering and phrasing (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Although Mass Observation cannot be seen as an interview in the traditional sense, these principles can still be applied to the semi-structured nature of the Directives that elicit open and easy flowing narratives that can meander as they wish. Drawing upon the full breadth of Directive responses submitted by each individual has allowed me to create these *Gestalts* by mining the life stories that are told to Mass Observation to illustrate aspects of their lives such as family relations, cultural activities and so forth, the frameworks within which lives are lived. All of these areas can be examined through a theoretical lens based on Bourdieu's theories to help understand if and how they are affected by their interactions with higher education. The longitudinal potential of Mass Observation data are exploited to unpeel the layers of life story (Sheridan, 1996) that each Observer has laid down over successive Directive responses they have submitted over the years to understand the value of higher education across a life course. This draws upon an interdisciplinary approach to qualitative longitudinal research that combines historical and sociological methodologies (Thomson and Mcleod, 2009), acknowledging the connection between

our past and our present. If life histories are formed and informed in their telling we need to be able to understand the individual's present in order to understand how they interpret their past.

Method

I selected four Mass Observers whose writing I would examine in greater depth, each of whom had responded to the Spring 2016 Directive. The scope of this thesis restricted the number of vignettes I was able to embark upon, and as I shall explain later in this section, the nature of the responses restricted the pool I was able to choose from. Rather than being representative of non-traditional groups in terms of ethnicity, disability or mature students, the sample represents generational and gender differentiations as well as different originating class backgrounds.

Whilst their responses to this Directive provided plenty of rich information on their opinions and experiences of higher education, their wider contributions to Mass Observation allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of how going to university has impacted on their lives through the creation of an overarching life story. These vignettes serve to provide a thick description of each individual's relationship with higher education. Although these four individuals cannot be taken as representative of the UK's population of university graduates, I selected them as their narrations were illustrative of different life courses, each of which have in some way been affected by going to university. For me they demonstrate the difficulty of making universal assumptions about the benefits of going to university, and how changes in policy and discourse over the last sixty years may have affected the *actual* value of a university education on an individual's life course. In terms of life course, I am interested in the tangible and non-tangible effects from job opportunities and financial benefits through to social class mobility and evolving identities. Applying a feminist social constructivist methodology to Mass Observation, I have used the detail in these narratives to create a case study on how each writer draws on the 'bits and pieces of their lives' to pull together interpretations that form an overall plot (Lawler, 2014, P.43).

The purpose of this case study approach is to allow me to look at how themes that have emerged in the Spring 2016 Directive come together and interplay with one another within the different circumstances and life stories experienced by individuals, allowing me to make 'sense of the variety of the data through how it works in a case' (Richards, 2005, p.165). These are therefore *instrumental* case studies in that they are studied to provide a particular 'insight into an issue of refinement of a theory' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.88). Undertaking this case study approach on the written responses submitted over a period of time allowed me to look for changes that took place in each individual's life, facilitating my understanding of how each life has evolved over that period. Social constructivism enabled me to be 'sensitive to the temporal sequence that people, as tellers of their own stories about their lives or events around them, detect in their lives' (Bryman, 2008, p.556).

I have already discussed the interactions of autobiography and identity in an earlier chapter but it is useful to reiterate how long-standing Mass Observers layer narratives over a period of time meaning that they 'constantly produce and reproduce life stories on the basis of memories, interpreting the past through the lens of social information, and using this information to formulate present and future life stories' (Lawler, 2014, p.32). For Lawler (2014) identity is produced through the very act of autobiography and as such, the way in which each individual constructed their life narratives provides me with an insight into the way they chose to construct and represent their identity. Alongside its depth, the breadth of writing provides significant opportunities as the themes cover so many aspects of a person's life, from innermost thoughts and personal experiences to general opinions on society. This allows me to think critically about how each individual has interacted and responded to higher education, in particular relating to dynamics of power in inclusion and exclusion within the field (Reay, 2013). In addition, the narratives sometimes allow these frameworks to be problematized, challenging what discourses may perceive to be normal (see Sarah's story later in this chapter).

As I read through the responses to the Spring 2016 Directive in order to select my individuals, I was aware of variations in the way people narrated their responses and

what I was able to discern about them as a result. I found Goodson's (2013) work on narrative capital a useful way of discerning these variations and understanding their implications. He demonstrates that narrativity has a complex social significance and it is therefore linked to identity, learning and agency as the 'capacity to describe or elaborate needs to be specifically related to the capacity to delineate courses of action in the material world' (Goodson, 2013, p. 70). Narrative capital is described as an 'armoury of narrative resources with which we not only render accounts but flexibly respond to the transitions and critical events which comprise our lives' (Goodson, 2013, p.63). Within his own work he has identified a spectrum of narration types, ranging from scripted describers who provide factually ordered accounts with little reflection or analysis through to elaborative describers who employ highly reflective narratives that experiment and theorise about their life experiences. Whilst I am wary of using narrative typology to draw definitive conclusions about a person's identity, I believe that it is helpful in allowing us to describe how they think through their identity providing an insight into how their identities and life narratives inform and intertwine with each other. I find Goodson's typology useful to help me understand the positioning of the writer in terms of their relationship with their life writing for Mass Observation, but also to provide an insight into identity construction.

I developed a set of three main criteria to select my four Observers. Firstly, they had to have responded to the higher education and social mobility directives issued in Spring 2016. The thread running through my reading of their writing would be their relationship with higher education and how this is exhibited within the social, cultural and economic capitals they possess and the identities that they have formed, and so their response to the 2016 higher education directive needed to be engaged and comprehensive in order to suggest which other Directives I could follow through them. Secondly, they needed to be a forthcoming and candid writer. I needed to find writers who delivered what Goodson (2013) described as 'elaborate narratives' who employed some level of self-exploration. Elaborate narrative responses to a selection of relevant Directives could therefore provide me with a more nuanced understanding about how the individual constructed their identity and its relationship with higher education.

Some of the richest responses in terms of reflective exploration in the Spring 2016 responses often fell to the younger members of the panel who had unfortunately only been writing for the Project for a short while. Whilst this may indicate that they were still in the process of pulling together that life narrative, eager to explore and elucidate, it did mean that they had not yet provided enough 'layers' of their autobiography for me to explore how it might have evolved over time. Finally, they needed to have participated in the Project for at least ten years. I needed to select writers who had written a substantive enough body of material for Mass Observation for me to assemble different aspects of the life story they had rendered. This also posed a problem in my attempt to gather a sample of writers who would represent different eras of university student as most of those representing more recent generations had not been contributing to Mass Observation for long enough to provide the depth of responses that I was seeking.

I had originally intended to select writers who represented different eras of going to university: pre-Robbins (1950s-early60s), years of massification (1980s), post Binary (1992-2000) and the era of tuition fees (2003 onwards), but came upon the issue of younger writers having had less opportunity to input to the Project through their age, and tending toward being less committed to maintaining contact with the Project. Whilst there was a plentiful number of writers to choose from the earliest era, the number of suitable candidates decreased as the era became more recent, and for the period from 2003 onwards there were no writers who had written for at least ten years, the time I had specified would provide enough 'layers' of Mass Observation writing. The issue of representation in Mass Observation has been addressed by many writers over the years, and I pulled upon the recent work undertaken by Lindsay and Bulloch (2014) who suggest that as researchers we should allow the data to define our sample and celebrate what it can tell us rather than concentrate on what is absent. I therefore decided to redefine my decision, and whilst I would seek to represent different eras as best I could, I sought writers that could provide me with different examples of the experience of university and subsequent life story. My final selection fell to four writers, one man and three women who ranged across the first three eras.

Richard attended Cambridge University in the late 1950s and early 1960s whilst Juliet attended Kings College at the University of Newcastle in the mid 1960s. Sarah went up to the University of Bradford in the mid 1980s and Alice, the final of my vignettes attended the University of Warwick in the late 1990s/early 2000s. All four went to university directly from school rather than as mature students, and their institutions all represent high ranking redbrick or elite universities. Although they all profess to being middle-class, their social backgrounds and current circumstances vary considerably in terms of the social, economic, cultural and, perhaps especially, the symbolic capitals that they possess. As writers, they all presented enough scope for me to get a sense of how they chose to form their identity and what experiences they pulled on to develop and interpret this.

The rest of this Chapter will examine the writing of each of these four Mass Observers in turn, presenting each in order of age, starting with Richard and ending with Alice. This ordering serves only to reflect the historical progress of higher education over the last 60 years and to identify parallels accordingly. For each vignette, I will begin by outlining their life story and their interactions with higher education to frame an exploration of their identity through their narratives. The role of higher education will weave a continuous thread through each study. I will then draw the four vignettes together to make a comparative study of their experiences and extrapolate how they have been influenced by the discourses surrounding higher education at the time they went to university.

Richard

Richard is the oldest and most economically prosperous of my four observers. The eldest of two children, he was born in London in 1938 to educated middle-class parents who he describes as socialist non-conformists (Su2006:2). His father was an analytical chemist who had worked in Europe but returned with his family to the UK on the eve of the Second World War. Richard's accounts portray a happy and contented childhood in which he enjoyed sports and outdoor activities with other children. His early education began in a mixture of small independent and state schools until he won a County Scholarship to Eton College at the age of 13. Despite acknowledging differences in social background, Richard appears to have enjoyed his time at Eton, demonstrating a social ability to get along with people that has continued throughout his life. Leaving Eton at 18, he served his two years of compulsory National Service in the Royal Marines and then went on to study Natural Sciences at the University of Cambridge in 1958. After graduation, Richard accepted a post at an engineering company in the USA where he thrived both socially and professionally. He married and had two sons, remaining in America for the next few years before returning to the UK in the early 1970s to establish his own successful IT company. Richard has remained self-employed ever since and even though he is now in his late 70s he continues to take an active, albeit part-time role managing his company. Following the breakdown of his first marriage in the early 1980s, Richard soon remarried and continues to live a physically and socially active life with his second wife in a large house outside a small university city in the UK.

I have selected Richard for several reasons. By the late 1950s only 8 percent of the population went to university, making higher education the preserve of a small elite (Ross, 2003; Reay et al, 2001; Burke, 2012). Going to an institution such as Cambridge therefore meant that Richard was in an even smaller group – the elite of the elite. In many ways, he represents the traditional white, privileged male stereotype of the 'bachelor boy' student (Hinton-Smith, 2012). What I find interesting about Richard is that his successes appear to be grounded in the educational and social capitals his background provided him with, over-riding any lack of economic capital that he may

have had and illustrating how habitus provided him with the framework to succeed in the fields that he entered throughout his life. For me, Richard's narratives demonstrate the symbiosis of education and power, the ways in which symbolic violence can be enacted to empower those who are already powerful by using education to reinforce the differences that exist in society.

Education has clearly been a valued commodity within his family background. As he observes, his family were from 'a stratum of society in which higher education is normal and its absence is rare' (Sp2016:2). Almost all male relatives from both sides of his family were educated to at least degree level; several become medical doctors whilst his own father forged a career as an analytical chemist. Although Richard's mother did not go to university as her father did not believe in higher education for women, she was still encouraged to extend her education by going to secretarial college. All in all, Richard was born into a world with high levels of cultural capital. The normality of university within his family has continued through the generations, with Richard's younger son following in his father's footsteps, attending Cambridge to complete both a Masters and a PhD and expectations that his grandchildren will also attend (Sp2016:2).

Starting at Cambridge in 1958, Richard was one of the last cohorts of students to attend university in the 'pre-Robbins era'. His entry to an elite university appears to have been straightforward. One of his teachers at Eton set him up for an interview, not even consulting Richard as to whether he would prefer Oxford or Cambridge but making the decision on his behalf through the merit of the courses offered. The lack of personal agency in terms of decision making does not appear to have upset Richard. He read Natural Sciences and admits that he could have done better academically, but there were too many 'distractions' that he 'did not see as wasting my time but rather as seizing opportunities' (Sp2016:2). The social aspects of Cambridge almost entirely dominate his narration of the experiences he had there. As with his time at Eton, Richard declared that he had no problems fitting in socially, making new friends with ease alongside those he already knew from school and his sailing activities. The opportunities that Richard 'seized' upon included being Chairman of the debating

society known as the Cambridge Heretics, and starting up a lending library for vinyl records. He also joined the Liberal Club allowing him to take advantage of 'well-known speakers'. Whilst at Cambridge he also joined MENSA and, although not active initially, connected with local branches when he moved to the USA, developing friendships that have endured (Sp2016:2). Richard has clearly possessed large amounts of social capital throughout his life which he has been able to use to good advantage, easily converting it into economic and symbolic capital.

Richard's narrative conveys an exceptionally positive relationship with higher education, beginning his response to the Spring 2016 directive by declaring that it means a great deal to him as a '...preparation for a fuller life, whose benefits [...] accrue gradually, cumulatively and satisfyingly over a lifetime' (Sp2016:2). In terms of how higher education has impacted his life, Richard readily acknowledges the social, cultural and economic benefits that he has accrued from his university education. In terms of his career he was able to gain lucrative employment in the USA as soon as he graduated, developing networks and experience that, when coupled with his own self-confidence, enabled him to return to the UK to start his own successful business (Sp2016:2). The social capital that he was able to build through his education, both at Eton and at Cambridge, was converted into the economic capital that has enabled him to support his social and cultural life as well as the education of his sons, who in turn were able to convert this support into economic capital. He also relates less tangible values to his higher education opportunities, believing that 'the influences of Cambridge on me were numerous, and varied in significance over time [...] they had an invisible influence on whom I married and some have quietly intensified over later years.' (Sp2016:2).

Having outlined Richard's life and interactions with higher education, I will now turn to how his identity, or indeed his identities, are projected through his narratives. Richard began writing for Mass Observation in 2006, corresponding by email by attaching word processed documents at an average of two pages to each theme and responding to almost every Directive sent out. His participation in the Project is a result of his discovery of his own father's contribution to the original project in the 1940s after his

diaries for Mass Observation were published within an anthology of war time diaries. Richard decided to join the current project in order to gain the 'satisfaction of doing as my father did before me', professing to enjoy the opportunity to express himself through writing about ideas and how they impact him (Au2010: Special Questionnaire). Richard positions himself as an information provider rather than an observer; he much prefers to comment on his own experience and opinion than what he observes in others, and fails to see the point in commenting on those things that he does not value or experience. Describing himself as apathetic towards the themes of the Spring 2014 directive on Politics and the Eurovision Song contest, he tells the reader that they are being short changed this time as, 'I don't write fiction, and I don't like inventing responses to hypothetical situations, and that leads me to respond with honest indifference and accept that it will disappoint some.' (Sp2014:3). Richard is certainly aware of his readers and often converses through his writing with both the researcher and Mass Observation, often in a challenging or critical way that displays self-confidence in his own opinion. For example, the Spring 2017 Directive asking about world events produces indignant criticism:

This is a very unorthodox topic for a directive. You want to *capture the contemporary* (apart from the excluded Brexit) but you could hardly cast your net wider and you invite us to comment on nine example topics with no further guidance. Do you appreciate that this makes responding harder? To me it seems like an abdication of your responsibility and close to a brush-off. Hope it makes interpretation of the responses correspondingly harder. (Sp2017:2)

Despite opinions such as this, Richard's commitment to the project overrides his natural antipathy for certain subjects meaning that he faithfully provides a rounded account of his opinions, likes *and* his dislikes.

Writing for Mass Observation is not a therapeutic exercise for Richard and his narratives portray an identity that is firmly formed and rooted within his own self-belief and experience. He does not use his narratives to experiment with his identity, instead he relates them to an overarching life story or meta-narrative. He falls into Goodson's category of the multiple describer, adopting rather off-the-peg identities rather than adapting them by using his narratives for self-exploration. He possesses a level of personal agency and flexibility that allows him to choose the most appropriate

identity to take advantage of opportunities that arise, whilst still holding onto a 'central script like a life raft' (Goodson (2013, p.95). For Richard, this central script is based on his ability to be successful within which ever field he encounters, be it in an educational, social or business context. His narratives are based on this central spine of success and illustrate how his identity is weaved from a combination of strands that have allowed him to enjoy this success including 'a high need of autonomy, and a lot is due to intrinsic self-confidence, and some of the success has been due to good judgement' (W2009:1). His self-confidence is present throughout his narratives and something that he explicitly acknowledges as a 'fundamental personality trait from which many other benefits can flow' (Sp2016:1).

The only point in which the language of success falters is in references to the failure of his first marriage in 1980, when on returning from a business trip abroad he discovered that his wife had left him for a younger man. Richard makes few references to this episode, appearing to gloss over it but on occasion its effect on his self-esteem is revealed. When writing out his lifeline in Spring 2008, he lists the event against March 1980 and writes the word 'astonished'. Against the whole year of 1980 he simply writes the word – 'Miserable'. When reflecting on the event in the Autumn 2006 Directive on Ageing, he describes how he and his sons were devastated by his wife leaving. The act of her leaving is the only point throughout Richard's narratives that I sensed his discomfort in having no control as all other references to the divorce show him in the controlling position – he initiates divorce proceedings, he takes custody of their children and within a year he has embarked on a new relationship with the woman who becomes his current wife. This leads me to surmise that his life script was destined to have a successful and loving relationship within it, and when this script was disrupted, Richard acted not only to put it back on track but to go on to emphasize its success. At no point does he ever refer to any fault on his part for the failure of his first marriage, but readily illustrates how positive his second marriage has been. All references to his relationship with his second wife are heartfelt, an emotional depiction that contrasts with the unsentimental style that characterises the rest of his

writing, even when discussing the death of his parents and only sister in the most practical of details (Au2006:3).

Richard's narratives throughout his Mass Observation responses present a man who is concerned with his own business:

My first responsibility is to my family, to educate them both formally and socially so as to make them welcome members of this society who can enjoy it and contribute to it in the way they lead their lives. [...] If what I (and they) do adds some greater value to the world at large, beyond our society, that is a bonus but not a primary responsibility (Sp2016:1)

He is politically ambivalent, tending towards a liberal tolerance that is tempered by an expectation that people should be responsible for their own welfare and integration into society (Su2006:2; Sp2010:3; Sp2014:1). Richard's most direct engagement with politics and social welfare issues comes when it relates directly to him, for example writing to his local MP on issues associated specifically to his constituency (Sp2010:2; Sp2015;2).

Richard sets out a distinct identity for himself through his Mass Observation narratives. His writing portrays an independent and self-confident man who has enjoyed success in his life and is careful to emphasize his own agency in creating this situation. He does not experiment with new roles, but simply seeks to strengthen that which he is satisfied with. Taking his writing as a whole, I sense that much of this confidence in his identity and self-worth is based on a social background that prepared him to adapt to whatever situation he found himself in, and that provided him with enough of the right capitals to give him the knowledge of which fields to invest his efforts in and to allow him to participate successfully. Over the next few paragraphs I will examine how this is related within his Directive responses.

Despite resistance to ever explicitly defining his own social class, Richard's depiction of his family background when discussing social mobility in Spring 2016 typifies an enduring upper middle-class status that is reinforced by higher education. He states that for the last 200 years, his family members have come from the 'professional classes such as the armed forces, law and medicine' (Su2008:1). The framework within

which Richard's habitus has been constructed entwines higher education deeply into its expectations and values.

Richard does not feel that his social class has changed from that of his father, another graduate from an elite university. He appears to sit solidly within what Savage et al (2013) refer to as an 'elite' class. Members of this elite tend to come from professional family backgrounds that comprise a high number of graduates from elite universities and have the 'highest levels of every form of capital' (Savage et al, 2013, p.233). As a Cambridge graduate and financially successful businessman, Richard enjoys highbrow culture and retains a significant social network of friends and colleagues who appear to enjoy equal amounts of success and he recognizes that he does not 'move in social circles where mobility is prevalent, and noticeable downward mobility simply does not happen' (Sp2016:1). He perceives an upward move in terms of social class for his own sons, largely through their own entrepreneurial successes that have enabled them to send their children to fee-paying schools with the expectation that they will go on to higher education.

Richard himself appears to be in possession of high levels of every form of capital. Now in his late 70s, he describes himself as 'fortunate enough to be able to enjoy a day-to-day standard of living which is very comfortable and allows us fairly expensive holidays and large parties for decade-birthdays' (Sp2016:1). He was able to send both of his sons to boarding school and has maintained a stable with horses since the mid 1980s. He describes his property as being his principle asset which he believes 'probably leads to people overestimating our cash wealth' (Sp2016:1) and although he claims to have few 'liquid assets', he and his wife both hold savings accounts and investments via a stockbroker (sp2010:1 & 2). Richard is quite clear as to why he is able to enjoy this level of economic capital stating that,

I see my present financial situation as a not unexpected outcome of a large group of factors including good fortune, good parental roles, good education, good experience, prudence and probably underlying some of these, a self-confidence that gave me no reason to take up risky behaviour, either financially or in relation to drugs or other distractions (Sp.2010:1)

As a child, he appears to have been educated in the art of financial responsibility, managing his pocket money and taking holiday jobs as a young adult to save money so that by the time he reached university he was already 'fluent and prudent in running my financial affairs' (Sp2010:2). Although he already had the skills to manage his finances when he arrived at university, it is clear that going to Cambridge allowed him to benefit from the opportunity to gain well paid employment in order to make the most of these skills for, as he writes, when he graduated from Cambridge he 'was going to be employable anywhere' (Sp2016:2).

Richard appears to be similarly successful at accumulating and exploiting social capital and enjoys maintaining contacts and relationships with people. Social networks are clearly important to Richard as throughout many of his directives he makes references to connecting with contacts around the world in the context of business and pleasure, often mixing the two. He describes his pleasure in revisiting friendships as he grows older, citing how he sometimes took the opportunity to reacquaint himself with university friends when making business trips abroad (W2008: 3). His current social networks continue to demonstrate the significant value of Richard's social capital as represented in the ways in which he relates his contributions to other organizations (Sp2010:1; Su2012:1). Experience in entrepreneurial business has led him to be involved in various roles, including being the treasurer for an informal organization for small businesses in his region, and an advisory role for alumni relations for his old Cambridge College. In addition, he describes how he has responsibility for parts of a couple of international organizations concerned with topics relating to his business interests and currently holds a position as a governor at the local secondary school in his village. Although not all of these roles are formal, they still represent a significant symbolic capital value that he is able to draw upon.

He appears to have a strong sense of belonging to certain social circles and infers he has always been accepted into groups with ease. Winning a County scholarship to Eton College moved Richard away from the state and independent school background into an institution that would have a substantial number of students from elite and/or privileged backgrounds. Despite the fact he felt he had 'stood out at Eton because I

had not been to a conventional prep.school [sic] and social class was a factor in its sub-culture' (Su2012:1), the ministrations of his House Master ensured he was incorporated into Eton life (Sp2016: 1). Although he attributes this to his teacher, it would appear that Richard does possess an innate ability to fit into new and socially mixed environments. This aptitude was also demonstrated whilst serving in the Royal Marines as, although he felt the strangeness that resulted in the mix of classes and social backgrounds within the platoon, he never felt as if he was an outsider and continues to remember his time in the Marines with a strong sense of belonging (Sp2016:1; Sp2010:3). Whilst he clearly enjoyed the social life at Cambridge, perhaps to the detriment of his academic studies, I sense that Richard's habitus had prepared him to take advantage of what was available. His social self-confidence eased his way and his ability to get on with those around him allowed him to be an insider who clearly belonged.

Richard scores highly in terms of 'highbrow' cultural capital, favouring pursuits that might be considered traditionally tasteful (Savage et al, 2013). He enjoys classical music and opera and enjoys a eclectic mix of literature ranging from thrillers through to books on the history of science and ideas with regular reading including *The Independent* and *New Scientist*, displaying an intellectual and critical engagement with authors such as Henry James who he does not admire at all (W2009:2; W2011:3; Sp2015:2). He states that he has always been quite discriminating and as such, he has elected to 'ignore large parts of popular culture' as he grows older (Au2006:3). It is clear that Richard's background had prepared him to take advantage of opportunities that were offered. His beloved grandmother had fostered in him a love of literature, whilst his leisure activities as a child largely favoured outdoor activities such as racing boats and water skiing. Richard took advantage of the opportunities that Cambridge offered him to exchange and accumulate cultural capital – he writes that it 'disposed' him to be interested in concerts, films, books and ideas (Sp2016:2).

Given Richard's own positive experiences he clearly values the impact that going to university has had within his own life. His passage through an elite education, although not unappreciated, was completely accepted as appropriate. His habitus had set him

up to assume an entitlement to a good education and provided him with an innate self-confidence, allowing him to foster a sense of belonging that endures throughout his life and allows him to take advantage of the economic, social and cultural benefits afforded him by his educational experiences. Throughout his narratives Richard never casts himself as the outsider. He had the confidence to take part, to 'play the game' in each field that he encountered, exchanging and accumulating his capitals so that their values increased, and then equipping his sons with tools to build upon this success. To some extent Richard is a product of his time in that the scarcity of higher education, particularly the elite level he was able to participate in, enabled him to stand out from the crowd in terms of employment, whilst at the same time qualifying him to be a member of an exclusive group with highly desirable social capital (Bourdieu, 2004).

It is with this in mind that we can view his opinions on the value of contemporary education. He is aware of contemporary discourses around higher education, explicitly mentioning that Tony Blair said that half the population should attend university (Sp2016:2). In recognizing a need for higher education to provide courses on modern skills to help the country adapt to the move away from manufacturing industries, he applauds the re-emergence of apprenticeships, but criticizes the labeling of 'indiscriminate institutions' as universities (Sp2016:2). Despite these insights, Richard's response to the contemporary value of higher education in the Spring 2016 Directive is comparatively less engaged than those of other Observers. Drawing on the whole of Richard's writing, and the character that we can construct from this, I surmise that this apparent lack of engagement is not to do with a lack of interest in the current generation of students, indeed his grandchildren are at university themselves, but more a reflection of Richard's tendency to prioritize and therefore concentrate on what affects him, and on what he is able to affect directly. The fact that Richard is 'not aware of any young person who has not gone on to HE' (Sp2016:2) means that he has little to say on whether it is fair that more young people now go to university.

In summary, Richard was born into a world in which higher education was rare, but into a family in which its absence was rare. Richard's self-confidence appears to have

been his enduring strength, allowing the exchange of capitals to his continual profit in all aspects of his life.

Juliet

Juliet is the longest serving Observer of my four studies, having written for Mass Observation since the inception of the new project in 1981. She is a retired journalist, married with one adult daughter and living in the North East of England. Her relationship with Mass Observation has been consistent over the years, her style of writing reflecting her profession in that she is a skilled writer, and generally retains a journalist's professional detachment even when writing about highly emotive subjects. In terms of Goodson's typology, she tends towards the armchair elaborator, in that her writing is characterized by an intense but fluent narrative that constitutes a 'commanding voice' but seeks a 'life detached from the action; search for inner peace' (Goodson, 2013, p.82). By her own admission she began writing for Mass Observation in the throes of post-natal depression and as a way of proving to herself that she still had the skills to allow her to pursue a freelance career (Au2010: Special Questionnaire). As such, she appears to write to Mass Observation for therapeutic reasons (Pollen, 2013), for even after recovering from post-natal depression, she continues to use her responses to Mass Observation as a 'safety valve', particularly when writing about subjects such as the family (Au2010:SQ). Juliet is a thoughtful and reflective writer. She observes, records and reports as befits a journalist, but I sense that this is as much a product of her nature as of her professional training and experience. As I will demonstrate later in this vignette, she often sets herself slightly outside the main run of things, distinguishing between the confidence required by her professional persona and a far more introverted and private persona.

Born in 1942, Juliet was the eldest of three children and grew up in what she describes as a lower middle-class household with working-class origins. She attributes her family's upward move in social class to her father's career as a journalist and then as editor of a local newspaper (Sp2016:1). Although close to her father until his death in the mid 1980s, Juliet had a much more complex and troubled relationship with her mother that I recognize as being an important factor in the context of Juliet's interaction with education as I will explain later. When responding to the Autumn 2000 Directive on Family, she reflects that she 'had made the fatal mistake of not being a

boy, having been conceived as a buffer between my mother and her parents' (Au2000:1). The next child to be born to the family was a boy who died shortly after birth, followed by her youngest brother who was a sickly child and therefore 'came, first, last and all the time' (Au2000:1). It appears that her mother targeted Juliet specifically, subjecting her to controlling and violent behavior that would have led to Juliet being 'on the 'at risk' register' if it had been happening today (Au2000:1).

The effects of Juliet's relationship with her mother reached into her school life, to some extent forming her relationship with education. As children of working class parents, neither of her own parents were able to go to Grammar school. She does state that her father and his four siblings would have been able to gain scholarships had her grandmother not realized the expense she would have to cover; she decided that if she 'could not manage it for them all, she would not do it for any of them' (Sp2016:1). Juliet herself passed the Eleven Plus and attended the local, highly academic girls' grammar school between 1954 and 1961. Although Juliet was clearly academically able she recounts how she 'queered' her pitch in the first year. She had been able to maintain a position at the top of her classes throughout junior school with minimal effort and on entering grammar school did not recognize the new, competitive environment she encountered and failed to apply herself accordingly, resulting in a string of poor marks that haunted the rest of her years at the school (Sp2015:2). The problems in her home life also affected Juliet's experience of school, particularly as she grew older; she possessed a sense of always being out of step with her peers due to the restrictions on freedom and money that her mother imposed on her. She reflects that,

'I suppose too, that being sat on at home, I broke out at school and was a bit of a rule breaker but I also had a persecution complex as far as my school was concerned' (Su2015:2).

Despite these problems, Juliet succeeded in passing all of her GCE exams and managed to develop a set of close friendships that helped support her self-confidence. Despite the relief she felt at having finished school, any thoughts of leaving education were countered by her receipt of a 'stunningly good 'Testamur' [sic] that makes all those bad reports seem very odd' (Sp2008:2). Rather than seeking employment she decided

to apply for a place at university, carefully considering her choice of degree course by gathering information from prospectuses and seeking guidance from an A-level history teacher who provided career advice where none else was offered (Sp2016:2; Su2015:2). In 1961, she moved to a traditional redbrick university in the North East, taking a general degree in economics and becoming the first member of her family to have gone to university. Entering higher education in 1961, shortly before the publication of the Robbins Report and the beginning of a widening of access, Juliet sensed that she was not 'classic university material'; unlike Richard, university had not been a foregone conclusion for her but a hopeful ambition that she was able to fulfil (Su2015:2). Whilst she states that her choice of degree course was dictated by her ambition to become a journalist, she also admits that in the 1960s a degree was not a requirement for a career in journalism (Sp2016:2). Other reasons therefore contributed greatly to her decision to apply for university, mainly an opportunity to be delivered from an exceedingly unhappy home life. Juliet states it as the one route of escape from her mother's control to which she could not object as she would not want to be known by her friends and neighbours as the person who stopped her daughter from going to university (Au 2000:1; Sp2016:2). The kudos of having a daughter at university outweighed any objections to her daughter living away by providing a 'respectable way of leaving home without actually throwing my mother into hysterics' (Sp2004:3) For Juliet, it was a welcome alternative to what she describes as the emotional blackmail she would have had to deal with had she instead got a job and tried to develop an independent life at home where she would have been 'criticised for going out to play when I could have been pulling my weight with housework.' (Au2000:1).

Juliet's time at University appears to have been happy. It took her away from her problems at home and allowed her to develop friendships that have endured to the present day. Her writing gives us a sense that she began to experience a contentment and a feeling of belonging that had so far always been absent in her school and home life (Su2010:2; Su2015:2). She qualified for a full major scholarship in her first year at university, but did not qualify for a full grant in the subsequent two years. Receiving no

parental financial contribution, she worked in her vacations, saving half of her wages to support herself in term time and giving the other half to her mother 'so that she didn't accuse me of wrecking the household finances by coming home' (Sp2004: 3). She appears to have enjoyed her studies, taking economics as her main subject and a range of subsidiary subjects that she considered would be useful to support her intended future career in journalism (Sp2004:3).

Commenting on the social life, Juliet states that it was not 'as it appears in novels' (Sp2016:2), emphasizing the fact that she had no other term of reference with which to build her expectations of university having never visited one until her first day as an undergraduate and being the first member of her family or acquaintances to go into higher education. She was required to live in rented accommodation some distance away from the college as there were few halls of residence available for female students at that time (Sp2016:2), reflecting how institutions still needed to develop infrastructures to deal with the growing student numbers. Living away from the central buildings of the university curtailed many opportunities to socialize in the evenings, but Juliet was still able to take advantage of activities available during the day including ballroom dancing, ice-skating club, trips to the cinema and chatting in the womens' common room, all of which she fondly describes as 'blameless pursuits' (Sp2016:2). Her social network at university was restricted to a small group of women, women being in the minority at her college, except for the 'one thing' that she did on her own which was to join the ice-skating club. In doing so she came into contact with other students such as scientists who she would not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet (Sp2016:2). Although Juliet makes no judgment as to how being in a minority affected her experiences, her narrative demonstrates some of the effects of such segregation in that experiences could be limited (Dyhouse, 2006). However, Juliet appears ambivalent to these, perhaps accepting them as what was to be expected by a woman in the early 1960s. I surmise that this may in part also be a result of Juliet not seeing herself as 'classic university material' and of having little prior knowledge of what to expect, therefore simply accepting what she experienced

(Sp2016:2). Perhaps she was simply grateful to be at university and took for granted that it was what she should expect.

On graduating in 1964 Juliet returned home to a job as a trainee reporter, her return coinciding with her mother's diagnosis and subsequent death from cancer. She worked at the same company where her father was an editor, and as such hesitated 'to join the general social life of colleagues for fear of being accused of carrying tales in either direction' (W2008:3). Given that most of her colleagues in journalism were non-graduates, Juliet sensed that the 'best thing you could do with a degree when I started was shut up about it' (Sp2016:2). Despite her existent qualification, she was required to undertake a series of professional examinations which she completed in 1967. In the same year, she became engaged to a telecoms engineer whom she had met on a blind date arranged by a colleague. They married in 1968 and have remained so, continuing to live in the local area ever since. She continued working as a reporter for a local paper until their daughter was born in 1976, subsequently returning to work as a freelancer and sub-editor for the same paper. Juliet continued working in local journalism until her retirement in 2007 and although she appears to have enjoyed her career, retirement came as a relief as 'it wasn't the job I signed up for in hot metal days [...] in my 40s, I used to think they would drag me screaming from the building when I had to retire; I never dreamed I'd be counting the days' (Sp2008:3).

Although Juliet and her husband are currently financially comfortable, eschewing exotic holidays due to their intolerance of heat rather than an inability to cover their cost (Sp2010:2), there have been periods of financial insecurity in their marriage. In particular, a period in which her husband was made redundant whilst their daughter was at an independent fee-paying school proved to be particularly difficult (Sp2008:3). Their decision to enroll her into private secondary education was influenced by Juliet's belief that her academically gifted daughter would be disadvantaged at the local school which she describes as a 'sink comprehensive' (Sp2010:2). Having explored the option of moving house to a catchment for a preferred state school, Juliet concluded that it was cheaper to enter a school fees insurance scheme, the surplus of which helped support her university fees (Sp2004:3). Her daughter read Maths at Oxford and

although she rarely shows off in her writing, Juliet indulges her pride of her daughter, describing her graduation day as ‘one of the happiest days of my life. If there is a better feeling than swanning through Oxford with your daughter in the robes of a higher degree, I’ve not experienced it.’ (Sp2008:3). Her daughter gained a First and has gone on to a successful career, enjoying a ‘spirit of adventure’ and an independence which Juliet recognizes that she did not have due to her own upbringing (Sp2008:3). Instead, she was able to set her daughter on a path that offered these opportunities so that through her, Juliet would be able to ‘experience vicariously, a lot of dreams that went down the pan’ (Su2015:3).

Although she talks of unfulfilled dreams, Juliet’s responses relate contentment with her lot in life. She appears to have a close relationship with her husband and daughter and enjoys close and long-lasting friendships with university and school friends, as well as being active in their local parish church. Juliet and her husband run a second-hand bookstall for charity, enjoy going out for meals and to the theatre as well as subscribing to Friends’ organisations for museums and other cultural venues (W2013). Together they have also enjoyed a life-long love of folk music and dance and continue to go to folk festivals and participate in the ‘broad social spectrum’ of folk music. She also takes pleasure in a wide spectrum of music ‘classical, folk, operetta, musicals, sixties pop, choral church music’ and enjoys listening to old radio comedy shows and BBC Radio 4 shows such as *News Quiz* and *I’m sorry I haven’t a clue*, in preference to what she describes as crude stand ups and sitcoms on contemporary television (W2013:2).

When asked to reflect on the value of higher education in the context of contemporary discourses of widening access as part of the Spring 2016 Directive, Juliet’s response typifies the vast majority of the Panelists. She references the increase in degree-awarding institutions and the increase in degrees that she feels are ‘no longer being limited to academic subjects’. As with many other Observers, she unfavorably compares sports science and social care with traditional subjects such as maths and history, but the arguments she poses are based on reported cases or anecdotal references. This is all in spite of, or perhaps because of, the experiences of the next

generation of her own family, including her daughter, all of whom appear to have gained degrees and careers that Juliet judges to be of worth such as doctors, actuaries and engineers (Sp2016:2). Her response to this particular Directive ends by her contrasting the 50 percent of young people going to university in the 2010s with the 4 percent who were considered 'of university ability' when she attended 50 years ago. She asserts that this large increase has diluted academic standards and therefore the value of a degree to the holder and to prospective employers.

In terms of the value of higher education to her own life, Juliet is rather ambivalent throughout her responses, particularly when compared to the value she attributes to it in the context of her daughter's life. Whilst university provided an escape route from her relationship with her mother and helped her develop her independence, it did not result in a substantial change in her fortunes. Going to university had no material impact on where she lived, as she moved back home, or on her profession which did not require her to have a degree and even on meeting her husband, a non-graduate from her local area. This return to what she could have acquired without having gone to university gives further strength to the suggestion that she sought to escape the relationship with her mother rather than her background. By working in the same profession and at the same level as her father she does not perceive any change in her social class from that of her parents (Sp2016:1), thus questioning any assumption that higher education enables upward social mobility for all. The value of higher education for Juliet is in fact far more nuanced, and only reveals itself through the opportunity that Mass Observation provides by allowing us to read across her narratives and in-between the lines. University provided Juliet with the foundation for her to build her own identity and to seek a more positive set of relationships, the value of which is demonstrated in the effort that she makes to ensure that they endure fifty years after they were first established. Perhaps more significantly, her escape to university allowed her to set a path of upward mobility of which her daughter could take advantage. These actions have enabled her daughter to benefit from greater economic capital which in turns appears to have driven her social mobility from lower-middle to middle-class. Through the education she has received, Juliet's daughter has been able

to gain a well-paid professional job in a male dominated field and Juliet sees that 'her social milieu is people with similar jobs and qualifications and she lives in a very middle-class London postcode' (Sp2016:2).

The implication that higher education could open chances of increasing economic capital is not borne out by Juliet, perhaps due to the fact her chosen career did not require a degree, and that she married a non-graduate. I am more interested in the way that Juliet's habitus may have pulled her back to her original position, but, by increasing her social and cultural capital she was provided with the tools that could enable her own daughter to be in a position to beneficially gain capitals through the field of higher education.

One of the things that drew me to Juliet's writing was the way that to some extent she characterized the outsider who was comfortable in her role. Perhaps tellingly, when discussing social class Juliet describes herself as a chameleon, framing this depiction in terms of a journalist's requirement to get on in all sorts of environments (Sp2016:1). Although she attributes this chameleonic personality to her profession, I sense that its roots lie more deeply within the habitus of her family. In reconciling the troubles that she experienced at home with her school life Juliet developed a carapace that allowed her to adapt to situations despite a feeling of always being slightly out of sync with those around her. She admits that although she always appeared socially confident in her working life, without her professional carapace she struggled to socialize at events as herself, preferring social environments where she was surrounded by close friends (W2008:3).

This ability to adapt and shift according to immediate circumstances despite feeling out of step with those around one may be a trait developed within the family habitus, as Juliet reflects on her younger brother's own social class. His employment as a labourer placed him within the working-class, but contrasted with his middle-class reading tastes and hobbies that placed him out of kilter with his work mates. In retirement, his socializing was limited to a lower middle-class circle of friends which, when complimented by his completion of an Open University degree, achieved what

Juliet describes as his eventual upward social mobility into the lower middle-class (Sp2016:1).

In summary, going to university was an escape route for Juliet, and although it did not have a strong effect on her own capitals, it did provide the foundations that allowed her to start engineering a way of changing the habitus of her own daughter. When compared to Richard's life story, Julia's own story demonstrates that in the pre-Robbins era, a university education was not enough to guarantee upward social mobility. The contrast in Richard and Juliet's stories can be attributed in part to the ways in which social class was entrenched within habitus as well as Juliet's identity as a woman in an era when less than 30 percent of undergraduate students were female (Dyhouse, 2006). In addition, Juliet came from a social, and perhaps more pertinently, a family background that had no expectations of going to university and therefore no expectations of the potential life changing opportunities that participation could afford. Juliet was not 'set up' by the local and indeed, wider society, to expect upward social or economic mobility from going to university. Juliet's experiences illustrate the intersection between gender and class at the time she was growing up, and its effects on how she experienced university and expectations of its subsequent effect on her life. In contrast, Juliet's daughter gained her place at university when numbers of women had risen to over 50 percent of the student population (Dyhouse, 2006) and a wider range of social class groups now expected to attend university if they had the ability. Combining this with the evolving changes in habitus that her mother had instigated by her own achievements at university, Juliet's daughter was placed in a position to take advantage of the opportunities of upward social mobility offered by higher education. I see Juliet as an adapter in the way that she dealt with the new experiences that she encountered in the field of higher education. Going to university in the pre-Robbins era was an achievement but simply going served its main purpose for Juliet – an escape from her mother. Although Juliet never alludes to thinking of how her life may have been different had her mother lived longer, I suggest that she may have sought other means of escape that could have led her away from home. By

not returning home after graduation, Juliet may have exploited the potential of the social and economic capital that her degree afforded her.

Sarah

Sarah went to Bradford University as an undergraduate in the early 1980s. After graduation, she worked as a bookseller then undertook a postgraduate teaching qualification (PGCE). Following a brief stint in a teaching-related job she returned to bookselling for a few years before getting a job in an NHS hospital pharmacy where she has worked for the last 10 years. None of the jobs that Sarah has undertaken since graduation required a degree. As I shall demonstrate over the next few pages, a consistent theme throughout Sarah's Mass Observation responses is a sense of disappointment at unfulfilled promise and missed opportunities. Sarah began writing for Mass Observation in 2006 and has responded regularly since starting. Of all my four Observers, her responses are usually the longest and most detailed and Sarah clearly takes pleasure in the act of composition. When asked why she participates for the Project she commented on how although she does not normally make time to write, Mass Observation gives her the opportunity to focus on writing 'in a relatively disciplined manner' (Au2010: Special Questionnaire). Sarah's writing indicates that she falls into the category of a therapeutic writer (Pollen, 2013) although unlike Juliet's use of the Project to let off steam, Sarah uses Directive responses to explore issues and states explicitly that they give her an excuse to 'reminisce and to re-assess various parts of her life' (Au2010:SQ). Although she is a forthcoming and communicative writer, Sarah hints at the fact that she is much less forthright in person. She describes her younger self as shy and lacking in self-confidence around others and without a large social network in her current life (Sp2008:2). Writing for Mass Observation allows her to discuss her views in a way that she would not do elsewhere. She writes, 'I don't really talk as much as most people I know outside the family so it's also an outlet that allows me to express myself' (Au2010:SQ).

Sarah presents her narratives with an honesty that can sometimes be painful to read, leaving me as a researcher both sympathetic and frustrated in equal parts by her life story. In her letter to her 16-year-old self she writes,

I think you would be very surprised and disappointed if you could see yourself at 50-ish, and upset that you didn't take the opportunities you were offered,

make choices that suited your personality and skills, and have the fun and interesting life you hoped for. [...]

I could just say, look at everything I did for the next 30 years or so and do the opposite [...] (Sp2016:3)

Whilst I can identify with aspects of her experience, I am forced to recognize where my own choices cause a divergence from hers and as a reader I have to recognize how this affects my interpretation of her writing. Of all four Observers, I have found Sarah the hardest to categorize in terms of her narrative style, in part due to the contrast between her highly literate and explorative writing with a powerlessness to alter a life that she alludes to as being unsatisfactory. She has the potential to be a focused elaborator, being adept at narration and locating her stories historically and sociologically. She could also fall into elements of the armchair elaborator by providing accounts that seem to 'reflect a desire for greater personal agency and an underdeveloped capacity to forge a link between narrative elaboration and deliverable courses of action' (Goodson, 2013, p. 83).

Born in 1962, Sarah is the middle of three children, with an older brother being born two years before her and a younger sister born four years after. She describes her family background as being firmly middle-class; her grandfathers were both professionals who were able to establish a comfortable standard of living for their families (Sp2016:1). Her mother was educated at Grammar school and although she had the ability to go onto higher education her father disapproved of women going to university despite having the means to support such a move and so she missed the opportunity (Sp2016:2). Sarah's father did go to university and subsequently became a university lecturer. Six out of fourteen of Sarah's own generation of her family went to university, including herself and her two siblings. Of the remaining eight non-university educated cousins, one went to music college, three became accountants and the others have all established themselves in business, all being considered successful in their fields (Sp2016:1). She appears to be close to her immediate family, always writing about them in a positive tone and often referring to their opinions and observations within her narratives. She describes them as 'intelligent, funny, kind, loving and fairly wise, and supportive when they can (Su2012:2) and she takes delight in her nieces and

nephews despite being someone who never saw herself as fond of children (Sp2008:2).

Sarah performed well at primary school and accordingly moved on to a girls' Grammar School at 11. Echoing Juliet's experiences, Sarah recollects that having always easily achieved top marks it did not occur to her that the other girls at Grammar school would also be bright and accordingly she did not work hard enough to be placed in the 'A' stream (Su2015:3). This appears to have had a profound impact on Sarah, and could be seen as foreshadowing subsequent academic problems including failing first attempts at both 'A' Level and parts of her degree course (Sp2008:2; Sp2015:3). After two years she decided to leave Grammar school to move to the local co-ed comprehensive school. Her parents chose not to argue against her decision for fear that she 'might rebel' and leave school altogether when she reached 16 (Sp2008:2; Su2015:3). However, in retrospect, Sarah herself rued her decision to leave, recognizing that had she stayed on at Grammar school many more options may have been opened up for her in life (Su2015:3). The belief that she could have tried harder is repeated as she relates her 'O' and 'A' Level exam experiences, stating that she didn't put enough work in and made assumptions about her capability that were not borne out (Su2015:3). Sarah took an 'A' Level in Geography but dropped out after one year due to the workload and then failed her remaining 'A' Level subjects the following year. Her parents were able to support her financially and emotionally to retake them at a private college, and although she still failed one she achieved enough to apply successfully for a place at a northern, redbrick university to study for a BSc in Psychology (Sp2008:2).

Sarah started her degree in 1981 during the height of the campaign of serial killing perpetrated by Peter Sutcliffe, otherwise known as the Yorkshire Ripper. Sarah claims that she only managed to get a place at university by applying to an institution based in the midst of the region where Sutcliffe was active, there being a far lower number of applications from female students that year due to the serial killer's presence in the area (Sp2008:2). Writing about going to university nearly forty years later, she questions whether she was right to go, suggesting to her 16-year-old self that she

should work for a year or two before deciding what she wants to do (Su2015:3). At the time, going to university was accepted as a foregone conclusion for Sarah as she was surrounded by family and friends who had gone or were going. Their experiences provided her with a seemingly innate knowledge of what was acceptable, applying for courses and institutions that she saw as 'less wishy-washy' and choosing a BSc over a BA simply because her brother and father had also done so and the qualification therefore came with a seal of familial approval (Sp2016:2).

In the tenor of much of her self-reflective writing in *Mass Observation*, Sarah's narratives relating to her university experiences are often tinged with regret. She writes that she found the academic work difficult to keep up with, attributing this in part to her struggle to deal with the open-ended tasks she was faced with such as research or writing dissertations as well as the fact that she did not spend enough time with her student peers and invested too much time in developing her social life away from the student environment (Sp2016:2). Sarah believed that she did not gel with other students but instead preferred the company of those on the fringes, 'waste-of-time people' and 'long-haired oiks' that she thought harmless at the time whilst thinking that 'normal people are boring' and not valuing their company (Sp2008:2; Su2015:3). Meeting one of those 'normal' people recently, a fellow student who had been on her course 25 years earlier, Sarah recognized that, had she acted differently, she could have gained a friendship that would have supported her throughout her degree (Su2015:3). She did join some of the student societies and clubs when she first began her course, including the Labour Club which resulted on her going on her first and only political march (W2011:3). Despite failing her second-year exams and having to retake them a year later, Sarah astonished herself by passing her degree with honours.

After graduation Sarah worked in a high-street chemist for a few months before getting a job as a bookseller at the age of 24. She describes this as the best job that she ever had with the earlier years being some of the happiest of her life (Sp2008:2). She felt completely at home with her colleagues describing them as a group of like-minded, intelligent and fun people, sharing common interests in film, music, books and other

social and cultural issues (W2013:2; Sp2015:3; Sp2016:1). It also appears to be the first time that she felt totally accepted for who she was, explaining that, 'I'd start to speak and find that they were still listening at the end of the sentence' (Sp2008:2). This sentence betrays the contrast between the eloquent confidence of Sarah's writing and the self-conscious awkwardness that appears to have always existed within any social interactions with others outside her immediate family circle.

Despite finding security and enjoyment working as a bookseller in her twenties, this period was punctuated by a series of troubled relationships and a failed attempt to travel across America, the latter of which she took as evidence that she was 'rubbish at travelling alone and I really shouldn't bother' (Sp2008:2).

After six years of working in a bookshop Sarah decided to enroll on a Postgraduate Course in Education (PGCE) and trained as a primary school teacher. She had to re-take her final teaching practice, and after having finally completed the course spent several 'unsettled' months applying for teaching posts (Sp2008:2). Eventually she took a post as a 'curriculum support' worker rather than continuing with the uncertain wait for a teaching post, something that she regrets doing as it meant she did not receive the support and mentoring opportunities available to Newly Qualified Teachers (Sp2008:2). Along with the fact that this post left her unable to develop her teaching skills with a single class over the course of a year, the situation left her disillusioned with teaching as a career. She decided to leave the profession without having really started and undertook some temping posts before moving back into book selling. After ten years in the same bookshop and at the age of 44, she felt 'tired and demoralised' and decided that it was once again time to try a new career path (Sp2008:2). This change appears to have taken a little time to effect, something she attributes to a lack of experiences and confidence, feeling that 'at my age I had too few practical skills to offer an employer' (Sp2008:2) but eventually she was offered a job at a hospital pharmacy and continues to work in the NHS today. Although she wrote of her delight in getting the post in the NHS pharmacy in her response to the Spring 2008 Directive, by 2016 she appears to be less satisfied with the job. Writing about social mobility in 2016, she describes her last years working in the book trade as being

merely 'till fodder', and whilst her move to the NHS gave her more variety in her work she still describes it as not being a 'professional' level post.

Despite having worked in her current institution for nearly a decade she writes that she feels like an outsider in her current job, sensing that some of her current colleagues are uncomfortable with the fact that she has a degree (Sp2016:1). She shares few interests with her colleagues and in describing this alludes to her perceptions of embodied taste as a way of marking out the difference in her social class.

'Many of them [her work colleagues] love the celebrity culture - people who are on reality TV rather than the ones who are accomplished at anything - and most of the time I don't know anything about the people they are talking about. Some colleagues like to wear bling or designer gear (which, along with fashion, seems to me a complete waste of money – individuals should each work out the style that works for them) or talk about how expensive or glamorous their holidays are etc.' (Sp2016:1)

Her cultural and social capitals, created within the middle-class habitus of her family and social background are of little value within her current workplace. I find it interesting that although they place her at a disadvantage in terms of social interaction, their value is inculcated to such an extent within her being that she maintains that, despite everything, she continues to hold the upper hand in terms of her taste. It is a wonderful example of how taste interplays with social class, where Sarah's social and intellectual middle-class upbringing has a symbolic power to legitimize her judgment and enables her to demonstrate a 'knowingness' that places her in a position of power (Skeggs, 2004, p.107-8), albeit an internalized symbolic capital that is essentially not convertible into any form of economic or social capital. Notwithstanding her downward economic and social mobility, Sarah provides an excellent example of how habitus is completely integrated in the self. Her comments and judgments on taste as seen in the quote above are so embedded as to be read as unconsciously and naively candid. An example of this is given when she considers symbols of social class, writing that her partner habitually wears a baseball cap which causes her concern that their neighbours judge him to be 'some kind of hooligan

rather than someone who's insecure about how his hair looks' (Sp2016:1). In many ways, this quote helps illustrate my understanding of Sarah's identity as an individual that has never quite been at one with her surroundings, in a way that makes her self-consciously unfulfilled.

Reading through Sarah's more recent Directive responses, I have ascertained that the symbolic capital that she possesses traces its roots back to the habitus within which she was brought up. Her middle-class professional family background and a schooling that led her unquestioningly to higher education, all contrast with the experiences of those who she currently lives and works amongst. Her current relationship and economic status do not measure up to her original social and economic status and she reflects that she is the only one amongst her peer group who has probably experienced downward social mobility (Sp2016:1). Sarah has never possessed much economic capital, describing her current circumstances as 'limited' particularly since her partner was made redundant from his work in retail and currently can only find work for three hours a day as a cleaner. Although she owns her own property, she describes their house as shabbier than those around them and neither she nor her partner earn enough money to allow them to live the fuller life they would like to, nor do they have the finances to pursue outside interests. She observes that as a result of a lack of external stimuli they don't have much to talk about and have descended into a vicious circle of anxiety and depression that affects their relationship with each other (Sp2016:1). Although she thinks it healthy to have friends, she allows herself to be influenced by her partner who does not see the point of them as they have each other. Despite the fact he does not stop her contacting friends she has not kept many friendships from previous parts of her life, only exchanging Christmas cards with two of her university friends (W2008:3).

Sarah remains close to her family, particularly her siblings who are both graduates and have successful careers and families of their own (Su2012:2). Sarah is close to her nieces and nephews and proud of her brother's and sister's achievements and, in contrast, she depicts herself as the 'difficult' middle child who did not know what her

role was supposed to be; the one who caused her parents the most concern by leaving her fee-paying school and mixing with 'the wrong sort' at university (Su2012:2).

Analyzing the value of higher education to Sarah's life is complex as it appears to have added little material benefit, in fact throughout her narratives she often questions why she made the choices she made including those around higher education. She appears to have gone to university as she believed that was what was expected of her at the time, when in fact forty years later her parents admitted that they had never really had any expectations about what she should do (Sp2008:3; Su2015:3; Sp2016:2). Reflecting back on her decision, Sarah believes that she would have gained much more had she followed a friend's suggestion and applied for technical college as it would have provided her with a practical qualification useful for a career, something that she does not feel a BSc in Psychology has given her (Su2015:3). The only way that she believes having a degree has affected her working life is that it allowed her to gain entry to the PGCE teaching course that ultimately never really led to a change in career path. All other jobs that she has held could have been gained with A Levels alone (Sp2016:2).

Going to university appears to have also had little impact on her social and cultural life. As I have already remarked, she has not really maintained any friendships from her time at university and despite professing that she gave more to her social life than to her studies, she gained nothing in terms of creating social networks from the groups that she associated with whilst there. She observes that her current friendships comprise graduates and non-graduates and her current partner, who left school at 16, is the only relationship she has had with someone who did not go onto higher education (Sp2016:2). Whilst she asserts that, for the most part, the difference in their level of education has not been a problem, there are examples throughout her Directive responses that might imply it has had an effect on who they socialize with. Before meeting her current partner, she was heavily involved in a local amateur theatre group, but ceased to socialize with them as her partner felt excluded by them, disliking parties and feeling they did not listen to him (Sp2008:3). Her social and political attitudes were inherited from her parents who she describes as 'left of centre, with a tolerant and intelligent approach' and varied little from the attitudes she came

into contact with at university, perhaps due to the fact her father already worked in higher education (Sp2016:2).

The greatest impact that going to university had for Sarah was the opportunity to move away from home, living away from her family for the first time being identified as the most relevant aspect of this point in her life course (Sp2008:2). Sarah describes university as 'a natural point at which to leave home', but unlike Juliet, she does not appear to have been escaping an oppressive home life. Instead Sarah writes that she was seeking the opportunity to create her own identity away from her parents who she admits had a 'fairly strong' influence on her (Sp2016:2). This influence is not described in a negative way indeed, if anything, it is once again used to demonstrate her own self-criticism: 'Perhaps I expected to feel stifled if I'd stayed at home, but on the other hand the influence of my family and friends may have steered me in the right direction (taking a more practical course at the local technical college)' (Sp2016:2). Perhaps her father being a university lecturer and she coming from a background that was already highly integrated in higher education, going to university may not have meant much of a change for her socially and culturally. In some ways, her decision to move away from socializing with other students and disassociating herself with 'normal' university life could be seen as a form of rebellion against her background.

In terms of wider discourses relating to higher education, Sarah's narrations relate mainly to the opportunities provided in the 1980s. Looking back she reflects that,

...most of us who went to university in the early 80s were lucky enough to get a student grant that we were not expected to repay. I cringe when I look back and think how lucky I was and how I didn't make the most of such a gift and opportunity.' (W2011:3)

She states that she is 'ashamed' to have taken the chance for granted when contemporary students struggle to afford the opportunities she was given relatively freely although she does take the opportunity to question the value of contemporary degrees commenting that she 'can't help thinking that some of the 'softer' subjects (don't ask me which ones I mean – I'm not too sure) could be called something else' (Sp2016:2). Sarah also refers to widening participation, to some extent following the line of many other Mass Observers in that although she values the opportunity for

those who can benefit from higher education to be able to do so, she feels that 'many jobs don't require qualifications and it's pointless to persuade people to go for Higher Education if they are happiest doing a straightforward job' with qualifications being demanded for the sake of it (Sp2016:2). Her take on discourses around the charging of tuition fees is also interesting in that whilst thinking they are too high, she does think it is worthwhile to ensure that young people are better informed about their choices than she was (Sp2016:2). This echoes other statements she makes regarding her own experiences of going to university in that 'maybe if it hadn't been so straightforward I might have put more thought into the career that would be right for me and gone a lot further in an appropriate direction. I am ashamed that I took this chance for granted, when so many students now struggle to pay for a course they know is right for them' (Sp2016:2).

To summarize Sarah's experiences, the value of higher education in her life is probably the most complex of all my four studies. Of the four, she appears to have benefited the least despite being in an environment that suggested she could have reaped many benefits. Sarah's own identity appears to be deeply entwined in how this happened, in particular a lack of self-confidence in her abilities that may stem from those early days at school when she realized she could no longer take being top of the class for granted. The assumption that she could go on to higher education, partly as a result of her family background but also due to the growing normalization of going to university throughout the 1980s may have contributed to her not valuing it at the time. Seeing it as an opportunity to leave home could be seen as an act of reaction against her background, but as her father was already part of the higher education establishment, perhaps placing herself as an outsider at university was an act of quiet rebellion against the system into which she was already integrated through her family.

Alice

Alice is the youngest of my four Observers and belongs to the student cohort that participated in higher education around the turn of the millennium as student numbers began to increase to unprecedented levels. She has written for Mass Observation since 2005 when she was 23 years old, and as with my other three case studies, is a fluent writer whose responses are fulsome and open in terms of discussing her opinions and experiences. Alice's responses depict an individual who is confident in her own identity and lives by principles she has formed through life experiences. Unlike Sarah, her responses do not appear to serve any therapeutic purpose and, whilst she uses her writing to explore and reflect, I sense that she is conscious of writing for a reader rather than purely for her own purpose. Of all four writers, Alice is the closest to being a focused elaborator with her writing comprising high narrative intensity and, as I shall explore shortly, being used to illustrate how she has sought to interrupt accepted family narratives. Goodson outlines focused elaborators as developing 'an open narrative that allow them to pursue the process of becoming' (2013, p.96). Reading through Alice's narrative from the age of 23 to her current age of 37, I can see her working through this process in a way that the other three older writers, who were more established in their adult lives when they began to write for Mass Observation, are unable to present. As observed by many of the Panel responses to the Spring 2016 Directive, the years between 18 and 25 are a period in which we start to form our independent adult selves; identity evolves and shifts according to the new experiences that intersect our lives. Accordingly, the fact that Alice's writing begins at 23 allows me to trace how these changes evolve over time, and how her experiences at university have impacted her life in terms of growing or lessening influence.

Alice and her twin sister were born in 1980 into a lower middle-class family. She describes her mother's family as working-class; despite the fact her grandparents eventually came to be able to afford a detached house and garden, this did not affect their working-class 'tastes and sensibilities' as they continued to read the *Daily Mirror* and vote Labour (Sp2016:1). In contrast, she portrays her father's family as middle-

class in both profession and in cultural pursuits. Her paternal grandfather was a civil servant and sailing club member with highbrow tastes in reading and music, whilst Alice singles out her grandmother's interest in horticulture and *The Times* crossword as particular indicators of her class (Sp2016:1). Alice's father continues to own a small business whilst her mother is a retired teacher. Both of her parents received a grammar school education and although they both started university courses, neither of them completed their degrees with her mother gaining a teaching qualification and her father dropping out altogether after an unhappy first year (Sp2016:2).

Her childhood and teenage years witnessed the breakdown of her parent's relationship and subsequent divorce, events that appear to have had a significant influence on Alice's strongly feminist social interests and activities. In her response to the directive on Violence in the home (Sp2007:2), she details the psychological abuse that her father inflicted on her mother for the 20 years of their marriage. Although Alice did once witness a physical assault on her mother, her father's behaviour mainly comprised 'constant verbal abuse, criticism and never knowing what mood he was going to be in' in order to control his wife, whilst he put on the 'usual charming act to ensure that he is well liked by everyone in the area and he is a well-respected small business man in the local area' (Sp2007:2). His relationship with Alice appears to be equally antagonistic and she gives an example of how he called her a 'useless left-wing twat and he would never be proud of me' after she gained three A grades at 'A' Level. She finally decided to break off contact with him in recent years but his behaviour has had a lasting effect on her attitudes by contributing to the formation of her strong feminist social consciousness that has led her to volunteer for the domestic abuse helpline, Refuge, and participate in feminist networks (Sp2007:2; Sp2008:2).

Alice and her twin sister attended a state secondary school until 16 which she describes as a 'bog standard' comprehensive school with a bad reputation (Sp2016:1). Her father decided that his daughters should transfer to a Grammar School in order to take their 'A' Levels and, whilst her sister agreed, Alice refused on the grounds that she did not believe in the Grammar school system. She attended her local sixth form college instead, achieving higher grades than her sister (Su2015:2; Su2012:2). Alice was

academically bright at her school despite its reputation and her teachers encouraged her to achieve, spending extra time to support her as she worked hard and 'got them good results' (Sp2015:3). Similarly, at Sixth Form College she felt well supported by teachers, particularly when she was bullied by another student 'who was basically jealous because I got better marks than her' (SU2012:1). Alice's Sixth Form teachers also encouraged her to apply to what they considered to be the 'best' universities, something that she interprets as a strategy for the college who wanted to use their success at getting students to Oxbridge as a marketing tool (Sp2016:2). She duly applied to Cambridge University but failed to gain a place having 'flunked' her interview. Although Alice does not elaborate on the reasons why her application failed at this stage, despite having been considered academically bright enough to be invited to interview, there may be evidence of the institutional habitus within a state run Sixth Form College that is unable to provide its students with the academic social capital that counts within the field of the elite institution (Reay et al, 2005).

Although she never explicitly says it, Alice expresses a sense that her intelligence and willingness to work hard academically is important to her self-identity. The notion of self-worth through academic achievement appears to be rooted in her troubled relationship with her father. She states that she felt a 'massive pressure' from him to do well at school as it was a way of gaining his approval. Even when she did do well at 'A' Levels she still relates how he told her she could have done better had she followed his wishes and attended Grammar school. Nonetheless, she instructs her 16-year-old self to do what she does for herself rather than wasting time trying to gain her father's approval 'he will never be satisfied with what you do, but that's his problem not yours' (Su2015:2).

Alice describes her failure to get to Cambridge as a 'kick' having previously taken much of her self-worth from getting the best academic results in her school and college (Sp2015:2). Going to university appears to have been a foregone conclusion for her 18-year-old self for whom it was 'unthinkable that anyone intelligent wouldn't go to uni' (Sp2016:2). Following her rejection by Cambridge, Alice successfully applied to the University of Warwick, starting immediately after her A Level year to read English and

American Literature (Sp2008:3). She chose to read English as she had always got good marks in the subject and enjoyed reading but looking back nearly twenty years later, she writes that she wished she had taken 'something useful such as psychology', blaming the fact she ignored advice from her teachers and parents on youthful ignorance and having a head strong character (Sp2016:2).

Although university appears to have been an inevitable step for the academically minded Alice, it also gave her an opportunity to escape from the unhappy situation at home where her parents were on the brink of an acrimonious divorce. Her choice of a university close to home was only acceptable to her on condition that she would be allowed to stay in halls of residence despite its proximity to her home, otherwise she would have chosen a different institution (Sp2016:2). Going to university also allowed her to escape the confines of the small village in which she had grown up but conversely, she was nervous that her village upbringing would make her 'the odd one out' who had never done the things she believed a normal 18-year-old would have done. Although not put off by her parents' failures at university, their experiences may have coloured Alice's expectations. Regardless of these reservations, Alice appears to have enjoyed her time at university. She was actively involved in the arts centre and relished the social life, going out with friends and developing her social capital. Although she enjoyed the social side of university, she was aware of social differences, recognising that her particular university was 'full of quite privileged people, many of whom had gone to private school and many of whom were, like me, Oxbridge rejects' (Sp2016:2). She was also confronted with people who she considered more intelligent than her which, for someone who took much self-worth from her academic achievement, appears to have curbed some of her youthful enthusiasm for a brilliant future (Su2015:2). Despite this, she succeeded in gaining her degree and chose not to follow the corporate route of employment for which she perceived Warwick prepared so many of its graduates (Sp2016:2).

After graduation Alice worked in Germany as a language assistant for a year before returning home to live with her mother for a brief period whilst she searched for a job. After a few months of temping, she secured a full-time job and eventually moved into

fundraising in the charity sector in which she continues to work today. She also began to volunteer for a domestic violence charity and began to participate in feminist networks and women's groups (Sp2008:3). After a few years working as a fundraiser, she decided to undertake a Masters level course at a local university in the same subject area as her work whilst working full-time and financing the fees through a career development loan. Alice met her current partner around the same time and after the birth of their son she returned to work as a fundraising manager. Her decision to return to work was in part driven by her beliefs in gender equality, that continuing to work gives a mother independence and self-esteem, something her own mother lost when she decided to give up her career to raise her daughters. Alice states that her career identity is part of her and therefore important even if it does not have significant financial benefits (Au2014:2).

Alice considers herself to be middle-class and although she believes she has not changed class from that in which she was raised, she does recognise that she and her partner have more economic capital, including owning their own home, than her parents had making them more 'comfortably middle class' (Sp2016:1). Her partner also comes from a middle-class background, his father having progressed from growing up in a Barnardo's home to retiring as a managing director. In identifying the markers of her middle-class lifestyle and what she describes as middle-class habits, Alice feels that they place her in a position of privilege, 'we shop at Ocado; we read the Guardian; we own a house in the home counties – we're members of the National Trust. That clinches it.' (Sp2016:1). Interestingly it is these characteristics that Alice sees as identifying her and her partner as middle-class as opposed to their educational attainments, occupations or income, supporting the idea that social class is inextricability embedded within ourselves.

Most of her friends and colleagues are described as being from the same socio-economic group as Alice and throughout her narratives it becomes clear that despite, a strong social consciousness, she does not tend to mix beyond her class. She is antagonistic towards elite networks, describing a period working amongst 'the richest of the rich' as a fundraiser for a private London hospital as the one time that she has

ever felt out of place. She ascertains that being what she describes as ‘well spoken’ enabled her to hold her own in this situation, but was clear that they inhabited a different world of which she was contemptuous. Alice clearly understands the value of the symbolic capital that is generated from holding social and cultural capitals that are given significant social value due to their scarcity (Bourdieu, 2004). In other words, she recognises how power is created and held by an elite, and sees this as a flawed process that disempowers other classes’ ability to change the world order:

‘white, middle aged men, who’ve been born into privilege, privately educated then through Oxbridge – where they probably got a place because of a family connection. Off they go into the City/law/media where the old boys’ network sees them through. Once in power, why would they change the rules that have benefited them? (Sp2016:1).

Criticism is also levelled at the inequity of career prospects between the classes due to the disparity between private and state education and the economic burden of university fees. Whilst such sentiments depict a socialist leaning, there are few instances in Alice’s life narrative where she appears to move out of her middle-class sphere. Her voluntary work for a domestic abuse helpline may have done so, but she does not reference any such event and her professional and personal life appear to be firmly situated within a left leaning middle-class environment. Alice’s sense of belonging lies where she is able to be herself and share her opinions without encountering too much conflict (Su2010:2) and sharing beliefs is an important feature in her sense of belonging. Her strongly feminist understandings, in part shaped by her parent’s relationship as well as through the influence of teachers whilst she was at school, have led her to join feminist network groups and promote gender equality, an area with which she feels she truly identifies (Sp2007:2; Su2015:3).

At the opening of her response to the higher education Directive, Alice states that she no longer places as much value on higher education as she once did. Much of this is based on her own personal experience and what she perceives she gained from her degree. Alice attended university at the turn of the millennium, a time when more young people than ever before were entering higher education and the cost of going was growing year on year. At the point at which she was applying to university, Alice admits that it ‘meant the world’ to her, thinking that ‘getting into the right uni would

make or break me' but admits that 15 years later it has done neither (Sp2016:2). She questions the value of having a degree in literature and wishes that she had chosen what she describes as a 'useful degree' such as psychology or law (Su2015:3; Sp2016:2). Whilst she believes she could do her job without a degree, she does recognise that the experience taught her skills that have been useful in her professional life, namely critical thinking, undertaking research and presenting arguments (Sp2016:2). She considers her Masters degree to have been far more useful due to its vocational nature, and although it is not a requirement by her employer it has given her professional confidence (Sp2016:2).

Going to university provided Alice with a route to escape the problems resulting from her parents' relationship, but also allowed her to develop her own identity. As a twin, she was aware of the beginning of their first real period of separation when they went to different institutions to take their A Levels. This prepared her for the much larger separation that they would experience at university, and although they have remained close it gave them both the opportunity to 'stop being just one of the 'twins' and start forging our own personalities' (Su2015:3; Su2012:2). Alice also appears to have benefited greatly from the social aspects of university, opening up contact with a wider range of people and enjoying new social and cultural experiences that were not available to her whilst growing up in a small village. The Arts Centre at the University of Warwick, where she worked as a steward, appears to have been an important influence on forming her cultural awareness by enabling her to develop an interest in the arts that has stayed with her. She states that whilst at Warwick she developed a love for what her partner refers to as 'depressing foreign films where everyone dies at the end. I'm not a fan of Hollywood films – I think this comes from having seen some really good non-mainstream stuff at uni' (Sp2016:2). Her intellectual disdain for mainstream culture could be interpreted as a use of her cultural capital to execute a form of symbolic violence against populist forms of culture. This contrasts with other areas of her narrative in which she rails against examples of symbolic violence enacted in areas of social or gendered inequality, in particular narratives around violence against women and charitable work. For me this exemplifies the way symbolic

violence can be consciously acknowledged whilst also being unconsciously enacted, albeit in different spheres of an individual's life. Reading it within Alice's writing enables me to recognise it within the other three narratives, and indeed within myself, but in Alice's case, I sense that she is constantly performing a balancing act between her desire to be a socially conscious member of society and an individual who possesses high levels of social, cultural and symbolic capital.

Alice makes few references to discourses around contemporary higher education, confining most of her discussion to her own experiences. However these comments do reflect broader issues relating to the value of going to university in today's world. As with many of the Mass Observers responding to the Spring 2016 Directive, Alice comments on the fact that employers no longer place much emphasis on degrees as so many people have one, meaning that although she is saving money in case her son goes to university in the future, she won't be pushing him to do. She contrasts this with her partner's opinion who, as a non-graduate, is adamant that their son should go. Her arguments are based on the fact that she knows quite a few people, including her partner, who have done very well without degrees and earn substantially higher salaries than she does. She also comments on the cost of going to university and how this prohibits working-class students from participating and therefore entering professions that require a degree, thereby contributing to the growing inequality within Britain today. In comparison with the other three Observers, Alice makes very few references to the cost of higher education and no mention at all of tuition fees or the cessation of maintenance grants. I surmise that this is due to the fact Alice belongs to the cohort of students who expected to pay their way through university with loans rather than grants, having gone to university in the year that tuition fees were first introduced. I am surprised that she makes no comment on this, as it highlights the contrast in expectation between Alice's generation of students and the other three Observers.

In summary, Alice presents a different value system to the other Observers that I believe is symptomatic of the era of higher education in which she participated. As an intelligent student with a high level of self-belief in her academic abilities, going to

university was a foregone conclusion for her, in part due to the habitus of family and school within which academic value and success was inextricably entwined, but also the expectations of her generation of middle-class young people.

Despite attending a university that she describes as a 'graduate factory for the corporate sector' (Sp2016:2) her social and political beliefs have led her to reject the kind of employment that would command a high salary. These beliefs appear to be more deeply rooted than simply being developed whilst at university; they lead her to place herself outside aspects of the institution that comprised what she perceived as more 'privileged' in terms of class and values such as viewing a high salary as a successful outcome of a degree. If anything, this belief shaped her decision to embark on a career in arts administration rather than to choose a corporate route, a choice that Alice indicates has been more socially worthy. There is an irony that I perceive in Alice's life choices in that she does not always recognise herself as one of those people of privilege. To be able to have made the decision to take a lower salary in favour of following her ambition of a career that aligned with her interests required an opportunity to be rescued if things failed. Parental support in some form was always available whilst her current economic stability enables her to indulge in those middle-class tastes that include membership of the National Trust. In some ways working through the value of higher education to Alice's life is more problematic than for the other three Observers as she is so much younger and has had less time to allow the benefits to accumulate and appreciate over a longer period.

Summary

Having undertaken an in-depth look at these four Observers, the final part of this Chapter will look at their narratives as a whole and explore how the value of higher education compares and contrasts between them according to their experiences. I have been looking at how they consciously value higher education as well as how its impact is embedded, perhaps unconsciously, in their lives. In addition, I have been struck by how they provide contrasting examples of how symbolic violence can be enacted within the field of higher education; the older of the two Observers appear to sustain this theory whilst the younger two challenge it, making me wonder whether agency is growing stronger as the symbolic violence imposed by class systems may grow weaker?

In the first part of this summary I will reflect on *how* the four Observers write and what this tells us about their identities. I will then go on to look at *what* they write through a Bourdieusian lens, finally leading onto how this supports or contests the dominant discourses outlined in Chapter 2 on the historical and political contexts. Although all four Observers went to university, their experiences and the impact on their lives varies significantly. I believe that these variations are in part a reflection of the different eras in which they attended, but also represent how our habitus informs the way in which we encounter the field of higher education and how it prepares individuals to use the capitals it affords them throughout their life course. I also recognise that measuring the success or failure of an individual to capitalise on opportunities is in itself a problematic process that is entwined within my own perceptions and experiences, themselves products of my habitus.

Within the life stories of these four people, assumptions on the interaction of habitus and higher education are supported *and* contested. They illustrate the importance of developing a much more nuanced understanding of these interactions if the sector is to ensure individuals from different backgrounds are to encounter a 'level playing-field' upon which they can gain the greatest benefit to themselves. As representatives of the pre-massification of higher education, Richard and Juliet both present different encounters with the same system largely informed by their backgrounds, but also

perhaps their gender. Sarah and Alice represent a very different era in which going to university is increasingly seen as the 'norm' and in which discourses of fairness and mobility underpinned their expectations of the system. At the same time, they also demonstrate a subtle change in the interaction in part informed I believe, by the changes in funding for higher education that cause Alice to regard it much more as an investment of time and resources for a better future.

One of the most significant benefits of using narratives that range across individual lives is that they allow us to understand the ways that different parts of an individual's identity intersect and how this intersection might affect the value placed on higher education. Within the writing, I recognise the role of intersectionality on how different combinations of socio-cultural categories can produce or indeed, reinforce social inequalities (Lykke, 2010). I can see how gender and social class effects a difference between Richard and the three women. Alice, Juliet and Richard's identity as parents gives them a different perspective on value than for Sarah; the intersection of Alice's generational and maternal identity provide her with a different view to that of the older Juliet.

I have commented on the tone of responses delivered by all four writers and how this has influenced my perception of their identities. Drawing them together, I recognise gendered differences in emotional tone, something that Mass Observation writing delivers in abundance due to the personalised nature of the relationship between writer and Archive (Langhamer, 2016). Richard's responses are often authoritative in tone, challenging the authority of researchers or the Archive through criticisms of its questions. His style of writing felt similar to a scientific or business report, clinical in emotion and proud of its matter-of-fact honesty. As I have mentioned, examples of vulnerability or tender emotional language are only used in relation to his marriages and relationship with his second wife. He chooses to portray a narrative of success where failure, when it occurs, is always attributed to the fault of others. I see this 'tone' of writing as an excellent example of how gender, generation and social class interact within Richard to produce an identity that is validated by his success. It would be easy to attribute this tone to arrogance but I feel it is far too embedded within his

unconscious dispositions, his habitus, for it to be a carapace for Mass Observation's purpose. His social networks and activities all revolve around a relatively closed set of interactions and as such he may rarely come into contact with other groups that may cause him discomfort or to reflect on his own position, or indeed that would in any way cause him to question his own validities.

Juliet's writing holds some similarities to Richard. Despite claiming to write for Mass Observation as a way of releasing frustrations, her tone and self-reflexivity are always measured, even when talking about traumatic incidents in her childhood. For me this is in part a result of the security which she now experiences in her life as she presents her current situation as ordered and undisturbed, produced and controlled by her own efforts but also, I propose that it is embedded within her generational and occupational identity. As a young reporter in the 1960s, she was entering a male-dominated environment, one where objectivity was prized. As she states, she has never publically, or even anonymously via Mass Observation, revealed her political beliefs as this would be counter to her professionalism. As Swan (2008) argues, emotional performance and subjectivity within the workplace are both gendered and classed. Seen as part of a denigrated feminized culture often associated with the 'masses', traditional middle-class male-dominated workplaces have perceived it as an emasculating force, 'a classed critique based on a fear of the mass and its imagined emotions, and it derives from middle-class masculine anxiety about the widespread outpouring of emotions' (Swan, 2008, p.101).

Unlike Juliet and Richard, Sarah and Alice employ a more reflexive and emotional range within their writing that I sense is reflective of their generations as well as their occupational identities. Swan (2008) notes the rise of therapeutic cultures and their association with valorising individualism. Sarah's use of Mass Observation to reflect on her own life course, working through her life story to identify where she perceives things went wrong for her is particularly strong example of this development. Similarly, Alice's identification as a feminist is a very deliberate demonstration of her beliefs; the value she places on emotional intelligence is seen in her analysis of the troubled

relationship with her father. Her own sense of self-worth in terms of this and other relationships is visible in the self-confidence with which she narrates her life.

Drawing on *what* these four Observers write about, I have been able to develop an understanding of how habitus encounters and interacts with the field of higher education. University is often the place where an undergraduate's sense of 'fit' is established or challenged in a big way for the first time (Adkins, 2004). The variations in experience demonstrate the subtleties that are present in individual lives and the danger of attempting to make classed and gendered assumptions.

Of all the four, Richard was the best placed to take full advantage of higher education. Generations of his family had gone to university and then professional occupations meaning that he came from an established middle-class habitus. As a child, he enjoyed active pursuits encouraged by what appears to have been an unconscious sociability that he has carried through his life. Although going to Eton may have been the first-time Richard encountered those in an even more privileged position, he appears to have been able to adapt and even adopt the sense of entitlement that enabled him to take full advantage of the opportunities of the University of Cambridge. At Cambridge, he clearly had a 'feel for the game'. There are significant contrasts with Sarah who, despite having a father who was a university lecturer, did not experience any sense of 'fit' at her university, although she was surrounded by students from similar backgrounds. Her efforts to seek out those 'on the fringes' appears to be grounded in a lack of self-confidence in her academic and social abilities rather than a political statement. However, reading through other Directive responses it is clear that Sarah has rarely had a sense of 'fit' in her environment. She feels like an outsider in her current workplace and home location, and even her favoured environment with booksellers was not a universal success. As far back as her school days, she left her Grammar School to join a comprehensive, suggesting she felt no sense of tie to the Grammar.

What is clear from a comparison of these two is that Richard knew the rules of the game when he arrived at Cambridge, and was therefore in a position to make the most of the advantages it could offer him. I believe that it is significant that he was the only

of the four Observers to have already left home by the time he went to university, first to Public School and then to his National Service. He had essentially served an apprenticeship at Eton, learning to adapt his dispositions and acquire the symbolic capitals that made him ready to become the professional at Cambridge. Unlike the other three Observers, Richard did not go to university seeking to develop his own identity and so was ready to convert other capitals to his benefit. At the other end of the spectrum, Sarah appears not to have wanted to play the game, although whether this is due to a sense of rebellion or misfit is difficult to tell. One may feed the other in an ever-perpetuating circle. In relating her experiences at university, and indeed her school years, I sensed that Sarah wanted to stage some sort of rebellion against her upbringing, a rejection of the expectations of her habitus. However based on several classed observations, it would appear that habitus has won through. Acknowledging her downward social mobility largely through her lack of economic capital, Sarah still maintains a separation between her perception of herself and her current work colleagues, in particular through their taste in clothes and culture. She is conscious of how she is perceived by her neighbours, that her house is not as well-kept and that her partner wears clothes that she appears to perceive as lower class. In many ways, Sarah and Richard's 'classed' perceptions of the world around them are similar and as Lawler says 'there are some people who by virtue of their habitus are able to pass judgement implicitly or explicitly, on others and to make that judgement count' (2004, p112-113). Although Sarah lacks many of the capitals, particularly social capital, that Richard possesses, they both share a level of symbolic capital that they invoke to differentiate themselves from others.

As the youngest of the four Observers, Alice is possibly the most conscious of the discourses of fairness around widening participation, having gone to university as the processes began to materialise. In terms of her social class, I feel that Alice is the most actively conscious, perhaps even embarrassed by her privilege. Her occupation in the charity sector, her volunteer work for a domestic abuse helpline and her participation in feminist networks all display a sense of social consciousness which is perhaps an attempt to share the benefits of the privileges she has acquired. The mixture of her

mother's working-class and father's middle-class upbringings appear to have given Alice a socialist conscience with middle-class privileges. Her father had the means to send her to a fee paying sixth form college and despite the antagonism that lay between Alice and her father, he appears to have expected academic success and in many ways, drove her to achieve it albeit on her own terms. In common with Richard and Sarah, Alice was brought up with a disposition toward higher education, in large part due to coinciding with the onset of mass-participation in higher education. She expected to go, and unlike Sarah she had the tools and the self-confidence to create a place for herself to fit when she got there. Alice's self-awareness differentiated between her background and that of students with more social and economic privileged, and this appears to have helped her to consciously form her own political and feminist identity.

Of all four writers, Juliet was perhaps in the least likely position to go to university. Whilst none of her family had ever gone onto higher education, she was able to take advantage of the institutional habitus of her Grammar School, where despite initially encountering problems she found herself with like-minded peers and supportive teachers. In terms of her experience at university, I believe that the era in which she went enabled her to fit in ways that may not have happened at a later date. The fact that there were so few women on her course, and that in some ways they were separate from others, enabled Juliet to form strong and supportive bonds with her peers. University provided a safe space for her to develop socially as well as academically and this appears to have supported her as someone who did not know what to expect. Developing on the fish analogy (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), she was able to be a big fish enjoying her time in a small pond rather than a small fish struggling against the current of a large ocean. Although her degree seems to have had little benefit on her economic capital given that she could have achieved the same in her occupation without a university education, I believe that it did enable her to engender a habitus from which her own daughter was able to benefit in terms of higher education. Both Juliet and Richard participated in forms of cultural reproduction

in which middle-class parents are able to influence their children's decisions in terms of higher education (Reay, David and Ball, 2005).

In light of these observations, the experiences of these four Observers concur with many of the opinions expressed by the other Observers in the Spring 2016 Directive. However, being able to draw on a deeper level of their life narratives has provided a much finer grained distinction of how higher education has impacted their lives and the resulting opinions of its value. Although they came from different backgrounds and going to university has had different impacts on their lives, Richard and Juliet both appear to have appreciated the value of going to university in the era before massification. For Richard, it ensured the continued privileges provided by an elite education by being in the elite of the elite, whilst for Juliet it enabled her to benefit from the care and focus available to a smaller number of students. In contrast, the value for Sarah and Alice appears to have been affected somewhat by the growth in numbers. Scarcity no longer contributes to value and they are therefore unable to take advantage of its social and economic capitals (Bourdieu, 2004) in the same way that Richard was able to even though both went to redbrick or Russell Group institutions. Sarah in particular appears to have been 'lost' in higher education, a fish out of water and with no hope of being guided to clearer waters, perhaps a symptom of the ways in which increased student numbers and institutions mean less opportunity to focus on individual needs.

As with Sarah and Richard, going to university for Alice was a rite of passage, and although the funding regime that she encountered may have monetised her perception of value to some extent, she still recognises its value to her social and cultural identity. I would argue that this reinforces the notion of differences between what middle-class and working-class habituses are disposed to expect in terms of value (Crozier et al, 2008). The depth of narratives, particularly that of Sarah, enables us to see how the influence of familial habitus may at times appear 'uncertain, shaky and prey to individual idiosyncrasies' (Reay, David and Ball, 2005, p.66). Even if it is troubled at university it is still powerful enough to influence the endurance of middle-

class tastes and expectations of what the value and impact of higher education should be.

Conclusions

This thesis has used the Mass Observation Archive as a tool to inspect the nuances of how individuals interact with higher education in terms of their opinions and/or experiences and accordingly what value they perceive it gives to individuals and to society as a whole. It has sought to understand what it is that drives individuals to invest in a university education, and to examine whether it met both personal and political objectives. My findings challenge the political objective of using higher education as a tool for social mobility and social justice and question the effectiveness of policies of widening participation in that whilst they may increase accessibility, the participation and outcome for individuals is still embedded within socio-economic classed experiences. The experiences of the Mass Observers suggest that although social mobility is not an inevitable outcome of going to university, it continues to be associated with aspirations to improving or maintaining social and economic position in society.

My initial interest in the subject arose from my own observation of widening participation policies and programmes that have been instigated over the last two decades. Whilst I wholeheartedly supported the principle of fairer access, I wonder about their effectiveness in terms of enabling non-traditional students to study whilst respecting their 'difference' and what effect participation had on lives in the longer term. Using the longitudinal and retrospective nature of the Mass Observation Archive responses, I have been able to explore some of these longer-term effects through the lenses of personal experience and perceptions of contemporary higher education and of going to university. The retrospective nature of the Project's responses has allowed me to understand the implicit and explicit value of going to university on the lives of individuals as well as understand how opinions and perceptions of the value of higher education have changed as policy has changed over the years.

Mass Observation responses

The Observers' responses to the Spring 2016 Directive suggest that the current higher education model may simply not be fit for purpose. The motivation for expanding

undergraduate numbers was clearly viewed with cynicism, with many seeing the coincidence of expansion and the introduction of tuition fees as being underlined by the consumerization of the sector in order to remove burdens on public funding. Increasing requirements for graduates to gain further qualifications in order to mark themselves out in the job market was also clear, often for graduates with degrees in 'traditional' subjects who found they were then required to take a career related postgraduate course.

The Observers suggest that there is a wide held view that policies of widening participation and expansion are viewed as 'top-down' efforts to fulfil wider commitments to governmental objectives around social justice rather than providing opportunities to fulfil the actual needs and aspirations of many young people. This thesis suggests that positive benefits of higher education to individuals and nations could be gained by adopting more consultative approaches with participants *and* non-participants that will provide a more nuanced understanding of how the greatest benefit can be achieved. Creating policy through collaborative methods of co-production between institutions and potential participants rather than the imposition of ideas and policies formulated by the existing hierarchy could create a more robust system that will give the most appropriate benefit where it is needed on an individual, local and national level.

It also suggests that the current political discourse that prioritises a degree above all other forms of education or experience, may not be appropriate and different forms of tertiary education should be accorded greater value. The Observers suggest that there should be less value placed on going to university and more on the other options that can provide a strong and sustainable society at a national level. The capacity for Mass Observation to span cross-generation opinions has also enabled me to see that the valorisation of certain subjects over others for different groups has persisted through the decades. Notwithstanding the paradox between criticism for non-traditional degrees and traditional degree subjects often being deemed as useless in the workplace, the Observers demonstrated that higher education is still viewed as a

middle-class stronghold rather than a space for equal opportunities and social mobility.

Using biographical narrative to understand complexity

The application of biographical narrative methodology to the relatively large qualitative sample available through Mass Observation has provided a nuanced understanding of how the value of higher education is perceived and how this has evolved through policies of growth in the sector. The use of Mass Observation as 'slices' of autobiography the purpose of analyzing effects across a person's life has provided a greater holistic understanding of the impact of higher education than any direct question may have done. Using Bourdieu's theories of capital has allowed me to apply a conception of value in terms of how my four vignette studies have or have not benefited in terms of social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital. Perhaps more applicable to interventions in discourses around widening participation, the application of Bourdieu's frameworks also highlights the importance of understanding how habitus interacts with the field of higher education and the effects this has in both short-term experiences of university and longer-term implications on life course.

The narratives demonstrated several paradoxes in the opinions that were represented. The belief that increasing numbers of graduates denigrated the value of a degree in the workplace was expressed, alongside a defense of the right for anyone with academic ability to undertake a degree programme. Those that lauded past opportunities and freedoms to study any subject without financial burden were sometimes the same writers who wished they had put more thought into their own subject choice. These views expressed across the Observer Panel both challenge and support dominant discourses of widening participation, educational funding and the value of higher education, indicating the complexity of the situation. The relationship between a university education and upward social mobility is evidenced and disputed over the life stories across the range of Mass Observers. Their narratives illustrate the 'messiness' of lives that rarely fit into the categories and outcomes that policies would have us expect, allowing us to disrupt and problematize dominant discourses (Hinton, 2016).

The narratives, in particular those of the four Observers I have studied in depth, demonstrate the relationship between an individual's background and what they are able to gain from going to university. They indicate that despite the evolution of widening participation programmes, the most benefit is still gained by those from middle-class backgrounds and that in general, the Panel of Observers believe this is detrimental to the aims of a fair accrual of benefit. These findings support Archer, Hollingsworth and Halsall's belief in the 'importance of starting to challenge and disrupt the continued middle-class cultural hegemony within the higher education system [...] how HE might be rendered more 'affordable' to working class young people (in social, cultural and economic terms)' (2007, p. 234). The experiences and expectations related by the Panel of Observers reinforce the evidence produced in studies by Reay, David and Ball (2001, 2005) and Burke (2012) that those students most likely to succeed in gaining entry to institutions that carry the greatest symbolic capital are those who are enclosed within school and family habituses that encompass the same middle-class values as the university institutions that they are applying to.

The Mass Observation Panel also demonstrate another aspect of the complexity of understanding value of participating in higher education. Much of the discourse surrounding higher education since the Second World War has been embedded within the valorization of economic, and through this social, benefit on a national and individual level. Whilst a significant proportion of the Mass Observation Panel responding to the Spring 2016 Directive were graduates, a high proportion of these writers were employed or were retired from roles in the service sector, in particular, the public and voluntary sector. Many are current and retired teachers, librarians, or working in aspects of social and health care, all of which are areas that are not renowned for high salaries but most of which require a degree. As such, the make-up of the Mass Observation Panel provides an insight into those groups of graduates who do not fit into discourses that promise social and economic mobility. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is therefore the less tangible, social and emotional benefits that are given more prominence in the narratives of such Observers. This suggests that we need to think about a different approach to understanding and encouraging

relationships with higher education rather than simply equating university as an easy path to social mobility. The Observers' life stories demonstrate that university is not a quick fix to an easier or more privileged life, indeed increasingly the burdens of student debt are likely to deem upward mobility on an economic scale even more problematic.

The Observers' narratives also illustrate how gender has interacted with higher education over the decades. Narratives from many of the older writers support the fact that women were of a minority in earlier decades (Tight, 2012), however they also provide an insight into the continuing complexity of the interplay of gender and higher education despite equality in numbers. Several of the younger women mention conflicts between familial responsibilities and studying, whilst narratives around motherhood and its effect on graduate level careers were also related. The nuanced understanding that we gain from these qualitative narratives highlight the continuing complexities that accompany participation, and therefore how institutions and governments need to avoid complacency in policy, even when statistics suggest that goals of equality have been achieved.

Summary

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge that has been building up over the last two decades in relation to the social value of higher education, the discourses around widening participation and its role in enhancing social mobility. It builds on research undertaken on contemporaneous accessibility (Archer, 2003; Reay David & Ball, 2001, 2005) by taking a longer view on how participation has affected lives after university. In this way, it compliments work undertaken by Stuart (2012) that uses life history interviews with first generation scholars who have subsequently made careers in higher education, but provides an alternative focus by accessing narratives from both participants and non-participants. In addition, it provides a view from beyond academe of wider public attitudes, with a significant concentration of individuals who have had little or no further interaction with higher education in adult life.

The responses from the Mass Observation Panel demonstrate how presumptions about higher education continue to endure over decades despite increasingly public discussion about efforts towards opening up access. For example, the findings reinforce the notion that, to fully benefit in terms of converting higher education into significant economic and social capital, individuals need to conform to the stereotypical middle-class student, reminiscent of the Bachelor Boy described by Hinton Smith (2013). Similarly, the belief that there is a hierarchy of universities that contributes to the symbolic and economic value of the degrees they award was present across the generations represented within the Panel, illustrating how embedded assumptions about higher education can be. I propose that in order to combat such assumptions and create effective change, policies need to be co-produced with the communities and groups that higher education is seeking to encompass. In doing so, the higher education sector can ensure that individuals are provided with a range of learning options that suit their short term needs and long term aspirations enabling them to make informed choices. Individuals will be able to make the most of the potentials offered by higher education whilst the sector would benefit from well matched students who thrive in their institution.

The data collected in the Spring 2016 Directive provides scope for further research beyond the limitations of this thesis. Whilst the tendency of Mass Observation to attract older female writers garners criticism in terms of its representation, it also provides excellent opportunities to look at the interaction of gender and generation with higher education. An area that I would particularly like to explore in future research is those Mass Observers who experienced higher education as mature students, and the impact of familial obligations on the careers of female graduates.

This research demonstrates how using biographical narrative methods across a range of life history documents provides us with nuanced meanings that help us understand the complexities of how people interact with higher education. Taking the long view of the impact of higher education should help inform the policies that are adopted, something that is problematic when governmental institutions are looking for quick gains. It is therefore vital that higher education looks at its culture to incorporate this

long-term view. By recognising how traditional notions of university participation are embedded throughout the life cycle of a student and their subsequent life course the sector can work to adapt these notions, making them truly inclusive and meaningful.

One of the most consistent themes that ran through the responses to the Spring 2016 Directive was the role that going to university could play in making a socially conscious, independent individual who would work to improve their communities. In discourses of social mobility, and indeed social justice, the quest for economic and social advancements and the right to fair access can obviate the social and personal benefits that can be accrued. It may be inevitable that the increasing financial burden of going to university will make this factor even less of a consideration for students who are seeking the best financial return on their investment in a university education. It is therefore more important than ever that research into higher education draws on the wealth of life experience from graduates over the last few decades to understand how best to incorporate these non-tangible, and often non-quantifiable yet crucial benefits, in its policy planning around equitable participation.

Finally, this thesis has also given me a space to reflect on my own experiences of higher education and how I feel about my own children's educational ambitions. In a professional context, it has allowed me to understand how researchers work with the Archive that I have curated for all these years, helping me to recognise its shortcomings alongside the huge opportunities that it holds. My development as a researcher over the course of this Doctorate has enabled me to find the methodological tools to conceptualise the world around me, enhancing my confidence to actively develop and communicate my opinions on education.

Things I do not regret. Choosing a non-vocational course and learning for the love of it. University was where I had my first sexual experiences. Where I fell in love. Where my heart was broken. Where I learned to budget, cook and share. Where my arm was broken. Where I danced and danced; sometimes with drink, with drugs, sometimes high on the music. And where the library was always warm and full of new and intriguing thoughts. For me, leaving home for the safe space of a University hall was a really important first step into adulthood.

D5157, 42-year-old female working for the NHS

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Mass Observation Directives (Au: Autumn; W: Winter; Sp: Spring; Su: Summer)

Au2000: 1 Your Family

Sp2004: 3 Going to university

Su2006: 2 Core British Values

Au2006: 3 Ageing

Sp2007: 2 Violence in the home

Sp2008: 3 Your life line

W2008: 3 The ups and downs of friendship

Sp2009: 2 Using the internet

Sp2009: 3 Issues in the news

W2009: 1 Mid-life transitions

W2009: 2 Books and You

Sp2010: 1 A working day

Sp2010: 2 Personal finances

Sp2010: 3 General Election

Su2010: 2 Belonging

Su2010: 3 Belonging

Au2010: Special Questionnaire (this Directive asked Mass Observers to discuss why they wrote for Mass Observation and their relationship to the Archive)

Sp2011: 3 The royal wedding, day diary for 29 April 2011

Su2012: 2 Siblings

Au2012: 2 Cosmetic surgery

W2013: 2 What makes you happy?

Sp2014: 1 Politics and politicians

Sp2015: 2 General Election

Su2015: 2 Dear 16-year-old me

Sp2016: 1 Social Mobility

Sp2016:2 Higher Education

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Appendix A: Mass Observation Directive, Spring 2016, Part 2

Part 2: Higher Education

The second section of the Directive focuses on higher education. Even if you didn't go to university or college, we would like your thoughts about how not going has impacted on your life.

What does higher education mean to you? What value do you place on it?

Did you go to university?

If yes, please share your memories about:

How did you decide what courses and institutions to go to?

Did you know what to expect when you arrived at college/university?

How do you feel that you fitted into the social life?

How did higher education impact on your later life:

- Employment?
- Your social and political attitudes?
- The things you do in your non-work life (e.g. friendships, relationships, pastimes)?

If no, consider:

Why did you not to go to university?

Do you think that not going to university has impacted your life in any way?

If you could change the past, would you have liked to have gone to university? If so, which university/college/course would you like to have attended?

Experiences of other family and friends

Did your parents, grandparents or other family members go to university?

What impact, if any, did this have on their lives?

Current/future generations

Are any of your children, or younger acquaintances studying at college or university?

Have you noticed any changes in their lives? What impact do you think their decision

Please start each part of your Directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number, sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

will have on them? We are also interested in any reflections about younger people who have decided not to enter into higher education.

More students than ever before go to university. Has this altered the value of higher education?

Appendix B: sample of thematic analysis spreadsheet

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
A4127	54	Once I believed it was a passport onto better style of living due to better employment opportunities and better pay. Now I no longer believe this when I see thousands of people with degrees in the same unemployment exchanges as the class yob who did not want an education.	Offered the course I wanted and was nearest university and could commute daily.		Socially it has made no difference to my life BUT has enriched my knowledge and aids my employment. Politically no effect as I still believe the same as i did then.	The problem with today's employment situations is I believe many at university are there not to learn and aid society but to avoid the unemployment queues.
B1771	80	It means a lot to me but when I was younger it was rarely discussed. It was assumed that only the most gifted or academic would			I wasn't able to attend University and I often thought I might go as a mature student, maybe the Open University. It's never too late, even at 80! I can't be sure	Mind you, if Cameron and Johnson are anything to go by it was money wasted sending them to Eton! They are so crass. [...]

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
		proceed to further education			that even if I had been able to go that it would have impacted greatly on my life. Since it was not realistic I gave no thought as to which college I would have chosen.	I know it is said that more students than ever are going to university even though many of the courses could be addressed by on the job training or apprenticeships. Doctors, Vets, Scientists, Teaching, Languages, History Ancient/Modern, Geography, and Archaeology etc are University subjects but Human Movement?? Yes that is PE. Madonna?? The use of Henna?? These are known as Mickey Mouse subjects. I object!
B2937	34			I decided to study at Sussex because I liked	Not really, I think it took me the first year	I wouldn't be the person I am today if I

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
				<p>the laid back atmosphere. I looked at St Martins, Reading, Exeter and other ones that I forget the names of. But Sussex was by the sea and was filled with interesting people and promoted cross-working between the arts and sciences, which I valued.</p>	<p>to settle down, and put my mind more towards studying. I'd had freedom before, but not on this scale or ease before. There was always a ready stream of people to hang out with, to socialise with and to go drinking with. It took a while before the crazy fresher feeling subdued! Also, id' never really written many essays before, having mainly done scientific studies at school, so that took a bit of getting used to.</p> <p>I threw myself into it! Tried to meet lots of new people, make new friends as much as I could. I was out most</p>	<p>hadn't gone to university. It's difficult to know where I would be now. But i'm not sure if I would have been able to find a job in my field of choice (Ecology and Conservation) without a degree and work experience. University broadened my horizons, I met many new interesting people and learned about myself and the world. I met my husband there.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>I wouldn't have the career I have now if I hadn't gone to university. I needed a degree to follow a career in conservation.</p>

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
					nights when I should have been studying. A lot of the people I met back then, I lost touch with, surprisingly, it's the people from my course, a core half a dozen people that I really stayed friends with. I think one of the great things about Sussex university was how inclusive it was. There were so many different people from different backgrounds, with different interests, it would have been difficult not to find a group of social peers you wanted to hang out with!	It was difficult enough to get into the field, but without a degree it would have been almost impossible. I'm not sure if university changed any of those views, but it did make me consider them more. The university experience was slightly insular, most people held similar views and were very liberal, anti-war etc.
B3227	49	The value I placed upon it the next time I	I took my A-levels and applied for university	I did go to university – twice, in fact. The first	Higher education hasn't really impacted	It is difficult to say whether the greater

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
		<p>applied (see below) was as an escape from the boredom and frustration of a job and colleagues I didn't much like, and also because in my mid-twenties and four years after the death of my father, I was worried about becoming one of those men who live too long at home with their mother. I know I hurt her feelings at the time, and I'm ashamed of that now.</p>	<p>between 1983 and '85. ITV's deluxe dramatisation of Brideshead Revisited had been on a couple of years before, and I wonder whether its scenes of homoerotic friendship, puking in the quad and languorous punting influenced my generation's ideas about university, at least those who had no family history of such places to draw upon?</p>	<p>time, I was 18 and went to the University of Kent at Canterbury to study English Language and Literature with Film Studies. I lasted just over a year and then dropped out. It was too far from home (which I did not take into consideration when applying despite my parents tactfully raising the issue) and I had trouble making friends, not helped by being assigned accommodation in a local bed and breakfast because there wasn't enough space in the halls of residence. I was severely lacking in confidence, found the</p>	<p>on my working life. Although some of the jobs I have done have stipulated a degree, none of them have been sufficiently demanding to truly merit it. (By which I mean they could have been done by someone who didn't go to university – and frequently were by colleagues who had been there longer – but there has been a trend for a while to try to make humdrum jobs look more interesting and rewarding than they actually are by requiring unnecessary qualifications.) Foolishly perhaps it never occurred to me</p>	<p>number of students attending university today has altered the value of higher education. I worked in administration at a local university that had once been a polytechnic; its rebranding was part of a Government initiative to widen access. As an administrator, I (and my colleagues) saw a significant amount of students who were not particularly academic and who had either drifted or been pushed into higher education by aspirational parents; there were no fires of intellectual curiosity burning under them. But perhaps the</p>

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
				<p>social activities intimidating, skipped meals due to social anxiety, lost a lot of weight, developed depression and had something of a nervous breakdown both before and after coming home. [...]</p> <p>The second time, I was 25 and went to the University of Birmingham to study English Literature (ultimately with a minor in Psychology). This went better in that I completed my studies successfully and made a small number of good friends. I still found the social life and apparent confidence of the other students difficult, this</p>	<p>to choose a course in something like Business Studies or Accountancy which would have equipped me for a career; instead I chose only on the grounds of liking.</p> <p>The most important quality my second stint at university developed in me was the ability to concentrate, to focus my attention on something that was obscure or not immediately rewarding. In other words, it trained my mind. Much of the information I received has disappeared, leaving only the memory of having once possessed it, but the</p>	<p>administrators at the more traditional university I attended would have said something similar about us. The pressure on the new universities to keep up appearances in the league tables was high; I remember on the undergraduate computing degree I administered a new tweak in the calculation of degree classifications being introduced: instead of the final result being based on the average of a student's ten second year and ten third year modules, it could be done on the average of the best</p>

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
				time with the added complication of feeling too old as well as temperamentally unsuited to join in. I did not reveal to anyone I had been to university previously.	training remains. This time around, my university course also introduced me to authors and types of literature which have remained enthusiasms of mine to the present day. The impression I get from friends on the same course is that on graduation they reacted against three years of prescribed reading and now prefer to read popular rather than literary fiction (if they have the time or interest to read at all). This is not to say I am the only one left flying the flag for Thomas Mann or Jane Austen. I am just as likely to pick up an E. F. Benson or	eight from the third year. This doesn't sound much of a change, but it enabled a few more first and upper second class degrees to be squeezed out. I also remember that mature part-time students supported by their employers tended to do disproportionately well; at one time we scheduled evening classes just for them. Increased access obviously helped, but just as important was their self-motivation.

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
					<p>Barbara Vine, but what I would say is that my interest in literature has continued and developed, whereas theirs appears to have dwindled.</p> <p>In a way, because I dropped out of higher education at 19, and had several years of being someone who had not gone to university (I very soon began to suppress that part of my history when making new acquaintances), I also know what it's like not to have gone. After I was made redundant in 2008, and got a temporary job at a teaching union, I noticed that because of</p>	

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
					the work I was doing, people generally assumed I did not have a degree. Partly through pride, partly because I didn't want them to know much about me, partly because I was ashamed to have a university education and to be doing that kind of job, I did not correct them. Colleagues might deplore the lack of common sense or general cluelessness of students to me, or brag mildly about their own child at university. Sometimes they would even combine the two by criticizing their student offspring's want of application in	

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
					tackling their studies. At one time, you used to hear people who seemed to have a chip on their shoulder at missing out on higher education remark challengingly that they had been to 'the University of Life' (with the implication that they knew about life from living rather than reading about it, and that they had bags of common sense unlike the educated who were well known to have none at all). This cliché seems to have pretty much died out now. I can't remember the last time I heard anyone say it. Perhaps its disappearance is to	

MO number	Age	What does HE mean to you?	Choices	Experience at University	Difference to life	Value of HE
					do with the widening of university access. My problem with it was that it was a cliché: I have known alumni of both types of university, some of whom were intelligent and interesting, some of whom were not.	

Appendix C: Ethical Review

Ethical Review Application (ER/ALFF4/2) Fiona Courage

Project Title	EdD Phase 3: The impact of higher education on the life stories of individuals: the Mass Observation perspective
Status	Approved
Email	F.P.Courage@sussex.ac.uk
Phone No.	
Applicant Status	PG (Research)
Department	Education
Supervisor	Morrice, Linda M
Project Start Date	01-Mar-2016
Project End Date	01-Sep-2017
External Funding in place	No
External Collaborators	No
Funder/Project Title	
Name of Funder	

Ethical Review Application ER/ALFF4/2 (continued)

Project Description

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which social class interacts with higher education (HE), and how this interaction impacts on the lives of individuals. I intend to use a life narrative approach that utilizes the longitudinal potential of data collected since

1981 by the Mass Observation Archive. This piece of research will form the basis of the final thesis for my EdD and follows on from a Critical Analytical Study undertaken last year in the form of a literature review exploring issues in HE participation, particularly in relation to social class.

The data that I will use has been collected as part of the Mass Observation Project (MOP) that has been working with a panel of volunteer writers since 1981, collecting a "people's ethnography, collective auto/biography and social commentary" (Sheridan et al, 1993, p.16). Questionnaires, known as Directives, are sent out to the Panel three times a year covering a range of themes ranging from current affairs to intimate issues. Over 5000 volunteers have participated since 1981, some responding for one or two Directives whilst others have written almost continuously since 1981 providing the opportunity to undertake a significant piece of longitudinal analysis. All respondents are voluntary and retain their anonymity in their responses, voluntarily providing a limited amount of biographical data that can be used for demographic analysis by researchers alongside the actual writing.

In order to undertake this study I will combine data already collected by Mass Observation in several previous Directives with new data from a Directive to be commissioned in early 2016. The purpose of commissioning this new directive is twofold: to capture attitudes of any respondents who have interacted with HE in the last 12 years and to gauge changes in opinion as a result of the significant changes in HE widening participation discourse and funding policy. The questions will be designed to reflect my research questions, but will also pick up on elements revealed by responses to the previous two Directives. For this I intend to start analyzing responses to 1991 and 2004 in advance of designing the questions. Due to time constraints of the MO Project timetable, I will only be able to reflect on a random sample of responses from each Directive before finalizing the questions to 2016. I expect the data to comprise retrospective accounts of people's interactions with HE, as well as capturing their contemporaneous reflections and attitudes to the policies and discourses around HE at the time each Directive has been issued.

The data will initially be analysed using a thematic coding exercise to reveal the ways in which respondents construct their perceptions and describe their experiences of HE. From this I hope to develop sets of shared constructs and phenomena. These

themes will be used to form my second stage of analysis by framing a deeper narrative analysis of individual life stories that will illustrate the 'why' of these experiences. This narrative analysis will concentrate on a sample of around 10-12 respondents, identified during the first stage of analysis, and whose writing within the selected Directives and their wider Mass Observation contribution will be subjected to a closer reading. They will be selected based on the 'story' that each individual tells, both within these three

Directives, and through their wider participation in the Archive. I will draw upon their Directive responses relating to other themes that can contribute to the creation of life stories for these individuals (as told to MO) to be mined to illustrate how they have or have not interacted with HE, and how this may have impacted their lives.

Ethical Review Form Section A (ER/ALFF4/2)	
Question	Response
>> Checklist	
A1. Will your study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent or in a dependent position (e.g. people under 18, people with learning difficulties, over-researched groups or people in care facilities)?	No
A2. Will participants be required to take part in the study without their consent or knowledge at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places), and / or will deception of any sort be used? Please refer to the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct for further information.	No
A3. Will it be possible to link personal data back to individual participants in any way (this does not include identifying participants from signed consent forms or identity encryption spreadsheets that are stored securely separate from research data).	No
A4. Might the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or produce humiliation or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in the everyday life of the participants?	No

A5. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, ethnicity, political behaviour, potentially illegal activities)?	No
A6. Will any drugs, placebos or other substances (such as food substances or vitamins) be administered as part of this study and will any invasive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind will be used?	No
A7. Will your project involve working with any substances and / or equipment which may be considered hazardous?	No
A9. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses, compensation for time or a lottery / draw ticket) be offered to participants?	No
>> Risk Assessment	
A10. If you have answered 'Yes' to ANY of the above questions, your application will be considered as HIGH risk. If however you wish to make a case that your application should be considered as LOW risk please enter the reasons here:	

Ethical Review Form Section B (ER/ALFF4/2)	
Question	Response
>> Data Collection and Analysis (Please provide full details)	
B1. PARTICIPANTS: How many people do you envisage will participate, who are they, and how will they be selected?	Responses from around 200 individuals have been received for each Directive that will be used. These respondents are already self selected, voluntary participants in the Mass Observation Project, coming from all areas of the UK and communicating via email or post with the Project. From these participants I intend to select a sample between 10 and 12 individuals, based on their age cohort, and their level of participation throughout the project to enable a longitudinal view to be taken of their lives. I have attached the contract between researcher commissioning a Directive and the Mass Observation Archive for information on the agreements made between the two.
B2. RECRUITMENT: How will participants be approached and recruited?	Mass Observation has a long standing reputation for working with its voluntary panel (the Mass Observers). Respondents find out about the project from publications, broadcasts and word of mouth. The data I will be using will be and has been collected from respondents who already have an established relationship with Mass Observation. All issues of informed consent and participation are managed by the Mass Observation Archive when participants are recruited, with participants being given the opportunity to amend any conditions of their consent (e.g. copyright allowance for quotation) at any stage in their participation. All paper work is administered by Mass Observation as part of the Mass Observation Project. I have attached documents that are distributed to Panel members/Participants when they initially join the Project.
B3. METHOD: What research method(s) do you plan to use; e.g. interview, questionnaire/self-completion questionnaire, field observation, audio/audio-visual recording?	The Mass Observers respond to a written, in depth questionnaire, based on a specific theme and designed to illicit subjective responses based on personal experience and opinion. Responses are normally returned to the Archive in written form, either handwritten, word processed or by email.
B4. LOCATION: Where will the project be carried out e.g. public place, in researcher's office, in private office at organisation?	The responses to the Mass Observation Directives are returned to Mass Observation staff, processed and stored as part of the University of Sussex's Special Collections held at The Keep. Analysis of the data will take place in The Keep Reading Rooms, under invigilated conditions as with any other archival holding at The Keep. whilst responses received electronically may be made available for me to use remotely via a secured flash drive.

>> Confidentiality and Anonymity	
B5. Will questionnaires be completed anonymously and returned indirectly?	Yes
B6. Will data only be identifiable by a unique identifier (e.g. code/pseudonym)?	Yes
B7. Will lists of identity numbers or pseudonyms linked to names and/or addresses be stored securely and separately from the research data?	Yes
B8. Will all place names and institutions which could lead to the identification of individuals or organisations be changed?	Yes
B9. Will all personal information gathered be treated in strict confidence and never disclosed to any third parties?	Yes
B10. Can you confirm that your research records will be held in accordance with the data protection guidelines? (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ogs/policies/information/dpa)	Yes
B11. Can you confirm that you will not use the research data for any purpose other than that which consent is given?	Yes
B11a. If you answered NO to any of the above (or think more information could be useful to the reviewer) please explain here:	
>> Informed Consent and Recruitment of Participants	
B12. Will all respondents be given an Information Sheet and be given adequate time to read it before being asked to agree to participate?	Yes
B13. Will all participants taking part in an interview, focus group, observation (or other activity which is not questionnaire based) be asked to sign a consent form? If you are obtaining consent another way, please explain under 15a below.	Yes
B14. Will all participants self-completing a questionnaire be informed that returning the completed questionnaire implies consent to participate?	Yes
B15. Will all respondents be told that they can withdraw at any time, ask for their data to be destroyed and/or removed from the project until it is no longer practical to do so?	Yes
B15a. If you answered NO to any of the above (or think more information could be useful to the reviewer) please explain here:	
>> Context	
B16. Is DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) clearance necessary for this project? If yes, please ensure you complete the next question.	No

B17. Are any other ethical clearances or permissions (internal or external) required? Please see the help text (i) for further details	No
B17a. If yes, please give further details including the name and address of the organisation. If other ethical approval has already been received please attach evidence of approval, otherwise you will need to supply it when ready. (You do not need to provide evidence of a current DBS check at this point)	
B18. Does the research involve any fieldwork - Overseas or in the UK?	No
B18a. If yes, where will the fieldwork take place?	
B19. Will any researchers be in a lone working situation?	No
B19a. If yes, briefly describe the location, time of day and duration of lone working. What precautionary measures will be taken to ensure safety of the researcher(s)?	

>> Any further concerns	
B20. Are there any other ethical considerations relating to your project which have not been covered above?	No
B20a. If yes, please explain:	



MASS OBSERVATION

Recording everyday life in Britain

The Mass Observation Project

FAQ

What does taking part involve?

We hope you will reply to our directives. These are normally sent out to you three or four times a year. They usually contain two or three different topics on which we would like you to report in the light of your own experience, including what you see and hear going on about you. The Directive is often made up of questions but it should not be treated as a questionnaire because it is most definitely not intended to be one. You can write as much or as little as you wish in reply.

Always include a "mini-biography" at the start of each part of your directive. It is very helpful for researchers to see your age, occupation, where you live and your marital status. It saves them looking you up on our lists; it means that the information they use about you is up-to-date and it gives you

control over how much you want to say about yourself. By the way, please don't just write "retired" or "unemployed" - add a bit more detail about any paid or unpaid work you have had.

How much you contribute depends mainly on how you feel and what you have time for. As our resources are limited, if you do not keep in touch with us for a year we will stop sending you directives.

How much should I write?

That depends entirely on you. We are never going to say that you've written too much or too little but we'd rather you wrote one or two lines than nothing at all. Don't worry about rambling or going off at a tangent. We know that some subjects inspire some people and leave others cold.

You must feel free to pick and choose and to write about your own experience. Stories about things that have happened to

you are of special interest. Do remember, all the same, that 'negative reporting' is always valuable. When we had a directive on cars and drivers, for example, it was important we heard from non-drivers as well as drivers. If you decide not to answer a particular directive, or a particular part of a directive, we like to know why. Is it lack of time? Lack of interest? Ill health? Or are there other reasons related to your feelings about the topic?

What kind of paper shall I use?

Any kind of paper, including the back of junk mail (but please remember to delete any identifiable information on the reverse of your contribution). If you are emailing a word document, you should use an A4 size page.

We ask only that you always start a new section of your directive reply on a new piece of paper so that the different topics can be detached and filed separately.

Must reports be typed?

No. They can be handwritten, typed, word-processed or spoken on to audiotape.

Can I send in visual material, films, videos, DVDs?

Yes, although it would be helpful to discuss this with staff at the Mass Observation Project by email or letter first.

Can I send in other pieces of writing, for example, diaries? We no longer actively seek diaries and they are harder for us to manage but if you are a keen diarist, please send it in. We are also pleased to accept contributions on topics which we have not been able to cover in directives. This could be a personal experience (for example, a holiday, an illness, a birth or death, an incident at work or in your community) or it may be your feelings about current issues

and events. We will file them separately under the subject heading.

But a special plea....

Please don't send in large parcels of material without checking with us first. Our space is limited and we must only accept donations of material if they are closely related to our concerns. So if you find your grandmother's diary in the attic, please do think of us (and please don't throw it away!) but contact us to check that we can accept it. If you usually use our FREEPOST system please think twice before sending parcels costing over £2 in postage, or several small items which would be cheaper sent together.

Do you want newspaper cuttings or printed material?

Not usually. They are bulky and difficult to preserve.

Newspapers are stored in larger libraries so we feel that it is important not to fill up our precious space with material that

can be obtained elsewhere. However, we are interested in the occasional cutting if it is relevant to the piece you are writing, or where it illustrates a point. And we are happy to accept leaflets, photographs, labels, menus, adverts, cartoons, drawings, maps, diagrams and any other "visual aids" where they relate to your response.

Is there a deadline?

We don't usually specify a deadline unless we have a researcher in the Archive who is in a hurry to see the material. It is helpful to us if you send in your reply before the next directive is due, say within 3 or 4 months. Occasionally, however, you may not have the time or inclination to write for a while, and we are still pleased to accept Directive replies which arrive late or in bulk.

Will I receive an acknowledgement?

We always try to ensure that you are told that your post has been safely received - if possible within four weeks of receiving it, though there are times when it can take longer. We produce a standard acknowledgement letter with some of the latest news to keep you in touch. The Archive may write to you personally if an individual reply is required.

Does it matter if I reply late or even miss a directive?

No. Sometimes correspondents are too busy to reply - or maybe they don't feel inspired by the theme of the directive. This is fine, although we are always interested to know if you don't like the directive and why. However, if you haven't been in touch with us for a year we will stop sending you directives - we simply haven't got the resources to keep sending them out and we don't want to become a nuisance to someone who has lost interest. If you stop hearing from us, it is probably because over a year has elapsed since your last contact with

us. If you write in, we can immediately re-instate you. On the other hand, if you do want to stop writing for us, please write and tell us why. It would save us postage and a lot of work.

Who sees my contributions?

When your contributions reach the Archive, they are opened, checked and recorded by Archive staff. We unfortunately do not have the time to read all your contributions in depth, but most are read very carefully by a wide range of researchers including academics from different disciplines, for example, sociologists, psychologists, historians and geographers. We also have visits from students, school children and the media.

How is my material made available to researchers?

Replies to the Directives are made available to researchers as soon as we can get them ready. They are boxed up in batches according to the section of the directive. So there are boxes on our shelves labelled "Gulf War", "General Election 1997", "The Lottery", "Close Relationships", "Charles and Camilla" and so on. Inside the boxes, the replies are arranged in folders in MO number order. It is worth remembering that many researchers only see the writing you do in reply to one particular directive, so don't worry about repeating information which you gave in an earlier directive reply.

Researchers visit the reading rooms in the Special Collections section of the Library at the University of Sussex. They are given basic information about each person (age, sex, marital status, current occupation and town of residence) so that they can set your writing in a social context. They are also shown the actual directives and background information about the whole Project. Researchers are told that access to the material

depends upon their respecting people's confidentiality and we keep a careful check on who sees the material and the ways it is used. Some researchers are also MO correspondents, by the way. Any MO correspondents can become researchers and visit whenever they wish by making an appointment.

How can I be sure that my privacy is respected?

We are very careful about the privacy of our correspondents. We issue everyone with a number. We ask you to write your number (rather than your name) on all your replies to directives. Only members of the Archive staff can link your number to your name.

To increase your privacy, we strongly encourage you to use initials or made-up names for the people you mention, and to do your best not to inadvertently identify yourself within your reply.

Your self portrait, your photograph, any letters or diaries, and any other very personal material you send us, are all covered by a 50 year embargo. You can ask for a longer embargo if you wish - or a shorter one. Fifty years from the date of leaving the project seems to satisfy most people's needs for privacy. It is only fair to say, however, that in the last analysis, no information is truly secure. If you send in information about illicit activities, the Archive might not be able to protect your privacy any more than a priest or doctor could.

Can my friends or members of my family read what I send to you?

We do not automatically allow friends or relatives to see your contributions, even if they are close family members. If you wish to ensure that your members of your family see what you have written either during your lifetime, or afterwards, we suggest you keep your own copies.

If you are happy for your family members to read what you have written, please write and say so. It is helpful for us to have your wishes on file. If we don't hear from you on this question, in writing, we shall assume that your contributions should remain completely anonymous, and we will do our best to ensure that even your nearest and dearest do not see your writing under your name.

Can my Mass Observation writings be published?

Most use of the Archive is by students for their essays, dissertations and theses. More senior scholars use the material for articles in journals or in teaching materials.

Sometimes we are asked for permission to use extracts from the Archive in books, films, TV or radio programmes. Providing mutually satisfactory agreements are made, the Trustees of the Archive are normally able to give their consent. In fact, the Archive depends on the income it receives from the fees and

royalties from the publication of the early papers. Formal contracts with authors and publishers are negotiated for the Archive by our literary agent In London so you can be sure that our interests are professionally protected.

We therefore decided to ask our current correspondents to share the copyright of their MO writing with the Archive. You will receive a form about this. There is no obligation to share copyright but it is a way of ensuring that we have a formal agreement with you. Most requests to quote are for very small passages. Every precaution is taken to ensure that no identifiable information appears in public unless you have given your written permission.

Do you need more recruits?

We are constantly developing the Project and we try to attract people from sections of society who are under-represented among our correspondents. We have a changing recruitment

policy depending on the make up of the writing panel and this is announced on our website. If you know someone who is very keen to join us, and they meet our recruitment criteria, please ask them to write to us themselves. We prefer to hear from them directly.

Can I go public on being a Mass Observer?

Of course. It is up to you if you want to "come out" as a Mass Observer. However, please do not advertise on our behalf without checking with us. If you decide to write about being a Mass Observer for the local paper, or in the newsletter of an organisation, or get interviewed by local radio, please emphasise that you are talking/writing in a personal capacity.

If more information is required, you should refer the journalist/interviewer to the Mass Observation Archive. In the past, enthusiastic Mass Observers have sometimes prompted new volunteers to contact us with overwhelming results. We

need to plan for the staff resources and the budget for to cope with a sudden influx of new correspondents. We don't like turning people away - and even apologising takes time and costs money!

By the way, if you are in the paper, on the radio or TV, or writing or speaking publically about Mass Observation, please let us know. If possible, send us a copy of your speech.

Do you accept "one-off" directive replies from friends and relatives of correspondents?

From time to time, people do send us a directive reply written by somebody else. We are very pleased to accept these contributions but they can cause us problems over copyright and confidentiality. If you want to enclose extra replies, please ask the person to:

- write on separate sheets of paper from your reply
- include a note of their sex, age, occupation and town/village of residence

- attach a statement signed by the writer saying that they make over copyright of the piece.

Then we can add it to the Archive in the usual way. Effectively they are becoming a correspondent, even if only for the one reply.

Can I leave the project?

Of course! No one should feel obliged to stay with us once they have lost interest or if their circumstances change. Please do tell us why you want to leave. If you would like to stay in touch, you can become a Friend of the Archive. In this way, you could support us financially (the amount of the subscription is up to you), come to open days at the Archive and receive our Bulletin without having to reply to directives.

Can I visit the Archive?

Yes. The Archive is a public resource in the care of the University of Sussex. All visits to the Special Collections reading rooms must be by appointment so please phone or

write first. We also sometimes hold open days or seminars which gives you a chance to meet staff at the Archive, see displays of material and talk to researchers. These are advertised on our website or in the Bulletin.

Where do I send my contributions?

Please send all your post (letters, directives, self portraits etc) to the Mass Observation Archive. It is very important that everything you send us is correctly addressed.

We have a Freepost system so there is no need to use a stamp unless you wish to. Please note that the postal code is different if you use the Freepost system.

<i>With a stamp:</i> The Mass Observation Archive University of Sussex The Keen Woollards Way Brighton BN1 9RD	<i>Freepost system (no stamp needed):</i> Freepost: RTGI1ΔVIE ΔVSSC The Mass Observation Archive The Keen Woollards Way Brighton BN1 9RD
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Can I send my contributions by email?

Yes. You can either send them in the body of the email, or send them as Word attachments to **moa@sussex.ac.uk**.

How is the MO Project funded?

We have two sources of support: the University of Sussex and the Mass Observation Archive Trust funds. The University through its budget for the main Library, is our main source of support. It provides office accommodation and for storing the collection in the Library. It also provides basic services, lighting, heating, phones and computer support. For MOP staff salaries and all other activities, including the collection of new material, we rely on the Trust fund. This has been built up from fees charged to media or institutional users, or from royalties and fees from publications, in particular the digital publication of material by Adam Matthew Digital from the first phase of MO activity (1937-50s). In the past we have also received funds from funding bodies and charitable organisations. The Nuffield Foundation provided most of our support between 1986 and 1991. We are always in the business of fund-raising. In 1997, we were successful in our bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and this has allowed us to store our material under proper archival conditions.

In 1991, we set up a Friends of the Archive Scheme and financial support from our much appreciated Friends has been vital in our being able to buy equipment and support salaries. Without the Friends' support, the contemporary Project would not have survived. We also now frequently collaborate with researchers who are asked to make a contribution to our costs. Since 1981, we have collaborated several times with the BBC, and we have collected information on topics for the London Office of the European Commission, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Film

Institute and with several academic researchers on special grants. The material gathered in this way remains the property of the Archive and researchers are required to comply with all the same conditions over use of the material even if they have made a financial contribution towards its collection.

The Mass Observation Project

Copyright of your Mass Observation submissions

We do our best to ensure that directive replies are made available to researchers within three months of receipt. Directive replies are only identifiable by your Mass Observation number so your identity is not disclosed to researchers. Full diaries, self portraits, letters to us which have your name and address on them and any other information which you tell us you'd like to keep private are all covered by an embargo which operates for 50 years from the day of receipt.

To avoid the problem of having to contact you every time we need permission for a researcher to reproduce material from your directive replies, we invite you to assign the copyright of your Mass Observation submissions to the Archive. This would include all writings, photographs, illustrations, and any other texts *created by you* which you have submitted to the Mass Observation Archive.

Your formal re-assignment of copyright to the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive means that, provided we are satisfied with the integrity of the researcher and he/she has agreed to abide by our conditions protecting your privacy, we can give permission for them to reproduce your writing, photographs or illustrations.

There is no obligation on you to assign your copyright to the Archive but most people have been happy to comply and it helps enormously with our administration. Please note that this arrangement does not interfere with your own rights to publish your writing independently. You must, however, keep your own copies as the Archive will not be able to provide copies in the future.

Please also note that unless we hear from you to the contrary, your Mass Observation contributions will not be made available under your real name even to your nearest relatives and even after your death. If you want family and friends to see what you write for us, we will need a letter specifically stating your wishes which we can put in your personal file. If we don't receive such a letter, your contributions will remain anonymous.

Please complete the form below and send it to: Freepost: RTGU-AYJE-YSSC, The Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, The Keep, Woollards Way, Brighton, BN1 9BP

Name MO No.....
Address

.....

.....

I assign copyright of my Mass Observation contributions to the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive.

Signed Date
.....

17/10/2013



The Mass Observation Archive

The Keep

Brighton

BN1 9BP

T: +44 (0)1273 678157 E: moa@sussex.ac.uk www.massobs.org.uk

The Mass Observation Project

Terms of agreement with commissioning researchers

DRAFT

The Mass Observation Project is a longitudinal project which has been in operation since 1981. It relies entirely on the trust and commitment of its volunteer correspondents. Any specific directive or collaboration must take into account the long term needs of the Project. It is financed by charitable contributions and fees generated by collaborative work. Researchers who wish to commission parts of directives are therefore asked to agree the following conditions:

1. The need to protect the privacy of the Mass Observation correspondents is paramount. No attempt must be made to identify the correspondents, to contact them directly or to reproduce information about them which could lead to their identification. Researchers will have access to basic biographic information about the correspondents including (where known) age, sex, marital status, place of residence and occupation.
2. Original papers may not be removed from the Archive. Work must take place, by appointment, at The Keep. Any copies of any format are for the exclusive use of the researcher and must not be made available to anyone else or deposited in another archive or institution without the formal permission of the Trustees
3. Replies resulting from the directives will normally be made available for general public access (that is, to all researchers including the commissioning researcher) after being sorted and checked.
4. The final form of a commissioned directive is subject to the approval of the Mass Observation Archive. The form, length, content and language of the directive must conform to the 'house style' and be consistent with existing practices so that no long-term damage to the project is sustained. In practice, the directive text would be a collaborative production between the Archive and the researcher.
5. The fee charged by the Trustees does not include any in-house analysis or photocopying.
6. Every effort will be made to ensure that the response rate is comparable with previous response rates in the Project, but researchers are warned that a specified amount of data can never be guaranteed.

7. The Project can only continue if it charges for commissions. All researchers should seek financial sponsorship and build the full fee charged by the MOA into any applications to grant-giving bodies. We recognise that not all researchers are able to find the full fee, and we therefore operate a sliding scale of charges. Researchers should recognise, however, that any contribution less than the whole fee amounts to our subsidising their research. The fee which is eventually agreed will reflect both the ability of the researcher to pay and the needs of the Archive.
8. The replies to all directives (including those received as a result of a commissioned directive) remain the property of the Mass Observation Archive Trustees. The non-exclusive right to quote up to 500 words from the directive responses is granted by the Trustees as part of this agreement. This right applies to text in the English language throughout the world in a single publication published, commissioned or otherwise authored by the commissioner, and in print form only. This agreement covers the licensing of this one specified use in physical print form and applications for additional uses (including other formats such as digital, and other territories and media) must be made to the Archive's literary agent, Gordon Wise, Curtis Brown Group Ltd, Haymarket House, 28-29 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4SP massobservation@curtisbrown.co.uk, and standard fees shall apply.
9. The commissioner must undertake to include the following acknowledgement and copyright notice in every copy of the work in which the Mass Observation material appears, and to provide the Archive with one voucher copy of the work on publication:

Mass Observation material reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive. Copyright (c) The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive

I accept the above terms of agreement:

Signed.....Date.....

Print name.....

cc: Curtis Brown Group Ltd

Patron: Lord Briggs • Curator of the Mass Observation Archive: Ms Fiona Courage

Trustees: Ms Hilary Callan • Mr Jeremy Crow • Ms Elizabeth Dunn • Mr Simon Garfield • Ms Kitty Inglis • Dr Claire Langhamer • Prof Jeremy MacClancy • Prof Dorothy Sheridan

Charitable Trust No. 270218



Certificate of Approval

Reference Number	ER/ALFF4/2
Title Of Project	EdD Phase 3: The impact of higher education on the life stories of individuals: the Mass Observation perspective Fiona Courage
Principal Investigator (PI):	
Student	Fiona Courage
Collaborators	
Duration Of Approval	n/a
Expected Start Date	01-Mar-2016
Date Of Approval	22-Mar-2016
Approval Expiry Date	01-Sep-2017
Approved By	Jayne Paulin
Name of Authorised Signatory	Janet Boddy
Date	22-Mar-2016

*NB. If the actual project start date is delayed beyond 12 months of the expected start date, this Certificate of Approval will lapse and the project will need to be reviewed again to take account of changed circumstances such as legislation, sponsor requirements and University procedures.

Please note and follow the requirements for approved submissions:

Amendments to protocol

- * Any changes or amendments to approved protocols must be submitted to the C-REC for authorisation prior to implementation.

Feedback regarding the status and conduct of approved projects

- * Any incidents with ethical implications that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported immediately to the Chair of the C-REC.

Feedback regarding any adverse and unexpected events

- * Any adverse (undesirable and unintended) and unexpected events that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported to the Chair of the Social Sciences C-REC. In the event of a serious adverse event, research must be stopped immediately and the Chair alerted within 24 hours of the occurrence.