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The apparent underrepresentation of 'white working class' men in British Universities: perspectives from a Kirklees case-study.

By

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THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

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Acronyms

Acronym	Full Meaning
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CSJ	Centre for Social Justice
DBIS	Department for Business Innovation and Skills
DCSF	Department for Children, School and Families
DFE	Department for Education
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HEART	Higher Education Access Rewarding Transforming
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIPR	Higher Education Initial Participation Rate
JWT	Jobs without Training
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NAO	National Audit Office
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admission Service
WP	Widening Participation
'WWC'	'White Working Class'

Abstract

This research investigates the apparent under-representation of 'white working class' (WWC) men in British Universities through a Kirklees case study. The research explores the relevance of the use of the concept 'WWC' in relation to educational experience, the perceived constraints identified amongst the worst off within this category and the effect this may have on university progression. Particularly amongst those boys on free school meals (FSM), constraints identified were the idea of a feminised education, aspirations and awareness.

The literature review explores the background behind the under-representation amongst those categorised as 'WWC', including exploring the factual background and policy landscape. It also explores the breadth of constraints faced in university progression, predominantly amongst those on FSMs. It concludes with the firm position that the 'WWC' conception is inappropriate and there is too much focus by politicians, the media and charities on the ethnic dimension of under-representation amongst those categorised as 'WWC'. Stating also that constraints do exist amongst part of the 'WWC', this is at the lower end of the social class scale however.

This research centres Kirklees as a case study, in which 11 key informants were interviewed in order to identify key knowledge in regard to the perceived 'WWC' under-representation within British Universities. Through thematic coding key themes appeared in the data, highlighting the shared perception amongst the key informants in regard to the constraints witnessed by those classed as 'WWC', specifically witnessed by those on FSMs.

The research concludes stating that the wide remit of what it means to be 'WWC' renders the concept unsuitable in understanding educational experience. Whilst there are constraints in accessing university within the 'WWC' category, this is overwhelmingly amongst those in receipt of FSMs.

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1.0 Introduction

It is evident that 'working class' educational underachievement is not a new phenomenon, and the idea that schooling is a place that leaves the working classes feeling out of place has been present throughout British history (Willis, 1977; Humphries, 1981; Green, 1990; Miller, 1992). Presently, however there has been an increased interest in relation to 'WWC' underachievement by the media, politicians and charities and the under-representation of this group in HE (Runnymede, 2009; JRF, Cassen, et al, 2007; Sutton Trust & EEF, 2013). In early 2013 former University minister David Willetts, in relation to the issue called on 'WWC' boys to be a target group by university access agreements:

'The Office for Fair Access can look at a range of disadvantaged groups – social class and ethnicity, for instance – when it comes to access agreements, so I don't see why they couldn't look at white, working class boys,' Mr Willetts stated in an interview with The Independent (Willetts in Garner, 2013).

This new emphasis regarding the idea that the 'WWC' are being under-represented in HE has sparked much debate in regard to the nature of this inequality, some commentators almost regarding it as an ethnic inequality (Paton, 2008). As highlighted by the Telegraph:

'White teenagers are less likely to go to university than school-leavers from other ethnic groups-even with the same A-level results, according to official figures' (Paton, 2008).

This study investigates the nature of the perceived 'WWC' under-representation in HE in a Kirklees case study, understanding this inequality as a social class inequality, however one which is misrepresented due to the 'WWC' label. The project title of this research is:

'The apparent underrepresentation of 'white working class' men in British Universities: perspectives from a Kirklees case-study'.

Investigating the underrepresentation of 'WWC' males is a highly contested issue, one in which stirs much debate regarding forms of distributive justice and the idea of a victimized white underclass on one side, and contradictory debates on the other stating that claims of 'WWC' underrepresentation is an unnecessary moral panic (Runnymede, 2009, p.2). The concern over the contested group: the 'WWC' derives from data representing 'WWC' underachievement at schools. Official publications stating that children from 'WWC' backgrounds in general are the most under-performing group amongst their peers: with as little as 30.9% of those children eligible for FSMs achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C, including English and Mathematics, at key stage 4 (Sutton Trust & EEF, 2013, p.2). It is believed in this 'WWC' group, boys are the lowest performers. This underachievement coupled with the perceived under-representation of the 'WWC' going to university is stressed by many: UCAS (2014), and is seen to be an inequality which needs addressing (Willetts in Garner, 2013). There has been much attempt in the past to remedy inequalities witnessed by disadvantaged groups in accessing HE, one notable well-funded initiative was Aimhigher (Passy, et al, 2009). April 2004 marked the beginnings of what was to be known as Aimhigher (funding ceased in July 2011), which was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (Passy, et al, 2009). The programme's purpose was to raise awareness, aspirations and attainment among those young people from lower socio-economic groups, under-represented minority ethnic groups, including students with disabilities in order to gain access to HE (Passy, et al, 2009; HEFC, 2012). In West Yorkshire the end of Aimhigher marked the beginnings of a group with similar goals. Higher Education Access Rewarding Transforming (HEART) is a partnership of 12 HE providers, including colleges and universities within the region, which aim to increase widening participation (WP) amongst under-represented groups in HE (HEART, 2014).

The recent emphasis by commentators on the underachievement of 'WWC' males in education, however, and the idea that WP is not benefitting 'WWC' boys, means there is a need for more empirical data and insights. In this therefore it is important to understand the

increased emphasis and the extent to which this increased focus around the underrepresentation of the highly contested 'WWC' is valid, including understanding the idea that there are distinct educational experiences within the 'WWC' constraining them into progressing into HE. In this there will be specific focus on those in receipt of FSMs. In relation to this issue universities and governments share the notion 'that unequal access to advanced study is a social injustice that needs to be remedied' (CVCP, 1998, P.1). And in this they advocate that HE benefits not only the individual, but the nation economically (to create a globally competitive economy), culturally and socially, which will also be the stance of this research (Archer, et al, 2000). This study aims to generate empirical data and insights through a case study focus in Kirklees, West Yorkshire.

Focussing on Kirklees is an advantage to this study in that, extensive research has been geographically focused on 'working class' young people in London (Bradley, et al 2010). Whilst this research has proven useful, much of the Government's focus is now on areas of close knit social networks and areas that have a sense of fewer opportunities, such as previous coal fields or areas that have seen industry decline (Cabinet Office, 2008).

The sense of fewer opportunities is evident amongst specific marginalised groups within Kirklees, whilst the economic activity rate in Kirklees is similar to the region and nation (78% at the time of publication of the '2020 skills: the Kirklees labour market and skills strategy 2008-2020' in 2008) it is evident many groups are disproportionately marginalised (Kirklees District Council, 2008). This is the case for Muslim and black Caribbean communities and those classed as 'WWC' boys, in which their economic activity rate is considerably below the sub-region and the nation as a whole. The lower economic activity rate, coupled with lower attainment and progression into HE nationally and locally makes Kirklees a highly relevant case study to explore issues around the under-representation of 'WWC' boys in HE.

This research acknowledges the contested nature around the use of the concept 'WWC'. This sets the most fundamental rationale for conducting this research, to provide an alternative insight in the understanding of 'WWC' underrepresentation. In providing an alternative insight it is important to understand that due to the ambiguous nature of the

meaning of 'working class' within the notion of 'WWC', there are issues with using the notion 'WWC'. Issues around exploring a distinct notion of educational experience amongst a group with an ambiguous remit, and thus the implications of this on policy. This research will therefore acknowledge the problems of using the concept 'WWC', will refer to this notion when used in other publications due to the wide dissemination of the term and the unavoidable nature of using it. In exploring the constraints to those regarded as 'WWC' also this research will regard much of the constraints to be experienced amongst the lower socio-economic end of the remit of 'WWC' and those in receipt of FSMs. This research will therefore exercise caution over the misuse of 'WWC' under-representation on the grounds that those at the lower end, the FSM end, experience the brunt of the constraints in university progression.

This research conducted 11 in depth semi-structured interviews with those termed as key informants. The key informants were chosen over the alternative of focus groups with 'WWC' boys due to the lack of availability given the research's start and end date, and were chosen on the basis of their expertise and positions within local colleges, university institutions and schools. This gave a varied insight and understanding to the challenges faced by those categorised as 'WWC', specifically those on FSMs, and arguably one in which may provide more concise, honest data as opposed to focus groups conducted with 5 or 6 'WWC' boys.

Based on these considerations therefore this research will have aims to achieve in order to gain an in depth understanding of the under-representation of 'WWC' men progressing into university.

These aims are as follows:

- To analyse the relevance of the concept of 'WWC' males in relation to educational experience.

This aim challenges the highly contested nature of the concept 'WWC' and the relevance of the use of the word in relation to 'WWC' educational experience. It will do this through

critically analysing the relevance of the concept 'WWC', through highlighting the ambiguous nature of the 'working class' element in 'WWC'.

- To investigate and discuss the apparent underrepresentation of the 'WWC' through case study research.

In this the research investigates the accounts of the key informants selected within the Kirklees case study. This research explores the key informant's understanding of underrepresented groups within Kirklees and the constraints they perceive to be amongst the 'WWC' in progressing into university.

- To investigate the potential policy responses to this situation.

In this study, potential policy responses will be referred to throughout in order to attempt to understand the way in which governments and universities can get greater numbers of 'WWC' boys and specifically those on FSMs into university.

These broad aims inform the specific research questions that need to be addressed. These are as follows:

1)   To explore the key informant's understandings of 'WWC' and the extent to which they think the 'WWC' concept is a relevant concept in relation to educational experience.

2)   Understand and explore the constraints to those categorised as 'WWC' (specifically those in receipt of FSMs) in Kirklees area in their considerations whether to participate in HE.

3)   To identify other groups that are underrepresented in HE and to critically analyse how those categorised as 'WWC' fare compared to these groups.

4)   Investigate whether the increase in tuition fees has had a negative, disproportionate effect on 'WWC' student's choices in Kirklees area.

The structure of the study is that Chapter 2 (literature review) of this research firstly introduces the university policy landscape and methods utilised in order to help under-represented groups progressing into HE. It then leads to the background of 'working class' educational underachievement and the current dimension of 'WWC' underachievement in school and underrepresentation in university. Later leading onto the section: the concept of 'WWC', ethnicity and social exclusion. In this discussing social class, and the relevance of using the concept 'WWC' in relation to educational achievement, later discussing ethnicity, and the similar notion of understanding different ethnic educational experiences based on unsuitable generalisations: using the example of the varied attainment within Southern Asian ethnic groups. It later discusses social exclusion within the target group: the 'WWC' and specifically those on FSMs. The final section in the literature review looks at gender. Discussing understandings of 'WWC' under-representation in terms of a gender disadvantage toward boys in the education system.

Chapter 3 (methodology) outlines the approach of this research (social constructionist), gives an outline of the case study in question (Kirklees) and outlines the interview process taken: through selection of key informants, transcription stage and through the coding model (thematic coding) used in this research. It also highlights the ethical guidelines. Chapter 4 (Data analysis and Discussion) begins by unpicking the research question by analysing the key informant's understanding of the contested 'WWC', and their understanding of male educational experience also. It will then discuss the emerging constraints from the interviews, arguing the constraints to the so called 'WWC' boys mainly apply to those at the lower FSM end.

Chapter 5 (conclusion) will give an overall summary of the key aims and questions answered in this research. Concluding that the contested 'WWC' conception is an unsuitable concept

to use in relation to educational experience and constraints drawn out from the key

informant's accounts could mainly be applied to those on FSMs, not the whole broad remit of

those regarded as 'WWC'.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research reviews the literature in regard to the background of 'WWC' underrepresentation, the contested nature of the concept 'WWC' and the possible constraints amongst this contested group which may affect their progression into university. Firstly this research examines the factual background regarding the claims that the contested group of the 'WWC' is being under-represented in a university setting. In doing this the research examines the underachievement and under-representation of various groups, locally and nationally, to explore the apparent under-representation amongst those classed as 'WWC'. The research then explores the university policy landscape, highlighting the policy landscape in regard to supporting under-represented groups into university since the late 1990s.

The second section within this chapter explores the notion of class and educational achievement. Within this the research begins by looking at 'working class' educational underachievement throughout history and its changing nature in regard to perceptions of an ethnic inequality.

Thirdly, this research examines the concept of 'WWC', ethnicity and social exclusion. This section addresses the problematic concept of the 'working class' element within the wider 'WWC' category. It later addresses the similar problematic nature of ethnic generalisations, and within this a focus on South Asian ethnic groups and the polarisation amongst the different ethnic groups. This section then explores the possible constraints contributing to the social exclusion and under-representation amongst the contested 'WWC', arguing that many of these constraints are regarded to be present predominantly amongst the lower end of the class spectrum: those on FSMs.

The final section within the literature review explores the notion of gender and masculinity and the constraints posed by these in those categorised as the 'WWC' progressing into

university. In this the research explores the notion of the feminisation of education and its effect on male progression within the education system and notions of constructed male masculinity favouring alternative routes to university.

2.2 Factual Background & University Policy Landscape

Much of the emphasis on 'WWC' underrepresentation by politicians, charities and the media are in relation to figures which have highlighted the educational underachievement of this group. Such as official publications stating that children from 'WWC' backgrounds in general are the most under-performing group amongst their peers: with as little as 30.9% of those children eligible for FSMs achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C, including English and Mathematics, at key stage 4 (Sutton Trust & EEF, 2013, p.2). The results of the remaining FSM students by ethnicity achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C, including English and Mathematics, at key stage 4 are as follows: Mixed 41.3%; Asian 51.8%; Black 45.6% and Chinese 68.2% (Sutton Trust & EEF, 2013, p.2). Those not on FSMs' attainment was significantly higher.

In regard to the attainment gap based on gender, at Key stage 4 the female students had higher attainment than their male counterparts throughout all ethnic groups. In relation to those white students, those boys achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C, including English and Mathematics amounted to 26.9% whereas their female counterparts achieved 35.1% (Sutton Trust & EEF, 2013, p.4). It must be stated however that those white female students in receipt of FSM were the second lowest achieving group amongst all other ethnic groups regardless of gender.

This is also the picture within Kirklees, the educational attainment of those in receipt of FSM is also considerably less than those not on FSMs. This is evident with only 30% of 'WWC' (both genders) children in receipt of FSMs attaining 5 or more GCSE's at grade A*-C,

including English and Mathematics compared with 49.8% of all other FSM students (Demie, 2014).

Furthermore whilst applications to HE coming from disadvantaged groups have said to be increasing (UCAS, 2014), there is presently still a gulf between those regarded as the most disadvantaged groups and those most advantaged groups. It is evident that underachievement of those on FSMs and the under-representation of those in receipt of FSMs are distinct, despite this however it is evident that underachievement hinders progression into HE (House of Commons, 2014). Based on statistical data from UCAS's submission to the select committee inquiry exploring under-achievement in education by 'WWC' children (2014), pupils not in receipt of FSMs were considered to be twice as likely to apply to university in 2013 as those that had been in receipt of FSMs. In this data submitted application rates into university were regarded as relatively high amongst Chinese and Asian ethnic groups, whereas the White, Mixed, Black and other ethnic groups had application rates in a narrow range in 2013, within this white applicants were regarded as having the lowest application rate (UCAS, 2014). It is also evident within this the gap between young women and men applying is significantly worse in regard to male applications. It was evident that young women were a third more likely to apply and enter university in 2012 than men (UCAS, 2014). It is clear therefore that even though the attainment amongst both 'WWC' girls and boys on FSMs' are considerably below the national average (DFE, 2013), with girls achieving higher than boys but lower than any other ethnicity regardless of gender, girls are still more likely to enter university compared to boys and especially 'WWC' boys on FSM.

'There is no greater ambition for Britain than to see a steadily rising proportion gain the huge benefits of a university education as school standards rise, meeting our goal of 50% of young adults progressing to higher education by 2010. An ambitious goal because we are ambitious for Britain' (Blair, in theguardian, 2001).

It was in 1999 that Tony Blair announced in the Labour Party's conference the goal of reaching 50% of all young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 progressing into university

(BBC News, 1999). This had the specific focus of WP to promote university to under-represented groups. The use of the notion WP is very broad, as highlighted by Gorard, et al:

'the term 'widening participation' is in common use, but it does not have a clear meaning and has been interpreted by some as increasing student numbers or recruiting more students from state schools, whereas a stronger equity focus would ensure that it was about greater access for students from groups that are under-represented in HE in comparison to their (qualified) population share.' (2006, p. 119).

It is emphasised here that WP does not specify whether it is quantity or the characteristics of students progressing into university, while it is evident by this account, Blair emphasised WP for those students without a history of university: non-traditional applicants, students from low income backgrounds and low participation areas (Gorard, et al, 2006). For example, Blair emphasised a change in which university was 'not for the few, as in the past' (Blair, in the guardian, 2001), emphasising the sense that university was a place of exclusivity.

The Aimhigher (2004-2011) programme was an initiative set up to support a WP agenda in order to raise awareness, attainment and aspirations of those groups termed as under-represented within a university setting (Passy, et al, 2009; HEFC, 2012). This WP agenda therefore specified targeting lower socio-economic groups, under-represented minority ethnic groups, and students with disabilities in order to gain access to university. Aimhigher consisted of specific teams within universities responsible for initiating a WP agenda through outreach activities to schools and colleges. This outreach work was intended to raise awareness and aspirations amongst those under-represented groups.

Despite the Labour government's commitment to the WP agenda through Aimhigher, and its commitment to increasing the numbers of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, it has been argued that this has had little effect on helping those defined as 'WWC' (Greenbank, 2006). Instead Aimhigher has focused on providing support for those categorised as having special needs and students where English is a second language (Mongon, et al, 2008). This could arguably be due to the fact these groups are readily identifiable compared to the contested 'WWC' conception. In 2008, however the HE initial

participation rate was stalling at 39% (NAO, 2008) and currently the provisional Higher

Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) is estimated at 43% for the 2012/13 academic

year (DBIS, 2014).

Aimhigher was abandoned by the coalition (Conservatives and Liberal Democrats)

government in July 2011. Much responsibility towards WP is now administered by individual

universities and overseen by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) through access agreements

and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (OFFA & HEFCE, 2014).

The interest in lower socio-economic underachievement and under-representation in

university, is however still firmly on the government agenda, with the very recent Commons

Education Select Committee focusing an inquiry on the 'underachievement in education by

white working class children' (2014), emphasising further commitment by the government

and the relevance and contemporary nature of this research.

Within West Yorkshire also there is HEART. The HEART partnership incorporates 12 HE

providers within the region with set goals, dedicated to equality in access to university,

supporting under-represented groups in accessing university and being able to benefit from

the advantages university has to offer (HEART, 2014). HEART's priority under-represented

groups for 2013/2014 include: looked after young people and care leavers; disabled learners

and adult learners. The key advantages of this group is evident: they are all readily

identifiable groups as their remit is not ambiguous as with the contested 'WWC' category,

which will be discussed later in this literature review.

2.3 Class and educational achievement

'Working class' underachievement has been present for a long time in British History, and

since the 19th century there has been an emphasis in academic writing that schooling is a

space where the 'working classes' are left feeling out of place and ill at ease (Willis, 1977;

Humphries, 1981). In Andy Green's (1990) survey exploring the rise of education systems in

England, France and the USA, Green highlights England as an example of the most explicit use of schooling by the upper classes in order to dominate the lower classes. In his work he demonstrated the way in which the Middle classes in the 18th and early 19th century had a growing commitment to 'working class' education that was in direct contrast with their ideals of middle class education, but was instead intended to ensure that the lower classes would acquiesce in middle class ideals and aspirations. Similarly, in reference to the introduction of universal state education in the 19th century, Jane Miller states:

'the provision of education for working class children was thought of by and large instrumentally, rather than as likely to contribute to the life possibilities of the children themselves' (Miller, 1992, p.2).

Whilst, this is a historical legacy amongst the 'working classes' as being the inferior 'other' (Runnymede, 2009, p.24) within the education system, there is an element of not belonging that resonates today. This is highlighted by Linda McDowell (2007) that states that it is still deference which was and is still expected amongst the 'working classes' (McDowell, 2007). Crucially also, the same two barriers that were present in the creation of state schools, still exist today (Runnymede, 2009): the 'working classes' still have relatively low levels of access to cultural and psychological resources that help contribute to educational success. Most struggle to afford private tuition and cultural activities to enrich their children's lives, as middle class parents invest in their children. They are also believed to lack the same level of confidence, and a sense of entitlement that is regarded as more present in middle classes in their interactions with schooling (Demie, et al, 2011).

 The notion of 'working class' underachievement in education is evident throughout history, whilst this class disadvantage is emphasised however, there is a current concern regarding the underachievement amongst 'WWC' boys and the under-representation of this group in HE. There are various current media, political and organisational reports highlighting 'WWC' underachievement, plus with increasing awareness of achievement gaps in the current audit

culture within the education system's policy and practices, underachievement has received greater attention (Keddie, 2013).

It is argued that whilst 'working class' underachievement has been present for long periods of British history, the emphasis on 'whiteness' is a new element in this debate (Runnymede, 2009). By presenting 'WWC' inequality in ethnic terms, commentators run the risk of providing a cultural reading of inequality, highlighting the distinctive cultural values of the group, as opposed to looking at the bigger picture and the way systematic inequality creates disadvantage (Runnymede, 2009). Not taking into account political and economic marginalization of such groups. This way of thinking further sidesteps the issues of class inequality, and focuses on the way in which disadvantaged groups compete for scarce resources, and ideas of distributive justice, rather than looking at the way scarcity is shaped in the beginning (Keddie, 2013). This research therefore will understand this issue not in terms of an ethnic inequality, but as a social class inequality.

The study of 'WWC' underachievement and under-representation is a politically contentious discourse, dividing theorists (Keddie, 2013). It is argued that previously 'WWC' underachievement had gone unnoticed due to the success of middle class white children in the English school system and failures of government statistics to distinguish between the white British ethnic group through social background (Demie, et al, 2011). Whilst others highlight that the issue of 'WWC' male underachievement in the education system is much warranted and long overdue (Demie, et al, 2011). And much statistical data would suggest the issues surrounding 'WWC' underachievement is overdue.

On the other side many state it highlights a misguided moral panic within the contemporary education system (Archer, et al, 2007; Gillborn 2008), The Runnymede Trust (2009) states that many reports add to this sense of moral panic: For example:

'White working class boys are so under-represented at universities that they may need to be treated like ethnic minorities when it comes to recruiting students, a government minister has suggested' (Silverman, 2013).

This example reflects this pervasive moral panic, sparking dangerous understandings of inequality based on ethnic inequality amongst the general public and distributive notions of justice.

It could be stated, however, which will be argued in this research, that definitions of what it means to be 'working class' are predominantly based on those on FSMs, due to FSMs being used as a proxy indicator because of its simplicity, however this over exaggerates the sense of underachievement as these students are the worst achievers and definitions of who are the 'working class' are much broader than merely those on FSMs.

2.4 The concept of 'WWC', ethnicity and social exclusion

In addressing one of the key aims of the research it is important to analyse the relevance of the concept 'WWC' in relation to educational experience, it is therefore fundamental to critically analyse what is understood by the highly contested term 'working class' in order to determine the relevance of 'WWC' as a whole. Firstly, it is fundamental to understand that 'class' is an ambiguous term and means various things to different individuals, and therefore differing socio-political definitions makes the use of term 'working class' a contentious subject of study (Demie, et al, 2011). 'Class' can be understood as referring to unequal resources, and status, and the social hierarchies which are subsequently created (Runnymede, 2009). The element of inequality in this definition reaches broad consensus amongst theorists, however this is where the consensus ends. The focus of academic and official classifications have been generally in relation to economic inequality, and linked to occupational definitions, however versions of the correct way to draw the boundaries of this class 'map' are often not met with broad agreement (Runnymede, 2009). It is important to note however, that despite accounts of the 'WWC' being portrayed as a marginalized

homogeneous minority, the 'working class' in itself remains an 'internally differentiated social group' (Runnymede, 2009, p.8).

 If understandings of 'working class' are in relation to a labour-market category, 'manual workers' amount to 38% of the UK working population (Runnymede, 2009). If sales and shop workers are added to the 'working classes' (as understood by official classifications, emphasising low skill, routine, low-pay and the low autonomy of such jobs), as well as unemployed (where this group is disproportionally drawn from semi-routine and routine workers that lack employment security), then those that are marked as the 'working class' amount to half of the working-age-population (Runnymede, 2009). Academic and official understandings therefore encompass a large section of society, and within this group there is considerable diversity, not just in ethnicity but also internal hierarchical differences. This is significant as, even category within the 'working class' category there are differences in relation to employment security, skill, pay and status.

Despite this lack of consensus, however, researchers and policy makers continue to refer to the 'WWC' in studies. For example, Cassen and Kingdon (2007) and Mongon and Chapman (2008) refer to this group by settling with the definition that 'WWC' pupils are pupils from a White British ethnic background that are in receipt of FSMs. This research regards using those in receipt of FSM as an indicator of those from a 'WC' background as it serves an educational purpose. It also helps ensure that issues of underachievement in educational debates have focus and that it is not lost or blurred when it comes to national policy formulation by giving unambiguous data for schools and policy makers (Demie, et al, 2011). For these reasons therefore, this research will use the term 'WWC' to refer to those pupils who are of white British background, whose parents have varied occupations: in skilled semi routine occupations, others whose income is dependent on the welfare state and all students in receipt of FSMs. Whilst many researchers refer to those pupils in receipt of FSM as being 'working class', due to its simplicity as FSM data is available in schools and helps measure child poverty and is used frequently as a proxy indicator for social class, this research has

expanded the idea of 'working class' pupils to be more inclusive due to the diverse nature of the term 'working class' (Demie, et al, 2011).

Similarly to that argued by Demie (et al, 2011) regarding social class, it has been argued that ethnic minority people, when contrasted with the white population were similarly qualified in terms of GCSEs, A-levels and Degrees, however this is misleading. This is because many ethnic minorities were seen as extremely well qualified whereas others were less so. This was the case amongst South Asians in which there was considerable polarisation amongst African Asians and Indians which had higher average qualifications, more so than the whites ethnic group also, whereas the position of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis was much worse (Modood, et al, 1997). It was evident that these ethnic groups performed much worse than all other ethnic groups. In this the findings showed that whilst African Asians and Indians were the best qualified groups, having similar qualifications in relation to O-levels (GCSE) as white students however greater qualifications in terms of Degree (Modood, et al, 1997), contrasting with this was the Pakistani and Bangladeshi students in which were the group with the highest percentage with no or below O-level qualifications.

Despite these studies being conducted many years ago (In Modood, et al, 1997), rendering much of the data highlighted outdated, the practical significance of these studies to this research and exploring educational experience of different ethnic groups remains. This is because, as highlighted distinctions amongst ethnic groups must be made in order to avoid generalisations, for example the notion that 'British Asian' students are high achieving. This is equally significant to that highlighted by Demie (et al, 2011) regarding the middle class and working class polarisation.

It must also be highlighted the differences between Caribbean men, due to the nature of West Yorkshire's demographic, and the polarisation amongst this group.

This research is focussed on examining the possible constraints amongst 'WWC' boys in progressing into university. In relation to this, aspiration has been highlighted as playing a significant role within this by many theorists (House of Commons Education Committee,

2014). In this research, aspiration will be regarded as playing a role within educational and occupational goals, it is important to highlight however, that this research will not regard HE to be a higher aspirational choice and that an occupational goal will not be regarded as a lower aspirational choice.

'The term 'aspiration' is widely used to capture the various desires and ambitions held by young people about their futures. Aspirations may centre on lifestyle or self-fulfilment, or revolve around roles in the family or community (such as performing a caring or leadership function)' (Kintrea, et al 2011, p.12).

In this definition regarding aspirations, there is an emphasis on the family and community and a sense that these are a factor in the aspirations of 'young people about their future' (Kintrea, et al, 2011, p.12).

Aspirations and expectations are seen to vary in relation to pupils' socio-economic backgrounds, and in this it is considered that students from more deprived backgrounds are less likely to have high aspirations (Schoon, et al, 2002). Whilst this viewpoint is advocated by others (Steve Strand, in House of Commons, 2014), many have contradicted this viewpoint, for example the JRF saw that aspirations were in fact high across all social groups (JRF, in House of Commons, 2014).

Aspirations is perceived by many to have a causal relationship with attainment. This topic however is a contentious issue, but one which can' be ignored in this research due to their importance. The importance of aspirations and attainment was indicated by Aimhigher and the emphasis it put around aspiration and attainment building (Doyle, et al, 2012). This research views aspirations to have a causal impact on attainment, however it argues that increasing aspirations amongst the 'WWC' will not subsequently mean the numbers of 'WWC' students in HE will increase, as they have different aspirations and HE is not the only avenue for talented students.

Many claim that aspirations have a direct impact on attainment, for example the Future Leaders Trust (FLT) stated 'one of the solutions to improve the educational outcomes and

attainment of 'WWC' students is to raise their aspirations (FLT in House of commons, 2014). Contradictory to this, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation felt that low aspirations were not instrumental in lower attainment among white British children from lower socio-economic backgrounds (JRF in House of Commons Education Committee, 2014). Understanding the difference between parents and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those from wealthier background to be the strength of their belief that they were able to achieve such goals. Sir Michael Wilshaw (2013) shares a similar position, understanding the underachievement of 'WWC' to be a 'poverty of expectation', and the low expectations of others:

'Poverty of expectation bears harder on educational achievement than material poverty…. And these expectations start at home. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds very often have high ambitions, especially when they're young. But the odds against achieving them can worsen with age' (Sir Michael Wilshaw, p.3).

It is argued that expectations shrink as they are not exposed to people around them going to university: their elder siblings or friends, so they believe it isn't for them. The problematic nature of most debates around aspirations is the nature of higher and lower aspirations, many regard HE to be a form of progression relating to those with higher aspirations. This research however highlights the need to make a distinction between 'aspirations' in the general sense and understand that many students may have educational aspirations or occupational aspirations (House of Commons, 2014). While it was evident, in a study consisting of regular data collection through interviews conducted with young people aged 13-14: the Longitudinal Study of Young people in Education (LSYPE), that socio-economic background plays a key role in wanting to stay in post-16 education, this does not mean that those not staying in education have low aspirations. Many 'working class' students may regard schooling less instrumental in achieving their aspirations, and therefore may have specific occupational aspirations which can be regarded as having high aspirations.

As stated aspiration and (im) mobility in work and education is often linked with the family and community, in this the research draws from Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, et al, 1977). In this, aspiration is viewed not to be a deficit of ambition amongst the student, in this those regarded as being the 'WWC', but structured by objective conditions. In this particular routes or courses of action are excluded from individual's plausibility structures and are regarded as undesirable (Skeggs, 2004). Many theorists within the sociology of education have explored the effects of family members in providing a 'general framework' (Allen, et al, 2013, p.500) for the aspirations of young people (Ball, et al, 2000). There has also been an emphasis around the notion that habitus being transformed through alternative experiences such as schooling (Horvat, et al, 2010). Habitus can therefore be regarded as being to some extent responsive to other social experiences as well as frameworks shaped by parents and family members. There has been extensive studies done in regard to the notion of habitus, and has also been used to examine 'the interpenetration of locality and identity' (Ingram, 2009, p.422). As highlighted by Sandercock:

'Habitus is a field of social relations structurally, but that field also has a spatial component, the spaces of city, as well as social spaces in which one feels 'at home', where we experience both a positive sense of belonging, as well as knowing where we belong, in the social order' (Sandercock, 2005, p.222).

It is therefore evident, that in decisions by those classed as 'WWC' in whether to progress into HE, decisions are not exclusively based on a class-based disposition of 'people like me but also people from round here' (Allen, et al, 2013, p.501). In this young people's aspirations are deeply related to their social and spatial location.

In relation to social exclusion amongst the 'working classes', many have also highlighted the changing nature of the labour market into an increasingly knowledge based market which has been detrimental to those regarded as 'working class'. The knowledge economy refers to the changing nature of the labour market, as highlighted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Brinkley's 'defining the knowledge economy':

'The role of knowledge (as compared with natural resources, physical capital and low skill labour has taken on greater importance. Although the pace may differ all OECD economies are moving towards a knowledge based economy (OECD 1996)'.

This highlights not only the importance of knowledge in high tech industries but along all

sectors and adding to the notion that knowledge is an asset important to economic success.

Within this also is the further commitment to life-long learning for employees to further

develop in the changing market. This involves further training and education in order for

greater economic productivity (Archer, et al, 2010).

It is evident that many have regarded this sector as 'cool, creative and egalitarian' (Gill,

2002). It is clear however, for many (Working classes) the shift to a greater knowledge

economy has been regarded as socially restrictive, having uncertain entry routes,

exclusionary working practices and therefore contributing to the lack of social diversity

(Allen, 2013; Oakley, 2006). In regard to Kirklees area, and specifically Huddersfield and the

promotion of Huddersfield as a 'university town and centre of knowledge economy

development' (Kirklees District Council, 2008, p. 82) this could contribute to the further

alienation of already targeted groups identified as having low economic activity rates: the

'WWC'. This is evident through the promotion of university over other sectors:

apprenterships, manufacturing etc. In which there is need for greater investment to tailor to

the occupational aspirations of the WC's (House of Commons, 2014). It is worth mentioning

despite Huddersfield being regarded as a 'university town and centre of knowledge economy

development' (Kirklees District Council, 2008, p. 82), based on the economic productivity

rate which is proportionately lower in Kirklees, there may be less skills for this new economy,

therefore those boys aspirations are not being met, also it is questionable whether

Huddersfield in changing into a knowledge economy. The commitment to lifelong learning

has also been regarded to be an unclear initiative. Lifelong learning has been seen as in line

with the government's obsession toward credentialising young people which is regarded as a

necessity within the knowledge economy, whilst on the other hand being regarded as being

underpinned by a socialising agenda (for a desire to 'civilise' the 'working classes') within a

'middle-class bias towards the professions' (under the assumption that more and HE is always better) (Archer, et al, 2010, p. 126).

In research commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) aiming to 'understand young people in jobs without training (JWT)' in order to encourage 16 and 17 year olds whose status was JWT into accredited learning, it was evident that there were large assumptions over the preferences of young people in JWT (Archer, et al, 2010). Within this study it was assumed that young people in JWT would prefer credentialised training and formal education as opposed to a more informal development of skills (Archer, et al, 2010). In the study these young people were not in the problematic NEET (Not in education, employment or training) category: in an area of concern regarding welfare dependency, unemployment and social exclusion, they were in employment and within employment which inevitably needs doing. It is evident that regardless of the preferences of young people, the government is still exploring ways in order to steer them into more structured education.

It is evident therefore that the knowledge economy may prioritise education over employment, discounting choice and autonomy and in this regard, devaluing 'working class' values and choices within the dominant approach and bias towards 'the professions'.

In regard to the research question, it is important to understand the nature of the constraints 'WWC' boys or specifically those on FSMs may have which may render this group socially excluded and thus hinder university progression. In regard to this they may come from a household in which there is a reliance on welfare due to low paid, insecure or lack of consistent employment or no employment amongst family members. In regard to this therefore it is important to explore what is understood by welfare dependency, and the nature of welfare dependency.

It is important to highlight that welfare dependency doesn't exclusively refer to those not in employment. An individual that is economically dependent is a person that relies on welfare

payments, received from the state in order to meet their basic needs. This however could be as a result of being unable to work due to an illness or disability; those receiving state pension; those that want to work but are unable to find work; those currently employed but their wages are unable to support the household and those that choose not to work (CSJ, 2013).

Within many accounts in political and media reports there has been much emphasis regarding welfare dependency. Within this there has been calls for a new approach in regard to the welfare system. For example Ian Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, states: 'There has never been a more pressing need for fundamental radical reform and we will waste no time in acting' (Duncan, 2010).

One aspect of welfare reform that appeals to many politicians and policy-makers is the idea of curbing intergenerational worklessness. The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ, 2013) have stated accounts of intergenerational worklessness in which 96 per cent of their Alliance of poverty-fighting charities stated it existed, claiming accounts of 3 or even 4 generations of worklessness (CSJ, 2013). Contrary to claims of up to 3 or 4 generations of worklessness however it has been emphasised strongly that there is no such evidence of this (Shildrick, 2012b). In a quantitative survey study relating to deprived areas of Glasgow and Middlesbrough researchers found that even 2 generations of worklessness was rare (Shidrick, 2012b).

The political mantra of all three main political parties is that work is the best route out of poverty (Shildrick, 2012). As expressed by Ian Duncan Smith: 'Work, for the vast majority of people, is the best route out of poverty' (Duncan Smith 2010). This approach was also taken by Tony Blair that stated: 'work is the best route out of poverty for people who are able to work' (Blair, 1998). The idea that getting into work is the best means of exiting poverty is understood by many politicians and poverty-fighting charities (CSJ, 2013), however as expressed by Tracy Shildrick, et al, (2012) in the book 'poverty and insecurity: life in low-pay, no-pay Britain', work can often keep individuals in poverty through 'their relegation to

churning low-pay, no-pay careers at the bottom of the labour market' (Shildrick, et al, 2010, p.7).

Shildrick's, et al, (2010) study research focussed a long-term study in Middlesbrough, drawing on interviewee's experiences in regard to work. Much of the work done by the interviewees was insecure and failed to provide labour market security or progress, and explained the reasons regarding why employment didn't last. Much of the interviewees were in 'recurrent poverty': in and out of low paid employment but often never moving far from poverty (Shidrick, et al, 2010). Recurrent poverty serves to understand the interviewee's intermittent interaction with employment. Often a move in and out of employment meant in and out of poverty expressing the significance of the low-pay, no-pay cycle: 'a longitudinal pattern of employment instability and movement between low-paid jobs and benefits' (Shildrick, et al, 2010, p.8). It is these reasons also that the concept of intergenerational worklessness is problematic as much employment is insecure giving the potential for loss of job not generations of worklessness but generations of insecure work.

2.5 Gender and constructions of masculinity

'Working class' boys have often been conceptualised as resistant to schooling, relating it with femininity and middle classness (Cohen, et al, 1994) and not compatible with their working-class constructions of masculinity. This is in line with many thinkers stating that the outperformance of male students by their female counterparts are due to the 'feminisation of education' (Phillips, 2002; Leslie, 2007) and society which has rendered boys performing worse than girls due to the inadequate transformation that education has made to tailor the ways girls learn, thus leaving boys behind.

To combat this many have proposed increasing the number of male teachers, this is particularly emphasised in a primary school setting (Biddulph, 1997; Hoff-Sommers, 2000;

Broecke, et al, 2008).This also has been the official government position (Skelton, 2001).

The idea behind increasing numbers of male teachers is to challenge today's 'laddish'

behaviours with providing boys with role models which will develop an 'alternative and

presumably more compliant form of masculinity' (Skelton, 2001, p.78).

Such arguments however are regarded to allocate a lot of emphasis on gendered identities

and sex roles which have been criticised by post-structuralist perspectives (Davies, 1989,

Walkerdine, 1990). As addressed by Connell:

'Though most discussion on masculinity is silent about the issue, it follows from both
psychoanalytic and social construction principles that women are bearers of masculinity as
well as men' (1995, p, 230).

An example of this was also highlighted in research conducted in a primary school located in

the North East of England (Skelton, 2001). The school was purposively chosen as it was

located in an area concentrated by the activities of groups of young men, with an age range

from their mid to late teens, in which teachers and fellow students were often targets of

verbal and physical attack. It was evident the control exercised by the young men was that of

aggression and intimidation. It was highlighted that classroom control was reinforced, by

both the male and female teachers by emulating the same types of masculine authority as

the young men, therefore it was highlighted that women can do masculinity effectively as

well as men.

This will be further explored within this research as a factor which needs to be explored due

to the continued higher results (see Sutton Trust, 2013) of girls compared with boys across

all ethnic backgrounds.

Constructions of masculinity in negotiations in whether to participate in HE have been

identified (Archer, et al, 2001) as shaping opinions toward HE. Research on men as explicitly

gendered individuals is somewhat recent, as feminist critiques have highlighted: prior

research has been done on men and by men, however today issues surrounding masculinity

are now in mainstream academic research (Archer, et al, 2001; Mac an Ghaill, 1996).

Research on masculinity can, broadly speaking, be divided into two main approaches: the critical versus the celebratory (Archer, 2001). Within these two main approaches are a variety of theoretical positions which have been developed, such as subcultural theory, role theory, discursive theories and psychoanalytic approaches (further reading see: Coltrane, 1994). This research is written from perspectives in line with recent shifts in the literature that stress theorising masculinity in relation to hegemony and multiple identities (Archer, 2001). This perspective highlights the complex interconnection of class, ethnicity, and 'race' within gendered identities (Anthias, et al, 1992). This perspective further suggests that identities are formed, and positioned differently, within numerous and uneven social patterns of subordination and domination (Anthias, 1996). Different masculine identities, therefore will be produced from differing locations across social divisions, which means different levels of subordination/dominance in relation to other classed, racialized and gendered groups (Archer, 2001). Identity in this research is seen as 'multiple, fluid and shifting' (Archer, 2001, p.432) and a process in which men in this research construct and use classed, racialized and gender identities to engage and interact with wider society (Alexander, 1996). Their sense of identity therefore will affect their negotiations on participation in HE.

2.6 Conclusion

In this literature review this research has examined the factual background regarding the apparent underrepresentation of those categorised as 'WWC' in progressing into university. It is evident that in order to understand the under-representation in university of this group exploring the factual background in regards to underachievement at key stage 4 level is key. In this it is evident that at key stage 4 level however it is not the entire remit of those categorised as 'WWC' that are underachieving at key stage 4 but those defined as being in receipt of FSMs. In this those white boys on FSMs were seen to be the lowest achieving at key stage 4 in regards to all other ethnic groups, and their female counterparts, this was the case nationally and at Kirklees level also. The factual background also highlighted that those

boys on FSMs were also proportionately less likely to apply to go into university (UCAS, 2014).

It is evident based on the literature that there has been a commitment to WP to under-represented groups in university in the past. Part of this commitment saw the introduction of Aimhigher, which sought to increase awareness, attainment and aspirations amongst under-represented groups, and a similar local project named HEART for West Yorkshire area. It is evident however that despite these initiatives, the group defined as 'WWC' are still seen as under-represented in university, as Aimhigher and HEART have chosen to focus on readily identifiable groups: those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, under-represented minority ethnic groups and those disabled learners.

Based on the literature it is clear that 'working class' educational under-achievement has been present throughout British history as a class disadvantage, the emphasis on 'whiteness' however is a new element of the debate (Runnymede, 2009). This presents the inequality of those classed as 'WWC', specifically those on FSMs, as being an ethnic inequality. This research does not however view this inequality as an ethnic inequality, instead understanding this inequality as a class inequality.

Analysing the factual background of those categorised as 'WWC' provided great insight into the relevance of the concept, as expressed the factual background is based on the FSMs proxy because it is effective in relation to understanding educational experience. In this the literature review explored the remit of 'working class' within the wider concept of the 'WWC' and understand the concept to be problematic in relation to educational experience. This is evident as those categorised as being 'working class' amounts to a large section of society that is not a homogenous group of people: the concept encompassing differences in relation to employment security, skill, pay and status. Similarly, this literature highlighted the misleading categories in regard to ethnic minority groups. This was highlighted through the polarisation amongst African Asians and Indians which had higher average qualifications compared with the attainment of Bangladeshi and Pakistani students. This puts emphasis on greater distinction needed within understanding educational experience of all groups.

In regard to research question 2 this research explores aspirations, the changing nature of the labour market, and the idea of welfare dependency in understanding the political, social and economic marginalization of those categorised as 'WWC', specifically those on FSMs. In this it was evident that aspirations was key to university progression and influenced by social factors, as highlighted by Bourdieu's concept habitus (Bourdieu, et al, 1977). It is evident however that differing aspirations is important and healthy, and whilst many have identified those from lower socio-economic backgrounds as having lower aspirations as the reason for fewer numbers progressing into university, this research identifies differing aspirations being the reason. In this, the research views schooling less instrumental for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds in achieving their aspirations. Based on the literature it is also evident that this group, mainly those boys in receipt of FSMs, are politically and economically marginalised, based on a shift in the labour market into a knowledge based market, and within their families their families are 'relegated to churning low-pay, no-pay careers at the bottom of the labour market' (Shildrick, et al, 2010, p.7). In this case study therefore this aspect is developed, as employment insecurity pose constraints, specifically to those on FSMs, furthermore those boys on FSMs may arguably be further excluded with the further promotion of the knowledge economy through the promotion of Huddersfield being regarded as a 'university town and centre of knowledge economy development' (Kirklees District Council, 2008, p. 82).

It is also evident based on the literature that gender and masculinity are considered as constraints to university progression. In this the notion of a feminised education was explored, and ideas of gender roles playing a key role in the formulation of role models within primary schools was highlighted as being problematic in terms of putting great importance on gender roles, however, it is seen that role models are often key in boys educational progression which are based on gender roles.

Next this research explains the methodological approach taken by this research in order to investigate the apparent under-representation of 'WWC' men in British Universities.

3.0 Methodology and project design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a justification of the research method utilised in seeking to understand the apparent under-representation of 'WWC' men in university, whilst also seeking to reach the aims of the research and answer the research questions. This research firstly does this by explaining the ontological position taken by this research and the way in which this research understands reality. It then explains the epistemological approach implemented in order to best understand knowledge within what is regarded by this research to be a social world. Later the research explains the way in which this research understands the contested conception of the 'WWC' group and thus the target group within this research which the interview questions will be targeted towards. It then explains the process undertaken in setting up the interviews, from purposive sampling of the key informants to the justification of the method used in order to understand this research. In regard to the data collection the research then explains the methods used in data analysis, later concluding and summarising the whole process and learning process of the way in which this research was conducted.

The 4 research questions of this research are:

1) To explore the key informant's understandings of 'WWC' and the extent to which they think the 'WWC' concept is a relevant concept in relation to educational experience.

2) Understand and explore the constraints to those categorised as 'WWC', and specifically those in receipt of FSM, in Kirklees area in their considerations whether to participate in HE.

3) To identify other groups that are underrepresented in HE and to critically analyse how those categorised as 'WWC' fare compared to these groups.

4) Investigate whether the increase in tuition fees has had a negative, disproportionate effect on 'WWC' student's choices in Kirklees area.

3.2 Research Approach

This research takes a social constructionist (research's epistemology) approach to understanding the social world, regarding interactions between people (individuals, groups,) and the way in which the social world is interpreted by those involved in it to be fundamental to this research (Robson, 2011). The ontological approach of Social constructionism, sometimes referred to as Interpretivism, asserts that social properties are a construct of interactions between people, rather than the assumption that they have a separate existence. In this, people through interaction and engagement construct meaning, meaning does not exist in its own right (Robson, 2011).

This research is implementing a social constructionists approach to understanding knowledge as it regards there to be many difficulties in the notion that the social world can be understood in terms of being an objective reality. In this there is not one objective reality that can be known, but multiple realities. Understanding research to uncover objective reality is linked to a quantitative paradigm and often a positivist approach, however due to much criticism the positivist approach has largely been superseded by a post-positivist position, which seeks to remedy the main criticisms (Robson, 2011). The social constructionist stance of this research views a positivist approach problematic in relation to social research. This is because positivism has been the philosophical view of the natural sciences, and is seen by this research to be inadequate in understanding the social world (Robson, 2011). Natural

sciences is often linked with Biology, Chemistry and Physics and understands science to be credible and possible because those involved are looking at the same bit of reality therefore see the same thing (Robson, 2011). It is evident however that what the observers 'see' is not merely determined by the features of the thing observed. Often is it understood that the features and the perspective of the observer both have an effect. As stated by the social constructionist position: regardless of the underlying nature of reality, there are varied perspectives in relation to reality. Post-positivists attempt to maintain aspects of positivism: objectivity, whilst taking into account that the researcher's background knowledge and values can influence what is observed (Reichardt, et al, 1994).

Within the quantitative tradition there has been an attempt to find this objective reality, however it is seen here that the focus on social research is in regard to human beings in social situations, therefore the quantitative approach is not adequate in understanding the social reality (Robson, 2011).

It is evident therefore, as understood by both the social constructionists and post-positivists position, that what is being observed, the observer often has a big role. Objective reality autonomous of the researcher's own influence is therefore not the primary goal here, the social world cannot be understood using a facts are facts approach (Robson, 2011). Instead this research is aware of the research's role in providing a subjective reality. This is evident in this research's aims: 'analyse the relevance of the concept of 'WWC' males in relation to educational experience. In this there is the initial notion that the contested concept 'WWC' may be unsuitable in understanding educational experience, it is this research's responsibility however to unpick and determine based on the data whether the concept of 'WWC' is relevant in relation to educational experience. This is done through weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of using the concept, based on key informant's accounts. This often can provide unexpected outcomes based on the findings and is often a developmental process in terms of the research, and the researcher conducting the research. This is often highlighted in research in which unexpected outcomes come to

surface, resulting in the researcher's position altering and the research becoming more of an organic process.

In the social constructionist approach there can be as many realities as participants, therefore the task of this researcher is to attempt to understand the numerous 'social constructions of meaning and knowledge' (Robson, 2011, p.24). Whilst the incompatibility of quantitative and qualitative methods: 'incompatibility thesis' (Sale, et al, 2002), have been criticised (Brannen, 2005), and sometimes methods are increasingly being mixed (Bryman, 2006) the reason for use of qualitative methods here are due to the appropriateness of these methods in investigating the social world.

3.3 Case Study

This research is conducted as a holistic case study with embedded units, looking at the reasons behind decisions by 'WWC' men on whether to participate in HE (Baxter, et al, 2008, p.550). This approach has allowed exploring of the Kirklees area in question whilst also considering the influence that various further education colleges within this area has on the decision making of the 'WWC' men. The research therefore looked at the contextual effect the Kirklees area had on students and through purposive sampling of a number of sites explored the wider issues, both for Kirklees area and supported by local and national data. The research is conducted within the Kirklees area, this gives the possibility to examine further education colleges (that provide courses which give its students the possibilities to further into HE, (i.e. BTECs) in depth. The case study approach allows the research to focus more on the particular demographics and social structure of the selected area in question (Davies, 2007). If this research attempted to compare multiple case studies it would run the risk of providing an incomplete explanation of either, with one case study it gives greater insight within the time period allocated: 1 year. Kirklees area as a case study fits well in research on 'WWC' males as the area is home to a history of industry, including

lots of old mill towns: Huddersfield and Dewsbury, which shapes the political and social landscape. It is also evident that based on the economic activity rate and the lower attainment for this sub-region amongst those considered as 'WWC', that West Yorkshire provides an ideal case study for investigating the apparent underrepresentation of 'WWC' men in university.

The research focuses on groups of pupils who are of white British backgrounds who have lived in Kirklees area for many years, whose parents have varied occupations: in skilled semi-routine occupations, others whose income is dependent on the welfare state and all students in receipt of FSMs. Whilst many researchers refer to those pupils in receipt of FSMs as being 'working class', due to its simplicity as FSMs data is available in schools and helps measure child poverty and is used frequently as a proxy indicator for social class, this research has expanded the idea of 'working class' pupils to be more inclusive due to the diverse nature of the term 'working class' (Demie, et al, 2011). The research's conception of 'working class' is therefore all inclusive based on the remit of 'working class' identified in the literature review. In this conception of what it means to be 'working class', the research is able to determine whether this class inequality is shared by all those termed as 'working class' or just by those at the bottom end of the class spectrum: those on FSMs.

3.4 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to identify Key informants in particular areas of expertise in order to inform my research. Gaining access to the key informants was done through gaining consent from managers (Careers advisors) within the organisations initially. This meant that measures were taken for good practice, in which key informants were advised prior and pre-informed of my research. This meant that invasive measures were avoided. Other links were created through the research institution's internal links and external links with colleges in the local area. The research began by interviewing internal staff (college liaison officer and

admissions staff) and provided good practice for initial interview techniques before approaching external staff in colleges and careers organisations.

Individual key informant semi-structured interviews helped identify key constraints to the group in question and also helped identify other and perhaps groups that are equally underrepresented in a HE setting to those termed as 'WWC'. The number of semi-structured interviews undertaken needed to take into consideration data analysis and data collection. With this in mind the research restricted the number of interviews to a set number with key informants, but also conducted enough to have a sufficient amount for varied informed opinions by professionals: 11 up to one hour in duration interviews. Data collection was collected via transcripts made from recordings (Robson, 2011).

The key informants were based on a select range of professions that often come into contact with my focus group: those categorised as 'WWC', at some point throughout their educational experience. In this the key informants came from a range of professions: Key informant 5, 6, 9 and 11 were all careers advisors. Key informants 5, 6 and 11 all worked in an education institution working predominantly with those at key stage 4 level, whereas key informant 9 worked in a further education college. Key informants 5 and 6 were both female careers advisors whereas 9 and 11 were both male careers advisors. Key informants 8 and 10 (both male) taught in an further education college, key informant 8 teaching a range of science based courses (BTEC & A-level) and Key informant 10 teaches a range of business related courses (BTEC and A-level). Key informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 are all female lecturers and admissions tutors or former admissions tutors working in a university setting. Key informant 1 in Criminology, 2 in Politics, 3 in youth and community studies and 4 in police studies. Finally key informant 7 is a school and college liaison officer working within a university setting (more details of the roles of all these key informants provided in Appendix A).

This research is aware that all of the key informants in this study are of the white ethnic group. This is however reflective of the education sector as a whole, in a survey in 2011 for

the Department of Education only 11% of classroom teachers were of an ethnic minority background, in contrast with 24% of pupils (Furness, 2012). It is evident therefore that as the key informants that were available were selected on the basis of willingness by line managers and head of staff, this research has captured the lack of diversity within the education sector. This may also be reflected in the data provided by the key informants, in which social class was seen mainly to refer to those British white students.

3.5 Research Method/Interviewing

This research used qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured interviews with those termed as key informants (admissions tutors, careers advisors, college liaison officers etc) as it is best suits the research question. Qualitative interview research methods meant this research acquired multiple perspectives in relation to educational experience. One clear benefit of qualitative research is that it is subjective and provides a better understanding of human experience (Silverman, 2010, p.119). It could be said that qualitative research can act as an ideal way in bridging the social distance in this study looking at the reasons 'WWC' men choose not to progress into HE, in which quantitative research could not do (Silverman, 2010, p.120). Undertaking a subjective approach means 'reality' was understood and made sense of through the interviews between the key informants and the interviewer/researcher, and in this the way the key informants interpret 'WWC' under-representation in HE. This allowed for greater understanding of social phenomena in relation to this research question, compared to what would be gathered through a positivist approach: through surveys, questionnaires and random sampling which would not give insight into the social world as it is lived and undergone by people operating in social situations (Schwandt, 2007).

Initially this research was going to use focus groups amongst those identified as 'WWC' in this research who were at key stage 4 (GCSEs) within their education. The change in research methods was prompted by logistical problems in gaining access to a sufficient number of boys identified as 'WWC' due to the start date of this study. The research began

in January, with this in mind, links with gatekeepers to access those identified as 'WWC' would have to be made, and a considerable amount of prior research would need to have been done before the school was off for the summer term. The access around examination before summer period would also prove problematic due to gaining consent from teachers and parents around this important time. The failure of gatekeepers to allow potential participants to take part in studies is often a concern in research in regard to younger participants/vulnerable groups (Miller, et al, 2002). Before the focus groups could have been undertaken also prior research would have had to be done to hand in proposals and to gain a reasonable amount of knowledge to inform the questions needed to lead the focus groups. There would also be the aspect of gaining the trust of those defined as 'WWC' boys so that the answers were ones based on their own educational experiences.

Focus groups do provide insightful shared experiences, which in the case of those categorised a 'WWC' would be useful for this research, despite this however within focus groups there is a tendency for the more dominant group members to be vocal and create the narrative (Robson, 2011). This can lead to the more silent members being over powered or conforming to what the more dominant members believe, alternatively they may not want to share their personal experiences.

Conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants was the best option given the constraints posed by conducting focus groups and helped provide information of the social world through the experience and perspective of those in contact daily with those termed as 'WWC' (Boeije, 2010). Semi-structured interviews helped with the time constraints set by term times and also gave the research access to well informed key informants that arguably would be more open in regards to speaking about the constraints amongst those categorised as 'WWC'. Asking informed questions directly to key informants in regard to understanding social phenomena is regarded here as the best route in understanding the apparent underrepresentation of 'WWC' men in university.

The choice of using semi-structured interviews allowed for greater depth of meaning as opposed to focus groups, allowing one interviewee time to elaborate and justify positions held (Boeije, 2010). Semi-structured interviews, meant respondents were freer to discuss a broad topic as opposed to a highly structured format. Having elements of structure to the research method as opposed to largely free unstructured methods also provided greater ability to discuss and work through an array of topics, including class, ethnicity and gender for this research, without running the risk of missing topics (Robson, 2011). Within interviews also there was the possibility for further lines of inquiry once the interviewee had answered which is not an option in other methods, including surveys and questionnaires. Through verbal and non-verbal 'probing' this research was able to provide clearer and well-articulated knowledge which may be left incomplete with other methods alternative to the face to face interaction of interviews (Boeije, 2010).

3.6 Analysis

Thematic coding analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data collected. Coding is understood to be the way in which you define what the data being analysed is about (Gibbs, 2007). This was done through identifying one or more sections of text that exemplify similar theoretical or descriptive ideas. In this research therefore, several passages were identified using coding and were then linked under a name for that idea: these ideas became the research's themes. Coding was undertaken by working through the qualitative interview data using a highlighter pen. This was however, not the only phase of coding. Themes appeared through various means before and after working through transcripts using the technique of coding with a highlighter pen. This was done through becoming familiar with the data through the transcribing period: reading and re-reading the data.

Words or extracts were identified in multiple ways. One way this research coded was by taking note of repetitions in data sets. This helped identify some of the more obvious themes

which were repeated in interviews, whilst also constituting important themes the more the theme was repeated (Ryan, et al, 2003). Whilst repetitions concerns what is in the qualitative data, missing data involves data not explicitly referred to. This method of identifying themes was undertaken with care, scrutinizing the data to ensure that the data being found wasn't what was purposefully being looked for, this involved reading and re-reading extracts. Furthermore, themes were also identified by referring directly to the research questions of the work, and issues regarding theoretical importance to this research (Ryan, et al, 2003). Whilst it could be argued that this is a very flexible method and therefore the potential range of issues to be said in regard to the data is broad, with clear focus within the coding stage clear relevant themes appeared in the coding stage through the process of becoming familiar with the research throughout transcribing plus through the reading and re-reading of the data. Whilst this is a potential disadvantage of this method, thematic coding analysis does provide a means in which large amounts of qualitative data can be summarized and key features can be identified (Robson, 2011).

The themes identified in this research to be critically analysed in chapter 4 (data analysis and discussion) were: the concept of 'WWC' males in relation to educational experience, the feminisation of education and attainment, aspirations and finally awareness. The first theme to be discussed: concept of 'WWC' males in relation to educational experience emerged through the key informant's understanding of the concept. The majority not questioning the concept 'WWC' in relation to educational experience, in which is highly debated in this research's literature. This theme was also chosen as much of the key informants were familiar with the idea of 'WWC' male under-representation and underachievement, therefore it is important to understand the nature of this under-representation and underachievement: based of class, ethnicity and gender dimensions.

The themes explored after are: the feminisation of education and attainment, aspirations and awareness were also selected however for different reasons. Whilst it is evident this research chose the first theme: concept of 'WWC' males in relation to educational

experience as many did not question or explicitly challenge the concept, the later themes were identified due to the repetition of their use between key informant accounts (Ryan, et al, 2003). Many key informants understood girls to be outperforming boys in education due to the idea, whether implicitly or explicitly referred to, as being the result of a feminised education that favours girls. In relation to this, boys' attainment plays a role in education progression therefore this would need to be explored. Furthermore, aspirations and the awareness of those categorised as 'WWC' was also repeated between accounts. Whilst the repetition of these ideas played a role in the decision to choose these themes, the literature also played a role. In this raising aspiration, awareness and attainment were key goals in the initiative Aimhigher, and these themes still play a key role in West Yorkshire's HEART partnership, therefore it is evident that themes were selected based on the data as well as previous literature.

3.7 Ethical Guidelines

This research follows the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) ethical guidelines for educational research 2011 (BERA, 2011). This research operates within an ethic of respect towards the key informants involved in this study. This was done through treating key informants fairly, sensitively and freedom from prejudices which is important in a study concerning difference including: gender, ethnicity, age, race, class, cultural identity, sexuality, nationality, disability, faith and political belief or any other additional differences (BERA, 2011). Within this ethic of respect the research puts importance on voluntary informed consent. In line with voluntary informed consent, all key informants agreed to their participation by their own accord, understood the interview process and the way in which their accounts will be used. Secondly it was important within this ethic of respect that there was openness and disclosure. In regard to openness and disclosure this research avoided

deception within the interview process as it is not relevant in the methodological design of this study. The right to withdraw at any point throughout the interview was also explained to each key informant at the beginning of each interview. Under the ethic of respect considerations regarding children, vulnerable young people and vulnerable adults must be considered, however as this research did not deal with these groups there is no ethical considerations to be made. One issue in this study involves the dual role of the key informant: being important to this study whilst having another profession as a teacher, careers advisor etc. therefore, it is important that under privacy that anonymity is respected. Within this study all key informants will remain anonymous. Anonymity in this study is beneficial as it provides a platform for the key informants to express views without the fear of accountability to their college, organisation or university in which they work. Under BERA's ethical guidelines it is also understood that there is a responsibility to the community of educational researchers, which involves conducting research to the highest of standard and avoiding misconduct (BERA, 2011).

3.8 Reflections on the Methodological Approach

The method used in this research was effective in drawing from the key informant's knowledge as professionals in contact with this research's focus: those categorised as the 'WWC'.

The decision to use semi-structured interviews with key informants as opposed to focus groups with groups of students meant the research did not struggle to arrange interviews around term times and was still able to gain valuable concise insight. Focus groups with students may have resulted in no-shows, insufficient amounts of data or data collection after the summer term which would have meant insufficient time for data analysis with the research ending in January.

The interview process was a developmental and organic process. The interviews were developed throughout through changing questions due to the appropriateness for the different key informants, plus a couple of questions discarded due to the ambiguous nature of them. Despite this however, the key questions remained. It was evident also that interviews became a much more streamlined process the greater number conducted, this was through the further relaxed atmosphere created through skills developed as an interviewer in which rapport was developed with the key informants. The use of introductory simple questions to create a settled environment and concluding questions to finish the interview process also helped develop a smoother interview process, and in regard to future studies will be utilised again.

In relation to future research, it may also be an option to use a mix of focus groups to get shared values from interviewees and one to one interviews, however in regard to this research this was inappropriate due to the time scale.

In the next chapter, data is reported on and analysed based on the themes discussed in this chapter, exploring the key informant's understandings of the under-representation of 'WWC' men in university.

4.0 Data analysis and discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this discussion section this research presents and critically analyses the key informant's understanding of 'WWC' male educational experience, as well as critically analyses the perceived constraints amongst the group in focus: those seen as 'WWC'.

The themes identified based on the data are: the concept of 'WWC' males in relation to educational experience, the feminisation of education and attainment, aspirations and finally awareness. The first theme explored is: the concept of 'WWC' males in relation to educational experience. This theme concentrates on the way in which the key informants understand the concept 'WWC' and the extent to which they view this under-representation in university as a distinct educational experience facing 'WWC' boys. This theme emerged from both the literature and data. As evident from the literature, the relevance of the concept is put into question, however within the data the concept on the whole was not questioned, therefore there is a need to explore the ways in which the key informants understood 'WWC' male under-representation. It does this by unpicking the concept 'WWC' and the extent in which the key informants identified distinct educational experiences with this group. The research does this through exploring the key informant's understanding around class, and specifically what constitutes being 'working class' and whether this is viewed as a meaningful concept by those key informants interviewed. This relates to the main aim and research question within this research: exploring whether the concept 'WWC' is relevant in relation to looking at educational experience. The research then explores the idea that 'WWC' under-representation in university is seen as an ethnic inequality in relation to key informant accounts. This section also looks at the problematic nature and highlights the

greater need for distinction between minority ethnic groups in regard to exploring educational experience. Later the research further unpicks the idea of 'WWC' male under-representation through exploring the gender aspect of this perceived problem. In this the research explores the extent to which the key informants understood the underachievement and under-representation of boys to be a gender inequality.

Later this research examines the perceived constraints amongst those categorised as 'WWC' in accessing university. In this the research explores the theme: the feminisation of education, and the idea that this has been detrimental on the attainment of boys within the education system. Later this research explores the theme aspiration. Aspiration in the literature and data is perceived as a constraint to those categorised as 'WWC' in university progression. In this it was highlighted in the literature and data that there are notable differences in regards to aspirations amongst traditional and non-traditional students/families. The final section explores the theme awareness. In this awareness is regarded as a perceived constraint amongst families from lower socio-economic backgrounds (particularly in relation to student finance). Within the data, these themes emerged through repetition between the key informant's accounts and the importance allocated to them: key informants regarding these themes as having a causal link on decisions whether to progress into university.

4.2 Concept of 'WWC' males in relation to educational experience

Amongst politicians, charities and media outlets the concept of 'WWC', in relation to educational experience, is seen to be a meaningful concept and relate to a specific group with distinct characteristics which are underrepresented in a HE setting. For example, former university minister David Willetts in relation to the access agreements stated the Office for Fair access should target 'WWC' boys similarly to those other disadvantaged groups identified (Willetts in Garner, 2013). This understanding is replicated amongst the key

informants, the majority of them understanding the 'WWC' to have a specific educational experience which is distinct to other groups. Whilst many didn't question the concept of the 'WWC', a couple of key informants understood the nature of this group and the problematic nature of referring to the 'WWC' in relation to educational experience. Key informant 2 and key informant 7 between them understood the concept to be a large section of society and to contain varied experiences within this group in relation to education.

For example, discussing WP in relation to West Yorkshire's HEART partnership which looks at targeting specific groups identified as being underrepresented in HE, key informant 7 states that HEART looks at 'readily identifiable sets of people': looked after young people/care leavers, students with disabilities, adult learners. In relation to 'WWC', key informant 7 expresses that:

'Not 'WWC' boys though... It's a very big group... The reason they've chosen those specific areas is because they're readily identifiable sets of people... Whereas 'WWC' boys there's issues around definition… And who will identify them… Much more difficult to identify for those purposes (WP)'.

Key informant 2 also understands 'WWC' to be a contested concept which unlike what is forwarded by politicians, charities and the media, has not one meaning but many, for example, key informant 2 states 'there isn't one working class experience and there isn't one white working class experience and there never has been'. In terms of 'WWC' therefore being a meaningful concept, key informant 7 and key informant 2 state in relation to educational experience, the concept 'WWC' has numerous meanings. It is evident therefore that key informant 7 and key informant 2 question the relevance of the concept: 'WWC', which is forwarded by those politicians, media and charity outlets.

The views forwarded by key informant 7 and key informant 2 questioning how meaningful the concept of 'WWC', are contradictory to many that recognise the 'WWC' to be a group in UK society and understand the concept to be a meaningful term. The majority of the key informants refer to the 'WWC' as a section of society readily identifiable and a group in which is recognised by many other sections of society. Here, they understand the 'WWC', in

relation to educational experience, to relate to a distinct group which are seen to have a similar social and economic backgrounds, lower aspirations, no history of HE in the family and lower attainment. These characteristics are seen to be distinct amongst 'WWC' students (non-traditional applicants) and contrast to traditional applicants to HE.

Many key informants in their understanding of 'WWC' relied and accepted uncritically as fact that which was advocated by politicians and media sources. For example, key informant 9 in relation to groups he identifies as being underrepresented in progressing into HE states:

'The current stuff were getting in the media... Comes from statistically information gathered by UCAS and universities... Which must indicate that working class students... I think the current thing seems to be white working class males are less likely to go straight into university so… One assumes well that is true'.

Similarly many other key informants refer to media sources in discussions around 'WWC' underrepresentation. It can be argued, based on the responses given by key informants, that certain outlets, the media being instrumental in this, has contributed in making the 'WWC' concept a meaningful category in relation to educational experience. Linked to this also, key informant 9 refers to the 'WWC' as the big one and the 'clichéd group' in terms of underrepresentation. Key informant 7 agrees, stating 'it has always been 'WWC' boys ever since I've started working in widening participation'. This adds to the sense that much of what has been promoted by politicians, the media and charities about 'WWC' underrepresentation has created a meaningful concept in the eyes of this research's key informants (Silverman, 2013, Willetts in Garner, 2013). This has been directly through day to day work in education in which the key informants operate, but also indirectly through media outlets through various news broadcasting platforms. This explains many key informants using 'WWC' as a meaningful term, and one which has been heard many times, in relation to educational experience.

It is evident therefore that there were some key informants that viewed the concept of 'WWC' as a problematic concept in relation to educational experience, which is in line with this research's hypothesis, despite this however, many key informants regarded 'WWC' to be a

meaningful concept. The notion of the 'WWC' as a meaningful concept may be through their direct involvement with this group in which they regarded as a distinct group, alternatively it seems that the idea that there is a distinct 'WWC' with distinct educational experiences seems to be one which is heavily pursued by many politicians, media and charity outlets, which may subsequently create a meaningful concept over time.

4.2 Class

This section addresses the problematic nature of referring to 'working class' within the concept of 'WWC' in relation to educational experience. Many of the key informants understandings, despite using the term 'WWC' often and as a meaningful term, highlight questions in line with this research to how real and meaningful the concept of 'WWC' is, partially because of the contested nature of the remit of 'WC' itself in key informant's responses. This section will firstly unpick the way in which the key informants interviewed understand what is meant by the concept 'working class'. It will do this by looking at the varied occupations identified by the key informants which they associate with the 'working class' category. Later concluding that the varied internal differences within the concept of 'working class' subsequently problematize the category 'WWC' in relation to educational experience.

The key informant interviews highlight the varied range of differences within their understanding of the concept 'working class', and therefore the problematic nature of the concept 'WWC' in relation to educational experience. All 11 of the key informants interviewed understand what is meant by 'working class' in terms of a labour-market category or occupation. In this there was a wide range of definitions that encompassed a range of employments with varied skill, pay, employment security and status, including: manual work (trade, industry), sales and shop workers, low skilled work and those unemployed and in receipt of benefits. As expressed by key informant 1 being 'WC' refers to

those 'families that were traditionally involved in industry or manual labour', in agreement to this key informant 8 furthers this and states being 'working class' meant:

'Traditionally…. manual occupations, now obviously we don't have as many of those now, but we have the equivalent service jobs' (in this key informant 8 refers to sales assistants at supermarkets or similar roles).

In agreement with key informant 8, key informant 11 states that industry and trade jobs are not as available as in the past and that the 'labour market has shifted… it's the service industry now'. The decline in industry was present in many of the key informant's interviews, including key informant 4 and 10, industry being the key traditional manual occupation that historically defined what it meant to be 'working class'. This shift noted by Key informants 8 and key informant 11 highlights the political and economic marginalization of groups which were impacted by industry decline, in which the labour market shifted from 'natural resources, physical capital and low skill labour' (OECD, 1996) into a greater knowledge economy in which the role of knowledge has a heightened significance presiding over the old labour market (OECD, 1996; Archer, et al, 2010). The views expressed by key informant 8 and 11 emphasise that they regard the shift to a knowledge economy to be contrary to that claimed by some which regard it to be 'egalitarian' (Gill, 2002), instead they view it to be 'socially restrictive' (Allen, 2013; Oakley, 2006) to those still seeking work in such areas. For example, key informant 11 states:

'So the labour market has shifted and then you've still got parents who don't realise that… Giving them false messages to the kid: well just get a job... Well what job?'

Manual occupations however, despite many key informants expressing that the concept of what it means to be 'working class' now also means those in service jobs, it must be said that traditional manual occupations are still expressed as being 'working class' occupations. Key informant 5 (key informant 7 also states the importance of trade) refers to those 'working class' boys as 'apprentice boys' choosing:

'Work based options because… what a lot of them say is I like to work with my hands, they want to do something practical and HE isn't necessary'.

While many of the key informants defined what is meant by the concept of 'working class' in line with this research's hypothesis: varied occupations from varied skill, pay, employment security and status, including: manual work (trade, industry), sales and shop workers and low skilled work, there was less agreement that in this 'working class' category, those that were unemployed should be included in the definition. Key informant 11 states:

'In some ways some of the kids I'm dealing with are not even working class… their parents are on benefits and they're showing no signs of attempting to work… could they work? Couldn't they work? They're certainly not working.. Working class is working'.

In this key informant 11 highlights a sense of benefit dependency, or an element in which parents are in receipt of benefits yet are not actively seeking work. As highlighted by this statement, key informant 11 shares a perception shared by many in regard to those in receipt of benefits: that 'work for the vast majority of people, is the best route out of poverty' (Duncan Smith, 2010).

Despite this, it can be argued that whilst many key informants didn't always explicitly refer to those who are unemployed in their understanding of what it means to be 'working class', there were however many terms used which implies a lack of consistent employment in their understandings of 'working class'. For example, key informant 9 refers to those he regards to have a lack of 'financial security', key informant 6 refers to aspirational levels of those families where there is a reliance on 'benefits' and key informant 5 refers to those:

'Working class… students that come from a background where there's low… Or no employment in the family historically' which have to be very ambitious to make it into HE.

These understandings of the concept 'working class' as lacking financial security, in receipt of benefits and low or no employment all relate to the understanding that being 'working class' can also refer to those that are unemployed or have a history of low employment. 'Low

or no employment' and ideas of lacking 'financial security' is in line with the hypothesis set by Shildrick, et al, (2012) in 'life in low-pay, no-pay Britain', and much of that expressed by the key informants highlight this: that many people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are relegated to 'churning low-pay, no-pay careers' (Shildrick, et al, 2010, p.7) at the bottom of the labour market. So whilst key informant 11 emphasises this idea that those in receipt of benefits seem as if they are not attempting to go back into the labour market, it may be the case that they are lacking job security which subsequently means they are never far away from going back into welfare support.

In the key informant's definitions of the concept of 'working class', it is therefore evident that there are clear similarities with the original hypothesis in the literature review of this research, that to be 'working class' in itself remains an internally differentiated social group (Runnymede, 2009). Based on the interviews the key informants therefore understand 'working class' to include manual workers, which amounts to 38% of the UK working population, sales and shop workers as well as those that are unemployed, therefore those that are marked as the 'working class' can be understood to amount to half of the working-age-population (Runnymede, 2009, p.8).

As expressed previously, in this 'working class' social group there is considerable diversity, including in terms of ethnicity, however for the purpose of this section it is important to address the internal hierarchical differences as this problematizes the use of 'WWC' as a concept in relation to educational experience, as the 'working class' category in itself has stark differences. To use the concept 'WWC' in relation to educational experience therefore, will not address the grievances and problems of one homogenous group, instead it would fail to address the various problems of an internally differentiated social group. In this the children of skilled workers that earn a respectable living may be seen in equal footing to those children in receipt of FSMs whose parents are on benefits and in and out of work due to the lack of job security.

4.4 Ethnicity

This section further unpicks the concept 'WWC' and seeks to critically analyse the extent to which respondents identified distinct ethnic educational experiences and therefore the relevance or legitimacy of using the 'white' label. In this section this research demonstrates the way in which key informants' link the term 'working class' to distinct ethnic experiences. It will do this by firstly unpicking what is said about the 'WWC' in relation to their educational experience. Later comparing against a similar concept of 'British Asian boys', in the way their educational experience is viewed: in ethnic terms; not differentiated by class. Later concluding that 'working class' is seen to be a concept which is in most part synonymous with white boys.

The key informant's understandings of the term 'working class' is highlighted in this section as it was evident that the key informants understood 'working class' to be almost synonymous with white British boys. This is evident in the interviews as there was a failure in the majority of the key informant's accounts to differentiate between those, many termed as 'British Asian students', in terms of social class, whereas often the term 'working class' was used to refer to one ethnic group: those from a white ethnic background. This gives a sense that British Asian students' are solely defined by their ethnicity in relation to educational experience, and in this almost regarded as classless due to the lack of reference toward those that can be regarded as 'working class British Asian boys'

Many of the Key informants as previously stated, understand the concept 'WWC' to be a meaningful concept. 'WWC' was used throughout the majority of the interviews, referring to distinct educational experiences amongst this group. Within these accounts there was a tendency for some of the key informants to use the term 'working class' exclusively to refer to those from a white ethnic background. For example, key informant 5 states:

'The demographic of the school is predominantly WWC children it's a mixed sex school .. It has an Asian population of about 14 % and I see everybody for a Careers appointment'.

It is possible to see here that when key informant 5 refers to those from a white ethnic background, key informant 5 distinguishes pupils by their social class, however when referring to those from an Asian background, key informant 5 doesn't distinguish between social class background. This is similar amongst other key informants also. For example, key informant 6 also doesn't distinguish between social backgrounds when referring to those students from Asian backgrounds, and in reference to the term 'working class', this is almost exclusively seen as distinct to those from a white ethnic background in key informant 5 and key informant 6's accounts. Key informant 6 emphasises this here in reference to differing aspirations amongst student cohorts:

'You see massive differences within the Asian community, you'll have people at E grades saying they want to go into the world of Doctors and soliciting… It's very much about having high aspirations within the Asian community... The absolute reverse… Within young white working class people the absolute reverse you know… It's like off no I don't want to go on to university it's a waste of time miss…I just want to get a job'.

It is evident that within the interview stage the concept 'WWC' itself was forwarded in questions put to the key informants, and therefore to some extent the question presumes a link between those from a white ethnic backgrounds and the term 'working class' within the concept 'WWC'. It is evident however, despite this that many key informants didn't distinguish between social backgrounds amongst those British Asian Students. Some key informants also didn't distinguish between varied ethnic backgrounds within the British Asian ethnic group: amongst those from Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani backgrounds which are in number within the Kirklees area.

Key informant 6 refers to the Asian community as almost one homogenous group, in her response stating within Asian communities high aspirations are desired. This understanding expressed doesn't distinguish between those British Asian 'working class' or British Asian students and communities from lower social and economic backgrounds, or different ethnic

backgrounds. This is contradictory to the standpoint expressed by Feyisa Demie, et al, (2011) in which Demie argues that the reasons for the underachievement of 'WWC' pupils within the English school system is due to the failure to distinguish between the white British ethnic groups in terms of social background. Demie argues that due to this 'WWC' underachievement has gone unnoticed due to the success of middle class white children. Key informants 5 and 6, and a few other key informants that fail to distinguish between social backgrounds of 'British Asian boys', contradict what is forwarded by Demie. In interviews many key informants differentiated between the British white ethnic groups, in terms of: traditional and non-traditional students, lower social and economic groups, 'working class' and 'middle class'. It is evident however, from both key informant 5 and key informant 6's accounts, which was similar in other key informant accounts, that several key informants didn't distinguish in terms of social class between those classed as 'British Asian' students. This was evident in key informant 5's account, in which key informant 5 distinguishes between the white British ethnic groups in terms of social background: using the category 'WWC', but doesn't distinguish between those British Asian students. Key informant 6 furthers this, stating that those from a 'WWC' background, referring to those from a lower social and economic background, lack aspiration in relation to furthering education, stating they are more interested in going into unskilled work for more immediate outcomes (income), whereas there tends to be 'high aspirations' amongst Asian communities. 'High aspirations' in this account relating to a community feel in which certain profession are seen more desirable in terms of status within 'British Asian communities', for example doctors, soliciting and dentistry.

Within this account, while key informant 6 distinguishes between the social class backgrounds of those from a white ethnic background, key informant 6 doesn't distinguish between those 'British Asian' students from lower social and economic backgrounds that may share similar beliefs to those categorised as 'WWC'. Understanding those categorised as 'British Asian' as one homogenous group fails to distinguish between those 'British Asian'

students from lower social and economic backgrounds ('working class') and those from higher social and economic backgrounds ('Middle class'). It may be evident that those 'British Asian' students will have 'higher aspirations', want to further their education and have shared community ideals around higher status professions, which may be similar to those ideals of white 'middle class' students, however this could be the polar opposite amongst 'working class British Asian' students from lower social and economic backgrounds. Those 'British Asian' students may equally share ideals around HE similar to those categorised as the 'WWC', in the sense that HE is not an option due to various constraints and the desire to go in immediate employment.

It is also worth noting that the majority of key informants also failed to distinguish between the various ethnic groups/backgrounds within the British Asian cohorts and their families. This is evident to be similar to that emphasised by Modood (1997) in which there has been failures in many accounts to differentiate amongst those from a South Asian background in terms of ethnic group. So whilst it may seem that those from a South Asian background used to achieve similar or have higher aspirations to their white British counterparts, it failed to display the large polarisation amongst the African Asians and Indians which had higher average qualifications, more so than whites also, whereas the position of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis was much worse (Modood, et al, 1997).

4.5 Gender

This section seeks to identify from the key informant's accounts the extent to which 'WWC' boys experienced distinct educational experiences compared with their female counterparts: 'WWC' girls. It will do this firstly by exploring whether the key informants understand 'WWC' underrepresentation in HE to be specific to boys. The research will then unpick the reasons explained by the key informants for their understanding behind their answers, unpicking

elements which are different between 'WWC' boys and 'WWC' girls in their educational experiences. It will then conclude that the key informants did distinguish differences between the educational experiences of 'WWC' boys and their female counterparts.

Many key informants did identify many constraints in 'WWC' boys progressing into HE, many constraints however were identified to not be distinct to 'WWC' boys but also effect 'WWC' girl's progression into HE. The key informants interviewed didn't regard the differences in educational experience between 'WWC' boys and 'WWC' girls being the result of social class background. Many regarded the same constraints, on social class grounds, to be similar amongst 'WWC' girls and boys. Some key informants stating that work or work based learning routes, which is seen as an alternative progression route for 'WWC' boys going into HE, shows similar appeal to 'WWC' girls as an alternative route to HE. Key informant 5 and key informant 11, emphasise this, key informant 11 stating that many 'working class' girls want to go into things like 'hair dressing, which would be seen as a traditional working class job'. Key informant 5 also highlights:

'girls… like young apprentice boys that want to go and do some work based learning and want to access careers where they think sitting in a classroom is not for them.. May result in them making choices based on that'.

Key informants also identified that other constraints affecting 'WWC' boys such as: differing aspirations amongst communities and lower awareness of HE, including student finance, also effected 'WWC' girls.

Despite this however, several key informants did relate to the notion that 'WWC' boys were progressing into HE in fewer numbers than 'WWC' girls. This viewpoint, that boys are progressing into HE less than 'WWC' girls, is shared by this research, however despite attainment levels, as highlighted by the Sutton Trust, to be some of the lowest amongst 'WWC' boys as well as their female counterparts, girls attain on average more than boys, and girls were still progressing into HE in higher numbers. This was seen as common

knowledge in most cases as key informants recognised that this was the national picture. This knowledge therefore was not in all accounts from their own experiences in Kirklees.

It is evident by the methodological approach taken: interviewing key informants which work with students' post-secondary education, that finding 'WWC' boys progressing in fewer numbers would be difficult to assess. This is evident as those students studying at college doing A-levels, BTECs or furthering education in subjects which are considered entry routes into HE would most likely be studying these subjects in order to progress into HE. This research acknowledges this, however it is clear that interviewing students at secondary school age was not a possibility. For future studies with a greater time scale this may be a possibility, alternatively it may be possible to interview more key informants working within a secondary school environment.

The majority of key informants did recognise specific constraints effecting progression amongst 'WWC' girls also. Pregnancy was highlighted amongst many key informants as being a fundamental constraint amongst 'working class' women in progressing into HE. This was not identified to be specific to a distinct ethnic group, however it was seen to be distinct to 'working class' girls or girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds. While it is evident having children has an effect on both the man and woman involved, it is seen by the key informants to have a greater effect and pose a greater constraint to progressing into HE for the girl involved. As highlighted by key informant 1

'A man may become a father at 19 but its not as significant as it is as becoming a mother at 19 and that is really going to put a hole in the progression for your life so women do have difficulties that men don't'.

4.6 Feminised education

As stated, whilst many constraints identified were understood to effect both 'WWC' boys and girls, two interlinked constraints were seen to effect progression amongst 'WWC' boys in

particular: feminised education and attainment. The idea of a feminised education is a theme as this was an idea that was repeated between key informant accounts. Whilst not always explicitly referred to as the notion of a feminised education, many key informants state ideas such as assessment type favouring girls way of learning and fewer male role models within primary schools as a contributing factors to gender attainment disparities. This section seeks to understand the way in which the key informants explain attainment differences amongst boys and girls within Kirklees. This section will firstly highlight then critically analyse the factors emphasised by the key informants as contributing to the higher attainment amongst girls than boys.

In this research the majority of the key informants understood attainment amongst boys to be lower than attainment amongst girls. Some key informants however did state that they regarded it to be more of a 50/50 divide in attainment amongst girls and boys within a further education environment. In regard to this viewpoint however, it could be argued that this was in relation to girls and boys attainment in post-16 education, in which the majority of students referred to were considering HE, as opposed to secondary education which evidentially shows greater attainment disparity between girls and boys. This is evident as the key informants in which expressed these opinions were referring to a further education college which they worked at which specialises in post-16 education, and therefore the majority of the students there would be attending for the purpose of going into HE. Within a key stage 4 setting however, it is evident that boys from all backgrounds not just from lower social and economic backgrounds, attain lower A*-C grades at GCSE than their female counterparts.

Many of those that regarded attainment to be higher amongst girls than boys referred to the educational experience throughout a student's education, referring to attainment of girls throughout primary and secondary schools. For example, key informant 11 uses the attainment differences of Batley Girls compared with Batley Business & Enterprise College (Formerly Batley Boys) as an example of attainment disparity.

'Batley girls is a mile or so away from Batley Business & Enterprise College so you'd think it would serve the same community, you've got the boys going to the boys school the girls going to the girls school.. The girls' attainment levels are much higher... You know… A bad year from the girls school would be sort of 65% A -C including maths and English 5 A*-C including maths and English a very good year at the boys school is 60% 5 A*-C including English and maths there is a big difference in their attainment at both schools .. And really that's the same community I would say... Same families... But the girls achieve better'.

This example highlights that it is not the family differences amongst the genders, as stated by key informant 11: both schools seem to cater for the same communities making attainment differences not the result of family influences which effect attainment amongst boys and girls. Instead the key informants highlight many factors which explains the disparity amongst boys and girls, those frequently expressed were: lack of male primary school teachers, boys developing at a later stage therefore effecting later progression and assessment favouring female student's way of learning. All factors mentioned add to this idea of a more feminised education system which subsequently has an impact on the attainment of boys (Phillips, 2002; Leslie, 2007).

The lack of male primary school teachers was understood as a key contributing factor to the attainment of boys being lower than girls. Key informant 7 states:

'Lack of male primary teachers .... Although that's getting much better but it's still a lot of primary schools particularly smaller primary schools they don't have any male teachers what so ever which I think is probably an issue…'

Adding to this notion that the lack of male primary school teachers contributes to lower attainment levels is key informant 3. Key informant 3 states that this issue is a national problem and stretches further than education, in many areas such as social work also and in professions which are now regarded as caring professions, in relation to education key informant 3 states that 'we need more male teachers in schools to actually build good relationships and be positive role models'. This reason, however, for the educational failure of boys assumes a response which involves increasing the number of male teachers, particularly within a primary school setting (Biddulph, 1997; Hoff Sommers, 2000). This however, as argued by Skelton (2001) is based on the idea of sex roles. This being that if one believes that primary schools are 'feminised' environments because there are more

female teachers than male teachers, by this argument therefore females are considered to act in only stereotypical feminine ways and men in stereotypical masculine ways.

Many key informants highlighted the idea that boys develop later than girls as being another issue that effects progression early in primary school which subsequently adds to boys in secondary school falling behind the progression made by their female counterparts. For example key informant 7 states:

'The school system is not as productive for boys as it is for girls, girls develop much younger and want to please the teacher with their fine motor skills, so they can write more neatly and more quickly… Boys when they're seven cant generally hold a pen properly and write properly so immediately they become disengaged with learning because they're writing scruffier and the teacher can't read it and the girls are writing neatly and getting the gold stars and the boys are getting told off for their hand writing… So a lot of it will begin at primary I think and then obviously that goes on'.

Similarly to key informant 7, key informant 11, referring to the differences of Batley Business & Enterprise College and Batley Girls states: 'there's a level of immaturity that is quite stark in Batley Business & Enterprise College'. Key informant 6 furthers this argument, referring to boys in secondary school as having 'more of an attitude' towards education which begins in primary school. It is evident that the development of boys is slower than girls in their early educational experience, the effects of which may be prominent in their entire educational experience, even throughout HE. Key informant 1 contrasts with key informant 6 however, stating that often 'there is a perception of bad behaviour that doesn't always hold true'. This is in a HE educational context in which often 'working class' boys are labelled a problem when often they are trying to engage, however may not meet certain codes of behaviour within a HE setting. Similar could be said for the bad reputation held by boys from Asian heritage backgrounds.

Another contributing element to the idea of a feminised education environment was also emphasised as being means of assessment, which was regarded to be beneficial to the way

in which girls learn. Again this assumes sex roles in which girls and boys are stereotypically

characterised to be one way inclined rather than the other. Much of which plays to the

perceived strengths of girls. For example, key informants, in line with some academic

thinking state that girls are more meticulous and organised, whereas as highlighted by key

informant 8, many boys often 'panic catch up'. In this view, coursework is seen to play in to

the strengths of girls whereas boys are seen to attain better through examinations, therefore

the move to greater coursework has been seen to be detrimental to the development and

attainment of boys. Key informant 1 highlights this:

'I think the move away from exams has actually been bad for white working class candidates
if you look at broader research into why girls are doing better than boys at school one of the
things that the finger gets landed on is course work .. increased amounts of course work and
if you are a girl... it just seems you have the kind of set of organisational skills required to set
your own deadlines and do the work to time and if you're a middle class girl you'll have a
nice safe home environment to do that if you are white working class boy that potentially...
you could be in at that position where you don't have that kind of same quiet space to do
your work and I do not know why but it just seems to me that boys seem to do a lot better at
exams…'

In this analysis key informant 1 also states that this has extra implications on those 'working

class' students, which is regardless of their gender. Stating that the move away from exams

has been detrimental, not only to boys but 'working class' candidates, regardless of gender,

and explaining that if you are from a 'middle class' background there will be a nice safe

home environment insinuates that whilst this change doesn't play to boys strengths, it may

not benefit 'working class' students because of certain needs to do coursework. These

needs being a safe home environment and a quiet space to do your work.

It is evident that boys regardless of background on average attain less than their female

counterparts. Greater feminised working environments have been regarded to explain this

shortfall, and is viewed by many key informants to be a contributing factor. Despite this

however, there are considerable arguments against this notion, one of which assumes sex

roles within the idea of a feminised education system: female teachers being regarded as

stereotypically feminine, boys worse at coursework due to lack of organisational skills. This

research however, regards the slower development of boys to play a contributing factor in attainment being lower amongst boys, but also the importance role models do play in the development of young boys, despite arguments regarding the over reliance on gender roles, positive role models were highlighted as key.

4.7 Aspirations

Many key informants understand aspirations to be a key factor determining the progression of 'WWC' boys into HE. Aspirations here were understood to concern ambition toward future development relating to education and career. Key informant 7 for example, understands aspirations to mean:

' it's about ambition and the fact that instead of aspiring to leave school at 16 and work at Morrison's or whatever it's about getting them to understand that if certain goals are reached then they can aspire to much higher things in terms of career destination in terms of education'.

This understanding relates to ambition and setting goals in order to reach an individual's full capabilities in terms of career and education. Whilst this understanding of aspiration is about reaching an individual's full potential, it is worth noting that aspirations are different, and whilst key informant 7 states students can 'aspire to much higher things', this research doesn't put more value on a particular set of aspirations. Key informant 9 highlights that having different aspirations is healthy:

'I think people choose alternative routes than HE for a huge mixture of reasons and healthily so... I think the ones that worry us are the students that are choosing not to progress for the wrong reasons i.e. it's not for the likes of us type of argument'.

This fundamentally highlights that students choose alternative routes than HE for a multitude of reasons, but most importantly the biggest concern is not those students that value different routes, but those students that feel HE is not for them due to what key informant 9 argues as being the 'wrong reasons'. Key informant 9 understands 'wrong reasons' to be

reasons other than progression into a desired career that doesn't involve HE, but reasons which involve assumption of not belonging, as stated by key informant 9: 'it's not for the likes of us'. It is therefore important to distinguish between different aspirations which are seen as healthy and low aspirations which are seen as negative in the understanding of educational experience of those categorised as 'WWC'. Similarly this is emphasised in the literature, there is a distinction between general 'aspirations' and educational aspirations. In this it was seen that 'working class' children don't necessarily have low aspirations, however in regard to education they see schooling less instrumental in achieving their aspiration (House of Commons, 2014). In this therefore, 'working class' boys may have occupational aspirations however their work aspirations are undermined by an unbalanced economy that is not generating a range of jobs to cater for these aspirations.

There was a range of reasons understood by the key informants for the differences in aspirations amongst non-traditional and traditional students. The key informants highlighted communities and families to be key in influencing the aspirations of those categorised as 'WWC'. Communities were also regarded as a big influencer in the aspirations and decisions on whether to progress into HE. This was seen as being the result of peer influence as well as local knowledge regarding HE. Key informant 9 highlights this:

'Social economic group and sociological sort of bonded area so areas of towns and cities and inner city areas there is perhaps not as much of an expectation by your peers by your parents that higher education is a valid option for you'.

This highlights that specific areas may have an impact on the choices, the value one puts on HE and the aspirations specific areas may have. In relation to this some key informants understood those with no history of HE to regard there to be fewer benefits of going on to HE. As highlighted by key informant 6:

'They've never had a family member go on to university they just see the costs of it and they don't see the benefits of it I think that's the major thing isn't it if you've not got anybody within your family circle that's gone on to university then get a job that is earning'.

In this viewpoint, there is a sense that HE has a large cost to it which outweighs the benefits. In regard to this notion, communities, especially those older and in less contact with information regarding HE see few benefits to HE, and in this may have a direct or indirect influence on those students in the position to make decisions on whether to progress into HE.

Whilst communities influence aspirations of students, it could be argued that a student's school or college environment is also a factor in influencing ones aspirations. School/college can act as a means of creating a distinct experience with regard to HE, not found otherwise within socially bonded areas which may regard HE as more of a negative choice. This is the case for students who may attend school/college outside of their community, and thus being subjected to different perhaps more positive influences in regard to HE progression. Whilst it may be that a student from a community within a lower socio-economic area may be positively impacted by different schools/colleges, it must be highlighted that often schools/colleges cater for those from different socio-economic backgrounds more than others.

This is evident in regard to two distinct colleges within Huddersfield, whilst not geographically that distant from one and other, they may provide contrasting influences in regard to aspirations. It must be noted that both colleges provide post-16 education, on the other hand however, Greenhead College and New College as stated by key informant 9 are different in terms of student intake. Whilst both colleges may be regarded by the majority of students to be a step toward HE, Greenhead College's cohort however only specialises in A levels, has higher entry requirements than New College and caters as key informant 9 states, for Home Barley or similar areas in which communities are regarded as more 'middle class'. New College on the other hand is regarded to cater largely for students of all abilities and from postcodes such as Dewsbury, Batley and Colder Valley.

In relation to family influences, those families with a history of HE were regarded as more supportive, more aware of the benefits of HE and more engaging in the student's education.

Whilst this viewpoint was expressed by most key informants, many also stated that families with no history of HE may be very supportive also in their child's education. This was expressed by some who regarded the lack of history as not detrimental to the support a family provides, rather in some cases it can be regarded to add to a more supportive atmosphere in order for those children to be able to progress into HE. There was also a sense that the everyday discussion and exposure to HE as a topic of conversation has a big influence on decisions and aspirations. In regard to this, there was the belief that within those families and communities in which 'working class' ideals: wanting to go into work and wanting a trade, were regarded amongst many as their career route, HE was not a discussion often had. This was evident to be the opposite within communities, families and peer groups in which there was a history of HE. HE was often regarded as the natural progression of many students which were regarded to come from homes where there was a history of HE (Runnymede, 2009). As highlighted by the Runnymede Trust (2009) there is a sense of entitlement that is arguably more present in middle classes in their interactions with schooling.

Many key informants understood students from a non-traditional background to regard HE to be a less viable option to those from a traditional background. Whilst this was reflected amongst the key informants, some also saw university selection to be key. Noting that those non-traditional students may be deterred from applying to more traditional, Russell Group universities. For example, whilst some key informants stressed the negative notion expressed by those 'working class' that HE 'is not for the likes of us', there was other subtleties which involved HE selection. In this, students from a 'working class' background were more inclined to attend more local universities or universities regarded sometimes as easier options, as stressed by key informant 9:

'I do think that we get more of a problem with students not necessarily for sacking higher education and not applying for higher education but I think we get a lot of students who think .. Things like the very selective university sector isn't for the likes for me I want to apply to .. A university that is an easy option for them.. Rather than one that maybe more suitable for them because they don't think they'd fit in'.

There was not always the belief that the reason students chose former polytechnic

universities was because they were regarded as less snobby environments, as highlighted

by key informant 7 many may not know the difference between a Russell Group universities

and a former polytechnic and will regard all universities as a place not for them:

'Whether they know that universities are different or not until they get there is a different
matter because there's that perception of you know all universities being similar and only
posh people go to university… It's those sort of perceptions around that and whether they
would know the differences between going somewhere like Durham and going to
somewhere like here (University of Huddersfield)'.

4.8 Awareness

This section critically analyses the extent to which 'WWC' candidates, and crucially their

families, are aware of student finance. It does this firstly by understanding the way in which

'WWC' prospective students and their families view student finance. It then contrasts 'WWC'

prospective students and their families understanding of HE to that of families with a greater

history in HE. This theme of awareness (specifically in relation to student finance) emerged

through repetition within the data. In this many key informants questioned whether 'working

class' families/students were aware of the support available out there in terms of finance, as

knowledge of student finance was seen by many key informants to be varied across the

board.

The introduction of £9000 tuition fees was understood by many key informants to not have

affected the numbers of applications amongst prospective students hoping to go to university

since its introduction. This relates to research question 4 which investigates whether the rise

in tuition fees has had a negative, disproportionate effect on those regarded as 'WWC'. Key

informant 9 highlights this stating:

'knew it would have an artificial impact in that students would not take their gap year they'd
been planning but we didn't know what would happen the year after, and it got down to the
year before and in fact it didn't and our numbers have risen proportionately slightly higher

going into HE than our, numbers our numbers have risen too .. of student's but ur entry into higher education has risen by about 1 to 1 and a half percent year on year for the last couple of year. The simple answer is .. It doesn't seem to have massively impacted at all'.

This answer is replicated amongst many key informants interviewed, and is also evident not only in Kirklees area but as a national picture. Nationally the UK has not seen a decline in numbers applying and progressing into HE.

In relation to student finance, there was an understanding by the key informants that 'WWC' prospective students and families were seen to be more debt averse than those students with a history of HE. Key informant 8 highlights this stating:

'White working class probably have an eversion to taking on debt… and therefore the idea that you're doing something that is going to leave you in debt probably would disproportionately affect them'.

It could be argued however that there was concern amongst both traditional and non-traditional student's families. For example, key informant 7 highlights:

'We get questioned very very closely by parents from all backgrounds .. parents that are fairly affluent.. are very very concerned as well and will ask lots and lots of questions so I think parents are just generally more concerned'.

It was however seen that those seen as 'WWC' prospective students, specifically those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, were greater impacted by the prospect of student finance, as this was seen to be a key constraint to progression for these students, greater than students with a history of HE. This was also emphasised by key informant 8: debt having a disproportionate impact. This is so as despite there being concern by both families with a history of HE and those without, it was seen as a 'deal breaker' amongst those with no history of HE. Being regarded as too costly for the overall benefits of HE. It was understood by some key informants that the benefits of HE were more visible to those within communities where HE is the norm and within families with a history of HE. As explained by key informant 6, the visible benefits within families with no history of HE are hidden. In addition to this, much of what is understood may come from knowledge within their

communities. Community knowledge, therefore may stress many of the financial

implications, the idea that HE doesn't guarantee employment, and it may be this that many

families base their knowledge on, all of which contribute to greater constraints to those from

a background in which there is no history of HE.

It must be stated that, whilst it is emphasised that 'WWC' students are greater impacted by

the prospect of student finance, this is often indirectly. Parents of these students, for

example, were seen as instrumental in baring a great influence on these students. Many key

informants highlighted that parents were key in relation to student finance, for example key

informant 7 states:

'The parents is the key one with finance.. the students just seem to accept it… it's just the
way it is that's what you have to pay that's how it works I'll worry about that later not too
concerned whereas the parents worry about it the 9000 figure and the debt the perceived
debt'.

Key informant 7 highlights here that there is an acceptance amongst students of student

finance debt, and whilst this is replicated in many key informants responses, it can be said

that student finance is a fairly new system to those parents of prospective students. So

whilst students are seen as accepting, this may not be down to immaturity but due to the fact

that student finance is a system they are familiar with, in contrast with their parents, due to

various workshops attended, presentation by various outlets: UCAS, school and college

liaison staff, the media and career advisors.

4.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, while it was understood by the majority of key informants that the 'WWC' is a

meaningful concept when referring to educational achievement, much of what was said

amongst the key informants actually helped highlight the flaws of using the term. Similarly to

the hypothesis in the literature review, those regarded as 'working class' encompassed a

large section of society, subsequently problematizing the use of this wider concept of the 'WWC' in relation to educational experience.

It was also highlighted, whilst not being present in the literature review that the key informants understood the term 'working class' in ethnic terms. This is contrary to ideas that 'WWC' underachievement has been seen to be hidden due to the idea that there has been a failure to differentiate amongst the white ethnic group (Demie, 2011) in terms of social class, in fact much of this was the case in relation to British Asian students. In this many key informants failed to differentiate between those British Asian students in social class terms, therefore this research highlights that in the key informant accounts, 'working class' is seen in an ethnicised way, class being seen exclusively to relate to those British white students. This highlights that often in references to social class inequality, this refers to those British white students. In relation to those categorised as British Asian students therefore, this research can conclude that key informants referred more to the ethnicity of those categorised as being British Asian students, rather than their social class. This highlights that in the key informant's accounts the educational experiences of those defined as British Asian students is often based on their ethnicity, and those British white students on their social class. Whilst this is the case that British Asian student's educational experiences were based on their ethnicity and not taking into account there social class, it is evident that there was little distinction between the ethnic groupings between those categorised as British Asian students. Accounts therefore did not take in to consideration the different attainment and progression routes between those African Asian students and Indians between the lower achieving Pakistani and Bangladeshi students.

In relation to aspects of gender, there were many similarities in constraints regarding 'WWC' boys and their female counterparts, and many constraints understood not to effect 'WWC' boys as much: child bearing. Whilst this was evident, it must be said attainment is regarded as key to the lack of progression amongst 'WWC' boys, and in this girls of all backgrounds on average outperform their male counterparts at GCSE level. This has been seen to be

predominantly the result of a more feminised education system, however whilst this is argued, it is evident that this argument puts great emphasis on notions of gender roles. It is evident however that many of the key informants understand much of the constraints amongst boys within the education system to be a result of fewer male primary school teachers and assessment methods that favour girls. Within this the lack of male role models within primary schools was seen amongst the key informants as being detrimental especially, and many key informants believed that the ways in which this could be resolved is to increase the numbers of male primary school teachers. It is evident therefore that despite the notion that there is over reliance on the idea of gender roles within arguments regarding a feminised education system, the majority of the key informants saw the gender attainment based heavily on the idea of role models and therefore the importance of gender roles.

It was emphasised that aspirations or different educational aspirations were considered a constraint to those progressing into HE. This research regards those students not progressing into HE not to have low aspirations but different educational aspirations. In this sense it highlights that those who don't progress into HE are not necessarily lacking aspirations but regard HE not to be instrumental in reaching their aspirations. These different educational aspirations however underpinned much of the reasons why students don't progress into HE, and a considerable amount of influence is derived from the family or community.

Awareness was also regarded a fundamental constraint in relation to HE progression amongst those 'WWC'. Whilst many students were more comfortable with the prospect of debt, debt culture within the family and the influence of the parents bear a great constraint in ideas being generated about going into HE. All of the constraints mentioned add to a culture in which 'WWC' boys are seen as less likely to progress into HE, however due to the problems regarding the concept of 'WWC', it could be noted that many of these constraints

don't apply to many of those defined within the wide remit of 'WWC', but regard those situated at the lower social and economic side of the 'WWC'.

5.0 Conclusion

It is evident that most of the data on 'WWC' educational underachievement and under-representation is based on FSM data. Whilst those white British boys in receipt of FSMs are underachieving at key stage 4 and progressing less into university, it is evident that the 'WWC' concept has a much wider remit than exclusively those in receipt of FSMs. As highlighted in this literature review those regarded as 'working class' amount as 50% of the British population based on a range of indicators: occupation and job security. This highlights therefore that despite the simplicity of using the proxy FSMs in relation to understanding 'working class' educational under-achievement and under-representation in university, using this proxy does subsequently present those regarded as 'WWC' as a highly underachieving and under-represented group in university settings. This however may not be the case for the great deal of those within the concept 'WWC', as many students regarded as 'working class' or 'WWC' may be from affluent families in which their parents have made a good living from skilled labour and therefore have financial and social resources, unavailable perhaps to those FSM students.

It is evident that if 'WWC' educational under-achievement and under-representation in university wasn't based exclusively on FSM data there would be an alternative positive factual picture. One could state that using the proxy of FSMs to determine 'WWC' educational underachievement and under-representation exacerbates the nature of 'WWC' underachievement and under-representation.

Based on the ambiguous remit of the concept 'WWC' in relation to educational experience, 'WWC' is not a term which can be utilised effectively in relation to government or university policy formulation, and as highlighted by WP groups such as West Yorkshire's HEART, the

focus on readily identifiable groups will most likely take precedent. The promotion of the 'WWC' concept by the government (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014) and media (Silverman, 2013) outlets have been instrumental however in creating a meaningful concept, as understood in many of the key informant's accounts, many using the term without questioning its use.

The idea of underachievement amongst those defined as 'WWC' is not specific to boys. Based on the data those understood as 'WWC' girls are achieving low also, slightly above boys however. This underachievement amongst those defined as 'WWC' boys and girls does not explain the lower numbers in university applications amongst boys and also the lower economic productivity rate which is disproportionately higher within the Kirklees area than nationally amongst boys either. These lower figures seem to suggest that there are fewer incentives within the market amongst boys categorised as 'WWC' but specifically those on FSMs. This is evident as whilst under-achievement is present amongst those defined as 'WWC' girls, there is still many applying to university and within the economy they are increasingly more productive than their counterparts, suggesting that there are more incentives within the economy for girls.

Whilst it is evident there needs to be greater distinctions made in terms of social class divisions within the 'WWC' concept, there is also a need to understand the nature of class throughout other ethnic groups, including various ethnic groupings within wider ethnic classifications. Evident amongst the responses from the key informants there is many assumptions made in regard to 'British Asian boys': 'British Asian boys' being seen as high aspirational. Whilst this surfaced in many key informant's accounts these accounts don't however understand the polarisation that exist between ethnic groups, for example South Asian polarisation: Indians are much higher achieving than Bangladeshi and Pakistanis (Modood, et al, 1997). There is also a need to understand 'British Asian boys' in terms of social class, as many accounts by the key informants understood those 'British Asian boys' to be classless, whereas class was seen more in relation to those 'working class' white

British boys. Viewing social class to refer exclusively to those labelled as 'WWC' highlights the ethnicisation of a social class issue, it is clear that the inequality in education faced by those defined as 'WWC' and specifically those on FSMs is a social class inequality.

Greater distinction once again is important for government and university policy formulation as underachievement can be hidden amongst groups in which there is also the presence of over-achievement. It is evident therefore that key informants viewed the educational experiences of those defined as 'British Asian students' based on their ethnic group, whereas inequality and educational experience of those defined as 'WWC' was based on their social class. In relation to research question 3 therefore, to identify other under-represented groups in HE and to critically analyse how those categorised as 'WWC' fare compared to these groups, it could be argued due to other generalisations in definitions amongst other ethnic groups' under-representation and under-achievement can be missed. Whilst those defined as 'WWC' boys are progressing into university at fewer numbers proportionately to most ethnic groups, underachievement amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic groups is also cause for concern.

In relation to the constraints identified, it is evident that there are constraints within the group termed as the 'WWC', but as previously mentioned, much of these constraints are more prominent amongst those in receipt of FSMs. This is the case in terms of underachievement and under-representation in university in which most of the data in based on the FSM proxy. This could arguably be said the case in relation to the constraints identified as themes in the discussion section also. Whilst there may be lower awareness, differing educational aspirations and attainment amongst those categorised as 'WWC' boys compared to their middle class counterparts or traditional students, the brunt of the constraints evidently will affect the lower end of the social class spectrum more: those on FSMs.

Addressing research question two: to explore the constraints to those categorised as 'WWC' in Kirklees, the constraints identified using thematic coding were: awareness, aspirations and the idea of an increasingly feminised education system. In relation to awareness, whilst

many students were more comfortable with the prospect of debt, the families of those considered as 'WWC' or specifically those students on FSMs, on the other hand were seen as more debt averse and therefore posed as a constraint in ideas being generated about university progression. Families in relation to awareness regarding university was seen as a significant constraint amongst the key informants. Traditional students were seen as being engaged in topics regarding university, whereas university was not a regular conversation had in family households and communities amongst those non-traditional students. This contributed to furthering educational aspirations amongst those traditional students whereas those non-traditional students were not subject to this. In answering research question 4: investigate whether the increase in tuition has had a negative, disproportionate effect on 'WWC' student's choices therefore, it is evident, despite the numbers, and that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are effected greater than those traditional student. Whilst many were concerned regarding the increase in tuition fees, it was seen as more of a deal breaker for those 'WWC' students, specifically those on FSMs. The national numbers, as well as the Kirklees general consensus amongst the key informants suggest however that the increase in tuition fees has not effected numbers progressing into university. Aspirations were also seen as a key constraint into university progression. Whilst varied aspirations are considered healthy by this research, it was evident based on varied communities and families aspirations were in line with Bourdieu's habitus. It was therefore evident that those students situated in communities which were regarded as having more occupational based aspirations, would see education less instrumental in meeting their ambitions or goals. The social environment in this sense played a key constraint in university progression, whilst not always being a negative factor, due to the healthy nature of varied aspirations amongst students.

In relation to the idea of an increasingly feminised education system, particularly within primary schools, this was mentioned often in the progression of male students. Many suggesting that educational experiences within primary school often has a cumulative effect on later educational experiences. It is evident therefore that whilst there are problems with

the concept of a greater feminised education, one allocating great importance around gender roles, one could argue that role models for young boys are important to their progression based on what they see other men doing. Furthermore, whilst it was argued that assessment type was favouring female students, it could be argued due to the cumulative effect of the slower progression in primary school, this may directly influence attainment at secondary school level, in which boys are increasingly playing catch up.

In recommendations for future incentives, this research suggests that if there is an attempt to target groups based on WP agendas, greater distinctions must be made for increased focused. In this groups should be readily identifiable as opposed to basing a WP agenda on definitions and concepts with wide ambiguous remits. In relation to policies that should be forwarded, the current climate suggests that still, despite the coalition's stop to Aimhigher, that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are still being under-represented in universities. In this, agendas promoting awareness, varied alternative aspirations and attainment increasing will need to continue to be pursued in order to meet WP agendas, which ultimately benefits the wider economy.

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Appendix A: Biographic overview for each Key Informant

Key informant 1:

White female senior lecturer and admissions tutor for Criminology in a university setting.

Key informant 2:

White female senior lecturer in Politics and former admissions tutor in a university setting.

Key informant 3:

White female senior lecturer in youth and community work and admissions tutor in a university setting

Key informant 4:

White female, former teacher at A-level teaching Biology and general sciences, lecturer in foundation police studies and admissions tutor within social work in a university setting. Helped at summer school for those categorised as lower-socio economic boys (Aimhigher initiative).

Key informant 5:

White female careers advisor working with children in an 11-16 age group school setting at key stage 4 level.

Key informant 6:

White female careers advisor working in an academy working with children from a range of ages particularly those at key stage 4 level.

Key informant 7:

White female, head of schools and college liaison service working within a university setting

Key informant 8:

White male science teacher working in an FE college teaching a range of BTEC and A level courses.

Key informant 9:

White male senior careers and education advisor working in an FE college.

Key informant 10:

White male business studies teacher working in an FE college teaching a range of BTEC and A-level courses.

Key informant 11:

White male careers advisor working in an all-boys school with a range of pupils, particularly with those at key stage 4 level.

Appendix B: List of Interview Questions (altered for different key informants)

Warm up

1. What is the role of the schools and colleges liaison service within and outside of the university?
2. As part of the university's schools and colleges liaison service do you play a role in making HE more accessible to disadvantaged groups?

Main

3. Is there a problem within HE of under-representation of those from worse off backgrounds?
4. What do you see as the constraints to those categorised as 'WWC' in participating in HE?
5. Do 'working class' male students seem less likely to progress into HE compared with their female counterparts?

Cool-off
6. How do you feel the universities schools and college liaison service fares in providing services to students regarding HE in Kirklees?