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**Young and Unemployed: Giving and Getting Recognition in  
Peer Groups and Online**

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When we were five, they asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up. Our answers were things like astronaut, president, or in my case... princess.

When we were ten, they asked again and we answered - rock star, cowboy, or in my case, gold medallist. But now that we've grown up, they want a serious answer.

Well, how 'bout this: who the hell knows?!

This isn't the time to make hard and fast decisions, it's time to make mistakes. Take the wrong train and get stuck somewhere chill. Fall in love - a lot. Major in philosophy 'cause there's no way to make a career out of that. Change your mind. Then change it again, because nothing is permanent.

So make as many mistakes as you can. That way, someday, when they ask again what we want to be... we won't have to guess. We'll know.

*(Jessica Stanley, Twilight Eclipse, 2010)*

## **Abstract**

Economists have stated that unemployment has a lasting negative effect, particularly on young people. The present research examined the experiences of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Scotland and the impact being NEET has on their identities. Specifically focusing on how these young people gain recognition and construct a positive sense of self.

Three research questions are addressed: (1) how do young people give and receive recognition in their peer group? (2) How do young people engage with the alternative context of an online social networking site in order to give and receive recognition? (3) Are there any disagreements and/or misunderstandings between young people and employers? These questions are examined using three data sets: 16 peer group discussions with a total of 79 young people, 37 Bebo (a social networking site) profiles and questionnaires completed by 33 young people and 29 employers.

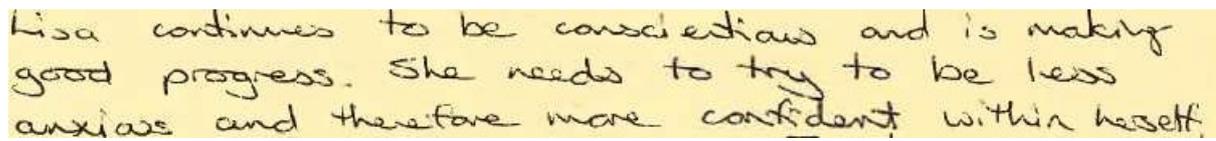
Analysis of peer group discussions revealed the ways in which young people give and receive recognition and the recognition they feel they are given and denied from others. This highlights the complex transition into work for these young people and their struggle for recognition. For example, trying to balance avoiding ridicule from peers associated with certain jobs with their desire to find a job which will allow them to buy certain things and participate in adult life. Analysis of Bebo profiles revealed that young people make use of the existing structures of recognition within Bebo but also manipulate the site in order to gain further recognition in ways that could not have been predicted. Bebo offers young people the chance to gain recognition for

popularity, sexual attractiveness and physical strength in ways which may not be deemed acceptable in everyday offline life. A comparison of the perspectives of young people and employers revealed a number of misunderstandings which hinder their relationship, for example the importance of qualifications. Analysis across these three data sets, and the social contexts they represent, reveals the tensions young people experience as they move between different structures of recognition.

The main theoretical contribution of this research is a model of recognition in which the self is caught between different structures of recognition. This model provides an insight into what motivates young people to behave differently in different contexts, based on the perceived and actual recognition available. For example, online social networking provides a space for young people to receive recognition for how much alcohol they can drink, however this is not something they would draw attention to in a work environment.

There are two applied contributions: (1) at a practical level, young people would benefit from more work experience placements and positive engagements with employers. (2) Most importantly, alternative structures of recognition are needed which recognise the knowledge and skills that young people do have. Instead of focusing on their weaknesses, we must help them build on their strengths. This would allow all young people to feel valued and more able to create a positive sense of self.

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Lisa continues to be conscientious and is making good progress. She needs to try to be less anxious and therefore more confident within herself.

*Excerpt from my High School Report Card, Aged 17*

This school report was written when I was a similar age to the young people who took part in my research. I've been fortunate to have support and encouragement from many people in my life. This has helped me develop the confidence I lacked in my teens and I would like to thank these people sincerely:

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## **Chapter 1: The Government, the Media and the Experiences of Unemployed Young People**

Many commentators talk about the scarring effect of recessions because unemployment is damaging at any age but when you're young it probably does more damage. The reality is there are some people still negatively affected by the recession of the 1980s; they're still paying the human price (Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, *Holyrood Magazine*, March 15, 2010).

### **The Problem of Youth Unemployment**

Economists have stated that “youth unemployment is one of the most pressing economic and social problems confronting those countries whose labour markets have weakened substantially since 2008, following the near collapse of worldwide financial markets” (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, p. 1). In 2010, then Chancellor Alistair Darling announced that an extra £450m would be spent to try to help young people in the UK make the transition into employment (*The Guardian*, 25 March, 2010). His pledge followed a succession of government policies targeted at young people (16-24 year olds); particularly those who have failed to make a successful transition out of education and into employment, a trend that is likely to continue in the upcoming 2011 budget. The media make the public aware of this problem using powerful headlines and images. The example in Figure 1.1 shows a stereotypical image of a young person with their hood up or ‘hoody’ standing outside the Job Centre.

However, the accompanying headline does not suggest that this person is looking for work but instead claiming benefits known as the ‘dole’ in Scotland. More shockingly, the article states that young people who find themselves not in education, employment or training for a long period of time are “more likely to be killed by drug and alcohol abuse, violent crime, ill health or suicide” (*The Sun*, 7 August, 2009).

This negative representation of young people is typical and commonly found in

British newspapers. The media portrayal of young people as a 'problem' is widespread, but it is certainly not new. The demonization of young people in Britain dates back at least to the 18th century, and tends to rise and fall in accord with broader changes and tensions in society (Wayne, 2007). The recent recession has brought the issue of youth unemployment to the forefront of public concern and government policy, but economists argue that this is a situation we have seen coming since the 1980s when unemployment was also a serious problem (Bell & Blanchflower, p. 1, 2010).

Economists are telling us we need to be concerned about youth unemployment. The government is targeting interventions at young people to try to address the problem. The media continue to document the problem in a negative way, resulting in stigma and stereotypes. Finally, we learn from history that neither the negativity surrounding young people nor the problem of youth unemployment is new. From a social psychological perspective, I want to understand the impact all of this has on young people today: how do they see themselves and others and how do they construct a positive sense of self amidst the negativity, stigma and stereotypes? Kelvin and Jarrett (1985) discussed the social psychological effects of unemployment. The authors comment that "those concerned with the psychology of work have long stressed that work provides much more than merely money" (1985, p. 18) as the complexities around unemployment will be apparent in the testimonies of young people presented in later chapters.

This chapter will outline some of these concerns, dating as far back as the 1920s, before moving on to explain why, due to de-industrialisation in the

1980s, youth unemployment is one of the most pressing issues in 2010, as illustrated in the opening quote. I will discuss the governments' interventions which have aimed to reduce the number of unemployed young people, before considering the complex nature of this social problem and I will argue that we must understand what the reality is for young people without a job today. The chapter will conclude by describing those at the centre of this research: young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Stirling, Central Scotland. The main aim of this research is to gain an understanding of how young people who are NEET construct their identities while immersed in a society which stigmatises them and sees them as a problem.



**Figure 1.1: “150,000 dole kids ‘dead in 10 years’” (The Sun, 7 Aug 2009)**

## Historical Background

Adolescence has been of interest to psychologists for decades with some of the earliest known work conducted by G. Stanley Hall in 1904 (1921). Topics of study include adolescent development, peer culture, education, status attainment and delinquency. Through the decades, young people have attracted negative attention from the media, resulting in moral panics (Cohen, 2002) concerning a range of issues including sexualisation of young people, youth crime, teenage pregnancy and binge drinking. During the 1920s 'The Bright Young People' dominated the media headlines for their antics and wild partying. One newspaper article described how "they dressed-up, partied and kept going on a diet of cocktails and cocaine [...] but behind the glamorous image lies a sobering story of sordid lives and sad, lonely deaths" (*The Independent*, 14 September, 2003). Today, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) occupy endless media column inches reporting their unemployed status as a cause for concern and action.

It could be argued that young people have always been seen by wider society as a deviant subgroup/culture. Aitken (2001) stated that "anxiety about the unruly nature of young people [...] has been repeatedly mobilized in definitions of youth and youth cultures for over 150 years" (p. 6). This anxiety leads to young people being segregated and stigmatised by society, or sees them actively creating their own rebellious groups. Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) suggest that post-war youth subcultures, such as the teddy boys, mods and skinheads, were pockets of working-class resistance to the dominant hegemonic institutions of British society. We have similar rebellious and stigmatised groups today, for example, Neds (a slang derogatory term used in Scotland to refer to hooligans louts or petty criminals) who

are characterised by the tracksuits and baseball caps they wear, Goths who predominantly wear black and leather and Emos wearing skinny jeans, tight t-shirts and particular brands of trainers.

Some authors such as Murray (1990) have gone so far as to argue that young people have evolved into an underclass. As MacDonald and Marsh (2001) comment “a central tenet for underclass theory is that a distaste for work and traditional family values is being inculcated into the young, creating a ‘lost generation’ disconnected from mainstream society” (p. 373). The presumed loss of ‘traditional values’ is often discussed in relation to young people. However, we must consider the impact society has on young people, especially as Furlong and Cartmel (2007, p. 1) comment “the life experiences of young people in modern societies have changed quite significantly”. Importantly as Jones (2002, p. 2) stated “young people’s transitions into adulthood have changed in recent years. [...] But they have not changed for all young people in the same ways” and this is crucial in understanding young people’s experiences.

We can draw on Beck’s (1992) notion of the ‘risk society’ to understand the changes which have occurred, resulting in a highly globalized society. Today young people lead diverse, technology-filled lives, where they can have multiple interactions and changing experiences. Bauman (2000) described this as a ‘liquid modernity’. The more rigid societal structures of past decades have now changed and these current structures impact upon young people, the way they lead their lives and their identities.

The term ‘societal structures’ is used frequently in the following chapters and therefore it seems appropriate to explain what is meant by the term. Social structures

are the ways in which our social lives are organized. For example, the structure of education where there are certain rules and expectations and pupils can achieve a range of grades and the school can occupy a particular place in a league table. Social structures shape individuals but simultaneously, individuals shape social structures. Echoing Risman's thoughts "social structures as the context of daily life creates action indirectly by shaping actors' perceptions of their interests and directly by constraining choice" (Risman, 2004, p. 432). This research explores three social structures which young people are embedded in, peer groups, social networking and the world of work. These are discussed fully in the following chapters.

Many older generations describe their youth as a time when they did not have the option to depend on the state, so when they left school they found a job, worked hard and paid their taxes. It is often thought that young people today lack traditional values. However, consider the following quote from a 16 year old young woman who describes where she would like to be in five years' time: "pregnant wi a good job and mibbe putting a mortgage on a hoose" (Jennie). Here Jennie favours many traditional values such as finding a good job, owning a house and starting a family. However, it is difficult for some young people to realise these values and aspirations and as a result they may reject them. Societal structures and constraints make it hard for some young people to realise these values.

This discussion falls within the wider debate concerning the interplay between agency and structure (Boeck, 2007). Young people's dreams of finding a job, owning their own home and starting a family can be described as traditional but their ability to realise these dreams is constrained by societal structures. Young people can

either continue to admit that they are struggling to fulfil their aspirations or they can reject them and hence reduce any sense of failure. This often leads to the criticism that they have no traditional values.

The one thing that all young people have in common is that they are not yet adults. Young people are legally considered adults when they reach the age of 16 in the sense that they can choose to leave education, choose to leave home with parental consent and get a full time job. However, there are also several things a 16 year old cannot do, including voting and buying cigarettes and alcohol. I argue that young people struggle to fully participate in adult society if they cannot access employment and training opportunities.

Being in employment and/or training offers people the chance to be financially independent and is seen as a positive status. Society is structured by adults based on adult values, and when it comes to policy and interventions about young people, adults relate to their own experiences of being young to inform the decisions they make. This is what Aitken (2001) calls our 'biographical baggage'. Young people grow up in societies very different from those of their parents, due to the evolving nature of the world we live in, as Furlong and Cartmel (2007, p. 1) comment "young people today have to negotiate a set of risks which were largely unknown to their parents". The behavior of young people is often a source of confusion and controversy for the older generations, but surely we cannot expect young people's beliefs and behaviour to mirror those of past generations when the contexts in which are immersed today are very different. For example, young people often find themselves excluded from many areas of adult life; businesses market to young

people and are keen to take their money, but at the same time often place limits on the number of young people allowed on their premises at any given time, for fear of shop-lifting. Mosquito devices have been placed outside shops and public spaces where young people congregate. These devices emit a high pitched sound which only those under 25 can hear, thus it serves the purpose of deterring young people from gathering in large groups which may intimidate or inconvenience other members of the community. There are few other groups in society which we would discriminate against in this way without consequences, but because these measures are directed at young people they are considered justified and deemed socially acceptable. What if, as Rachel Jackson stated, "Our youth are not failing the system; the system is failing our youth" (1970, p. 85)? It could be argued that young people are a product of societal structures and often rebel against these structures.

Drawing on William Bunge's (1973) discussion of the geography of human survival Aitken (2001, p. 12) posits "children as the ultimate victims of the political, social and economic forces that contrive the geography of the built environment". This way of thinking can be applied to understand the behaviour of groups such as the teddy boys, who often attracted attention for their violent behaviour. However, Hall and Jefferson (1975) offer an explanation of this violent behaviour. In describing an example of a fight breaking out after someone insulted the way a teddy-boy dressed, Jefferson states:

my contention is that to lads traditionally lacking in status, and being further deprived of what little they possessed (a reference to the declining social situation of the Teds) there remained only the self, the cultural extension of the self (dress, personal appearance) and the social extension of the self (the group). Once threats were perceived in these areas, the only 'reality' or 'space' on which they had any hold, then in

fights, in defence of this space become explicable and meaningful phenomena (p. 82).

Furthermore, there were incidences of teddy boys attacking youth clubs, but what must be noted is that most youth clubs at the time banned all teddy boys based “purely on reputation” (Hall and Jefferson, 1975, p. 83), so the teds took their revenge and attacked the youth clubs. Young people today describe similar reactions to the mosquito device, with many stating that the presence of the device leads them to feel increased resentment, thus making them more likely to cause damage to the surrounding property. Many would argue that young people deserve to be chastised, punished and made an example of based on their behaviour, but we must also consider the societal structures which effectively back some young people into a corner with little defence or retaliation beyond physical strength and aggression.

As identified in the introductory section of this chapter, the current challenge which young people face is trying to find employment in a society emerging from an economic recession.

### **Youth Unemployment during a Recession**

In the UK, youth unemployment rose by 66,000 to 965,000 in the three months to the end of December 2010, the highest level since comparable records began in 1992.

The current youth unemployment rate is 20.5%, compared with a general unemployment rate of 7.9% (*BBC News*, 16 February, 2011). In Scotland, latest figures suggest that 41, 230 young people aged 18-24 are unemployed and claiming

the Job Seekers Allowance benefit. This number has risen by 15,570 since 2006 (*Official Labour Market Statistics*, March 2011).

Unemployment is rarely thought of as a positive experience, and it is one many people have had to endure in recent years in the struggling economic climate. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, for young people, the experience of being unemployed can be particularly damaging (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010). Since the beginning of the recession we have experienced a similar crisis of youth unemployment to that of the 1980s. Many would argue that we did not learn enough from history and this current situation impacts upon young people today and will also negatively impact upon future generations of young people.

In the context of this research, the young participants left education at a time when the country was experiencing a severe economic downturn. This made the search for employment particularly difficult. This has resulted in more young people staying in full-time education. However, this is less of a choice and more of a necessity for some young people, who feel they have little to gain from staying in school but few other options (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010). Young people should not be considered a homogenous group. Many young people thrive in education and proceed successfully into further education or employment. However, for a variety of reasons, many other young people have a negative experience with the education system and this can lead them to leave school with few skills and qualifications. As Furlong and Cartmel (2007, p. 16) state, young people can be “caught in a situation where rejection of educational values or hostility towards school-based figures of authority almost guarantee a precarious future in the labour market”.

Unqualified young people have been highlighted by economists who say “we have special concerns regarding the employment prospects of these young people without qualifications – the disadvantaged young – going forward” (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, p. 9). Perhaps the reason for the special concern is the disadvantaged position that these young people find themselves in when competing with graduates who are also struggling to find work. In a report for The Prince’s Trust, Blanchflower stated “with graduates flooding the jobs market, those with fewer qualifications have been pushed further down the pecking order – leaving those with no skills or qualifications even further from jobs” (The Prince’s Trust, 2010, p. 1). With few qualifications and little experience, it is difficult to paint an optimistic picture of the future for these young people. We know that unemployment makes people unhappy, stressed, it lowers self esteem and morale and as the authors point out it “causes permanent scars rather than temporary blemishes” on the young (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, p. 10).

Although the current situation in terms of youth unemployment has been heightened during the recession, as stated it is by no means a new problem. A look at past government policies reveals that concern over youth unemployment has been a national priority in the UK for the past three decades, which leads to a discussion of the present government interventions.

## **Past and Present Government Interventions**

It is worth briefly situating UK policy interventions among those of other countries. At an international level, the issue of youth unemployment in countries such as Japan is well documented; young Japanese teenagers who are unemployed are

called 'Freeters' (for example see Inui, 2005). However, unlike the term NEET used in the UK, Freeter has more diverse and positive connotations it is also used to describe those doing freelance work or those people moving between many short term, temporary jobs and not committing to a long term career. There are several difficulties with making international comparisons about youth unemployment, such as the different ways official statistics are compiled, but we can briefly discuss the ways in which several countries have tried to tackle this problem. Fyfe (2007) examined the measures that have been taken in a number of different countries to reduce youth unemployment figures. The author highlights two distinct and innovative interventions. The first is the idea of two people sharing one job and has been piloted, with varying degrees of success, in the Netherlands. Secondly, in Belgium, special centres have been set up to "guide young people towards the training or employment that is most suitable for them taking into account their attitudes, aptitudes and local employment conditions" (p. 59). For the past two to three decades, most European countries have "witnessed a rate of youth unemployment twice as high as the adult rate" (Recotillet & Werquin, 2003, p. 79). Consequently, youth unemployment is never far from the political agenda across Europe.

It seems there are a range of attempts to address this issue and the UK adds to this growing list. Few disagree with "the general argument that the nature of youth transitions in the UK has altered radically over the past thirty years" (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2007, p. 590). Rising unemployment since the late 1970s has meant there has been a massive rise in the scale of policy intervention targeted at young people. As the employment market crashed, more and more young people were left

unemployed. The Youth Opportunities Programme was launched by the Labour government in 1978. The programme offered the most disadvantaged young people, aged 16-18 years, a six month scheme which focused on life and social skills and work experience. Unemployment continued to rise in the 1980s which led the Prime Minister at that time, Margaret Thatcher, to expand the programme; it ran until 1983 when it was replaced by the Youth Training Scheme. In a similar way to its predecessor, the purpose of the Youth Training Scheme was equipping school-leavers with the skills needed to move into employment. A standardised form of certification was issued at the end of the year-long training period. Criticism surrounded the Youth Training Scheme, with critics claiming that employers could use the scheme to exploit young people for cheap labour. However the government argued that the scheme was effective and much needed after a drop in the number of apprenticeships and the rise in youth unemployment figures during the late 1970s and 1980s. In 1986 young people under 18 also lost the right to claim benefits and income support. This meant that young people who did not find work after leaving school had little access to money. The Youth Training Scheme acted as a halfway point where young people would be paid a weekly allowance for the duration of the programme, but they would also be trained and supported to make the transition into employment. In 1989 the Youth Training Scheme was renamed Youth Training and was placed under the management of local Training and Enterprise Councils. In the years that followed, Youth Training became a destination for many young school leavers. In the UK, "around 730, 000 young people have participated in publicly-funded schemes since 1998" (Dietrich, 2003, p. 87).

In Scotland, the political situation changed in 1999 when a process of devolution led to a Scottish Parliament, based in Edinburgh, coming into being. The national

Youth Training Scheme paved the way for Get Ready for Work Programmes, which are common throughout Scottish local authority areas. Further, research has revealed that Scotland has a lot to be concerned about when it comes to youth unemployment. Hammer (2003) presents the findings from a comparative study of unemployed youth from 10 countries: Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Scotland. He points out that all of these countries have high percentages of young people out of work and each country has its own way of trying to deal with this problem, mainly through welfare arrangements and market measures. It is worth mentioning that comparative studies like this one highlight the different ways in which youth is conceptualised in various countries. For example, in Scotland, where the present research was conducted, interventions are targeted at 16-19 year olds, and the maximum age of a 'young person' is 25. However in Italy, interventions such as tax incentives have been introduced for employers to hire young workers aged between 16-32 years.

Hammer's (2003) comparative study found that Scotland had lower numbers of youth unemployed than other countries such as Finland and Spain. However, overall Scotland did not fare well in the comparative study; researchers found lower levels of wellbeing, lower levels of political activity and less parental support. All of these factors are caused by, and contribute to, the levels of youth unemployment. The authors also conclude that their overall findings illustrate how complicated the transition from youth to adulthood is for unemployed young people (Hammer 2003). Furlong (2006) also discussed the effect which unemployment has on young people in Scotland and highlighted the need to consider the vulnerability of young people rather than only their employment status.

There are various problems associated with youth unemployment, including social-psychological harm and health effects. Kelvin and Jarrett (1985, p. 6) discuss the social psychological effects of unemployment and describe it as “deeply disturbing, distressing and debilitating”. From a government perspective there are issues with unemployed young people are not contributing to the economy which can leave young people at risk of becoming marginalised and socially excluded and this could lead to anti-social behaviour. Due to these associated concerns, interventions to try to reduce the number of unemployed are generally welcomed. However, Hammer (2003) points out that “longitudinal research in Scotland has [...] highlighted the ways in which policy initiatives that were introduced to help alleviate the consequences of high levels of youth unemployment have provided an institutional framework for the reproduction of inequalities” (p. 7). Schemes have typically recruited unqualified and disadvantaged young people, which has attracted stigma. Often young people do not want to admit that they are participating in a programme and the programmes seem to carry many of the same negative connotations as unemployment, such as labelling as lazy or scrounger. Another problem is that youth training schemes are seen as a cure and once the programme is finished, young people are often forgotten. Furlong, Stalder and Azzopardi (2000, p. 44) describe how some young people “enter the 'black magic roundabout' of unemployment, government training schemes, followed by further unemployment and schemes: for some, the cycle is occasionally broken by a short-term job”. While it could be argued that youth training schemes provide young people with valuable skills and work experience, failure to find work after participating in a training programme can leave some young people trapped in a vicious cycle struggling to find stable, long-term employment.

Many countries have developed a wide variety of similar interventions to the ones we have here in Scotland, such as “counselling and guidance, vocational training, work experience, wage subsidies and job creation” (Dietrich, 2003, p. 87) However, it was revealed in Hammer’s (2003) comparative study that “in most of the observed countries a remarkable proportion of longer unemployed young people had already participated in youth schemes within their school-to- work transition” (Dietrich, 2003, p. 94). This highlights that perhaps the existing interventions are not as effective as they could be. As MacDonald and Marsh (2001) commented government policies and interventions, such as those discussed above, are based on the assumption that there are the appropriate number and quality of jobs for young people emerging from education and youth training programmes. Therefore in the governments’ eyes youth unemployment is a “symptom of an ill-prepared workforce; the ‘fault’ of the young unemployed” (p. 387/388). However, other authors such as Roberts (2009) argue that there is a much bigger question relating to a jobs deficit and a lack of demand for young workers which is perhaps due to an ageing workforce.

Roberts (2009, p. 335) discusses “opportunity structures” which are formed by the inter-relationships between family origins, education, labour market processes and employers’ recruitment practices. Roberts discusses the ways in which young people’s opportunity structures have changed over the last 60 years leaving a situation today where we have a surplus of young job seekers and a lack of jobs for them to move into. Roberts echoes the discussion above when he states that young people who have participated in training schemes but still failed to find employment “have either felt exploited as temporary ‘slave labour’ or have been ‘warehoused’ on

community projects and in workshops” (p. 361). Roberts effectively sums up the situation today by stating that “youth labour market imbalances in the UK are not due to a poverty of ambition. Young people, today are excessively ambitious relative to the jobs that the economy offers” (p. 365). This again relates to the preceding discussion about traditional values. We cannot assume that the situation young people find themselves in is solely due to their agency and personal choice it is also combined with their wider circumstances and many things that are outwith their control. Despite this some past government policies have further stigmatized unemployed young people.

### **Status Zer0**

In 1993, a new term, Status Zer0, was introduced to describe young people who were not engaging with the education system or labour market. It was initially a technical classification, status 0, to be set against those in education (status 1), training (status 2) and employment (status 3). But, by invoking the idea of ‘zer0’, it also seemed to be a metaphor for young people who, in policy terms, at the time counted for nothing and were going nowhere (Williamson, 1997).

The Times Educational Supplement (*TES*) published an article in December 1998 titled “‘Status Zer0’– life on the outside”. I note the title of this article and the use of the word ‘outside’ in reference to unemployed young people’s position in relation to society. The article described how “unprecedented attention is now being given to teenagers at the margins of education and work”. The article raised the question: how much do we really know about these young people and what should be done to help them? Ten years on, the number of young people falling into this category has risen, the label has changed from Status Zer0 to NEET, but the question is still very

relevant and largely unanswered. The term NEET was coined in March 1996 by a senior Home Office civil servant who detected a resistance on the part of policy-makers to working with the controversial phrase 'status zero'. Thus the acronym NEET, Not in Education, Employment or Training, found its way into government policy. This research aims to provide an insight into the way young people who are NEET see themselves and others and ultimately propose interventions which will reduce the number of young people falling into this stigmatised group.

In our economically driven society, employed status represents the currency you need to participate, coupled with this is the fact that employment is often seen as a pivotal signifier of adulthood. This is a very stigmatised position. Goffman (1963, p. 1) defined stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance". Without employment young people find themselves on the outside, excluded from adult society. Young people who are unemployed are not fully accepted into an adult society until they can prove they are, and are seen to be, contributing to it.

## **The NEET Strategy**

The NEET Strategy, More Choices, More Chances: an action plan to reduce the proportion of young people not in education employment or training, was launched in Scotland in June 2006, following the government's growing concern about vulnerable young people and social exclusion. Based on recommendations from the Beattie Report (1999), a number of key interventions were actioned, including the concept of a key worker as someone to support a young person before, during and after the critical transition stage. Thorough analysis of the NEET Strategy gives an

insight into how the government perceives young people. The major concern is that “the young people experiencing NEET today are more likely to become the economically inactive of tomorrow” (p. iii). Throughout the 57 page strategy document, young people are continually referred to in terms of what they are lacking when it comes to contributing to the economy. Although the Scottish Executive recognise the damage done by the media in portraying the NEET population in “feckless young tribe” headlines (p. 8), they have done little to try and change the public perception of this particular group of young people. The Scottish Executive recognise that the “transition from secondary to post-school is a critical time” (p. 15), however they choose to highlight the young people who struggle with the transition, and present them in a negative way and imply they are a ‘problem’ which we need to ‘eradicate’ in Scotland (p. 3). As MacDonald and Marsh (2001) have discussed, government policy assumes that there are the necessary number of jobs and training places available to accommodate young school leavers. The authors state that in the government’s eyes, “youth unemployment is a symptom of an ill-prepared workforce; the fault of the young unemployed” (p. 388). It is argued that it is in the government’s interests to define young unemployed people as a problem. Whether an issue is considered a problem or not is time and context specific. During a recession it is easier for the government to state that a certain group of young people is not equipped for the labour market and intervene to try and change them than try to create more jobs. The government state that “the economic and social cost of NEET extends well beyond a young person’s nineteenth birthday” (The NEET Strategy, 2006, p. 11). In the eyes of the government, the cost of NEET impacts on the individual, government and society as a whole.

As MacDonald (2008, p. 236) stated, many labels exist to describe young people who have struggled to make a successful transition from education into training or employment. These labels include: disaffected, disengaged, disconnected, hard to reach. The label NEET has dominated government policy since the launch of the NEET Strategy in 2006. The advantage of labelling young people as problematic and in need of help is that they become the focus of political attention and debate. As Furlong (2006, p. 554) stated “low rates of unemployment can reduce the political pressure for action”. High rates of unemployment resulting in the NEET strategy has led to increased spending on services and resources to help unemployed young people. However, it seems the disadvantages far outweigh any positives associated with this label. One major concern is that the NEET labels masks many other difficulties which a young person may be experiencing. This was highlighted by Yates and Payne (2006, p. 342), who state that “the focus on ‘NEET’ to label such young people can risk diverting attention away from the range of other, often quite profound risks and difficulties they face”. Young people who have failed to make the transition out of school successfully often have issues such as a lack of parental support, drug and alcohol issues and homelessness issues. By only focusing on a young person’s employment status there are risks in potentially overlooking more immediate issues which are often more of a priority to young people than holding down a job. It is clear we need a greater understanding that “within the NEET category there are a wide range of different situations that young people experience” (Yates & Payne, 2006, p. 343).

After much criticism and allegations of discrimination over the negative descriptions of young people, there have been moves to try to and put a positive spin on the

NEET strategy. The term More Choices More Chances (MCMCs) is now favoured over the term NEET, but it is vague and is proving difficult to catch on. Instead the Government has subtly changed the phrasing when it discusses the strategy, such that instead of a strategy “to reduce the proportion of young people not in education employment or training” (The NEET Strategy, 2006, p. 1), it is now described as a strategy to increase the proportion of 16-24 year olds in education, employment or training, and is now discussed within the Backing Young Britain campaign (Department for Children, Schools and Families, *DCSF Publications*, 2009).

### **Media Stigmatization of Unemployed Young People**

As described in the introduction, the media’s negative representation of young people is not a recent phenomenon. As Wayne (2007, p. 6) comments “In the post-Second World War era there was a rogues gallery of “delinquents”, from teddy boys, mods, rockers and skinheads through to punks, crusties and ravers”. It seems throughout history that the media have printed predominantly negative features about young people. By contrast, young people are often the target of advertising in the media. We live in a society dominated by consumerism and celebrity, and businesses will often direct marketing strategies at young people with disposable income. It seems that as a society we need young people and are happy to take their money, but the media is equally happy to stigmatise them. The media also give a very one-sided view on young people. There are few stories about the effects of poor housing, education, health, parental abuse and unemployment on young people. This encourages fear and condemnation rather than an understanding of the experiences of young people. Furthermore, if the media lay the blame with young people for their situation and behaviour, then there are few attempts to question the societal structures and institutions which may have influenced young people. As

discussed, during the recent recession, youth unemployment has become a daily cause for concern and this is driven by media headlines.

The media provide a constant source of information about the problem of youth unemployment. The media typically represent unemployed young people in a very negative way (for example, Figure 1.1) and often associate unemployment with anti-social behaviour. This results in public concern, criticism and fear of young people. As previously discussed, during a recession young people suffer the most, yet the media continue to blame and stigmatise them. The example below illustrates the media's portrayal of policy debates surrounding youth unemployment. The article, reported in *The Scotsman*, 15 September, 2007, illustrates the strong and negative views that are held about young people who are not in education, employment or training:

### **Here are a few NEET phrases**

The new Education Secretary, Fiona Hyslop, has announced that she does not like the acronym "NEET", which stands for the 35,000 young Scots aged 16 – 19 who are "not in education, employment or training". Ms Hyslop feels this is a pejorative label that stigmatises this group. She has a point: may we suggest some alternative "positive" phraseology for the new Scottish Government? The homeless might be referred to as "outdoor urban dwellers", "residentially flexible" or "those who are living mortgage free". The poor should always be termed "economically marginalised, but upwardly mobile". A peripheral housing scheme with a high percentage of crime and vandalism should be an "economic opportunity zone". Any gangs in these estates will now be called "youth enterprise groups". In the justice system, prisoners will always be referred to as "clients of the correctional system". Addicts will become "recovering victims of society". In education no-one will be failed; they will merely achieve a deficiency". As for a replacement for "NEET", Ms Hyslop says she prefers a collective noun that accentuates the fact these teenagers need "more choices, more chances". So there you have it – "chancers".

It seems that the language used in government policy and the media to describe

this group only adds fuel to the fire in terms of the stigma that surrounds these young people. It is generally accepted by economists that “the lack of demand is the primary cause behind the recent rise in unemployment” (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010, p. 21). Therefore, stigmatising young people in the media and trying to change individual young people will not solve this problem, and government policy should perhaps be directed towards increasing demand for young workers and encouraging self-employment. I agree with Bell and Blanchflower (2010) who state “what has been absent from the policy response thus far, though, is a coherent approach to the treatment of younger people who have not yet entered the labour market” (p. 33). However, before effective policies can be developed, a thorough understanding is needed of the impact of unemployment on young people. Only when we understand their experiences and needs can we develop interventions which will enable young people to make positive transitions in employment.

### **The Experiences of Unemployed Young People**

Many have commented on the cost of youth unemployment in terms of economy and society (for example see Godfrey Hutton, Bradshaw, Coles, Craig, & Johnson, 2002), but what about the cost for young people? What are their experiences of being unemployed? How does it affect how they see themselves?

Society expects young people to be engaged in some sort of employment or training once they leave school. As Hodgkinson (2004, p. 12) states, we live in a “work-obsessed world”, we look down upon people who do not work and label them ‘spongers’ and ‘free-loaders’. Young unemployed people are thought of as a social problem. Constructionists “argue that what makes a given condition a

problem is the collective definition of a condition as a problem and the degree of felt public concern over a given condition or issue” (Goode & Ben- Yehuda, 2009, p. 151). Barry (2006, p. 13) also discusses this in relation to her work with young offenders. Barry states “a focus on the need for young people to find work or merely become ‘employable’ in order to reduce their offending overshadows the need to reassess the discriminatory nature of an adult-orientaed labour market”. I have discussed the ways in which the government has defined youth unemployment, most recently in the NEET strategy, and how they have attempted to address it; now I want to consider the perspectives and experiences of young people. It is argued that we need to build on our understanding of young people’s lives and try to reduce the number of unemployed young people.

The education system is geared towards pupils achieving academically which reflects in the school’s league tables. Despite some authors demonstrating that bad experiences at school and negative comments from teachers are often internalised by pupils and have an influence on their self-perception (Reay & Wiliam, 1999), educational performance is still the main criteria by which young people are judged when they leave school. As young people approach an age where they can choose to leave school, they are asked by many people “what will you do?” The option of doing nothing is rarely seen as a positive and acceptable choice. However, in a time of increasing diversity of ‘post-school options’ (Archer & Yamashita, 2003), some young people do not make the transition successfully and risk falling into a stigmatised and labelled group.

As MacDonald (2008, p. 238) stated, youth transitions can be understood as the “pathways that young people make as they leave school and encounter different labour market, housing and family situations as they progress towards adulthood”. They have also been referred to as trajectories, pathways, routes, journeys and navigations. For the majority of young people transitions are likely to involve periods of flux, inconstancy and multiple relocations (Fergusson, Esland, McLaughlin, & Muncie, 2000). Many years ago it was common for young people to follow in the footsteps of their relatives in terms of employment, and this was likely to be an industry job. There are now so many possible jobs to choose from that computer programmes have been developed which help young people narrow down their preferences. This would be one example of Bauman’s ‘liquid modernity’ (2000). One such programme, Careers Match, is used by the Careers Scotland service ([www.careers-scotland.org.uk](http://www.careers-scotland.org.uk)). Young people are guided through a series of questions relating to their employability likes and dislikes. Once they have completed all of the questions, the programme generates a list of occupations which are well suited to the individual, based on their responses.

Given the complexity of these situations, it is argued that we need to understand the many twists and turns of young people’s transitions and the ways in which these are socially structured, in other words their opportunity structures (Roberts, 2009). While Miles (2000, p. 10) states that we must “prioritize the actual views, experiences, interests and perspectives of young people as they see them...” Clearly we must explore the opportunities which young people have and how these are structured and also how these impact upon young people. It is vital that we understand them from young people’s perspectives.

Furthermore, in a time when “many young people experience the responsibilities and privileges of adulthood much earlier” (Lawrence & Dodds, 2007, p. 404), it is important that we understand as much as possible about this complex life stage. It could be argued that the essence of this comes in understanding how young people see themselves and each other. As MacDonald and Marsh (2005, p. 201) state “policy initiatives (such as those discussed earlier in this chapter) to count and respond to distinct, static categories such as ‘NEET young people’” are ineffective and “miss the point”. Many young people, including those who took part in this research, move between periods of employment, unemployment, training and volunteering and due to this constant flux and movement comes the need to understand the impact this has on young people and their experiences.

One charity, The Prince’s Trust, has undertaken extensive research exploring the experiences of unemployed young people. They have concluded that “young people who are NEET are less happy and confident in all aspects of life than those in work education or training” (The Prince’s Trust, 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, the research suggested that the negative impact of unemployment caused arguments with parents and friends and left some young people reluctant to get out of bed or turning to alcohol and drugs. The data from this research are mainly quantitative in the form of online surveys, but the Trust do highlight some individual case studies. One young person describes her struggle to find employment: “I had a criminal record, an erratic employment history, no qualifications, no social skills, very low self-esteem and visible scars on my arms (from self-harming). With a history like mine, didn’t think anyone could help me”. It’s clear from this quote that unemployment is a blanket term which can cover many complexities within a young person’s life. This research builds on the findings of the Prince’s Trust, Youth Index (2010). Instead of utilising

online survey methods in order to reach a large number of young people, I would like to add to this research by talking to young people and providing an in-depth insight into their experiences as they move from being unemployed to participating on a local authority training programme and their future transition from the programme.

The present research was conducted in Stirling, Central Scotland. Towards the end of the research period, Stirling Council produced an annual report entitled “Giving Young People More Choices and More Chances to Succeed in Stirling”. In this report the council outlined how they support young people in the Stirlingshire area to make a positive transition from school to adult life. One quote from a young person is very interesting from the point of view of the current thesis. This young person describes what they would like to get out of their training programme: “Hoping to come out of it with a job or papers to show I’ve actually done something” (Male, 16). This young person is seeking recognition in the hope that what he has done will in turn be recognised by others. This concept of recognition is the central focus of this research. In a society that defines you by not only your employment status but also the status of your job, how do unemployed young people think about themselves, protect their identities and maintain a positive self image? This research will provide an understanding of the importance of recognition within the identities of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training. Identity theory is needed to expand on these questions and this will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **Overview of the Thesis**

In Chapter 2, the theoretical background of this research will be discussed. The theory of the Dialogical Self (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1993) will be used as a model for identity construction and I will attempt to contribute to this theory by adding an understanding of the role of recognition.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology used to answer three research questions: 1) A micro-genetic analysis of two discussion groups forms the first data set, 2) an analysis of young people's social networking pages, 3) the use of the innovative IPM questionnaire which was developed and utilised to reveal any disagreements and misunderstandings between young people and employers.

Chapter 4 presents the first discussion group and illustrates young people giving and receiving recognition within their peer group. Chapter 5 follows in a similar fashion but presents data from a discussion group conducted with a group of young people taking part in a health and safety test.

Chapter 6 presents an in-depth analysis of a sample of social networking pages. As young people now spend a large proportion of their lives interacting with others online, this must also be considered as part of an understanding of their identity construction.

Chapter 7 presents a description and analysis of the Interpersonal Perception Method (IPM). Use of this methodology revealed several disagreements and misunderstandings between young people and employers. It is argued that

addressing these will improve the relationship between these two groups and enable young people to make successful transitions into employment.

Chapter 8 will present a concluding discussion bringing together these three contexts, giving an insight into the identities of young people 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' and also suggesting some interventions that would effectively reduce the number of young people falling into this stigmatised and problematic category.

## **Chapter 2: Identity, the Dialogical Self and Recognition**

The way society is structured today is very different to societies as experienced by previous generations. For example, we now have varied family and living arrangements, working lives, not to mention the advances in technology. Thus, identity development in adolescence has also changed over time. As Baumeister and Muraven (1996) described, medieval adolescent and adult identities were defined in a very straightforward manner. The social rank and kinship network into which one was born determined one's place in and for life. This process is very different nowadays. As Meijl (2008, p. 185) comments "following the increasing exchange of capital and communication across the globe, people are more on the move than in the past". Young people nowadays are continually moving between the different social contexts of school, work, home life, friendships, relationships, and travel. There is also the recent introduction of social networking sites which provide another aspect of young people's lives and context for them to communicate and interact with others. The nature of this complex transitional time has attracted much attention from researchers and as a result "social scientists have characterised the teenage years as a crucial time for the formation of identity" (Kinney, 1993, p. 21).

To explore the areas discussed above, I will begin by introducing the relevant identity literature, emphasising the social nature of identities. I will then discuss the theory of the dialogical self and how I hope to extend this by explaining the importance of recognition. The chapter will conclude with an in-depth discussion of recognition, specifically structures of recognition and what happens to the self when we find ourselves caught between different structures. This will lead to the three research questions addressed in this thesis.

## **Introducing Literature on Identity**

'Identity' is a keyword in contemporary society and a central focus of social psychological theorizing and research (Howard, 2000, p. 367). Many theories of identity development have been debated and discussed over the years. We have learned from Social Identity Theory the extent to which individuals define themselves in terms of group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Cooley's (1902) explanation of the "looking-glass self" details how we imagine we appear in the eyes of others. Related to this, several authors have discussed the way in which we choose to present ourselves to others and how this can vary depending on which social role or roles we are occupying at any given time (Goffman, 1959; McCall & Simmons, 1978). A common factor in each of these theories is the social nature of identity construction and development.

Gergen (1991) has commented on the increasing number of social contexts we participate in. He described the 'post-modernist' period we live in, where who we are and how we define ourselves comes from a variety of different sources. We interact with others at home, in the workplace, in our communities, in our social lives with our friends and peer group and increasingly we participate in online interactions. All of these social contexts provide opportunities for us to gain feedback from significant others and adjust our view of ourselves and other people. Many years ago people may have described themselves in terms of their employment or whether they were a parent or not. Nowadays we describe and identify ourselves using many aspects of our lives, including our employment, relationship status, peer group, group membership, race, religion and age.

## **The Social Nature of Identities**

Mead (1934) has also stressed the importance of everyday social interactions in identity development. Mead's (1934, p. 155) most widely known concept is "the generalised other", in which he theorised that the self can only be developed when the individual adopts the stance of the other toward himself or herself (p. 106). Our interactions with others allow us to think about ourselves from a variety of different viewpoints. Mead (1934, p. 140) has described the self as "essentially a social structure" which "arises in social experience". In other words our self-perceptions are based on our experiences and interactions with others. Hence, the social nature of the self indicates the way in which our perceptions of ourselves may change from one social situation to the next. Mead (1934) developed the theory of the relational self which states "one's sense of self is mutually interdependent with one's sense of other". The way we see ourselves in the eyes of other people has a great influence on the way we perceive ourselves, and in turn shapes our thoughts, decisions and behaviours. Many authors have echoed these thoughts, including Baumeister and Muraven (1996, p. 405) who state "individual identity is an adaption to a social context". If so, then it is theorised that our individual identity and our self perception will change each time we move between different social contexts, and be fractured if we participate in two or more social contexts (e.g. family, school, peer group, work etc).

As described in Chapter 1, this research is centered on a group of stigmatised young people and while other perspectives highlight the collective aspects of identity and how reactions to stigma/low status can take on different (individual and collective) forms (for example social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1986), this thesis focuses on more micro-level interpersonal dynamics of recognition that unfold through interaction. Hence, the dialogical framework, discussed below, is most appropriate, though of course not the only perspective.

Mummendey *et al.* (1999) state “one important source of self evaluation is the relative status position of the groups people belong to and identify with” (p. 229). If you are aware that the group you belong to is viewed negatively by others, this is likely to impact upon the way you see yourself. It is in this situation that people often engage in various strategies to try and boost their own self-esteem and construct a more positive sense of self. There are several ways of dealing with a stigmatised identity, including changing social group or finding a new dimension of evaluation which places your group in a more favourable position. However not all group membership is made by choice and people are often forced into social categories which they cannot easily change. In order to further develop our understanding of identity construction, this research will consider how unemployed young people construct a positive sense of self within their negatively viewed social group.

A further related school of thought focuses on the notion that identity is communicated through language as we interact with those around us in our various roles and in many different social situations. Howard (2000, p. 372) states that “people actively produce identity through their talk”. Studies analysing identities

within specific groups have revealed how identities are constructed, re-constructed and presented in natural talk (Verkuyten, 1997; Cherry, 1995; Tewksbury & McGaughey, 1994). Mead (1967) also commented that as well as constructing our identity vocally through interactions with others, we also have internal conversations with ourselves, for example: “One starts to say something [...] but when he starts to say it he realises it is cruel. The effect on himself of what he is saying checks him; there is here a conversation of gestures between the individual and himself” (Mead, 1967, p. 141).

This explanation of an internal conversation gives an insight into the unseen processes that occur during our social interactions. We continually receive feedback from others and use this as cues to monitor our behaviour and what we communicate. This may be direct feedback which someone gives us verbally or more indirect in terms of what we think others think about us. We are also aware of other people’s expectations of us and we choose how to behave depending on which social group we are part of at any given time. This creates a running dialogue or commentary in our head in which we, in a sense, have a conversation with ourselves to regulate our behaviour and how we feel we appear to others. This notion has become known as the dialogical self.

### **Theory of the Dialogical Self**

Barresi (2002) discusses several theories of the self and gives a clear picture of the origins of the dialogical self. Barresi (2002) explains that Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1993) brought together James’ (1980) theory of the self and Bakhtin’s

(1973) theory of the polyphonic novel and formed the theory of the dialogical self. As Barresi explains:

each me in James becomes a character in the polyphonic novel of self, and each of these me's has not a thinking I but a speaking voice to represent its point of view vis-à-vis other characters and their voices in the polyphonic or dialogical self (p. 238)

As Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon (1992, p. 29) state, “the dialogical self, in contrast with the individual self, is based on the assumption that there are many different I positions that can be occupied by the same person”. Each I position may represent each of the social roles we occupy and each of these forms different voices within our heads. This conceptualisation can be linked back to Mead’s (1967) theory of the relational self. Our ability to think of ourselves from the viewpoint of another facilitates our internalisation of their perspective. Hermans *et al.* (1992) describe how Bakhtin’s (1973) notions of the dialogical self can be traced back to his thesis based on Dostoevsky. Bakhtin (1973) argued that every word, as soon as it enters in a dialogical relationship is “double-voiced” (p. 42). He further stated that “dialogue is at the heart of every form of thought” (p. 43). Thinking of the development of the self in this way led Bakhtin (1973) to conclude that “the self is not a given but an emergent” (p. 44). Barresi (2002) further confirms this connection between the theories in the following excerpt: “the notion that an ‘idea or thought’ becomes a ‘voice’, according to this theory, confirms Hermans *et al.*’s (1992) suggestion that there is a simple and direct connection between the theory of the dialogical self and William James’ theory of the self” (p. 238).

Wertsch (1991) states that an individual speaker is not simply talking as an individual; rather, in his or her utterances the voices of groups and institutions are heard. This has become known as ventriloquation and Bakhtin also referred to this term which he defined as “the process in which one voice speaks through another voice” (p. 78). Hence, our dialogue is multi-voiced as Bakhtin described “people’s views of the world and of themselves may be more or less dominated by the voices of the groups ... to which they belong” (p. 78). Barresi (2002) concludes by stating that the “self and other are always essentially in dialogue. And this applies not only to two distinct individuals, but also to the same individual across time, that is between past, present and future selves” (p. 246).

Bakhtin (1986) argued that an individual speaker’s utterance is not just coming from an isolated, decontextualised voice; rather individual voices are influenced by the culture of institutions, groups and communities in which they participate. Hermans (2004) expanded on this by stating that “I positions are not only inside the person but also outside, not only here but also there in the so-called outside world” (p. 297). This is becoming an increasingly complex notion, as not only do we have face-to-face interactions with others, but we also have online interactions and often create profiles of ourselves online which forms another, albeit digital, I position. Hervern (2004) used the theory of the dialogical self to explore ‘Weblogs’ and the often contradictory and competing personal viewpoints expressed in these blogs.

As discussed previously, we each assume a number of different social roles in our everyday interactions, for example the role of a daughter, student, sister, mother,

employee and so on. Salgado and Concalves (2007, p. 610) state that “the most striking feature of a dialogical relationship is its implication of an Other (a person, a group, a community, a society) with whom a given person relates”. These ‘others’ can be thought of as the voices we hear internally relating to all the significant people in our lives. When we talk, we talk through the voices in our heads (Hermans, 2002), either by directly quoting and impersonating others or by assuming their voices as our own. In earlier work Hermans *et al.* (1992, p. 29) stated that “the dialogical self is conceived as social [...] in the sense that other people occupy positions in the multi-voiced self [...] because of the power of imagination the person can act as if he or she were the other”. For example, we may hear the voice of our parents when we are about to make a decision which they may or may not agree with. Hence, parents would be a significant other in our life. Often the voices we hear tell us very different things and contradict one another, the conflict this creates can have a big impact upon the decisions we make and the way we see ourselves.

The theory of the dialogical self has explained the notion of the internal dialogue and the voices that comprise it, but in order to build on this theory an understanding is needed of the impact of others. Hence, we need to explore identities situated within social life (Jasper, Moore, Whittaker & Gillespie 2011). This could allow us to answer further questions such as what do we receive from others in interactions? What happens when we engage in negative or confrontational interactions? What happens when we are ignored? It is proposed here that in order to extend the theory of the dialogical self, a thorough understanding of the role of acknowledgement from others, in terms of recognition, is needed. Previous research by the author as part of a wider research project has revealed that recognition plays a vital role within the

identity construction of a specific group of adolescents (Whittaker, in press). It is argued that recognition is not only important to this particular sample but indeed plays a universal role in identity construction. Hence, it is necessary to build on the existing theory of the dialogical self by understanding the role recognition plays within identity.

### **Contribution: Theorizing Recognition**

This research aims to extend the theory of the dialogical self, and add to the wider body of literature discussing adolescent identities, by specifically focussing on recognition. In the wealth of literature in the fields of youth studies, sociology and education, the importance of recognition in adolescent identities has been alluded to, but not explored thoroughly or discussed explicitly. Archer and Yamashita (2003) focus on 'working class' young people and explore their hopes and expectations in relation to their identities through the transition of leaving school. The authors raise some interesting questions around society's expectations of employment. They highlight that it is commonly assumed that engaging in training or work is desirable, as it can result in social and economic benefits for individuals, communities and society as a whole. Therefore, not working or training is associated with a lack of motivation and laziness. This often leads to negative views of unemployed young people and masks any other issues which may be present. The authors are critical of research where "the views of young people are [...] absent from discussions" (p. 55) and the lack of space given to the voices of young people in policy documents. The authors state that when it comes to exploring adolescent identity, "analysis needs to account for the 'messy' shifting and subjectively experienced classed, racialized, masculine and feminine identities" (Archer & Yamashita, 2003, p. 55-56). This

shows the complex nature of identity development. The authors go on to state that 'risk, uncertainty, deficit and disadvantage' are the main themes running through their transcripts. However in the first excerpt presented, there is an example of recognition in the young person's dialogical self. The young person is talking about how they have chosen a career because a parent has recognised that they are good in this area: "my mum goes I'm 'good at it' and that I might as well go on a course and I said yeah". This is an example of a parent appearing as a significant other in the voice of a young person trying to make a decision about a future career. The theory of the dialogical self is very effective in understanding adolescent identity development; although in this paper it is not directly referred to. This research uses the theory of the dialogical self, but extends the thinking beyond identifying voices of significant others and examining the recognition they give or deny.

The overall message from this research is that the working class sample of young people believed that "education is for other people" and they are "not good enough" (Archer & Yamashita, 2003, p. 66) to continue in education. When young people do not receive positive recognition and feel undervalued, they often shy away from education and fall into a group which attracts a lot of negative attention from the government and media.

MacDonald (2008) also discussed young people's transitions from education into adult life and the complexities of these journeys. MacDonald (2008) presents an excerpt from one young person, Malcolm, who discusses his desire to find a job and not sign on 'the dole'. Malcolm describes the negative recognition he gets from

others: "it's embarrassing going to the Post Office with your giro" and he also does not want his son to be ridiculed or embarrassed by his unemployed status: "when his friends' Mams or teachers say 'what does your Dad do?' 'Oh he's on the dole'. I don't want none of that" (p. 240). The impact of what others think is clear in Malcolm's words. He feels unhappy and frustrated about being unemployed based on what he thinks others think of him. Malcolm would like to find work so he can support his family and be a father his son can be proud of. This further highlights the stigma which unemployment attracts and the limited opportunities which some young people have to receive positive recognition.

The current research aims to extend the work of Archer and Yamashita (2003) and MacDonald (2008) by presenting a comprehensive analysis of the dialogues of young people and explaining the impact of positive, negative and no recognition on their identity construction.

### **Building on Existing Literature**

The notion of recognition has been studied by a number of different authors and is often described using various different terms (for example; reputation (Fraser, 2000), prestige and self-esteem (Giordano, 1995), dignity (Nordenfelt, 2004) and social comparison (Turner, 1985)). This research will build on these existing theories by demonstrating that recognition is a dynamic social process which can be understood within each turn of dialogue but also at a broader structural level. This research will discuss what happens to a self caught between these different structures of recognition.

One of the first authors to try and theorise recognition explicitly was Hegel. His work is discussed by Taylor (1992), who outlined the history behind the modern day emphasis that is placed on recognition, and cites Hegel's (1949) master and slave (lordship and bondage) relationship as an early example of the role of recognition within a relationship. Hegel described that within the relationship between the master and slave, there is the potential for the slave to gain recognition for carrying out the duties the master asks of him, in effect being a good slave. However, this recognition only goes in one direction; down the power hierarchy. There is no potential for the master to gain meaningful recognition from the slave. It is argued here that Hegel's example highlights several important things: firstly recognition plays a crucial part in how we see ourselves and others; secondly recognition is related to power; and finally the recognition available is determined by the context we are in. For example, again using Hegel's master-slave relationship, if the slave carries out all his duties then the master may praise him, the slave receives acknowledgement that he has performed well in his role and this may boost his self-esteem (identity). However, it would not be appropriate for the slave to praise the master, as this may be seen as patronising (power). The master however, may gain recognition in another setting from other masters when he describes how obedient and efficient his slave is (context). Hegel's example may seem outdated now but the same principles could be applied to the relationship between an employee and employer.

Taylor (1992) goes on to describe how, historically, recognition has been discussed in terms of 'honour' and 'dignity'. Honneth (1995) also takes mutual recognition as being central to the processes and very possibility of human relationships. Honneth's (1995) approach, which evolved from the social theories of Hegel and Mead's

naturalistic transformation of Hegelian ideas, implies that without mutual recognition there could be no sense of either dignity or indignity. It is the feelings associated with recognition or rejection that give a sense of dignity within the individual (Honneth, 1995). However, since the collapse of traditional social hierarchies, these terms (dignity and indignity) are less widely used.

Taylor (1995) states “the importance of recognition has been modified and intensified by the new understanding of individual identity that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century” (p. 227). It is clear from the preceding discussion that recognition is historically contingent; in different societies and at different times recognition has been considered more or less important. Our modern day lives have resulted in, as Taylor (1992) states, “not the need for recognition, but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognised can fail” (p. 35). It is precisely this situation where recognition is denied which Taylor highlights as a problem. He states “non-recognition or mis-recognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being” (p. 25). Here Taylor makes the important link between recognition and identity on which he elaborates as follows: “the thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the mis-recognition of others” (p. 29). I would question Taylor’s weak word choice in his use of the word ‘partly’ and go further to propose that our identity is greatly influenced by recognition or a lack of recognition from others. However, I completely agree with him when he says “recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need” (p. 26).

Mead (1967) states that the way we see ourselves and construct our identity is influenced by our interactions with those around us. Taylor (1992) reiterates this by

saying “my own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (p. 34). Therefore, in order to understand ourselves, we look to other people for recognition. We look to others to recognise our selves and in doing so we recognise them. If they fail to recognise us, this impacts upon our view of ourselves, our actions and our view of them as others. As Taylor states “we are all aware of how identity can be formed or malformed through the course of our contact with significant others”. It is these significant others in our lives that come to form our internal dialogues or our dialogical selves (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992). It is through the recognition from significant others that we are aware of our influence within our social worlds; if we never came into contact with other people, we would have no measure of the effect of our actions. To have no idea of our impact within our social worlds would leave us feeling powerless and invisible. This was summed up by William James in his famous quote:

No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in a society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned around when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person ‘cut us dead,’ and acted as if we were non-existent things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would long well up in us, from which the cruellest bodily torture would be a relief (James, 1980, p. 293).

In this quote, James captures our need to feel influence within our social worlds, and the feeling of frustration that would occur if we were effectively invisible to others. In a second quote from James, the notion of recognition is evident: “I should not be alive now had I not become sensitive to looks of approval or disapproval on the faces among which my life is cast” James (1890) Here James highlights the importance of,

not only the feedback we receive from others, but also how we perceive this feedback. More recently Sennett (2003) has captured this idea in his writings:

Lack of respect, though less aggressive than an outright insult, can take an equally wounding form. No insult is offered another person, but neither is recognition extended, he or she is not seen – as a full human being whose presence matters (p. i.).

Sennett (2003) describes the power of recognition and the consequences of no recognition, in terms of our identity. Taylor effectively sums this up in saying “we define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against the things we think our significant others want to see in us” (p. 33). As James alluded to, if one is given no recognition at all, one is invisible to others and hence feels powerless in one’s social world. It is necessary to examine the relationship between recognition and power in more depth.

### **The Link between Recognition and Power**

Jovchelovitch (2008) states that “in so far as we can initiate an act we are the holders of power by virtue of our actions we can produce effects and transform the worlds in which we live” (p. 28). I would argue that we can only do this if our acts are recognised by others, for example if we tell a joke and the audience laughs, then our joke has had the desired effect. Therefore “my power to act is always limited by the recognition others confer on what I do” (Jovchelovitch, 1997, p. 19). It is clear that inextricably linked with recognition is the concept of power - is it possible to have power without recognition? Or is it possible to achieve recognition without power? In order to understand how we see ourselves and others, it is necessary to take into account how these concepts influence our thinking and understanding of our social realities. Jovchelovitch (1997) concisely sums this up in saying “power to produce, to

construct or to institute is not intrinsic to agents: it arises by virtue of the recognition others grant to the actions of agents” (p. 19). When we come to think of our ‘actions’, it is not only physical actions but also knowledge which must be taken into account, and this introduces another important dimension: the relationship between power and knowledge. Again Jovchelovitch has an effective and succinct way of illustrating this using the Portuguese phrase “saber j poder” (p.19), which translated means ‘to know is to be able to’. Jovchelovitch uses this to describe the connection between power and possibility. This suggests that knowledge gives us the power to act but again, if this knowledge is not recognised, then does it create a sense of power? This raises an important question: if your knowledge is not recognised, how does this impact upon your identity? Jovchelovitch comments on this stating “asymmetries in the recognition of the legitimacy of different knowledges have profound consequences on how people are defined and acted upon by others” (p. 24). Politicians are perhaps an obvious example; they may hold knowledge but if the voting public do not recognise this as legitimate and meaningful knowledge, then they are restricted in their actions.

Using young people as an example, is it fair to say that if a young person fails to achieve top grades in school that they have no knowledge or that what they know is not recognised within the education system? A young person may struggle to write an academic essay or formal letter and it would be easy to assume they have a deficit in their literacy skills. However, it is not uncommon for the same young person to show that they can effectively and creatively distort the language on their social networking page in order that the content is only read and understood by the intended audience, their peers and not, for example, their parents. On a similar note

young people frequently write 'disses', which are complex songs or raps (in hip hop terms means one rapper is singing against someone else) about someone they dislike, these are often recorded with backing music demonstrating similar skills needed in poetry and song writing. Clearly young people have knowledge which is evident in their actions but this knowledge is only recognised in certain contexts.

### **Recognition Embedded in Context**

The example above illustrates the link between power and context. Knowledge must be recognised within the given context in order for power to be achieved. In the example above, the knowledge young people have is not recognised in the context of school; however it is recognised by their peers in a social context. Therefore some young people receive power and recognition for this knowledge from their peers but it is highly unlikely they will receive it from their teachers.

Rogoff and Morelli (1989) discuss the importance of considering context within the research process. Indeed, experimental psychologists have focussed on controlling context and eliminating it from their analysis. The underlying assumption is that the characteristics of the person are relatively stable over time. By contrast it is argued here that people behave differently in different situations and an appropriate question would be why do people behave differently in different contexts? One potential answer lies in understanding the role of recognition. As we move between different structures of recognition, we change our behaviour according to the recognition we seek.

## **Structures of Recognition**

In today's society an increasingly strong emphasis is placed on recognition and we have developed several ways in which recognition can be categorised and collectively known as structures of recognition (Gillespie, Cornish, Aveling & Zittoun, 2008). An understanding of how our social contexts are structured according to recognition on offer is extremely useful when attempting to understand what motivates behaviour, and this research aims to highlight this novel and under-studied concept. This research will illustrate the process of recognition as it appears in dialogue within certain contexts, but will then build on this by examining how we move between different structures of recognition and the impact conflicting structures have on identity development.

There are several structures of formal and informal recognition which occur in everyday life. Formal structures include grades in school, promotions and pay rises in the work place, medals given to war veterans, sports trophies and many others. There are also more informal means of recognition in the form of verbal praise or simply knowing that someone trusts and believes in you.

As our social worlds have expanded and our interactions with others have increased, this has called for new ways of understanding and talking about identity. Alongside this have come new ways in which we can be recognised by others. Historically, recognition may have come predominantly within the family and centred on upholding the family name, but now we have a society where there are few things that are not centred on recognition. This has divided out social worlds into structures

of recognition, such as academic achievements, school league tables, promotions in the workplace, salary scales, brand names, sporting awards and many others. This may be thought of as a positive situation where there are various different ways in which we can receive recognition but this can also be problematic.

Returning to our focus, young people, within the education system pupils who do not excel academically are at risk of receiving little positive recognition from those around them. This is problematic given that research has shown “that recognition for positive behaviour is related to adolescent’s self-perception” (Cheng, Siu & Leung, 2006, p. 468). Given the high numbers of young people failing to make a successful transition from school, the importance of recognition in the way young people see themselves and the lack of research exploring the impact of recognition on adolescent identity development, this research will explore the ways in which young people view themselves and others and make sense of their lives against a background of social change and stigma. As Zittoun (2004, p. 154) highlights, “a young person who has been defined in exclusively negative terms at school may wish to be judged by others on something other than school-related skills”. Negative experiences at school can have a profound effect upon a young person’s self-perception and leave some young people with few opportunities to gain positive recognition. This has led authors to call for a move away from an emphasis on academic achievement. Cheng *et al.* (2006, p. 468) assert that “apart from emphasising academic achievement, there is an explicit need in our secondary schools to promote the recognition of students’ constructive behaviours and its positive consequences”. This further justifies the current research which presents an understanding of the impact of recognition.

It is worth pausing here to make an important distinction between 'recognition' and 'attention'. It could be argued that what we seek from others is attention (defined as "the paying of particular notice to the behaviours and demands of another" Colman, 2009, p. 63), however I would argue that while this may be true, what we are ultimately seeking is recognition and this is something slightly different. We attend to many things in our everyday lives, but the majority of these things are then dismissed from our conscious thought; to give recognition to a person or situation is to decide that it is legitimate; it is meaningful and holds some value for us. Again, it is perhaps easier to explain using an example: someone may say something to us and we give our attention while we listen, however if what this person says holds no meaning or value then we may not recognise it in the form of a response. This is not to say that we disagree with them but rather we do not recognise what they are saying as legitimate from our perspective. Therefore, if we were simply seeking attention from others, then the fact that someone has listened to us would suffice. However, this is often not the case, which is perhaps why people often complain that they are "being listened to but not heard". As Jovchelovitch (2008) notes "dialogical encounters [...] involve an effort to take into account the perspective of the other and recognise it as legitimate" (p. 29). It is only when we feel others recognise us that we have a measure of our influence in our social worlds. This influence can also be thought of as power.

## **A Model of Recognition**

From the preceding discussion it is clear that recognition plays a crucial role in our identity construction. Further, to extend the theory of the dialogical self, we need to

move beyond understanding recognition as an intra psychological phenomenon and examine it as a social phenomenon. In order to gain a fuller understanding it is necessary to determine what exactly this role is, I thus propose a model of recognition.

Recognition has direct links with motivation. It is thought that we are motivated to act in ways that will allow us to receive positive recognition from others and thus create a positive sense of self. But, what if you are in a marginalised and socially isolated or stigmatised group and opportunities to gain positive recognition are limited? The argument would follow that if this is the case, and we struggle to gain positive recognition, then the creation of a positive sense of self is jeopardised. It is here we return to the earlier point made by Taylor (1992) that it is not the need for recognition which is problematic but instead “the conditions in which the attempt to be recognised” (p. 35) fail. What happens when we seek recognition and it is denied? Figure 2.1 presents a model of recognition within dialogue and attempts to show the process of recognition as it occurs, turn by turn, in an interaction.

<p><b><u>Primary Action</u></b> (something is said or done)</p>	<p><b><u>James:</u></b> I'm waiting for my maw and da to pop their clogs... hoose, car, money</p>
<p><b><u>Recognition</u></b> of (others respond: for Positive Recognition is Negative Recognition No Recognition)</p>	<p><b><u>Jamie:</u></b> that's nasty that is actually one sickest things you can say... I'm waiting my mum and dad to pop their clogs that nasty</p>
<p><b><u>Reaction</u></b> (Recognition is perceived and reacted to)</p>	<p><b><u>James:</u></b> he's getting on a bit my old man</p>

**Figure 2.1: A model of recognition within dialogue**

Marková (1990) proposed a theory where dialogue could be divided into meaningful units of analysis and the model of recognition proposed here is building on Marková's three-step process as a unit of analysis in dialogue. The importance of the 3rd step in the sequence is well documented by various other authors: Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Schegloff and Sacks (1973), Schegloff (1979) and Jefferson (1989). In the example above, James tries to gain recognition from his peers by saying that he is waiting for his mum and dad to "pop their clogs" (die), then he will get "hoose, car, money" (house, car, money). This is a bold statement from James as he clearly thinks his peers may find this funny or have similar feelings towards their own parents. But James mis-judges this and is criticised by Jamie. James reacts to this and tries to justify his previous comment by saying his Dad is getting old but this does not change Jamie's opinion and no recognition is offered.

Whenever something is spoken it is directed towards an audience, at times the audience may only be our self but the purpose of speaking remains. When others are present, every time we speak it is reacted to and bound up within the notion of recognition. For example, we might bump into someone in the street and turn to them and say 'sorry' they might then smile and say 'it's ok, thanks'. Our resulting reaction is based on their response which was in this case a positive and forgiving one. We would then probably continue about our day and not give this interaction a second thought. However, if we were sure the person heard our apology but they chose to ignore us then our reaction might be one of anger. Similarly if the person swore at us and then stormed off it might cause us to feel humiliated and create more lasting effects. I use this example to illustrate the 3 step process which we can use to understand recognition within dialogue. Within this example we can identify dialogue, perception of (recognition) and reactions:

Step 1: A primary action – something happens (someone says or does something)

Step 2: Recognition – the audience either gives positive, negative or no recognition

Step 3: Reaction – based on what is perceived to occur in Step 2, the author of the primary action reacts.

Chapters 4 and 5 will further illustrate this model by applying it to discussion group data. Importantly this model is only concerned with one context and highlights one structure of recognition in which James is trying to be humorous among his peers. Often, however, we have to negotiate our way between several structures of recognition and these can overlap. For example, if your friends come into your place of work, then you are caught between a structure of recognition embedded in the context of your job, which encourages you to act professionally, and the structure of recognition embedded in your friendships with your peer, which may offer recognition

for larking around. It is therefore important to consider the impact on a self caught between structures of recognition.

## **A Self Caught between Different Structures of Recognition**

The recognition that we receive from others leads us to form ideas about their expectations of us. For example, if we receive praise from our parents for achieving good grades at school then we come to realise that they hope and expect that we will continue to achieve good grades in the future. However, as mentioned above in these modern, technological times, we engage in an increasing number of social roles, therefore it would be too simplistic to suggest that we deal with each context in isolation. Each of our roles come with expectations and offer recognition in different ways, but these are often in competition with each other and this creates conflict within our dialogical selves. For example, parents may set a curfew for their child when he is out with his friends in the evening, the child knows that the parents expect him to return home at a certain time and he would be praised and trusted for doing so. However, in direct competition with this is the expectation from his friends that he will stay out later, as they are perhaps allowed to, for this he will also receive recognition, thus creating a dilemma. This dilemma is a dialogical tension but I think this is a very specific conflict of recognition. The following excerpt illustrates at least two conflicting sources of recognition which leads to a dialogical tension for James:

**James:** I'm no even gonne say what I wanted to be

**LW (researcher):** why?

**James:** I wanted to be an accountant

**Steven:** fair enough

Within this discussion group a conflict of recognition is seen for James. At this point in the discussion the group are talking about what they wanted to do when they were planning to leave school. In terms of context James is participating in a discussion group with his peers and myself as a researcher. Therefore there are two potential sources from which recognition could be offered or denied. However, these sources are very different and James must negotiate between these sources in order to gain recognition. If successful, he could receive recognition from his peers and myself, he may only successfully gain recognition from one source or, if unsuccessful, he may be denied recognition within this context. In this excerpt James begins by saying: "I'm no even gonne say what I wanted to be". In the very act of verbalising this James invites me to ask "why?" James then explains that he wanted to be an accountant. It seems James is aware that I will offer recognition for this occupation as it is an academic subject and a job that carries a certain amount of status. By contrast James is unsure how this will be perceived by his peers. Therefore he carefully engineers the conversation in order that I ask him why he doesn't want to say and this provides justification for him to do so. One of his peers, Steven, then provides recognition by saying "fair enough".

Different structures of recognition (Gillespie, Cornish, Aveling & Zittoun, 2008) are embedded in different contexts, and as we move between these contexts we often find ourselves caught between different structures of recognition and, as we have seen with James, this can create conflict within our dialogical selves. As we encounter different social situations we develop our expectations of what is expected of us and what may or may not be recognised in any given situation. Even so, negotiating between these social situations and structures of recognition is extremely

complex and more so when we encounter a situation for the first time. It is therefore understandably complex for young people who encounter many novel situations during their adolescent years.

## **Research Questions**

The overall aim of the study was to understand the role of recognition in the identities of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The theoretical underpinnings of this study state that young people will see themselves from a variety of different perspectives, based on the multiple interactions they have at this very transitional time in their lives. However, we need a more thorough understanding of the recognition offered and denied from significant others and the impact this has upon identity construction. At a broader level we need to understand the different structures of recognition which young people move between and what happens to the self when young people are caught between different structures. Focussing on structures of recognition, this research addressed the following questions:

1. How do young people give and receive recognition in their peer group?
2. How do young people engage with the alternative context of an online social networking site in order to give and receive recognition?
3. Are there any disagreements and/or misunderstandings between young people and employers?

## Chapter 3: Methodology

*“They just make ye write the questionnaire things they probably just get chucked in the bin n no looked at”*

This thesis comprises three research questions as stated at the end of Chapter 2. Each of these questions is answered by one of three data sets and analyses, each of which corresponds to an empirical chapter (See Table 3.1). The first research question is: How do young people give and receive recognition in their peer group? In addressing this question, Peer Group discussions allowed me to gain an insight into the dialogues of young people speaking informally with their friends and peers. Analysis of these discussion groups revealed the ways in which young people gave and denied recognition within interactions. The second research question is: How do young people engage with the alternative context of an online social networking site in order to give and receive recognition? In addressing this question, Online Social Networking pages allowed me to examine a new feature of young people’s social lives. Analysis revealed that social networking pages provide young people with opportunities to gain recognition in ways they may not be able to do in their everyday offline lives. Finally, the third research question is: Are there any disagreements and/or misunderstandings between young people and employers? Comparing the perspectives of young people and employers in relation to relevant aspects of the world of work gave an insight into the recognition, or lack of recognition, which these groups give or perceive to receive from the other. From an applied point of view it also allowed me to identify barriers which often prevent young people from gaining

employment. For example there is a view held by some young people that employers will not consider them for a role if they do not have qualifications.

**Table 3.1 – Turning the Questions into Research**

Ethnographic Background			
Question	Data needed to answer question	Analysis	Chapter(s)
How do young people give and receive recognition in their peer group?	Speak to young people, naturalistic dialogue with peers, discussion groups around relevant topics	Voices, echoes, traces, put downs, compliments, subject changes	4 + 5
How do young people engage with alternative contexts such as online social networking in order to gain recognition?	Observations of young people's social networking pages	What is written? Who is the intended audience?	6
Are there any disagreements or misunderstandings between young people and employers?	Perspectives of young people and employers in relation to the relevant issues in the world of work e.g. punctuality and qualifications	A comparisons of perspectives to reveal disagreements and misunderstandings which may create barriers to employment	7

This chapter will describe how and where this research was carried out using three distinct methods combined with an overarching ethnographic approach and the rationale behind this. When considered individually, each of the three data sets provides interesting insights into young people's lives and identities, but their strength is in their combination, as they provide a rich and in-depth understanding of the way young people not in education, employment or training see themselves and others and the importance of recognition in their identity construction. The key

methodological strength of this research is a micro-genetic design (Lavelli, Pantoja, Hsu, Messinger & Fogel, 2004), which allowed the researcher and in turn reader to observe the process of recognition as it occurs. This is a central aspect of the research which sought not only to reveal the end result of a change but also the process of change as it occurs. The following methodological chapter outlines the research approach and the methods developed and utilised resulting in three empirical data sets (peer group discussions, online social networking pages and the perspectives of employers and young people).

## **Research Site**

This research was conducted in Stirling, a city in Central Scotland. With a population of approximately 38,000, Stirling has transformed from a small market town to a bustling city, home to Stirling University and various business parks. Following the launch of 'The NEET Strategy, More Choices, More Chances: an action plan to reduce the proportion of young people not in education employment or training' in 2006, local councils came under growing pressure from the government to identify and address their 'problem' young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. Stirling Council implemented several programmes based on the original Youth Training Scheme rationale. Stirling's Get Ready for Work (GRfW) programmes are designed to enable young people who are vulnerable or at risk from social exclusion, to overcome barriers to participation in the economic, cultural and social life of the area. Their most recent 'More Choices, More Chances' strategy aims to support "100% of young people to make the transition from school to adult life" (MCMC Partnership Annual Report, May 2010).

During my MSc I completed a 5-week work placement with the Youth Services Department in Stirling. This gave me an overview of the work of Youth Services and also introduced me to the concept of NEET within national and local government policy and more importantly young people falling into this category. As a result of this work placement I developed a strong relationship with Youth Services and negotiated an agreement meaning I could attend each training programme 2 days per week and act as a participant observer for research purposes but also be present as a responsible adult if the lead youth worker on the programme needed support. I have previously been employed as a Youth Worker so felt comfortable supporting the lead youth worker.

There are three programmes within the Get Ready for Work scheme: Access to Motor Vehicle, Access to Construction and Choices in Care. These programmes are targeted at young people aged 14-25 years who are NEET. Young people must firstly make an appointment with their local careers guidance service. A careers officer will compile an Action Plan with the young person which details their strengths, weaknesses and goals. The careers officer will refer a young person for an interview for one of the programmes if this is deemed appropriate. Only young people who have multiple barriers to employment are referred. Barriers include under-achievement at school, living in a workless household, being homeless, being a young parent and having a history of offending. The young person will then attend an interview with a youth worker from the youth services department. This is typically a brief meeting where the young person is given information about the particular programme and asked one important question – why do they want to do this

programme? If a young person presents him or herself well and gives a reasonable answer to this question then they are offered a place.

Get Ready for Work Programmes are designed to give young people a taste of what working in a particular job or industry is like. Each programme focuses on a different trade/industry but structurally the three programmes are very similar. Young people receive a training allowance of £55 per week as well as travel expenses, which is often the initial attraction for young people under 18, as they are not yet entitled to claim Job Seekers Allowance. Youth workers recruit a maximum of 12 young people onto each programme. If anyone drops out within the first 2-3 weeks their place will be re-allocated, any later than this and it will not be. Reasons for leaving the programme early vary. Some young people move away from the area, some become homeless and other priorities take over, some girls become pregnant, some young people quit the programme because they dislike it and some are sacked from the programme because of their behaviour. Young people are recruited from the Stirlingshire and Clackmannan area. As Clackmannan was identified as a 'hotspot' in the NEET Strategy (2006), with high numbers of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training, four places on each training programme are reserved for young people living in the Clackmannan area. Get Ready for Work programmes are funded from a variety of different sources including Scottish Government Funding, Fairer Scotland Fund and Skills Development Scotland (MCMC Annual Report, May 2010).

### **GRfW – Access to Construction**

Access to construction is a 26-week training programme for young people who are interested in the building industry or learning a trade such as bricklaying, joinery or painting and decorating. The course provides young people with the basics of these trades.

### **GRfW – Access to Motor Vehicle**

Access to motor vehicle is a slightly shorter programme of only 13-weeks. It gives young people an introduction to some of the practical skills required to work in the motor industry.

### **GRfW - Choices in care**

Choices in Care is a 26-week training and development programme for young people interested in working in the care sector. Young people get the chance to work in nurseries and homes for the elderly.

All the programmes aim to develop employability skills and build young people's confidence. Young people also have the chance to gain accredited certificates in First Aid and moving and handling, as well as more specific employability skills such as CV writing and interview skills.

### **Participants in this research**

I met young people at the beginning of each programme; I then attended the programme 2 days per week in order to get to know the young people. Once the

programme was finished, I invited young people to a discussion group which also gave them an opportunity to catch up with each other. A total of 79 young people attended discussion groups.

## **Ethnographic Background**

Ethnography is the process of studying people's actions and accounts in "everyday contexts" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p. 3). I adopted an ethnographic approach as I wanted to gain an in-depth insight into these young people's lives and understand the way they construct their identities. My three data sets were interpreted within an ethnographic framework which involves exploring "meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p. 3). The result, as I will go onto describe, is a rich understanding of the complexities of young people's lives and the importance of recognition in their identities.

By spending time with young people and listening to their experiences, thoughts, hopes and concerns, I was able to form research questions based around issues relevant to them. I used this information to inform my topic guide and start conversations with young people based on topics they were already discussing. For example, while spending time with the young people on the training programmes they would share stories of how they often felt stupid and worthless, they felt that others looked down upon them as they had not done well at school and were now struggling to find work. I could then continue this conversation and ask questions to clarify and add to my understanding. These conversations highlighted the

importance of recognition to me. I would often observe the impact of positive recognition when a young person passed their first aid test and commented that it was the first time they had ever achieved anything. Again, by immersing myself in the day-to-day running of the training programmes, I was able to see how much time young people were spending online interacting with others, posting photos of themselves and then discussing these with other young people on the training programme. This alerted me to the need to explore how their identities were being constructed on social networking sites. Similarly, as the training programmes were geared towards finding a job, the young people often shared their experiences with employers and the struggle they encountered trying to find work. . One young person explained she did not attend an interview because she had no certificates to take with her. Meaning, although this young person was invited for an interview, she did not feel confident attending without certificates, and felt that employers would not be interested in offering her the job with no evidence of her qualifications. By not attending the interview, she immediately ruled herself out of being offered the job based on her thoughts about employers' expectations. Anecdotes like these informed my use and adaptation of the Interpersonal Perception Method (Laing, Phillipson & Lee, 1966) questionnaire, which allowed me to explore the relationship between young people and employers. An ethnographic approach informed not only the research questions but also the way in which the data were interpreted. The information I had gathered from spending time with young people resulted in an in-depth interpretation of the data from a variety of sources.

Data were collected from three sources: discussion groups, Bebo pages and questionnaires, with discussion groups forming the main source of data. These data

sources will be discussed in detail in the remainder of this chapter. Instead of using a self report approach, in which one would ask young people directly about the positive and negative recognition they received from others, I was able to observe young people's naturalistic interactions and behaviours, which captured the subtleties of the notion of recognition and the process by which it impacts upon the way young people see themselves and others. For example, I was able to observe first hand the reaction of a young person who was speaking but was being ignored by the rest of the group. More traditional research designs can be limited in their ability to "capture ongoing processes of change" Lavelli *et al.* (2004, p. 40). I tried as much as possible to immerse myself within each training programme, in order to gain a full understanding of each individual, group dynamics, relationships with youth workers and experiences on the training programme. For example, I tried to participate fully in the activities of the programme. This involved learning first aid, helping young people write their CVs, taking part in diversity awareness sessions and visiting young people on work placement, among other things.

I also kept in touch with the young people after they left the training programme and tracked their onward journeys. This ongoing contact gave the research a longitudinal dimension, which allowed me to gain an insight into the processes of recognition out with the training programmes. For example, I was aware when young people were celebrating significant birthdays such as turning 18, moving into and out of employment and from one job to the next. Hence, this research has not looked at young people at one time point then a future time point (for example when they are unemployed and then again when they manage to find work). Instead this research

has attempted to follow the young people on their journeys which are often fragmented.

Alongside holding discussion groups with young people, I also interviewed key stakeholders to gather information about the social contexts within which these young people are immersed (see Appendix 1). For example, I interviewed a member of staff from Careers Scotland who is responsible for referring young people onto the Get Ready for Work Programmes. This interview gave me an insight into the different ways in which young people come into contact with the careers service and the advice and support young people receive. I also interviewed two Youth Workers from Stirling Council who deliver Get Ready for Work Programmes. These interviews gave me an insight into their perspectives and an understanding of the targets they must try to achieve – these targets are commonly a percentage of young people from each programme moving into employment or other training. Throughout the research I collected newspaper articles about young people to understand the ways they are represented in the media.

One of the main justifications for taking this ethnographic approach arises from the observation of other authors that “the majority of transition studies have traditionally relied upon postal questionnaire surveys that tend to require respondents to note (from memory) their education/employment status (in the singular) at selected points over the post-16 years” (MacDonald, Mason, Shildrick, Webster, Johnston & Ridley 2001, p. 9). It was hoped that this research would provide a thorough and rich understanding of these young peoples’ lives. Therefore it was necessary to build personal relationships with them and not rely on more distant methods such as

postal surveys. It is also argued that, due to the very complex and transitional nature of these young peoples' lives, retrospective survey methods do not adequately capture their experiences. Often young people make many transitions within short periods of time and these can often be forgotten when reflecting. The use of face to face methods also gave the researcher the opportunity to check, clarify, probe and inquire in detail in order to get a clear understanding of young people's experiences. Often the language these young people use can be hard to understand, but spending time in their company allowed the researcher to become familiar with this language and also clarify any ambiguous terms.

As the opening quote of this chapter suggests ("they just make ye write the questionnaire things they probably just get chucked in the bin n no looked at"), many of these young people have participated in research previously. One of the consequences of being positioned in a problematic group, such as unemployed, is that it attracts attention from many people hoping to find out why or what can be done to help. This is not always a negative experience for participants but unfortunately many of the participants in this research had very negative views of researchers, as illustrated in the quote. This again reinforced the need to spend time building a rapport with these young people and taking time to understand their perspectives. The methods discussed in the following sections allowed the researcher to see how the process of recognition operates within peer group dialogue, within an online context and in relation to the work of work and young peoples' perspectives of employers.

## **Giving and Receiving Recognition in Peer Groups**

In order to fully explore the experiences of young people it is important to interact with them in familiar environments and contexts (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

Therefore to gain an insight into how young people's identities are constructed and produced through their dialogue, the ideal setting would be to involve them in discussions with their friends or peer group. These group discussions were organized to explore a specific set of issues (Kitzinger, 1994). Moreover, as this research is concerned with a dialogical analysis, it is crucial that young people are given the opportunity to talk as freely as possible, in order to understand how they see themselves and significant others. The use of the researcher's field notes will also add to the understanding of the discussion groups and interactions (field notes discussed below).

## **Participant Recruitment**

I attended each training programme for a minimum of 2 days per week. This occasionally varied depending on the content of the programme that week. Towards the end of each programme, I asked the group if they would be interested in arranging a catch up, at least one month after the programme finished. I explained that this would be used for the purposes of my research but it would be very informal and a chance for everyone to catch up with each other. I informed the young people of the date and time of the catch up meeting, but noted that attendance was completely voluntary; young people were encouraged to attend but if they decided not to, this was not discussed further.

## **Discussion Groups**

A total of 16 discussion groups were conducted with 79 young people (40 females and 39 males), aged 16-18, generating approximately 28.5 hours of data. Table 3.2 shows a list of these discussion groups. The discussion groups were not intentionally split by gender this occurred within each programme as males were typically referred to Access to Construction or Access to Motor Vehicle and females were typically referred to Choices in Care.

These discussion groups were arranged specifically for the purposes of this research and not naturally occurring within the training programmes (with the exception of the discussion group discussed in Chapter 5) or young people's lives. However, in an attempt to make the discussion groups as informal as possible they acted as a catch-up for young people following the end of their programme. The researcher tried to create an informal relaxed environment and the opening discussion was always related to what they young people had been doing since their training programme ended.

## **Semi-structured Schedule**

The topics of discussion related to young people's experiences of school, training programmes and work. Within these broad themes any specific issues which the young people had discussed during the programme were also discussed. Discussion groups followed the format of the researcher asking a broad open question (for example, what did you all think about school?) and then following the lead of the young people in terms of where they took the discussion. I interrupted with another

question if the group drifted off topic and started talking about something completely un-related such as a film they had seen recently.

**Table 3.2 List of discussion groups**

Discussion Group	Programme	No. of Young People	Gender	Age	First or Repeat Group Discussion	Duration (hours)	Location
Group 1	Choices in Care	7	F	16-18	First	2.5	The Basement
Group 2	Choices in Care	5	F	16-18	Repeat (First:Group 1)	3	The Basement
Group 3	Motor Vehicle	8	M	16-17	First	1.5	The Basement
Group 4	Motor Vehicle	8	M	16-17	Repeat (First: Group 3)	1.5	The Basement
Group 5	Construction	10	M	16-18	First	1.5	The Basement
Group 6	Construction	10	M	16-18	Repeat (First: Group 5)	2	The Basement
Group 7	Choices in Care	5	F	16-18	First	3	The Basement
Group 8	Choices in Care	5	F	16-17	Repeat (First: Group 7)	1	Community Centre
Group 9	Motor Vehicle	5	M	16-18	First	1	The Basement
Group 10	Construction	8	M	16-18	First	1.5	The Basement
Group 11	Construction	8	M	16-18	Repeat (First: Group 10)	1.5	The Basement
Group 12	Choices in Care	10	F	16-18	First	2	The Basement
Group 13	Choices in Care	10	F	16-18	Repeat (First:Group 12)	2	The Basement
Group 14	Motor Vehicle	6	M	16-17	First	1.5	The Basement
Group 15	Construction	5	M	16-18	First	1.5	Falkirk College Health & Safety Test
Group 16	Construction	4	M	16-18	First	1.5	Falkirk College Health & Safety Test

Note: Groups shaded in grey (2, 15 and 16) are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. The reasons for choosing to present only these 3 discussion groups are discussed in the section below: Presentation of Discussion Group Data. I also refer to Groups 15 and 16 as part of the same discussion group as both of these discussions took place within the same context.

As shown in Table 3.2, fourteen of the discussion groups were conducted in The Basement. This is a space owned by Stirling council and where the majority of training programmes are conducted. The young people are familiar with this location and it provided the ideal setting for informal discussion groups. One discussion group was conducted at a community centre where a training programme was being piloted. I was unfamiliar with this particular group of young people, and as a result the discussion group was very brief. This provided further support for the ethnographic approach which I used with all other groups. I had spent time getting to know all other groups which resulted in lengthy informal discussion groups, this was not the case when I did not know the group. The final discussion group was conducted at a local college where the young people were sitting a health and safety test. This provided an excellent opportunity to collect data in a real-life setting. I also spoke to the youth worker accompanying the group and the health and safety tester, thereby gathering data within one context from a number of perspectives.

At the beginning of each discussion group I checked everyone was happy that the Mp3 recorder was switched on. During the 13 discussion groups conducted in the Basement, I ordered some pizza for the group. I always began the discussions by asking what everyone had been doing since their training programme ended. The discussions were semi - structured so the young people decided on the direction of the conversation. Usually I said very little. I had a list of topics which I wanted the group to discuss and if these did not occur naturally in conversation, then I asked specifically about them. These topics included experiences at school, jobs and employment, friends and family, the training programme, hopes and fears for the future, role models and social networking.

These discussion groups gave me a breadth of data and an in-depth insight into the lives of the young people who took part. I continued to collect data from discussion groups until the same issues were being discussed each time and with each new group. This gave me a sense that saturation had been reached, in terms of the relevant issues for these young people. As stated by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) “saturating data ensures replication in categories; replication verifies, and ensures comprehension and completeness”. In both conducting and analysing data from all of the discussion groups I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of these young people.

### **Presentation of Discussion Group Data**

In order to provide the reader with an in-depth insight into the dialogue and experiences of these young people, I have chosen to present the analysis and interpretation of only two of these discussion groups. This is a slightly unusual case study approach but one which I hope allows the reader a chance to familiarise themselves with the young participants in each discussion group. As Yin (2009, p. 2) states “case studies are the preferred method when [...] the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon in a real life context”. This research represents exactly what Yin described. This is important as often the impact of recognition is not an instant effect and we need to follow the interaction through each turn to gain an understanding of how young people are giving and receiving recognition within the group. It was felt that isolated quotes and excerpts would not illustrate this process as clearly as following a continuous dialogue. As Patton (1990) stated:

the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the

observational /analytical capabilities of the researcher than with the sample size

All of the discussion groups were analysed, but instead of presenting excerpts from each discussion group, it is hoped that by presenting the two selected discussion groups in full, the reader will gain a rich and comprehensive understanding of recognition as a socially situated process within the identities of these young people. Yin (2009) discusses the ways in which single cases can be used to represent a unique or extreme case. I have chosen to present two discussion groups one which I feel is representative and the other distinctive. It was necessary to conduct 16 discussion groups in order to feel confident that I had uncovered all the information relevant to the research questions and reached saturation. However, I present these two discussion groups as I feel they allow the reader to gain an in-depth understanding of the young participants.

The discussion group presented in Chapter 4 represents a typical discussion group. It was typical in the sense that, as with the majority of discussion groups, it was conducted in The Basement and involved discussion with everyone sitting around one table. I knew the group of girls well and all of the discussion issues were also discussed in other groups. One of the girls brought her boyfriend along with her; he had not participated in a Get Ready for Work Programme and did not say much during the discussion. The discussion group provided the opportunity for the group to catch up with each other after the training programme which had finished 3 months earlier. Some of the young people had managed to find employment while others were still looking. Discussion of their experiences provided an excellent insight into the recognition they give and receive within their peer group. Micro-

genesis is commonly used in developmental psychology and tracks behaviours movement-by-movement over a period of time (Lavelli *et al.*, 2004). Interpretation of this discussion group allows me to present an analysis of dialogue turn-by-turn throughout an entire discussion.

The discussion group presented in Chapter 5 is distinctive. This discussion group did not consist of young people sitting around a table it was conducted as the group of young people prepared to sit a health and safety test at a local college. The discussion group continued while the young people left in small groups to sit the test and then returned and received their results. This discussion group provided an excellent insight into recognition in a real-life setting. While chapter 4 presents an understanding of the impact of recognition within dialogue, the data in chapter 5 allow us to see this process translate into a real-life context. This chapter also highlights the structures of recognition which both young people and youth workers are immersed in. By beginning with an understanding of the micro-level real-time processes within dialogue, as shown in Chapter 4, we can then gain an insight into the role of recognition at a broader macro-level, which leads us into a discussion of structures of recognition in Chapter 5.

These two discussion groups were analysed in the same way as the remaining 14 and these data, coupled with field notes and interviews with key stakeholders, provide a rich interpretation of the identity construction of these young people and the importance of recognition. It is hoped that the micro- genetic approach to this research shown in these two discussion groups will give the reader an

understanding of the role of recognition within the identities of these young people both in a round the table discussion group and a real-life test setting. It is hoped that both of these discussion groups will show the fine grained information that is necessary to understand the role of recognition in identity construction.

## **Field Notes**

Throughout the research process, detailed field notes were taken which helped the researcher reflect on the time spent with young people. These notes were recorded by hand in a notebook which the researcher kept. They also supplement data analysis by adding information that was perhaps not adequately captured by the Mp3 recorder or when things occurred outwith the discussion groups and so were not recorded. As Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995, p. 28) discuss field notes are useful to note “the perspectives and concerns embedded and expressed in naturally occurring interaction”. Field notes ensure that any relevant non verbal communication can be noted, as well as the atmosphere in discussions, which may not be picked up from transcripts of dialogue alone. Further, field notes allowed the researcher to document her own thoughts and opinions which will add to and influence the data produced.

## **Analytical Framework**

All of the interviews and discussion groups, along with the researcher’s field notes, were analysed using the computer-based analysis tool Atlas/ti (Muhir 1997). The data were coded initially to explore young people’s views about school, council programmes, their parents, friends and family, other people’s opinions about them, the media, regrets and their hopes and fears for the future (see Appendix 2 for final

coding frame). This provides an insight into how young people see their lives and how this influences how they think about themselves.

Further analysis then moved on to explore the dialogical selves of the young people by coding all instances where young people talk in the voice of an 'other' in their life. These instances are also known as traces, which are defined as "any content that provides a clue as to the social processes that either produce or sustain a given discourse" (Gillespie, 2006, p. 159). More specifically, traces can be broken down into voices and echoes. A voice appears when young people directly quote or impersonate an 'other' person, such as when a young person quotes their parent saying 'you should get a job'. Echoes occur when there is no direct quote, but it is clear that the young person is referring to the voice of another, such as when a young person says 'you're meant to be good at school'; they are not directly quoting someone else but the reference to an authority figure is still present. This section of analysis relates to the theory that we have the ability to imagine different positions or perspectives, and these exist as the voices of others in our internal dialogue (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992). The coding frame is detailed in Appendix 3.

This type of analysis gave me an insight into the relevant issues for young people but also the significant others appearing in their dialogues. However, as the role of recognition emerged as a significant theme, it became more important to analyse/understand each discussion group in its entirety, therefore all discussion groups were transcribed and analysed verbatim from start to finish. This allowed the inclusion of previously disregarded nuances of dialogue, which give a great insight into the processes of recognition within each context. Returning to the importance of

the researcher's relationship with the young people, it is possible to present the data using individual and/or group case study illustrations. While individual stories will be discussed, it was deemed most effective to illustrate the dialogues of young people and explore the concept of recognition using two discussion groups; one chosen for representativeness and one chosen for distinctiveness.

## **Recognition Online**

Approximately 18 months into the research process, I observed and noted in my field notes the increasing amount of time young people were spending online, particularly interacting on social networking sites and also talking about these interactions offline. I was also using Bebo as a convenient and free way to keep in touch with young people and to arrange discussion groups. I therefore decided that in order to fully understand these young people's identity construction in relation to significant others, an analysis must also be conducted of the way they present themselves and interact with others online. The researcher set up a Bebo page which gave brief details about the research taking place. A balance was needed here, as I did not want young people to feel I was spying on them but I did want to make them aware of the research being conducted. I decided I would not restrict analysis to young people I had met in person but instead use a snow balling technique to gain access to young people's pages.

## **Sampling**

As Cooper, Schere and Mathy (2004) commented, "traditional research methods were not designed for the internet" (p. 437). The authors comment that research conducted online is often criticised on methodological grounds. However it is not

always appropriate, and at times near impossible, to sample in a strictly randomised way in this online context. For the purposes of the current research I was interested in how young people engaged with Bebo. I therefore adopted a snowballing technique which has been discussed in the wider literature as a means of studying hidden populations (for example, see Faugier & Sargeant 1997).

The normal procedure for interacting with people on a social networking site involves inviting someone to be your 'friend' – they receive a message and have the option to accept or reject you. Authors also have the option to make their pages private and if they choose to do this only those they have accepted as 'friends' will be able to view their page. If they have elected not to make their page private, it will be freely available in the public domain.

I firstly chose pages of 3 young people who had taken part in a broader ongoing study, and then chose the pages of their friends or partners who had chosen to make their pages public. This could be checked by entering the person's name or Bebo alias into Google - if the researcher could gain access to the page it was deemed to be in the public domain. Access to Bebo pages is discussed further in the Ethical Considerations section below. This was not a random sampling method but sampling this way allowed the researcher to analyse the pages individually while gaining information about the online peer group connections and interactions. I was looking for a sample of publicly available pages which were then analysed until recurring themes emerged. Initially, the research examined 14 personal web pages which were available in an online domain. As little was known about the way young people present themselves online, and in an attempt to be as unrestrictive as possible, the examination of pages was conducted in a snowballing way. Each time the researcher came across a new and interesting page, she would then examine

this person's friends' pages and add any public pages to the increasing sample. After 6 months, the sample had increased to 30 and a further 7 web pages were examined and analysed in the final 6 months of the study.

As shown in Table 3.4, a total of 37 Bebo pages were each accessed and monitored by the researcher on a fortnightly basis over a period of 18 months. Every fortnight the researcher would login to Bebo and view the pages saving a screenshot of the page and noting any changes. As I became increasingly interested in social networking sites, it became a topic of conversation within discussion groups with young people, although I was less concerned with what young people said about their online behaviour, and more focussed on examining their pages directly. The authors of the pages were thirteen males and twenty-four females, aged 16-18 (according to their Bebo page). The fewer numbers of males may be partly explained by a recent police operation (conducted across Central Scotland) which led to many Bebo pages being shut down. Some young men were displaying photographs of themselves posing with weapons and this led police to fear incidences of violence and gang culture. While it could be argued that this sampling method restricts the generalisability of the findings, considering the qualitative nature of this study, the goal is not to generalise but rather to explore more deeply the nature of this phenomenon (Rowan & Huston, 1997).

**Table 3.3 Breakdown of Bebo pages accessed**

Profile Analysed	Gender	Age (according to)	Approx no. of words in profile	First Accessed
1	F	16	78	June 2009
2	F	18	33	June 2009
3	M	17	58	June 2009
4	F	16	12	July 2009
5	F	16	60	July 2009
6	F	17	15	July 2009
7	F	17	90	July 2009
8	F	17	43	July 2009
9	F	16	20	July 2009
10	F	18	40	July 2009
11	F	17	35	July 2009
12	F	16	135	July 2009
13	F	16	200	July 2009
14	F	16	190	August 2009
15	F	15	20	August 2009
16	F	17	60	July 2009
17	F	18	131	July 2009
18	F	18	100	July 2009
19	F	17	240	July 2009
20	F	16	200	July 2009
21	M	16	70	July 2009
22	M	16	100	July 2009
23	M	16	110	July 2009
24	M	16	80	August 2009
25	M	17	140	August 2009
26	M	16	33	July 2009
27	M	18	20	July 2009
28	M	17	40	December 2009
29	M	18	60	December 2009
30	M	18	20	December 2009
31	F	16	100	December 2009
32	F	17	130	January 2010
33	F	18	80	January 2010
34	F	18	250	January 2010
35	F	16	240	January 2010
36	M	18	40	January 2010
37	M	17	80	January 2010

## Analysis

There is a vast amount of information on each Bebo page, and as this study was conducted as part of the wider research project, it was decided that analysis would be restricted to the profile section of each page. This section is most relevant as it is where young people present themselves to the wider audience. The quantity of data appearing on young people's profiles varies greatly, with some young people choosing as few as 10 words to describe themselves and others using 250 words. Each portion of text was copied into a word document preserving as much of the appearance (e.g. emoticons) as possible. Other information from this section was also noted, such as Profile Views and number of Love Hearts. The text was then analysed in a similar way to the discussion group data using Atlas/ti (Muhr 1997). The researcher identified and coded voices appearing within the profile and dialogue between friends (see Appendix 4 for final coding frame). The concept of recognition was also fully explored. Bebo pages also contain many images. These are extremely interesting, and are briefly mentioned in Chapter 6; due to time constraints I could not explore these fully. This would be a worthy topic of follow-on research.

There were several difficulties when it came to coding the Bebo pages. As illustrated and discussed in Chapter 6, young people are very creative with their pages and often distort language. For example "Awwww Hennnyyyy Youuuu Got Textssssss Dearrryyy ?" Translated into Queen's English, this reads "Oh Hen (slang term meaning girl) have you got any texts (text messages) dear?"

As with the discussion groups, the amount of time I spent with the young people familiarising myself with their language, colloquialisms and slang greatly helped in coding and interpreting the Bebo pages.

### **Internet Safety Campaign**

As a result of this research, I was invited to be part of a steering group with Central Scotland Police and other agencies looking into Internet Safety and young people. I explained from the outset that my primary focus was not internet safety (although I do acknowledge that this is a very important issue) but I wanted to bring to the group an understanding of how young people engage with social networking sites and what they gain from them. I argued that only when the police and other agencies have a clear understanding of these two issues can they devise effective messages to make young people safer online. I was given the opportunity to present my work at various local seminars and parents' evenings. This provided an ideal opportunity for feedback from several perspectives, including young people themselves, and proved an invaluable opportunity to make a contribution to the applied field.

### **Exploring the Disagreements and Misunderstandings between Participants and Employers**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the theory of the Dialogical Self (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1993) assumes that the voices within the self are internalisations of voices in society. For example, when preparing for a job interview we often rehearse the conversation we think we will have, taking the perspective of the interviewer. The extent to which an individual can take the perspective of the other is crucial for

effective communication (Rommetveit, 1974), and yet there is little access to this information contained, as it is, in silent, internal thoughts (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010). It is commonly assumed our knowledge of others' perspectives is accurate. However, literature suggests that the relation between what people think other people think and what those other people actually think, is often quite weak (Shrouger & Schoeneman, 1979; Cast, Stets & Burke, 1999). In order to try and understand the perspectives of young people and employers, I used a questionnaire based on original work by Laing, Philipson and Lee (1966).

The Interpersonal Perception Method (IPM) (Laing *et al.*, 1966) examines the relation between what people think other people think and what those other people actually think. The IPM is elaborate and enables the identification of many types of inter-subjective relationship (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). However, it is not used simply to assess accuracy of perspective taking. The IPM can also be used to identify relational patterns, misunderstandings, and the origin of particular perspectives or projected perspectives. Hence, this method is relevant to research on the dialogical self because it enables us to address the question of how the views held by others, and our views of them, have become entwined within the dialogical self.

An example of a question from Laing *et al.*'s (1966) original IPM questionnaire:

A. How true do you think the following are?  
She understands me.  
I understand her.  
She understands herself. I  
understand myself

B. How would SHE answer the following?

1. "I understand him"
2. "He understands me"
3. "I understand myself"
4. "He understands himself"

C. How would SHE think you have answered the following?

She understands me.

I understand her.

She understands herself. I

understand myself

Within the context of this research, the IPM allows the following specific questions about the perspectives of young people and employers to be answered:

Are there any disagreements between young people and employers?

Are there any misunderstandings between young people and employers?

Answering these questions will allow us to address any misunderstandings and improve the relationship between these two groups.

### **Strengths of the IPM**

One of the strengths of the IPM methodology is that it explores interpersonal perception without narrowing its focus to how accurate we are in knowing what others think of us. Many authors have discussed interpersonal perception (for example, see Hinton, 1993, Cook, 1971 and Jones, 1990), but few have considered the impact our views of others have on our own identities. Instead, researchers have focussed their attention on the accuracy of the perceptions we make about other people (for example, see Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). It is argued here that it is important to fully explore this area by questioning how these perceptions of others and what others think of us impact upon our individual identity development.

Towards the end of his book, Jones (1990) turns his attention to getting to know ourselves and states “self-knowledge can be a direct consequence of perceptions of others in our presence [...] it is obvious we can learn about ourselves by learning how others respond to us in the interaction sequence” (p. 201). This obvious fact had been highlighted previously by Laing *et al.*, (1966) who stated “self-identity is a synthesis of my looking at me with my view of others’ view of me” (p. 5). Based on this assumption, Laing *et al.* (1966) developed the IPM, which allows us to go beyond meta-accuracy and reveals many interesting divergences both within and between individuals or groups.

Another strength of the IPM method is the flexibility it allows. It is possible to take the original IPM questionnaire and adapt it to address the relevant issues within any given interaction (White, 1982). The IPM has been described as “a powerful measurement tool which can be flexibly adapted for the individual, dyad, and family as units of analysis” (White, 1982). The IPM can also reveal a great number of comparisons, allowing researchers the choice of exploring many different perspectives, both between and within individuals and groups. This yields a wealth of data in a relatively short period of time and with minimal costs compared to other methods such as qualitative interviews.

## **Pilot Study**

Laing *et al.*’s (1966) original questionnaire was adapted for the current study to address the most salient issues pertinent to young people and employers. As such, the process of developing and piloting the questionnaire was lengthy. To discover what these issues were for young people, the researcher re-analysed the data from

discussion groups. These data were then re-coded for any mention of employment or employers. Several themes emerged, including indecision about possible jobs, the importance of earning money, appearance when applying for jobs, employers and Bebo. In order to understand the issues from the employers' perspective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six local employers. These employers were selected as they come from a variety of businesses and offer work placements to young people participating in the council programmes. Five interviews took place at business premises and one interview was conducted in a local coffee shop. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two hours. The researcher did not ask employers to discuss specific young people, but instead asked what they think of young people and what they think young people think of them in more general terms. The themes from the discussion groups with young people were also used to inform the interviews with employers. Topics included: the importance of appearance, Bebo pages, what young people think of the council programmes and the struggle some young people have finding work.

In total, 19 statements were included in the questionnaire which the researcher felt captured all of the relevant issues (see Appendix 6 for pilot questionnaire). The purpose of the pilot was to trial the questionnaire, investigate whether or not there are any divergences of perspective between the two groups and then subsequently refine the questionnaire.

Six young people and six employers completed a set of questionnaires (one from each perspective: direct, meta and meta-meta). While a wealth of data was gained from the pilot, it is unnecessary to discuss it in great depth here.

## **From the pilot to the main study**

The scale used in the pilot study proved problematic as the 'Don't Know' option is only really relevant if it is expected that respondents will not be able to give a response. Since the IPM has been constructed from the thoughts and opinions of young people and employers and takes into account perspectives, it is appropriate to assume that all respondents would be able to comment on each question. Furthermore, in the original IPM, Laing *et al.* (1966) did not include a 'Don't Know' option. Their four point scale ranged from Very True, Slightly True, Slightly Untrue and Very Untrue. Appendix 2 shows the adapted questionnaire used in the main study; the 'Don't Know' option has been removed and the scale changed to mirror Laing *et al.*'s original scale. An extra question was also been added:

19) Young people who choose to wear baseball caps and tracksuits will cause trouble

This question was added in light of the stereotypes that appear in the media in relation to young people's choice of dress predicting bad behaviour. One recent article discussing gang violence in Easterhouse, Glasgow, described one young person:

Alan, 15, kitted out in the standard tracksuit and Burberry cap, says all he wants for his section (block of flats where he lives) is a shop. There is one a couple of streets away, but he can't get to it because "you just start fighting with people" (*The Guardian*, 25 March, 2009)

This article in the Guardian describes the way Alan is dressed using the word 'standard' to imply other young people dress this way and then links this to a quote about his behaviour. The result is a very negative image of a young person, dressed in a certain way, behaving violently.

Many businesses also operate a 'Hats Off, Hoods Down' policy. The presumption here is that young people will shoplift and will be harder to identify with hats on and hoods up. It therefore seems appropriate to ask young people and employers about their perspectives on the way young people dress, and the impression this creates about their behaviour.

## **Main Study**

In the main study, 33 young people and 29 employers completed the IPM questionnaires (see Appendix 2 for an example of the questionnaire used in the main study). The young people were all participating in training programmes at the time of data collection and were chosen as they were already familiar with the researcher and the research being conducted. At times it was most appropriate to ask young people to fill out the questionnaires at the end of discussion groups. This often resulted in unplanned but very interesting data being recorded, which captured young people's comments about the issues raised on the questionnaire and the questionnaire itself.

The 29 employers were all local to the Stirlingshire area. The employers were selected on the basis that they had some knowledge of the council training programmes and had previously offered work placements to young people. The

employers also represented various businesses including car garages, retail shops, nurseries and elderly care homes. These businesses often provide entry level jobs to job seekers. These employers are representative of employers who would commonly provide opportunities to the young people who have also taken part in this research and therefore can provide relevant perspectives about these young people. All of the employers had met the researcher on at least one occasion prior to completing the questionnaire. These employers were selected as they ran businesses which often employed young people.

I was often involved in visiting young people at their work placements and this gave the ideal opportunity to ask each employer to complete the questionnaires. The sample size is small as it did not seem appropriate to send questionnaires out by email or post. Many employers offered to fill them out at a later date and send them back to the researcher. However, I wanted to do as much as possible to ensure participants, both young people and employers, understood the questionnaires, particularly the third questionnaire investigating meta- metaperspectives, which could be considered confusing, and the researcher's presence allowed any questions to be answered and any other relevant comments about the questionnaire or research to be noted.

Each questionnaire set comprised of 3 separate questionnaires, printed out and collated separately. In order to gain the direct, meta and meta- metaperspectives, each participant was asked to complete the same questionnaire three times. Firstly, responding what do you think? Secondly, what do you think young people/employers think? And finally what do you think young people/employers think you think? The

questionnaires were completed in ballpoint pen and statistical analyses were conducted using statistical software package SPSS 14.0 for Windows.

To take the analysis one stage further than the pilot study, and give a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of the divergences both between and within groups, Mann Whitney-U tests were conducted on all comparisons. The use of this non-parametric test is due to the fact that it cannot be assumed that variances in this data set are equal and that the distribution is symmetric. This test is preferable to a transformation, because the use of transformations can be problematic, in particular when sample sizes are small. Furthermore, non-parametric tests make fewer assumptions about the format of the data (i.e., don't assume a normal distribution), and they may therefore be preferable when the assumptions required for parametric methods are not valid. Nonparametric methods can be useful for dealing with unexpected, outlying observations that might be problematic with a parametric approach. In this case participants were asked to make a forced choice (4 options - agree/disagree) resulting in some skewed distributions (i.e., with the majority of people agreeing or disagreeing) this is justification for using non-parametric tests because the data violates the assumptions of normal distribution. These results are discussed in-depth in Chapter 7.

### **Limitations of the IPM Questionnaire**

The IPM questionnaire model relies on the individuals completing the questionnaires to self-report their perspectives, which, especially at the third level of meta-metaperspectives, can be tricky and hard for respondents to conceptualise. This is

not because meta-metaperspectives do not exist, but because they are hard for participants, both employers and young people, to articulate. It is quite straightforward to report your own perspective, and likewise to report another's perspective, but difficulty arises when you have to internally combine these thoughts to report a perspective based on what you think another thinks you think. However, meta-metaperspectives do appear in everyday interactions, and are somewhat easier to identify in dialogue. Take, for example, the following statement from Lorna, an employer, about some young people she has employed in the past: "I thought they actually think that they're doing me a favour coming here". Here, we can identify a meta- metaperspective. Lorna thinks that the young people think that they are doing her a favour i.e. "I thought (direct perspective) they actually think (young people think = meta perspective) that they're doing me (meta-meta perspective) a favour coming here. However, for Lorna, this type of reflection is much harder to self-report in the questionnaire form of the interpersonal perception method.

Many comparisons were applied to the data collected from the IPM questionnaires, but not all of these were useful and meaningful. Meta- metaperspectives, that is what young people think employers think young people think, are problematic for several reasons. Firstly, although they occur in dialogue, for example "I thought they actually think that they're doing me a favour coming here", they are extremely difficult to self report using a questionnaire style methodology. This is also reflected in the small body of literature which discusses meta-metaperspectives. Meta-metaperspectives are either conspicuously absent (e.g. Assaa-Eley & Kimberlin, 2005; Kenny, 1994 and Scheff, 1967) or they produce unclear results (e.g. Allen & Thompson, 1984).

It could also be argued that certain items on the questionnaire used in this study had 'inbuilt' meta-perspectives, which made interpreting the responses very difficult. For example:

17) Young people care what employers think of them

Responses to this question at the level of meta-metaperspectives are very difficult to interpret and convey in a way that is meaningful to the reader. The result can be a very wordy explanation 'young people think that employers think that young people think young people care what employers think of them'. At this level of interpretation, these comparisons, while interesting, do not add anything to our understanding of the issue.

As mentioned earlier, the IPM is an extremely versatile method, and while every effort was taken to include relevant items, upon reflection I suggest the IPM would have benefitted from one further question relating to young people's willingness to travel to find work. This issue has arisen in my research with many young people commenting that they would prefer to work locally and others refusing a work placement in another town or village. Often this is due to transport issues and a lack of confidence using public transport. It was also highlighted by Canny (2004) who stated that employers "alluded to the inability or unwillingness on the part of some young people to travel outside their local area to find employment" (p. 503). The IPM would have potentially illustrated whether both young people and employers agreed or understood whether or not this is a problematic issue.

The current study could also be accused of being slightly one sided in favour of young people's points of view. I have only thought about the changing and transitional nature of young people's working lives from their point of view and as a situation which employers should merely accept. I did not think about how this might impact upon employers and their businesses as Canny (2004) concluded "few employers considered that their young workers would remain with them long term, this may signify a reluctance on their part to provide internal education/training opportunities" (p. 511). However, I feel that Canny's observation further adds to the negative way in which young people are seen by employers. This is something which must change if the relationship between young people and employers is to be based on a mutual understanding, which will hopefully reduce the youth unemployment figures.

### **"Your Phd, what? Your Poofy Hair Do!" The Role of the Researcher**

My voice appears briefly in Chapters 4 and 5. My input to the discussion groups was minimal, but this does not mean that I, as a researcher, did not have an influence on what was discussed. Researcher was my overarching role within this research process, but within the context of a group discussion, I occupied several roles. For example, I was more educated than all of the young people and had a very positive experience with the education system. This meant that when they were talking about 'geeks' everyone was aware I fell into this category. Mainly this was mentioned in humour and I welcomed the honesty of the young people, some of them said they thought I was 'posh' but this did not bother them because I was interested in what

they had to say (unlike other 'posh' people they have come across). The difference between our experiences, however, led some young people to say that I would only understand what life was like for them if I walked in their shoes.

I was also associated with the council and this caused some slight tension when it came to discussing the council programmes. At times I found it difficult to explain my role clearly to young people. The youth workers considered me another member of staff and I distanced myself slightly so I was not considered a member of their group, but the resulting position was quite vague. This did not tend to cause any problems until there was tension between the young people and council/youth worker. During times of tension I was expected to take sides and this became tricky; I often tried to overcome this by acting as mediator between the group and youth worker.

In terms of recognition, it became clear during analysis that at times young people were trying to work out what recognition was on offer from me – I, as a researcher, I as educated (posh), I as female (boys trying to demonstrate physical strength), I as a youth worker. Although this was never explicitly discussed, it is worth noting. Also, it was important to me as a researcher that I developed good relationships with young people and built their trust, which meant balancing my personal experiences and acknowledging them as different, but positioning myself as interested in young people's experiences. An example of this would be my description of my time at school – I would always say I was lucky that I enjoyed school and had good teachers, but I was aware that not everyone had the same experience and therefore I wanted to understand more about their time at school.

It is argued that the role of researcher is central to the research process and should not be overlooked. From the planning, throughout the analysis, to the write up stage, my role as researcher was key. This links back to the previous discussion about field notes. My field notes have captured my thoughts and perspectives throughout the research and add to the interpretation and analysis in the following chapters. When analysing my data, I was able to use my field notes as reminders of anything a young person may have said/done during their time on the programme. For example, in my field notes I noted any arguments or points of tension between different group members. I was aware of these while conducting the discussion groups and this often meant I had a fuller understanding of why some comments were made in a sarcastic tone.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Each phase of this research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Psychology Department at the University of Stirling. Throughout the research process, I did my utmost to ensure I built good relationships with young people. This may sound simplistic but is often taken for granted in the research process. Taking time to build these relationships meant that I was sensitive to each young person's circumstances and acted accordingly. I am a trained youth worker which includes training in child protection and how to deal with challenging situations. Care was also taken to protect each young person's identity – names were changed throughout and identifying features removed. I also remained aware of the context within which I met with young people. The majority of discussion groups took place within The Basement, a city centre local authority owned space, which the young people were familiar with. The only discussion group not to take place

here was conducted at a local college campus. If I met with a young person individually, this was done in a public place, usually a local coffee shop.

Additional consideration was given when analysing Bebo pages online. This was necessary as there is some ambiguity surrounding the age of young people online. Much care was taken that only pages appearing in the public domain were analysed, that is, pages that young people had chosen not to make private. I checked this by typing the name/username of the young person into Google, if I could gain access to the Bebo page via this public search engine, then the page was deemed to be in the public domain. Issues around social networking pages are well documented in the media and are attracting growing attention from researchers. Social networking has been linked to several issues, including cyber-bullying (Kowalski, Limber & Agaston, 2008) and identity theft (Bilge, Strufe, Balzarotti & Kirida, 2009). I was very much aware of the sensitivity of collecting data from this source. Care was also taken in changing young people's names and removing any identifiable information when reporting online material.

At all times young people were made aware of my role as a researcher, including noting this on my own Bebo page, and whenever possible I would share transcripts of discussion groups and discuss their thoughts on my interpretation of what was said.

## **Triangulation**

The following four empirical chapters discuss the interpretation of three distinct data sets: discussion groups, social networking pages and questionnaire data.

Separately these data sets are interesting, but they have been combined to provide a richer and fuller understanding not only of young peoples' lives but also of how they construct their identities and the role of recognition within this. This research draws on the argument Fielding and Fielding (1986, p. 33) make when they state "we should combine theories and methods carefully and purposefully with the intention of adding breadth or depth to our analysis". The combination of methods and resulting data give an in-depth insight into the way these young people construct their identities and thus should not be subject to the criticisms often directed at qualitative work.

Often the debate surrounding qualitative research has questioned the validity, reliability and replicability of such work. In order to address such concerns, researchers have often used a number of different methods in triangulation.

However, the point here is not to suggest, as done in quantitative research, that if several methods reveal the same data, then we can conclusively believe it to be true.

Triangulation used in this way assumes a single fixed reality that can be known objectively through the use of multiple methods of social research (Seale, 1999). As Willig (2001, p. 71) states, "triangulation enriches case study research as it allows the researcher to explore the case from a number of different perspectives". The following four empirical chapters allow the reader to see the way young people give and deny recognition within discussions with their peer group, the way they engage

with the social networking site, Bebo, to gain recognition and finally the relationship between these young people and employers, specifically their disagreements and misunderstandings.

The combination of these three data sets gives an insight into the multiple perspectives involved in the dialogical self and the complex nature of adolescent identity development in a time of transition. Further, it allows the reader to gain an understanding of three different structures of recognition in the lives of these young people. For example, the recognition young people give and deny each other in their peer groups for working in a particular job, the recognition they gain online for receiving a large number of love hearts and the lack of recognition they often feel from employers. The concluding chapter will then bring these three data sets together, and show the ways in which young people can find themselves caught between different structures of recognition and the resulting impact this can have on their identity and behaviour.

## **Chapter 4: Recognition in Peer Groups**

How do young people give and receive recognition in their peer group? As previously discussed I met with several groups of young people participating in Get Ready for Work training programmes. I will begin by broadly describing these groups, then in order to familiarise the reader with the dialogue of these young people I will present an analysis from one discussion group in its entirety. It is more common for researchers to present excerpts from discussion groups but in order to fully explore the identities of young people and examine the role of recognition it is argued that it would be beneficial to immerse the reader in the context of a group discussion. This will allow an insight into the lives and experiences of these young people.

### **Get Ready for Work Training Programme Groups**

I met with 9 separate groups of young people throughout the research process. Three groups of young people were on an Access to Motor Vehicle Programme, one group of young people on a Construction programme and five groups of young people on a Choices in Care training programme. Due to the ethnographic nature of the research there is unequal distribution across programmes, this was due to the programmes available (for example often two programmes were running simultaneously however it proved difficult for the researcher to spend time getting to know more than one group at any given time; therefore depth was favoured over even sample distribution).

All of the 79 young people who took part in the research lived in the Stirlingshire and Clackmannanshire area. This covers quite a large area of central Scotland and often young people would spend over an hour travelling to and from the training programme each day. Young people had a variety of living situations. Many lived at home in 1 or 2 parent families, very few were only children, some young people were living in homeless or emergency accommodation. It was not uncommon for living circumstances to change frequently throughout the training programme. All young people attended local primary and secondary schools and the majority of the sample had chosen to leave school at the first opportunity, (the legal school leaving age is 16) if not before. A few young people had no qualifications as they did not sit their standard grade exams. The majority of the young people who took part in this research had standard grade qualifications at foundation level.

### **A Typical Peer Group Discussion**

The following transcript is from a discussion group conducted early in the research process in 2008. I have chosen to present this data for several reasons. Firstly, this discussion group gives an insight into the diverse experiences of these young people. I am not claiming that this discussion group is typical. Nor does it cover all the issues that became relevant to my analysis of the full sample. But neither are the experiences discussed here isolated or unusual examples when compared with those of others. The five girls who took part in this discussion group had all recently completed a 26 week Choices in Care training programme. I had met them frequently throughout the programme and established a good rapport with this group. Jennie's boyfriend also came along with her but chose not to take part in the discussion group. The following analysis will provide an in-depth discussion of the

role of recognition within the identities of these young people and also an understanding of the structures of recognition which emerge in this discussion group.

### **Introducing the Participants**

Natalie was 17 at the time of this discussion group. Due to family fall outs Natalie had left home and was supported in her own tenancy. Natalie had a boyfriend, Jamie, and after completing the Choices in Care programme had realised that working in the care sector was not what she wanted to do. She was more interested in admin work and initially found work at Falkirk football stadium and then moved from there into a position with Central Scotland police. Natalie had a strange phobia of never wanting to be too far away from a hospital. The group were taken canoeing as part of a team building event and this caused great stress to Natalie who did not like being in the country side or 'the middle of nowhere'.

Jennie was 16 at the time of this discussion group. Jennie's mum was an alcoholic and as a result Jennie lived in homeless accommodation on the outskirts of Stirling. Of all the group members Jennie had the most turbulent and chaotic life. This was fuelled by infrequent contact with her mum and issues with Jennie's homeless accommodation. Jennie found it hard not to have groups of visitors at her flat and threw weekly parties, and this resulted in Jennie struggling to keep in a regular routine. Jennie also had a very bad temper, she was constantly cheeky to staff and often had confrontations and disagreements with other group members. Due to a number of pending police investigations and minor charges it had been difficult for Stirling Council staff to arrange a work placement for Jennie as she needed an enhanced disclosure check. Her closest friend in the group is Emma.

Emma was 17 when this discussion group took place. Emma lived at home with her mum, dad and sister. Her younger sister was achieving well at school and Emma describes how she felt constantly compared to her. Emma is reluctant to take money from her parents and is committed to finding a job within the care sector. Emma has a few qualifications and has previously applied to university. Emma tries to live a similar lifestyle to Jennie but this often causes arguments and conflict relating to her parents' curfews. Emma is often the voice of reason within the group.

Angela was 16 when the discussion group took place. Angela had a very bad experience with the education system which she prefers to not discuss. Angela lives at home with her mum and dad and two siblings. Her parents are both unemployed and are putting some pressure on Angela to contribute financially to the household. Angela is one of the quietest members of the group and often struggles to be heard over the louder characters such as Natalie and Jennie. When it comes to employment Angela would like to work in the care sector and has no problem starting off as a domestic cleaning assistant if this means she can gain employment (many young people are not taken on as a care assistant until they are over 18).

Michaela was 16 when the discussion group took place. Michaela was very close friends with Jodie during the programme but unfortunately Jodie couldn't

make it along to the discussion group. Michaela also lives at home with her parents and 3 siblings. Although Jennie is also unemployed, Michaela gets much more criticism from other group members for her lack of employment. While the other girls follow the fashion of their peer group Michaela looks noticeably different. She regularly dyes her blonde hair bright colours such as pink and green, she has several tattoos including the recent addition of her initial letter M on her wrist. Michaela always has the latest phone which riles the group. Michaela has always stated that she wants to work in an elderly nursing home but unlike Angela she is less willing to accept a job of domestic assistant until she turns 18. Michaela had a work placement at a local care home but due to her age and lack of motivation they did not offer her continued work.

## **Analysis**

As described in Chapter 3 this discussion takes place in the Basement which is a small building with two rooms and a kitchen which is used for the training programmes. We are all seated round an oval shaped table. I bought the group some pizza and juice and I turn my MP3 recorder on:

**Natalie:** Ken what you should dae you should bury it and go n get it 10 years later [referring to the MP3 recorder]

**Emma:** Whit?

**Angela:** Naw she needs it  
[Everyone laughs]

The girls seem a bit distracted by the Mp3 recorder and start shouting into it

**Emma:** Is that on?  
**LW:** Yeah  
**Jennie:** Hello to you  
**Emma:** You wee  
shite  
**Jennie:** You wee shite  
[Everyone laughs]  
**LW:** What're you like, no one else is going to hear it, it's just, it's just me. Em, right I just wanted to, I know we've spoke a bit about it so far but just since I've turned that on now, em, I just wanted to catch up a bit about what you's have all been up to so, em , I don't know who wants to start but I haven't seen you's since March time, at the presentation.

At the beginning of the discussion the girls seem preoccupied and distracted by the MP3 recorder. This is perhaps because turning on the recorder immediately makes the atmosphere slightly different. Some groups became quieter when the recorder was turned on but this group chose to focus on it. Natalie begins by suggesting that we treat the recorder like a time capsule. This may also indicate that the girls know that this will capture their thoughts at this particular time in their life. Interestingly, I bumped into Natalie in the local shopping centre in November 2009 and she said that she had recently found some of the transcripts (all young people were given the opportunity to see the transcripts and comment on them). Natalie thought it was very funny to look back on what she was saying at this time in her life. In this opening excerpt Emma and Jennie's friendship is visible as Jennie repeats what Emma has just said. The girls have different personalities and Emma often has to defend Jennie who had a fiery temper. I then explain that no one else is going to hear the recording, as this discussion group was conducted early in my research I had not yet realised that it is more effective to turn the recorder on at the very beginning as

young people are arriving. So, there has already been some discussion as young people met up and we sorted out the food. I explain to them that I just want to catch up and find out what they've been up to in the 2 months since the programme finished.

Primary Action	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Aye we finished on March the 9th and I wasn't there
Recognition	{ <b><u>Angela:</u></b>	Aye we ken [know]
	{ <b><u>Emma:</u></b>	We know
Reaction	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Sorry for letting you's all down girls

During all 16 discussion groups training programmes were discussed 53 times. This discussion group was the first time these girls had seen each other since the end of their Choices in Care programme. At the end of each programme there is a small presentation of certificates and celebration of each young person's achievements. Jennie immediately states that she "wasn't there". This is a strange thing to say in a way because everyone round the table, including myself, knows that Jennie wasn't there, hence the reason Angela says "aye we ken" and Emma follows with "we know". It is clear that Jennie cared about the presentation, this discussion took place two months later and she can still recall the exact date and she goes on to talk about specific aspects of the presentation. Jennie was perhaps expecting the girls to give her a hard time so by mentioning it up front she felt she could keep more control over the conversation. It seems Jennie is also looking for an opportunity to explain her absence or pre-empting a challenge from the rest of the group as she then says "sorry for letting you's all down girls". If we analyse this in terms of the 3 step process for recognition (as illustrated in Figure 2.1) we can see that the recognition Jennie receives from Angela and Emma influences her reaction. If the girls had not responded to Jennie's comment about her absence then she may have

found it harder to make her apology. Jennie is also assuming that the group were disappointed by her absence although there has been nothing in the discussion to suggest this. If Emma and Angela had commented that they either didn't notice Jennie was missing at the presentation or that they were pleased that she didn't turn up then Jennie's response would have been different or not uttered at all. It seems Jennie wanted to apologise and in order to do so had to try to provoke a reaction from the group which she could then respond to with an apology. The girls' reaction could have been stronger and more negative but the very least Jennie needed in order to apologise was the recognition from the group that they were aware of her absence on the day of the presentation and Angela and Emma both gave this recognition.

Jennie is a very strong character in the group and in preparation for the presentation she had taken on quite a big part in a role play the group were going to perform to tell the audience about the programme. The girls were really disappointed when she didn't show up without explanation and now, even though 2 months have passed, they give her a hard time about it and she genuinely apologises. This apology may not have been voiced if the girls had not responded to her original statement "I wasn't there". The conversation continues:

**Natalie:** Aye I forgot to get you about that, whit are you aw about?  
**LW:** How come you missed it?  
**Emma:** She wiz gassed  
**Natalie:** Do you ken that was so bugged up because you werne there, you hud a big part and everybody just looked dolly, wiz it you that just came on stage and ...

Natalie now grills Jennie and makes her feelings clear. She states that she had forgotten Jennie didn't attend the presentation but now that it has been mentioned Natalie asks a rhetorical question "whit are you aw about?" This challenges Jennie to explain herself further but she doesn't respond so I then ask, in a less challenging way "how come you missed it". Emma then tries to lighten the mood by jokingly saying Jennie was "gassed" (drunk). However, Natalie continues to try to make Jennie feel bad by saying that the presentation was "buggered up" because Jennie wasn't there and that Jennie's absence meant everyone else looked "dolly" or stupid in front of the audience. Natalie and Jennie often vie for position of top dog within the group and Jennie's absence at the presentation gives Natalie an opportunity to put her down in front of the others. The atmosphere was still fairly light hearted and instead of responding directly to Natalie's comments Jennie asks about how the presentation was carried out without her. It seems that Jennie has enough power and status within the group to know that she has apologised once and does not need to keep trying to gain the groups' forgiveness:

**Jennie:** Did she [referring to Emma] no have to do 2 bits?  
**Natalie:** Aye she made it work she made everything [referring to Emma] funny but it wasne intentionally  
**Emma:** I was feelin such a fanny I was like that, whit  
**LW:** It was good tho  
**Jennie:** Did anybody dae the falling act?  
**Emma:** Nut, I never done anything right! Like what we said, I just kinda came on and ...  
**Jennie:** I felt well bad, but I wouldne have made it, I slept in  
**Angela:** Aye [disbelieving]  
**Jennie:** I did, slept in  
**Emma:** Aw well who cares

There's an interesting exchange here as Jennie asks "did she no have to do 2 bits?" Firstly, this shows that Jennie does have some knowledge of what happened at the presentation and this may have been fed back from Emma as they are friends out with the training programme. Natalie then gives recognition to Emma but saying that "she made everything work". Natalie gives Emma a bit of a back-handed compliment as she says that Emma made the presentation funny but it was not intentionally funny. Emma was embarrassed to be in the limelight at the presentation and this show when she reflects back on it and says she was "feelin such a fanny" (fanny is a British word for vagina but also means fool). I respond by saying that despite Emma's embarrassment the presentation was good. Jennie then asks if anyone did a falling act which they had rehearsed to demonstrate their manual handling skills. This question indicates that the presentation did hold some importance for Jennie and her reasons for missing it seem unclear she goes onto say she felt "well bad". However, Angela does not seem to believe her excuse that she slept in. I think that Jennie avoided the presentation due to nerves and a lack of confidence. Jennie definitely has the loudest voice and the most to say within her peer group but this might not have been the case in a strange environment with an unfamiliar audience which mainly consist of managers from the council. There is also another reason why Jennie would have missed the presentation, the girls can invite friends and family to come along, however Jennie's mum is an alcoholic and she has never mentioned any other family therefore she might have wanted to avoid the presentation so she would not draw attention to the fact no one was there to support her. Jennie tries to defend herself and convince the group that she slept in, Emma then tries to diffuse the situation and move the conversation away from this topic by saying "aw well who cares". This leaves the matter unresolved but without a better

explanation it seems the group are not going to openly forgive Jennie but they are prepared to forget about it and talk about something else. Following Emma's cue I ask:

	<b><u>LW:</u></b>	so what've you been up to since then?
Primary Action	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Looking for a job ... no got one
Recognition	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	Shut up when's the last time you looked for a job?
Reaction	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	I got an application through the door the other day there
	<b><u>Natalie:</u></b>	Is that what you call looking for a job?
	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Aye [yes]

Unemployment was discussed 27 times during the 16 discussion groups. Here, the girls who are working try to provide some peer support to Jennie who admits she is struggling to find work. Jennie may have been aware that Natalie, Emma and Angela are all employed so she immediately responds to explain her situation. Emma responds negatively by saying "shut up" and asking Jennie when she last looked for a job. This may seem highly derogatory but Emma can almost get away with talking to Jennie like this because they are friends and it may be due to that friendship that Emma knows Jennie has not been actively seeking work as her statement would suggest. Jennie defends herself and responds to Emma's comment by saying that she "got an application (form) through the door the other day. Interestingly Jennie is not in a position to challenge Emma in return. Natalie then mocks Jennie by asking "is that what you call looking for a job?" Jennie takes this less kindly to this comment from Natalie illustrated by her one word reply "aye". Natalie has been the most successful member of the group and since leaving the programme has managed to gain full time employment as an administrator for

Central Scotland Police. This puts Natalie in a powerful position when it comes to criticising Jennie for her supposed lack of effort in finding employment. Natalie's advice continues:

- Natalie:** You're supposed to be in and out the shops everyday  
**Jennie:** I go once a week, dinne like the town, its foo ey [full of] people...  
**Natalie:** You don't need to go up the toon go somewhere on the Glasgow road, go to the King Robert, go to the Greenyards  
**Jennie:** Oh aye I never thought about that

It is unclear who Natalie is referring to when she says "you're supposed" to be in and out of the shops everyday but this may indicate society's expectations that people should be employed. This relates to Wertsch's (1990) observations that through our utterances voices of groups and institutions can be heard. This seems particularly relevant here as Natalie continues to assume the role of careers advisor. Natalie's comment also hints at the struggle for jobs as Jennie has never said that she would like to work in a shop but young people know that this is where the majority of vacancies suitable for them are found in retail. So, even though Jennie has just completed a Choices in Care training programme the advice from her friends and pressure from society is pushing her towards any job. Jennie responds by saying that she does not like the town. Jennie lives in homeless accommodation on the outskirts of Stirling, although she attended the training programme in the town centre since it has finished she no longer has the need to be in the town and prefers to stay in her comfort zone (this is indicative of the limited social geographies which many young people in this sample had). Natalie then tailors her advice and suggests potential employers nearer to where Jennie stays. Jennie then concedes by saying

she “never thought about that”. Jennie is an example of a young person who has influence and power in some contexts (e.g. with her peers) but is afraid to move into new contexts where she will have few opportunities to feel a sense of influence. The conversation continues:

**LW:** [to Natalie] You could get a job in the careers centre (laughs) telling people where to go  
**Natalie:** I'll let you know if there's any jobs that come up in the police station  
**Jennie:** Do you think they'll take me on  
**Natalie:** Aye in the cell [giggles]

I make a joke as Natalie seems to be taking on the role of a careers advisor. Many young people talked about career advice they had received. This topic was discussed 14 times during all 16 discussion groups. They said this was usually poor and unrealistic. There seems to be a deliberate attempt to give good advice here. Natalie then continues by saying she will let Jennie know if “any jobs come up in the police station”. This is perhaps an attempt by Natalie to mention her job. Jennie then questions whether or not they would take her on, this is not asked in a serious way but more in a way which highlights Jennie’s awareness of how others would view her and her situation. Natalie then jokes “aye in the cell”, Jennie has been in trouble with the police before although she does not have a criminal record. The conversation continues:

**LW:** [to Jennie] What kind thing are you wantin to do?  
**Jennie:** Anything that pays  
**Natalie:** That's the main thing at least you're not saying I dinne want to dae this I dinne want to dae that



**Jennie:** I was just going to say minus anything to dae with chippies or anything like that cause I'd just munch

**Natalie:** What about the Tavern thing?

**Emma:** They're aw guffs that work in there

**Natalie:** Holybank?

**Jennie:** I've applied for them before I think

**Natalie:** The little Pakistani shop round the house [everyone giggles] on the corner

**Emma:** You arne [are not] getting a job there, get away, ask Twig [a friend] to get you a job how come ..

There are several interesting things to note from this section of dialogue. The girls are discussing Jennie's search for work. Job hunting was another frequently discussed topic arising 31 times during all of the discussion groups. When I ask what she wants to do Jennie replies "anything that pays" this highlights the need for money which is especially the case for Jennie as she has few other sources of support. Also, Jennie may struggle to feel included in her peer group if they all begin earning money which allows them to take part in more expensive activities and she is left behind. Natalie's comment is again reflective of a wider societal pressure to take any job and the saying 'beggars can't be choosers'. Jennie states that she does not want to work in a chip shop or anywhere similar because she would just "munch" (eat) all the time. Natalie continues to make suggestions and suggests a local pub (the Tavern). Emma then says "they're aw guffs that work in there" this illustrates how Emma is negatively recognising another context. This is nothing to do with the type of work but is more connected to the people who work there (a 'guff' is a derogatory term used to imply stupidity). Natalie suggests a local restaurant which Jennie thinks she has applied to in the past. This also highlights the fact that if a young person is denied recognition once they are unlikely to keep going back and trying again. Although Jennie was unsuccessful in the past she may be successful if

she applies again but she is unwilling to do this for fear of further rejection. Natalie then suggests a convenience store and over emphasises the word 'Pakistani' which in a paradoxical way ensures that she is being politically correct, the fact that everyone laughs at this indicates that she would not usually have described the shop in this way and is perhaps only doing so because she is being recorded. Again, before Jennie can reply Emma states "you arne gettin g a job there" there is a stigma associated with this shop and Emma is very clear that it would not be a good idea for Jennie to ask for a job there. Emma suggests that Jennie asks a friend to get her a job. Many young people find work through word of mouth and suggestions from others. A recommendation from a friend gives a job recognition and status and deems it an acceptable occupation and place to work. It is worth noting at this point that Michaela has not taken part in the discussion so far, this is perhaps because she is unemployed like Jennie but rather than want to highlight it and discuss it she is keeping quiet.

[Janitor comes in to clean the building]

	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	You're on tape
	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	How come twig (a friend of Jennie's) wouldne get ye a job?
	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	I dinne want a job in there, he's gonne say te see the guy that barred us because you were in there with your fake ID n mucked it up, he's gonne see about a job at Pirnhall
	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	Where's that?
	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Right at the end
	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	Aw aye, watch her trekking up there
	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Aye right it's only a 2 minute walk
Primary Action	<b><u>Natalie:</u></b>	I got the bus from my work tae here
Recognition	{	[Jennie laughs]

Reaction                      **Emma:**                      You're lazy  
   **Natalie:**                      I get the bus tae the toon [town] every  
   lunch, well every lunch I'm goin oot

Jennie makes a comment to the Janitor and then Emma returns to the conversation by asking Jennie "how come Twig wouldne get ye a job". Jennie's friend Twig works in a pub that Jennie and Emma have drunk in using fake IDs when they were underage. Jennie's reply is mocking and sarcastic and she says that Twig can hardly ask someone to give her a job when that person caught her and Emma with fake IDs but she does say that her friend is going to help her find work in another local restaurant. The girls discuss how far away this is from Jennie's accommodation which again relates back to wanting to work close to home. However, Jennie says it's only a 2 minute walk. Natalie dislikes walking anywhere and admits to getting the bus from her work into town which is less than half a mile away. Jennie laughs at this and Emma calls her lazy but this is not meant to be offensive and is not taken as such. If we take these last 3 utterances and examine them within the 3 step model then we can see that Natalie admits to getting the bus a very short distance and Jennie and Emma respond by mocking her but this is not perceived to be a serious insult and therefore Natalie responds by re-iterating her point. If Natalie had perceived the recognition from Jennie and Emma as insulting and offensive then she may have felt the need to defend herself. I try to include Angela in the discussion:

**LW:**                      What about you Angela what've you been up to, you were saying you're working now

**Angela:** Aye  
**LW:** Yeah, when did you start there?  
**Angela:** About 2 month ago....  
**Natalie:** I need the toilet  
**LW:** She's cleaning thum  
**Jennie:** Ya fucking idiot  
**Emma:** She's cleaning the toilet  
**Natalie:** Aye but she's no cleaning two at the once!  
[Jennie laughs]  
**Emma:** She might be  
**Angela:** That's whit I dae  
**LW:** Sorry so when did you start there?

Angela is quieter and more reluctant to talk about her work initially. During the training programmes the young people are all unemployed and this unites them. However, by the time of the discussion groups some young people had found work and although this is perceived to be a positive thing it often alienated them from their unemployed peers. Work was discussed 34 times during all 16 discussion groups. As Angela explains that she has been working for the past 2 months, Natalie interrupts by announcing that she needs the toilet. At the time this did not seem too out of place as I was used to Natalie being very chatty and bubbly but we can see here that when the conversation has moved away from Natalie she immediately brings the attention back to herself by announcing that she needs the toilet and this is only a matter of minutes after the janitor came in to tell us she was going to clean them. Jennie's more boisterous side is shown when she jokingly calls Natalie a "fucking idiot" this perhaps Jennie's chance to exert her power after being on the receiving end of Natalie's ridicule and advice. Natalie makes a joke that the janitor cannot clean two toilets at once and then Angela tries to re-enter the conversation by saying that's what she does. The conversation continues:

Primary Action	<b><u>Angela:</u></b>	2 month ago
Recognition	<b><u>LW:</u></b>	Yeah, how's it going?
Reaction	<b><u>Angela:</u></b>	Awright
Primary Action	<b><u>LW:</u></b>	Yeah
Recognition	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	How much dae ye get?
Reaction	<b><u>Angela:</u></b>	7 pounds odd an hour
Recognition	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	Dae ye?
	<b><u>LW:</u></b>	That's really good

This is quite a long exchange but the turns are quick with Jennie and Emma almost quizzing Angela about her job however Angela does not respond to all the questions and for the first time we can see a complete denial of recognition. Angela begins by explaining that she started her job about 2 months ago, I show an interest and ask how its going and Angela responds by saying "awright". The conversation continues and Jennie asks how much Angela gets paid. This issue of money is again important as Jennie seems less concerned with what Angela does and more concerned about how much she gets paid. As an aside it is also striking that this question is entirely acceptable to ask in this context but it is not always a question people respond well too, for example, I would never ask a friend how much they get paid. Money was discussed 19 times throughout the 16 discussion groups. Angela seems happy to say she gets £7 an hour as this is recognised by most of group and myself as a really good rate for someone of their age (the minimum wage for under 18s is £3.57). Emma however questions this amount. It is more jealousy that disbelief that causes Emma to ask "dae (do) ye (you)?" but this has an effect on the following turns of the dialogue:

Primary Action	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	When did ye start?
Recognition	None	
Primary Action	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Is there goin to be jobs going? [Laughs]
Recognition	None	
Primary Action	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	Is it every day?
Recognition	<b><u>Angela:</u></b>	About 20 hours a week
Reaction	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	Dae ye?
	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	I want a 9 tae 5 job....5 days a week
	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	What kinda hoors is it?
	<b><u>Angela:</u></b>	Like usually like I go in 9 till 2 or its either 1 tae 6 or something
	<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	That's awright
	<b><u>LW:</u></b>	Cool so do you think you'll stick with that for a while?
	<b><u>Angela:</u></b>	Aye [yes]
	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	What is it you're wanting to dae?
	<b><u>Angela:</u></b>	Nuthin [laughs] I don't know

Emma asks when Angela started working there but Angela ignores this question, perhaps because she has already answered it, but this could also be due to the fact that Emma has just appeared to question the amount Angela says she earns. Jennie then asks if there are any jobs going but Angela ignores this question too. This complete lack of response could be due to Jennie's laughter at the end of her question, suggesting she is not serious. However, Angela also seems to dislike being singled out and quizzed by the other girls. Emma then changes her question and asks if she works every day, Angela replies and Emma then reacts by questioning her in a clarifying way. Jennie, who was ignored by Angela, now attempts to change the direction of the conversation and she states that she would want a full time job which is not what Angela is describing. However, Jennie is almost ignored again and Emma continues to question Angela about the hours she works. Jennie then tries to re-enter the conversation by asking Angela "what is it

you're wanting to dae" and Angela replies "nuthin, I don't know". This could be seen as quite a subtle attempt by Jennie to dismiss Angela's job as a cleaner, by asking what she wants to do assumes that she does not want to be a cleaner. Angela almost tries to take the attention away from herself and her job and align herself back with the rest of the group by saying she wants to nothing and she doesn't know what she wants to do. Jennie then commands the conversation again by taking on the role of interviewer:

**Jennie:** Fair enough....and you for the tape please, what do you do?

[LW and Jennie laugh]

**Jennie:** I was always the leader in the group, ey that was brilliant

**Emma:** Shut up

**Jennie:** I was the wee teacher it was great, sit doon and shut up and dae this

**Emma:** Mind that thing?

**Jennie:** Whit?

**Emma:** Mind we were sitting writing names n that

[Angela giggles]

**Jennie:** Right that's a completely different thing from what we're talking about

**Emma:** Aye because we werne alloowd in the class [session of training programme]

**Jennie:** [laughs] Banned oot that

Jennie begins by picking up the tape recorder and pointing it at Emma and asking what she does, this effectively ends the previous conversation with Angela. I laugh with Jennie and then she states that she "was always the leader in the group" after being given a hard time for being unemployed and excluded from the last conversation by Angela Jennie is now trying to reaffirm her position at the top of the hierarchy. However, she does this in a reflective way which shows she may well have been leader within the context of the training programme but she is no longer

an outright leader. This is shown in Emma's response "shut up" but Jennie ignores this and say this she was like a teacher ordering others to "sit doon and shut up and dae this". This may also point to the fact that Jennie was not in a position of power at school and did not like it when teachers ignored her so in the new context of the training programme she is able to assume a more powerful position. Emma then tries to change the topic of conversation by asking vaguely "mind that thing" Jennie replies "whit" and Emma refers to a time when they were sitting "writing names n that" this is something Angela obviously identifies with as she giggles but Jennie then becomes irritated that she's losing control of the conversation and attempts to get this back. However, when Emma mentions that she is talking about the time when they were not allowed in the class (session) Jennie identifies with this and laughs about the fact they were excluded. There are tensions here relating to authority and the girls resisting instructions, if they are not in a position of power they can change the situation and become excluded which gives them recognition from their peers. The conversation moves on and the girls are talking about sign language that they learned on the course:

**LW:** Do you remember any of the sign language?

**Jennie:** Aye, eh, I canne mind

**Angela:** I canne

[Everyone is doing sign language]

**Jennie:** Favourite place Stirling [laughs]

**LW:** Margaret was in Tillicoultry the other day and she was saying that that [gestures] is drunk

**Jennie:** Is it?

**LW:** Yeah [laughs]

**Jennie:** Standing like that

**LW:** All wobbly

**Jennie:** Nah wait

**Angela:** What on earths that?  
**Michaela:** Alphabet, ken that much  
**Jennie:** Aw aye that's glesga [Glasgow]  
**LW:** Aw is it?  
**Jennie:** So, favourite place is Stirling, that's Stirling, that's Italy n i  
canne remember much else

[Natalie comes back into the group]

As part of the training programme the young people learned sign language.

However, while this is a very necessary and worthwhile skill to learn it is

questionable how relevant it is for these young people. Jennie continues to interview

Emma:

**Jennie:** So tell the tape aboot your building job how many hoors  
what dae ye dae?

[Emma has been working with her dad as a labourer]

**Emma:** Shut up, that's no what I'm wanting to dae with my life,  
come on!

**Jennie:** But tell them what you're daeing and what you want to do

**Natalie:** nah I'll tell ye something that's the saddest thing you've ever  
heard in your life ken your wee welcome note that you put  
on your phone? It comes up whenever...

**Emma:** You write in it, aye

**Jennie:** Aye [yes]

**Natalie:** I wrote Belief, Hope and Faith like with 3 dots in between  
them

**Jennie:** Why?

**Angela:** Aw naw

**Jennie:** [laughs] Why?

**Natalie:** Coz when I'm sad

**Jennie:** Aw, turn your phone off n turn it back on just so you'll feel  
brilliant

[Emma and Jennie giggle]

**Natalie:** Naw just in case it ever happens

**Jennie:** Aw right

**Natalie:** But I never turn, ma phone's never off anyway

Jennie asks Emma to tell everyone, for the benefit of my recorder about the work she's been doing with her Dad in the building trade. Emma seems extremely embarrassed about this, again showing the stigma attached to certain occupations she states "that's no what I'm wanting to do with my life" and then for added emphasis "come on" as if this is a ridiculous suggestion. So Jennie rephrases the question and asks Emma to say what she has been doing and what she wants to do. Natalie then interrupts the conversation and change the topic of conversation completely. Again the topic is not directly relevant to the wider discussion (like the announcement of needing to go to the toilet). Natalie begins "nah I'll tell ye something that's the saddest thing you've ever heard in your life" (here Natalie is using the word sad to mean pathetic) this is quite a strange thing to say because the fact that she is announcing this to the whole group does not suggest that Natalie thinks she is pathetic. Natalie then goes onto talk about the welcome note on her phone. It is indicative of Natalie's status and power within the group that none of the other girls react to this change in topic and seamlessly switch their focus to Natalie who describes that she wrote "Belief, Hope and Faith" on her phone. Jennie asks why and Angela says "aw naw" perhaps because she knows this has some sentimental overly emotional meaning that can't be taken seriously in this context. Natalie admits she has written the note to cheer herself up when she feels sad. Jennie then mocks her by implying that her phone makes her feel better. Natalie ends this exchange by saying that she never turns her phone off anyway; again this is strange as it makes the conversation slightly pointless she has described the importance of a welcome note which she never sees. The janitor is Hoovering in the background – the girls talk about Hoovering and sweeping up then I continue the conversation:

**LW:** [to Emma] So what have you been up to - working with your dad?  
**Emma:** Aye in trying to get into uni but ....  
**Natalie:** Trying to get on the internet?  
**Emma:** Uni!  
**Jennie:** Uni, [laughs]  
**Angela:** Natalie goin you shut up!  
**Natalie:** Well stop mumbling and I'll be able to hear what you're saying!  
**Angela:** [to Natalie] Sit on your arse  
**Emma:** Every cunt else heard me  
**Jennie:** Aye but remember she's got a bad ear  
**Emma:** Good, I'll gee her another yin  
[LW laughs]

Emma dismisses the work she's been doing with her Dad and explains that she's been trying to get into uni. (University was discussed 5 times during all 16 discussion groups, this was either in relation to the young people's feelings about going to university or discussions about my experiences). Natalie mishears and thinks she said something about the internet, again Natalie tries to dominate the conversation and this leads Angela to say "Natalie goin you shut up!" Natalie defends herself by saying that Emma was mumbling but at this point in the discussion Natalie was clearing rubbish off the table which is the reason why Angela then asks her to sit down. Emma becomes a bit exasperated as she has been trying to tell her story for a few minutes now, Jennie then tries to defend Natalie and explain that she has a bad ear and Emma replies in a joking fashion "good, I'll gee her another yin". This is light-hearted and funny conversation but it does give insights into the hierarchy within the group. The conversation continues:

**Emma:** [emphasises words] I've been trying to get into uni but I've been getting knocked back

**Jennie:** Where?

**Emma:** Glasgow and Edinburgh

[Everyone is laughing]

**LW:** To do what?

**Emma:** At first it was midwifery but they had nae spaces then I tried for children's nursing so I got something back the day fae Dundee saying that they've got my application and I've applied for Aberdeen as well so .. that's like my last 2 chances if no then I'm thinking about going for the police but a dunno because it sounds stupid wanting to go and dae one thing then dae another

**LW:** No it doesn't

**Jennie:** Naw its no, it's variation

Emma repeats her earlier point about trying to get into uni but this time she finishes her sentence by saying she's been "getting knocked back". Emma explains where she has been applying to and I ask her what courses she has been applying for. Emma's response to my question is really interesting she explains that she has applied for a number of different courses at different institutions however because she has not been successful and hence denied recognition she is reluctant to keep trying (this is similar to Jennie situation with a local restaurant described earlier). Emma explains that if she continues to be unsuccessful then she's going to try another option and apply for the police. Emma then states "but a dunno because it sounds stupid wanting to go and dae one thing then dae another" this shows that because we ask young people what they want to do when they leave school they then think once a choice has been made it looks bad (to others) if you change your mind. Emma is pursuing different options and not only is she struggling because these options are unavailable to her but she is also struggling to think about how her

change in opinion will look to others. I tell her it doesn't sound stupid and Jennie agrees describing it as "variation". The conversation moves onto highlight some of the groups' attitudes towards the police. All of the group know that Natalie works for the police:

Primary Action	Natalie works for the police, Emma states that she is thinking about applying for a job with the police
Recognition	<b>Angela:</b> You're no wanting to work for the scum dae ye? <b>Jennie &amp; Emma:</b> Hooo hooo
Reaction	<b>Natalie:</b> I dinne care but
Primary Action	<b>Emma:</b> I never even looked at ye!
Recognition	<b>Natalie:</b> I'm talking tae Angela
Reaction	None [from Angela] <b>Jennie:</b> What de you want to work there for anyway? <b>Emma:</b> Because it's a good starting salary <b>Natalie:</b> You's are aw just green eyed monsters <b>Jennie:</b> Naw I'm quite proud ey ye [claps] congratulations

As soon as Angela refers to the police as "scum" Jennie and Emma react as they know this could provoke a reaction from Natalie who works for the police. Natalie reacts by saying she doesn't care. In this context it matters more having a job than the relationship with the police. Emma then states that she wasn't even looking at Natalie suggesting Natalie is being overly sensitive. Natalie then reacts to this in a defensive way again by saying her previous comment was direct to Angela. Jennie questions why Emma would want to work for the police and Emma replies that it's a good starting salary, the issue of money is recurring. Natalie then suggests that everyone is jealous of her and her job to which Jennie replies in a genuine way that she is proud of Natalie. There is a tension here between Jennie and Natalie, so far

we have seen Natalie give Jennie advice and criticise her lack of effort looking for work, we have seen them both try to dominate the conversation, Jennie has defended Natalie when others were ridiculing her and now Jennie is disagreeing with Natalie's suggestion that they are jealous but also congratulating her. The positions that Natalie and Jennie occupy within this group could be likened to Hegel's (1949) master and slave. Natalie is in the most powerful position in terms of employment and independence and therefore can be likened to the Master. Jennie however occupies a weaker position; she has no job and although she lives on her own this is in homeless accommodation. As we discussed at the beginning of the analysis Natalie can offer practical advice and support to Jennie and this means that recognition flows down the hierarchy. However, we have seen that Jennie also tries to give Natalie recognition however this is less meaningful to Natalie and as a result she does not respond to it. Natalie continually tries to gain recognition from the group but this is not fulfilled as she is in the most powerful position. It may be that Natalie is seeking recognition from me as someone who is older perhaps. Jennie uses other means to exert her power and retain a central position within the conversation and this can be seen in her adoption of the role of interviewer.

Emma then continues to talk about what she would like to do in the police, it is clear Emma has given this some thought and she is perhaps reluctant to admit this is something she would really like to do because she knows how that would be received in this context (for example in another context Emma's parents may be very supportive of her wish to join the police):

- Emma:** I want te dae the dogs... dogs or the driving  
**LW:** so would you move to Aberdeen if you got in would you go up there?  
**Emma:** I wanted to move away from home anyway cause it's crap hate staying at hame [home] and plus I want te kinda try growing up a bit see what it's like  
**Jennie:** Go out in the big wide world

There seems to be a tension here between where young people would like their lives to be and their aspirations and the lack of opportunities to realise this. Emma wants to move away from home and gain some independence, getting into university would also mean she is no longer compared to her sister and she has achieved something of her own. Jennie reinforces that point by saying “go out into the big wide world”. However, the differences in Emma and Jennie’s lives are stark here and while Emma is desperate to get away from her family and live independently Jennie has been in this situation from quite a young age. That is perhaps why Jennie seems like an adult talking to a child, Emma, in this excerpt. Moving out was only discussed 4 times during all the discussion groups. This was perhaps because young people were either already living independently or were still living at home with parents and did think they were in a position to move out. Here we can see the interplay between power and recognition between Emma and Jennie. As Jovchelovitch (1997, p. 19) stated “my power to act is always limited by the recognition others confer on what I do”. Within this interaction between Emma and Jennie the conversation is about gaining independence and moving out of your parent’s home. Jennie can assume the more powerful position as she has knowledge and experience of living on her own and Emma has yet to make this transition therefore she affords Jennie some recognition for this. However, if the context or topic of conversation within this group changed to employment then the

power and recognition relationship would reverse with Emma occupying a more powerful position than Jennie as the group seem to recognise and give status to those who are employed. Emma continues:

- Emma:** Aye, if I, I think it'd be easier, I think you have to go for your first year then ye can like get a flat your second year, so they say but I dunno, just have to see because I'm no travelling up there aw the time too much hassle, that's about it and I've been working wi my dad , boring
- LW:** Yeah but you said you quite like going different places tho so is it all over this area or is it different...?
- Emma:** It's mainly kinda like Edinburgh and then we were in, what's that place called...Melrose
- Jennie:** Aye [yes]
- Emma:** Eh and that was quite good that was a private school so it was quite good to see that but I dunno, we're working in Edinburgh this week and then we're goin to Arbroath so it's quite good but it's a lot ey travelling
- LW:** Yeah
- Jennie:** That's the best bit, sitting back listening tae the tunes
- Emma:** I'd rather dae that than sit in the hoose and dae nuthin, so
- Jennie:** And ye get paid for sitting in the van half the day
- Emma:** Ah know, drinking tea, that's all I've been doing [laughs] ma dad goes mental he's like you drunk all the tea

Emma starts to describe her plans if she does get into university and you can see that she has given this some thought but then in the same time she returns to her present situation by saying that she's been working with her Dad which she finds boring. I then try to ask about some of the more positive aspects of this which Emma has referred to in previous discussions. When Emma starts to describe travelling to other places she is more positive about the work (this is in contrast to the discussion earlier about not wanting to travel far for work). Emma also admits that she would rather be working with her Dad than doing nothing and again Jennie refers to the importance of money. Emma jokes about drinking too much tea. There is a tension

here between Emma's ideal self (where and who she would like to be) and her present self. The conversation continues:

- LW:** Natalie what've you been up to?  
**Emma:** oft  
[Natalie giggles]  
**Natalie:** Em, working  
**Jennie:** Explain what ye dae on that [refers to the recorder] up to the mic  
**LW:** You started off at Falkirk Stadium did you, is that where you were first?  
**Natalie:** Aye n then I walked oot there  
**Jennie:** Did ye?  
**Natalie:** aye because the manager was being a (pause) prick and em so I walked oot there without saying anything to anybody I just got up and left (giggles nervously) but after that...  
**LW:** Was it good before that? Was it good before it went wrong?  
**Natalie:** Naw, you always got like...there was no lassies to sit and talk to it was all guys and they aw used to come in and hey a laugh and sometimes it was embarrassing and I was like I dinne want to sit here but I liked the work because I like admin work n I walked away fi that and I'd already got the polis job and that's about a month and a half I've been working there noo

I ask Natalie what she has been up to; again Jennie assumes the role of interviewer and refers to the recorder. Natalie explains that she walked out of her first job at Falkirk Football stadium. She uses very deliberate language here, she was not sacked or asked to leave she "walked oot". This implies that because Natalie did not like her job that instead of handing in her notice she denied her employers any recognition and left. Natalie explains that her manager was being a prick, the slight pause before she says this is perhaps because she is conscious of swearing and also being recorded. Natalie clearly felt uncomfortable in a working environment

surrounded by men who did not acknowledge her fully so she moved into a new context where she seems happier. Emma then returns to the subject of money:

**Emma:** What wis it like getting your first wage?  
**Natalie:** I blew it all in about the space of a weekend  
**Emma:** did ye?  
**Natalie:** Aye but on stuff like clathes [clothes] I got about 3 or 4 things out of Next but I've still gotta pay the hoose n that, it's still crap but it's awright I still get about a couple of hundred to myself

Natalie describes how she blew her wages in one weekend and in her following remark we can see the tension between being a young person and being a young adult with the responsibility of a house this is reflected in the contrast "it's still crap but it's awright". The conversation continues:

**LW:** That's cool, so do you think you'll stay doing that for a bit then?  
**Natalie:** Hope so, well for 2 years anyway  
**Jennie:** Then what di ye want to dae?  
**Natalie:** Work my way up to my daddie  
**Jennie:** What is it he does again?  
**Natalie:** He's a mad manager of some company in London  
**Jennie:** Cool  
**Emma:** Could see you being a manager like ..  
**Jennie:** You're just one ey they folk  
**Emma:** Ay know  
**Natalie:** Eh?  
**Jennie:** One ey they folk  
**Natalie:** In a way it's bad but in a way its good [laughs]

Natalie explains that she would like to stay in her job for about 2 years then move up to the same managerial level as her Dad (Natalie has very little contact with her Dad

but knows he is a successful businessman). Both Jennie and Emma seem to agree that this is something Natalie would be well suited to with Jennie describing her as “just one ey they folk” this suggests they have a stereotypic image of what a successful person is like. Again, a tension is revealed when Natalie almost hedges her bets by saying “in a way it’s bad in a way it’s good” (similar to her earlier comment “it’s still crap but it’s awright”). The conversation then changes again, I notice that Michaela has not joined in with any of the discussion so far so I try to involve her directly:

**LW**: What about you?  
**Michaela**: Sweet fuck all, nay other way to pit it  
**Emma**: Have you been looking?  
**Michaela**: Aye  
**Angela**: Where have ye looked?  
**Emma**: Apart from dyeing your hair and getting another piercing  
**Natalie**: But if you’ve no got a job then where do you get your phone fi?  
**Michaela**: Ma dad gives me the money  
**Emma**: Are yi [you] on the brew?  
**Jennie**: Daddy  
[Michaela shakes her head]  
**Emma**: How can you live?  
**Jennie**: Mummy, daddy  
**Michaela**: Pretty much aye  
**Natalie**: You’ll just steal stuff out the lorries and sell it at the market eh?  
[Everyone laughs]  
**Michaela**: Fuck aye

This exchange between the girls aimed at Michaela was bordering on becoming an attack and it was clear the group had an issue with the fact that she was not working but still clearly had money and was not lagging behind them in terms of having the latest phone etc. Interestingly, all of the group were in the same situation as

Michaela while they were taking part in the training programme and there was never an issue then but now Natalie, Emma and Angela have gained employment and moved into new contexts therefore they feel they are in a position to judge Michaela. Michaela begins by stating that she has been doing nothing or “sweet fuck all” she accepts that there is no other way to explain this. The conversation then follows a similar theme to the earlier discussion with Jennie. Emma asks if she has been looking for work and Michaela replies “aye” but then Angela asks where and Michaela ignores this question. Emma then points out that although she is not working Michaela can still afford to dye her hair and get piercings and tattoos. Given the importance the group have placed on having money Natalie asks how Michaela can afford a new phone if she is not working. Michaela admits her dad gives her the money. Emma asks if she is claiming benefits but Jennie pre-empts the answer by saying “daddy”. Michaela becomes increasingly quiet and doesn’t defend her position but instead seems to agree with the groups ridicule in order that the conversation moves on.

Natalie who is in the most powerful position compared to Michaela when it comes to employment delivers the most derogatory comment when she says “you'll just steal stuff out the lorries and sell it at the market eh?” It is understandable that Natalie may resent Michaela’s position given that Natalie is working and supporting herself while Michaela is unemployed and receiving money from her parents. Everyone gives Natalie recognition for this by laughing. Michaela agrees in a very sarcastic way. This is an example of what Taylor (1992) describes as harmful recognition or mis-recognition. Taylor states that this can be ‘a form of oppression’ and it seems that the girls are keen to position Michaela at the very bottom of the group’s

hierarchy. Not only is she unemployed but her parents are giving her money which means she is not struggling and is able to fit in with all the latest material possessions. Perhaps because Michaela isn't responding to an argument Natalie changes the subject:

**Natalie:** Here can I just ask how much they are [referring to the recorder] because they'd be quite good at getting evidence n that

[Everyone laughs]

**LW:** It was about 60 pound I think, coz it's just, it's just an MP3 player that's got a voice recorder on it

**Natalie:** Is it a good one?

**LW:** I think so, I don't know I don't use it, I've got an iPod, thing so I don't use it for MP3 player

**Natalie:** But that's really good tho coz member you recorded about an hour and a half the last time

**LW:** Yeah, it's alright if you charge it up and stuff, em, yeah but I don't use it for anything else so I don't know what it's like, what do you mean getting evidence, evidence of what?

**Natalie:** Catching your boyfriend cheating on ye or that

[LW laughs]

**Emma:** What are ye gonne leave it in the hoose when you're away oot, Jamie what have ye been daeing

The girls then laugh and Emma and Natalie talk about a night out they had Natalie changes the subject here and directs everyone's attention back to the voice recorder. Perhaps having the recorder there gives everyone a chance to escape from what was becoming quite a serious conversation. It may also be that Natalie became aware of how she would sound on the recorder and this directed her attention to it. Amidst this conversation Michaela tries to talk to me individually about tattoos, this is one thing we have in common which the other girls don't:

**Michaela**: When did ye get that? [Referring to my tattoo]  
**LW**: Aw Friday, it's still scabby  
**Michaela**: Aye it looks new

Michaela and I are talking about my tattoo and at the same time Natalie and Emma are talking about a night out. This may have been Michaela's attempt to join in the conversation but not directly related to employment or work so she looked for another common feature. She also chose to do this at a time when there was another conversation taking place. This shows how we can try to manipulate situations to make our voice heard. In order to try and bring all five girls back into the conversation I ask them if they miss the training programme:

**LW**: So do you's miss choices in care?  
**Jennie**: Definitely not  
**Emma**: Aye ye dae  
**Jennie**: I dae actually, coz at least it was there  
**Michaela**: I miss the bus pass and the money  
**Jennie**: Aye a know that's the only thing I miss, the bus pass and the banter  
**Emma**: The food  
**Natalie**: Totally

Jennie immediately and strongly says "definitely not" but Emma then challenges this, perhaps because she has a knowledge of Jennie's life after the programme and then Jennie concedes "I dae actually, coz at least it was there". Here we can gain an insight into the complex ways in which young people experience youth training programmes. For Jennie the programme did not allow her the opportunity to gain work experience and has not led to any employment or further training which may be the reason she initially says she does not miss it. However, many of the young people enjoy the youth training programmes because it gives them a sense of

routine as opposed to doing nothing and this is perhaps what Jennie is referring to when she says “at least it was there”. Michaela then states that she only misses the bus pass and the money. Here we can see a tension again with Jennie as she reverts back towards her initial stance and says she “only” misses the bus pass and the banter with the rest of the group. The girls are provided with breakfast and lunches on the programme and this is what Emma and Natalie miss. The conversation continues:

**Michaela:** [to Natalie] Aye but you must be getting a hell of a lot more than you were getting fae here

**Natalie:** It’s not that but its better work, I love ma job, I love it

Again the importance of money is mentioned by Michaela. Michaela seems to make more of an attempt to defend her position here as she is trying to legitimate the fact that she misses the money by comparing herself to Natalie who has a full time job and should not, in Michaela eyes, miss the programme at all. Natalie then states that it’s not just about the money and she emphasises how much she loves her job. Natalie may be trying to set herself apart here from Emma and Angela by not only working but loving her job. Emma then asks more about Natalie’s job:

**Emma:** What dae ye dae? Typing on the computer n that nut?

**Natalie:** Hiding on the computer?

**Emma:** Typing,

**Jennie:** Aw I swear to god,

**Angela:** You are deaf [deaf] ey?

**Emma:** Fuck sake, why would i say that tae ye?

**Natalie:** You’re sitting at ma bad ear

**Emma:** She’s the loudest yin here

**Jennie:** I’ll shout to you

**Emma:** [whispers] Do you type on the computer?

[Everyone laughs]

This is quite a jokey light-hearted exchange between the girls but Natalie begins to take it more seriously assuming that she is being ridiculed:

**Natalie:** Obviously

**Emma:** Sorry

**Natalie:** Well what else would ye dae?

**Emma:** Well what the fuck would I say hiding at the computer for?

**Natalie:** Naw see that's ma problem even though I know you didn't say that I still said that coz I thought that's what you said

**Emma:** [laughs] Ah know you didne say it but I thought you said it [sarcastically]

[Everyone laughs]

**Jennie:** That's just confused me

**Natalie:** Right, anyway

Natalie and Emma have a slightly tense exchange here, it seems Emma is continuing the joke but Natalie feels that it has went far enough. Natalie tries to turn the joke on Emma by saying "well what else would ye dae" suggesting Emma's original question was stupid. Natalie eventually makes a definite attempt to change the subject, after attempting to explain herself the girls end up laughing again and Natalie is not very comfortable with this. I then return to discussing the training programme:

**LW:** So what else do you's miss then?  
**Emma & Jennie:** Bus pass and money  
**Jennie:** A bit ey the banter sometimes, naw if it was still on a wouldne mind  
**Natalie:** Ken what I dinne like is having to pay for my lunches n that, it s a big big, a big chunk oot my money  
**Jennie:** Take a wee packed lunch in wi ye  
**Natalie:** Naw but it still costs me mare for food whereas I used to just buy stuff for breakfast and dinners n snacks  
**Jennie:** Ye didne even have to buy breakfast ye came in here and got it  
**Natalie:** Aye but noo I dae, I need to buy breakfast, lunch snacks and dinner ken what a mean and the lunches are mare expensive cause I eat hunners [loads,hundreds]  
[LW laughs]

Again from this section of the discussion we can see that money is a big consideration for these girls. They seemed to like the routine and company on the training programme but they continually refer back to the bus pass they get, their wages and the fact that meals were provided. Natalie expands on this slightly here by explaining that she spends a lot of her money on lunches. Jennie makes a practical suggestion that Natalie takes a packed lunch but Natalie says this is still too expensive, the girls then discuss how much Natalie would eat while she was on the training programme. We can again see here that this group of young people, especially Natalie and Jennie have quite a bit to cope with for their age and as a result they can give each other practical advice and support. These young people are simultaneously trying to manage a life where they are young and carefree to socialise with their friends and spend their wages, but at the same time life, for Natalie and Jennie, means living alone and supporting yourself which are very adult responsibilities. The conversation about food continues:

**Natalie:** Naw honestly  
**LW:** Fair enough  
**Natalie:** And its like tins of soup and ..  
**Emma:** Ye get tins of soup for about 20p  
**Natalie:** But no my Heinz chicken soup  
**Emma:** Tesco stuff is the same  
**Jennie:** Get the big family pack

I laughed when Natalie said that she eats “hunners” she then replies “naw honestly” to confirm. The practical advice continues with Emma suggesting that Natalie buy a cheaper brand of soup. Aside from the implied status and quality of different brands Natalie is continuing to dominate and control the conversation. I try to change the subject by encouraging the group to think of other things beside food:

**LW:** Apart from the food and stuff what else do you's miss or not miss or whatever?  
**Emma:** I miss my placements,  
**Angela:** Aye  
**Michaela:** I miss ma placement  
**Natalie:** Uh I hated mine

As part of the training programme each young person is normally offered two work placements for 6 weeks each. Young people discussed their work placements 23 times during the discussion groups, this was often in relation to the competitiveness involved in getting a job as they were told by youth workers that if they worked hard on their placements they may be offered permanent work. As part of the choices in care programme these are usually at a local nursery and a local elderly care home. Emma said that she missed her placements and Angela and Michaela agree but Natalie said that she hated hers. This highlights the issue that young people often do not know what a job entails until they try it out. Natalie signed up for the Choices in

Care programme but then after trying a work placement in a nursery decide that the care sector was not for her and she preferred admin work. I wanted to find out more about why Michaela wasn't working if she missed her work placement so much:

**LW:** [to Michaela]:So could you not have stayed on at your placement?  
**Michaela:** Naw I decided I wasnae going to the nursery and Lynne said right well I've got to let you go, so ah thought right fair enough [lowers voice]

I asked why Michaela could not have continued to work at her placement. After enjoying work in a care home Michaela was offered her other 6 week placement in a nursery however she refused to try this and it's a stipulation of the programme that young people must at least try both placements before making up their mind (as in Natalie's case). Michaela explains that the Youth Worker who ran the programme, Lynne, said that she had to let Michaela go. It is clear from the way Michaela lowers her voice that she was unhappy with this decision and does not want to discuss things more openly within the group. Natalie interrupts the conversation and changes subject again:

**Natalie:** Here, can I just say something, I've been to ma work everyday and for 20 tae 9 and I've built oot, built up 12 hours of flexi-time and you're only allowed to carry forward 7 [everyone claps]  
**Jennie:** Well done you [claps]  
**Emma:** De ye get paid for that?  
**Natalie:** Paid for what?  
**Emma:** Flexi-time  
**Natalie:** Well your flexi time is where you build up hoors and then take days off  
**Emma:** Aw right

**Natalie:** So you get paid for your days off but you're only allowed to build up 7 for a day and then...

**LW:** What happens now you've got 12? Will you lose...

**Michaela:** She'll need to take it soon

**Natalie:** I've got one for 4th ey June so 2 weeks but then there's a bank holiday so I've got 2 Mondays off in a row

Throughout the discussion Natalie continually manages to interrupt discussions and change the subject and usually she is directing the attention of myself and the group back towards herself and in this case her job. Natalie is clearly pleased to be working and does not seem to feel uncomfortable discussing this in the group. She states she has been to her work not only on time but early every day and has built up flexi time. There is a structure of recognition within Natalie's work and she sees the accruing of flexi time as a reward for her commitment to her job. Jennie again genuinely shows support for Natalie and says "well done you" there is perhaps little else Jennie can do as she has limited resources with which to gain the upper hand. Natalie seems to enjoy explaining how her flexi time works and it is worth nothing that when I ask a question that Michaela is the first one to respond. Michaela has knowledge about how flexi time works and uses this to maintain her place in the conversation. The conversation continues:

**Emma:** Ma sister is like that she's shite for holidays

**Natalie:** I've actually got gid holidays actually cos I've got about... you're entitled to like 12 days like so you're entitled to 1 day a month for flexi days if you build oot your hoors and I will dae that cos the way ma buses run so you've got your 12 days you've got your 20 days for your holiday which is about nearly 3 weeks

**LW:** 3 weeks

**Natalie:** Nearly 3 weeks, and then you've got your 14 public holidays so that's almost like 2 months ey the year

**LW:** That's awright  
**Natalie:** No bad [giggles] and I get paid for it  
**Jennie:** When d'you work Monday to Friday  
**Natalie:** Mmm?  
**Jennie:** Monday to Friday?  
**Natalie:** Aye

Emma tries to relate to Natalie's story but as Emma is working as a casual labourer with her Dad she cannot draw parallels with her own situation so instead mentions her sister. Natalie then explains her holiday entitlement at her job and revels in telling both myself and the group the perks of her job. I then ask the group to reflect back on the training programme again:

**LW:** So would you's do a course like choices in care again?  
Like ah know you's are all working n stuff but if you had the chance again  
**Natalie:** I wish I'd done it when I was 16 rather than 17  
**Emma:** So dae ah, coz I went to shitey school for an extra year  
**Jennie:** If it was something different, something cos I think it was too boring too much sittin about  
**Michaela:** Never

I ask if they would do the course again given the chance. Natalie states that she wishes she had done the course when she was a year younger. Emma agrees and this is a common theme for many young people. Often when they first leave school it takes a while for young people to realise their limited options or lack of availability of money. Or, as in Emma's case, young people stay in education for lack of other options and education offers them nothing and they feel like they have wasted their time. Jennie says that she would only do it if it "was something different" Jennie found the programme boring which is understandable given the difficulty in getting her a work placement. Although Michaela admitted earlier that she missed her

placement she simply says she would “never” want to do the programme again.

Natalie then changes the subject again:

- Natalie:** Wait a minute ah was here on ma birthday eh?  
**Jennie:** Aye coz you tain a day off but you came in the next day  
**Natalie:** Hey there’s a thing but I wish I'd done it when I just turned 16  
**Michaela:** Naw see I wish I'd waited till I was 18  
**Emma:** How?  
**Michaela:** Or near enough 18...  
**Natalie:** So ye could get gassed and come tae it? [Everyone laughs except Michaela]  
**Michaela:** Naw just so I didne need tae, see I want to work with the elderly eh but I've got be 18 so I’m sitting about hoping that I can get a job until I'm 18  
**Angela:** Just get a domestic job then  
**Michaela:** Well I’ve applied for domestic but whether I get it or no's a different story  
**Angela:** Just keep pestering them

It initially seems as if Natalie wants to change the subject and talk about her birthday but she is still on topic but just thinking out loud. She reiterates her point that she made about wishing she had took part in the programme earlier (young people sometimes talked of regrets they had, this topic arose 9 times in the discussion groups). Michaela however feels the opposite and explains that she wishes she’d done the programme later when she turns 18. This is due to the fact that many care homes do not employ people as care assistants until they are 18. Natalie takes another opportunity to mock Michaela by suggesting she wanted to be older so she could turn up to the programme drunk. Everyone else still give Natalie recognition for this by laughing. Michaela continues with her point and states that her wish to be older is for the purposes of the job market. Angela then suggests Michaela applies for a job as a domestic which is what Angela does. Michaela here sums up the

tension between her ideal self and reality by saying that she has applied for a domestic job but whether she gets it or not is a different matter. Angela continues to advise her to keep pestering them. It seems to be that finding a job requires a lot of determination and this is especially true for young people as the experiences are often new therefore when they are rejected they tend to be reluctant to apply again, especially to the same employer, for fear of further failure/rejection.

**Jennie:** Have ye just applied for aaaaaa (starts to say Alloa but then corrects herself)..... Fishcross Fishcross

**Michaela:** Aye

**Natalie:** No aw ey thum are 18 by they way

**Jennie:** Did ye just apply for about that area?

**Natalie:** No aw ey thum are 18 cos Kirsty was gitting shifts

**Michaela:** Maist [most] ey thum, William Simpson's is about the only yin apart from the yin where ah dun it but fuckin

**Emma:** Its cos ey the sex act or somethin stupid

Jennie continues the conversation here by asking if Michaela has only applied for work in the area she lives in. This is interesting as earlier Jennie seemed reluctant to travel far from home and it's unclear here where she stands on this matter.

Interestingly Michaela does not answer Jennie's second question. Emma then offers an explanation as to why the care homes would only want to employ over 18s.

Jennie then asks Michaela another question:

**Jennie:** Why did they no keep ye on

**Michaela:** Ey because the time they'd sent me oot the application form they sent me oot the wrong yin ey and it hud a closing date on it so they sent me oot yin for...

**Natalie:** But if you were working there could you no have just filled it oot there?

**Michaela:** Naw because the wife, one ey the seniors that I worked wi she asked about if there was any chance that I could get another yin sent oot and they said that the human resources

had starting processing the application forms but there was only 3 folk that had applied

**Natalie:** That's terrible you were still working there, they already knew you the folk already knew you

**Jennie:** Ah know they should have just geed ye it without ...

Jennie asks why Michaela was not kept on at her placement. Michaela explains there was a mix up with application forms. Natalie seems to doubt this story and asks why Michaela could not have just completed an application form at her work. Despite Natalie's doubts she offers sympathy when Michaela explains that she missed the deadline for applying for the job. Natalie says "they already knew you the folk already knew you" this links back to the previous discussion where I stated that a lot of young people manage to find employment through recommendations and word of mouth and this is another example where the group think that as Michaela was known to the employers that this should have meant she was offered a job. Emma then continues:

**Emma:** They've no employed Kirsty [another girl from the course] they've just got her in for shift work

**Michaela:** It'll be bank work she's got

**Emma:** Stuff... I think it's just folk on holidays n that

**Michaela:** Aye like bank work

**Emma:** Is that whit ye call it?

**Michaela:** Aye

**Natalie:** Aye but she'll still get a fair shift oot it

**Michaela:** It just depends tho some places...

**Emma:** That means you're just sitting on your arse waiting on a shift

**Natalie:** Aye but she'll get mare in the holidays

**Michaela:** Some places offer ye...

**Emma:** Is it just weekends she's dain? Maistly weekends, aye that's what I'm saying

**Angela:** I'm working 7 days a week

**Michaela:** Aye but some places offer ye set hoors even though yer relief staff n that so it's no as bad as that

This lengthy section here still centres on Michaela's struggle to find employment. It seems while the group are trying to be sympathetic they are struggling to understand Michaela's position. Emma begins by mentioning that her friend Kirsty, who previously took part in a Choices in Care programme had managed to get some work at the place where Michaela completed her placement. Michaela explains that Kirsty is probably getting "bank work" which is work on an as and when required basis. Michaela does not seem keen on this type of work and Emma perhaps echoes Michaela's reservations when she says "that means you're just sitting on your arse waiting on a shift". It is often assumed that young people should take any work available, even if it is short term and insecure. However, it seems Michaela, although she does not say it would prefer to wait until she is offered more regular work. Michaela states that "some places offer ye set hoors" and this seems to be what Michaela wants. I return to the issue of the girls wishing they had done the programme when they were younger:

**LW:** So why do you guys wish you'd done it when you were younger?  
**Emma:** [to Natalie]: supposedly she's no getting charged or that  
**Angela:** That's a wee shame  
**Emma:** Whit?  
**Angela:** You're dingying Lisa  
**Emma:** A wisne.....sorry

Emma tries to talk to Natalie about something and Angela notices that I've asked a question and no one has responded. Rather than answer herself Angela says "that's a wee shame" to which Emma asks "whit?" Angela then replies "you're

dingying Lisa". The term dingy in this context means to ignore someone and Angela uses it to make Emma feel bad about ignoring me. Emma says that she wasn't ignoring me, which suggests that it was not intentional and then apologises. This perhaps highlights my status as a researcher, as we have seen there are other instances where someone has asked a question and no one has replied but this is the first time it was specifically referred to. I then re-phrase and repeat my question:

- LW:** Why... like Michaela wishes she'd done it when she was older so it'd be easier to get a job why do you's wish you'd done choices in care when you were younger?
- Jennie:** Cos...
- Emma:** I stayed on at school and got fucking 2 exams and it wis shite and i done 6 subjects.
- Jennie:** If you done it when you were younger then.... nah I dinne really think ah dun it any different
- Natalie:** Naw see I wish I'd got my job younger
- Jennie:** If i'd kent [known] it was gonne be like that... sat about so much then I'd ey done something else
- Emma:** I wish I'd fuckin applied for uni sooner
- Jennie:** I'd ey stayed on at school or something or when to college...
- Angela:** See I wish I'd stayed on at school
- Jennie:** As soon as I left school that's whit i'd ey done cos this was too easy

Emma clearly feels that she wasted her time at school and got very little recognition for taking 6 subjects. If she's only taken 2 subjects and passed two exams that might have been easier to understand but Emma knows that she failed 4 subjects therefore she wished she'd left school earlier. School was a popular topic during all of the discussion groups with young people discussing it 49 times. Here, there is a tension with Jennie who seems to initially agree that she wanted to do the programme when she was younger but then she does not finish her point and says "nah I dinne really think ah dun it any different". Natalie returns to talking about her

job. Jennie then reiterates an earlier point she made which gives a sense that she did not get much out of the course and for that reasons she regrets participating. Emma says she wishes she had applied to uni sooner but it's unclear why as she has still not been offered a place and is only turning 17. Jennie and Angela both wish they'd stayed on at school, the opposite of Emma's experience, and Jennie wished she had applied to college because the course was "too easy". This discussion shows the difficult position this group of young people are in. They have many thoughts about how they would do things differently but they can't go back, however some, especially Michaela and Jennie are not moving forwards, they are almost stuck in limbo. Natalie then makes an interesting statement about school:

- Natalie:** School's no about education anymore but schools about popularity n socialising n everything it's no about education see the folk that really want educated they'll go tae college n university or some sorta training after they leave school n the folk that dinne really care about it...
- Emma:** They do fuck all...
- Natalie:** Aye they might get a job but they dinne care about education therefore it spoils it for everybody else
- Emma:** Your no allowed tae fucking study ye get slagged that's what is aw about
- Natalie:** Aye I know so how ey ye meant to dae good at school when everything's about oh school's really important - it's no it's after you leave school it counts
- Michaela:** It's about who ye ken

Natalie here explicitly refers to the competing structures of recognition which operate within the education system. Natalie states that "school's no about education anymore" this would be one structure of recognition but instead she said school is about "popularity and socialising". Natalie distinguishes between people who want an education and will continue to learn after they leave school and other people who "don't really care about it". Emma says that these people "do fuck all" and Natalie

claims that these people spoil education for everyone else. I'm not sure where these young people would place themselves in this picture. Emma then states that "you're no allowed to study" therefore by studying you will be actively going against one structure of recognition within your peer group and this would result in getting "slagged off". Natalie's next comment highlights the tension between being in school and then making the transition out of school. Natalie implies that it's hard to do well at school and the assumption is that school is really important but Natalie feels "it's after you leave school it counts". The realisation that adult life requires you to hold down a job and earn money are often only truly realised when a young person leaves school and struggles to do just this. The ideas here relate to Baumeister and Muraven's (1996) work, and their discussion of how identity development in adolescence has changed over time. The authors state that "individual identity is an adaption to social context" (p. 405) and this is clear from the discussion above. Young people's post-16 routes are increasingly complex and varied. As such more structures of recognition have been introduced and these provide more competition for existing long standing structures such as the education system. These young people describe an adaption to a school context within which, in their eyes, education is not the main knowledge or behaviour that is recognised. I move the conversation on to ask the group about the media. The media did not come up in all discussion groups but it was discussed 9 times. Young people often paid particular attention to the local press looking for stories about people they knew, which was either ridiculed or given respect. Here, I ask explicitly about the media:

- LW:** Like I was saying earlier I'm interested in role models and the media, do you pay much attention to whats in the papers n stuff about young people or?
- Jennie:** Nah you just read it all the time - young person...
- Emma:** Missing
- Jennie:** Aye missing or attacked somebody
- Natalie:** Naw di ye read the story a couple of weeks ago about the 15 year old or 14 year old that got stabbed or something and died?
- Emma:** That's aaw ye hear
- Jennie:** Ah know, the only thing ye ever hear about teenagers is if they've done something wrong
- Emma:** Pregnant, smoking, drinking....
- Jennie:** It dosne say in the paper ooo congratulations to this person
- Michaela:** Aye aw ye hear especially the noo man is about teenagers drinking
- Angela:** They just put us aww doon
- Michaela:** We aw get tarred wi the same brush

The group show a real awareness for the negative ways which young people are represented in the media. The group discuss the negative recognition they are given by the media and in some cases complete denial of recognition for any positive achievements or successes. Angela and Michaela both acknowledge that young people are thought of as a homogenous group even though they do drink and smoke. There seems to be a conflict here between what is seen as 'normal' behaviour by young people and what is deemed inappropriate by the media. Natalie then gives a concrete example of this in her everyday life:

**Natalie:** Like see when Jamie's goin to his work he wears he's hat, trackies, trainers ...

**Jennie:** Aye I know aw the auld folk look at him

**Natalie:** Naw but he looks like a wee ned and...like... see this morning like aw the wee auld wifey's put their heed doon n that whereas i'm just on ma ane n they'll say "morning hiya" [puts on mocking voice]

**Emma:** They stare at ye and your like that "Whit!"

**Natalie:** They just dinne look his way and it pisses me off

**LW:** Its just appearances

Natalie describes how the neighbours ignore her boyfriend Jamie when he is dressed in his work clothes which make him look like a "wee ned". The fact that the people put their heads down frustrates Natalie as people speak to her when she is alone because she is dressed more formally. There is a frustration shown here because Natalie feels as though Jamie is invisible to the neighbours when he's dressed a certain way and I say "it's just appearances". I then explore the concept of 'ned' a bit more:

**LW:** What's a Ned to you guys? What would you say is a ned?

**Jennie:** Trackies, tracksuits, caps,

**Emma:** Him [referring to Jennie's boyfriend]

**BoyF:** I'm no a fucking Ned

**Emma:** Whit?

**BoyF:** I'm no a Ned

**Emma:** Whit ey ye like?

**Jennie:** A weegie

**Natalie:** A casual

**Emma:** I dunno just pure Burberry n minging

Even though the girls have just finished talking about the negative stereotypes of others they are happy to explain to me that Jennie's boyfriend is a ned, and he immediately refutes this. This highlights the complex relationship between the

recognition young people receive but also give to others. Interestingly it is Emma who challenges Jennie's boyfriend and Jennie does not defend him. The other girls perhaps hold back from commenting here as they do not know Jennie's boyfriend and Emma has met him several times before. The description of a ned seems wide ranging and vague it clearly has something to do with dress and appearance but it is also associated with Glasgow and being a "weegie" and also football "casuals". However, it is always used as a derogatory term as summed up by Emma who says a ned is "just pure Burberry n minging". I realise that I'm running out of time and the girls want to head off soon so I ask one last question about role models:

	<b><u>LW:</u></b>	Who do you look upto, who are your role models someone you know or someone else
Primary Action	<b><u>Natalie:</u></b>	Lynne Smith
Recognition	(Everyone sniggers)	
	<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Come on!!
Reaction	<b><u>Natalie:</u></b>	Naw she's no talking about somebody famous

Natalie assumes that I mean a role model in everyday life so she says "Lynne Smith" who ran the Choices in Care programme. But everyone laughs at this suggestion with Jennie even saying "come on" in other words don't be stupid. So Natalie reacts by defending her answer and suggesting that I do not mean someone famous. I then say:

<b><u>LW:</u></b>	It could be it's whatever you think really...
<b><u>Emma:</u></b>	Mahatma Ghandi
	[Everyone laughs]
<b><u>Jennie:</u></b>	Jordan

Natalie changes the subject again and tells a story about telling her mum and gran she wants a boob job.

- LW:** Why Jordan?  
**Jennie:** She started off as a naeb'dy she hud a rough life  
**Emma:** Because she doesn't care that her boobs are fake n massive n she dosne care  
**Jennie:** Have ye read her books n that  
**Angela:** Aye she's goin thru alot the noo  
**Jennie:** She's been thru alot aw her life, she's hud alot of shite and she's still going, with her head up high I like her cause I've read her books n that and she's quite nice

Interestingly after the group laughed at her Natalie did not join in with the discussion but again tried to change the subject by telling a story, however the conversation immediately restarts when Natalie finishes her story. It is worth noting that Emma says "Mahatma Ghandi" is her role model but does not expand on this. It is argued that this could be an example of ventriloquation (Bakhtin, 1986) as Emma seems to be voicing what would be thought of as a good role model by others. It is likely that Emma learned about Mahatma Ghandi in school and although she did not elaborate on her reasons for saying this her choice of role model is very different from Jennie's. Jennie says her role model is "Jordan", a glamour model and reality TV star. Her reasons for choosing Jordan seem to revolve around being able to relate to her. Jennie describes how Jordan started out as a "naeb'dy" which is perhaps how Jennie feels now, and Jordan had a rough life. Natalie says that Jordan does not care that her boobs are huge and this is stated as if it is a disability and not something which she has paid money for to further her career. A lot is revealed in

Jennie's last statement (Jennie seems to speak from a position of knowledge and authority because she's read Jordan's books). Jennie describes how Jordan has been through a lot but still holds her head high which shows that pride is something which Jennie respects and recognises. Emma's phone starts to ring and the girls decide it's time for them to leave. They all decide which buses to get, thank me for the food and head off.

## **Discussion**

Taylor (1992) described recognition as a vital human need and the preceding analysis illustrates the complexities of the notion of recognition and gives an insight into the impact that it has on young people's identity construction and their attempts to seek it.

Each of these girls brings their own individual experiences to the group but the context and discussion provides a structure for what will be recognised and what will be denied recognition. It was the intention of the researcher to create an informal and relaxed environment. However, it must be noted that I, as a researcher, influence the context and this perhaps caused confusion as the girls tried to work out what I will give recognition for. Rogoff and Morelli (1989) emphasised the importance of understanding context when exploring development and behaviour. The authors highlighted the "importance of considering the contexts in which people practice skills and behaviours, as well as those in which we as researchers observe them" (p. 12). We can see from the preceding discussion that context is central to our understanding of recognition. Bound up in each context are structures of recognition and young people must negotiate within and between these.

In this peer group discussion we can identify several structures of recognition which the girls find themselves caught between. The overarching structure is employment. Within this specific context Jennie and Michaela find themselves in the minority as they do not have a job, however, Natalie and Angela find themselves being quizzed about their jobs and often having to defend their positions e.g. Natalie's job with the police. There is also a discussion of potential places where Jennie can look for work with some options favoured and other ridiculed. This also alerts us to the fact that within this peer group recognition is not given or denied for getting any job but it also depends on the specific job in question.

The girls are also caught between missing the Choices in Care programme where they feel they were respected and treated like adults and now struggling to find work and facing rejection in the adult world (for example Emma not being offered a place at university). This relates to their discussion about school and education. The education system is structured to give recognition for working hard and academic achievements but the girls explain that from their perspective school is about a lot more than this. They give examples of alternative structures of recognition such as popularity.

Fashion, money and material possessions are also given recognition. Yet again this is a complex structure. As we seen with Michaela, she has the latest phone and a new tattoo but this is given no recognition as she is not working and the other working members of the group mock her for taking money off her parents.

Michaela therefore finds herself caught between a structure which recognises having money and being fashionable and trendy and another structure which recognises earning your own money by getting a job.

As we can see these young people's lives are multifaceted and filled with competing sources of recognition such as friends versus parents, popularity versus school achievements, employed versus unemployed. The tension caused by moving between these different structures of recognition causes conflict within our dialogical selves (Gillespie, Cornish, Aveling & Zittoun, 2008).

## **Chapter 5: Recognition within the Institution of Training Programmes**

Following from Chapter 4 the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to another group of young people, this time a group of young males, and present an analysis of a discussion group conducted with them. This chapter also addresses the first research question how do young people give and receive recognition in their peer group? However, this discussion group did not take place round the table but instead as the group are taking part in a health and safety test. Recognition can be gained from the tester and attending youth worker by doing well in the test, however as with the previous discussion group, there are complexities in this process. This discussion group will allow the reader to see the process of recognition discussed in the previous chapter operating in the real life context of a health and safety test which is part of the wider institution of the Get Ready for Work Programme. As before, to provide a full understanding I will begin by describing the members of this group and the background leading up to this discussion group.

### **Access to Construction**

I met the Access to Construction group at Falkirk College on 17th March 2009. This programme is directed towards young people who would like to work in any area of the construction industry. It typically attracts young males. The programme runs for 26 weeks and the group spends two days per week at the local college and the rest of their programme consists of group work, work placements, first aid training and team building activities. Originally eleven boys aged 16-18 started the programme on 15th September 2008; nine boys completed the programme on 20th February 2009.

I previously conducted two discussion groups with these boys in December 2008 and attended their end of programme presentation.

## **The Recession**

In order to fully understand these young people's experiences and specifically their struggle to find employment it is worth noting the economic conditions at the time this discussion group took place. In December 2007 the United States suffered a crisis within its banking system brought on by reckless and unsustainable lending practices. This triggered a recession which affected most of the industrialised world. This has resulted in deceleration of economic activity, rising levels of inflation and record numbers of people, both adults and young people, unable to find work. At the time of this discussion group, March 2009 the BBC reported that UK unemployment has risen above two million for the first time since 1997 (*BBC Business News*, 18 March, 2009). It was therefore a very difficult time for young people to leave school or training programmes. However this problem was compounded for this group of young people trying to enter the construction industry as it was reported to "feature prominently among the 20 professions that have seen the biggest increases in benefits claimants" (*The Guardian*, 20 March, 2009).

## **Discussion Group Context**

I have chosen to present this data for several reasons. This discussion group is atypical because, unlike all of my other discussion groups, it was not conducted at the Basement. Also the young people had primarily turned up to complete a Health and Safety test and the discussion group was an aside to this. However, this discussion group provided an opportunity to observe and engage with young people in a real life process and in terms of recognition the context of a test provided an

ideal setting to examine recognition explicitly. This discussion group does not cover all the issues that became relevant to my analysis of the full sample. But neither are the experiences discussed here isolated or unusual examples when compared with those of others. Finally, this discussion group gives an insight into the diverse experiences of these young people.

The nine boys who completed the programme were offered the chance to sit the CSCS Health and Safety test which they need in order to work on a construction site. Eight boys turned up to sit the test; one boy did not turn up (Scott explained later that the missing boy did not have a suitable form of identification which is needed to sit the test). I met the group along with their two workers, Scott and Willie at the college. The test was held in a mobile unit located at the back of the college buildings.

All of the boys were casually dressed in tracksuits and seemed relaxed and were chatting to each other, and while we were all walking towards the back of the college they stopped to talk briefly to other people they knew attending college. Once we reached the mobile unit Scott spoke to the man administering the test. The tester explained to us that the boys needed 35/40 to pass the multiple choice test. He also explained that apprentices are given 2 hours a week to work through a health and safety book, they then sit the test when they feel confident they know all the information. Scott explained that the boys had been given the work books but it was their responsibility to read them and study for the test – no support was available from the council and indeed this was the first time the workers have seen the boys since the end of the programme.

Willie left at this point to go and check on another group of young people attending the college. The first four boys were called into the unit to sit their test and I spoke to the remaining four outside. I was comfortable that they all recognised me and I explained I had come along to catch-up with them now that their programme had finished. I checked it was ok with the boys to record the discussion. We sat on a wall next to the unit while we talked.

## **Introducing the Participants**

Paul (all names are pseudonyms) is 17 he lives in Stirling with his Mum and Dad. He left school after gaining some Highers (Scottish qualification) but struggled to find work, he was not in education employment or training for 7 months before joining the Construction programme. Since completing the programme he has struggled to find work. He is currently trying to secure a place on a local regeneration project and the hopefully gain an apprenticeship in plumbing. Football is a big part of all of these young people's lives and Paul strongly supports Celtic.

James is 16 he lives in Clackmannan with his Mum who is a single parent. He didn't enjoy school and left at the first opportunity. He is currently unemployed. James signed up for the construction programme as he had limited options and no way of getting money. He has been looking for work and has previously said that he would accept any job but he has been unsuccessful in anything he has applied for.

Steven is 17 he lives in Stirling with his Mum, Dad and younger sister. Since completing the programme he has remained unemployed. Steven's Mum and Dad work full time and his sister is still at school, so Steven spends most days in the house alone. He is unsure of what he wants to do as he didn't enjoy some aspects of the programme such as painting and decorating.

Neil is 17 and is the only person to have move into employment since the end of the programme. He is working as a labourer; this is casual and insecure employment but has the potential to become more permanent if his employers secure more work in the near future. Neil lives at home with his Dad, a single parent. Neil knows his Dad has quite high expectations of him and thinks he should have left school earlier and looked for work in order to contribute financially to the household. Neil is the only member of this group to pass the health and safety test.

Thomas is 16; he is a bright young man who is frustrated at his situation and not being able to find work. Thomas lives with his Gran after falling out with his Mum but he likes this living arrangement and still has contact with his Mum. Thomas thought it would be easy to find work after he left school and at times talked about wishing he stayed on at school. Thomas seems confident that he will pass the Health and Safety test and does not like it when he realises he has failed.

Aldo (nickname) is 17. He is a very quiet member of the group and gives the impression that he dislikes being there. I struggled to get to know anything about his personal situation other than he lives with his Mum and Dad and has a girlfriend called Louise.

Ian is also 17. He is a bit of a loner within the group. He just managed to complete the programme and was close to being sacked due to several unexplained absences. The other members of the group seem wary of him and during the programme he often met up with friends outside the basement; this created an intimidating atmosphere for the other members of the group. Ian is unemployed but seems unconcerned and plans to sign on the dole when he turns 18.

John was 17 at the time of this discussion group. He was a much quieter member of the group and said very little both during the programme and discussion group. The youth worker had a suspicion that John had a turbulent home-life but despite attempts to offer John the chance to discuss this he never opened up.

Scott is a Youth Worker with the council. He has worked on a number of construction programmes. He gets on well with the young people and is often seen as one of the lads. He is straight talking and often challenges council rules, for example it became policy that staff were not allowed to stand near young people while outside on a cigarette breaks or lend them a lighter and this is something Scott strongly disagreed with. Scott is keen to further his career within the council and as a result he works hard to get as many young people into employment (known as

outcomes) as possible. Often this means however that young people accept temporary insecure jobs and become unemployed again at a later date.

Tester (name unknown) was an employee of an external company commissioned to conduct the health and safety test. He was very business-like and matter of fact and said little to the young people by way of advice or encouragement. He mainly spoke to Scott and myself and only directly engaged with the young people to tell them they had passed/failed the test.

## **Analysis**

All of the young people had gathered next to the testing cabin at the back of the college. The tester split the group in two and began to brief the first group about the procedures for the test. I began a conversation with the remaining boys:

**LW:** So what've you been up to since I last seen you at the presentation?  
**Paul:** Sleeping, that's it  
**Steven:** Well I've no had a job so lying in the hoose all day  
**James:** I've been trying to find a job but it's just no for happening

Although the boys seemed happy and relaxed the mood changed slightly when I asked what they had been doing since the end of the programme, although I've tried to keep my question broad it is clear I want to know whether or not they have managed to find jobs. This could be seen as a structure of recognition which I am imposing on the discussion and within this structure these boys struggle to gain recognition. It can be seen in this extract above that three of the boys have been

unable to find employment and there was a sense of frustration about this. James in particular describes trying to find a job but “it’s just no for happening”. The boys describe having nothing to do and Steven says he’s just been “lying in the hoose all day”. I got the impression from the boys that they were bored and perhaps the reason for the initial happy mood was that the test gave them something to do and a focus on that day. I move the conversation on by asking:

**LW:** How long since the programme finished?  
**Paul:** 5 weeks  
**Steven:** Is it?  
**Paul:** Aye, it’s pish like

Again this part of the dialogue re-emphasises the negativity the boys feel about having nothing to do now the programme has finished. I would argue that there is also a bit of tension in relation to the training programme as the boys had hoped that after completing the programme they would be able to move forward into employment. However, as explained above the recession hit the construction industry particularly hard and the result is that these young people are in a very difficult position. Paul states that it has been five weeks since the programme ended and Steven asks in surprise “is it”? His surprised tone suggests that he had not realised it has been as long as five weeks and highlighted the length of time he has been unemployed. Paul reinforces this by saying “it’s pish like” this is a negative colloquial word which is often used instead of urinate. One of the boys Neil has not spoken yet so I ask him directly:

**LW:** [to Neil] What've you been up to since ...  
**Neil:** Working

**LW:** So you've got a job

**Neil:** Aye till Easter he's just needing a hand so I'm just helping him

There seemed to be a tension here for Neil as he is the only one in this group who is currently working. He perhaps did not want to draw attention to this at the beginning of the conversation. When I ask him directly he seems to be giving me one word answers such as “working” and then almost trying to play down his job by saying his employer is “just needing a hand” and saying he is “just helping him”. It is easy for the boys to commiserate with each other and unlike the group of girls in Chapter 4 there does not seem to be the same focus or motivation to help each other and suggest potential employers. While they are frustrated this group of boys seem more accepting of their situation. I realise that Neil may feel uncomfortable so I tried to move the conversation on more positively:

**LW:** Cool, then after that do you think he'll give you more work?

**Neil:** He's waiting until Easter then he's seeing if he's got more work, then if he's got more work then he's gonna keep me on for a wee bit longer.

At the time my intention was to make Neil more comfortable however closer analysis reveals that I also provide positive recognition in my use of the word “cool”. Neil seems more comfortable in his answer here as he explains his job is temporary. This almost puts him back in line with the rest of the group as he too is still looking for long term employment. While Neil and I have been talking Paul started to explain to one of the other boys that he has been offered a two week placement with Raploch Regeneration Project at the end of April. Again, we can see hear that the boys show no interest in finding out more about Neil's job and the conversation

continues without us. Paul explains that the project offer many young people temporary work placements then pick the ones they judge as being the best to stay on and begin an apprenticeship:

	<b><u>LW:</u></b>	So you were saying you're up against 3 other guys...
Primary Action	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	For one apprenticeship at plumbing
Recognition	<b><u>Steven:</u></b>	Is Kyle still at it?
Reaction	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	Nah he's at another one but there's another guy Kyle Jones, he's a wee boy about that size [gestures he's small] and cannae lift a fork to his dinner then there's this big massive dopey cunt that couldn't even fit in a door he's that stupid he dosne ken how to work it...

Recognition [everyone laughs]

Paul explains he is competing against 3 other men for the chance to be an apprentice plumber. Steven asks if someone he knows, Kyle, is one of the 3 men. Paul answers Steven's question but then uses this opportunity to deliberately mock and belittle the other people he is in competition with for the apprenticeship. In order to think of himself favourably Paul must put others down. By belittling someone else and highlighting their flaws Paul can maintain a stronger social position. He describes the first boy, Kyle Jones, as small and uses statements like "cannae (cannot) lift a fork to his dinner" which is said to give the impression he is incapable of doing the job. He then describes the second person as a "big massive dopey cunt" who is "stupid" (stupid). It seems like Paul is trying to position himself in the middle of the two extremes he describes, he would like to be seen as someone who is most appropriate and capable of doing the job. This may also be an attempt to show confidence and gain recognition from the other boys.

Recognition is shown by the rest of the boys as everyone laughs at Paul's statements. The conversation continues:

- Paul:** See if I dinne beat them I'll be gutted like
- LW:** So what do you need to do? How long is the placement?
- Paul:** Eh 2 weeks, well its fae the 20th tae the 1st of May eh so it's like round about two weeks
- Neil:** Are they getting placements tae?
- Paul:** Aye we've all got the same placement, but one ey ma pals who's after me is only working for 10 days and I'm working for 12 he's getting May day off and he's getting another day off
- Steven:** Dae ye get paid in that placement?
- Paul:** Dinne think so no but ay the boy was telling me that they've got folk who've just passed their apprenticeship after 4 years and getting a thousand pound a week daeing plumbing I was like 52 thousand pound a year at 22 year old that'd be no bad, so I might just break some legs so they cannae dae their placement [jokes]

As the conversation continues Paul admits that he will be “gutted” if he doesn't succeed above the other two boys. The competition that Paul feels is apparent in his use of the word “beat”. The impression formed here is that these young people are part of a game and they must beat other opponents in the race to find a job and move forward otherwise they remain stuck in their current position. Paul answers my question and Neil's question and explains how the placements work. Interestingly, Paul makes another attempt here to position himself above the other candidates, this time he tried to demonstrate his hard work and commitment to the placement by saying that he worked more and had fewer days off than his friend. The importance of money is highlighted when Steven asks if Paul will get paid for his placement. Paul explains that he doesn't think he will be paid but that the incentive seems to come from hearing that other people who have completed their apprenticeships are

earning a thousand pounds per week. It is clear Paul has thought about this as he explains that for him this would mean he would be earning “52 thousand pound a year at 22 year old” he goes on to say “that’d be no bad”. Paul seems pleased and excited at the prospect of earning this much and jokes that he “might just break some legs” so that the other people he is in competition with cannot do their placements. This is not said in an aggressive or threatening way but it shows that Paul is perhaps not as confident as he appeared to start with, as he would rather not have any competition.

Paul is trying to claim power here in a powerless situation. Power can come from beating the competition and gaining employment but if this fails then power can also be gained from being physically dominant. This highlights the structures of recognition which exist in the social world. Recognition can be sought and gained for pro-social or anti-social behaviours. Recognition can also be further categorised into formal and informal which occur in everyday life. Informal recognition could include complements, verbal praise, knowing that someone trusts and believes in you or more negatively winning a fight due to physical strength and stamina. More formal structures of recognition include academic achievements, promotions and pay rises, economic wealth, sports medals and trophies. In this example, Paul is trying to gain recognition in the field of employment but if this fails it seems he will resort to physical power and violence. This rest of the group seems to endorse this by laughing.

Within the education system young people who do not excel academically are at risk of receiving little positive recognition from those around them. This is problematic

given that research has shown “that recognition for positive behaviour is related to adolescent’s self-perception” (Cheng, Siu & Leung, 2006, p. 468). The emphasis on positive recognition solely for academic achievement is problematic for young people who do not achieve good grades. As Zittoun (2004, p. 154) highlights “a young person who has been defined in exclusively negative terms at school may wish to be judged by others on something other than school-related skills”. Negative experiences at school can have a profound effect upon a young person’s self-perception. Further, failing to make a successful transition from school can lead to a young person remaining in a position where there are few opportunities to gain positive recognition.

Paul’s discussion of potential wealth also relates to Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of social recognition for capital. Bourdieu describes young people’s social world as a “microcosm within wider society” and Bourdieu’s notion of capital “offers a common denominator between the microcosmic world of young people in transition and the macrocosmic world of ‘mainstream’ society” (1984, p. 114). Paul is keen to earn a wage within an adult society that he feels would be appropriate and possibly advanced for his age. This would allow Paul to gain recognition for his employment status but also money to buy resources which are valued in adult society such as a car and house.

One author has applied this theory to her research with young offenders (Barry, 2006). Barry stated that “young people on the whole are conformist and that their problems in youth are exacerbated by the pessimistic image and limited understanding that many adults have of them” (p. 4). Barry draws on Bourdieu’s

concepts, in particular social capital, and argues they are helpful “in examining the imbalances in opportunities and status for young people in transition” (p. 6).

Barry’s work resonates with Paul’s experiences. Paul is in a period of transition as he is trying to gain work in order to become part of adult society where he can earn money and hence increase his economic and social capital. Barry (2006) explains that one of the reasons behind youth offending behavior is an “in ability to achieve one’s aspirations conventionally within mainstream society” (p.13). Although not as extreme as offending behavior we can see signs of this strategy when Paul belittles the other’s he is in competition with and later jokes that if he is not successful in gaining the apprenticeship he will “kill someone”.

Paul goes on to describe the test that he sat in order to be offered a placement:

**Paul:** This boy came in when I was sitting the plumbing test, he come in sat doon and she said [the examiner] right this is one of the health and safety advisors and one of the head guys I was like awright turned roon and he went like that I'm a rangers fan afore ye ask, aw for fuck's sake I just turned n looked away I was like that's ma job oot the window already everybody I've worked wi has been a rangers fan [Paul supports Celtic]

Here, another structure of recognition is introduced as Paul explains how big a part football can play in the working environment. This seems to be more specific to males, football is discussed a lot even in my experience in the council offices. The declaration that the Health and Safety advisor makes about being a Rangers fan in the above quote could also be explained in terms of recognition, had Paul been a Rangers fan he may have seen an opportunity to start a conversation with the advisor. Similarly, had this been another context Paul may have felt able to disagree

with this person and state his support for Celtic. However, this person was introduced by the examiner as “one of the head guys” which makes clear a hierarchy and Paul does not feel able to state his support for the opposite team. Paul explains that he “turned and looked away” and he thought “that’s ma job oot the window already” however he then states that everyone he has worked with in the past has supported Rangers. It is therefore unclear why Paul feels like this is a problem. If this is linked to the competition that Paul is facing for the apprenticeship then perhaps Paul sees this as a disadvantage compared to the other candidates as they may be Rangers supporters and therefore on the same side as “one of the head guys”. I then ask what Paul will do if he is unsuccessful:

Primary Action	<b><u>Paul:</u></b> Kill somebody [jokes]
Recognition	[everyone laughs]
Reaction	<b><u>Paul:</u></b> Naw I'm going stay, just gonne keep pissing the lassie off at the Raploch till they gee me a job
	<b><u>Steven:</u></b> Go back to school for 2 weeks!

Paul makes another joke by saying that he will “kill somebody” if he is not offered an apprenticeship. Again the recognition from the other boys is laughter, which shows they find his comments funny but also perhaps that they can identify with how he feels. Paul and Steven both react to this in different ways. Paul gives the impression that he is determined to get a job by saying that he will “stay” and “keep pissing the lassie off” until they give him a job. This suggests a determination and also a lack of options for Paul. However Steven suggests another option “go back to school for 2 weeks”. Paul’s attitude is different attitude to the ones displayed by the girls in Chapter 2. While the girls were reluctant to persist after being rejected Paul draws on another strategy and describes that he thinks eventually they will become so

annoyed with him they will offer him a job anyway. Steven’s comment about returning to school represents a common frustration with the lack of options and opportunities. This is common amongst all of the young people I spoke to, including the girls in the previous chapter. Many young people regretted leaving school as they were naive about the difficulty they would face trying to find work. Paul goes on to respond to this by saying:

Primary Action	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	Aye go back to school aye, I dinne think I'd be allowed back to school
Recognition	<b><u>Steven:</u></b>	Ne'er would I,
	<b><u>Neil:</u></b>	Ne'er would I
Reaction	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	Na I was gid at school
Primary Action	<b><u>James:</u></b>	Teachers either hated me or loved me
Recognition &		
Reaction	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	Na everybody loved me at school I was a gid boy at school, I ken it's hard to believe, [laughs] that's crap like, I've got highers n everything n I'm still fuckin looking for a job

Paul continually attempts to position himself above others within the discussion group and we can also observe this here. Paul says, sarcastically, “aye go back to school aye” suggesting that he thinks this is a ridiculous suggestion. He then follows this by saying he does not think he would be allowed back to school. Steven and Neil recognised Paul’s feeling and identify with his comments saying they do not think they would not be allowed back to school either. Paul then reacts to this and attempts to position himself more favourably than Steven and Neil, almost contradicting his previous comment and says “na I was gid (good) at school” this

suggests that he does not think the reason he would not be allowed to go back has anything to do with bad behaviour. The implied suggestion here is that Paul did well at school which Neil and Steven did not. James comments that teachers either hated or loved him at school. Paul disagrees with James and again tries to distance himself from the others by reinforcing his previous point by saying “na everybody loved me at school” he described himself as a good boy and then jokes that this is “hard to believe”, possible in relation to his current situation. There is a point of realisation for Paul when he realises that he did well at school but he is unemployed his swearing further emphasises his anger when he says “I’m still fuckin looking for a job”. This again reinforces the frustration that became apparent at the beginning of the conversation. It’s almost as if he feels he does not belong in this group. He achieved qualifications at school and wants to work but social situations are preventing him from realising this but he also does not accept his current situation.

Primary action	I ask if the boys wish they had left school earlier:
Recognition	<div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;"> <p><b><u>Neil:</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Steven:</u></b></p> <p><b><u>James:</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Paul:</u></b></p> </div> <div> <p>That's what ma Dad says “if you'd left earlier you probably would've got a job”</p> <p>I didn't know what I wanted to dae</p> <p>I couldne be bothered</p> <p>You probably would've been paid off by now anyway</p> </div> </div>

In response to my question Neil gives an insight into the recognition given by his parents. Neil quotes his Dad, who said “if you'd left earlier you probably would've got a job” meaning if Neil had left school earlier he would have found work. This not only shows that issue of leaving education and moving into work has been something Neil and his Dad have discussed but also that Neil’s dad felt he stayed too long in

school and as a result is struggling to find work. Young people often discussed their parents; the topic arose 20 times during the 16 discussion groups. Steven and James then respond to the question by explaining their own circumstances. Steven admits that he didn't know what he wanted to do and this is the reason he didn't leave school earlier. James states that he couldn't be bothered, it's unclear if he meant he could not be bothered leaving school or he could not be bothered getting a job. Paul however does not talk about his own experience but comments on what Neil said "you probably would've been paid off by now" this is perhaps a reflection on the current economic times and the lack of job opportunities in the construction trade. This could also be an attempt to provide some positive recognition to Neil by saying that even if he had followed his Dad's advice he may well still be in the same situation. Steven then reacts to Paul's comments:

Reaction	<b><u>Steven:</u></b>	Ken Paul sat for 7 months before he even came on this course
Recognition	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	I never sat for 7 months
Reaction	<b><u>Steven:</u></b>	It was 7 months
Recognition	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	wiz it?
Reaction	<b><u>Steven:</u></b>	Aye, it was like February till the course started in September or something
Recognition	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	Aye

Steven states that Paul "sat" or did nothing for seven months before starting the programme. This was not said in a negative way directed at Paul but more in support of Paul's comments about the struggle to find work. But this also serves to bring Paul back in line with the group as he has previously tried to distance himself from the others. Paul initially disputes the length of time he "sat" or did nothing for. Steven then explains the timings and Paul eventually agrees by saying "aye" he did

do nothing for seven months. This again highlights the boys struggle to find employment but also their somewhat reluctance to acknowledge, or lack of awareness of the amount of time they have been unemployed, there is almost a feeling of embarrassment about this which is shown in the boys questioning of the length of time that has passed. The discussion also highlights the boys need to be seen as a collective and Paul's struggle with this. If all the boys are struggling to find work then they can partly explain this on a lack of opportunities, the current economic climate, their negative experience at school. However, during the discussion it is clear that Paul struggles with his position as he knows he has qualifications and did well at school and yet is forced into the same boat as the others which leave him competing for work.

Society expects young people to be engaged in some sort of employment or training once they leave school. As Hodgkinson (2004, p. 12) states we live in a "work-obsessed world", we look down upon people who do not work and use labels such as 'spongers' and 'free-loaders'. As young people approach an age where they can choose to leave school they are asked by many people 'what will you do?' The option of doing nothing is rarely seen as a positive and acceptable choice. However, in a time of increasing diversity of 'post-school options', (Archer & Yamashita, 2003) some young people do not make the transition successfully and risk falling into a stigmatised and labelled group.

The conversation is then interrupted when the boys recognise someone they know walking towards another college building. We then chat about different things including football and their girlfriends. The atmosphere was relaxed so towards the

end of the conversation I showed the group a picture of the Carlsberg article (Figure 5.1) the origin of the article is unknown but it appeared on the researcher's social networking page as part of a collection of adverts, it also appears on many other internet sites (including <http://www.partyvibe.com/forums/jokes-humour/30252-carlsberg-dont-make-shooting-ranges.html>):

**“Carlsberg don’t make shooting ranges, but if they did....**



**They’d be the best shooting ranges in the world!”**

**Figure 5.1: Carlsberg Picture and Caption**

I asked the group what they thought of the photo and caption:

- Paul:** [laughs] Fannys, they're all Rangers fans  
**Steven:** [laughs] Ha ha, that's quite gid like  
**LW:** Do you think it's funny?  
**Paul:** Aye  
**LW:** Why?  
**Neil:** Cause they look like junkies

**LW**: Cow do they look like junkies?  
**Paul**: They're aw wee neds  
**James**: [points to picture] That looks like Aldo!  
[Everyone laughs]

From the first part of the excerpt it can be seen that initially the boys laugh at the photo and caption. Again, football enters into the conversation with Paul saying “they’re all Rangers Fans”. I then ask if they think it’s funny, even though they are laughing I wanted to clarify that they thought it was funny before attempting to find out why. When I do ask why they think it’s funny Neil replies “cause they all look like junkies” as it’s unclear to me where the reference to drugs come into the photo or caption I then question this. Although no one answers my question directly Paul states “they’re aw (all) wee neds” this illustrates Bakhtin’s (1981) comments relating to individual’s voices being influenced by institutions and social groups. The term ‘ned’ is often used by the media is also appears in young people’s dialogue as a way of describing other young people. The girls in Chapter 4 also discussed the label ‘ned’ and it was discussed a total of 13 times in all of the discussion groups. It also shows that the label of ‘ned’ carries with it an image of a young person dressed in a tracksuit possibly wearing a baseball cap which appears in the picture. James then points to the picture and jokes that one of the boys looks like “Aldo” this is the nickname of one of the boys sitting his test. I also become aware as I look at the boys that they are all dressed in tracksuits. I pointed out the similarity between the way they were dressed and the young people in the photo but none of the boys commented on this. The boys introduce football and derogatory stereotypes in a bid to distance themselves from this image. When I try to point out the similarities in the way they are dressed they choose to ignore me and carry on the conversation with

Scott. The conversation moved on when Steven called Scott over to where we are sitting:

Primary Action	<b><u>Steven:</u></b>	[to Scott the youth worker] Do you think that's funny?
		[Scott reads the caption]
Recognition	<b><u>Scott:</u></b>	There's a dark humour in there
Reaction	<b><u>Paul:</u></b>	Do you know what I'd like to do I'd like to drive past in a car with a big wet fish and slap every single one of them across the face
Recognition		[Everyone laughs]

Steven asks Scott if he thinks the caption is funny, he may have done this to gain recognition from Scott, or possibly to show me that they were not the only ones who found the photo and caption funny. Scott then replies “there’s a dark humour in there” this is quite a vague response but this is possibly because Scott is a council employee and has to be guarded about what he says, he therefore recognises the humour without personally identifying with it. Perhaps another reason for Scott’s cautious response is that he also recognises the similarities between the way the boys are dressed and the young people in the photo and does not want to reveal any negative stereotypes. Scott is also aware that I have brought the photo along to show the boys and at this point I have not revealed my thoughts about it. Paul then reacts by joking and by mocking the boys in the photo by saying he’d like to “drive past in a car with a big wet fish and slap every single one of them across the face”. His choice of a non-violent response to make fun of the group in the photo almost belittles them further. Everyone then laughs which gives Paul positive recognition for his comments.

After approx 30 minutes the first group of boys finish their test and come out of the mobile unit. All the boys I've been talking to ask the others how they got on. James then says "I should've brought my book with me", he said this very quietly and it gives the impression that just before he goes into the unit he realises he would have benefitted from reading the book. This could also be seen as an excuse given in advance just in case he fails the test.

The remaining boys enter the Testing unit and complete the Test. The first group go off to smoke in another area of the college grounds. Once the second group had finished everyone gathers to await their results.

There is a lot of confusion as the boys are all handed letters as they leave the mobile unit and some assume this means they have passed without reading the letter. However, the entire first group failed the test. The test is split into several sections and their letters explain which sections they have failed. The tester talks to them about their results:

**Tester:** You should've passed the handling equipment you've done your abrasive wheels

**Thomas:** Aye a know

The tester seems to berate the boys and says to Thomas that he "should've" passed one section of the test because of a previous course in Abrasive Wheels. At no point are the boys congratulated on the sections of the test that they did pass.

**Steven** [shouts over to group] Did Aldo pass?

**Thomas:** I actually thought it was easy I thought I

was daeing alright tae

**John**: I thought I was daeing alright tae

**Aldo** [to Scott] I dinne know if I've passed or not?

The confusion about the test results is evident in this excerpt. The second group of boys are keen to find out how the first group got on and Steven shouts over.

Thomas then admits that he thought the test was alright and he thought he “was daeing (doing) alright tae”. This shows Thomas’ surprise at failing the test, John then agrees with Thomas. Aldo is confused as to whether he passed or not and gives his letter to Scott who begins to read it out aloud:

Primary Action	Scott begins to read out his letter "unfortunately"....
Recognition	<b><u>Ian</u></b> : Ah you've failed tae
Reaction	<b><u>Aldo</u></b> : I've failed?
	<b><u>Scott</u></b> : Yeah
	<b><u>Aldo</u></b> : I thought it wasne tae bad like, obviously no
	<b><u>Tester</u></b> : You'll ken [know] if you've passed, if you pass you get a wee certificate at the bottom of the letter and a number you've got to phone up

It seems a slightly unfair for Scott to read the letter out, however perhaps he felt this was ok as the other boys had also failed. Recognition comes from Ian who comments “ah you’ve failed tae”. Ian’s words are negative in the sense that he is emphasising that Aldo has failed the test however the underlying tone is positive as if in recognition that they are all in the same boat. Aldo reacts to this by asking Scott if he has indeed failed and Aldo goes onto re-iterate the earlier points by saying that he thought the test “wasne tae bad” but states that his failure means he was wrong. The tester then explains what the letters would look like if the boys had passed. This

seems a strange thing to comment and it is not even of benefit to the other boys who have already gone into the unit by this point.

The first group stand apart, after the test rather than as a group which makes it harder to talk to them. Their mood seems to have become slightly more negative, as it seems they all thought they would have passed the test. Scott begins to talk about employers and the boys being out on placement. He mentions a local employer that I know:

**LW:** I don't know Rhuri as well as I know Neil  
**Scott:** A very understanding boss, you ken what he said, it was Jamie he's the guy that's no here the day right (laughing) after the 5, 6 weeks Rhuri, Rhuri was sitting in the office wi his feet up and he says Scott goin come in for a quick word before you go, and I thought oh no what's the young lad done, and my heart stopped, so ah goes in and says what's up, and he'd missed a day, said he had problems with transport, he was late a couple of mornings, and you know he was getting every tool in this workplace and he says look he's fine when he's here, he's absolutely bang on he says, I says well what's the problem then, he says the excuses I says what's wrong wi his excuses he says they're shite [laughs] I went well ok we can work on that then

Scott describes what he feels like as a council employee trying to support a young person on a work placement with a local employer. Scott begins by describing the employer, Rhuri, as “a very understanding boss” he then talks about the only young boy that has not come along to sit the test. Scott is talking openly here and the other boys were standing not far from us. It's clear that Scott takes his job very seriously as he says his “heart stopped” when he assumed the employer was going to tell him something the young person had done wrong. He then goes on to explain that the young person has had some time off his work placement. However, Scott is clear

that this is a bad thing as he believes the placement is good and the young person is getting taught how to use “every tool in this workplace”. The employer tells Scott that when the young person attends his placement he is “absolutely bang on”, but he goes on to say that the problem is the fact that his excuses for not being at work placement are “shite”. Scott shows his relief when he laughs and he told the employer “ok, we can work on that then”. This paints a very mixed picture of what it’s like to be on work placement, on the one hand Scott describes a very flexible understanding employer but on the other Scott gives the impression that Jamie’s time off is only unacceptable because this is a good placement with the opportunity to learn a lot. As the conversation continues with an exchange between the youth worker Scott and the Tester we can see the structures of recognition within which they are embedded:

Primary Action	The tester then approaches us and begins to speak to Scott about the preparation the boys have done before the test	
Recognition	<b><u>Tester:</u></b>	They've had no training for this test so I take it you've just thrown it in as an extra
Reaction	<b><u>Scott:</u></b>	Aye but what we done the last time they got a mornings training somebody went through the book we thum

After the first group failed the test the Tester then asks Scott about the training the boys have had before the test. The Tester’s use of the word “thrown” suggests that this is how he would explain the failures in the first group. The Tester shows an awareness here that these boys have been given no support to prepare for the test and have effectively been set up to fail. It is unclear who benefits from this situation, the council may benefit by being able to say they have provided the boys with the

opportunity to sit the test but this would mean they would have to acknowledge that so many of the boys failed the test. This seems to be at best a waste of time and at worst a potentially very damaging experience for the young people. In terms of adolescent identity construction who young people think they are, and who they think they might become is shaped by the recognition that they receive from significant others (Mead, 1967; Gillespie, 2005). Scott agrees that the boys have had no training but describes the process that he went through with a previous group.

- Tester:** They've no had a book, they said
- Scott:** They have they've been issued with a book, but dae they read it? Dae they wheeky! but the last time at least they got the morning and just about 7 out of 9 of thum passed it because they were switched on to it
- Tester:** We had 45, 50 turn up this morning, and see out of the full 50 of them standing there I said how many of your have brought your books with you...
- Scott:** Not one of them
- Tester:** What do I want to bring my book with me for? I said see when those 4 are in what're you's lot doing?
- Scott:** Exactly, exactly you want to pass the bloody thing don't you?

The conversation continues with both the Tester and Scott blaming the young people for not reading the book given to them in preparation for the test. The Tester then says that they boys told him they have not been given a book, Scott disputes this and says that the boys have been given a book but they don't read it. Again, he describes a previous group where seven out of nine boys passed the test, this seems to be Scott's attempt to redeem himself for the bad results the current group have had. But it begs the question if it worked so well the last time then why did they take away the support this time? Scott himself admits that the previous group passed because "they were switched on to it" after a mornings' training. The Tester then

identifies with what Scott is saying by describing the number of people who turned up in the morning without their books. Scott seems to differ in where he places responsibility, he has just described the difference that some training can make but he then places the responsibility back with the young people when he says “you want to pass the bloody thing don’t you?”. This discussion comes after the first group of boys have failed the test and it seems that in order to deny any responsibility for this both the Tester and Scott blame the young people.

After a short time the second group come out of the unit and we find out that one of the boys has passed his test. Neil, the only boy who is currently working, passed the test. He walks over to the other boys and they all look at his letter as it is different to their own. Scott then says:

**Scott:** That's funny that's the man, he's the only yin that I've got an outcome out ey so far, picked it up last Thursday (pause) that's amazing, and see when he started his placement he was wi Griffin it was heavy heavy work the boss man went pfff he's no very gid, right, then after about 5 weeks I went oot to get a signature, his exit review and the boss man said he's a good worker we're wanting to hauld [hold] onto him, what a turnaround, amazing.

Scott is clearly pleased that Neil passed his test, saying “that’s amazing”. Neil success also exonerates Scott from the failures of the rest of the group as it proves the test can be passed even with no support or preparation. This also supports Scott’s argument for individual motivation and responsibility. As Neil has managed to get a job Scott can claim an outcome; each youth worker is tasked with getting as many outcomes as possible in order that the council can continue funding their training programmes. Scott describes this achievement as “amazing”. Scott then describes how when Neil first started at this work placement the employer did not

think he was “very gid (good)” but then after 5 weeks the employer had changed his mind and wanted to employ Neil. This short quote illustrates that Scott is immersed in a structure of recognition imposed by the council and he also must negotiate within the structure imposed by the employer to ensure that a young person is offered a job.

Further, by using the word “outcome” Scott is speaking the language of the council; the term ‘outcome’ is used by the council to describe a case of a young person gaining employment. Wertsch (1991) states than an individual speaker is not simply talking as an individual but that in his her utterances the voices of groups and institutions are heard (p. 76). This has become known as ventriloquation and Bakhtin (1973) also referred to this term which he defined as “the process in which one voice speaks through another voice” (p. 78). Hence, our dialogue is multi-voiced as Bakhtin described “people’s views of the world and of themselves may be more or less dominated by the voices of the groups ... to which they belong” (p. 78) Here it is clear from the language which Scott is using, specifically, the word outcome what the young people mean to Scott. The more outcomes the council gain the more funding they can apply for and justify. Scott is judged on the number of outcomes he achieves and this reveals what the boys are to him in terms of his own recognition through his job. In a similar way the council are also judged on the outcomes they achieve. Scott then describes the first impression that Neil’s employer had of him and this shows how the employer shared this opinion with Scott. However after five weeks the employer’s impression changed and he wanted to “hauld (hold) onto him

(Neil)". Scott and I then have a brief exchange about the nature of first impressions and how they can be wrong.

Scott then goes on from this to describe a less successful story of another young person who is also standing not far from us but far enough not to hear what was being said:

**Scott:** [laughs] He wanted a painter and decorator, that's all he wanted painter and decorator, I phoned up a guy I'd spoke to the guy last summer so he, I says' I'll be phoning you in the winter time if that's alright, aye fine, and I says right I've got a young laddie, he says right what's he really like and I says look I says he's no feart fi heights he's got eyes like a hawk and he's got bags a guts and he's raring to go, right, and I'm thinking all the lies I'm telling here, the boys says after a recommendation like that I can only say bring him in for an interview so he lasted 3 weeks and then he got caught he was sanding windae frames, he was sanding windae frames he ended up sanding the windae it was 20 wee panels ey windaes and the boss man was like whit the fuck and sacked him on the spot (laughs) for being an idiot and Willie says to me mibbe he done it deliberately because he wasne enjoying his placement and I went John's no that clever! [Laughs] he was sacked for incompetence, some days I feel like I'm banging my head off one ey them [points at a wall]

Scott begins by describing the process he went through to get a work placement for a young person and he describes how he exaggerated the skills of the young person saying "he's no feart (scared) fi heights, he's got eyes like a hawk, and he's got bags a guts and he's raring to go". Scott recognises that he's exaggerating by saying "I'm thinking all the lies I'm telling here" this is very honest of Scott as I would have no idea if this is an accurate description or not. Scott then explains that after his recommendation the employer gave the young person a chance but this ended after

3 weeks when the boy was caught sanding down windows and not the window frames. Scott shows his amusement for this by laughing and saying the boy was “sacked on the spot for being an idiot”. Scott then describes his colleague Willie’s alternative explanation that the young person may not have liked his work placement therefore tried to deliberately get the sack. Scott mocks this explanation and says that his reply to Willie was “John’s no that clever”. Scott’s frustration with young people and employment is shown when he ends by saying “some days I feel like I’m banging my head off one ey them (points at a wall)”.

It is unclear why Scott told me this story, perhaps to reinforce claims he made earlier that suggests he feels the responsibility lies with the young person. Scott feels he does his job well and the employers create opportunities but often the young people do not make the most of these opportunities.

## **Discussion**

The analysis of this discussion shows the ways in which this group of young people talk about and make sense of their search for employment. The interpretation also reveals the process of recognition within this group as they aim to pass a Health and Safety test as part of their Get ready for Work training programme.

This group would fall into the category NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). However, as MacDonald and Marsh (2001) have discussed, government policy assumes that there are the necessary number of jobs and training places available to accommodate young school leavers. The authors state that in the

government's eyes "youth unemployment is a symptom of an ill-prepared workforce; the fault of the young unemployed" (p. 388). This is a message often portrayed by the media which further stigmatises this group. However, as mentioned this group have left school and this construction training programme during a recession. As a result they have entered a very competitive labour market where they are competing with many others, including graduates, for a very limited number of vacancies.

Further, the youth worker Scott and the Tester also adopt a similar attitude described by MacDonald and Marsh (2001) as they blame the young people for their failure in this context. Even though they have, effectively, set them up to fail.

As Lawrence and Dodds (2007, p. 406) describe "many forms of work previously open to young people are no longer available to those not possessing an academic edge". This is particularly relevant for this group of young people as they have just completed an Access to Construction programme and industry that is struggling in the current economic climate. As a news report stated "The Get Britain Building coalition of construction organisations and companies is warning 300,000 jobs could be lost in the industry around the UK" (BBC News, 25 March, 2009). It is therefore crucial that these young people are given as much support and opportunities to gain positive recognition as possible.

This discussion illustrates the many structures of recognition which this group of boys must negotiate within and between. They have all recently left the education system which imposes one structure of recognition and now they are trying to make the transition into employment which will allow them access to structures of recognition contained within the adult world. Without employment, as some of the

boys described, they do not have a lot to fill their time with and limited funds. Finding a job would allow them to be recognised for the social capital and status (Bourdieu, 1984) within the adult world and eventually buy other resources such as a car and house. However, this transition is complicated by several other structures of recognition, for example the Access to Construction programme. There are opportunities for the boys to gain recognition from youth workers and employers while on the programme. However, as the discussion highlights, the programme has not opened doors into employment for many of the boys and this is a source of frustration and seen as a further failure. Indeed, the context of this discussion group, the Health and Safety test, is also a potential source of recognition but for all bar one of the boys this was not the case.

As we can see the issues discussed in the previous chapter which arose in a round the table discussion group are also evident in this context. The discussion groups in Chapters 4 and 5 reveal how structures of recognition are established and negotiated, specifically in relation to less formal structures of recognition such as popularity. Young people are very conscious of appearance and this was discussed in each group. Young people negotiate this structure by dressing a certain way so they fit in with and gain recognition from their peers. However the discussion in Chapter 4 revealed what happens when structures of recognition clash or conflict. Michaela had tried hard to make the most of her appearance but as she did not have a job the other girls turned on her and the recognition was negative. The young men in this discussion group find themselves caught between different and conflicting structures of recognition, for example being unemployed in an adult world which gives recognition for employment and independence. This causes tensions within

their dialogical selves and leaves them struggling to understand their current position. Despite this groups' inferior and often stigmatised position they often use other structures of recognition as a strategy to try and boost their self esteem and think of themselves positively. The young people make several attempts throughout the discussion to put others down which means that they are not at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This is particularly evident when I show them the Carlsberg photo. Instead of identifying with the boys appearing in the picture they immediately look for ways to belittle them and position themselves as superior. Throughout the discussion they draw on affiliation to football clubs, physical strength and well known stereotypes such as 'neds' and 'junkies' in order to feel more powerful than others.

While there are many similarities between the discussion groups in Chapters 4 and 5 it is also worth noting the differences. The groups are distinct in their gender basis and it's clear from the transcripts that the girls spoke a great deal more than the boys, however this may have been due to the location of the discussion group. The girls were free to talk privately with only the janitor interrupting the discussion, by contrast the discussion with the boys was a lot more open with people occasionally walking by and also their youth worker and tester standing nearby. The boys also negotiated slightly different structures of recognition as the girls made no mention of violence of recognition for physical strength. The next chapter will go onto discuss the ways in which young people are using the social networking site Bebo to gain recognition.

## **Chapter 6: Giving and Receiving Recognition Online**

How do young people engage with the alternative context of an online social networking site in order to give and receive recognition? This chapter will introduce the social networking site Bebo, and argue that it provides a context where young people can gain recognition.

Online interactions are increasingly important for young people (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Therefore, in order to fully understand or gain an insight into how they construct their identities we must consider how these online interactions play a part in shaping how they see themselves and others. The social networking site, Bebo, is an online space where young people can be given or denied recognition from friends and peers. The research questions addressed are: 1) how do young people use the in-built structures of recognition which Bebo offers, 2) how do young people creatively manipulate the site to gain recognition from others.

As described in Chapter 3 a dialogical analysis was conducted on a total of 37 webpages created and maintained by young people on Bebo. Due to the sampling method and ethnographic nature of this research not all of these pages were initially accessed over the same time period, however once a page was included in the study it was re-saved every two weeks and analysed for any changes. Please see Table 3.3 for a breakdown of these pages and Appendix 4 for a sample webpage.

In short, this chapter illustrates how young people use several strategies of self presentation which provide informal recognition in a number of ways. It is also

argued that young people deliberately and creatively obscure the language they use to communicate with their peers but exclude out groups which may include parents. It is concluded that Bebo provides a space for young people to receive informal positive recognition from their peer group.

## **Constructing Identities Online**

The number of people we interact with is now wide-ranging and diverse given the modern, technological world we live in. The past decade has seen the rise of online communication via internet chat rooms and online forums which provide us with feedback electronically. For many people the internet is an additional source of communication, however, for young people growing up surrounded by this new technology, the internet and specifically social networking sites are a major part of their social lives. Gross (2004) stated the internet provides adolescents with an ideal setting in which to explore their identity.

Online social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and Bebo have become widely used in the UK, and across the world. Throughout the country, young people have been logging into social networking sites, creating elaborate profiles, publicly articulating their relationships with their peers and writing extensive comments back and forth. In terms of identity development these pages and the interactions young people encounter through them will add to, and become part of, their dialogical selves (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992). As discussed in Chapter 2 our dialogue is multi-voiced and Barresi (2002) concludes that the “self and other are always essentially in dialogue”. We can assume that similar processes appear in

online interactions but it can be argued that communications online have the added complexity of wider, and sometimes unknown, audiences.

During the period of adolescence we encounter many new situations. Our interactions with others increase and become more and more diverse as we move into new social contexts and this has an impact on our identity development and dialogical self. Young people today do not only interact with others in face to face situations but also online. Therefore, in order to fully understand or gain an insight into how they construct their identities we must consider how these online interactions play a part in shaping how they see themselves and others.

There are many social networking sites; Boyd and Ellison, (2007) identified 36 major social networking sites including Facebook, MySpace, Friendster and Twitter. Not all sites remain active, for example Six-degrees.com was one of the first social networking sites to be launched in 1997 but the site was closed down in 2001. The current study will focus on Bebo. While there is nothing in the existing literature about Bebo in particular, other authors have begun turning their attention to identity construction in cyberspace (for example see Talamo & Ligorio, 2001 and Hevern, 2004).

In the following sections I examine the existing literature in relation to young people's behaviour online. The aim of this chapter is to add to the small but growing knowledge base which seeks to understand and explain how young people's behaviour online impacts upon their identity development. Drawing on Goffman's

theories of self presentation (1959) an analysis of young people's profiles on Bebo will illustrate firstly the inbuilt structures which provide an opportunity for young people to gain recognition and then secondly the ways in which young people manipulate these structures and creatively obscure their language in order to favour in group audiences of friends and peers and deter out group audiences such as parents.

### **Young people and Social Networking Sites**

Due to the vast numbers of young people online in the United States much of the research in this area originates there. The Pew Internet & American Life Project has conducted a vast number of studies including an overview of social networking websites and teens (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). The authors conducted a telephone survey of 935 youths aged 12-17 and asked them about their use of social networking sites. The research produced several key findings, including: more than half of all online American teens use social networking sites and 48% of teens report that they visit social networking websites daily or more often (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 3). Similar figures have been found in the UK (OfCom, 2008).

Boyd (2008) focussed on American young people and their engagement with the social networking site MySpace. The author posed the questions: Why do teenagers flock to these sites? What are they expressing on them? How do these sites fit into their lives? Are these online activities like face-to-face friendships or are they different or complementary? In examining various aspects of teen's behaviour on MySpace Boyd (2008) concluded that we have moved from a time where it is not only celebrities' lives that are well documented in the public domain. Nowadays, the

internet provides a space for anyone to publicly discuss their life and invite comment from others. As Boyd states “teenagers must determine where they want to be situated within the social world that they see” (p. 138) and in the online world of social networking sites this means that teenagers must negotiate their relationships and identities with the possibility of “unimaginably wide publicity” (p. 137).

Thomas (2007) discusses the ways in which young people in Australia, Canada, U.S.A, Switzerland and Holland are making sense of their own identities and their place within broader communities. She makes the distinction between the physical cues that we use and rely on in face to face interactions to make judgements about people and the way people are presented through texts in the virtual world. Thomas is one of many researchers who consider the virtual self as separate from other aspects of the self. However, it is argued that in these modern times our identities are constructed both online and offline and often as we move between these two spaces. It is vital that we consider how all of our interactions impact upon identity development.

In the UK, Livingstone and colleagues have conducted a great deal of work into children and young people’s participation online, drawing largely on the UK Children Go Online (UKCGO) project (for example see Livingstone, Bober & Helsper, 2004). Livingstone (2008a) has also discussed young people’s notion of privacy online. The author described how one of her respondents did not want his parents to see his profile, which he considered private but he wanted to communicate publicly with his friends. This further illustrates the complex negotiations which young people must undertake within this online space. Young people have often resorted to setting up

fake pages which they allow their parents access to, this allows them privacy in their interactions on their 'real' page.

West, Lewis and Currie (2009) also explored the notion of privacy. The authors examined students' notions of public and private spheres in relation to their Facebook pages. As in Livingstone's (2008a) work the researchers chose to interview students about their pages rather than look at the pages directly. The researchers concluded that "notions of what is private and public are fuzzy, with no clear-cut public private dichotomy" (p. 615). The current study will add to this discussion by illustrating the ways in which young people appear to be trying to create a notion of privacy from unwanted audiences within a very public space.

The internet has proved to highlight the generation gap between young people and their parents. Young people are growing up into the existing technology and have been described as "digital natives" (Livingstone, 2008b, p. 102) whereas parents are having to learn a vast amount about new technologies and keep up to date with a knowledge of how their teenagers are engaging with the internet. This is one of the few examples where children and young people seem to hold all the knowledge and therefore find themselves in a position of power over their often naive parents.

Livingstone (2008b) commented on this situation stating "only in rare instances in history have children gained a greater expertise than their parents in skills highly valued by society" (p.102). These comments were based on the authors' investigation into teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression. Livingstone conducted interviews with young people and observed them navigating through their pages online. One of Livingstone's respondents

discussed the support she receives online, “it’s nice like if you’ve got a nice picture of you and people are, oh, you look nice. It’s like quite nice, I think when people say you’re pretty”. This quote could also be interpreted to show firstly the dialogue that takes place between young people online and also the opportunity to gain recognition and the importance of this for young people and the way they see themselves.

Tanya Byron (2008) was commissioned by the British government to review young people’s behaviour online. The main focus of the review was to investigate the risks that children and young people face online from both the internet and video games. When conducting the review Byron (2008) realised “how integral these new technologies have become in the lives of young people” (p. 1) and this is further support for the current chapter. Young people today do not only interact with others in face to face situations but also online. Therefore, in order to fully understand or gain an insight into how they construct their identities we must consider how these online interactions play a part in shaping how they see themselves and others. Byron points out the generational divide between adults and young people means that adults such as parents and teachers do not “feel equipped” to help and educate children and young people about the internet. Byron’s review stresses the need to listen to children and young people and appreciate that while they are more confident with new technology that they need support to make “wise decisions” (p. 6). This again provides further support for this study which seeks to increase our understanding of young people’s behaviour on a social networking site and how this impacts upon their identity development.

Williams and Merten (2008) conducted a review of adolescents' online social networking profiles. They describe the important role of self presentation and the role that online interactions play in shaping the way we see ourselves and others. The authors state "adolescents have the ability to construct a personal profile or online environment depicting how they view themselves or how they want others to view them" and the emphasise "it is unwise to write off Internet Communication as superficial or unconnected to real life" (p. 255). As in face to face interactions online interactions also rely on feedback from others and the authors describe how "the words on the screen have as much power as they are assigned by both the author and the reader – thus developing co-constructed meanings" (p. 255) this links back to the dialogical self and the way selves emerge from interactions with others. Williams and Merton (2008) use this to guide their analyses of social networking pages but they do not discuss this notion fully. For example, they describe the coding of one comment "I think I would really kill myself without you" as violent without interpreting the dialogical nature of the comment, that is, who the comment was directed towards and why such a comment would be posted on a social networking page.

Further, Williams and Merton (2008) divided the content of each page into several themes including: social content, social issues, risk behaviours and identity vulnerability. They revealed some interesting data, especially within the latter two themes. Included in risk behaviours were criminal activity and sexual content and identity vulnerability referred to young people posting personally identifiable information online. The current study aims to provide some understanding as to why

young people might engage in these behaviours online or use their social networking pages to talk about events which could be deemed risk behaviours.

It is argued here that a thorough understanding is needed of the ways in which online interactions can shape and construct our identities. Berman and Bruckman (2001) have tried to provide an understanding of this. The authors conducted an innovative study to explore identity online. The authors created The Turing Game to explore and teach online users/players about issues of identity. The game involved a panel of people pretending to be members of a cultural group. For some of the panel this was their 'true' identity, but others were acting, for example, a man masquerading as a woman. The panel are asked a series of questions and it is up to the online audience to guess who the imposters are. The purpose of the game is to encourage both role-players and assessors to reflect on their experience and what it means about identity online. The authors do not go beyond a description of how participants played the game, but the study does provide an insight into the process of intended and perceived roles.

The current study aims to extend the work done by the Pew Internet and American Life Project and Livingstone by moving from self-reported behaviour about young people's internet use to analysis of their personal profiles. It will also build upon the work of Williams and Merten (2008) and West, Lewis and Currie (2009) by providing an understanding of why young people might engage in 'risky' behaviours online and by giving a further insight into the ways young people creatively use language to try to create a sense of privacy and deter unwanted audiences reading their profiles. It is further hoped that this research will add to the small but growing body of identity

research in relation to young people's behaviour online and provide a dialogical understanding of young people's profile sections within their social networking pages and give an insight into the voices appearing on these pages.

To summarise, identity in the online world is still poorly understood - both by the general public and scholars (Berman & Bruckman, 2001). In the nine years since this research was conducted the technology has developed and become more advanced but our understanding is still lagging behind. In 2007, Boyd and Ellison commented that "although the situation is rapidly changing scholars still have a limited understanding of who is and who is not using these sites, why, and for what purposes, especially outside the U.S". This research aims to address this problem and add to the literature by increasing our understanding of the way Scottish young people present themselves on the social networking site Bebo, the ways they can gain recognition and the impact this has on their identities.

## **Self-Presentation**

Livingstone (2008b) stated "young people have always devoted attention to the presentation of self" (p. 394). The introduction of social networking sites has extended the need for self presentation in an online context which also brings new complexities. The importance of self-presentation online has also been discussed by other authors, for example:

like other online contexts in which individuals are consciously able to construct an online representation of the self – such as online dating profiles – social network(ing) sites constitute an important research context for scholars investigating processes of impression management, self-presentation and friendship performance (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 9)

The way we construct our personal pages and present ourselves online can be linked back to Goffman's (1959) classic book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman's theory of self-presentation appears in much of the research relating to online behaviour (for example see Boyd, 2008 and Berman & Bruckman, 2001).

According to Goffman, we are social actors and have the ability to choose our stage and props, as well as the costume we would put on in front of a specific audience. The actor's main goal is to keep his coherence, and adjust to the different settings offered him. This is done mainly through interaction with other actors. Each actor uses verbal and non verbal communication to express his or her identity. Most self-presentation studies have focussed on the type of face- to-face interactions which Goffman (1959) describes. However, recent studies have looked at written interactions, specifically presentation of self on the internet (Dominick, 1999; Papacharissi, 2002). Dominick (1999) has even claimed that "personal homepages represent the biggest burst of unsolicited self-expression that the world has ever seen" (p. 647). It is clear that self- presentation plays an important in our everyday lives and personal web pages allow new opportunities for self-presentation.

However, the way young people present themselves and each other on social networking sites like Bebo go beyond Goffman's (1959) original ideas. As will be illustrated in the analysis below young people often ask their friends to write about them on Bebo. This involves self-presentation to two audiences; the individual and the wider Bebo community. A young person may ask a friend to write about them as their friend may be able to write about them in a way they could not write about

themselves. The friend must then write in a favourable way about that person while presenting them to a wider online audience. It is common for some text to be directed towards the individual and some to be directed to anyone reading the page. Similarly, as will be illustrated below when a girl is writing about her boyfriend she must strike a balance between presenting him in a good way to his peers but not presenting him too well so that other girls would be interested in him romantically. This creates a complex online arena of managing human social relations which, as will be seen in the coming analysis, young people are very skilled in maintaining.

In exploring this area many authors have used Jones and Pitman's (1982) five strategies of self-presentation (Ingratiation, Competence, Intimidation, Exemplification and Supplication) as a model for exploring personal web pages (for example see Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005). This aims to add to this understanding by taking more of an exploratory approach. The current study is not only interested in how young people present themselves online as this process seems to go beyond individual self presentation. Rather, this study aims to explore all of the 'voices' that appear on these personal web-pages and how this adds to a young person's identity development. For this reason the current study will use the theory of the dialogical self to explore personal web pages. The dialogical self allows us to fully explore the content of these pages without being constrained by any pre-determined strategies. This will give an interesting insight into a very much unprecedented area of study.

## **Recognition**

As we can see from the discussion of self-presentation and the dialogical self much of how we present ourselves and what we think others think of us is based around the notion of recognition. In its simplest form when we receive recognition in the form of praise or a complement this makes us feel good about ourselves. By contrast when we receive negative recognition or no recognition, for example if someone is rude to us or ignores us, we tend to feel bad about ourselves. This is one of the reasons we present ourselves in the best light to receive positive recognition from others.

There are several structures of formal recognition which occur in everyday life whether it be grades in school, promotions and pay rises in the work place, medals given to war veterans, sports trophies and many others. There are also more informal means of recognition in the form of verbal praise or simply knowing that someone trusts and believes in you. For many young people the main source of formal recognition comes from achievements in school. However, within the education system young people who do not excel academically are at risk of receiving little positive recognition from those around them. This is problematic given that research has shown “that recognition for positive behaviour is related to adolescent’s self-perception” (Cheng, Siu & Leung, 2006, p. 468).

The idea that we feel good about ourselves when others recognise that we have done something good may seem obvious but very little research has focussed on the impact of recognition on our identity construction. Previous research by the current author has highlighted that young people who receive little formal recognition create

their own structures of recognition (Whittaker, 2008, in press). The current study will explore the idea that social networking sites provide a new structure of recognition for young people.

With the growing number of young people creating personal pages on social networking sites it seems relevant to add another dimension to the existing research by using the theory of the dialogical self to analyse the content of Bebo pages. It is argued the pages become another voice in a young person's internal dialogue or their dialogical self. Similar research has been conducted by Hevern (2004); however, the focus was slightly different. Hevern (2004) studied the content of 20 personal Weblogs, he was particularly interested in how people presented themselves, the functional role of these blogs and he analysed how people discussed the events on Sept 11th in their blogs (as a common cultural event). Hevern (2004) used the model of the dialogical self (Hermans *et al.*, 1992) and James' theory to explore the moving I positions across time. It is my aim to use the theory of the dialogical self to explore the Bebo pages of young people. In order to build on the limited amount of existing research in this area this study will aim to firstly explore and describe the nature of young people's Bebo pages and then present a more in-depth analysis of their content.

## **Research Questions**

This chapter addresses the second research question: How do young people engage with the alternative context of an online social networking site in order to give and receive recognition? In order to be more specific given the wealth of

information found on Bebo pages and the numerous ways in which young people engage with the social networking site this question has been broken down into 2 sub-questions 1) how do young people use the in-built structures of recognition which Bebo offers, 2) how do young people creatively manipulate the site to gain recognition from others.

This research has a similar focus to the work of Livingstone (2008b). The author explored “how young people creatively use the different affordances of different sites to meet their changing identity needs [and] how young people also struggle to fit their interests and concerns within the structures offered by the sites” (p. 398). However, this research has focussed on one site, Bebo, to provide an in-depth analysis into how young people make use of the structures of recognition built into the site but also how they manipulate the site to gain recognition.

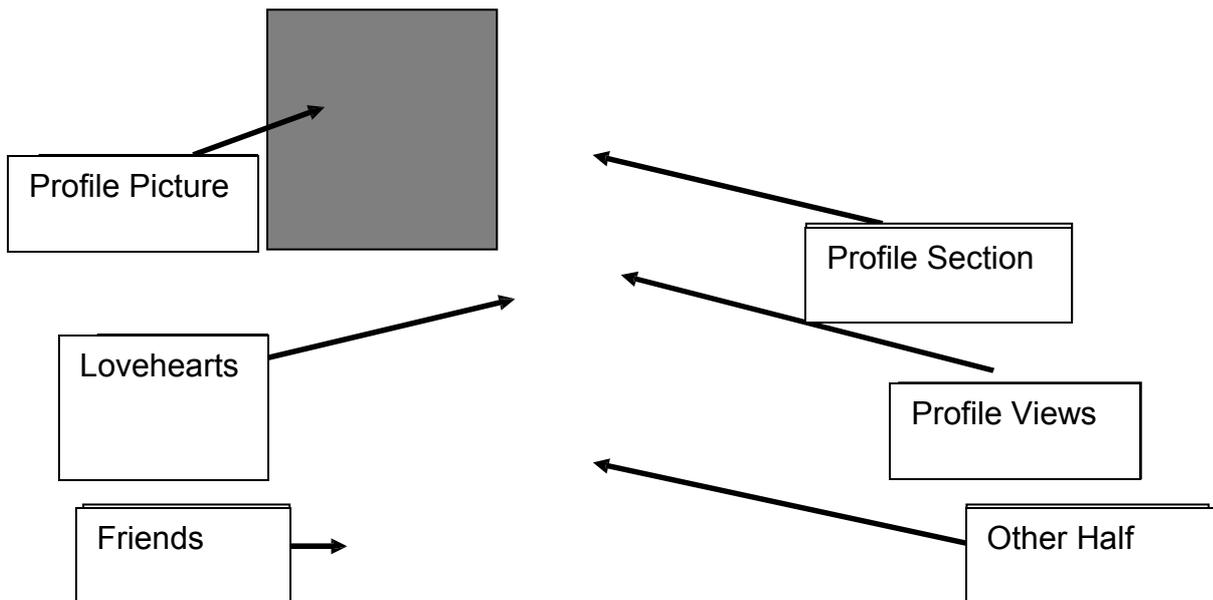
## **Bebo**

Since its launch in 2005, Bebo (Blog early, blog often) has become a worldwide social networking site attracting over 34 million registered users, with 4.5 million of these from the UK (<http://www.crunchbase.com/company/bebo>). However, coupled with the initial popularity of Bebo there is also a growing awareness of the negative consequences of the site, for example, cyber bullying and identity fraud.

Furthermore, Gosling, Gaddis and Vazire (2007) have discussed the ways in which personality judgments are made on the basis of Facebook profiles. Sites like Bebo are therefore bridging the gap between how we would present ourselves at work and how we would present ourselves in our private lives, for example, at the weekend with our friends. The growing popularity and interest in this area highlights

the need for a greater understanding of how young people construct their Bebo pages and how this can add to our understanding of their identity development (See Appendix 5 for an example of a Bebo page). For the duration of this study Bebo was the social networking site favoured by Scottish teenagers. More recently, the trend has changed and young people now consider Facebook to be the best social networking site and many have closed their Bebo accounts. However, this study was conducted when Bebo was a very frequently used site by Scottish teenagers and I use this site because its current mass popularity offers critical insight into how young people present themselves online and these patterns do and will exist on other sites.

## Bebo Pages: A general overview



**Figure 6.1: Example Bebo page (showing profile section only)**

Social networking sites are based around profiles, a form of individual or group home page which offers a description of each member. In addition to text, images and video created by the member, the social networking page also contains comments from other members and a public list of the people that the author identifies as Friends within the network. In addition to the content that members provide to create their own profile, social network sites typically have a section dedicated to the comments by Friends. On Facebook this is called The Wall while on Bebo it's called the Lifestream. This space is used to provide

regular status updates which can range from things like sharing what you just had for dinner to announcing a pregnancy. These tend to be like mini blogs where people will give updates on what they are doing at that particular time for example: “i hate monday mornings 😞😞so tired, just wanna go back to bed 😞😞”. These sayings only remain on the Lifestream for a limited amount of time.

Each Bebo page must also have a ‘skin’ or background. Again these vary greatly and range from images of the sunset, to adverts for films and band to explicit graphics. Scrolling down the page there is space for each person to receive comments from others, they can then reply to these comments and these will appear on the other person’s page. These messages are free of charge to those with internet access and are rivalling text messages in popularity. There are also several quizzes which young people can do and add to their personal pages. These quizzes vary greatly in content and range from those with a sexual basis to others focussing on appearances. A few examples of Bebo quizzes that the young people took and posted results for were: (1) What’s your grade in the bedroom? (2) How blonde are you? (3) Which High School Musical character are you? (4) What weapon are you? (5) What kind of baby will you have? (6) What’s your best quality? (7) What common stereotype do you fit? For example:

## ▼How Old Will You Be When You Get Pregnant

Take This Quiz

Go to How Old Will You Be When You Get Pregnant | Try this App

### How Old Will You Be When You Get Pregnant?

26-35

*(Bebo Profile No. 2 Female, 18)*

These quizzes are very interesting and add to the identity each young person is trying to present on their page. In a more recent advance authors also have the ability to add to their pages and post messages via mobile. Although there was not scope within the current study to examine the content of the whole Bebo page I would argue that each aspect of the page can serve as an opportunity to gain recognition. Bebo as a social networking site is a structure of recognition, as described in Chapter 2, and within each page young people can choose their 'skins' and complete quizzes in order to gain recognition from others. For example, many young females seeking a partner would complete the quiz 'What's your grade in the bedroom?' in order to attract attention and recognition from potential partners.

When a user creates an account with Bebo they choose a user name and password, each subsequent time they login to Bebo they are taken to their Bebo homepage.

The top section of each homepage is known as the Profile. This research only focussed on the content of the profile section. Because the popularised style of these sites emerged out of dating sites the profile often contains material associated with those sites, for example, demographic information (age, sex, location) interests, a

profile photo and a description of the author of the page. Bebo has divided this into several sections and subsections:

**Basic Information** (similar to demographics): display name, tagline birthday (not age), gender, relationship status, country, postal code and hometown.

**Me, Myself and I**: things that describe who you are, me (1000 characters), boxes to include likes and dislikes, loves and hates, music preferences.

**IM User Names**: this is a space where you can display your details allowing people to communicate with you using other sites such as Windows Live Messenger and Skype.

**Contact details**: (only visible to selected friends) home address, home phone number, work address, work phone number, alternative email address and contact details.

**Education details**: your schools and colleges

**Work details**: your job title and places where you have worked.

Many of these serve as opportunities for recognition. Basic information allows a young person to advertise if they are single or part of a couple. It also allows them to add where they live, many young people choose to emphasise the fact that they live in an area that others should be fearful of. This is a further attempt to gain recognition for being intimidating.

**Profile Views**: running total of how many times your profile has been viewed by others.

**Last Active**: the number of hours or days since you last logged into your page.

**LoveHearts** : running total of the number of love hearts you have received. When sending someone a message via Bebo you have the option of posting the message publicly meaning it will appear on their page or sending a private message which only they can access by logging in. Every time you opt to send someone a public message you are also given the option of giving them a red love heart which appears next to your message on their page. Bebo makes use of the scarcity technique by only allowing each person to send three love hearts per day these have become very exclusive forms of recognition with some young people trying to get as many love hearts as possible.

**Friends**: number of friends you are connected with. Within this list each member can select their Top 20 Friends which form a hierarchy of friends.

**Profile Picture**: users can upload a vast number of photos on their page and organise them into Albums but they must choose one to appear as their profile photo e.g.



Photos are perhaps one of the most powerful structures of recognition on Bebo. The two examples above are not exemplars. Young people also use photos to gain recognition and respect from their peers. The two examples above are illustrative of the way young males and females present themselves on Bebo. It is clear that there are gendered notions of what will be recognised. In these photos the young man trying to appear physically strong, powerful, resourceful, ready, equipped and willing to defend himself. Whereas the young girl is presenting herself in a very sexualised manner which would seem to suggest she is trying to attract attention. Another difference that we can see from these two examples is that in the photo of the male there is more than one person involved in this (it is highly unlikely but not impossible that this young man has taken the photo himself using a timer on a camera) the young man we can see and the person(s) taking the photo. However, the girl appears to be taking the photo herself which illustrates that for this young female taking the photo a private act but then by posting it online is very public. These photos illustrate the various structures of recognition which young people are

embedded in, they also demonstrate the way young people present themselves in order to gain recognition within these structures. There is a wealth of information in these photos illustrating social identity and intergroup relations, for example, Rangers. However, due to time constraints this analysis specifically focused on interpersonal dynamics of recognition, it is clear from the photos that social identity processes are at play too, but not focused upon here.

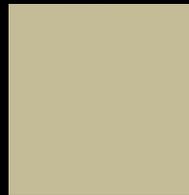
The quantity of data appearing on young people's profiles varies greatly with some young people choosing as few as 10 words to describe themselves and others using 250 words. For example:

HELLO PEPO.

am 18 years yung, and a proud new mammy. got a braw wee hooz in hilpark that a share wae jambo n ma bby kimberley who is 8 wkz old today. shes the most cutiest bby in the world, if a say so ma sel.went tae mnd's oan sunday wae wiggles jamie n twiggy.sum buzz! but ma throats still f\*\*ked wae aw the shoutin n screamin lol. wun hunners ae teddys 4 ma baby.n got the cold coz ae the water flumes apart fae that av no been upty much, am a boring c\*\*t lol.

big shout out tae ma big sis whos ma bessie m8 n a couldni cope wivout n tae aw the pepo a luv. u no who u r. xxxxx p.s wul sumday day ma bludi quiz or am jst deletin it lol x

**The Other Half Of Me**



Jamie D  
LOVE YAE FUR EVER

*(Bebo Profile No. 17, Female 18)*

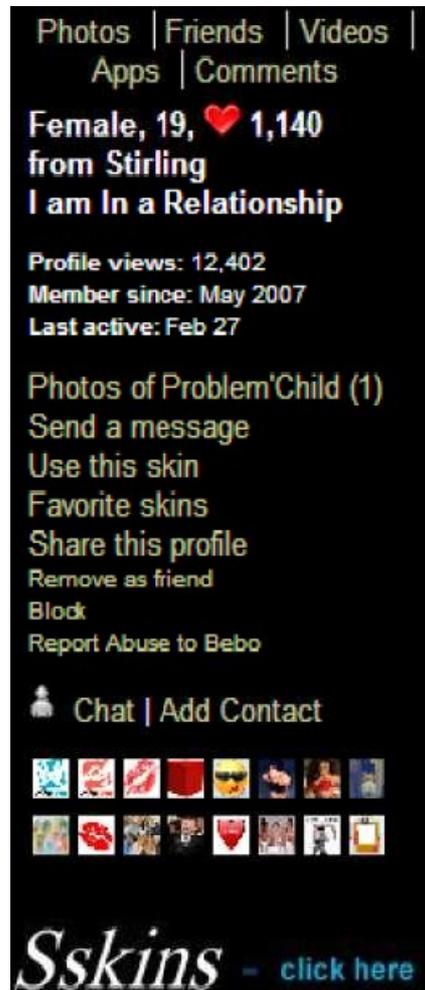


*(Bebo Profile No. 8, Female 17)*

After creating a profile participants are asked to invite their friends to the site by supplying their email addresses. They can also look at others' who have already created profiles and add those people to their list of Friends. Most social network sites require approval from both people before they are connected as Friends.

Because your number of Friends indicated your popularity there are now other sites which have emerged with the sole purpose of allowing users to add Friends to their social networking pages, for example, [www.needaddys.com](http://www.needaddys.com), with 'addys' being used as an abbreviation for addresses.

Each profile also displays information relating to activity on your page:



*(Bebo Profile No. 18, Female, 18 when first accessed)*

These are further examples of structures of recognition in particular, Profile Views, Lovehearts and Number of Friends, illustrate the structure of popularity. Young people must manipulate these structures in order to ensure they are viewed as popular by peers and potential friends.

As described above, social networking is a big part of young people's social lives. Young people often state that they are 'stuck' with their page as they feel they

cannot opt out for fear of missing out on part of their social life. Other young people have described the site as 'addictive' and they prioritise logging on and do so whenever possible. Many young people have commented to me how impossible it is to keep up-to-date with their peer group and social circle if they do not log into Bebo on a very regular basis. This resonates with Livingstone's (2008b) work as she states that just as it is important to keep in touch with people offline the same process applies online. Young people must log in and make contact with peers on a regular basis in order to keep up to date and maintain their social status within their peer network. As will be discussed below it seems social networking sites like Bebo have managed to hook young people into a vicious cycle where their popularity depends on their engagement with the site so they cannot neglect their pages for fear of unpopularity and social isolation.

## **Analysis**

The analysis will firstly address how young people use the inbuilt structures of recognition within Bebo. These are displayed on each page and are visible to anyone looking at the page and the author has no choice to remove them or directly change them. Following this there will be a discussion of the ways in which young people have manipulated their Bebo pages to gain recognition from others. These are factors which Bebo could neither predict nor control. How do young people use the structures of recognition within Bebo (Profile views, Love hearts, Friends, Top Friends and Other Halves) to gain recognition? As described above there are several aspects of Bebo pages that provide recognition for young people, and other users alike. The first three of these, profile views, friends and love hearts refer to headings

and totals which appear on all profiles and cannot be deleted by the user. Hence, I refer to these as in- built structures of recognition. For example the following information was taken from one young person's Bebo profile:

Profile views: 37,427

Love hearts: 2,782

Friends: 2,280

### **Profile views**

In the current research there seemed to be less importance placed on the number of profile views, this was never discussed by any young person or referred to on their page. This may be due to the lack of control that young Bebo users have over this particular aspect of their page. However, I argue that young people keep their pages updated with new information and photos to try and attract their friends and others to view their pages.

### **Love hearts**

Every time one person sends a public message to another they have the option of attaching a love heart to the message. This appears as part of the message on the recipients' page and it also adds to the total which appears as part of their profile.

Unlike the profile views above, young people have more control over the number of love hearts they have and they actively seek to reach as high a total as possible. For example, young people post requests on the Lifestream to ask for more love hearts, as discussed above. Take the following sayings for example:

"Need wan mare luv tae gt 500 whos gonnae gee meh it?"

And,

" Who wnts tae gee meh mah 600th luv? " via [Mobile](#)

(*Bebo Profile No. 35, Female, 16*)

Further, as the Lifestream is temporary and constantly updated by users' comments there is no lasting trace of these requests, only the growing number of love hearts remain on their page. In order to gain more love hearts and recognition from others some young people use strategies of reciprocation, for example:

"Leave some Love It Shall Be Returned " [me too!](#)

The reciprocal nature of this recognition is also illustrated when users give recognition to those who have given them love hearts. For example:

100th love  
Holly Bell

150th love  
Emma Gair

200th love  
????

Here, the persons name appears beneath the milestone number and as can be seen from this example recognition for "200th love" is still available. Love hearts serve as a measure of popularity, however by far one of the biggest and most complex measures of popularity is how many friends you have.

## Friends

The total number of friends you are connected with indicates your popularity. However, in terms of self-presentation and recognition this is not a straightforward process. For young people, a low number of friends, for example, less than 500 is a sign that you are not very popular or very well liked. By contrast, having too many friends can also be detrimental to your self-image as you appear desperate. This complex aspect of impression management was also highlighted in Boyd's (2008) study of MySpace:

It's cool to have Friends on MySpace but if you have too many Friends, you are seen as a Myspace whore (p. 129).

The number of Friends you have on Bebo must be carefully monitored but within this structure of recognition Bebo has created an optional structure of Top Friends which authors can use if they choose to.

## Top Friends

On Bebo users select their top 20 friends and these people receive public recognition on the person's page but also a private message to inform them they have been selected as a Top Friend. This is the best indicator of the individuals' closest friends but these lists are not fixed and change frequently. There are very public social consequences to falling out with a friend as you are likely to be demoted to the very bottom of their friends list meaning another person will be promoted into their Top 20 Friends. For example:

[Dylan Addy](#) says, "changing my top 16 any1 want in ? 🤔 leave a comment and love and i shall palce u haha!" [me too!](#)

*(Bebo Profile No. 21, Male, 16)*

Perhaps the highest accolade in terms of friendship is the ability to add someone as your other half.

### **Other Halfs**

Each person on Bebo has the option of adding a friend as an 'other half', a link to their other half's profile pages appears at the bottom of the authors' profile. On all of the 37 profiles analysed the author had chosen to add an 'other half'. Commonly people who are in romantic relationships declare this by being each others' Other halves but it is also used to make friendships explicit. The Other half appears at the bottom of each profile and takes the form of a photo and optional comment. For example, one comment reads:

#### **The Other Half Of Me**

Haley. My angel (:



In a similar way to the love heart requests above, young people actively use the Other half function to ask for recognition, for example:

STEPH says, "Who Wnts Too Be Mah Other Half?"

In the above statement the author, Steph, is asking for people to indicate an interest in being her Other half. Often when relationships break-up young people will delete their ex-partner as their other half and seek a new one. Other half is an example of one of the many in-built structures of recognition devised by Bebo and utilised to varying extents by young people to gain recognition, boost their self-esteem and appear publically popular. In addition to the in built structures of recognition which Bebo affords, young people have also devised very creative strategies to gain recognition via their social networking pages. How do young people creatively manipulate Bebo to gain recognition from others?

### **“Doin’ ‘Someone’s’ Bebo Up!”**

It is becoming increasingly common for young people to ask someone else to write their profile section for them and thus what appears on their pages is an account of them from another person’s point of view. They commonly describe this as “Doin’ (name)’s Bebo Up!”. When conducting this research one very surprising finding was that young people often do not know exactly what is written on their own page. They give a trusted friend the responsibility for this and they often write their friend’s profile in return.

Often young people use Bebo to ask for volunteers to write their page for them, for example, "who wants to do my bebo up pls ? !" The other person is usually a close friend who knows the person well enough to write about them. An example of this is shown in the profile below:



*(Bebo Profile No. 7, Female, 17)*

It is made very clear in the first line that it is not Kerry who is writing her own page and this is crucial as not to cause confusion with potential readers. This also highlights that it is the voice of a friend which is appearing on this page. Lyndsay must make it clear to readers that she is writing about Kerry through her Bebo page and this allows Lyndsay to write about Kerry in a way that Kerry would not be able to write about herself. This also serves a dual purpose as it allows Lyndsay to gain recognition for writing Kerry's Bebo page. Lyndsay goes on to describe Kerry as a "bam". 'Bam' is a Scottish slang term, possibly short for 'bampot' used to describe a lazy, lowlife person. Lyndsay then makes reference to the sexual nature that appears in many pages by stating that you will already know Kerry's name because "your

boyfriend is always screaming it. Lyndsay then states Kerry's age and continues the sexual theme by saying "she's legal" which refers to the legal age to have sex. The theme remains with relationships as Lyndsay describes Kerry as "singo pringo" meaning she is single, "pringo" is possibly chosen as a rhyming word, and looking for offers from boys which also makes her sexuality very clear. These slang colloquialisms appeared approximately 500 times across the 37 Bebo pages analysed. Lyndsay then ends this section by stating that Kerry is from Bannockburn but feels this is "boring". From a dialogical perspective a pattern is observed here, Lyndsay states a fact about Kerry and then comments on it, there is a dialogue between Lyndsay and Kerry which is presented on Kerry's Bebo page for the online audience to see. The dialogue illustrates two voices within one person, Lyndsay, and creates a setting for Lyndsay to comment on Kerry. Lyndsay cannot comment without first stating the fact, for example: "And Shes From Bannockburn... How Boring !!". It is not Kerry who has written her original profile and then Lyndsay has commented on the facts. Lyndsay has written both sides of this dialogue.

Lyndsay then moves from describing Kerry to commenting on her directly again this is stated clearly:

Now Its Timee Forr My Say

A Love This Girl Too Pieces Lyk  
Shes Always Makin SumoneLaugh  
A Can Tell Hur Anything  
And Jst Too Let Youu No Am Always Here For Youu!

This is a more personal comment it is still written in the third person and directed toward the audience but as this is Kerry's page it gives Kerry some recognition as a

friend and a good person. The 3 step model of recognition can also be used to explain this dialogue:

Primary Action	Lyndsay is a good and trust Friend of Kerry
Recognition	Kerry asks Lyndsay to write her Bebo profile
Reaction	Lyndsay responds positively, firstly by, writing Kerry's profile giving details of who she is including that she is single but Lyndsay then goes onto describe how she feels about Kerry which allows her to complement her as a friend with a good sense of humour.

Lyndsay specifically recognises her sense of humour when she says "she's always making someone laugh" and her trustworthiness when she says "I can tell her anything". Lyndsay then returns the favour in a sense by stating "just to let you know I'm always here for you". This comment is directed at Kerry but there is also knowledge that other people will read this comment and therefore Lyndsay is writing for two audiences. By making the comment "I'm always here for you" Lyndsay is equally trying to look like a good friend and gain recognition from Kerry and other Bebo users who will read the page. Lyndsay is therefore writing for herself, Kerry, and the wider online audience.

### **Bad Spelling or Creativity and Distortions**

One of the most striking features of all of the Bebo pages presented here is the language that the young people use when writing their profiles. Young people often distort the language they use making the pages difficult those unfamiliar with the distortions and colloquialisms. I found approx 700 separate incidences of words with incorrect spellings which suggested deliberate distortions. Boyd (2008) found similar

presentation styles on young people's MySpace pages and highlighted the "Top 10 list of "How to be Cool on MySpace" includes material like "Your MySpace name MUST contain symbols and incorrect spelling" (p. 129). It is argued that this is an example of what Bakhtin described as "a social language" (1984). For Bakhtin, a social language is a discourse peculiar to a specific stratum of society within a given social system at a given time, for example, technological jargon or medical language used by doctors. The language used by young people on their Bebo pages certainly seems to be the social language used by this particular age group (16 -18 years old) on this online social networking site. The language used on Bebo seems to go beyond abbreviations that are commonly used in text messaging, such as removing all the vowels (which could also be considered a social language). Young people can read each other's pages very easily but others who are less than familiar with Bebo struggle to read the content. However, it is argued that this is not just bad spelling which would suggest literacy issues but a deliberate attempt to creatively misspell words.

Livingstone's (2008b) interviews with young people also highlighted the need to create privacy online she states "being visible to strangers [...] is not so much a concern [...] as that of being visible to known but inappropriate others – especially parents" (p. 399). Young people seem to use two different strategies when expressing themselves online. The first is changing the way words should be written for example by adding in extra letters:

Katiee No Kennt Yuu That Longg But I Kenn  
You Firevaa 🤪

*(Bebo Profile No. 8, Female 17)*

[Katie, I've not known you for long but I'll know you forever] or writing in the slang or colloquial way that they talk:

**haa. am jobless da noo n am nearli oot of a flat noo tae cauz a hay to many partiez lol.**

*(Bebo Profile No. 14, Female 16)*

[I'm jobless just now and I'm nearly being thrown out of my flat because I have too many parties, laugh out loud].

The comment below from a profile page illustrates the use of extra letters:

Awwww Hennnyyyy Youuuu Got Textsssssss Dearrryyy ?  
N Yehhhh Mannnn Youu Shud See Jays Wee Haircut  
N Emmm Gonna Cut Ma Grass A Thinkkkkkk Ahaa Youuuu ?  
*(Bebo Profile No. 5, Female, 16)*

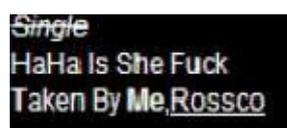
In normal English this comment would be translated as:

Oh Girly, you got texts deary?  
And yeah man, you should see Jay's little haircut  
And I'm going to cut my grass I think, and you?

The second strategy which young people have adapted is the use of abbreviations. Many of these are very similar to those used in text messages but some of them appear to have been created specifically for online contexts. For example, young people frequently use the letters MWI which stand for Mad wi (with) it. This

abbreviation is used to describe going out and getting drunk. Descriptive words are commonly shortened and letters substituted, for example gorgeous is written as “Gorjis” which may indicate a return to phonetic spelling in this context. Other frequently used abbreviations are OMG (oh my god), Ppl (people), Lyk (like), Besto (best friend) and Kwl (cool).

Young people have also developed words which are added to profiles or photos to show or request a strong relationship between two people, usually an intimate or romantic relationship. Young people write the word ownage (which they write as “ownagee”) on other people’s photos to declare that they are or want to be in a relationship with them. If it is a request the word is usually followed with a question mark (ownagee?). The word ‘taken’ is also used to describe a young man or woman who is in a relationship; this is in addition to entering their relationship status within the basic information section. This is an example of a young females’s profile, written by her boyfriend ‘Rossco’:



Single  
HaHa Is She Fuck  
Taken By Me, Rossco

*(Bebo Profile No. 18, Female 18)*

Further, as can be seen in many of the examples above young people make use of several different font settings, they also embolden the text and use italics. This perhaps adds to the individual profile they are trying to create and Bebo allows this differentiation by not confining users to one standard font. As young people are predominantly hoping to interact with their peer group online the creation and use of

their own social language may be a deliberate attempt to keep adults from understanding what is written on the page. By doing this they are able to communicate with their in group and conceal it from the out group. This further adds to their online identity. This use of language could also be seen as an act of rebellion as there are very few mainstream forums where young people would be permitted to write in this way. In other educational settings they must conform and are recognised for their good literacy skills but online they can be recognised for the exact opposite, obscuring language.

## **Discussion**

This paper analysed the personal profiles of Bebo pages authored by young people and their friends. This revealed several interesting things relating to the ways some young people choose to present themselves online. Personal profiles were coded for voices which appeared in written form on the pages. Predominantly, the voices of peers were present as they often created profiles for the user of the page. However, these voices are complex as they are speaking to the individual and the online Bebo audience at the same time.

When young people create personal pages on Bebo they are adding another dimension to their dialogical self. This medium allows interaction with many different people and instead of giving and receiving feedback verbally feedback is written on the Bebo pages themselves. By creating a dialogue young people can comment on each other and provide recognition directed at the individual and the wider audience. One way young people create this dialogue is by asking other people to write the profile sections for them. The recognition is reciprocal a young person receives recognition from a friend through what they write and the writer displays their name

clearly and can also present themselves as a good friend. These acts of presenting the self and other to a wider audience creates a complex network of social relationships which young people must manage. As many young people choose to make their pages publicly available online they also have a limited knowledge of who the audience is.

As discussed, Bebo has in-built structures of recognition in the form of love hearts. Some young people actively seek recognition by asking for more love hearts but interestingly they choose to post these requests in the temporary section of Bebo. This means there is no record of the fact they have asked for more love hearts, all people can see is their love heart total. Receiving a high number of love hearts makes a young person feel popular and in this context it makes them look popular to those who view their page. Again, recognition here is often reciprocal when a person receives a love heart they return the gift by sending their friend one.

As noted above some young people find themselves excluded from mainstream structures of recognition such as academic achievements. The emphasis on positive recognition solely for academic achievement is problematic for young people who do not achieve good grades. As Zittoun (2004, p. 154) highlights “a young person who has been defined in exclusively negative terms at school may wish to be judged by others on something other than school-related skills”. This may support the claim that social networking sites like Bebo provide young people with an opportunity to gain informal positive recognition from their peer group.

Interestingly, a common feature of all the profiles presented above is the language used. It is thought that young people deliberately obscure the language they use to identify with their peers or in-group and conceal the content of their pages from the out-group. However the young people did not obscure language in the same ways. For example, some chose to use slang terms, some added extra letters while others abbreviated words. While there are many similarities across the different Bebo pages analysed this is a very specific context and young people are choosing unique ways to communicate. Some of the language and abbreviations used are Scottish colloquialisms which would not be understood in other areas. Young people only manage a portion of their relationships online, they do not usually interact with their parents, youth workers or employers. Further research is needed to determine who are the significant others that make up the out-group for young people. This study has given an insight into the way some young people present themselves online and the content of their pages. Applying the theory of the dialogical self to this area allows us to further explore and understand the identities of young people and illustrates the voices and dialogue appearing on their pages. What we do know is that young people live in a society where life is changing rapidly (Boyd, 2008) social networking sites have made things which may have historically remained private and personal very public and this technology is not going to go away. Further longitudinal research is needed in this dynamic area to fully understand adolescent self presentation online.

Finally, with the continual introduction of new sites such as Twitter the area of cyber psychology is a rapidly growing field. Bebo's popularity is declining although it still reported 12.8 million unique visitors in February 2010 (ComScore). A recent article in

The Guardian stated “at its peak, Bebo was the most popular website for younger teens. The company [...] moved to San Francisco, where it grew virally with its biggest audiences in the UK and Ireland”.

At a broader level it seems the recognition Bebo received by Bebo is declining. Celebrities have endorsed Twitter and within the hierarchy of social networking sites it appears Bebo’s place is slipping. It is difficult to predict where the development of new social networking sites coupled with advances in technology will take us. However, there is no denying the importance that vast numbers of young people place on these sites. The current research has illustrated why this may be the case in terms of the opportunities for recognition and the impact this has on their identity development.

Livingstone (2008b) states that “the recent explosion in online social networking sites [...] has attracted considerable interest from the academy, policy makers, parents and young people themselves, the repeated claim being that something new is taking place” (p. 394). In one way it could be argued that something new is taking place in terms of online social networking and advances in technology. However, it could also be said that young people have always found ways in which to conceal certain thoughts and behaviours from their parents and the new aspect is not the desire to do this but the context in which they are doing it in.

### **“need a job ”: Talking About Work on Bebo**

Chapters 4 and 5 young people discussed seeking and struggling to find work and this is also a topic of conversation on Bebo for example: "need a job! cant wait to get

my own house! lifes went down hill atm [Need a job, cannot wait to get my own house, life has went down hill at the moment]. Across the 37 profiles analysed I found 14 references to work or looking for a job.

Here we can see the impact that not having a job can have on the different structures of recognition within a young person's life. This young person, Louise, is showing her frustration about being unemployed as this is preventing her from getting her own house and the result is that she feels her life has gone down hill. Louise has chosen to post this on Bebo which may prompt a reaction with friends who will console her or, as we seen in the girls discussion in Chapter 4, people may suggests opportunities for her to get work or tell her about vacancies they know of. Another young person posted "Cannot stand! Not working" which may indicate similar feelings as Louise. When young people do find employment they often choose to post this information, for example:

Just recieved a letter from the collage I defo [definitely] have a place ,  
woohoo Chef McNeill in the making!!

This young person is keen to share her good news which may prompt positive recognition from peers. These comments show the importance of employment in these young people's lives and also the overlap between different structures of recognition.

Chapter 4 illustrated the process of recognition within the dialogue of young people participating in a discussion group. This gave an insight into the many structures of recognition which the girls are embedded in and the resulting tension when they find themselves caught between conflicting structures, for example having fashionable

material items but no job. In chapter 5 I illustrated the process of recognition again but this time as it operated within the institution of the training programme, specifically a Health and Safety test. This gave an insight into a very specific structure of recognition within which, I argue, the boys were set up to fail. This chapter has introduced Bebo as an alternative online structure of recognition. By engaging with Bebo there are many ways in which young people can gain recognition, for example by taking quizzes, posting photos and writing the profile sections. I have shown how young people manipulate the site in order to gain further recognition by strategies such as creatively distorting language. The next and final empirical chapter will explore the relationships between young people and employers.

## **Chapter 7: Disagreements and Misunderstandings between Young People and Employers**

This chapter examines the relationship between young people who are participating in local authority training programmes and local employers. The high youth unemployment figures, both locally and nationally suggests that, among other things, the relationship between these two groups is problematic. Therefore the main question addressed in this study is: what are the disagreements and misunderstandings between young people and employers? Further, using qualitative data from discussion groups and interviews to try and further interpret these disagreements and misunderstandings, this research will propose interventions in order to improve the understanding and therefore the relationship between young people and employers.

### **Youth Unemployment**

The media continually report the struggles young people have finding work. This is not a particularly new problem but it is a growing problem. As described in Chapter 1 at the end of 2010 youth unemployment figures were at the highest level since comparable records began in 1992, figures have again increased in 2011 at time of writing. Steedman, Gospel, and Ryan, (1998, p. 7) commented "Britain has serious skill shortages and enduring skills gaps [...] and these shortages have consequences for the economy as whole, [...] the wide-ranging personal and social skills that are increasingly sought by employers are best developed in the 'real life' situations. This statement reflects the different perspectives which young people and employers have in terms of learning and recruiting and how this can have practical implications. Further, media headlines such as "Teenager 'steals tracksuits' after filling in form for

job” (Metro, 3rd December 2009) have portrayed young people in a very negative light which may have coloured some employers’ perceptions of potential young employees.

In the context of this research the first time many young people come into contact with an employer is during a work placement which forms part of the Local Authority Get Ready for Work programmes. Young people go out to work with an employer in the community for two days per week for six weeks. The hope is that the employer will see potential in that young person and offer them permanent employment; if this is not the case then the young person will have gained some valuable work experience. However, often this set up does not result in a positive experience for either young person or employer. I observed many young people who expected to be offered a job at the end of a work placement and if this did not happen they viewed the experience as a failure and further set back. Employers expected young people to be very grateful for the work placement opportunity but at times young people failed to turn up. There seemed to be a mis-match of perspectives and this proved the ideal context to explore the perspectives of young people and employers. Young people and employers are brought together through the council programmes – they each have to take the perspective of the other in order to try and get what they want – either an employee or employer. If there are misunderstandings and disagreements this process will become hindered.

The Wolf Report (2011, p. 12) stressed that “major efforts should be made to provide greater access to the workplace for 16-18 year olds”. The report highlights the need

for young people to spend substantial periods of time in the workplace and that they should be carrying out meaningful tasks which will equip them with transferable skills recognized by, not only that employer, but the wider labour market. This further supports the need for work experience and vocational learning, however we must strive to make this a positive experience for young people and employers. It is argued that exploring and comparing the perspectives of young people and employers will enable work experience to be meaningful to both groups.

## **Perspectives of Employers**

A lot of the existing literature is heavily weighted towards what employers are looking for and this information seems to be directed towards informing the education system which bypasses young people's perspectives completely. The extent of this asymmetry can be seen in the UK context – in 2010 the UK government launched the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and one of its first missions was to “address once and for all the age-old gripe from employers that young people emerge from the education system ill-prepared for work” (*The Guardian*, February, 2009). This is a topic which has also been discussed in the literature from the perspective of the employer.

Rosenbaum and Binder (1997) explored the value which employers place on education and recruiting an academically skilled workforce. Their aim was “to discover whether employers actually value academic skills and act in accordance with their valuations” (p. 71). The authors found that employers often deviate from the list of skills they state they require. They adopt a more flexible approach for example by adjusting jobs to match workers' skills. This is something young people

are not always aware of. The authors argue for social policies that encourage school-employer linkages which would help disadvantaged students and create a more systematic pathway from school to work.

Without a clear and accurate idea of what employers are looking for, the education system and youth training programmes struggle to adequately prepare young people for the world of work. Further, researchers are failing to take into account the perspectives of young people. We must take into account the perspectives of both employers and young people and as Rosenbaum and Binder (1997) suggest look for ways to bring employers closer to the education system and other agencies that are training and preparing their future workforce.

Recognition plays a part here especially in terms of knowledge. Within the literature the knowledge of the education system and employers is valued but young people's knowledge is not recognised. Indeed, some careers advisers often dismiss the aspirations of young people who want to follow in a parent/relative's career footsteps. This is seen to be a poorly thought out choice and young people are encouraged to think of other options. Society is structured in such a way that employers set criteria for employment which teachers, careers officers and youth workers must interpret and convey to young people who are placed at the bottom of the employment hierarchy and must display the qualities and skills which are recognised by employers in order to gain more recognition and power.

Other countries face similar problems. The Canadian government commissioned a study which resulted in the Employability Skills profile which outlined what employers are looking for from the new labour force, but the study also called for

employers to articulate and communicate their needs better. The result of their wide scale study involving 25 major employers revealed that employers were looking for 3 main traits with equal emphasis on each: people, who can communicate, think and continue to learn throughout their lives, people who can demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours, responsibility and adaptability and people who can work with others. The purpose of this employability skills profile was to match what employers are looking for with what teachers are teaching in schools. What is unknown in this study is the perspectives of young people? Do they agree with employers? Do they understand that employers are looking for these things?

In the UK we have something similar: National Employers Skills surveys. These are commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) provide definitive information on skills and workforce development issues facing employers in England ([www.readingroom.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.readingroom.lsc.gov.uk)). For example the extent and nature of skills problems facing employers as well as asking employers how they were impacted by the economic downturn. Again, this information is sought and presented from the perspective of the employer without considering the perspectives of young people.

It is worth noting that the employers interviewed and surveyed in this study were all small businesses owners located in Central Scotland. They ran a variety of businesses including car garages, children's nurseries and care homes. They offered young people training programmes with a view to offering them entry level jobs.

Therefore they had a particular view on employment and young people that may differ from many other employers.

## **Perspectives of Young People**

There is a very limited literature on the perspectives of young people and the existing literature is quite dated. In 1999 the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) commissioned a literature review of young people's attitudes towards education, employment and training (Morris, Nelson, Rickinson, Stoney & Benefield, Research Brief No.170). There were several key findings from this study. The authors found that young people's attitudes are subject to broad societal influences and parental and sibling attitudes, and reflect noticeable 'time lags' in changes in public attitudes. Furthermore, confused and mixed messages conveyed by parents, employers, educationalists and the media also impact upon young people's perceptions. The authors summarise the rest of the findings in a similar fashion and do not present any actual data from young people which would have helped to illustrate their points. Nevertheless, the review gives an interesting insight into the perspectives of young people and how these are shaped. However, as with many of the studies focussing on employers this research presents only one half of the picture. To increase our understanding a more up to date exploration is needed of both young people and employers' perspectives.

## **The Relationship between Young people and Employers**

The literature is limited in terms of the perspectives of young people and there is a gap where no literature brings the two perspectives together to reveal divergences in perspective and misunderstandings. The relationship between young people and

employers is a complex one. It is argued here that it is only when there is a mutual realisation of any misunderstandings that this relationship will improve and more young people will be able to find work.

In order to fully understand the relationship between young people and employers, moving beyond unemployment statistics and media headlines, it is necessary to study both groups and the relations between their perspectives. Developing this understanding involves also understanding how these perceptions of others and what others think of us impact upon our individual identity development. Towards the end of his book Jones (1990) turns his attention to getting to know ourselves and states “self-knowledge can be a direct consequence of perceptions of others in our presence [...] it is obvious we can learn about ourselves by learning how others respond to us in the interaction sequence” (p. 201). This obvious fact had been highlighted previously by Laing, Phillipson and Lee (1966) who stated “self-identity is a synthesis of my looking at me with my view of others’ view of me” (p. 5). Based on this assumption Laing *et al.* (1966) developed a methodology for exploring interpersonal perceptions from more than one perspective, known as the Interpersonal Perception Method (IPM).

The IPM (Laing *et al.*, 1966) examines the relation between what people think other people think and what those other people actually think. The IPM is elaborate and enables the identification of many types of intersubjective relationship (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). However, it is not used simply to assess accuracy of perspective taking. The IPM can also be used to identify relational patterns, misunderstandings, and the origin of particular perspectives or projected perspectives. Hence, this

method is relevant to research on the dialogical self because it enables us to address the question of how the views held by others and our views of them have become entwined within the dialogical self (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992).

The underlying argument was that disagreements and divergences in perspectives occur but it is misunderstanding or lack of awareness of these disagreements and misunderstandings which can cause problems within relationships. Sillars, Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2005) argued that more important than agreement or disagreement is understanding or misunderstandings about that agreement or disagreement. For example, it is not enough to know that young people and employers disagree about the importance of qualifications we also need to know whether each group is aware that a disagreement exists. If they do, then employers might emphasise that qualifications are desired but not essential and young people will value other skills such as communication and team work which are much harder to certificate.

The IPM allows the researcher to make a number of comparisons between the perspectives of the dyad or group after completion of the questionnaire. Gillespie and Cornish (2010) illustrated the multiple comparisons which can be made in the following tables. Table 7.1 shows the comparisons that can be made between two people or groups.

**Table 7.1: Actual Intersubjective Relations**

<b>Comparisons</b>	<b>Intersubjective Relation</b>
Direct perspective & Direct perspective	Agreement/disagreement
Direct Perspective & Metaperspective	Understanding/misunderstanding
Meta-metaperspective & Metaperspective	Realisation of understanding/ misunderstanding

Table 7.2 shows the comparisons that can be made within each group using the three levels of perspectives to reveal perceived agreement/disagreement and understanding/misunderstanding and the extent to which individual or group feels understood/misunderstood.

**Table 7.2: Perceived Intersubjective Relations**

<b>Comparison</b>	<b>Intersubjective Relation</b>
Direct perspective & Metaperspective	Perceived agreement/
Direct Perspective & Meta-metaperspective	Feeling understood/
Metaperspective & Meta-metaperspective	Perceived understanding/

Using the IPM as a tool to study the theory of the Dialogical Self Barresi (2002) explains how Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992) brought together James' (1980) theory of the self and Bakhtin's (1973) theory of the polyphonic novel and formed the theory of the dialogical self. One of the main assumptions of the concept of the dialogical self is the existence of a relationship between self and other (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). As Hermans *et al.* (1992, p. 29) state "the dialogical self, in contrast with the individual self, is based on the assumption that there are many different I positions that can be occupied by the same person". Each I position

may represent each of the social roles we occupy and each of these forms a different voice within our heads. This can be linked back to Mead's (1934) earlier work when he described our internal conversations and the way we take the perspective of others to gain information about ourselves. These others form the voices in our dialogical selves.

Hermans *et al.* (1992) describe how Bakhtin's notions of the dialogical self can be traced back to his thesis based on Dostoevsky. Bakhtin argued that every word, as soon as it enters in a dialogical relationship is "double-voiced" (p. 42). It is the voice of the speaker directed toward the object of speech but it is also directed toward another person. He further stated that "dialogue is at the heart of every form of thought" (p. 43). Thinking of the development of the self in this way led Bakhtin to conclude that "the self is not a given but an emergent" (p. 44). The way we think of ourselves emerges from our dialogue and interactions with those around us. There are many types of possible dialogical relationships.

While there is a growing literature on the theory of the dialogical self, the gap between the theory and a suitable methodology for testing it has attracted criticism. One pressing question which Hermans *et al.* (1992) fail to answer is how we can identify an I position. A possible solution may be found in thinking of an I position as a perspective and thus combining the theory of the dialogical self with the interpersonal perception method (Laing *et al.*, 1966). As the IPM questionnaire asks respondents to take the perspective of the other then this would be an effective tool in identifying I positions within an interaction. The results should reveal not only the different perspectives or I positions within dialogues but also any divergences in

these perspectives. This approach, as used in the current research, allows researchers to work within the IPM framework to identify perspectives within and between groups and also examine how these perspectives play a part in identity construction.

## **Research Questions**

This study addresses the third research question: Are there any disagreements and/or misunderstandings between young people and employers? This is broken down into a sub-set of 3 questions specifically addressed by the IPM questionnaire which tap into three levels of perspectives: (1) the direct perspectives of young people and employers? (What do you think of X?) (2) The meta-perspectives of young people and employers? (What do you think the other thinks of X?) (3) The meta-metaperspectives of young people and employers (What do you think the other thinks you think of X?) Comparing the answers to these three questions can reveal any disagreements or misunderstandings between young people and employers.

## **Main Study**

In the main study 33 young people and 29 employers completed the questionnaire. As described in Chapter 3 the researcher was present while all participants filled out the questionnaires. To take the analysis one stage further and give a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of the divergences both between and within groups Mann Whitney-U tests were conducted on all comparisons. The use of this non-parametric test is due to the unequal distribution of the data and also the ranking of data.

There is not space in this chapter to discuss each of the comparisons between young people and employers and within each group in depth, and it would not be useful to do so in terms of answering the research questions. Instead, I have split the analysis section into two parts: Part 1 will discuss the disagreements between young people and employers, Part 2 will discuss the misunderstandings between the two groups.

## Disagreements between Employers and Young People

Table 7.3: Do young people and employers agree/disagree with each other?

Question	Mann Whitney - U	P value	Young People (median)	Employers (median)	Agree/ disagree
Trust is very important in the world	466.0	.645	2	2	Agree
Commitment to your job is very important	422.5	.123	2	2	Agree
Punctuality is very important in the world of work	378.0	.020*	2	2	Agree
Getting paid for work the most important thing	386.0	.162	1	-1	Disagree
<b>Qualifications are very important</b>	<b>284.0</b>	<b>.004*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Career Planning is very important	374.0	.107	1	2	Agree
<b>It's ok for employers to look at social networking pages</b>	<b>233.5</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>An employee's background is very important</b>	<b>278.5</b>	<b>.003*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
First impressions at work are very important	408.0	.070	2	2	Agree
Council Training programmes are	421.5	.366	1	2	Agree
<b>It's a young person's choice not to work</b>	<b>312.0</b>	<b>.015*</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Society makes it difficult for young people to find work	461.0	.783	1	1	Agree
<b>Employers understand young people</b>	<b>214.5</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>Young people understand employers</b>	<b>195.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>Employers are flexible with young people</b>	<b>166.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>Young people care what employers think of them</b>	<b>175.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>Employers care what young people think of</b>	<b>324.0</b>	<b>.016*</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Council training programmes help young people find employment	319.5	.019*	1	2	Agree
<b>Young people who choose to wear baseball caps and tracksuits will cause</b>	<b>236.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Disagree</b>

(agreement/disagreement) Scale: Very true = 2, slightly true = 1, slightly untrue = -1, very untrue = -2 Asterisk (\*) indicates statistically significant disagreement ( $p < .05$ )

## **Discussion: Disagreements**

Young people and employers disagree about several issues, as detailed in Table 7.3 above. I have chosen to focus on the disagreements, placing emphasis on significant results. As the Table shows there are some results which suggest young people and employers significantly differed in their agreement, for example, Punctuality is very important in the world of work. However, it is argued here that the most interesting findings come from exploring the disagreements, and later, misunderstandings between the two groups.

## **Getting paid for work is the most important thing**

Young people responded that getting paid for work was the most important thing while employers disagreed. Although this disagreement was not significant I think it is worthy of brief discussion. Young people feel that money is important and this was also reflected in the discussion groups in Chapters 4 and 5. Money allows young people to buy things and access other structures of recognition, for example, fashion. By contrast employers felt that young people should be motivated to work without always focusing on money. Employers often commented that young people were unwilling to work slightly later if they did not think they were being paid for it.

## **Qualifications**

There seems to be a clash in terms of what young people and employers value when it comes to the world of work. Young people and these employers disagree about the more traditional requirements such as qualifications and a good background and the current context of social networking sites and young people's appearance. What employers are looking for in terms of qualifications has been

much debated within the literature, centered around two main arguments. Some argue that there has been a shift with some employers no longer “demanding higher skills and qualifications from their recruits (e.g. see Gallie, 1991), instead “employers are now seeking different qualities [...] namely qualities that include personal, communication and problem-solving skills and commitment to the values of the company” (e.g. Warhurst & Thomson, 1994). It must be highlighted that the importance of qualifications will vary from sector to sector. Certain professions such as the medical profession and accountancy will require specific qualifications. This research deals with small businesses who are employing staff for entry level positions therefore qualifications may not hold the same importance. I conducted in depth interviews with employers which revealed that they place less importance on formal academic qualifications and instead value other skills. For example, I asked one local businessman, Jim, what he thought about qualifications:

**Jim:** That's what I'm saying to you, see that [holds up a bit of paper] that's a bit of paper now that could tell you anything right but see in the real world out there what's that gone do if you're really lucky you could light it to get a fire going but you understand paper will take on anything its a very true saying that you could put anything on a bit of paper I have guys I start older guys and I say what can you do same as starting a kid there is no difference what can you do, I can do this, I can do that I can do the next thing, great that's it and then they come to work and they canne do this and they canne do that bullshit but hey they've got a bit of paper saying they can

*(Employer 1: Jim, Local Garage Owner)*

Clearly Jim has very strong views regarding qualifications and he describes how he feels that anything can be written on a piece of paper but as an employer he wants to see that someone can actually do the job. He uses sarcasm when he states “if

you're really lucky you could get a light and get a fire going". This illustrates the scepticism Jim has about how closely qualifications are related to ability. However, young people disagree and think that qualifications are important. One young person once described how they did not turn up to a job interview because the certificates for the First Aid and Elementary Food Hygiene courses they recently passed had not yet arrived. The reality of this disagreement is that it can create barriers for young people who think that employers are looking for qualifications when in fact employers are more interested in what a young person can actually do. One young person, Laura, discusses the importance of qualifications:

**Laura:** I think it's helped me a lot with like confidence and routine and coming [to the programme], getting back up again in the morning and coming somewhere i've got more things now I've got my hygiene certificates on my CV I might not have my standard grades but at least I've got other things that things are going to recognise (employers).  
*(Discussion Group 7)*

Laura feels that attending the training programme has helped her in many ways and one of them is in terms of qualifications which she thinks employers will recognise. This is very interesting in terms of recognition. Young people, like Laura are trying to gain qualifications which demonstrate their skills and abilities but often employers don't recognise certificates and would prefer to see for themselves what potential employees can do.

### **Importance of a Young Person's Background**

A similar disagreement is found over the importance of an employee's background. Young people think this is very important but employers do not place the same

importance on this issue. It is worth reminding ourselves here that these employers provide work placements for young people on council training programmes and they are aware that some of the young people have had troubled backgrounds, this can include periods of homelessness, truancy from school and vandalism. Therefore employers may be sensitive to the idea that these young people should still be given an opportunity to work despite anything that has happened in their past. This perspective is illustrated by Ian, manager of a local care home:

**Ian:** I suppose in their family culture it affects them you know it could affect their attitude but I mean, that's not, you can't paint the brush over them it's down to their individual attitude as well you know because at the end of the day I mean you know yourself everyone's got their own mind and if they can rise above maybe a bad upbringing or bad experiences then there is nothing to stop them going forward but I would say that there's certainly going to be a strong influence depending on how they've been brought up you know the way if they've come from a good background or a dodgy background you know either wealthy or poor or whatever you know I mean these things they can't not affect people but there is nothing to stop people rising above it  
*(Employer 2: Ian, Local Care Home Owner)*

Ian presents a very balanced attitude towards young people here and there could be an aspect of self-presentation as he knows that I am a researcher and part time youth worker, it is therefore likely to assume that I would not agree with any negative stereotyping of young people. However, many other employers also echoed Ian's thoughts and described how they would give any young person a chance, on the condition that they showed willing and demonstrated commitment to the job.

By contrast, young people think that an employee's background is important and again many have described how they would rather not go into a situation where they feel they will be judged or criticised. (These are anecdotal stories from young people taken from my field-notes as often strong feeling about employment arose if a young person was offered/declined an interview or job, it was more difficult to discuss during discussion groups).

The preceding discussion has described the disagreements over what could be termed the more traditional aspects of employment. There are however, more recent issues which cause disagreement between young people and employers, for example social networking sites. Young people today do not think its ok for employers to look at their social networking pages, employers disagree. Social networking is a relatively new phenomenon. Bebo, one of the most popular sites with adolescents, was only launched in 2005. Employment law is still trying to catch up with the impact these sites have had on the world of work with many stories hitting the headlines, for example "Teenage office worker sacked for moaning on Facebook about her 'totally boring' job" (Daily Mail, 26 February 2009). I have also witnessed firsthand a similar story of a young person losing her job because her employer looked at her Bebo page and did not like the content. The following is an excerpt from a discussion group with that young person, where I took the opportunity to ask her thoughts on losing her job because of her Bebo page. Before she can answer another member of the group says:

**Katie:** I know but they might think if you're like that outside you might bring it in

**Kerry:** That's nuthin to dae with them

**Kayleigh:** Nosey bastards  
**Kerry:** That's like saying cause I go and get drunk at the weekends I come in here drunk everyday but I dinne  
**Katie:** I bet ye half the folk that work there go out and get rat arsed at the weekends  
**Kerry:** Aye n half of them huv got Bebo n talk about getting gassed n aw that at the weekends

*(Discussion Group 13)*

It is clear that this group of young people have strong opinions about their Bebo pages and employers' rights to look at the pages and make judgements about them. The discussion here centres on the overlap or clash in terms of our behaviour as an employee in work and in our personal lives away from work. This is an important issue as far as identity development goes as we do present ourselves differently in different situations. Social networking sites are now providing employers with the opportunity to see how we behave outside of work and this all adds to the impression they have of us. In the quote above Kayleigh describes the employers who looked at Kerry's Bebo page as "nosey bastards". The group then try and argue that most people probably go out and get drunk or "rat arsed" at the weekends. There is clearly a tension here between what is public versus what is private.

While most employers said that they do think it's ok for them to look at the social networking pages of employee's what is not captured in the questionnaire is that many employers said they would not look at social networking pages unless an issue arose and this is illustrated in the following quote from Lynn, a manger of a local nursery:

**Lynn:** I wouldn't delve into anybody before I took them on it's based on application and interview and references and disclosure check that's how I decide but I have to say I did have experience of the Bebo site in here and it was, em, members of staff discussing things about work on the site and we clearly said, you know, you can't do this, you can't

do it em, I wouldn't delve for it but if things were reported to me like that incident then I would take it up because there's all sorts of, you know the confidentiality you know em talking about the nursery is it in a bad way is it in a good way these are all things that they are supposed to be complying with in their contract so it's a shame because these sites are exposing, everybody is getting too exposed now.

*(Employer No: 3 Lynn Local Nursery Owner)*

Lynn stresses that she employs people based on application, interview and references and says she would not go looking for information on social networking sites. However, she then goes on to describe a situation where her staff were discussing their work on Bebo and Lynn intervened and spoke to the staff members concerned. Lynn states that she feels "everybody is getting too exposed now" through these sites and this is compromising confidentiality. There are clearly implications here for both young people and employers. Young people very much see their personal Bebo pages as an extension of their private lives or private self; however employers see this as a matter worthy of consideration and attention to avoid any negative impressions about their business being communicated via these pages. This is an issue which needs a great deal of attention due to the growing popularity of these sites.

### **Self Presentation**

The disagreement about Bebo pages is perhaps part of a larger disagreement and tension about how young people present themselves and employers' views of this. Employers think that it is a young person's choice not to work, that young people wearing baseball caps and tracksuits will cause trouble. There seems to be two issues here, firstly the responses from employers indicate that they think some young people do not want to work or are not committed or motivated to work. Secondly, there is an issue of self presentation which suggests that the

predominantly negative media portrayal of young people is mirrored in the perspectives of employers. The media frequently present images of young people dressed in a stereotypical way with accompanying headlines which link their dress to their behaviour and often unemployed status. For example:

Prince launches TV ad to rescue the 'lost generation' of hoodies - Charles's charity makes a plea for one million youths facing a life of unemployment and crime (*The Guardian*, 15 October, 2009)

Again this negative perception can create real-life barriers for some young people in their search for work. One 16 year old jobseeker, Laura describes an awareness of the negative ways in which young people can be viewed which is all based on choice of clothes and appearance:

**Laura:** Yeah cause a lot of people like if you wear a tracksuit... [pause] you're a chav if you wear a tracksuit and a cap you're trouble you know I think it would broaden and open people's mind to the fact that you're not branded if you wear a name it's not you it'll open their minds to if someone comes through I mean I've noticed that if you go to find an application form and you're wearing a tracksuit they just won't give you one at all they'll be like oh we've got none left.

*(Discussion Group 7)*

Here, Laura describes seeing an advert for a job, going in to ask for an application form and being refused one. She believes this happened because she was wearing a tracksuit and this is linked to other stereotypes. Laura also states that rather than young people not wearing tracksuits that others should be aware that just because they are choosing to wear them it does not mean they are "a chav" or "trouble".

However, from an employer's point of view appearance is very important, and some

employers placed a great deal of importance on appearance even if a young person was asking for an application form as Laura described. When asked about appearance one local employer, Lorna, states:

**Lorna:** That would matter to me because I would look and think they're not, it's like trying to make a first impression so I would think well if they're not, psychologically you wear different things according to what you're going to do so if they don't have, that's an indication to me that they don't have that mentality so they must just think everything get's dealt with the one way and it would be my way and they're not kind of taking account of how society works so that would be my impression.  
*(Employer No 4: Lorna, Local Shop Owner)*

Lorna's statement is again illustrative of all of the employers interviewed and given her opinions it is easy to understand why Laura feels she has been refused application forms because of the way she is dressed. More understanding between the two groups is needed here, it seems clear that young people must understand the importance of first impressions from their very first encounter with a potential employer. But equally employers need to understand that appearance does not always predict behaviour and not all young people have the financial means to dress smartly. Appropriate work clothing is often something which the training programmes buy for young people.

To summarise there seems to be a clash of perspectives in terms of traditional employment skills and the current context which young people are part of. While these employers do not place a great deal of importance on qualifications and an

employee's background, their perspectives on the way young people dress seems to be similar to the stereotypes produced in the media. By contrast, young people think that employers value qualifications and care about an employee's background. However, arguably the main disagreement revealed here is that young people think they understand employers but do not think employers understand them. Similarly, employers think they understand young people but do not think young people understand them. There is also a significant disagreement between the two groups relating to how much the other cares what they think of them. The preceding discussion has shown there are many disagreements between young people and employers which neither is fully aware of and this could cause problems for young people trying to engage with employers and enter the labour market.

### **Misunderstandings between Young People and Employers**

Further comparisons are needed to explore the extent to which each group understands the other. One excerpt from an interview shows Ian discussing his understanding of young people:

**Ian:** Probably an older person em, I suppose it depends how I interact with them, I mean the initial impression is an older guy who knows what's going to happen here you know but once you start talking to folk em, it depends how, I mean I think I can relate to young folk fairly well simply because I've got a family round about early 20s there's a lot of young folk come about my place so I think I've got a good understanding of what happens and what goes on plus I remember myself you know I've been there so I can make allowances and I can come and go wi folk em so I think they would need to form their impression after we started talking

*(Employer 2: Ian, Local Care Home Owner)*

In order to further develop the analysis the discussion will move onto the misunderstandings between young people and employers. Tables 7.4 and 7.5 show the understandings and misunderstandings between young people and employers.

**Table 7.4: What employers think young people think?**

Question	Mann Whitney - U	P value	Young People (median)	Employers (median)	Understand/ misunderstand
Trust is very important in the world of work	357.0	.110	2	2	understand
Commitment to your job is very important	369.5	.042*	2	2	understand
Punctuality is very important in the world of work	416.0	.275	2	2	understand
Getting paid for work the most important thing	62.5	.011*	1	2	understand
Qualifications are very important	380.5	.137	1	1	understand
Career Planning is very important	448.5	.653	1	1	understand
It's ok for employers to look at social networking pages	283.5	.021*	-2	-2	understand
<b>An employee's background is</b>	<b>273.0</b>	<b>.003*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
First impressions at work are very important	400.5	.147	2	2	understand
Council Training programmes are well	457.5	.738	1	1	understand
<b>It's a young person's choice not to work</b>	<b>246.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
<b>Society makes it difficult for young people to find</b>	<b>227.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
<b>Employers understand young people</b>	<b>268.5</b>	<b>.002*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
<b>Young people understand employers</b>	<b>264.0</b>	<b>.001*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
Employers are flexible with young people	459.0	.771	-1	-1	understand
Young people care what employers think	429.0	.431	2	2	understand
Employers care what young people think of	467.0	.864	1	1	understand
Council training programmes help young people find employment	388.0	.145	1	2	understand
Young people who choose to wear baseball caps and tracksuits will cause trouble	297.5	.021*	-2	-2	understand

**Asterisk (\*) indicates statistically significant misunderstanding ( $p < .05$ ) Scale: Very true = 2, slightly true = 1, slightly untrue = -1, very untrue = -2**

**Table 7.5: What young people think employers think?**

Question	Mann Whitney - U	P value	Young People (median)	Employers (median)	Understand/ misunderstand
Trust is very important in the world of work	462.0	.286	2	2	understand
Commitment to your job is very important	476.5	.927	2	2	understand
Punctuality is very important in the world of	407.5	.068	2	2	understand
<b>Getting paid for work the most important thing</b>	<b>187.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
<b>Qualifications are very important</b>	<b>141.5</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
Career Planning is very important	369.0	.058	2	2	understand
<b>It's ok for employers to look at social networking pages</b>	<b>252.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>- 2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
<b>An employee's background is very important</b>	<b>91.5</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
First impressions at work are very important	451.5	.371	2	2	understand
Council Training programmes are well respected	390.0	.134	2	2	understand
It's a young person's choice not to work	306.0	.009*	2	1	understand
<b>Society makes it difficult for young people to find work</b>	<b>216.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
<b>Employers understand young people</b>	<b>335.0</b>	<b>.012*</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
Young people understand employers	392.0	.200	-1	-1	understand
Employers are flexible with young people	450.5	.652	2	2	understand
Young people care what employers think	321.5	.021*	2	1	understand
<b>Employers care what young people think of</b>	<b>255.0</b>	<b>.001*</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>
Council training programmes help young	448.5	.570	2	2	understand
Young people who choose to wear baseball caps and tracksuits will cause trouble	<b>235.0</b>	<b>&lt;.001*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>

Asterisk (\*) indicates statistically significant misunderstanding ( $p < .05$ ) Scale: Very true = 2, slightly true = 1, slightly untrue = -1, very untrue = -2

## **Discussion: Misunderstandings**

Young people and employers misunderstand each other in response to several issues, as detailed in Tables 7.4 and 7.5 above. As in the above section I have chosen to focus on the misunderstandings, placing emphasis on significant results. I argue that these are the most interesting points and the issues that have the potential to cause problems between the two groups. There are varying degrees of misunderstandings, for example at times young people and employers share a similar perspective but there is a significant difference between how true or untrue they think a statement is. To clarify, question 11 states 'it's a young persons' choice not to work'. Employers think this statement is slightly true while young people think employers think this statement is very true. I would argue that it is misleading to claim this is a misunderstanding on the part of young people as there is clearly a degree of understanding. Therefore to avoid any ambiguity I will only highlight here the questions which reveal a polarisation of perspectives which highlights a clear misunderstanding on the part of young people or employers.

Employers do not think that getting paid for work is the most important thing but there is a misunderstanding here as young people think that employers think that getting paid for work is the most important thing. A similar misunderstanding is revealed in relation to qualifications and an employee's background. It seems that young people misunderstand the importance or in this case lack of importance which these employers place upon getting paid for work, qualifications and an employee's background.

Furthermore, employers think that society can make it difficult for young people to find work which suggests they have a sympathetic or compassionate view of the

situation some young people face. However young people do not think employers will think this is the case which reveals another misunderstanding. Employers do think that young people who wear baseball caps and tracksuits will cause trouble but young people do not think that employers will think this is the case. These two comparisons are very interesting, they reveal two further issues over which young people misunderstand employers but they also reveal the complexity of the perspectives of employers. It seems young people struggle to understand employers but also that employers can be very difficult to understand. Perhaps one reason for this complexity is that when it comes to the issue: does society make it difficult for some young people to find work, the qualitative interviews with the employers reveal a slightly different perspective from the IPM questionnaire:

**Jim:**

I think life's a lot easier for folk nowadays, if its no working I don't need to care, that's ma opinion, I had to work when I was younger if I didne work I didne get anything nowadays I think, ma opinion again, too much mollycoddling going on they get too many opportunities if they muck up one opportunity then its "well we'll give you another one try not to do this again" well where does the opportunities stop aw you're doing is putting them in this bubble wrap and nothing ever bad's gone happen because we'll just try and get ye something else and if it dosne work out there then we'll put you somewhere else.

*(Employer No 1: Jim, Local Garage Owner)*

A lot of employers, like Jim, reflect back on their own lives when trying to understand young people today and this may lead young people to misunderstand the perspective of employers in relation to the statement about society. As Jim describes he feels it's "a lot easier" for young people today and this view was common among many employers who took part in this study. Employers would often

acknowledge the fact that the UK is currently experiencing a recession but they would still argue that there are jobs for young people if they want them. However, this view would suggest that employers do not think that society makes it difficult for some young people to find work, when, in fact the opposite is revealed in the IPM questionnaire.

From these comparisons we can see that young people misunderstood employers in relation to five key statements and this may be due to the mixed views that employers hold about the way young people present themselves and the opportunities available to them.

The IPM comparisons reveal that employers have a better understanding of young people than young people have of them. This could be attributed to the fact that an employer can take the perspective of a young person because they were in that position once, young people are unable to take the perspective of an employer and indeed often an employee as the transition into work is a very new one for young people. There is only one question where employers clearly misunderstand young people:

Question 8: An employee's background is very important

Young people think an employee's background is very important but employers misunderstand this and think that young people do not think an employee's background is very important. Employers do not think a young person's background

is very important and this reveals a disagreement and misunderstanding about this issue. There are several questions where employers have over-estimated the degree to which young people will think the statements are true or false.

Question 4: Getting paid for work the most important thing

Question 11: It's a young person's choice not to work

Question 12: Society makes it difficult for young people to find work

Question 13: Employers understand young people

Question 14: Young people understand employers

Firstly, young people think that getting paid for work is quite important but employers think that young people think that getting paid for work is the most important thing. This again suggests that employers think that young people are only interested in making money and this is the only thing which motivates them to find work. When asked if it's a young person's choice not to work young people responded that this is slightly untrue but employers think that young people think this statement is very untrue. A similar misunderstanding was revealed in relation to the statement society makes it difficult for some young people to find work.

Finally, following on from the earlier discussion in relation to the disagreements between these two groups, employers also misunderstand young people's perspectives about how much they understand employers. Given the statement 'employers understand young people', young people think this is slightly untrue but employers think that young people would feel stronger and think it was very untrue. The reverse is true as young people think that they understand employers but employers think that young people's views would have been stronger. This is complex as these do not appear to be areas of misunderstanding between employers and young people but suggest that young people are not as extreme with

their views as employers think. This group of young people have been conservative with their views over some issues, and it is less common for them to use the extreme ends of the scale. Furthermore, these comparisons also reveal that these employers think young people don't think employers understand them. However these employers think they understand young people. The employers who took part in this research seem aware that there are divergences in perspective between themselves and employers.

In order to provide an overall picture of the above comparisons and resulting disagreements and misunderstandings between young people and employers there are a number of questions which we can ask in order to try and improve the relationship between the two groups:

What are employers looking for?

What do we need to communicate to young people?

What do employers need to understand about young people?

There seems to be an overall mismatch in perspectives in relation to work ethic (Fouts, 2010). Based on the results of the IPM I would argue that young people think employers are looking for things associated with a more traditional work ethic for example, employee's having a good background and qualifications where in fact employers are looking for more generic skills such as good communication and motivation. By contrast employers seem to have a negative view of things which are associated with the current working climate such as the impact of social networking sites and the way young people express themselves in terms of dress. These are issues which it seems employers need to gain a knowledge and understanding of.

Employers need to understand more about the current climate within which young people are trying to find work. Young people need to understand that employers value generic skills which centre on commitment and motivation to work. This is illustrated well by two employers who describe what they are looking for from employees:

**Ian:** Well we look for a nice ambience a nice personality we look for a bit of commitment we look for people who are prepared to turn up for their shift.

*(Employer No 2: Ian, Local Care Home Owner)*

**Lorna:** Well I think the first things is they actually look and give me a sense that you want to be here [...] I think the main thing is to actually feel like they want to be here they want to come to work every day and everything else just falls into place after

*(Employer No 4: Lorna, Local Nursery Owner)*

Ian and Lorna run different businesses, Ian runs a respite care home for ex-servicemen with mental health problems and Lorna manages two local nurseries. However they share similar perspectives in terms of what they are looking for from staff. It is hard to communicate to young people that they must give an employer 'a sense' that they want to be at work but it is important to increase young people's understanding of the importance of being motivated and enthusiastic in any job.

## **Discussion**

In terms of recognition the search for employment is a complex process. When a young person is rejected by an employer it can have a huge impact upon the way they see themselves. As a result they may seek recognition in another context which

could be applying for a different position or alternatively deciding not to seek employment and do something else. They may, however, decide to change themselves and gain more training which may be recognised and valued by the original employer and apply again. It is also important as to how recognition is perceived. For example, often when the council struggle to find work placements for young people they try to encourage them to gain some experience in a local charity shop. This can often be seen as an insult by young people who see this as one of the lowest forms of employment/work. Therefore, in the council's view a charity shop may provide a young person with an opportunity to gain transferable skills whereas a young person sees this as an indication that they cannot work elsewhere and they would often rather not work at all.

Often we think the solution to youth unemployment is the creation of more jobs or volunteering opportunities. It is important however that we understand how these are perceived by young people. Often taking a job in a certain place will leave a young person alienated from or ridiculed within their peer group or family. This again highlights the need to understand the different structures of recognition which young people must negotiate between.

This study has revealed a number of disagreements and misunderstandings between young people and employers. It is extremely important to address these and try to make the transition into adulthood and employment successful for all young people including those who are not in education, employment or training. The next chapter will discuss applied interventions such as more work experience

opportunities for young people which will address and improve their relationships with employers.

## **Chapter 8: The Self Caught Between Structures of Recognition**

This final chapter has proven one of the most difficult to write for many reasons. My desire to complete my PhD has always been in direct conflict with my desire to continue conducting research. Given the current economic climate I am more aware than ever of the importance of helping and valuing young people as the future generation. While I hope this research provides a much needed insight this story is far from complete and much more needs to be done to ensure young people make positive transitions in their lives.

In this chapter I will return to the three research questions and explain the contribution they make. Beginning with their contribution in a theoretical sense captured in Figure 8.1 which depicts the self caught between different and often conflicting structures of recognition. I will move on to discuss the applied nature of this research and suggest some interventions to address the issues highlighted in this thesis. Finally, I will discuss my suggestions for future work which I believe should be an ongoing priority.

In a speech at the University of Stirling economist David Blanchflower commented that psychology often hides behind theory and long winded explanations of complex and irrelevant problems instead of dealing with social problems that are a priority now (26 February, 2007) I do not want to fall into the trap of taking a very social

issue and losing sight of it among psychological theory. This is not to say that I do not place value on theories as I believe they drive research and I hope to contribute to them. However, I feel this research is more than a theoretical contribution and if it is to make any difference in today's society it must be accessible to the reader (of which I hope there are many). So this final chapter is my attempt to pull together what I consider to be the main contributions of my PhD and to discuss my thoughts arising from these.

As I write this concluding chapter I received an invitation to take part in a radio interview with BBC Radio Oxford. The interviewer wanted to discuss recent comments made by the actress Emma Thompson who attacked young people's use of sloppy language arguing that use of slang makes young people "sound stupid" (*BBC News*, 28 September, 2010). I was invited to take part in the programme based on my research of Bebo and young people's use of language on social networking sites. Once again the prominent concern was that if young people used slang language in one context, for example, their Bebo pages, they would also use this language in schools and other areas of their lives. The fear here is that modern technology is rendering young people illiterate. For me this raises two key, but closely related points.

The discussion of the impact of modern technology upon young people's lives illustrates the complexity of the social worlds in which young people are immersed in. Further, it is my belief that we are underestimating young people if we assume that they cannot adapt their behaviour to the context they are in. Young people,

especially those making the transition out of education and into adult environments, must negotiate between many different contexts each of which offers or denies them social recognition (for example: school, peer groups, family, employment, unemployment, sports teams). This social recognition has a significant impact upon the way young people see themselves and others and how they construct their sense of self.

Young people today face many challenges and I firmly believe that as a society we need to shift the focus from the weaknesses to the strengths of young people and invest in the next generation. Importantly, I do not believe this investment should be purely financial. As discussed in Chapter 1 government funded training programmes to support young people into employment often attract stigma and can have an extremely negative impact for those who fail to find employment after the programme (Furlong, 1993). As I will go onto discuss when it comes to the problem of youth unemployment creating more jobs is a superficial solution. We must learn to value young people to ensure we do not continue this cycle of negativity with their children and grandchildren.

## **Returning to the Research Questions**

The broad aim of this research was to “understand the role of recognition in the identities of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)”. This is a very broad topic and I narrowed this down by focusing on structures of recognition, specifically examining three contexts of young peoples’ lives. As described in Chapter 1 unemployed young people are considered a problem by the government as they are not contributing to the economy and this can create a risk of

them engaging in anti-social behaviour. This research has tried to gain an insight into the lives of the young people behind the unemployment statistics.

Chapter 2 discussed the theory of the dialogical self (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1993) which explains the way we construct our identities based on interactions and feedback from others. I aimed to take this one stage further by examining more specifically what this feedback is. I have used the term recognition as I believe it captures positive feedback, negative feedback and no feedback at all, in other words being ignored. Hegel's (1949) description of the master and slave relationship gave a good but basic understanding of recognition. It was basic in the sense that it only dealt with one relationship in one context which provides a starting point but does not take into account the multiple contexts we move between in our daily lives. For example, the master could not gain recognition from the slave but what about the other contexts where could he build his positive sense of self? We do not deal with each context in isolation and it is often difficult to stop what happens in one area of our lives impacting on other areas. This research extended Hegel's work by examining 3 contexts of young peoples' lives: peer groups, online interactions and relationships with employer, there are of course many more. This research builds on the early work of Hegel (1949) by providing an understanding of recognition in modern life where we all including young people move between many different contexts giving, receiving and denying recognition.

Recognition, however, is not just something we perceive cognitively; recognition is situated and structured in social life. In chapter 2 I referred to Gillespie *et al.*'s (2008) concept structures of recognition. The authors examined the diaries kept by June, a

young British Woman, during World War II. The authors focused on June's conflicting commitments in terms of her contribution to the War effort and her involvement in her home community. These could be considered two contexts where recognition is structured very differently. For example at home June runs the family home and I imagine, recognition would be given for doing this efficiently, but June must leave these commitments behind to contribute to the war effort and it is here that she finds herself caught between these structures of recognition. Gillespie *et al.* present an interesting analysis of June's diaries and it is clear to see the importance of recognition in these different contexts of June's life. I have built on this by providing a more comprehensive understanding of recognition as a dynamic social process situated and structured within contexts, institutions, relationships and interactions with others. This thesis has examined three contexts of young peoples' lives; peer groups, social networking pages and relationships with employers. By examining these three contexts together I have shown how young people can become caught between different structures of recognition.

By focusing on three different contexts and structures of recognition this research builds on the work of Hegel and Gillespie *et al.* by exploring how young people give, receive and deny recognition within different structures. The denial of recognition can have a big impact on the way young people see themselves. This supports the discussion of Taylor's (1992) work also in Chapter 2. Taylor (1992) states "non-recognition or mis-recognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being" (p. 25). This research has revealed that denial or lack of recognition often causes young people to look for other, sometimes less socially acceptable, ways to gain recognition.

Furthermore, structures of recognition are often conflicting and young people find themselves caught between structures of recognition (see Figure 8.1), for example recognition available from peers as opposed to the recognition available from a teacher. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Together these different contexts (peer groups, online social networking site and relationships with employers) and structures provide us with a rich and in- depth insight into the lives of a group of young people and the role of recognition within their identities.

I will now discuss each of the research questions in turn before describing how their combined insight give us a rich understanding of young people's identities and the role recognition plays.

### **How do young people give and receive recognition in their peer group?**

Chapter 1 explained the very stigmatised position which young unemployed people occupy; in the eyes of the government, media and wider society. The negative experience of being young and unemployed has also been well documented by large youth organisations such as the Prince's Trust (Youth Index, 2010). I wanted to examine how young unemployed young people build their self esteem and gain a positive sense of self. Get Ready for Work training programmes aim to support young people to move into employment and they provided an excellent context to examine how young people give, receive and deny recognition in their peer groups. The young people participating in these programmes know that they are each there because they have one thing in common: they do not have a job. The young people

who took part in this study were also working class with few formal qualifications. By bringing them together in informal discussion groups I was able to observe the process of recognition in discussion with their peers.

Building on Marková's (1990) three-step process as a unit of analysis in dialogue Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate the ways in which these young people give and receive recognition within their peer group. The analysis also revealed the recognition young people feel they are given and denied from others. This occurred in many different ways with young people negotiating between several structures of recognition. Interestingly hierarchical structures worked both ways while sometime being at the top brought positive recognition but sometimes the opposite was true. These structures were often conflicting and this revealed nuances within young people's experiences. The discussion involving Michaela in Chapter 4 is an excellent example of this. These discussions show that for young unemployed people the transition into work is complex, for example, working in certain places would lead to ridicule from their peers. It is clear from their discussions that these young people are caught between several structures of recognition: they are aware that the media stigmatises them and that people will cross the road to avoid them, they discuss their desire to find a job which will allow them to buy certain things and participate in adult life, eventually being able to buy a house and start a family, but they are also keen to stress the social stigma associated with some jobs and the pressure to remain popular within their peer group. From this, we can begin to see that once they have left school and they are entering a variety of new contexts young people alter their behaviour based on the recognition available in each context. For example, they may spend the day looking for work, dressed smartly and politely asking for application forms and attending interviews but then at night they change their clothes

and go out drinking with their friends. The movement between the various contexts of our lives and our social roles relies on careful self-presentation strategies e.g. wearing a uniform while in work. We all negotiate our identities within these various contexts and embedded structures of recognition often un-problematically but problems arise when we find ourselves caught between these structures.

Social networking has become a major part of young people's social lives but the online nature of these pages has meant that people in other contexts have observed young people in their personal lives, for example, an employer being able to watch videos of their young employee drunk with their friends at the weekend. This has caused some considerable stress to young people who suddenly find that although they behave differently in work their employer has made a judgement based on their behaviour in their personal lives. It was incidences like this which caused me to examine social networking pages in more detail.

### **How do young people engage with the alternative context of an online social networking site in order to give and receive recognition?**

Young people today not only interact and construct their identities in face-to-face interactions, but also spend a great deal of time online. Therefore I felt it necessary to explore their online interactions in order to fully understand how these play a part in the way young people see themselves and each other. Social networking sites, Bebo is one of many, provide young people with opportunities to present themselves and interact with others online. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) theory of self-

presentation and building on Herven's (2004) work I set out to understand what young people got from social networking. I found that Bebo provides many opportunities for young people to gain recognition within an alternative structure of recognition. I consider this an alternative structure as it is online but also it is a context where young people can express themselves in ways which would be deemed unacceptable in everyday life. For example, writing in ways which would not be allowed in school or work and posing for photos wearing very little or carrying weapons which would not be allowed in any other setting.

Chapter 6 discussed the ways in which young people present themselves and interact with others online. Analysis revealed that young people make use of the existing structures of recognition within the social networking site Bebo but they also manipulate the site in order to gain further recognition in ways that could not have been predicted. Bebo then acts as a structure of recognition within young people's lives. Often when opportunities for recognition, power and influence are limited social networking sites like Bebo offer young people the chance to gain recognition for popularity, sexual attractiveness and physical strength in ways which may not be deemed acceptable in everyday offline life. This echoes the discussion in chapter two of Jovchelovitch's work. Jovchelovitch stated "my power to act is always limited by the recognition others confer on what I do" (Jovchelovitch, 1997, p. 19). For many young people therefore Bebo provides a much needed space where they can feel a sense of power and influence in their lives which can boost their self-esteem and create a positive sense of self.

## **Are there any disagreements and/or misunderstandings between young people and employers?**

Given the problem of youth unemployment and the often turbulent relationship which some young people have with the labour market it was important to examine the perspectives of 2 stake holding groups central to the employment process – young people looking for work and employers. While researchers in the past have discussed the perspectives of either employers (see Rosenbaum & Binder, 1997) or young people (see MacDonald & Marsh, 2001) I compared the perspectives of each group to identify disagreements and misunderstandings that create barriers to employment.

Recognition is complex between these two groups as their contact is often limited to the application and interview process. Young people often reported feeling dismissed by employers and employers often felt young people were not committed to working. The IPM questionnaire was adapted and used to gain an insight into the relationship between employers and young people. To extend the theory of the dialogical self the perspectives of both groups were documented and analysed which socially situates the relationship and moves it beyond the perspectives of one individual or group. The Interpersonal Perception Method (IPM) (Laing, Phillipson & Lee, 1966) examines the relation between what people think other people think and what those other people actually think. In this case what young people think employers think and what employers actually think. The key finding here is the IPM questionnaire revealed a number of misunderstandings which hinder the relationship between young people and employers. Again this can be linked back to the model of recognition – when you are receiving no positive recognition in one context i.e. you

do not get offered the job then you are likely to either apply for other jobs (the same behaviour in another context) or seek positive recognition by changing your behaviour which may lead to disengagement with the job market. By using several methods in triangulation we gain a rich description and understanding of these young people's lives and a meaningful and intricate understanding of how they see themselves and others.

### **Bringing These Contexts Together**

In Chapter 2 I discussed the need to extend the theory of the dialogical self by exploring identities situated in social life. The empirical contexts described above provide insights into these young people's lives and allow us to see how recognition impacts upon their identities in three key areas of their lives: with their friends and peers, on their social networking pages and in the world of work. Each in isolation provides fascinating data and interesting findings but combined they give us a fuller understanding of these young people's identities and the complexity of their lives as they move within and between these contexts and at times find themselves caught between different structures of recognition.

The use of discussion groups allows us to understand the perspectives of young people in their own words. Further, it provides them with an informal relaxed environment where they are free to interact with their friends and peers. However, as mentioned previously young people spend a great deal of time online and rather than ask them to self-report these interactions and acts of self-presentation the researcher witnessed this directly through analysis of social networking pages. The IPM questionnaire also allowed the researcher to report and compare the

perspectives of young people and employers. The use of these different methods (discussion groups, individual interviews and questionnaires) in this case allows a deeper and broader exploration of how identities are constructed and the impact of recognition.

This research has attempted to extend the theory of the dialogical self by examining the role of recognition and moving beyond understanding recognition as an intra psychological phenomenon and examining it as a social phenomenon. This research proposes a model of recognition which allows an insight into what motivates us to behave differently in different contexts of our lives.

Central to the theory of the dialogical self is the idea that the feedback we receive from others has an impact upon the way we view ourselves and others. However, we need to understand more about the nature of this feedback and the impact it has on identity construction. I propose that recognition is inherent within the feedback we receive from others. Recognition is a process of acknowledgement and the perception of this acknowledgement. Further, recognition cannot be understood as an individual, isolated concept. It requires the other. Recognition can take several forms – positive recognition e.g. praise, negative recognition e.g. scold or no recognition e.g. to ignore/be ignored. The impact of recognition is a feeling of positive recognition, power, influence and a positive sense of self or the opposite feeling of rejection and disempowerment.

Therefore, drawing on the findings of this research we can now attempt to answer the questions raised in Chapter 2 (what do we receive from others in interactions? What happens when we engage in negative or confrontational interactions? What happens when we are ignored?). What we receive from others in interactions is the basis for our creation our sense of self, if we receive positive recognition this enables us to build a positive sense of self and feel empowered within our social worlds. However, if we receive negative recognition then we may feel disempowered and continue to seek a positive sense of self. Perhaps the most detrimental of all interactions is where we feel we are denied recognition, in other words we feel ignored. The impact of being ignored was specifically discussed in Chapter 4 when I observed the girls ignoring each other during the discussion. The girls also gave examples of when they felt teachers ignored them at school. The reaction, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, to being ignored often involves trying to change the topic of conversation or an attempt to gain recognition in an alternative structure. For example, when feeling ignored at school young people often described becoming disruptive which not only got the teacher's attention but also resulted in recognition from their peers. Negative recognition or a complete lack of recognition can have a serious impact upon the way we see ourselves.

Understanding the role of recognition allows us to explore how the voices within the self relate to the external voice of significant others. In Chapter 2 we discussed the example of during a period of decision making a young person may hear the voice of their parents as significant others within their dialogical selves. This research has elaborated on this by explaining that it is the recognition on offer from parents which is the key part in identity construction. Later in chapter 2 an example was given of a

young person discussing her career choice based on the fact that her mum told her she was “good at it” (Archer & Yamashita, 2003, p. 55). Given the preceding discussions it is now clear to see that positive recognition from a significant other has a crucial impact upon, not only the way a young person sees themselves, but also their behaviour.

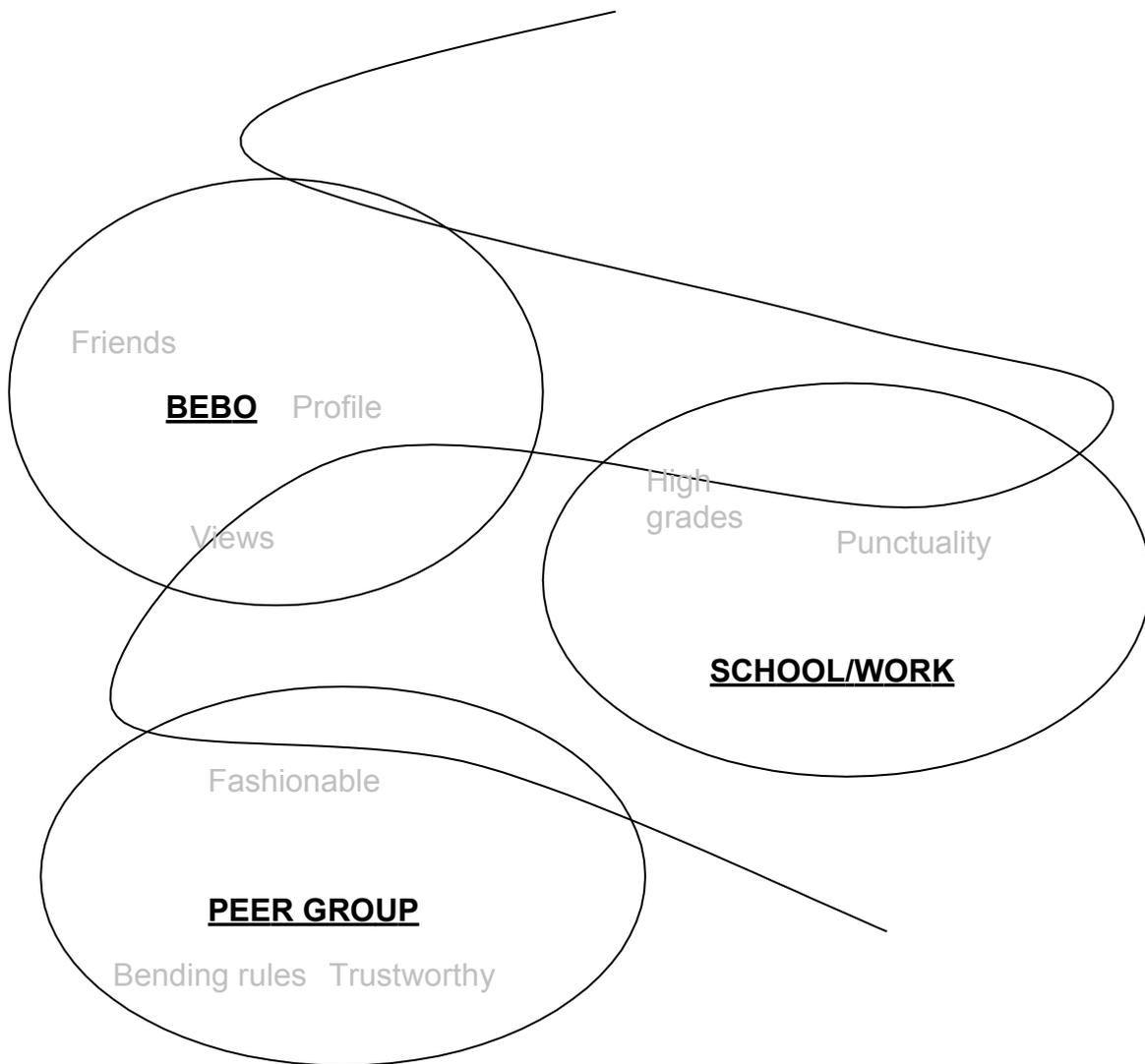
The preceding chapters provide an insight into young people’s dialogue with their peers, their self-presentation and interactions online and a comparison of their perspectives with the perspectives of potential employers. This research has demonstrated that the ways in which young people give, receive and deny recognition in dialogue with their peers also appear in other settings such as the health and safety test discussed in chapter 5. This illustrates the ways in which recognition is a social process and not one which can be fully understood by focusing on the individual, instead we must examine relationships and young people in context(s). The model of recognition which will be discussed below highlights the way we can understand recognition in each turn of dialogue but also as a social facet which is embedded in our interactions and structures the contexts which comprise our social lives.

### **The Self Caught Between Different Structures of Recognition**

Recognition is a dynamic and socially situated process. Whenever someone does or says something there is always a response from others, even if this response is being ignored (Illustrated in Chapter 2, figure 2.1). Another may respond positively,

negatively or not at all and the consequence of this can be seen as the dialogue continues. For example, if you say something and other's ignore you, you may choose to repeat your point, rephrase it/repeat it in a different way, say nothing, change the line of conversation in the hope that they will respond or you may respond to what someone else has said or done. Immersed in this process is our understanding of social norms and acceptable behaviour in different contexts. I argue that this centres around recognition, and we must all determine the recognition available and the recognition we want from whom. For example, for a young person in school there is recognition on offer from the teacher for working hard and behaving in class but there may also be recognition on offer from peers for not being a geek and joking around in class. This example highlights the problem of the self being caught between different, and at times conflicting, structures of recognition. This is illustrated in the diagram below.

**Figure 8.1 An example of an individual's trajectory (represented by a line) through three contexts within School**



A discussion of these different structures of recognition leads to my second, but related, theoretical contribution which is an illustration and understanding of the various structures of recognition which young people move within and between (at a broader level these structures do not only apply to young people but also to everyone).

Returning to the theory of the dialogical self which states that many different I positions can be occupied by the same person and these may represent their various social roles. However, we do not move from one social role to another in a robotic fashion leaving one behind before assuming another, for example when moving between socialising with our friends to a work environment. So in a sense these I positions become layered and overlapping and our behaviour within each social context is influenced by the recognition on offer. Mead's theory of the relational self explains our ability to think of ourselves from the viewpoint of another. This process is complex when moving within and between many social roles. In an attempt to capture this Figure 8.1 above illustrates three different structures which can be found in young people's lives: peer group, work and Bebo.

As discussed earlier many young people strive to be as popular as possible, this may mean looking a certain way and having many friends. Young people who are trying to find work must also consider where they work and the recognition on offer from their employer, this may include turning up on time and being praised for hard work. A newer structure of recognition is offered by social networking sites like Bebo where young people can gain a measure of their popularity and present themselves in ways which may not be accepted in other contexts, for example posing with weapons. Independently, each of these structures requires a young person to present themselves in certain ways and engage in certain behaviours or recognition will be negative or denied, for example turning up late for work may result in a warning from an employer. When a young person is caught between these different structures the process becomes more complicated. For example, as the girls discussed in Chapter 4 a young person would have to consider the consequences of

taking a job which their friends would ridicule them for. Further these contexts do not exist in isolation, together with many others they comprise our social lives. The list is exhaustive, with many structures like work and peer group being permanent in our lives with others such as Bebo being more temporary structures which we can choose to engage with.

## **Applied Contributions**



What does this research mean in the real world? This thesis opened with a statement from Michael Russell (Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, March 15, 2010). Russell stated that the recession (and unemployment) does the most damage to young people. This research has provided an insight and explanation of what exactly this damage is in terms of these young people's identities, the ways they see themselves and others. I would like to conclude with some suggestions about what we can do to better help and support young people making the transition into adulthood. According to Economist David Blanchflower we need to tackle youth unemployment in the following ways:

First, we need to create jobs. The government should undertake a substantial fiscal stimulus focused on jobs, as soon as possible. Second, there is a case for large cuts in National Insurance contributions targeted at the low-paid and the young. Third, there is a case for encouraging the under-25s to be in education as an alternative to becoming unemployed. Fourth, there is growing interest in teaching as a career. This interest in teaching is likely to rise as unemployment rises, so a further option is to increase the number of teacher training places. Finally, it is important to do something about preventing long-term unemployment. I agree with Paul Gregg and Richard Layard, who have proposed a job-guarantee programme after 12 months' unemployment for 18 to 25-year-olds, and after 18 months' unemployment for 25-plus. I agree with their view that targeted action to prevent long-term unemployment and to provide work and hope in a time of potential despair is a good idea

*(The Guardian 18 March, 2009)*

While I agree that the creation of more jobs would help young people feel included in society as opposed to marginalised I do not think this proposed solution goes far enough. As discussed in Chapter 1 Barry (2006, p. 15) highlighted “the need to reassess the discriminatory nature of an adult-orientated labour market”. In the current situation in 2011 we have an ageing working population and with many working longer meaning there are fewer opportunities for young people trying to enter the labour market. This is an example of Robert’s (2009) opportunity structures therefore we need more opportunities for young people to enter the labour market. However, we also need quality jobs which allow young people to develop skills and feel valued. The result will be a positive experience with employers and the labour market which young people will be keen to remain engaged with.

Based on the findings of this research I make two applied suggestions which I feel will improve the lives of young people making the transition through their teenage years to adulthood. However, one issue which has not been discussed at length

within this research is social class. All of the young people who took part in this research were working class, however, as Roberts (2009, p. 358) points out “the proportion of young people who are reared in middle class homes has risen” meaning that schools are now educating young people whose parents are keen that they do well but “doing well” means something different in different social classes” and many of the young people who took part in this research came from workless households. Therefore, while I argue that the following interventions will improve young people’s transitions we cannot forget the importance of social class and the impact this has on young people’s lives and opportunities. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 revealed the need for alternative and diverse structures of recognition. Chapter 7 revealed the need for more work placements and engagement with employers in schools. I will begin by discussing the latter suggestion.

### **More Opportunities for Work Experience and Engagement with Employers in Schools.**

Chapter 7 highlighted that disagreements and misunderstandings between young people and employers can lead to barriers when young people try to find work. I suggest that this situation would be improved by more choice and opportunities for young people to engage with employers in work experience placements and more opportunities for employers to play a part in the education system. This is in agreement with MacDonald and Marsh (2005, p. 213) who state the need for “viable vocational and educational pathways (or mixtures of each) from the mid-teenage years onwards”. In modern society there are a great number of jobs, careers and occupations which young people must choose between when they leave education. We have moved away from the traditional industrial roles and now the list of

potential jobs is diverse and almost endless therefore we have to give young people more opportunities to try these jobs out before they commit to something they may have little knowledge of. The traditional work experience model within Scottish secondary schools is a week-long placement at the age of 16. This I feel is too limited, I suggest that an extended period of multiple work placements would be beneficial to all young people. Carr, Wright and Brody (1996) investigated the effects of working while in high school and concluded “working during high school has a positive effect on a variety of labor force outcomes (labor force participation, employment status, and income) even a decade later” (p. 79). This American study provides evidence that education must be complimented with work experience in order to provide young people with the skills and confidence they need to make a successful transition out of education and into employment or further training.

Allowing young people to experience many different working environments will enable them to make a more informed choice when they leave education. It will also allow them to network with a larger number of employers and find out where they are best suited. Young people say it’s difficult to imagine yourself doing a job if you know nothing about it. It should also be emphasised to young people that being able to say you definitely do not want to do a certain job after you have tried it is also highly valuable and should not be seen as a failure.

Fuller, Beck and Unwin’s (2005) study highlights the issue that when young people take part in training programmes the most significant relationship is between the training provider and the young person e.g. the youth worker and the young person.

The employer has little direct input in this situation until they actually take the young person on work placement. The relationship between employer and young person is mediated by the youth worker. This is certainly the case in the local context as described above. An interesting question is therefore: do youth workers know what employers want and are they communicating this message accurately to young people? This also relates to teachers and the wider education system. Young people seek and are given information relating to employment from a variety of sources and this information must accurately reflect what employers are looking for if young people are to be successful in securing employment.

This research has also highlighted the need for a greater understanding from employers of the current climate in terms of employment which young people are immersed in. Historically, young people may have left school and found employment in industry for their entire working lives but today the situation is very different. For a young person leaving school there are many different opportunities, part time or full time work, further education or training, travel and apprenticeships and a range of different jobs which these positions can be offered in. Another interesting finding from Fuller, Beck and Unwin's (2005) study is that young people wanted "more information about the type of work" and an opportunity to "try it out before making a commitment" (p. 306). Young people often have little information and no experience of a job and rather than commit fully from the outset they may benefit from more work experience, work tasters and work placements. Employers may doubt a young person's commitment to work but for young people these experiences are so new that they may be reluctant to commit to a job they have little knowledge or experience of.

Following from the previous point more work experience opportunities would allow young people and employers to come into contact with each other and gain an understanding of the other's point of view. Encouraging employers to engage with young people before they leave school would also greatly improve the relationship between the two groups and reduce the number of misunderstandings. As illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5 young people often talk about wishing they could go back to school. I suggest that if they were better prepared for the world of work before they left school and were able to receive positive recognition from employers they would look to the future instead of wishing they could return to school.

More input from employers in the education system would also increase the number of positive role models available to young people and also help to address some of the misunderstandings between young people and employers. Mentoring systems, such as the VIP Mentoring Scheme offered by the charity Lifeline (LifeLine Projects), should be available in every school. Young people are often offered this kind of support once they leave school I think that this could be introduced earlier in order to effectively support the transition from school to work or further training/education.

Young people often look up to and admire celebrities which should not always be seen as a negative thing but we need to look for ways to connect young people with positive role models and mentors in everyday settings. These people, unlike celebrities, can directly communicate with young people and also have a better understanding of the social landscape they live in.

## **Create Alternative Structures of Recognition**

While creating more jobs may reduce the numbers of young people who are unemployed it is a superficial solution to a much deeper problem. We must create more opportunities for young people to gain positive recognition and create a positive sense of self. We need to make the transition from education to employment and from youth to adulthood a more successful, supported and positive experience for all young people. I stress the importance of valuing young people and providing them with power, control and choice during this transitional time in their lives. Adolescence is very much a time of uncertainty for young people and it is crucial that we move away from stigmatisation towards more support and guidance.

As illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5 I argue that when we are talking about young peoples' employment status we must not forget that this is only one aspect of their lives. While being employed is valued in our society often young people have more pressing concerns surrounding homelessness, addictions, support networks, abuse, discrimination, financial hardship and relationships. These must not be forgotten as I argue that simply getting a job will not improve other aspects of their lives.

This research has discussed the various structures of recognition which young people are often caught between. Many young people find that they have limited opportunities to gain positive recognition and this is something which I argue has to change. The above model and structures of recognition highlight the importance of recognition within identity development. This research has illustrated the need for various structures of recognition and ways in which young people can gain positive recognition in some aspects of their lives. It is unrealistic to expect that all young

people can be high academic achievers but for those that do not excel in this domain there should be other, equally meaningful, opportunities available to them.

Chapter 6 discussed young people's use of social networking sites and proposed these as a new structure of recognition. Social networking sites have managed to attract many young people as they offer alternative opportunities for recognition for example, for popularity and attractiveness. I suggest that we look at ways in which to provide more diverse opportunities for recognition. Returning to a point made in Chapter 2, the emphasis on positive recognition solely for academic achievement is problematic for young people who do not achieve good grades. As Zittoun (2004, p. 154) highlights "a young person who has been defined in exclusively negative terms at school may wish to be judged by others on something other than school-related skills". The education system, as it stands, recognises a limited field of knowledge, skills and qualities and we must broaden this.

We must learn to value the skills that young people have. They are under pressure to keep up to date with the latest trends in various aspects of their lives e.g. fashion, IT, slang colloquialisms etc and it seems that the current structures of recognition are lagging behind in relation to young people's skills. For example, when it comes to IT skills within schools a young person who can produce a letter of application for a job would be given positive recognition whereas a young person who knew how to access banned websites, such as Bebo, would be considered a trouble-maker. We need to find ways of harnessing the skills young people have and building on these strengths in order that young people do not feel that the only way they can use these skills is to cause trouble and be disruptive. A similar example would be a

young person who is not considered very good in an English class but can spend hours writing a 'diss' about another young person.

As Furlong (2006, p. 565) stated "the Government is right to set targets to reduce the overall level of NEET as long as it employs a range of different initiatives". This research has suggested two ways in which we can begin to improve young people's experiences as they make the transition from youth to adulthood. As a society we often spend more time trying to address our weaknesses than playing to our strengths. When it comes to recognition we need to start by looking at young people's strengths and determining how we can give positive recognition and develop these skills instead of dismissing them as a weakness.

It is argued here that providing meaningful work experience and offering vocational education and training which is equally recognized and valued as academic qualifications would greatly improve young people's transitions from education through to adulthood and the world of work. The Wolf Report (Wolf, 2011) examined the role of vocational education system in England and although the situation in Scotland is slightly different I argue a lot can be learned from The Wolf Report. Wolf argues that as a society we need an education system which equips young people for their future lives and for "an economy undergoing constant and largely unpredictable change" (p. 8). It is vitally important that our education system prepares young people for the current economic climate which they will find themselves in once leaving the education system. Wolf also argues that any programme of study should be prepared to equip young people for this regardless of whether it is academic or vocational.

However, we still have a situation where vocational programmes and qualifications are viewed as the weaker option for those who are less intelligent and unable to achieve academically and this, I argue, is the underlying attitude which needs to change. As discussed above we need to understand that young people have very different skills and ways of learning and only by providing meaningful, valuable and widely recognized opportunities to learn and progress can we hope to improve the experiences of young people.

### **Future Directions**

The current coalition Government must develop policies which not only address the current problem of youth unemployment, as the NEET Strategy (2006) does, but prevent this happening to future generations of young people. I have argued that this can only be achieved by changing the education system. The new Curriculum for Excellence (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2011) is a step in the right direction and proposes a more holistic approach to education. This new approach will establish stronger links between academic subjects and more importantly, links between learning in school and the world of work. However, I think we need to maximise employer engagement within schools and begin preparing young people as early as possible for the transition out of education.

The Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond recently appointed Angela Constance as a minister to tackle youth unemployment in Scotland (*BBC News*, 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2011). I feel this is a positive move as this minister will focus on, and hopefully

improve, the current situation for unemployed young people. Only time will reveal the impact of this new measure.

### **Limitations of this Research**

This research has several limitations. The research was concentrated in one geographical area which added depth to the data but limited breadth and the ability to generalize. The analysis was conducted by myself, the researcher and although I discussed this frequently with my supervisor and research group it could be argued that the analysis is very subjective with no secondary verification. Exploration of Bebo pages was limited due to time constraints and only as a result I only examined a small part of each page. Similarly IPM questionnaires were only completed by a small number of employers from a selective number of businesses. A better insight could have been gained by increasing this number. While the IPM questionnaire is a novel research method the meta meta perspectives proved too complex for respondents to understand and for me to analyse. It is argued that the IPM as a method of analysis is a more effective methodology.

### **The Struggle to Create a Positive Sense of Self**

In conclusion, despite its various limitations, this research has stressed the importance of the role of recognition within the dialogical self. The research has explored the ways in which unemployed young people construct their identities amidst government interventions and media stigma. Findings suggest that recognition has a powerful impact and can be seen within dialogue but also within various contexts. The research has suggested that young people would benefit from more support to move forward into adulthood and not be judged solely on academic

achievements. We must shift the focus from young people's weaknesses to their strengths and develop structures which recognise their knowledge instead of dismissing it. This research has given an insight into the complex structures of recognition which young people must negotiate between and their struggle to deal with often conflicting structures to create a positive sense of self.

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## Appendix 1: Background Information

Who?	When?	Why?
Careers Scotland	Nov/Dec 2007	As Careers Scotland has control over which young people are referred to Get ready for Work programmes I wanted to gain an insight into Careers Adviser's perceptions about the young people and the training programmes.
Youth Workers	Throughout	I worked closely with Youth Workers running the training programmes and I wanted to understand their thoughts about the young people they work with, the effectiveness of the programmes and the recognition they are offered/denied as workers.
Alex Cole-Hamilton	Jan 2008	My research began in the run up to the General Election and I wanted to gain a political perspective. Alex Cole-Hamilton was a candidate for the Liberal Democrats and has a keen interest in the welfare of young people including links with two national youth organisations: YouthLink and Fairbridge.
Mary Cuthbertson	Mar 2008	As I conducted my research government legislation changed increasing the legal age to smoke from 16 – 18 years old. This outraged many young people taking part in my research and left them feeling controlled and disempowered. I wanted to understand how and why this change had happened so I met with Mary Cuthbertson Head of Tobacco Control Strategy at the Scottish Executive who explained the change in the law in more depth.
Employers	Throughout	Throughout the research process I met many local employers and had many discussions about young people, unemployment and the labour market. The fact that their opinions often differed from the young people's provided a basis for using the Interpersonal Perception Method Questionnaire.
Media: Newspapers  Radio	Throughout	I collected media cuttings throughout the duration of my research as I was keen to see how young people were represented in the media. I also discussed some of these media articles with young people (e.g. the Carling Article) I was surprised when some young people scoured the local papers for stories about people they knew as they seen this as an example of high status or ridicule. I also had my own experience of dealing with the media when I release a press release about my research on Bebo. I also met with Darren who interviewed a group of young people for a BBC Radio Scotland programme entitled "every NED is a human being with a heart and a soul and a story". Darren discussed the negative stereotype of NED with young people who all stressed the importance of going beyond the label before making judgements about young people.

## Appendix 2: Coding List for Discussion Group Data

<u>Category, word(s) and frequency ()</u>
<u>Personal circumstances</u> Appearance (22) Attitudes (12) Background
<u>Bebo</u> Bebo (11) Bebo and work (1)
<u>Careers</u> Careers advisor/advice (14)
<u>Get Ready for Work Programmes</u> Motor Vehicle (10) Construction (17) Choices in care (26) Work Placements (23) Compass (10)
<u>Education</u> School (49) Leaving school (19) School Uniform (5) College (3) My PhD (5) Qualifications (12) Uni (5)
<u>The World of Work</u> Work (34) Employers (6) Employers own story (6) Employment or training (5) Getting a job (31) Losing a job (2) What employers look for (7) Competitiveness (4) Being unemployed (27)
<u>Expectations</u> Family (3) Friends/Pals
<u>Time</u> Future (9) Changing the past (2) Age (5) Regrets (9)

<u>Labels/stereotypes</u> Geeks (2) NEDS (13) Posh people (2)
Media (9)
<u>Others</u> Other people (13) YP – others perceptions of them (7) YP-perceptions of other (7) Emp-perceptions of young people (7) Emp-others perceptions of them(8) Attitudes (17)
<u>Significant others</u> Pals (24) Parents (20) Sister (2) Teachers (7) Relationships
<u>Role models</u> Jordan (2) Sister (1)
<u>Recognition (explicit)</u> Achievements (13) Important Qualities in a YP (4)
<u>Other (misc)</u> Tattoos (3) Football (8)
<u>Independence</u> Driving (4) Moving out

### Appendix 3: Coding List for Bebo Pages

Category, word(s) and frequency ( )
<p><u>Inbuilt Features</u>            Profile Views            (37) Lovehearts            (37)            Friends (37)</p>
<p><u>Dialogue</u>            Dialogue directed to specific others e.g I love you, Kelly            (179) Dialogue directed to general audience e.g. can't            be dealing            with haters, if you hate me – get off my page! (205)            Work/jobs (14)</p>
<p><u>Creative Manipulations</u>            Distortions of language – any word writing in incorrect English            (approx 700)            Emoticons            e.g.   (approx 200)            Slang/Colloquialisms e.g. “bam” “singo pringo” (approx            500) Emphasis e.g. <b>bold</b>, <i>italics</i>, <u>underlining</u> (approx            200)</p>

## Appendix 4: Sample webpages from Bebo

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Appendix 6: IPM (pilot) Questionnaire: Employer's Direct Perspectives

Employment: what do YOU think?

Please answer the following questions by ticking the box you think most applies

**Very True    Quite True    Don't Know    Quite False    Very False**

1. Trust is very important in the world of work  
What do **you** think?
2. Commitment to your job is very important  
What do **you** think?
3. Punctuality is very important in the world of work  
What do **you** think?
4. Getting paid for work the most important thing  
What do **you** think?
5. Qualifications are very important  
What do **you** think?
6. Career Planning is very important  
What do **you** think?
7. It's ok for employers to look at social networking pages (e.g. Bebo)  
What do **you** think?
8. An employee's background is very important  
What do you think?
9. First impressions at work are very important  
What do **you** think?
10. Council Training programmes are well respected  
What do **you** think?
11. It's a young person's choice not to work  
What do **you** think?
12. Society makes it difficult for young people to find work  
What do **you** think?

13. Employers understand young people  
What do **you** think?
14. Young people understand employers  
What do **you** think?
15. Employers are flexible with young people  
What do **you** think?
16. It's hard for young people to find work  
What do **you** think?
17. Young people care what employers think of them  
What do **you** think?
18. Employers care what young people think of them  
What do **you** think?
19. Council training programmes help young people  
find employment  
What do **you** think?
20. Are there any other things you can think of that are not covered in the  
questions above, e.g. any other issues or misunderstandings young  
people have with employers?

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## Appendix 7: IPM (final) Questionnaire: Employer's Direct Perspectives

Employment: what do YOU think?

Please answer the following questions by ticking the box you think most applies

- |   | <b>Very True</b> | <b>Slightly True</b> | <b>Slightly Untrue</b> | <b>Very Untrue</b> |
|---|------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Trust is very important in the world of work<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                         |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 2. Commitment to your job is very important<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                             |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 3. Punctuality is very important in the world of work<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                   |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 4. Getting paid for work the most important thing<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                       |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 5. Qualifications are very important<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                                    |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 6. Career Planning is very important<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                                    |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 7. It's ok for employers to look at social networking pages (e.g. Bebo)<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think? |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 8. An employee's background is very important<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                           |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 9. First impressions at work are very important<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                         |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 10. Council Training programmes are well respected<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                      |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 11. It's a young person's choice not to work<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?                            |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 12. Society makes it difficult for young people to find work<br>What do <b><u>you</u></b> think?            |                  |                      |                        |                    |
| 13. Employers understand young people   |                  |                      |                        |                    |

What do **you** think?

14. Young people understand employers  
What do **you** think?
15. Employers are flexible with young people  
What do **you** think?
16. Young people care what employers think of them  
What do **you** think?
17. Employers care what young people think of them  
What do **you** think?
18. Council training programmes help young people  
find employment  
What do **you** think?
19. Young people who choose to wear baseball  
caps and tracksuits will cause trouble  
What do **you** think?

“I want to try growing up a bit and see what it’s like”

(Emma, 16)