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Long-term Unemployed Men: A Social Constructionist Exploration of Identity Construction

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"Well, I wouldn't say I missed the boat like. There wasn't any boat. There was no boat."

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Abstract

Identity construction in long-term unemployed men over the age of thirty-five was explored using discursive psychological analysis (Wetherell, 2001). Forty participants in County Kerry, who had not engaged with statutory agencies providing employment rehabilitation services, were accessed over a three year period in order to identify the reasons for non-engagement. A grounded theory approach (Bryman, 2004) to data collection was utilised. This yielded six broad codes and eighteen categories of discursive resource drawn upon by the men in constructing identities. In explaining their continued absence from the workforce and lack of engagement with services, discourses identified by Levitas (2004) classifying them as morally deficient (moral underclass discourses) or lacking in skills and resources (social inclusion discourses) were rejected, as were individualising discourses (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) which put responsibility with the men themselves for their social situation, in favour of those which drew attention to structural factors relating to social class and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). The identities constructed by the men in response to these circumstances centred on their fulfilment of responsibilities which are directed towards social capital formation (O'Doherty, 2007). The men drew upon discursive resources which allowed them to maintain their performance of acceptable masculinities (Connell, 1995). An exception to this model of masculinity, was the inclusion of roles relating to caring and parenting. Consumerist values and the traditional work ethic were rejected and this finding is interpreted in relation to Etzioni's (2004) concept of voluntary simplicity, as possible evidence of a further category which has been classified as "involuntary simplifier". Limitations of the research methodology and its interpretative approach are discussed and it is recommended that it might be possible to harness the skills and abilities of the men in the area of social and community care by the reintroduction of a more permanent form of the Community Employment scheme for welfare recipients in this category.

Introduction

This research explored a range of issues surrounding the construction of identity amongst a group of men in Co. Kerry, in Ireland, who were over the age of thirty-five and long term unemployed. As a researcher who was employed in the area of "employment rehabilitation", my job involved working with those who are most distanced from the workforce in order to help them to become socially included in the world of work. This particular group was chosen because it has repeatedly been identified as one that is disinclined to engage with services which support the kinds of up-skilling required to reintegrate into the world of work.

My professional experience in other areas has also informed my inquiry into this particular group. I have worked in a range of community education settings and I teach counselling skills and the psychology of adult learning to adult literacy tutors and organisers, who are pursuing a Higher Certificate in Arts and Literacy Development. In my discussion with colleagues and dealings with students it has been apparent that there were far more women who were prepared to engage with local employment services and education and training programmes generally than there were men, despite the live register figures.

Researching the experiences of these men from a social constructionist perspective enabled me to examine my own assumptions as a researcher and those that are taken-for-granted by state agencies and policy makers, who commentate on issues in relation to participation in work and unemployment. This approach enabled me to achieve the most important goal of research: to find results that I had not necessarily been expecting; findings which go against the common sense assumption that, as my insightful supervisor, Dr Colm O'Doherty put it "we are all eagerly pursuing the middle class goal of self-improvement". The research enabled me to question the assumption that everyone in society pursues goals in the same way, and that all opportunities are available equally.

A part of this finding was a direct result of taking a relativist approach to the construction of knowledge. Foucault (1966) in the preface to his famous book "*The Order of Things*"

describes the classification from an ancient Chinese encyclopaedia which classifies animals in the following ways:

Belonging to the Emperor

Embalmed

Tame

Sucking pigs

Sirens

Fabulous

Stray dogs

Included in the present classification

Frenzied

Innumerable

Drawn with a very fine camel Hair Brush

Et. Cetera

Having just broken the water pitcher

That from a very long way off look like flies

Foucault's point in citing this example is that the way in which things are classified is entirely an artefact of the classification structure that is put upon them. This is most certainly the case with our understandings of those who live in the social world. In approaching this analysis from this perspective then, my aim was to attempt to uncover some of the social classifications that go to define one particular group of people and also to document the extent to which the power of those doing the categorising is resisted or accepted in the case of the group in question. This proved to be particularly interesting in this case, because there was clearly a reason that the men in this category were not utilising the state services available to

help them reintegrate into the workplace, which suggested that they might be resisting the definitions and understandings that circulate amongst those who work with them.

Outline of thesis

Chapter one begins by outlining some of the changes in the labour market that have taken place globally and examines trends in the Irish labour market. It identifies the participants in this research, men over the age of thirty-five who are long term unemployed, as a group who have by and large been excluded from the expansion of the workforce in recent years. It also outlines some policy responses to unemployment and comments on their effectiveness. The chapter explores the ways in which identities are constructed in the post-modern world and identifies the importance of discourse to identity construction. Discourses relating to the work ethic (Bauman, 2005) and social inclusion (Levitas, 2004) are examined and counter discourses that resist these classifications such as voluntary simplification (Etzioni, 2001) are introduced. The chapter also outlines my own perspective as a researcher and presents my research question.

The second chapter examines some of the structural factors such as social class, masculinity and age that may impact upon the construction of individual life histories. It also introduces the concept of social, cultural and symbolic capital (c.f. Putnam, 1993) and considers the possible relevance of these concepts to the participants in the research. It considers the possibility that experiences of social class may impact on the ways in which the men in the study constructed their identities, and explores the possibility of a "crisis in masculinity" as a possible reason for non engagement with employment and educational supports. Meritocratic discourses (Levitas, 2004) are examined and linked with the process of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) to produce individualising discourses that move responsibility for participation in social life from the structures of society to the individual. Lifelong learning discourses in relation to education, and age as the "neglected dimension of stratification" (Bradley, 1996 p145) are introduced.

The third chapter starts by describing the grounded theory approach to data collection (Bryman, 2004) which was used in the study and goes on to outline Wetherell's (1996) epistemological stance to social psychology, which builds on the approach taken by Foucault (1980). The process of accessing and developing a working relationship with participants is outlined and the difficulties in accessing men who do not generally engage with services are identified. The process of data collection and discursive analysis (Wetherell et al, 2001) are explained and the codes and categories that were identified as a result of the data analysis are presented. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the difficulties with the kinds of interpretative methodologies that were used in the research.

The fourth chapter introduces the results of the analysis of the first three codes identified by the analysis which related to individual construction of identity: unemployment and identity; masculinity identity and symbolic capital; and age opportunity and symbolic capital. The results presented suggest that only some of the discourses relating to unemployed identities are utilised by the men and some of these are actively resisted. The data from the second code identify ways in which the men experience their masculinity as a way of constructing their identity and the third code examines categories in which age is a crucial factor in identity construction.

Chapter five presents the analysis of the three codes relating to the structural discourses of identity construction that are resisted and re-defined by the men in the study: occupational and educational opportunities and cultural capital; current identity and new discourses; and social capital and involuntary simplification. This chapter makes the argument that these men actively reposition themselves, not in relation to their unemployed status, but by drawing on other discourses that are circulating in society. It makes the argument that the men reject individualising discourses that position them as deficient instead drawing on family and relationship discourses and those that reject consumerist and status based values. In this sense, they are classified as involuntary simplifiers, who have, through a combination of structural factors, realigned their value systems in order to construct a coherent identity project that allows them to retain self-esteem.

Chapter six presents the conclusions and recommendations that stem from the analysis of the results of the research. It is recommended that if the government wishes to harness the skills and abilities of men of this kind, the value systems of the men should be taken into account, as should the lives that they have constructed in response to the social circumstances available to them. Future interventions, it is recommended should centre of the feasibility of providing a new form of Community Employment, which does not require progression into the workforce, but allows the men to work within their own communities in a social care context. The methodological approach used in the study is also evaluated.

Chapter 1

The construction of identities through discourse

Introduction

This research will explore the topics of identity and unemployment from a social constructionist perspective. The social constructionist approach in social psychology works from the assumption that human experience and identity are constructed by social interaction, and in particular, language. Potter and Wetherell (1987) are credited with being the first to apply this approach to social psychological research. Their approach challenged the view of mainstream cognitive psychologists because instead of assuming that individuals are separate entities with their own private cognitions, they worked from the assumption that identity is the result of the "sum and swarm of social participation" (Wetherell and Maybin, 1996). Drawing from linguistics, post structuralism and Ethnomethodology, they argue for a critical discursive approach to understanding the person. This approach works from the assumption that talk is not a neutral medium for communication rather it is a form of social action; that identity is constructed by power in that the taken-for-granted assumptions that are held about who and what people are, are actually the result of culture; and that social order is produced through social practices, in particular language and discourse.

In this chapter the ways in which discourses construct unemployed identities will be discussed. In setting the scene for research into identity in long term unemployed men over the age of thirty-five in Co. Kerry, it will begin by discussing global changes in the world of work. It will then examine the way in which identity is constructed by discourse and discuss the complexity of this process in the post modern world as well as the role of power in the making of identities. In this context the role of the work ethic in forming identities and the ways in which the work ethic discourse has developed to its use in present day discourses, relating to social inclusion, will be explored. This will be related to Levitas's (2004) identification of "social inclusion discourses" and "moral underclass discourses", as well as her concept of the "meritocratic discourse". This concept will be looked at in the context of broader discourses, which I am calling "individualising discourses" and, I will argue, have the effect of moving responsibility for structural factors from the institutions which create the conditions within which identities are negotiated, to the individual him or herself.

The chapter will then identify some of the differences in the Irish context that influence the way in which the work ethic discourses may have impacted in Ireland, as well as examining some of the parallels with Levitas's (2004) observations in Irish political discourses in relation to unemployment. A brief overview of the development of the employment market in Ireland, as well as some policy responses to unemployment will also be presented. The chapter will conclude with an overview of my own motivations for researching the possible reasons for the lack of engagement of men over thirty five, who are long term unemployed and will present my broad research questions.

Socially Constructed Identity in the Post-modern world

The term identity is slippery and ill defined and its nature and origins hotly contested in the world of psychology. Understandings range from biologically based personality theories (e.g. Toates, 1996; Eysenck 1967), to psychodynamically oriented approaches (e.g. Thomas 1996). This research will define identity in terms of a person's understanding of who they are, their individual characteristics and how they relate to others. It will take an explicitly social constructionist approach to understanding identity, which argues that identity is constructed as a direct result of the ideological climate in which an individual is socialised: we are constructed by the discourses that surround us.

Social constructionism, as an approach, developed against the intellectual movements of postmodernism and post structuralism. Postmodernism and Poststructuralism are generally used interchangeably (Burr, 1995) and refer to an assumption that identity is created by structures within society and a rejection of the notions that:

a) the world can be understood in terms of grand theories

b) the ultimate truth of the world can be "discovered" by uncovering hidden structures

These approaches are contrasted with modernism, which assumed that the world has certain structures underlying its organisation and was associated with rationality, order and progress. In sociology this is typified by Marx (1818-1883) who saw the social world as broadly

organised along economic lines; and in psychology by Piaget (1896 – 1980) and Freud (1856 – 1939), who suggested the existence of psychic structures underlying personality.

The social constructionist approach argues that identity can only be understood in terms of the social and historical context in which it is enacted. It also draws attention to the fluidity and variability of identity in various contexts. Goffman (1959) introduced this idea by using the analogy of the stage. He suggested that the inner world of the individual is made up of a public stock of knowledge about how interaction is performed in particular circumstances, and drew attention to the patterned and ritualised nature of human interaction. In social interaction we take on particular roles and sets of behaviour in order to develop a socially understandable identity. In developing his analogy of the stage, it was not his claim that the detail of the interaction was carefully scripted, so much as that Goffman saw participants as ad-libbing around a generally expected theme. He further suggested that participants in social interactions ensure that one another do not "lose face" by maintaining the identities presented to one another.

This social positioning of interaction, Goffman suggested, was indicative of power structures within society. He offered examples of institutional forms of interaction being used to re-position people in a passive fashion, as people without agency, and describes these as "mortification rituals" for example, those used in the prison service, the army, or in hospital settings. In this way, he suggested that individuals both construct identity and have their identity constructed through social interaction.

Global labour market trends

The distribution of employment in the global economy has undergone significant change in recent decades. Countries that are referred to as "industrialised economies" by the International Labour Force Organisation (2004), such as those in Europe, America and Japan, now rely much more on service based industries than on manufacturing, as a source of economic growth. The current trend is for manufacturing industries to move to less developed countries, such as India and the new European states, where producers can avail of

lower labour costs and overheads. In place of manufacturing, developed economies are now largely reliant on service sectors and some theorists have identified the emergence of a "knowledge economy" (Boden and Miles, 2000).

In addition, in conjunction with, and many would claim as a result of, the feminisation of the workforce, there has also been an increased concern with issues such as work life balance and quality of life, as well as an increase in the numbers of people working in part time employment. This has coincided with work opportunities which are significantly less secure than was once the case and a requirement that workers be more flexible in terms of doing different kinds of work for different employers and being prepared to learn new skills, with "lifelong learning" becoming a much used phrase by policy makers, media and educators alike. This suggests that in order to participate in the new knowledge economies, one must constantly learn new skills and develop new knowledge. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue:

> The ubiquitous rule is that, in order to survive the rat race, one has to become active, inventive and resourceful, to develop ideas of one's own, to be faster, nimbler and more creative – not just on one occasion, but constantly, day after day. Individuals become actors, builders, jugglers, stage managers of their own biographies and identities and also of their social links and networks. (p. 23)

What these writers are arguing is that the demands of the economy influence not only the ways in which people behave, but actively shape who they are. Participation in the world of work (or indeed the lack of it), is therefore central to the construction of personal identity.

Power and Identity and "Common Sense"

Postmodernists suggest that as the world becomes more complex and variable, identities are less rigidly fixed. Gergen (1991) argues that in post-modern society our understanding of what it means to be a person is changing. With the changes in media, technology and

information availability, individuals are bombarded by so many possible ways of being a person, that identity needs to be negotiated. As Giddens (1997) describes it:

> The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices amongst a plurality of options (p27).

This research takes as a starting point the assumption that power is central to the formation of identity. Indeed Foucault (1980) argues that identities are the product and outcome of power and suggests that we should make power the prior term when discussing identities. Foucault suggests that traditional histories of society about who did what to whom, fail to take account of what he describes as power/knowledge complexes. What he is suggesting is that various discourses circulate throughout society and several of these become common currency and indeed accepted "common sense" at particular times in social history. Those discourses that get to define our common sense understandings of the world are those which are the most powerful, but unlike in Marxist theory, which suggests a top down theoretical understanding of the influence of capital and those who control it, Foucault suggests that there is a gradual change and development of a network of interrelated ideas about what counts as truth. This would include counter discourses that resist conventional wisdom and challenge existing understandings of the world.

Powerful ideas do not necessarily start as powerful or taken-for-granted, but may start as counter-discourses which gain momentum over time and are then harnessed by the powerful in society. Foucault offers the example of the medical profession, which became associated with another emerging and powerful discourse, that of the positivistic, natural science method of understanding the world. The medical profession developed whole new ways of understanding the world and of positioning people, for example in the accepted discourses between a consultant and a patient. In this sense the discourses, which include not only what is said, but also the social practices surrounding the words, position people in society in a manner that is invisible because it is so taken-for-granted or "common sense."

Discourses and identity

Perhaps one of the most widely held assumptions about human experience is that the words that we speak are a direct representation of inner thought which is manifested in language. From a social constructionist perspective the relationship is very much in the opposite direction. From this perspective, identity is formed as a direct result of communication through discourse. Harré (1983) suggests that in order to understand people we need to examine the discourses that they use in everyday life. We need to examine the, all-be-it changing and contradictory patterns of talk, to get a flavour of the ways in which people use discourse to construct themselves. As Bruner (1986) puts it, 'literary texts initiate 'performances' of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves" (Bruner, 1986, p.25).

This is not to suggest that individuals are so constructed by existing types of common sense, that they are unable to evaluate or select and construct an identity of their own choosing. We are not, as Wetherell (1996, p 312) observes, “social dopes”. Rather we select from the available discourses circulating in society in order to produce an identity. Foucault (1980) argues that identities are negotiated collectively and over time, so that there is a range of discourses and counter-discourses available at any one time to particular groups within society. These discourses make available a variety of identities that are seen as acceptable in any given time period. In addition this process is not static. New discourses develop over time and changes may be made in order for the person to have a sense of a coherent identity.

Discourses about work and Unemployment

Work, particularly by men, has been generally regarded as having a value in its own right above and beyond the explicit reasons of exchange of labour for money. This assumption dates back to the teachings of Luther and Calvin and led to a belief system which Weber (1904, 1905) described as the “Protestant Work Ethic”. Such a network of beliefs is a relatively recent event in human history (Lipset, 1990). Indeed for most cultures up until medieval times, work was regarded as an activity that was to be despised and engaged in by

those who could not avoid it, such as slaves. Aristotle, for example, believed that the majority needed to labour so that the "minority elite might engage in pure exercises of the mind- art, philosophy and politics. (Tilgher, 1930 p.5).

Bauman (2005) describes the process by which the work ethic was introduced in Europe, to facilitate the needs of factories for workers. He makes a distinction between "traditional" approaches to work with the approach of "modernity". For Bauman, traditional workers, such as craftsmen, worked to satisfy their needs and then used their remaining time in leisure pursuits. They had control over their time, work and purpose in life. With the onset of modernity and industrialisation, the work ethic was introduced to ensure that there was a moral obligation on a worker to continue working in a factory despite the absence of control over the outcome of the work or how and when it was accomplished. In short, it facilitated control over workers by factory owners and managers. Bauman also details what he describes as "carrot" and "stick" approaches that were used to ensure that the new work ethic philosophy took hold. The "carrot" was the ability to purchase items and have money. The "stick" was that one might, if one was not able to participate in paid employment, end up in the poorhouse. Furthermore participation in work was presented as a moral issue: those not participating were regarded as morally deficient in some way. The result of this in post-traditional modern society, Bauman argues, is that work became the main site of identity construction for most men since it was the place where they spent most of their time and that this continues to this day

Voluntary Simplification

In more recent times the "carrot" and "stick" approaches used to ensure that people engage in the world of work, and indeed construct an identity around it, have been linked to the fear of moral censure and the need to construct an acceptable occupational identity. De Botton (2004) for example suggests that the decline in actual deprivation resulting from increased prosperity has been accompanied by a corresponding sense of deprivation which fuels increasing participation in consumerism and work related projects, owing to what he describes as "status anxiety".

Bauman (1989) suggests that the development of personal identity has been trivialised through consumerism: "individual needs of personal autonomy, self definition and authentic life or personal perfection are all translated into the need to possess and consume, market offered goods"(p 189). The rejection of materialistic goals and the use of consumerism as a source of identity construction seems to have impacted upon some sectors of society. Etzioni (2001) has identified people who actively resist the consumerist and status driven identity projects that are available to all of us. He terms this movement "voluntary simplicity". He suggests three categories of participants in this social enterprise:

- "**Downshifters"** are financially well off people who voluntarily give up using certain consumer goods and move to a less conspicuous form of consumption.
- **"Strong simplifiers"** may, for example, actually give up high paying jobs and live off savings, spending their lives doing voluntary work. They may also reduce working hours or switch to lower paying but more rewarding jobs. This category also includes the growing number of people who take early retirement in order to have more leisure time.
- **"The simple living movement".** Such people differ from the other two categories in that they have a clearly articulated philosophy and actively resist participation in all forms of consumerist society, preferring to use what they can produce themselves.

In examining this phenomenon, Inglehart (1977, 1995 – with Abramson) charts an increase in what he calls post-materialist attitudes and a greater emphasis on quality of life. These values, in common with the voluntary simplifiers identified by Etzioni, demonstrate a disillusionment with identity projects based on work and consumerist values. The percentage of survey respondents with clear post-materialist values, in Inglehart's study doubled from 9% in 1972 to 18% in 1991. In addition the numbers with clear materialist values fell by more than half in the same period. These trends have also been reported for most Western European countries *(ibid)*.

Individualising Discourses

Whilst voluntary simplicity and post-materialist values appear to be on the increase, the moral imperative to participate in the world of work is still prevalent in everyday discourses and indeed in social policy. Levitas (2004) identifies some of these discourses in a UK context, in the discourses of New Labour and in European Union policies. She traces the development of differing types of discourse about social exclusion and identifies three discourses that have emerged in recent decades:

Firstly the Redistributive exclusion discourses (RED), are identified with the 1980s and 1990s, and suggest that poverty can only be addressed by redistribution of resources. However, these discourses were replaced by two others:

- Social inclusion discourses (SID) are associated with the mid-1990s and present participation in paid employment as the route out of poverty
- Moral underclass discourses (MUD) suggest that those who are excluded are morally different from society at large and are not participating fully in social life.

Levitas concludes that those who are regarded as socially excluded are people whose behaviour is regarded as problematic.

> [Policy makers] presume poverty to result from deficiencies in the skills and human capital offered on the labour market by workers, rather than to be a consequence of the distribution of positions generated by the social and economic characteristics of the system as a whole. (Levitas, 2005 p 7).

Social inclusion discourses (SID) might then be regarded as presenting those who are poor as casualties of an inhospitable system whilst moral underclass discourses (MUD) suggest that the person is cheating the system. They are not "doing their bit" for society at large.

Levitas also observes that these casualty and cheat discourses are closely aligned to discourses that imply that society is meritocratic. If people have the skills and work hard they too can

participate and fulfil the moral obligation to improve oneself by work and by developing the required skills to obtain and retain it. These opportunities, the meritocratic discourses imply, are freely available to everyone, if they can just be pushed or cajoled into availing of the supports that are provided for them.

Meritocratic discourses would appear to be closely linked to and supported by lifelong learning discourses. In March 2000, the members of the European Union decided on a ten year mission to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Commission Website). A core element of this strategy is lifelong learning. It would appear then that what meritocratic discourses, and those that are aligned with them, do, is to have the effect of individualising the responsibility for participation in the opportunities that are available, whilst assuming a moral duty that everyone should become involved in this for the good of the economy. Such an approach supports the development of a moral underclass discourse. Beck (2001) argues that a process of individualisation has taken place, whereby individuals have to take their own responsibility for the consequences of changes in the economic demands of the economy. He describes this as a "tyranny of choice" (Beck, 2001 pp164-174) because individuals cannot control the structural factors but must still take personal responsibility for outcomes. Furthermore Kirby et al (2002) note that individualisation of responsibility is facilitated by media interest in individual tales of hardship, which, whilst focussing on the human interest part of the story, make no mention of structural factors that provide the ideological framework for such experiences.

Work and unemployment in an Irish context

Although Bauman's (2005) claims about the strength and power of the work ethic in Europe and Levitas's (2004) claims about the SIDs and MUDs are compelling, there is a possibility that owing to the specific history and development of Ireland this influence may have operated in a slightly different fashion to other European countries. Bauman (2005) makes this point about the USA, which he claims has a "money ethic" rather than a work ethic. Irish

adaptation of the work ethic and individualising discourses may differ from other countries for a number of reasons:

- Industrialisation in the Irish Republic was slow and patchy. Industrial exports did not equal agricultural exports until 1972, and had only made up a quarter of exports in 1958 (Sweeney, 2004). From this perspective Ireland was really more an agricultural community than an industrial one and this may well impact on the ways in which the discourses relating to the work ethic have taken hold.

- Ireland was, and remains, a predominantly Roman Catholic country (Census, 2006). This is believed to impact on identity in terms of the degree to which responsibility is regarded as collective to the community or specific to the individual, with those who live in Roman Catholic countries being regarded as more collectivist in orientation than, for example, those who live in Protestant countries who are regarded as having a more individualistic approach (Wetherell, 1996).

The result of this combination between predominantly agricultural and Roman Catholic social composition, may well result in an historical orientation towards a more collectivist approach in which responsibility for family and communities resides with its members. Whist Ireland's increasing prosperity in recent years has led many to comment on an increasingly individualistic society, the basic psychology of the nation has its own historical roots. Residues of this can be seen, for example, in the regulations regarding applications for third level grants. Any applicant under the age of twenty-three must provide details of their parents' incomes, in order that the assessment of means can be made. This regulation applies even, for example, in the case of a single parent, living separate from parents for several years! It is interesting to note that this example typifies the retention of collectivist principles when it involves moving collective responsibility for inequality onto an individual family budget.

There is, however, some evidence of what Kirby et al (2002) describe as "ideological franchising": the borrowing of ideologies from a more powerful country, mainly the UK.

Certainly there might be strong echoes of former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's political sentiments expressed by Irish politicians in recent years. The following excerpt, for example is from a speech by An Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Mary Harney, TD, on Private Members Motion, Dáil Éireann, Tuesday 14th October 2003

> Our success in this country has been built almost entirely on the application of sound liberal values. We have reduced taxes on enterprise, investment and employment. We have opened markets to competition. We have reduced the role of the state in the economy.

In addition, there would appear to be strong similarities to the UK discourses identified by Levitas (2004) in terms of government discourses in relation to unemployment and work. For example, the opening address by An Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern, at the Launch of National Anti-poverty Strategy (NAPS) 2000, relates the root causes of poverty to unemployment:

> We now have a booming economy and low unemployment, providing us with the resources to break cycles of poverty and deprivation and to make this a country where everybody feels they belong. Economic growth is the means to an end, however, not the end in itself. It has provided us with an opportunity to progress our strategy on social inclusion. It has given us a solid base to attack the root causes of poverty and exclusion. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy has built on this base and provided a focus for co-ordinated action towards social inclusion.
>
> (Department of Social and Family Affairs website)

This statement clearly links unemployment as a root cause of poverty in Ireland and might usefully be identified as what Levitas (2004) describes as a social inclusion discourse (SID). Other discourses more closely adhere to the Moral underclass discourses (MUD) identified by

Levitas or what might be regarded as a cheat discourse. Other institutions, such as the press, adopt similar discursive strategies. The Irish Examiner reports as follows:

> 111.6m welfare fraud exposed:
> An intensive review of social welfare pay-outs has uncovered a staggering €111.6 million in fraud in the first three months of this year alone. New anti-fraud measures had been drawn up with a view to saving the taxpayer millions in lost revenue, Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan said yesterday. (Dan Collins, Irish Examiner, May 2004)

The implication of this story is that tax payers (the moral majority) are being defrauded by those who need to be cracked down upon because they were not entitled to a social welfare payment or, as in the following example from the Irish Independent they were not "seriously" looking for work:

> 16 000 lose dole payment in fraud crackdown
>
> A CRACKDOWN on social welfare fraud has resulted in more than 16,000 people being cut off the dole over the past 18 months. They were knocked off for either not seriously looking for a job or being unavailable for work. (Linda McGrory, Irish Independent, 11 September 2005)

These discourses have been translated into policy in Ireland as exemplified by the National Economic and Social Forum's report "Creating a more inclusive labour market" (2006). This report identifies the implementation of a National Employment Action Plan (NEAP), for working with unemployed people, as a process "which has also been implemented by other public employment services across the EU as part of their action plans."(p78). Before examining the way in which the NEAP has been implemented, and evaluated, it is worth examining the development of the labour market in Ireland in recent decades to set the scene.

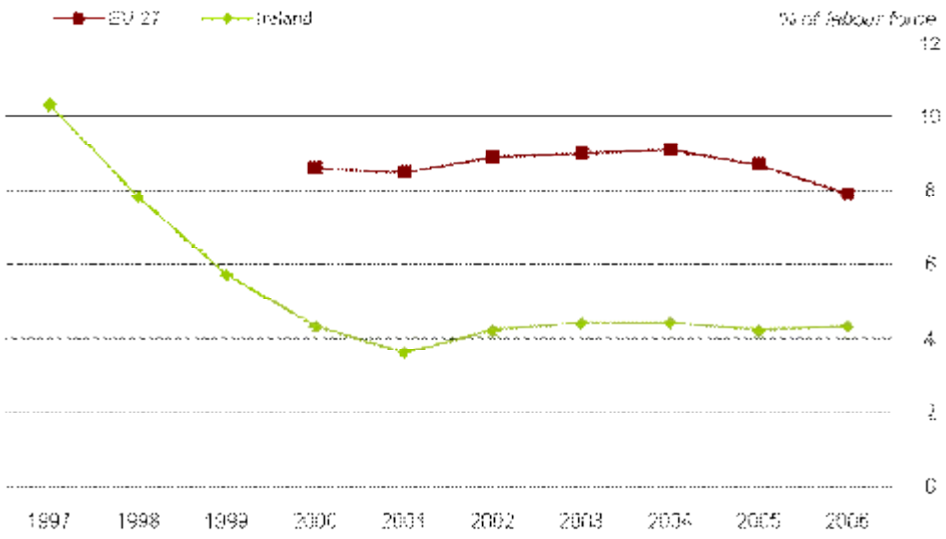
The employment market in Ireland

The United Nations Development Programme (2005) ranks Ireland as the second wealthiest country in the world. The calculation for this figure is broadly that debt within the country is added up and subtracted from wealth. The resulting figure is divided by the number of people in the country. Naturally this wealth is not equally divided amongst the populace and Ireland also has the third highest level of poverty of the countries surveyed.

There have certainly been huge economic changes in recent decades. The trend for net emigration of Irish people has been replaced by net immigration and rates of unemployment have fallen to around 4% nationally. The Irish economy has been transformed from being agrarian and traditional manufacturing based, to one increasingly based on the hi-tech and internationally traded services sectors. O'Hearn (1998), however, claims that the growth in Irish jobs is concentrated in low-paid service industries. In 2004, the services sector accounted for 66% of employment, industry for 28% and agriculture for 6% (ESRI 2006). This offers further support for the claim that Ireland is now what Boden and Miles (2000) describe as a knowledge economy.

Ireland has not always experienced high levels of employment. In the 1980s unemployment levels reached 20% (National Competitiveness council, 2006). In the past two decades however, unemployment has steadily decreased and has remained static at around 4.4% since mid 2000 (NESF Report, January 2006). Much of the increase in the numbers in employment between 1997 and 2006 has been as a result of increased participation in the labour force. Demographic factors, such as an increase in the population of people of working age added 45, 000 people to the workforce in that period, but a third of the increase was as a result of 20 000 additional people entering the workforce (ESRI 2005). The proportion of non-Irish people living in Ireland has now reached 10% (Census, 2006).

3.5 **Ireland and EU: Unemployment rates, 1997-2006**



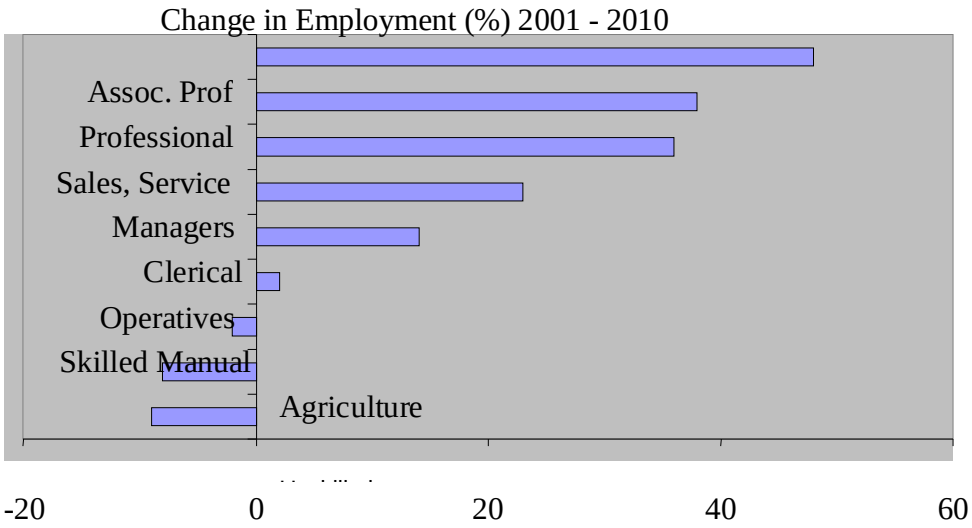
Source: Eurostat, CSO Table 4.5

A rising tide lifts all boats?

The continuing decrease in the numbers reporting themselves as unemployed is largely concentrated in the 25-35 age group. Long term unemployment has increased by 2,700 per 100,000 of population in the period 1999 - 2004. This figure, which dropped steadily from 1991 – 1999, has been slowly increasing since then (Quarterly National Household Survey, quarter 4, 2004[1]).

[1] Although some of the data from Census 2006 were available at time of writing, those relating to unemployment were not. The figures relating to live register unemployment in the Quarterly National Survey (2004) were used for this figure because the data relating to long term unemployment were no longer presented in this format after this date.

Whilst some growth has been in low paid service industries, other occupations have actually declined against the backdrop of the booming economy. Agricultural work, unskilled manual and skilled manual work are in decline and are predicted to decline significantly by the end of the decade, whilst there are predicted rises in the areas of professional, associate professional, sales, services, management and clerical work (Manpower, 2004).



(Table Manpower, 2004)

Female participation in the workforce has increased sharply since 1991. This may well be because of the huge increase in the services and clerical sectors, which have traditionally been dominated by women. (Census, 2006). This feminisation of the workforce, the increasing skill levels required by high technology and the decline in the availability of semi skilled and unskilled employment, together with an increase in the number of people reported to be long term unemployed (Quarterly National Household Survey, quarter 4, 2004) suggests that there is a small but growing number of men, over the age of 35, who do not appear to be participating in the workforce.

Research from within agencies working with long term unemployed men suggests a Social integration discourse (SID) or casualty, view of this group. They are lacking the skills and competencies to engage effectively in the pursuit of meritocratic goals. For example:

> Typically across the literature, men who are "missing" from education and training are characterized as being over the age of thirty-five, unemployed, with low levels of educational and skill qualifications and consequently having literacy difficulties (Owens, 2000 p 7)

> Qualitative studies, although limited in number, repeatedly cite lack of confidence and low self-esteem as key dispositional barriers to participation in education and training initiatives (ibid).

Since some of our economic growth has been in low-paid service jobs; some occupations have experienced a decline; and since long-term unemployment has actually increased, it would appear that some sectors of society have failed to benefit from inclusion in Ireland's new knowledge economy. The next section will examine some policy responses to unemployment in this economic context.

Irish Policy Responses to Unemployment

The National Economic and Social Forum report (2006) says that "with the fall in the level of unemployment, the Service [that is the national employment service] is increasingly engaging with those who have many employability difficulties"(p78).

It goes on to describe the implementation of the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) as a means of engaging those who are in receipt of welfare payments with service providers. The program is designed to ensure that once a person has been in receipt of a welfare payment

for six months they are referred by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to FAS[2] to engage with a "caseload process" during which the participant is assigned to a caseload officer for the development of an action plan. The caseload officers are trained as adult guidance practitioners and work for either FAS or for one of the Local Employment Services that were set up in areas designated as disadvantaged and therefore in need of additional support and are funded by FAS.

The reported success of this initiative has been somewhat limited in terms of customer satisfaction. Although the NESF report estimates savings of €50 million in 2004, from the participants' perspective of the 52, 330 people referred through the process in 2004, one third did not attend for interview and of those who did only 28% were said to have progressed to training or work. This was a reduction from 39% in the previous year - a finding the report attributes to the rolling out of the programme to older long-term unemployed people. This comment is made without any further explanation of why this should impact on figures. Of those who did attend 59% responded that the process did not help them and 44% said that the process had not given them any new job skills. In fact, 41% stated that the national employment services had little to offer them (NESF, 2006).

One initiative with which men in this category have willingly engaged in recent years is Community Employment schemes. Up until 2004 this was the most popular service with which long-term unemployed men over the age of thirty five would engage. Although this category does not engage with state services generally in the same proportions of other categories of welfare recipient, in the case of Community Employment their participation rates were similar to other categories of welfare recipient. Indeed the proportion of men in this category engaging with Community Employment programmes was similar to the proportion of all other categories of welfare recipients engaging with Community Employment (FAS Annual Report, 2001). This is in direct contrast to the proportion

[2] (Foras Áiseanna Saothair- the Irish Training and Employment department)

engaging with employment services or education and training, which was less than one third of those registered as unemployed in this category (FAS Annual Report, 2001).

Community Employment programmes allow people in receipt of welfare to work for 20 hours per week in a variety of roles within their communities. Welfare allowances are replaced by a Community Employment payment which is based on the welfare payment. The following table compares the payments.

	Unemployment Assistance / Jobseekers Allowance	Community Employment
Personal Allowance	185.80	210.20
Adult Dependent	309.10	333.50
Child	22.00	22.00

Data Accessed by telephone from FAS and Social Welfare Local Offices (May 2007)

Participants have worked as school caretakers, providing maintenance for community centres and training for children participating in sporting organisations and supporting initiatives such as the "tidy towns" project. The programme also provides training and allows participants to earn small amounts of money outside of their Community Employment participation. The availability of places on these schemes has declined steadily since 1998 - as the table overleaf indicates.

Table data sourced (FAS Annual Report, 2006)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Participants	58,522	58,919	55,230	48,941	43,750	36,907	31,793	32,101

Community Employment schemes were designed to provide "progression to the workplace" and participants had a period of between one and three years to accomplish this, after which they were required to leave the scheme for a period of time. Their availability was scaled down, following a government decision in 2002, because progression rates were poor and opportunities for employment in the main stream economy had improved dramatically (FAS Annual Report, 2003).

Researcher Perspective

My interest in this area stems from my work with Tralee Local Employment Service as an adult guidance practitioner which began in 2000. This research project focuses on participants from the Partnership Trá li, area and the South Kerry Development Partnership area. Direct figures from the Department of Social and family affairs locally put unemployment in Kerry at 7%. Kerry is identified as one of the eighty-eight "unemployment black-spots" in Ireland (Census 2006) that have been identified by the government as in need of specific supports. In County Kerry area, in common with many areas of rural Ireland the vast majority of the employment growth has been in the services sector, primarily in retail and tourism, but also in the areas of child and social care.

Funding from FAS is drawn down by the local development companies. My former employer, Partnership Trá li, regards itself as providing a community service for unemployed people, as expressed in the Tralee Local Employment Service mission statement "Our mission is to assist our clients to enter suitable employment through voluntary participation by providing a confidential, professional and quality service".

As will be discussed in the methodology chapter, each researcher approaches a topic with his or her own pre-conceptions and biases, which need to be made explicit, in order for the worth of the outcome to be judged by the reader. This is as relevant to quantitative research as qualitative, although this aspect is often less frequently addressed in the former (Banister et al, 1994). My personal value system would have been very much attuned to this philosophy and approach, since I believed that the only route out of poverty is education for work and that in empowering people to engage with a service like the LES, I was assisting people to be socially included. I was, in short, very much attuned to humanistic approaches which from a structural perspective might be argued to be similar to Levitas's (2004) social inclusion discourses, which present participation in the world of work as the only route out of poverty and place responsibility for being socially included with the individual.

When I joined the company initially, I noted that the distribution of clients was around one third male and two thirds female up until 2003 (Tralee LES internal report). This is in direct contrast to the live register figures for those "available for work and actively seeking employment, which show that the gender balance on the live register is distributed in the opposite direction: approximately one third female and two thirds male (local DSFA figures). This is consistent with national figures on the live register as indicated by the following table.

Thousands	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Unemployed Males	89.8	75.0	67.6	80.4	80.5	81.1	77.1	80.3
Unemployed Females	35.1	34.3	31.6	34.3	33.1	31.6	32.5	35.1
Total Unemployed	124.8	109.3	99.2	114.7	113.6	112.6	109.7	115.4

Research Question

It has been widely noted by a number of agencies, that men over the age of thirty-five, who are long term unemployed are much less likely to engage with service providers, either in the field of adult education (e.g. Owens 2000, Corridan 2001) or in employment supports such as Local Employment Services (e.g. McGann, 1999, Reid 2001). They conclude, in line with general SID discourses that these men lack the skills and/ or the confidence to engage effectively with education, training and employment reintegration programmes. However, all of these research projects take as their source of information, data collected from interviews with men who actually had engaged voluntarily with services, in order to find out about the needs of men who do not. The aim of this project was to interview the men who do not engage with service in order to explore the reasons for this non-engagement. The broad research question then was:

What is it about the way in which individuals in the target group (LTU men over the age of 35) understand their experience that makes them less likely than other groups to avail of education, training and employment rehabilitation opportunities?

In 2003, I set about pilot research to examine the question I focussed this research on the following areas:

1. Individual understandings of or attitudes to work
2. Beliefs about the impact of engagement with education and training
3. Understandings about what it means to be a person in the social world, in particular to be a man

To facilitate a grounded theory approach to data collection, these three categories of investigation were topics rather than questions, in order to allow the men to dictate the direction that the research would take and the specific questions that would be asked. An

additional question and overarching motive for the research was: If the way in which existing services are provided is changed, would this group be more likely to engage with services?

The first of these topics was framed in relation to the research regarding the various discourses that are used to define this group (Levitas, 2004) and indeed to discover the extent to which the work ethic is relevant to this group (Beauman, 2006). It was also developed in relation to understandings of the benefits of work in relation to individuals (e.g. Jahoda, 1982), which will be discussed further in chapter two.

The second topic was in relation to the finding that participation in state funded programmes designed to increase skill levels to facilitate participation in the world of work is at best reluctant (Mc Gann, 2002) and in most cases non-existent (National Development Plan, 2005). This will be further explored in Chapter Two.

The subject was explored because it was reasoned that since occupational identity is one of the major sites of identity construction, in particular for men (Tolston, 1977; Seidler,1991), then both identity construction and masculinity would be relevant to our understanding of this particular group. The topics of identity construction and masculinity will also be examined in more detail in Chapter Two.

The final and overarching question was to examine the approach that was being taken by state agencies, in order to see if any changes could be made to make the target group more likely to engage with them.

In 2004 Tralee Local Employment Service was included in the implementation of the National Employment Action plan (NEAP) which meant that the Department of Social and Family Affairs instructed people on the live register to attend for appointments at our offices. This brought about a great deal of change in the way in which the organisation had worked with unemployed people in the past. Most obviously it brought into question the “voluntary” nature of engagement with the service. This research had already begun at that time and, as

the methodology chapter will show, this impacted on the way in which participants for the research were accessed.

The methodology chosen for this research enquiry was developed in order to facilitate a grounded theory approach to the collection of the data (Charmaz 1995), and to enable the research participants to select the discourses that they regarded as most relevant to their understanding of their situation, rather than having me define them for them. This was to facilitate identification of discursive resources (Wetherell et al 2001) generated by the participants themselves. In addition the inclusion of research participants, who habitually do not engage, rather than those who have already done so, allows the actual people of interest to participate.

Summary

This chapter has examined identity construction from a social constructionist perspective and examined the use of discourses in the construction of identity. It has outlined some of the economic changes that have shaped identity construction in relation to participation in the labour market globally, in the UK and in Ireland and looked at some of the economic changes that have shaped the identities that are available. Possible differences in the ways in which discourses may have developed differently in Ireland from in the UK are also briefly addressed. The relevance of discourses in relation to the work ethic as relevant to the development of a moral imperative to participate in the labour market is also discussed. Counter discourses in the form of voluntary simplification that have been identified by some researchers have also been examined, as well as some of the policy responses to those who do not participate in the labour market. The chapter has argued that a process of individualisation of responsibility, for participation in a society that is presented as meritocratic is at play. My own professional background and the reasons for my interest in this particular question are discussed and the chapter concludes by introducing the research question in relation to long-term unemployed men over the age of thirty-five and identifies grounded theory as the chosen approach to data collection.

Chapter 2

Constructing Individual Life Histories

Introduction

Chapter One examined some of the discursive resources used by policy makers to position people who do not engage in paid employment: those excluded from participation in the meritocracy or the moral underclass (Levitas 2004). It also briefly introduced the concept of voluntary simplicity (Etzioni, 2001), a discourse that is beginning to gain momentum with those who are dissatisfied with consumerist ideologies. My initial research question was asked: what is it about the way in which individuals in the target group (LTU men over the age of 35) understand their experience that makes them less likely than other groups to avail of education, training and employment rehabilitation opportunities?

This chapter will turn to some of the issues relating to identity on an individual level. It will introduce the debate on the "crisis in masculinity" and the ways in which masculinity is regarded by some commentators as being enacted by men. It will review some of the research into identity in unemployed people and the identities produced by different kinds of work. The relevance of age to identity and participation in work and education will be examined, as will identity in relation to participation in education and training itself. The chapter will then go on to discuss the relevance of social capital for men who are long term unemployed. The literature reviewed will set the scene for the topics I chose to focus on, in my research interviews:

- Individual understandings of or attitudes to work
- Beliefs about the impact of engagement with education and training
- Understandings about what it means to be a person in the social world, in particular what it means to be a man

An additional question and overarching motive for the research was: if the way in which existing services are provided is changed, would this group be more likely to engage with services? So the chapter will also examine policy interventions and international trends as they relate to these topics.

Social structure and individual selection of discourses

Bradley (1996), arguing from a broadly structuralist perspective, suggests that the debate in sociology between structuralists and post-structuralists, presents an either or scenario whereby structural arguments classify identities in relation to social divisions such as class, gender and age; while post structural arguments focus on the fluidity and variability of identity. In contrast to structuralists, post-modern theorists define post-modern identities in terms of the experience of those who are developing identity projects. This takes place in a society where the initial fascination with science and modernity has passed and people are beginning to become interested in finding an identity project that makes sense to themselves in the context of their life histories. It is not that social divisions are no longer relevant to self understanding; it is more that in the post-modern world there is a multiplicity of values upon which to draw when understanding the self. Indeed Gergen (1991) proposes a "saturated self", which has become over filled with a range of possible understandings and ways of being, made available by modern technology and communications. This means that identities become fragmented due to overload of possible material for an identity story. In a world where there is an emphasis on personal agency, this may create difficulties for selection of relevant identity understandings.

This does not mean that social structures have ceased to impact on the selection of personal biographies. As Giddens puts it:

> Social structures are made up of human actions and relationships: what gives these their patterning is their repetition across periods of time and distances of space. Thus the ideas of social reproduction and social structure are very closely related…all of us are influenced by the structural characteristics of the societies in which we are brought up and live; at the same time, we recreate (and to some extent alter) those structures and characteristics in our actions.(Giddens, 1991 p 19).

In the case of men over thirty-five who are long term unemployed, we need to ask ourselves which discourses have they selected to define themselves. How do they relate to the institutional definitions that are made of them? Is there something about being a man, about being the age they are and about their understandings of educational institutions and practices that can give us an insight into the experience of unemployment for these men and allow us some guidance in shaping social policy with regard to them? Is it possible to identify the reasons for their lack of engagement with the employment rehabilitation process?

Taking account of the active way in which people use discourse in the shaping of identity is important for social policy makers. Both carrot and stick approaches to understanding these men have been used, as discussed in the previous chapter, yet despite the growth in the economy and in the discourses of lifelong learning, many have not availed of the various services available to them. In order to understand we need to listen carefully to what they have to say and the discourses they select to construct identities.

The reasons for this approach are clear if we look at an example of the ways in which social policy can fail to achieve what it sets out to, because it has failed to take into account the active process that people engage in when they select the discourses that they will use to construct themselves. Kennedy (2001) in her discussion of Irish economic history describes the economic policy devised by An Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Éamaon DeValera at the inception of the Irish state. DeValera had a vision of the kind of society he wished to create and devised a social policy to match this. Kennedy (2001), suggests that it was his intention that Ireland should retain its rural agricultural, Roman Catholic character and he put in place educational systems and housing policies to ensure that this happened. In the event Kennedy claims, he was unsuccessful because the economic pull of urban centres [or emigration in some cases] made moving to the cities and obtaining waged labour a more attractive option than agriculture. It seems then that people will choose the actions that will maximise their own life chances, provided there are suitable alternatives available and the positive consequences of that choice outweigh the negative. It also suggests that the imposition of a moral imperative can only go so far in shaping peoples choices when it is weighed up against

economic needs and the two do not coincide. Lewin's (1947) seminal psychological research on how to influence groups also suggests that people are influenced best when they "buy in" to a situation, rather than having it imposed upon them.

Unemployment and Identity

Writing from a humanistic perspective, Rogers (1966) suggests that success in therapy involves bringing closer together the "ideal-self" and "perceived self" by greater self-acceptance. This implies that if people have an ideal self that they are unable to attain, it will result in a self-perception that is damaging to the individual. From a social constructionist perspective, this would suggest that if the discourses people select as the raw materials for identity construction are unattainable, it could indeed result in the kind of low self esteem described in the literature about this group.

I would like to briefly consider the generally accepted assumptions about unemployed people that the agencies working with unemployed people, such as those who provide adult guidance, literacy training or adult skills training courses, put forward. The following is an extract from the training manual for Local Employment Services mediators. The model used is one that was developed in the Netherlands in 1991 and modified to suit the Irish situation.

"By working intensively with the job-seeker, it is then possible to achieve a placement that satisfies both the need of the job-seeker (for a suitable job) and the needs of the employer (for a suitable employee). The effects of long-term unemployment are well documented and include –

- Apathy, lack of motivation and goals
- Isolation, loss of social connections and network
- Financial problems as a result of low income
- Loss of identity and self confidence

- Loss of social status and relationship problems
- Lack of scope for self-development
- Family breakdown with the consequences evident in children and community

The net result is often a deep sense of discouragement, which considerably decreases the employment potential of the individual" (Imminck, 1998 p 47).

Such assumptions are based on seminal psychological work that examined the value of work and, indeed, the damage caused by unemployment. Jahoda (1982) developed what she termed a "latent function model" of psychological value to the individual engaging in paid work. Earning a living, she suggested, is a "manifest function" but she also identified latent functions of employment, namely:

- Opportunities for social interaction
- Broader social networks than the immediate family sphere
- Access to social status and identity
- A sense of purpose and a reason to structure time

Unemployment, she believed, is harmful to people because it reduces access to these latent functions. Gallie and Marsh (1994) were critical of this analysis on the basis that not only did it fail to take full account of the financial deprivations associated with unemployment, but it assumed that life structure and community ties could only be achieved through participation in paid employment.

Other research, however, suggests that not all unemployed people choose to define themselves in terms of occupational identity. Canaan (1996), in her interview research with unemployed men found that many had adjusted to their situation and neither attempted to fight against state power nor to climb the class ladder. Furthermore, in recent times, qualitative studies have identified a group of unemployed people who find alternative forms of satisfaction to work-based activity. Ball and Orford (2002), for example, identify what they

describe as “work-like activities” amongst long term unemployed people, which, they claim, allow them to create meaningful activity for themselves that provides challenge, requires effort and is valued by their community. This would suggest that for some unemployed people, at least, relationships, collective goals, social identity and structuring of time can be achieved by means other than participation in the world of paid employment.

Social, cultural and symbolic capital

Bourdieu (1984) as well as Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993) have explored the concept of capital in relation to the invisible resources that an individual has at his or her disposal. The use of the term “capital” in this context has been criticised by some commentators, for its implicit suggestion that human resources can be conceived in monetary terms. It is the case however, that the impact of the different forms of capital can have an impact on the financial situation of the individual in question. Cultural capital broadly refers to the impact of educational and employment practices of the family within which one is socialised. It includes not only educational qualifications but a more subtle value based expectation of what life can offer. Symbolic capital relates to the kinds of status that is bestowed upon one by society by being of a particular age, gender, race and social class. Being male and being over 35, in most circumstances, should provide access to the symbolic capital of the powerful in society, and this will be discussed in more detail in later sections.

Social capital on the other hand appears to be more evenly distributed throughout society. The main features of social capital have been identified by O’Doherty (2007) as follows:

- social relationships and social support
- formal and informal social networks
- group memberships
- community and civic engagement
- norms and values

- reciprocal activities (e.g. child care arrangements)
- levels of trust in others

O'Doherty (2007) argues that social care practitioners increasingly acknowledge the value of social capital to empower those with whom they work and has developed models of practice around the potential of networks to empower individuals. In researching long-term unemployed men, who are traditionally presented in terms relating to being casualties of an inhospitable system, then, it was considered worthwhile to examine the transcripts of the interviews, for evidence (or the lack of it) of this kind of resource.

This would be particularly important for those without work since there seems to be a similarity of the features of social capital to some of the characteristics of Jahoda's (1982) "latent function model of employment", namely:

- Opportunities for social interaction
- Broader social networks than the immediate family sphere
- Access to social status and identity
- A sense of purpose and a reason to structure time

In embarking on this research, the latent functions described by Jahoda (1982) were regarded as being very similar to O'Doherty's (2007) characteristics of social capital. Therefore, if the men being researched indeed suffered from low self-esteem and lack of confidence, and did not feel socially valued it would seem likely that they would also lack social capital. The research set out to examine what the participants had to say about work and unemployment, and the extent to which they described themselves in the light described by the theorists such as Jahoda (1982) or resisted this kind of definition by finding alternative forms of identity project, like the participants in Ball and Orford (2002). Did they see themselves as casualties of an inhospitable system or have they created a new form of identity unrelated to occupational status?

As well as being unemployed, the research participants were all men who, when they had engaged in work in the past, had engaged in working class occupations such as factory work or labouring on building sites. The next two sections will review literature in relation to masculinity and how it is accomplished and then go on to look at this in the context of class.

Masculine Identities

In recent decades many theorists who write about gender issues have identified what they term a "crisis in masculinity" (e.g. Franklin, 1984). The central idea is that with the changes brought about by feminism, traditional male roles are becoming less viable in society. Coward (1995) has argued that masculinity is in crisis because men traditionally had access to the world of work as a source of status. Women, he suggests, are able to fit better into what he calls portfolio-style careers (those that require the flexibility to move from one kind of work to another easily and quickly). He offers this as one explanation for the feminisation of the workforce together with the availability of new feminine identities that are available with the advent of feminist thinking

Some theorists who identify a crisis in masculinity , claim that men are often portrayed in feminist analyses as violent, selfish, emotionally cold rapists, whose competitive and aggressive behaviour is unacceptable (e.g. Franklin, 1984). This leaves men in the position of developing an identity from accepted social norms that are becoming increasingly unacceptable, prompting worries about whom men will choose as their role models if no acceptable role models exist. Farrell (1993) for example, puts forward the argument that whilst women have made gains from the feminist quest for equality of power, they still benefit from the model of woman as vulnerable and in need of protection. This means, he argues, that men are more expendable than women; they act as body guards of women, they are expected to work in more difficult conditions than child- rearing which, he suggests is not a "sacrifice", but an easier, more flexible and pleasanter role than those available to men. Furthermore, he suggests, in common with all excluded groups, men die younger than women. Whilst feminist researchers would concur that men and women have differing power

bases (Williams and Watson, 1988) they would be likely to dispute the claim that this difference disadvantages men overall, though gender sensitive therapy (Vetere, 1996) recommends approaches to family therapy in which participants openly discuss feelings of power and powerless in relation to socially ascribed roles.

In examining masculinity as a possible factor in understanding our research participants, this research shares the social constructionist view that masculinity is performed (Connell, 1995). What Connell argues is that masculinity is an active project that is accomplished by effective performance of behaviours that are both social and personal and constructed through power relations. Active creation of masculinity results on a personal level from the selection of discourses from the range available. Such selection is likely to change over time, in line with the dominant discourses of the day and also the individual experiences of the man in question. Some commentators have also suggested that it is more accurate to think in terms of masculinities in the plural. Segal (1990) suggests that the concept of a single masculine identity is inappropriate in a post-modern context. Rather, we need to think in terms of masculinities in the plural, providing contradictory and varied possibilities and understandings of what it means to be a man.

Connell (1995) suggests that different types of masculinity have different values and statuses. He defines "hegemonic masculinity" as the dominant form of masculine behaviour in a particular historical period or society. This type of masculinity, he suggests, is the one which best serves men's interests in relation to women. Although it may be an unrealistic and fantasy-based representation of maleness (such as the Rambo character of the 1980s) it represents an ideal of masculinity which epitomises an extreme version of what is masculine. This is the model to which young men are believed to aspire. If this is the definitive form of being a man that young men are offered, it is easy to see how it might conflict with feminist conceptions of egalitarian men who are caring and sensitive. Connell also identifies other types of masculinity: subordinate, marginal and complicit that have varying levels of status and social power attached to them. Subordinate masculinities are categorised as those which are often rejected, ridiculed and ignored, for example, homosexual masculinities; marginal

masculinities are defined as those that do not live up to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity in any way, but are not actually persecuted; and complicit masculinities are those that, whilst rejecting the excesses of the hegemonic ideal, fail to challenge the dominant forms and thus uphold their status and the masculine ideal.

One of the features of symbolic capital, described earlier, was that it assumes certain characteristics to confer power and authority on a person. One of these is gender and many feminist theorists talk about the "patriarchal dividend". Connell (1995), for example, notes that:

> Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend. In rich capitalist countries, men's average incomes are approximately double women's average incomes. (Connell, 1995, p 82).

In researching the non-engagement of long-term unemployed men, it seemed important, then, to examine the extent to which the participants felt that they benefited from the power ascribed to them as men, or whether this perceived power was actually an inhibitor in their choice to access supports similar to that found in men's unwillingness to obtain medical treatment when ill (Harkin, 2001). Does ascribed power mean that it is impossible to seek help and assistance because this is too humiliating?

Further questions were also relevant in the consideration of the issue of masculinity. Do the men in the sample find their ability to perform masculine roles undermined by their lack of participation in the world of work? Would they, for example, regard some forms of work as not masculine? How would they feel about engaging in domestic duties? Do they feel pushed aside by women due to the feminisation of the workforce? As the methodology chapter will outline, the kinds of work in which these men engaged before the onset of their unemployment might reasonably be described as working-class occupations. In light of this, a further question was considered worthy of consideration: would they negotiate their own

forms of masculinity or would they rely on those traditionally associated with the working class forms of masculinity they would have experienced in the world of work?

Class-based identities and symbolic capital

Bradley (1996) argues that social class is a contested concept and has rather ill defined boundaries. In general major factors relating to class can be related to such issues as educational attainment, occupation and type of work done, levels of status in society, degrees of social influence and power, and particular lifestyle, expectations and behavioural patterns. However, Bradley (1996) suggests that none of these criteria can be neatly allocated to people, and there is considerable debate about the relevance of class to today's post-modern world.

De Botton (2004) argues that as income levels have risen and there has been a decline in actual deprivation, the sense of perceived deprivation amongst people has increased. In feudal times people were defined by their birth. It was the family into which they were born that defined their particular social situation. This was accepted as natural and unchangeable. It is only with the introduction of the competitive nature of a society that aims for meritocracy that people began to measure their progress against the progress of others. A preoccupation with achievement and income, he suggests, has very little to do with actual living standards, rather it relates closely to the sense of deprivation that comes from having fewer material possessions, than those with whom one compares oneself. Drawing on the work of William James, author of the seminal work "*The Principles of Psychology*" (1890) he argues that in a world where people can now measure themselves against anyone of any status, self- esteem becomes impossible. While it is possible to decide to lower ones sights, he cites the huge growth in self help books and inspirational stories or triumph in the face of adversity to exemplify the overwhelming conventional wisdom in the discourses that anyone can "get on" if they decide to do so. Human agency is the discourse of the day, and no-one can escape the need to exercise it. From this perspective, everyone is engaged in climbing the social ladder

and participating in the meritocratic race to purchase consumer goods and compare them with one's neighbours.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have suggested that the process of individualisation of responsibility for participation in social life, means that the traditional support provided by class-consciousness is no longer available because "people must take individual responsibility and blame for – and often cope alone with – what used to be handled collectively […]the loss of face is indescribable'.(pp48).

Whilst participation in meritocratic projects and the individualisation of responsibility for doing so seem to be prevalent, there is also evidence that certain aspects of the traditional division between working-class and middle-class occupations remain. Rocha et al (2006), for example, suggest that insecure occupations have negative long- term consequences in knowledge based economies. For Connell (1995) the phrase "labour market vulnerability" masks the fact that those with low levels of educational qualification have very little value in the labour market. He quotes Marx:

> He becomes transformed into a simple, monotonous productive force that does not have to use intense bodily or intellectual faculties. His labour becomes a labour that anyone can perform. Hence competitors crowd upon him on all sides. (Connell, 1995 p 96).

Connell suggests that the lack of value that the employer feels for the employee, and the sense of interchangability is reciprocated by the working-class employee, who feels that a job is not something to be emotionally invested in but rather an instrument for the obtaining of money for the necessities of life.

Furthermore a person's gender is relevant to their experience of the world of work, since some commentators suggest that in modern Western societies, the labour market is sharply segregated by gender and that there are very definite men's and women's occupations, workplaces, and work tasks (Kauppinen-Toropainen and Lammi, 1993).

It has long been argued that forms of masculinity are organised around the types of work that are done. (E.g. Tolston, 1977; Seidler, 1991). From this perspective, the economic organisation of modern capitalism structures the kinds of masculinities that are available. Competitiveness is central to this. Tolston (1977) suggests that working class men have a more instrumental attitude to work and are more likely also to split themselves at work from themselves at home. He also claimed that they were less likely to purchase consumer goods for the sake of social admiration. This would suggest that the kind of cultural capital that is passed on through families to ensure that children take their place on the social ladder will vary, depending on the educational level and social status of the parents (Giddens, 2001). If parents define themselves in terms of occupational identity, so will their children, if work is seen in instrumental terms, this also will be passed on to children inter-generationally. The concept of job satisfaction, then, is not relevant in this context.

Masculinity for those with middle-class occupations is regarded somewhat differently. Seidler (1991) distinguished between working-class and middle-class masculinity by suggesting that middle-class men are more isolated because their struggle for promotion is individual, and they lack access to the collective practices of working class men on shop floors. Lloyd (1985) argues that the role of men is dependent on the class into which they are born. There is an expectation that middle-class men are intelligent, self-reliant, competitive and aware that it is 'better to think than to do'. In contrast to this view of middle-class men Lloyd suggests that the working-class man is expected to be rough, tough, loud, good at fighting and expected to be able to 'do rather than think'.

Glastra et al (2004) argue that in knowledge based economies, key employees (who might be regarded as having more middle class occupations than, say, a builder's labourer) are needed to provide creativity and innovation for their employers. In return they expect to derive satisfaction from their work, and to be able to negotiate autonomy and flexibility for themselves. They are in search of what Glastra et al describe as "the good life", which allows them flexibility in working practices and job satisfaction, due to the opportunity to work using their creativity.

Both Seidler (1991) and Tolson (1977) also suggest that occupational class impacts on men's relationships with women. For these researchers, working-class men are more subordinated at work, so are more patriarchal at home, whilst middle-class men experience some power and autonomy in their working lives and so are more egalitarian at home, particularly since they need the women to run the home and support their middle-class work.

This research, then, will examine the extent to which the research participants construct themselves using discourses and practices related to traditional working- class approaches, or whether they choose other forms of identity project. Do they, for example, see themselves as patriarchs in their homes, or do they exhibit more egalitarian discourses? Is their attitude to work instrumental, or do they expect to derive satisfaction from work projects?

Education and identity

Central to the issue of participation in employment, is participation in education and training. There is a strong relationship between the level of education a person has and the likelihood that they will be poor. Murphy and Walsh (1996) for example found that the chance of an individual being poor declines as their level of educational qualification rises.

Government policy in knowledge based economies explicitly encourages lifelong learning. For example, Department of Education and Science, (1998; 2003) and Skilbeck, (2001) propose the facilitation of greater participation of mature students for economic, social and personal reasons. Some commentators argue that the use of liberalist humanist discourses which suggest that engagement with lifelong learning is emancipatory, merely to serve the needs of the economy for more educated workers (e.g. Scott, 1995).

Boshier (1998) suggests that the European Union has transformed lifelong learning by putting in place policies that encourage governments and other agencies to provide resources to promote education. Glastra et al (2004) point to the introduction of the concept of lifelong learning, as a direct result of the influence of globalisation and individualisation. Policy in relation to adult education, they argue, is used to facilitate the needs of the rapidly globalizing

knowledge economy, making it necessary for people to constantly improve existing skills and obtain new ones. Griffin's (1998) examination of the rhetoric in European policy documents emphasises individual moral responsibility for individual, social and economic benefit, in a similar way to the meritocratic discourses identified by Levitas (2004). As Levitas points out, those who do not participate in the goals of the meritocracy for advancement and self-improvement are regarded as lacking the skills and abilities to do so.

An examination of research and literature targeted at those who work with unemployed people, supports Levitas' suggestion. As discussed in the previous chapter the men of interest to this study are currently described by the literature as lacking the skills and competencies to engage effectively in the pursuit of meritocratic goals.

> Typically across the literature, men who are "missing" from education and training are characterized as being over the age of thirty-five, unemployed, with low levels of educational and skill qualifications and consequently having literacy difficulties (Owens, 2000 p 7).

In addition, they are described as being personally demoralized by lack of work to such an extent that they lack the confidence and self- esteem to change their situations.

> Qualitative studies, although limited in number, repeatedly cite lack of confidence and low self-esteem as key dispositional barriers to participation in education and training initiatives (Owens, 2000 p 7).

In Ireland, there has been a great deal of attention to the provision of lifelong learning to all citizens of the state. As the report of the taskforce on lifelong learning (2002) puts it:

> The State and citizens working in partnership should achieve: the skills, motivation, supports / tools, resources and time to engage in learning on a lifelong basis and thus enrich lives and develop a more prosperous, more inclusive society. (p6)

A number of factors may have contributed to this lack of engagement with education.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the 1980's, when many of these men left school, were a time of high unemployment in Ireland and poverty (National Competitiveness council, 2006). It may be then, that these men did not have the opportunity to access education for reasons of lack of financial resources.

Many commentators (e.g. Owens, 2000, Mc Gann 1999, Reid, 2001, Corridan 2001) suggest that Irish adults experienced aversive educational experiences as children and this has impacted upon their ability to learn. As Jarvis (1995) and Tennant (1997) have noted, belief in one's abilities is directly related to past experiences of education.

Identities, Age and symbolic capital

Bradley (1996) describes age as the "neglected dimension of stratification". She argues that our assumptions about age are so taken-for-granted that we fail to question them in relation to a whole range of situations. She suggests that generally speaking there is an "age elite" of middle-age groups, who are at the height of their power, both economically and in terms of authority, and that both the young and the old are forced into being dependent on this middle group. Ageism, she claims, is the process of systematic stereotyping of people in relation to their age. Thus, all older people are seen as less suitable for employment than younger applicants, because they are older.

The middle age-group that Bradley describes as the "age elite" is those in the 40 – 60 age group. This definition is problematic in relation to the target group of this research, since it adds further symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) to the status of being men, which is already ascribed to the participants. As men between the ages of 35 and 60 our target group should, by Bradley's reasoning, be part of the "age-elite".

However, it is possible that this elite status is only available within the world of work: to those who have already developed an employment history and are not unemployed. This supposition is supported by the evaluation of the effectiveness of the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) described in Chapter 1.

The report found that the programme had little success when it was targeting people in the over thirty-five age bracket. In fact 41% stated that the national employment services had little to offer them. Clearly there is an implicit assumption that the symbolic capital generally attributed to people between the ages of 40-60 is not available to this group.

Research commissioned by the Equality Authority into ageism in employment (Russell and Fahey, 2004) defines those in the "older" category as people over the age of fifty. They also conclude that the shorter the term of unemployment, the more likely it is that a person will return to the workforce. In addition they note that the likelihood of returning amongst this age group, is highest amongst those educated to degree level, and next, amongst those with a Leaving Certificate[3]. The occupations identified as exits from unemployment are shop and sales work and elementary occupations. In relation to age then, the research investigated the extent to which the men regarded age as a factor in their constructions of their unemployed status and whether or not they constructed their identities as too old to learn or to be acceptable to an employer.

Summary

This chapter has introduced some of the literature in relation to broadly structuralist and post structuralist approaches to understanding the person in the post modern world and has argued that although the post-structuralist approach emphasises the fluidity of the available resources, structural factors such as class, gender and age are still relevant because they are readily available discursive resources. It also introduces the concepts of social, cultural and symbolic capital and relates these to masculinity, social class and educational opportunity and age. It also examines seminal psychological research into the impact of unemployment upon identity. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology chosen to investigate identity construction in men over the age of thirty-five who are long term unemployed.

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[3] This is the state school completion exam in Ireland, which is usually completed at age 18.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will outline the approach used for the research and the reasons for the different choices of methodology. It will begin by discussing the grounded theory approach to data collection and will then go on to outline the specific way in which this approach was used in this case. Since the world does not remain static for our inspection at any given time, policy decisions by government served to change the research environment during the process. The chapter will discuss the attempts to respond to this changing landscape creatively. It will then go on to describe the specifics of the processes used to access participants and develop a dialogue with them. It will discuss my role as researcher and how this impacted on my relationships with participants and finally go on to describe the process used for analysing the data, namely critical discourse analysis.

Theoretical background to data collection

The research used a grounded theory framework within a social constructionist approach to examine the ways in which the participants in the study created their identities and the ways they utilise the discourses available in society to do this. Grounded theory was utilised for data collection and analysis because it is designed to allow ongoing interactions to be used to identify and pursue the most common themes that emerge from participants rather than attempting to impose a structure that was generated before finding out what the men had to say about their experiences. This approach is preferable to a positivistic quantitatively based approach, such as psychometric assessment for the following reasons:

- The questions in a psychometric instrument impose a pre-conceived structure on the available responses, thereby limiting the available responses to specific Likert type responses.

- Psychometric instruments measure specific traits that have been identified by researchers as identifiable personality characteristics, but are less useful for identifying the changing ways in which identity can be constructed in relation to changing social

circumstances. Salmon (2003) suggests that this approach is inclined to "force subjects onto a bed of Procrustes". In suggesting this she is referring to the highwayman of Greek mythology, who offered travellers a bed for the night. Unfortunately the way in which the bed was made to fit, was by adjusting the bodies of the unfortunate travellers by cutting off limbs rather than adjusting the bed itself.

- This approach is inclined to obscure the richness, variability and contradictory nature of the types of identities that emerge through interaction.

Since the very nature of enquiry means that some broad topic must be introduced to find any kind of meaningful data, the general topics of work, education and training and masculinity were introduced to the participants.

Epistemological stance

Wetherell (1996) argues for an epistemological stance within social psychology which rather than attempting to generate general laws of human behaviour, as positivist experimentalist approaches do, prefers to examine talk and texts in order to identify the ways in which power acts upon individuals, and is enacted in the discursive resources they utilise. She describes this approach as explicitly political in orientation, in that it is designed to identify the impact of power on identity. This approach also has the advantage of allowing the researcher to identify contradictions and variability in the experiences of individuals. In taking a relativist stance to the construction of reality, it also assumes that reality is not "out there" and thus amenable to being "discovered", but rather that it is constructed within social interactions in a given time and place (Still, 1996).

Grounded theory

Although there is some debate about the various ways in which the grounded theory approach has been interpreted, this research used the framework developed by Bryman (2004). Data relating to the research question were generated from a sample of the target group. These were then categorised into themes which were explored further and compared until they were

refined into a number of key categories that were relevant to the overall research question. Bryman's (2004) model of grounded theory suggests a model for data collection, which proceeded along the following lines:

Theoretical sampling – the broad topic was introduced to a small sample of the target group using a variety of stimulus materials to elicit general concepts that were salient to the members of the target group that were sampled.

Coding – the emerging data were separated into broad themes that emerged in the interviews on the topics in question. A number of significant concepts were identified through progressive meetings with other members of the target group who were recruited using the information yielded by the initial sampling interviews.

Categorisation – over time the contacts with the men made it possible to refine the general concepts, identified in the coding stage into specific categories of discursive resource that were identified. This process was moved back and forth with a constant refinement of the data, to arrive at a number of categories of data that could be analysed using discourse analysis.

There is an ongoing debate within social research about whether or not grounded theory should be used for discovery of what is really going on for participants or whether it should be about the ways in which meaning is constructed by participants (Landbridge 2004). Charmaz (1990) emphasises the social constructionist approach which considers the researcher's central role in the construction of categories and meaning and this is the approach that this research uses. This approach then, is a relativist stance, which also acknowledges the role of the researcher in developing, creating and influencing the data.

Discourse analysis

Fairclough (2001) defines discourses as "diverse representations of social life which are inherently positioned – differently positioned social actors "see" and represent social life in

different ways, as different discourses"(p 235). Discourse analysis is not designed to improve our understanding of linguistics, rather it is relevant to our understanding of social action.

The application of discourse analysis in social psychological research has been largely credited to Potter and Wetherell (1987) (Horton-Salway, 2007). The discursive psychological approach draws on the work of Foucault (1980) and examines the ways in which the discursive resources that people use in their construction of identity are culturally, historically and geographically situated: that is that they reflect wider cultural beliefs and practices that are enacted in the talk that people use. For Horton-Solway (2007) This is a "top-down approach" in that it identifies discourses that circulate in society and in so doing define the understandings that are available. Discourse analysis examines the ways in which people are positioned in society by the discourses available to them and also the ways in which this positioning is resisted by the use of alternative discourses (Landbridge, 2004).

For Foucault, discourse can be examined on a number of levels "sometimes…the general domain of statements, sometimes an individualizable group of statement, and sometimes regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (Foucault, 1972:8). What Foucault is claiming is that discourse, power and knowledge are all intimately interconnected. The effect of this is that certain ideas and assumptions become "common sense". Unpacking these "common sense" understandings can often demonstrate the ways in which meanings can produce certain types of people and practices in the social world.

The themes identified from the data collection process, were the main discursive resources that the men utilised in order to construct their identities, as identified by the researcher. The use of this approach was designed to allow insight into the ways in which these men create their own identities through the available discourses that are circulating within the social field. At different times discourses that contradict each other can be expressed, depending on the circumstances in which the person finds him or herself. So the research noted apparent contradictions in the data, rather than ignoring data that did not fit. The codes and categories that were selected as having significance were based on the currently circulating discourses on the topics under investigation as identified by the researcher and as a result of the grounding

of the themes within repeated analyses of the codes and categories identified. Data were also examined for evidence of innovative uses of discourses that resisted the dominant understandings of men in their social category or utilised alternatives, for as Foucault (1975) suggests, wherever there is power there is resistance.

As with any interpretative style of research, it is possible that another researcher may have identified or categorised discourses in a different manner or found evidence of different types of discourse to those identified by this study. This is a common criticism of discourse analysis (Parker and Burman, 1993).

Ethical considerations

At both pilot and at full research stage, participants were informed of the purpose of the research and were asked to sign a consent form. Confidentiality and anonymity were promised in line with the BPS guidelines for ethical research. The consent form (See Appendix A) was written in simple language which avoided legalistic terminology in order to establish greater equality between the researcher and the participants. It was explained that the identities of the research participants would not be revealed to anyone other than the researcher and that the interviews from the research process would only be available in full to the researcher and her supervisor. It was made clear that quotations from the interviews would be used in the research but without identifying the participant.

Because of the power differential between the researcher's role as someone working for a state agency and the fact that the men had been "invited" to participate in the course by social welfare I was very clear about the voluntary nature of their participation in my research and clearly explained that the research was part of a degree that I was completing, and that the interviews were not the property of social welfare. The men were also informed that they could withdraw at any time from the research and that they could request copies of transcripts, tapes of the completed research should they so wish.

Stimulus Materials for theoretical sampling

In the first stage of the research participants were recruited by making informal enquiries to identify men in the target group who were prepared to co-operate with the research. This stage of the research proved to be particularly difficult and the attempt at snowball sampling (when one participant in the target group refers another) proved to be unsuccessful. It emerged that there was a huge problem finding anyone willing to engage with the process on a voluntary basis. The main difficulties were that:

- Potential participants were wary of engaging with anyone who was employed by the state and might be in contact with the Department of Social and Family affairs (who pay welfare payments).
- The men had alternative lifestyles and were busily engaged in their own activities
- There was no incentive, in terms of a financial payment, for engagement with the research process.

The initial contact with members of the target population, used a variety of stimulus materials, such as video clips about unemployed men, short situations about different men in differing work situations, and general interview questions on the three major topics; work, education and masculinity. The design of these initial stimulus materials was to introduce the topics in as broad a fashion as possible. They included showing each participant two short clips from the movie, The Van, an adaptation of a story written by Roddy Doyle (1991) which tells the story of the lives of two unemployed men from Dublin, and the way in which they deal with unemployment. One clip shows the two men discussing the appropriateness of work in a McDonald's restaurant and the other shows one of the men at a family meal during which he responds to his teenage son by asserting that he put the food on the table. The son contradicts this assertion by saying that the state actually provided for the family and this is followed by an uncomfortable silence around the meal table.

The men were also presented with a number of short accounts of the lives of various men, with a variety of social circumstances (see Appendix B). These include a man who is living with his girlfriend who is claiming one parent family benefit, a homosexual couple, a managing director and a man who is a single parent. Participants were asked to comment on the social circumstances of the men and were asked which of them they would most like to change places with. The rationale behind this approach was to attempt to introduce the topics of work, unemployment and masculinity in a non-threatening way, rather than using direct questions about the men themselves, which I feared they might find too personal and intrusive.

Development from theoretical Sampling

The numbers of men who were willing to engage were small (six men participated in all, at this stage of the data collection), but they did enable the researcher to identify a number of key themes that emerged from the data. It also enabled the researcher to identify the ways in which further participants could be accessed to participate in the project. Key amongst these findings were:

It would be necessary for the researcher to spend considerable time with the men in order to win their trust. She had assumed that her position as a community worker and her training as a counsellor would make it fairly easy to encourage the participants to discuss themselves with her. It emerged that she was regarded very much as an authority figure, working for the state and this was the reason for the small numbers of men who were prepared to engage with her.

There would need to be an incentive for the men to engage in terms of cash and interest for themselves, whilst not being too time consuming.

These interviews were used to ground the data collection process in the areas of interest and relevance identified by the participants.

Engaging a larger sample of participants

Because I had some considerable difficulty obtaining participants from the target group to participate in my research, it was necessary for me to devise a method of engaging participants from the target group. Since this group had already been identified by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, as a category suitable for the Employment Action Plan, I put together a proposal for a training course that would be likely (based on my preliminary findings) to attract members of the target group.

The men in the initial sample of six had identified a number of elements that would be essential if they were to engage with the course. Namely, that it should:

- Have short hours to ensure that it did not interfere with the alternative (to work and education) lifestyles that the men had created for themselves
- Have topics that would be of interest to men i.e., subject matter and activities that they would define as appropriately masculine in character.

The proposal was taken up by my line manager, who worked with the manager of the service in South Kerry to write a funding proposal shared by the two services. He made the argument that the DSFA had sent people from this category to the two services, through the Employment Action Plan programme, and that there was little availability of progression opportunities (courses, work programmes etc) available to them. He profiled the potential participants as follows:

- *… the common characteristics of this group and the barriers that face them:*
- *Very low educational attainment levels*
- *A lack of motivation*
- *A distrust of organisations and services*

- *Have not accessed any training / education provision*
- *Geographic isolation*
- *Low skill levels*
- *Current unemployment is also contributed to by other factors, e.g. low confidence / self – esteem, alcohol addiction, domestic circumstances, poverty traps* (p1 Internal LES Document – Proposal to DSFA).

The proposal was granted and funds were made available for the development of a twenty-four week long part-time training course.

Recruitment of Participants

Participants were recruited by means of written invitations that were issued to them by their mediators in the Tralee and Killarney Local Employment Service. Letters were sent out inviting these men to participate in a training course (See Appendix C). The course had a number of elements that were outlined in the letter, that the researcher hoped would encourage the target group to engage with the project:

- The course ran for only 24 weeks (from Spring – early Summer 2005)
- The time commitment was six hours per week
- There was a small payment for attendance which did not impact on social welfare payments
- Modules were available for choice that the emerging data indicated would appeal to the men such as landscaping, construction skills

Participants

Participants were recruited by means of written invitations that were issued to them by their mediators in the Tralee and Killarney Local Employment Service. In all, forty letters from the Tralee Office and a further thirty from the Killarney Office were sent to potential participants. Of the seventy letters that were sent, ten participants from the target group were recruited to participate in the course and therefore in the research process. It is not the aim of this study to argue that Kerry is a typical kind of area in relation to the research question at the core of this investigation. Nor is there any reason to think that it is unrepresentative of rural Irish counties.

Engagement with the course was voluntary. However, it is worth noting that an "invitation" from a state agency to someone who is in receipt of a welfare payment, could be regarded as holding an implicit threat. In the event, the twenty-four participants in the two locations included people who did not fall into the target group, including two women and men who were of a younger age profile or who had not been unemployed for longer than three years. The ten participants who eventually made up the target group shared some critical commonalities:

- All were over the age of thirty-five and ranged in age from thirty-six to fifty- four
- Two had never been married, one was divorced, one was in a second relationship, and the remaining six were married.
- All had left school without a Leaving Certificate
- All had been away from main-stream employment for a minimum of three years

In quoting from the interviews in the next two chapters, participants have been given pseudonyms. The presence of course participants from groups other than the target group served allowed for comparison when arriving at the dominant categories and discourses to be analysed. This is in line with grounded research (Landbridge 2004) which should allow

constant comparison of concepts and categories within a target group and between groups. For a qualitative enquiry of this intensity, which repeatedly "boils down" the core categories before commencing analysis, a sample of ten was large enough to generate sufficient data for analysis.

Developing relationships with participants

One of the central findings from the initial sample was the lack of trust in state employed personnel that inhibited interaction and indeed prevented engagement. It was therefore vital that I develop a relationship with the participants during the training course if I was to research the discourses used by the participants in any meaningful way. As part of my work role as an adult guidance practitioner, I was very involved in the organisation of the course. I met with each participant three times during the course on an individual basis.

The first meeting was to establish a relationship with the participant and establish myself as someone that participants could trust to confide in about any issues affecting them during their participation with the course. In the second meeting I used a brief profiling instrument to indicate the participant's personality type on the Jung Type Indicator (a psychometric personality profiling instrument). The purpose of this exercise was to encourage the participant to reflect on his personality and on personal identity more generally. The profiling instrument was sourced from a psychometric company in the UK because it has similar results to written psychometric tests but uses pictures. Because of this it does not meet the validity and reliability criteria usually demanded of psychometric profiling instruments. It was chosen because it was feared that participants might have literacy difficulties.

The individual profiling exercise was followed by a group workshop on the different personality types at each of the course locations. Towards the end of the course I worked with both groups in a joint session of the two groups. During this session I was required, as part of my work, to give information on welfare to work incentives and educational and training opportunities, as well as discuss job seeking skills and CV preparation. This was

followed by a group discussion in which I introduced each of the identified key categories by means of a group discussion.

Data collection and analysis

Themes were developed throughout the process by constant examination of the emerging data. Themes that appear to recur and be important to participants in their understanding of their lives were identified for further exploration. Each of the initial interviews with the six pilot participants was transcribed and these data were coded into a number of categories. The information found in these interviews was used as the basis for the first round of interviews with the course participants as well as providing information for the design of a course that might appeal to the target group. Following the use of the fairly complex stimulus materials in the first phase of the research, it was decided that it would be critically important that the researcher should develop a relationship of trust with the participants in order to progress the research.

An initial interview was carried out with all course participants (including those who did not come from the target category). The data were refined following the first interview with the course participants and comparisons were made between the categories of discursive resource that were utilised by the target group and those that were discussed by other course participants. The codes were also refined in the light of repeated meetings with the participants. This process was repeated with constant refinements as a result of the two workshops and second individual interview until a number of categories of discourse were identified. These categories were used to develop a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix D) for the final interview, which was used as the data source for identification of the discursive resources utilised by the participants and the extent to which they were resisted or accepted. A semi-structured approach was used in order to provide a framework for the discussion, whilst still allowing the flexibility for participants to talk about topics in their own way and follow lines of enquiry that they found relevant themselves.

In order to identify the dominant discourses in the transcribed interviews, the researcher first read each interview a number of times identifying the subject codes that had been identified in the previous research. Each of these codes was then scrutinised for different categories of discourse and a list of these was attached to the front of each transcript. The transcripts were then compared and the ways in which the codes and categories were used was noted.

Coded Themes

The broad themes were organised in relation to my initial research interests

- Individual understandings of or attitudes to work
- Beliefs about the impact of engagement with education and training
- Understandings about what it means to be a person in the social world, in particular in relation to discourses about masculinity, class and occupational identity and age, as well as alternative discourses that have been identified by the men in their identity projects.
- If the way in which existing services are provided is changed, would this group be more likely to engage with services?

Codes and Categories

The codes categories and two broad classifications will be presented in this section. They were arrived at by continual immersion in the data and division of the statements made by the men into coded discourses. Six broad codes were identified from the final interviews. The coded themes that were identified were divided into two broader groups for ease of analysis. These two broad classifications were

(a) Those that both accepted and resisted common sense understandings about the meaning of unemployment for long term unemployed men: the impact of unemployment on their

individual personalities, how they negotiated their masculinity and those relating to their perceptions of the impact of age upon them;

(b)Those that the men utilised to construct and negotiate their identities in terms that were meaningful to themselves: structural factors that determined their life choices, new discourses and value systems that they utilised. Each of the six broad codes and the associated categories into which the men's discourses were sorted are discussed in greater detail in the two chapters of results. The first three codes were in relation to common sense discourses relating to identity in long term unemployed men and the codes that were selected, are as follows:

Accepting and resisting common sense assumptions

1. **Unemployment and identity**
    - Practical problems with unemployment
    - Ascribed unemployed identities
    - Unemployment and the work ethic
2. **Masculinity and identity and symbolic capital**
    - Men's work and women's work
    - The man as breadwinner
    - Feminism and social inclusion
3. **Age opportunity and symbolic capital**
    - Adaptability
    - Age and social structure
    - Current value of education

The second three codes were in relation to structural factors impacting upon identity construction and codes and categories selected are as follows:

Meaningful negotiation of identity

4. **Occupational and educational opportunities and cultural capital**
    - Class
    - Educational opportunity
    - Lack of ability
5. **Current identity choices**
    - Relationships and social networks
    - The family man
    - Value of childcare
6. **Involuntary simplification**
    - Ambition
    - Materialism
    - Quality of life and job satisfaction

These codes and categories were extracted from the initial interviews in the pilot studies; the workshop that was conducted during the training course; the interviews that were conducted during the research; and the final interviews that were conducted with the participants on the training course.

The structure of the initial research question is disbursed across the codes and categories rather than neatly grouped under the specific questions that were of interest to the researcher. This is an artefact of the grounded theory approach to the collection of the data. The codes were extracted from repeated meetings with the men in order to allow the relevant data to be driven by the things that they as participants had to say about unemployment, masculinity and education. This grounding of discourse selection in data driven by participants was central to the design of the study in order to facilitate the collection of data that would actually reflect the concerns of the participants who were being researched, rather than imposing a pre-conceived or previously decided structure on the results.

The decision to divide the two results and analysis chapters into (a) accepting and resisting common sense assumptions and (b) meaningful negotiation of identity was primarily for ease of management of the material. In the first set of codes the participants looked at what it meant to be unemployed, what it meant to be a man and what it meant to be of the age they were. Age had not been a particular facet of my research questioning until I spoke with the men, when I found that social expectations of a particular age-group were central to the way in which these men construct their identities. The second set of themes, on the other hand, appeared to me to transcend the everyday understandings of this category of person in the everyday discourses of others. In this set of codes, discursive resources in relation to the ways in which the men's identities were shaped by social structures were explicitly referred to, except in the final code, involuntary simplification and social capital, in which the men appeared to harness discursive resources which resisted the institutional definitions of what makes long term unemployed men. Instead they selected discourses that were relevant to their own understandings of their lives and allowed them to preserve an identity with which they were able to make sense of their experiences. This will be explored further in chapter five.

Reflection on Methodology

As discussed in Chapter 1, my interest in this project and in this group stems from my employment and from an interest in finding out why this particular group are less likely than others to engage with services. The authority of my role as someone who was working for a government funded agency cannot be overlooked in assessing the worth of my findings. "The researcher's history, identity and personality play a role in constructing the story of the people involved and the interaction" (Stroobants 2005, p 56) as the "Interviewer is a central and active participant in the interaction" (Rapely 2001, p 316).

Although I did work for a state agency, my own personal bias is to empathise with groups who for one reason or another are subjected to social disapproval in the general discourses of society (although naturally, I share many disapprovals also). My attitude towards this group then, was from the outset inclined to examine the ways in which their experience is socially

positioned. This may elicit the criticism that the study may lack objectivity. However, this research takes as a starting point the assumption that it is not possible to generate observable objective facts that are true and observable for all time in a positivistic sense. De Valle (2001) argues that this kind of stance is in itself a social construction that legitimises a particular kind of knowing and prioritises it over other kinds of knowing. "The problem exists where acquiring the techniques of measurement involves being socialised into the perspective which produced them" (p131). No form of knowing can therefore be entirely free of the pre-conceived notions of the researcher about what counts as data and what is worth drawing attention to. By reflecting on the methods I use and my personal beliefs and intentions, I therefore leave it up to the reader to evaluate the findings based upon the information I have provided about my beliefs and knowledge. This, I would argue, is far more transparent a means of holding up the data to public scrutiny, than ignoring the issue and behaving as though complete objectivity were somehow possible.

I have trained and practised as a counsellor using the Rogerian approach of non-evaluative warmth and positive unconditional regard (Rogers, 1951) and this is the approach I attempted in my interviews and workshops with the course participants, however, there is no denying the authority of my position in the interactions, and it is likely that certain discourses are likely to have been withheld from interactions with me because of this. I was very concerned to find ways of winning the trust of participants, so that they might share with me some of the discourses that they might otherwise not display for someone who was associated with having the power that is vested in them by the state. My intention in integrating my role into the course as one of course psychologist, (performing personality profiles, listening to difficulties etc) was to develop an open dialogue with the participants. I do believe that I had some success in this regard. To exemplify this, take this quote from one of my participants:" […] *I wouldn't say that to social welfare but… (Joint laughter)[…]"*. This is not to suggest that participants would not be guarded in their approach to me, but there does appear to have been some openness by the time we did the final interviews.

In addition, the interview process itself has been described as a series of "artful productions, that will often be shaped by concerns about self-presentation or persuasion" (Hammersley, 2002, p 123). This implies that at any time in any interview situation (or indeed any interactive process more generally) a person is presenting him or her self in a particular way in order to create an impression. This is not necessarily problematic in the context of this research since the research is explicitly concerned with documenting the ways in which this production of identity is accomplished.

Another criticism of this approach is that interpretative approaches by their very nature reflect the intentions and observations of the researcher. Whether or not the researcher is a woman or a man, an authority figure or a close companion, a self must be presented. However, since the way in which identity is being constructed, is what is of interest, rather than a search for some objective reality, this is not really an issue for this style of research, provided the contextual background has been provided.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the research process and the development of the data through its various stages. It has discussed the choice of qualitative and interpretative methodologies and the uses of grounded theory approaches to data collection as well as identifying the process used in identifying discursive resources used by the men in the study in constructing individual identity projects. Difficulties in relation to accessing participants are discussed as well as the ways in which these were overcome. The coded themes and the ways in which they were categorised are presented together with a reflection on the methodology used and possible criticisms of this approach.

Chapter 4

Accepting and Resisting Common Sense Assumptions

Introduction

This chapter discusses the discursive resources that the men utilized in constructing identity in relation to the generally accepted discourses and common sense understandings about what it means to be a long term unemployed man over the age of thirty-five. The first three categories identified in the methodology section are explored in relation to the results and analysed in relation to academic literature on the subject.

As discussed in the methodology chapter it was not possible to structure the results, specifically under these headings as a variety of categories and codes were extracted from them as a result of the grounded theory approach to data collection that was used. However, it will be clear that these three broad questions are very relevant to the first three codes presented below.

The categories under each of the three codes in this chapter are explained and explored as they are introduced and discussed. As discussed in the previous chapter, the first three categories are as follows:

Accepting and resisting common sense assumptions

7. **Unemployment and identity**
    - Practical problems with unemployment
    - Ascribed unemployed identities
    - Unemployment and the work ethic
8. **Masculinity and identity and symbolic capital**
    - Men's work and women's work
    - The man as breadwinner
    - Feminism and social inclusion
9. **Age opportunity and symbolic capital**
    - Adaptability
    - Age and social structure
    - Current value of education

Unemployment and identity

The first broad category related to the discursive resources drawn upon by the men in constructing an understanding of their experience of unemployment and the impact this had upon them. It explores the extent to which the generally held understandings about unemployed identities are utilised by the men in their constructions of themselves. The codes are broken down to look at issues such as the impact on the individual who is unemployed as described by psychological research (e.g. Jahoda, 1983; Gaille and Marsh, 1994) and outlined by state agencies; the social stigma and understandings of lack of participation (Levitas, 2004); and the impact of discourses that make participation in work a moral imperative This category is divided into three codes:

- Practical problems with unemployment
- Ascribed unemployed identities
- Unemployment and the work ethic

Practical problems with unemployment

The discursive resources that were utilised by the men in the first category related to some of the practical problems relating to being unemployed as identified in Jahoda's (1982) seminal work. Jahoda suggested that people without work were deprived access to latent functions of unemployment, namely:

- Structuring of time, both in the immediate term and also over weeks and years.
- Regular shared contact with people other than family members
- Links to collective goals and purposes from outside the individual's immediate sphere
- Access to social status and identity

The interviews clearly suggest that the first two of these aspects of the unemployed experience were apparent to the men as disadvantages of their social situation and these are

grouped under the code of practical problems with unemployment. There was, however, no mention of access to collective goals from outside the individual's immediate sphere nor was there any acceptance that work provides social status and identity. In fact this latter point was actively resisted.

There was certainly some evidence that participants agreed with the analyses which suggest that participation in the world of work serves the function of providing opportunities for social interaction and also for the structuring of time, though this was in the short term rather than in the longer term. All ten of the men in the main study mentioned this in their conversations; the issue was also raised by four of the six participants in the pilot. Similarly four explicitly identified having the opportunity to mix with others during the programme as a positive outcome. The following excerpt is typical of this approach:

> *Lisa: How do you think not working influences what a person is like?*
>
> *Liam: Where we worked now, how will I say it? You had social contact like. You were on the same wavelength as other people. You were discussing what was happening in the news. You were discussing other things. It's different when you are alone. Whereas in the course now, it was kind of like being at work. You were able to discuss what happened, or whatever, the night before. But you had that communication like. You do not have that when you are not working.*
>
> *Lisa: Right, so that was the big thing?*
>
> *Liam: That was the big thing yes. That's why I finished it. I wonder if most of them would have gave up, but I found that very good anyway. You had a purpose like. You had to be there at a certain time and (...) you understand?*
>
> ---
>
> *Lisa: So it's difficult to find a structure in your life?*

Gerry: It would be like, I mean it's fine if you have something planned for the day, but what are you going to do when you have nothing planned for the day?

Lisa: So what are the biggest down sides of not working?

Tom: Em you have no...No system and you have no (.) contact, which is nearly worse.

This participant refers to having "*No system"* as a secondary drawback after lack of social contact. The structuring of time element is, however, (and this was the case for all of the participants) specifically in the short term and in relation to having something planned for the day. This structuring of time was also identified as essential to the management of good mental health. This is how one participant put it:

Lisa: So why did you do CE[4] schemes when there was no extra money in it?

Mike: Ahh, I suppose, to be occupied.

Lisa: So work, doing work, has a value on its own outside of money?

Mike: Being occupied. Keeping myself occupied has a value to me. Em I'm not, I wouldn't consider myself to be materialistic. I would be (…) I value people and I value my own (...) sanity, more than anything else. I value my own sanity, that's it I. (..) Money to me it's, it's OK. Obviously you have to have it and all that but it's not important or it's not important to me. You know. I'd like to make a living. I'd like to be self sufficient, I'd like to be blah blah blah blah blah and all the rest (.) em, but it would never be the most important thing to me.

[4] Community Employment schemes, as discussed in Chapter 1.

The participant in this latter quotation makes it clear that money is not the motivating factor in his participation in Community Employment Schemes (for which participants are paid a small addition to their social welfare payment, of around €22 to cover additional expenses), but that he does need to be busy.

None of the participants mentioned status or collective goals. In this analysis I have related this finding to the alternative discourses that I will review in the next chapter. In the case of access to collective goals, this suggests that the discourses selected by the men in relation to the ways in which they construct themselves, often relate to their contribution to their community, as will be explored under the category of "Relationships and social networks". The idea that an identity is constructed out of work or that it offers access to social status, was actively resisted. I will consider the reasons for this rejection of the social status discourse in the next chapter, when I examine the category of "ambition" as a discourse that was utilised by the men.

Throughout the research financial deprivation was mentioned from time to time, but primarily as an inconvenience rather than as a serious drawback. The strongest statement in this regard was as follows:

> *Lisa: And do you think there is an upside to being out of work?*
>
> *Sean: Well you've ups and downs. When it comes to getting kids presents and that kind of thing, the person who's working have…so then your child gets up on Christmas Day and your one has a go-Kart, the one next door has a bike … it's very hard. People are getting different things and more people are getting computers. Thanks be to God they're only six and seven years of age, you know it's not too bad, but em …there's benefits and there's drawbacks.*
>
> *Lisa: So the drawback is really the money thing.*
>
> *Sean: The drawback is the money thing.*

The deprivation is not in relation to himself, but in relation to his ability to provide consumer good for his children when other children are receiving expensive gifts. This comment might also be seen in the context of his role as provider for his children, although this is not identified by him so much as a particularly male viewpoint, as that of a parent. Talking to the other participants it would appear that there is an acceptance of their financial situation as an inconvenience. This supports Canan (1996) who suggested that in modern Capitalist societies, unemployed people can adjust to having minimal resources, provided they are not actually hungry. However, there is no evidence of what De Botton (2004) describes as status anxiety: the idea that as actual deprivation decreases, there is a sense of relative deprivation. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that all the theorists on the psychological effects of unemployment identify finance as the most important issue. This is probably linked to what Warr (1987) describes as certainty about the future and physical security and home comforts, neither of which were mentioned by the men in this study. This topic will be addressed again in the next chapter, when I examine some of the discourses that the men used in relation to materialism and social status.

Ascribed unemployed identities

The second code in this category related to discourses that might be used to position the men as either "casualties of an inhospitable system" as identified in the discourses of state agencies and also what Levitas (2004) identifies as social integration discourses (SIDS) which position the men as lacking the skills and abilities to participate adequately in social life. They were also examined for evidence that the men utilised "cheat" or moral underclass discourses (MUDS) (Levitas 2004) which present those who do not participate in the world of work as morally deficient and failing in their duty to society at large.

In looking for discourses utilising "casualty" discourses, very little evidence was found that the men utilised discourses relating to having low self-esteem or described themselves in relation to the impacts identified by Imminck (1988) in the model for work with long term unemployed men used by state agencies.

"The effects of long-term unemployment are well documented and include –

- Apathy, lack of motivation and goals
- Isolation, loss of social connections and network
- Financial problems as a result of low income
- Loss of identity and self confidence
- Loss of social status and relationship problems
- Lack of scope for self development
- Family breakdown with the consequences evident in children and community

The net result is often a deep sense of discouragement, which considerably decreases the employment potential of the individual" (Imminck, 1998).

In relation to this quotation it is worth noting, before discussing the findings in detail, that none of the men constructed themselves as apathetic or isolated, nor was there any allusion to family and relationship difficulties brought on by unemployment. As will be discussed in the next chapter under the category of "Current identity choices", family relationships were very important in the discursive resources used by the men and were highly prized forms of social identity. In addition, as will be seen under the category of "Involuntary simplification and social capital", social networks were extremely important to the men in this study. Rather than constructing themselves as lacking scope for development, these men utilised discourses of self-development in discussing their rejection of the work ethic. This topic will be addressed further in the third code under this category "Unemployment and the work ethic".

As acknowledged in the methodology chapter, discourses can be contradictory. There was some evidence that the men used discourses relating to loss of social connection when describing the disadvantages of unemployment. This however, was in a small number of

cases. The vast majority of the men used discourses relating to social involvement on a community level, and this will be further explored further under the category of "relationships and social networks" in the next chapter.

There was also some allusion to the issue of self-confidence. This however, was only mentioned by two of the men. It will be my contention, in the next chapter, that by utilising alternative forms of identity construction, than those related to occupational status or consumerist identity, most of the men have attempted to resist the "low self esteem discourse". The ways in which these discourses are used will be explored now.

Only two of the men alluded lack of self-esteem or depression as part of unemployed identity; the first is shown in the following extract:

> *Lisa: So you think that there's a way of behaving socially and a way that people treat you because of the job you do?*
>
> *Gerry: Oh, I do yes.*
>
> *Lisa: So how does that affect you if you're unemployed?*
>
> *Gerry: Well it can get you very much down and maybe depressed even sort of lack of self esteem, lack of confidence.*

The second man who suggested that this type of definition might be a facet of unemployed identity put it as follows:

> *Lisa: And do you think that the kind of work you do influences the kind of person you are?*
>
> *Liam: Yes, if you're working you're a totally different person from when you're idle and you know, down and out and down in the dumps. You know if you're working you're busy and active and you know what I mean?*

Lisa: So you think it's better for people to be working?

Liam: Yes. You get down if you're not doing anything

However, this seems to have less to do with lack of self esteem and motivation, and more to do with the advantages that work provides in the structuring of time. Indeed, as will be discussed in the next chapter under the category of "Current identity choices", family relationships and social and community contacts were of particular importance to all of the men, who in common with those identified by Canaan (1996) appear to have adjusted to their situation and neither attempted to fight state power nor climb the class ladder. The data to be presented also suggests that goals are not centred around work or occupational identity, but rather, in relation to, social relationships and family roles.

The data discussed in the next chapter in the category identified as "Occupational and educational opportunities and cultural capital" could possibly have been identified as evidence of a casualty discourse, as I will discuss when I introduce it. However, I have aligned it more with a discourse resisting individualising discourses, that put responsibility with the individual for participation in the assumed meritocracy identified by Levitas (2004).

Other ascribed social roles, that the men were asked about, centred around the cheat discourses which Levitas (2004) identifies as Moral Underclass Discourses (MUD) that presume those who are excluded are morally different from society at large and are not "doing their bit", by participating in the world of work. Although all the men were asked about social status and work, none of them suggested that social status was a potential advantage of participation in the world of work. One man identified the possible "cheat" discourses that might be used about him by others. This was as part of a sequence of conversation that started with the previous quotation about unemployment and moved into the use of "cheat" discourses as follows:

Lisa: So do you think that other people look down on you when you're not working?

Gerry: I think there would be a bit of that. I think so. You know they wouldn't say it up to your face maybe, but they could maybe. They might say it in a joke of some fashion. That em God are you ever going to do, em get a job or anything, or are you ever going to work you know or will you start or something or (…)

Lisa: And how do you feel about that?

Gerry: Well it hasn't really happened now, to be honest with you. Oh I dunno. You don't expect it I suppose and it can, em knock you a bit or shock you I suppose. But as I say it wouldn't be really that blatant. It might be just say a sarcastic remark or something, maybe. It depends on the individual. But I think I can recognise that individual. So it wouldn't be of any consequence. I would know that personality type and I wouldn't give any credence to them anyway. So it wouldn't really impact as much, you know.

This section provides an interesting sequence in that the participant begins by outlining the kinds of psychological results of unemployment that are generally agreed by the agencies: lack of self esteem, depression, lack of confidence. This is very similar to the kinds of discourse used by the service providing agencies such as Local Employment Services and Vocational Educational Services, discussed earlier. This is interesting in view of the fact that this is the only participant who had attended a VEC course or indeed any course prior to this. Initially he outlines the kinds of "cheat" type opinions that he imagines exist and the way in which it might be presented, but then goes on to discount and reject it by suggesting that the kind of person who would say this kind of thing would not be worth taking note of.

Of the ten men who participated formally in the study and the forty or more additional men to whom I spoke through their referral to me by social welfare, only one demonstrated any inclination to make use of "cheat" discourses in order to classify himself. During a discussion in which I was exploring the role of agency in making a life, one participant said this:

Stephen: […] you have to be very strong to change what you are and take a different path.

Lisa: And what do you think makes people change their lives?

Stephen: If they're unhappy with it or if they're going the wrong way kind of thing.

Lisa: When you say the wrong way…

Stephen: Em, going down the way I have really, you know just…going off the rails kind of thing. You know.

Lisa: You think you have?

Stephen: Yes, have done yes

This participant appears to hold himself in some sense as responsible for his situation in his depiction of himself as *"going off the rails"*. It might also be evidence that he is aware that he is using discourses to construct himself that resist those used by state agencies working with unemployed people. This was, however, the only instance of this type of understanding in the sample group. Interestingly there was no sense of resentment of the social welfare services, expressed by any of the men. As one put it:

Lisa: And is it hard on you then when social welfare have the power to say "come in here I want to chat with you"?

Mike: Em no.

Lisa: You don't mind at all?

Mike: Because they're just doing their job.

However, this must be taken in the context of a conversation with someone who was working for the state services involved in moving people out of unemployment.

Unemployment and the work ethic

Discussions with the men appeared to suggest that although they constructed work as useful in relation to social interaction and life structure, they valued it less in relation to a source of identity related to a moral imperative to work, as identified by Bauman (2005). Participation in work, Bauman suggests, was made into a moral issue: those not participating are regarded as morally deficient in some way, as in the Moral Underclass discourses identified by Levitas (2004). The result of this in post-traditional modern society, Bauman argues, is that work became the main site of identity construction for most men since it was the place where they spent most of their time and that this continues to this day. This however, does not appear to be the case in this study. The men I spoke to actively resisted any such assumption. Take the following quotation as an example:

> *Lisa: So do you feel on the other side that society and people in it look down on you because you're not working?*
>
> *Tom: Twould be my own stuff like. I know that no-one judges me because I'm unemployed. But em, I see people attaining success and I see people moving on and things like that and where I'm at now I'm (..)*
>
> *Lisa: You're learning things that you think are useful right now?*
>
> *Tom: Oh absolutely yes. Especially when you think that you're in a job and for me, I thought it was the measure of who I am. To be working have money, pay my bills.*

Again in this quotation, whilst there is an acknowledgement of the mainstream attitude to work, the participant constructs himself as actively resisting what is implicitly, in this quote, an unhealthy approach "*Twould be my own stuff like",* from which he has progressed" *I thought it was the measure of who I am".* This is a very clear rejection of the work ethic as a moral measure of the person and was common to all of the men in the study. However, this approach also contradicts the state agency approach which suggests that unemployed people lack the opportunity for self-development. On the contrary, rejecting occupational status as a

form of identity project is constructed by this participant as a form of development. This will be examined further in the next chapter when the codes of "materialism" and "ambition" are explored under the category of "Involuntary simplification and social capital". The following example however, is quite typical of the kind of discursive resources used in this context:

> *Lisa: Money and self-esteem, are they linked?*
>
> *Mike: Ehh, (.) not today. It's a funny place to be unemployment. I took it for granted always that I'd work. I have a hard job at the moment to do nothing. I used to always be doing something. And I now realise that you don't have to be doing something to be something or to be someone. You know?*
>
> *Lisa: OK. Right. So part of it is good, being not working?*
>
> *Mike: Oh absolutely yes. Oh yes, the ability to actually sit and not do something, for me would be a very hard thing to do. I would always have been an up at eight man. For me to have day after day (well I get up anyway) but not to actually be somewhere, maybe to have time to myself. Sometimes it's hard like, because I have all this sitting with myself.*

For this participant unemployment is redefined as an opportunity to develop personally into a person who can just exist with him-self rather than having to be engaged in an activity in order to construct an identity. Another example of this is when participants talked about losing work as an opportunity for a better life. Take the following quotation:

> *Bert: Because em em my factory that I was working in had kind of almost closed down and they got rid of me see. So I said, "Now's my chance". My wife's is in a permanent job […]. She earned more. I've said it was more secure. I didn't mind. I was quite happy to mind the children.*

The inclusion of this quotation is not to suggest that minding children is not work, but rather, that for this man an actual workplace is not the site of identity construction as Bauman (2005)

suggested in his discussion of the development of the work ethic. Indeed, the results in the next chapter, which discuss the alternative identity projects chosen by the men in this research, show that the men actively selected discourses which positioned them as "family man"; an identity category that appears to be highly valued by all the participants.

Summary of the Code of Unemployment and Identity

This first category of discourse has identified the ways in which the men constructed their identities in relation to their status as unemployed people. The three codes of practical problems associated with unemployment, resisting ascribed unemployed identities and unemployment and the work ethic were presented. The extent to which the traditional discourses under, each of these categories, was used by the men was explored. The data indicate that whilst the men acknowledge the practical problems associated with unemployment including a lack of finance and social contact; overall the ascribed qualities of unemployed people were resisted. There was very little evidence that the men utilised discourses relating to "cheat" or moral underclass discourses (Levitas 2004), nor did they appear to construct their identities in relation to their unemployed status, as Jahoda (1982) suggested. There was also evidence of a resistance to the work ethic discourse Bauman (2005). As will be explored when the evidence in the next chapter is presented, it would appear that these men appear to be using alternative discursive resources to construct an identity, a trend identified in other unemployed groups by Ball and Orford (2002) who appeared to have selected alternative identity projects to those based around work based identities.

Masculinity, identity and symbolic capital

The second broad category that was explored was the notion of masculinity as a form of symbolic capital (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984, Coleman, 1988, Putnam, 1993). Symbolic capital in this context is relevant because the research participants are men and as such have a particular status bestowed upon them by virtue of being male. As Connell (1995) puts it:

> Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend. In rich capitalist countries, men's average incomes are approximately double women's average incomes. (Connell, 1995, p 82).

This category then explored the construction of masculinity in relation to the unemployed status of the men. The codes that were identified related to discourses which suggested that some kinds of work were not suitable to men "Men's work and women's work", the extent to which masculinity is contingent upon being a financial provider "The man as breadwinner", the responses of the men to the changes brought about by the feminist movement; "Feminisation and social inclusion" and the possible reasons why men are less likely to engage with education and training than women are "Participating in education and training".

The coded discursive resources identified then, in this category are as follows:

- Men's work and women's work
- The man as breadwinner
- Feminism and social inclusion

All of the men had clear understandings about what they believed was an appropriate work role for a man and what kinds of work would be emasculating. They varied somewhat on whether or not it mattered who earned the money. There was a strong and uniform belief in the importance of family as well as the acceptability and value of childcare as a social activity. There was no sense that these men felt aggrieved by the changes brought about by feminism, regarding it rather as about inclusion and social justice. It may be worth noting here, that the researcher is a woman with whom the participants had developed a working relationship, and whom they might possibly want to approve of them.

<u>Men's work and women's work</u>

All ten of the men expressed the view that there were a variety of jobs that they would find demeaning or unacceptable. The assertion that certain kinds of work are more suitable for

men than others arose frequently. This is in line with research findings which suggest that occupations are frequently segregated along gender lines and that there are very definite men's and women's occupations and work tasks. (Kauppinen-Toropaien and Lammi, 1993). When pressed on this point participants were clear that some roles were emasculating for men and would open them to ridicule:

> *Joe: Well men are better for more physical work and that and women are more for office work, hotel receptionist or something like that.*
>
> *Lisa: So do you think it's different depending on your background?*
>
> *Joe: Yes, not really about equal, but you wouldn't see a woman in a bar going down lifting kegs. A fella might go down and try it alright. But you see, probably the fella wouldn't like to be seen cleaning up the bar with the brush and that.*
>
> *Lisa: Why do you think that is?*
>
> *Joe: You know people would be coming in and they would be laughing at him, cleaning up. I know most of us would probably do it, but I know some fellas would take it as a woman's job. I'm not being sexist or anything.*

Here we see an instance of competing ideas that the participant is quick to justify. He wants me to understand that he believes in equality but that at the same time there are socially prescribed roles that are suitable for men and women. In the following quotation the participant is quick to distance himself from anything that might be regarded as "sexist", whilst at the same time acknowledging that cleaning type roles are considered more powerless for men, than those involving physical strength and stamina. Another example of this is a participant who differentiated between theoretical assumptions about gender roles and practical considerations in order to distance himself from any suggestion of being sexist:

> *Lisa: Do you think that there are kinds of work that men are more suited to than women and the other way around?*

Stephen: Well there would be,. Well I mean I (..) know both people should do any type of work, but you don't see a woman lifting the sack of potatoes. Well you could do, because you have woman weight-lifters as well, but you have to look at it in general. Amm heavy goods driving, manual handling of heavy goods, forklifts, pulling trolleys (..) it's really men's work.

The way in which this man identifies himself as being drawn into a particular form of identity is a clear acknowledgement of social forces at work. The masculinity of work requiring physical strength is also compared to what are considered "soft jobs":

Liam: [clerical work…] was considered a soft job. A few people had done it with kind of teaching and things. But they were considered softies. At that time, you know what I mean. There was a few exceptions but not many. Most people went for the trades and that kind of thing.

Lisa: Because they were considered more manly?

Liam: I suppose yes. It was kind of, you followed and you didn't think about it.

Masculine work, then, is constructed in relation to power involving physical strength rather than other kinds of power. This is very much in line with the finding of Lloyd (1985) who suggested that working-class men are expected to be rough, tough, good at fighting and better able to do than think. Indeed this was the only kind of ascribed masculine power to which the men alluded. One participant put it like this:

Lisa: And do you think when women are moving into positions of power, do you think that has any negative effects for men then?

Mike: Mmm No the men's work will always be there. You know what I mean like, if it's an intellectual job that they have, and they're not qualified to do it then they shouldn't have it and if they're good enough to have the job they'll always keep it.

The suggestion that men's work will always be there is a clear construction of masculinity in a work context as work requiring physical strength and stamina. This approach does point towards some aspects of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) being used in understandings of what it means to be a man and what is expected as a man. However, there is also a clear acknowledgement that things are changing:

> *Lisa: [...] Em so do you think that there are types of work that men are more suited to and women are more suited to?*
>
> *Tom: I suppose there is yes. I mean women worked in the home normally like, but I don't see any reason why a man wouldn't do it.*
>
> *Lisa: So do you think what is expected of men and women has changed?*
>
> *Tom: Oh indeed I'd say yes. In the last em like I say 14 or 15 years you can see women doing men's jobs and men doing women's jobs.*

In presenting these results, before considering whether or not a "crisis in masculinity" can be identified amongst these men, it is important to consider the data that will be presented in the category "current identity choices and new discourses". Under this category two codes are identified that are relevant to this concept within the private realm of the household: "the family man" and "the value of childcare". It does seem clear however, that whilst the men were anxious to construct themselves as "not sexist", in the public sphere of the world of work, hegemonic masculinity needs to be preserved as an aspiration.

<u>The man as breadwinner</u>

The question of whether or not the role of breadwinner was central to masculine identity was explored with all of the participants. It was difficult to obtain any clear consensus on this topic. In fact the men were evenly split on whether or not being the breadwinner is part of a man's role. There were a number of discussions about the ways in which women's ability to earn money has impacted on men. The men used a number of strategies to negotiate the

competing debates about the link between being a breadwinner and being a man. Some of the men were reluctant to commit themselves on the issue of whether it matters who earns the money:

> *Lisa: And do you think it matters in a couple situation, which one earns the money?*
>
> *Tom: Up until about fifteen years ago yes, but not anymore. Then things started going so kind of up-market that it doesn't make any difference who's bringing in the money now.*
>
> *Lisa: And do you think it would be hard for a man if his wife earned more than him?*
>
> *Tom: (…) I don't know. (..) I don't know.*
>
> *Lisa: Ok…would it have bothered you?*
>
> *Tom: I don't know 'cause I didn't go through the whole thing. You'd have to live it to be sure. I mean it's very easy to assume something but you could be giving the wrong answer. You'd really have to ask someone who went through it. At least they'd give you a definite answer from living it.*

The comment that things have gone "upmarket" is of interest in that the participant appears to be commenting on the movement from manufacturing and low skill type occupations to a knowledge economy (Boden and Miles 2000) whilst at the same time acknowledging that this has class implications. This approach supports Lloyd's (1985) contention that working class masculinities are based around "doing" and the use of physical strength, whilst middle class men are expected to be intellectually competitive. He constructs his reluctance to commit himself on the issue, as being unwilling to comment on something he has not experienced. He suggests that attitudes about who earns the money have changed and yet he is unwilling to say that he would not mind not being the main breadwinner. It appears that the man is struggling with competing discourses of masculinity and equality and is unwilling to select one.

The next participant goes further:

> *Lisa: What about in a relationship. Do you think it matters where the money comes from and who earns the money?*
>
> *Mike: Again, that would be a generation thing. That won't happen overnight either. 'Cause you know you come from generations of men who were breadwinners and women who were home-makers. And obviously today you're still going to have a woman who's having children. So it would be her who would be the first obvious choice to be the homemaker. You know (.)*
>
> *Lisa: But what about how a man feels about it, though?*
>
> *Mike: How a man feels about it? I'd be very domesticated myself and I'd be involved with the children, hands on like, because I live with a woman like. But I'd say it took that in me to appreciate the level of work that has to be done around a family home. You would assume, well I would have assumed, that a woman at home looking after children, was easy. But for me to integrate into that and to leave work and stay at home on a full time basis, and be a homemaker, I don't think I'd find, for me anyway, a great quality of life in it.*
>
> *Lisa: OK*
>
> *Mike: If you were to switch roles, you know, which is the gist of what you are talking about, I don't think I could ever see a switching of roles. I don't think my self esteem would take it.*

This man quite clearly draws on the notion of self esteem as a vital component of identity, whilst positioning himself as The man as breadwinner. He appreciates the importance of the role of homemaker and is prepared to engage in the activities, but would not see this as a permanent situation. He also acknowledges the ideological dilemma of the implicit suggestion that homemaker roles are of less status than breadwinner roles. Other participants deal with

this dilemma by relating this idea to a former belief system of fifteen or twenty years ago, whilst still asserting that socially prescribed gender differences remain.

> *Lisa: OK so you're saying that expectations of men in the last fifteen or twenty years have changed.*
>
> *Joe: They have, we've got more modern and that. If a man stayed at home now it would be fine whereas before, I think that people would say that lazy so and so won't get up and go to work. Whereas if a woman stayed at home they'd say that's a woman's job. You know. Fifteen years ago it would have been "He won't get up and go to work. She has to go to work."*
>
> *Lisa: So you don't think if a man was at home with his kids they'd class it as work if a man was doing it?*
>
> *Joe: No. Because there wasn't too many people doing it. Fifteen or twenty years ago, I mean you're talking about 80% of normal households, where working in mills would be the man's work and that. And even today I'd say in 75% of cases it is always the man that goes out to work. I mean even some sports, fishing, things like that. You don't see too many women at the fishing. Em golf, you don't see too many.*

There is also a sense in this quotation that working full time at home is not real men's work. However, others in the sample talked about equality of value and the worth of work in the home to argue that the positioning of men outside the home is now irrelevant:

> *Lisa: […]Em so do you think that there are types of work that men are more suited to and women are more suited to?*
>
> *Sean: I suppose there is yes. I mean women worked in the home normally like, but em I don't see any reason why a man wouldn't do it.*
>
> *Lisa: So do you think what is expected of men and women has changed?*

Sean: Oh indeed I'd say yes. In the last, em, like I say fourteen or fifteen years you can see women doing men's jobs a bit like and men doing women's jobs.

There is a clear acknowledgement of and agreement with, the notion of gender role swapping in the previous quotation. Responses coded under this section were also quite mixed ranging from the man who said that his "self-esteem wouldn't take" having a wife who earned more than him to the man who actually constructed himself as a "househusband":

Lisa: Do you think that working full-time at home with the kids has been good for you?

Bert: Well it hasn't been bad anyway and it has been very good for the kids like. To have someone there to kind of keep a check on them and bring them up the right way. I'd rather be with them than have them with somebody else. Some people they just don't care. They just let them run around wild, I think anyway. They should be with their parents.

In constructing himself as a full-time caretaker he contrasts his identity with those parents who do not pay enough attention to their children or care enough. This approach to identity construction will be explored further under the "current identity choices" category.

Feminism and social inclusion

None of the men in this study appear to identify themselves with the kinds of ideas put forward by Farrell (1993) which suggest that feminism has caused men to be exploited as a result of the changes it has brought about. Indeed they seem to be extremely comfortable with and approving of the impact of feminism. They were very positive about what they regarded as female inclusion, in society in general and were concerned to assert that this is a matter of social justice. This is in conflict with Seidler's (1991) claim that working class men are more patriarchal than middle class men. None of them seemed to feel excluded or resentful of women, nor did any of them draw on the negative stereotypes associated with feminists in general. Whilst as a researcher, I was careful not to express any opinion on the topic at any

time during my interactions with the men, it is likely that they would have regarded me as an educated woman and an authority figure, so this may have influenced their choices in relation to their presentation of themselves in relation to this topic.

> *Lisa: Do you think there are certain jobs that are easier for men than women and women than men?*
>
> *Sean: Mmm I suppose there probably are like. Opportunities are better now in fairness.*
>
> *Lisa: With women getting more into the workforce, do you think men get left out of certain jobs?*
>
> *Sean: They don't really. I think most places now there's nearly equal women, well not equal, but you have a mixture of male and female.*

This quotation certainly suggests that the participant constructs feminism as a positive move towards equality, rather than a way in which men have been pushed aside. All of the men in the study regarded feminism as an advance for women which was necessary and fair. As the following quotation shows:

> *Lisa: OK. Do you think, its feminism that has made that change and made opportunities for people to try out different stuff?*
>
> *Liam: Oh I'd say so yes. I'd say a lot of people think differently. They had no say in years gone by. And maybe it was needed because they were that bit smarter.*
>
> *Lisa: Laughs Ah you're just sucking up!*
>
> *Liam: (Laughs) – I don't think so. I think in fairness that women are smarter than men but they weren't given an opportunity. I'm just sorry that men didn't sit back and listen to what they have to say. Yes. It's a good thing, because I suppose, two heads are always better than one anyway. Whereas before they just put the head down and*

the man was the boss and that was it. Everything was addressed to the man, but now it would be to Mr and Mrs, whatever. So that's important really. Two heads are better than one. In our lives it has been good anyway. She always has great ideas, different to what I would do. So I would definitely sit back and study what she had to say.

There is no hint here that this man feels powerless in his relationship, by including his wife in the decision making process. He regards it as a valuable contribution to the running of the household, which should be acknowledged. In addition he appears to construct himself as active in empowering his wife to do this. The phrase *"So I would definitely sit back and study what she had to say."* constructs him as active in including and empowering his wife. It does, however, also suggest that his inclusion of his wife's opinion on decisions was something he chose to do, rather than something that was inevitable. This does suggest that the symbolic capital (Bordieu, 1984) available to men by virtue of being men, is still available to them within the private sphere of relationships. This, however, was a single comment by one of the ten, so can in no way be regarded as representative of the sample in general.

All the participants did however, regard the gains made by women due to feminism in a positive light. There was also an implicit understanding that the issue of gender is one of power and that power can be abused. One participant put this very nicely:

Tom: Well I wouldn't know. I couldn't speak for all men, I could only speak for myself and say that I think the integration for equality has been very very important. I also think that like with any group, you have equality and you have extremes. That some women, when they get equality they arrive at a place that they are not happy with. Because em, "I don't have to be happy with this, I can be on one level with a guy, or I don't have to be under the guy, I can be over the guy". And I've come across that in life as well, where it is gone from, emm, I suppose, what's the word, oppressed. You'll get the opposite of that too, like. Until it balances itself out, you'll get women that will oppress men. Because they were oppressed, or it is perceived that they were oppressed anyway. That's the perception in a lot of cases. Women always had the ability to be happy where they were at or shift the bar for themselves. It's only

because, I think, society has given them the vote and they say "Oh we have the vote now, we have kind of power" and you know there are extremisms in it like. But for me as a man, I welcome equality like. At every level. Or I'd have no problem working for a woman, or anything like that.

This shows a sophisticated understanding of the power dynamic within the changes taking place in gender roles, and an awareness of the kinds of discourse that presents women as oppressing men (Farrell, 1993), whilst at the same time positioning this extreme response as a reaction to change which is partly understandable, but also a temporary "backlash". There is also a sense in some of the interviews that men have not even considered the possibility that they might be discriminated against in relation to women. A possible reason for this finding is that although Coward (1995) suggests that the crisis in masculinity is because men traditionally had access to work as a source of status, since these men do not regard participation in work as an aspect of status, their sense of their own masculinity remains undiminished by the movement of women into the workforce.

Summary of Masculinity, identity and symbolic capital

Whilst there is considerable evidence in these interviews that the men draw on models of hegemonic (Connell, 1999) masculinity in relation to what is acceptable work in which a man might be seen to be engaged in the public sphere, these are tied very much to masculinities based around physical strength rather than ascribed power *per-se*. All of the men constructed themselves as unsuitable for certain kinds of work because they are not men's work, and regarded some work as only suitable for women, as supported by Kauppinen-Toropainen and Lammi's (1993) research which suggests that the labour market is sharply divided by gender. This has implications for their participation in the "knowledge economy" (Boden and Miles, 2000). There is still some difference in the ways in which the men construct masculinity in relation to being the breadwinner, with many asserting that this is an aspect of gender roles that is changing rapidly, whilst some assert that it would be difficult for them to make this change themselves. In this manner half of the men appear to maintain the symbolic capital (Bordeiu,1984) of the status of breadwinner, despite not actually being employed. In relation

to the impact of feminism, all of the men regarded it positively. None of the men constructed themselves as having been excluded from the workforce or undermined as men because of this. This may well be linked to the social class expectations of working class men (Lloyd, 1985), which position them as physically strong and tough, rather than the middle class expectations of being intelligent and self reliant, which do not require physical strength and which have been challenged much more than the aspects of physical strength ascribed to masculine identities.

Age opportunity and symbolic capital

Age has been identified by Bradley (1996) as a "neglected dimension of stratification". In this study all of the men identified their age as being central to their current identity position. In terms of symbolic capital (Bordieu, 1984) this is interesting, because the men are of the age that Bradley (1996) describes as the "age elite": people who are middle aged and at the peak of their power and leave younger and older groups relatively powerless by comparison. These men however, have not participated in the world of work for many years and thus, do not seem to have access to this particular kind of capital. This code then, examined some of the discursive resources used by the men when discussing this aspect of their experience. The categories under which these discourses have been coded are as follows:

- Adaptability and change
- Age and social structure
- Current value of education

Adaptability and Change

The first code in this category relates to a common understanding amongst all of the men that adapting to change in order to fit in with social change is difficult .In many of the interviews there is reference to women being better equipped to deal with social and role changes than men. The following two responses were generated by my question about why men were less likely to engage with services than women. In this first excerpt the man constructs himself as different from other men in this regard:

Davie: Em I would say that yes, some fellas get set in their ways. They have developed habits and attitudes and are unwilling to change them. I've always been looking to improve and change if I can. I'm not afraid of it either, you know.

In many instances, as in this one, the man distances himself from being set in his ways, in the same way that discourses regarding female inclusions include references to a generalised "other" who would not be comfortable with the changes brought about by feminism. Other participants, however, constructed personal change as unlikely to occur except in exceptional circumstances:

> *Lisa: Do you think people change their lives very often?*
>
> *Stephen: It's pretty difficult because you're forced into something that you mightn't be able to get out of.*
>
> *Lisa: Right. And that's what I meant about change. You don't think people change voluntarily?*
>
> *Stephen: Very rarely. D'you know. Very, very rarely, I'd say.*
>
> *Lisa: 'Till life kind of forces you?*
>
> *Stephen: Oh I would imagine yes, well I suppose if people have ability and are lucky. And maybe like that, there are people who are thinking all the time about change. But*

I think you have a lot of people of the older generation, went along in the flow, where young people are different. They have a different outlook. A lot probably comes from where your education and I suppose in the, the times you live in as well like.

There is a sense in this discourse that social circumstances actually shape the degree and capacity for agency that an individual experiences. This was also accompanied by a sense that this is easier for women to accomplish, because they are more adaptable. This fits in with Coward's (1995) claim that women are better able to fit into the kind of portfolio style careers that are now available because they have been used to change in identity because of feminism. This was expressed by one of the participants as follows:

Lisa: Ok and do you think that there are certain jobs that men just won't do?

Chris: I think so. Men can be fussy I think. With women like they can adapt. There might be more openings for women, in supermarkets and stuff. There might be more jobs available, I think they're more willing to slot into jobs. I mean they go back to VTOS and they go to college and some of these women are married or would be single mothers and they do it all.

Whilst acknowledging the changes that have taken place in the needs of the workforce, this quotation also constructs women as more adaptable. As another participant put it:

Liam: […]I've noticed that actually. I don't know. They seem to be better at doing it really and they don't have more time. My sister is married with children and she's doing ECDL. Because she wanted to do it. So, I can't see why. I think they've just got more drive, girls. Definitely have more drive em so..(.)

When directly asked about their capacity to shape their own lives, the participants drew on ideas relating to the kinds of opportunities that have historically been available with an implicit understanding that it is too late to change now:

Gerry: I suppose career wise it would be difficult to choose and change, depending on your age and personality wise, I wouldn't know that at all.

Lisa: Why would it be difficult career wise?

Gerry: Well because the older you are the less opportunities you have. I think young people have a better chance, have a better chance, to act young, which is a good thing like. Because that can be half the battle, you know.

This quotation accepts as a given that life opportunities are limited once a certain age is reached. This is in line with everyday assumptions about the capacities of people to learn once they have reached a certain age as exemplified by Russell and Fahey (2004) in their research which suggested that the extent to which men identify age as a factor in their ability to learn is directly related to their likelihood of returning to the workforce. There are however, also suggestions from within the state agencies that taken this as an assumed truth. For example the government evaluation of the National Employment plan (National Economic and Social Forum report, 2006) attributes the failure of the initiative in its first year to the fact that this was when the programme was rolled out to "older participants". What is extraordinary about this statement is that it is made without explanation, as though this should be self explanatory. Nor is there any acknowledgement of the ageist assumptions inherent in the statement. It also appears to contradict Bradley's (1996) claim that those between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five, comprise an "age elite".

Age and social structure

There was certainly no doubt in the minds of these men about their ability to participate in the new prosperity:

Lisa: So do you think that once a chance has been missed it's very difficult to go back?

Liam: Well. It's hard like. It's not that difficult. But it would be em.. It's like anything like you miss the boat and, things rarely come around a second time.

This participant constructs himself as having "missed the boat" because Ireland was not prosperous when he was young. This discourse is also used as another way in which meritocratic discourses (Levitas, 2004) are resisted.

Stephen: Oh it would be. It would be. Age is a big issue, because the opportunities are not there and well at the speed this country is going now like, people have to have a bit of youth on their side like.

Lisa: Why?

Stephen: Well, the pace some of the work goes at now is unreal like. You only have to watch the construction. The speed they work unreal, and the hours, the length of the day. Whereas if you worked an eight hour shift like, the difference between that and working thirteen, fourteen hours and they have to because it's all deadline.

Lisa: So the actual physical strength that's required…

Stephen: Oh I can only imagine. The pressure I'd say mentally and physically.

This participant develops a picture of construction workers as having huge stamina, the ability to work long hours at speed and the capacity to be able to withstand physical and mental pressure. It would appear that these men have fallen into the early retirement category of manual workers, identified by Blythe (1982) at a much younger age than is generally expected, since the men range in age from 35 to 50. This would appear to be a response to a decline in manufacturing work and the unattractiveness of the work as a labourer on a building site. There is also a belief that it would be difficult to begin a new work path at their age by all but one of the men. This will be discussed further when looking at the men's responses to the topic of engagement in education and training.

Current value of education

Central to the ability to adapt to the changing needs of the economy is the ability to learn new skills and abilities. Beck (2001) argues that this is because individuals are expected to take responsibility for the consequences of a changing economy and if they do not, it is they who are at fault. Only one of the ten men in the study expressed any desire to gain new skills in order to start a new career. Only two of the participants apportioned blame to themselves for not participating in education. Here is how one put it:

> *Gerry: […]But I think people, especially over 35, you go into a rut or a routine. Fellas are not inclined to go back to school to learn because I suppose they feel it, I suppose they feel they've been a failure maybe in that part of their lives. They would have left their education at maybe sixteen or seventeen and I think they feel very inadequate going back the second time and em. […]I think it's a lack of confidence a lot of fellas over 35 who are unemployed for a certain amount of years they develop a kind of a fear factor as well.*

This participant suggests that part of the issue is a fear of failure on the part of men as well as a sense of being humiliated by being in education and training. In the second case, as in the quotation at the end of the last section, this is conceived as a lack of ambition:

> *Lisa: OK so do you think it has something to do with them being men? Do you think it's easier for women to go back?*
>
> *Chris: I think so, women are more open I think, to new experiences. Whereas men can get into a routine, especially if they're unemployed. They're used to going to the pub and they're used to going to the bookies office and that's their life. And they get into that and they're not really going to jolt out of it unless for an exceptional reason.*

This belief is discussed further under the category of "Ambition" in the next chapter, where the discursive resources used to describe "lack of ambition" are used in a much more positive and active sense, as a rejection of an unsuitable discourse.

Two of the men did believe that if they returned to education they would experience the threat of ridicule from other men:

> *Gerry: em I suppose there's that slagging. There is that and fellas would take that to heart, I suppose more than women. They might be more sensitive about it. Emm I suppose if you don't delve too much into it, then you just go for it if you're interested.*

This suggests that the need to preserve some kind of symbolic capital as a man may be implicated in the men's lack of interest in returning to education as adults, as being a student is regarded as a powerless position suitable for women and children. Some had actually experienced this kind of ridicule themselves as a result of participating in the course:

> *Lisa: I'm just wondering one of the things that agencies have noticed is that men over 35 often don't go on courses, they don't come to places like this. Why do you think that is?*
>
> *Davie: Well there's a very negative attitude some people have. Even a neighbour of mine used to be slagging me "don't say you're going to school again, put away that schoolbag." That's the truth. It was terrible like, you couldn't go up and down and do your own thing.*

This finding is likely to be linked to the finding that men constructed themselves as being only suitable to men's work (Kauppinen-Toropainen and Lammi, 1993) which conforms to the working class expectations of demonstrating physical strength, loudness and toughness (Askew and Ross, 1993).

This idea that going to a training course was likely to make them a source of ridicule, was also allied to discourses that were categorised in relation to the perceived value of education for the identity projects in which these men were engaged. Many of the men felt that the kinds of things that they learned in school were irrelevant to them:

Lisa: Em education. What influence do you think that what you learned at school had on the rest of your life?

Sean: (...) I really learned nothing in school

This was the general consensus amongst the men. As will be highlighted in the next chapter, this is not to indicate compliance with the kinds of discourses that identify the men in this category as lacking in ability- merely that it was irrelevant. There was also a sense that if a person left school without completing the Leaving Certificate, there was little point in thinking about further education or attempting any type of employment that would require it:

Lisa: So for example with your education, do you think that what happened to you at school had a big influence…

Liam: It can't because I didn't go as far as the leaving. I had meant to do it but it's just I only went to fifth year, see. So maybe if I had done the leaving it might have turned out different, it might have been different

Education and training are constructed as a missed opportunity and this determines the rest of your life, not because of the intrinsic value of what is learned, but because of the value put on educational qualifications by society. This is in line with Putnam's (1993) claim that education is a form of cultural capital that is contingent upon the employment and educational practices of the family in which the person is socialised.

Tom: Ahhm I think you go into em, well if you leave school early, you do kind of get a niche I think. Whether you're employed or not, you are inclined to fall into that and you make your own life don't you and em I mean if you've (..) if you excel at school, you leave school, you go to college and get a job. And you know that's that lifestyle and em

Lisa: (…) so it's all down to how (..) bright you are at school?

Tom: Ahhm I think a lot of it has definitely to do with the school system because if you don't pass your exams, you don't pass your exams and if you do pass your exams you do pass your exams. And then you can go further. So I mean if a lot of us probably left school early so we didn't fall into the category of excelling in school and passing the exam and going to college. So we left school and it was kind of to unemployment.

This quote is interesting because the participant resists the suggestion that educational attainment is related to ability. He corrects my understanding with, "*Ahhm I think a lot of it has definitely to do with the school system"*. This was a recurring theme in all of the conversations with participants and will be explored further in the next chapter.

The interviews suggest that not only do the men have a clear understanding of the subtle and intertwining reasons for their lack of participation in education when they were younger, they also believe that it is too late for them to engage in education for the purpose of career advancement at this stage of their lives:

Lisa: Could you imagine yourself at college now?

Liam: I'm not really sure you see, that's the thing about it. Maybe for one year. If I got on a course for…, if I spoke to a mediator and got the accounts technician and then an ECDL, we'll say part-time or something. If I got it into one year and I was out of school like. If you were guaranteed a job after that year. A fairly good job. Not a brilliant job. But em not three years no. I just wouldn't do it.

Lisa: Why not?

Liam: Getting too old for it. What am I, 43? I'll soon be 44. A few more years and I'd be near retirement. Twenty one years I was working for.

Without guaranteed results this man is sceptical about the usefulness of education as a means to participation in the workforce given his current situation. This is not to suggest that the men were antipathetic to the idea of education and training *per-se*:

Joe: Well I suppose you could never sort of go anywhere without your Leaving Cert up to quite recently anyway.

Lisa: and is it something you'd consider now?

Joe: Yea, I would consider it yes.

Lisa: what kind of course do you think would be (…) useful?

Joe: (…) ahh, I guess a thinking course (..) Maybe philosophy or something. Amm

Lisa: Something that you would enjoy?

Joe: Yes, I think more than my brain addled with em (..) stuff that I wouldn't be really (..) into. And facts and figures and that sort of thing. Emm I would maybe even do it just for the sake of doing it. For the enjoyment of it.

In this extract the participant corrects my question about courses having to be useful stepping stones to work and expresses an interest in learning "*for the enjoyment of it*".

Summary of Age, opportunity and symbolic capital.

This section examined the discursive resources used by the men in relation to their non-participation in and engagement with services. For all of the men age was a factor. This is in direct contrast to Bradley's (1996) suggestion that men in this age group represent and "age elite". In fact, the men seemed to accept unquestioningly the common sense assumption voiced by Russell and Fahey, 2004) that once a certain age had been reached learning in order to adapt of the needs of the economy was impossible. This demonstrated a resistance to the approach critiqued by Beck (2001) which suggests that people are expected to take individual responsibility for adapting to the needs of the economy. It was also found that two of the men identified ridicule from other men as a factor which discourages participation in training and suggested that this is because in maintaining the symbolic capital derived from construction of working class style models of hegemonic masculinity, the men would not position themselves

in an activity that would make them appear weak or powerless. The men all agreed that their participation in education as children was also lacking in any kind of value because they did not manage to attain the kind of cultural capital from education that made it possible to use it as a resource for social advancement. Some of the men did, however, suggest that they might engage in part-time educational courses, not necessarily for the purpose of acquisition of skills, but for reasons of personal development.

Chapter 5

Meaningful Negotiation of Identity

Introduction

Whilst the previous chapter examined some of the discourses that are accepted as being relevant to the identity negotiation of the group of interest in this study, this chapter examines some of the ways in which the men both resisted common sense understandings of their situations, as well as constructing for themselves alternative identity projects formed from the available discourses in society. The following are the codes and categories to which the discursive resources the men utilised were allocated:

Occupational and educational opportunities and cultural capital

- Class
- Educational opportunity
- Lack of ability

Current identity choices and Social Capital

- Relationships and social networks
- The family man
- Value of childcare

Involuntary simplification

- Ambition
- Materialism
- Quality of life and job satisfaction

Occupational and educational opportunities and cultural capital

This first coded set of discourses is based around the ways in which the men actively resisted the meritocratic discourses identified by Levitas (2004). They did this by using a number of categories of resistance. The first of these related to the social class into which the men were born and the economic opportunities that were available to them due to both the families into which they were born and the economic circumstances that prevailed at the time.

Class

Without exception all the men were clear that their social class, the prevailing economic circumstances when they left school and their current age, are the main reason for their being long term unemployed at present. They examine the ways in which the family into which they were born determined the life they led afterwards, often because they did not question the ways in which things were done around them. They also look at the ways in which the economy of 1980s Ireland impacted on their experiences. Two thirds of the participants used both of these types of explanations, the remainder focussing on just one. In their discussions about their position in the social structure, the participants often drew upon a well-established common-sense understanding that social mobility is a desirable form of progress that was denied them by their social circumstances. :

> *Tom: Emm (pause) Class is what it's about really. Way more than just a little bit. I think it's a very real influence. A very real place to be Emm (.) I think there's a distinction there like, a class distinction.*
>
> *Lisa: Defined (.) as what?*
>
> *Tom: To the individual (.) emm over time (..) everything, I think. You know, you don't get to bat otherwise.*

The use of the metaphor of class membership as a matter of "not getting to bat" argues for a sense of exclusion that is beyond the control of the man himself. This is a clear resistance to

the meritocracy discourse identified by Levitas (2002). This curtailment of agency is further elaborated in the following interchange:

> *Lisa: […] do you think you have any say in how your life turns out yourself?*
>
> *Mike: Well you're kind of acting your own life anyway. Em I know if you woke up in the morning and you wanted to become a surgeon, you wouldn't become a surgeon, you know in a year or anything like that, but you have a major say in it.*

This example demonstrates a clear resistance of the discourses that present advanced capitalist societies as meritocratic in origin. The suggestion that one is acting one's life, is not unlike the observations of Goffman (1959) that identity is enacted within a particular social context. Perhaps resistance to dominant discourses makes this more apparent to people. Certainly this resistance to meritocratic notions was found in all of the men. Levitas (2004) describes these meritocratic discourses as suggesting that "individuals have the responsibility to maintain themselves as marketable commodities […]The very existence of poverty is explained in cultural and supply-side terms, with an explicit rejection of structural explanations"(p 49).

The participants in this study, on the other hand, all offered explanations for their current life situations in terms of structural factors. In addition, all of the participants suggested that their current age means that they are not regarded by employers as useful participants in the new knowledge economy (Boden and Miles 2000).

> *Liam: […] with computers and everything, office work is becoming the thing isn't it? When I was young back in the seventies and eighties it was all geared towards manual work, wasn't it? Our age was geared towards manual work. We pushed towards either manual work, the priesthood for people that were good at school really, yes , but em, not much clerical really.*

This argument alludes to family circumstances as crucial to life chances in a competitive market economy, whilst the following quote elaborates this with the use of an example that

draws on a common sense understanding of the results of growing up in financially and socially impoverished circumstances:

> *Mike: […]Because it's your environment too. If you grow up in a high rise flat in Ballymun,[inner city North-side area of Dublin associated with social problems] it's very hard to be positive if there's drugs and there's (.) or you're born into a one-parent family or a two-parent family and they're fighting, you know. If you do grow up with that sort of negativity, I think no matter how positive you're born with or your personality, I think environment definitely plays a part.*

The impact of community and family on life chances are clearly expressed by this participant. In addition to resisting discourses of individual responsibility, the participant does not use the language of social blame that characterised the moral underclass type discourse when talking about groups who live in poverty. It is clear from these exchanges that these men have not experienced a meritocratic approach to participation in the world of work. On the contrary, they have experienced social class-based life opportunities as *very real.*

Another way in which structural factors were explained was in terms of the overall economic circumstances in which the men grew up. These discourses pointed less to the overall class structure and focussed on the lack of local opportunity in Kerry, drawing upon explanations about the Irish economy during the 1980s:

> *Lisa: It sounds as if you are saying that because of the age you are you missed the boat.*
>
> *Chris: Well, I wouldn't say I missed the boat like. (laughs) There wasn't any boat. There was no boat. At least there is a boat now like. I have done the course I've done now like, but FAS, they were not there. Yes, you couldn't miss the boat because there was no boat.*
>
> *Lisa: OK.*

Chris: I'm only looking at it from my point of view. Maybe I'm looking at it the wrong way, like. You see, it's probably different for you, I don't know were you here in the eighties, but...

Lisa: I do, I remember.

Chris: Well you know what I'm talking about. You understand.

The participant in this quotation works to get across that his current position is the result of limited life chances early on.

Educational opportunity

The participants were very aware that their social positioning had a huge impact on the opportunities and choices that they made in relation to education and training and made the link between being poor and their lack of educational attainment (Murphy and Walsh, 1996) These had to do with social expectations, economic circumstances and family responsibilities. There is no discussion of the concept of lifelong learning as it relates to participation in the world of work, nor any suggestion that they had accepted the moral responsibility identified by Griffin (1998) for improving their skills in order to comply with the changing needs of the economy. This suggests general resistance to these notions on the basis of structural factors that had determined their experiences. All discussed the hostile environment that they had encountered at school, and some of the aversive experiences they had encountered there. Although many said that these practices hastened their exit from school, it would be an overly- simplistic generalisation to suggest that there was a direct link between these experiences and a fear of engaging with the system, although there was a sense that such participation would put them in a powerless position that would open them to ridicule from other men, as discussed in the previous chapter.

They discussed their having left school early as a missed opportunity, not in terms of what they might have learned, which they considered largely irrelevant, but in terms of the status that the possession of a Leaving Certificate would have given them in entering the workforce:

the cultural capital that educational qualifications endow on the possessor (Bourdieu, 1984). The following quotation exemplifies this:

> *Tom: In my education in school like, there was very little opportunity because it was all emigration. So, I mean, you have lots of opportunity now. I mean, you have people now who can go off and do a trade. That was non-existent. All we had that time was (..) you have the building now, you have retail, you have hotels. We're a different country, we've a booming economy. I would imagine that most people go to college. It was very rarely you went to college when I was going to school.*
>
> *Lisa: Did it cross your mind?*
>
> *Tom: There was no way you could have afforded it. You could get no points or you couldn't afford it. So those two things were against you like.*
>
> *Lisa: and could you even kind of visualise yourself being a student?*
>
> *Tom: No. No, never. Because the only people that went were the people that were well off. That was the way society, and I'm not criticising society, that's the way it was like. The places weren't there, half the colleges weren't there anyway. The IT [Institute of Technology] was I'd say maybe only starting up. So you had em, you had less places and em just the same number of people. A small number of places and you had very few people who would go for them, you understand?*

This participant is arguing that because of his position in society and the economic opportunities available for someone from his social background, school and third level education were not an option. There is a sense that the participants do not regard third level education as foolish or a waste of time, it was simply something that was not available to them. Other financial and social reasons included parents not having the financial resources;

> *Lisa: And why is it that you never went to college?*

Liam: Oh my father couldn't afford it. He honestly could not afford that. He had a large family, like, em, I left school the same time as my sister, who left at (..) we started on the same day and we finished on the same day.

And the need to take on family responsibilities:

Lisa: And education?

Davie: Well my father died when I was young like. So that was kind of laid out then.

Lisa: You were expected to…

Davie: Well I mean in fairness I, em there was only three of us there like, and I was the eldest.

Lisa: Right

This participant argues that it was inevitable that he take on the role of provider for his family when his father died because he was the eldest child. Educational participation, or the lack of it, was also argued to be linked to the social expectations of parents and family positioning or what theorists describe as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984):

Joe: If a parent says "you have to stay at school. You have to make a go of it" for yourself and you have the ability to say "yes" and ground yourself there, that's great. But if you're someone like me, who never grounded myself in school but had the ability...

Lisa: Mmhmm

Joe: I mean, the actual ability I know I have today is slightly higher. I know I'd be average enough. It was useless to me. So it was a useless measure of me.

This participant actively resists the notion that educational attainment is a measure of ability. At the same time he sees education as a worthwhile endeavour in its own right. There is a

sense, in this case, that it may be regarded as a missed opportunity "*if you're someone like me, who never grounded myself in school but had the ability*".

Many also explained their leaving school as a reaction to being educated in a system they regarded as hostile:

> *Sean: Well, I grew up in a system. I grew up in a system of, Em, education that was (.) that was a very threatening environment…em at a very young age(.) dealing with em dealing with lay teachers and Christian brothers who (…) if you didn't learn (.) if you didn't learn your stuff, it was beaten into you. You know and (.) I don't know who they respected, but that was the system I grew up in. It, it was normal (.) it was normal for its time because everybody went through that, you know everyone that I knew had gone through the exact same thing. Em so anyone that was (.) I wouldn't consider myself intelligent at school. I wouldn't have considered myself slow either, somewhere around the middle (.) em and I'd have seen I suppose thinking back, I'd have seen young lads that would have been, would have been, slow, I suppose, or maybe not, slow is probably the wrong word. Em maybe just learning difficulties, you know. Em attention deficit disorder, all bloody these things we've names for now, you know. But at the time there was a lot of ignorance about them. Kids that were dyslexic would be an example, you know. Em I mean I remember a time when the em writing with your left hand was frowned on. So I would have thought yeah, that the way we were educated was very wrong. That forced education I mean with a (em) a kind of threat over you all the time you know. I mean I remember leathers and bamboos and all that kind of craic, you know. At that time like, and it wasn't that long ago.*
>
> *Lisa: And would that have impacted then on your attitude to school?*
>
> *Sean: Yes. Absolutely no doubt 100% impacted on me because I (.) I had this fear, going to school most days because of it.*

Lisa: Really

Sean: Yes! yes. I mean my very young days with the Christian Brothers was just filled with dread. You know. They were not happy times at all. Em. So I suppose going to school, I didn't look forward to it, we'll say. That was the early age. Em Secondary was, wasn't too bad. You know. Because we'd left the Christian Brothers so there was a bit of relief. But we were still dealing with lay teachers, who were (…) arrogant to say the least. Not all of them mind you. Not all of them. But em a share of them were like. They were hard so em (…)

This lengthy extract tells a story that is repeated again and again across Irish society. It constructs leaving school as a rational and understandable reaction to unacceptable treatment. This is also constructed in some instances as a missed opportunity:

Lisa: so do you think that you would have enjoyed learning if it had been done differently? That's what you're saying?

Chris: I most definitely would have enjoyed, em, my schooling, I would say, if things had been different. If there hadn't been the threat of violence. I may have stayed longer, but I can't really say. There weren't a lot of opportunities anyway around nineteen eighty or whatever it was in Tralee. There was very little, you know. Most people left school, em, got an apprenticeship, if they could get one. It was near next to impossible to get an employer to take you on and, em (.) the rest went to England (laughs) That was it.

This participant makes a subtle case for the complexity and multiplicity of factors that led to him leaving school without qualifications. He suggests that education was not enjoyable; that there were few opportunities to use education in the workforce (often resulting in emigration); and that early school leaving was the norm in his experience.

Lack of ability

All the men repeatedly resisted any suggestion that there is a relationship between educational achievement and ability. Most claimed to have been quite competent at school. For the most part education and training were not seen as a realistic ways of accessing work, because of the belief that opportunity had passed them by and that their age was against them. They did not, however, reject education and training as a concept; they were interested in pursuing personal interests through education, providing it was possible to do so on a part-time basis and it fulfilled their personal needs.

None of the men suggested that their lack of educational attainment was due to lack of ability. This is in direct contrast to the agency view outlined in Chapter 2 (e.g. Owens, 2000).

> *Sean: I used to do my lessons going to school in the morning, walking to school. I'd spend ten minutes going to school. That's about basically it. I never done an exam at school. I don't know why. If I was sick or missing or in England. Amm I went over to England for a couple of weddings and em I didn't do any exam. Through all the tests that I did at school, I passed them all. In CBS, I was probably third highest in the class, second highest in the class. I just found it easy to learn I suppose, and em there was a couple of teachers there that were dangerous. So I found it easier to learn than not to learn. Em I was actually missing half the year from one of those and still came in the top three.*

There is a clear argument here that lack of ability was not the issue. A number of factors were suggested as reasons for not continuing in education. Many of these had to do with the availability of finance. Lack of opportunity to make use of qualifications, meant that in many cases it was pointless to pursue them:

> *Lisa: So you had talents but you didn't…*
>
> *Mike: I just didn't bother pursuing them.*

Lisa: Why not?

Mike: In England it was a case of like you have to go to work. And em, when I came back then, I had time then, I was unemployed, so I could sit down and (..). I still want to play the guitar. I don't know would I have the patience now, though. A few people have offered to teach me how to play. Once I get the first few chords I'll be fine. I often just watch them play, but they'd be going too fast.

Lisa: So at 16, why did you decide, "No I'm not doing the Leaving Cert"?

Mike: I, em, left school and that was 32 years ago, and I was getting between sixty and seventy pounds a week after tax. And em I just signed up for it.

Lisa: So you didn't see the point of it?

Mike: No. And so I stuck that for about six or eight months and then I just went to Manchester. Went working over there.

In this discussion the participant attempts to move the conversation on to the ways in which he uses his time when he is unemployed. This theme will be addressed further in the next chapter. At that point in the interview, I was keen to find out why he left school and he clearly constructs himself, here, as being interested in pursuing a different goal, namely, getting paid. Other participants overtly criticised the notion that educational accomplishment is a measure of intellectual ability:

Tom: Of course it was irrelevant. All that unnecessary stuff on which your ability and intellect is measured on. All these things are useless. They're useless to me now as well, by the way (laughter). I didn't know that at the time. Exams and working towards something that was just "I've just got to get out of here. I don't want to be here". But then I turned around and because I had bad results in my exams and

people said, you know, show me your Inter Cert[5] results, show me (Well I didn't have a Leaving Cert) Show me how smart you are. As if that's how smart I am. "Well, I'm stupid". You know, but at the time, I didn't really want to be there. I'm not that stupid. (laughs) Stupid is a judgement anyway.

Lisa: Ok, so you know now that, well you believe now, that exam results don't reflect how smart you are?

Tom: Absolutely not.

Summary - Occupational and educational opportunities and cultural capital

The results in this section suggested that the men in this study in no way accept the individualising discourses identified by Beck and Beck Gershiem (2002). Instead they construct themselves in relation to the social circumstances into which they were born. They identify family circumstances as not providing the kind of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) that is necessary for occupational and educational attainment. Although the participants all agreed that they experienced aversive experiences in education, (in common with many Irish people of their age), they did not relate this to their lack of engagement with education in current circumstances, though many claimed the violence perpetuated by some of the teachers together with the lack of relevance of the material they studied to their everyday lives, speeded their exit from the school system. There was universal resistance to the notion that their lack of engagement with education and retraining was linked to lack of ability (Owens, 2000). In all cases the men constructed themselves as being capable of academic achievement given the right circumstances. In fact, some were interested in pursuing part-time education, not for work skills, but for reasons of personal development.

[5] Intermediate Certificate – State examination taken after the third year of secondary education, usually at around age 14.

Current identity choices

This code looked at some of the everyday discourses that the men utilised in constructing their identities on a day- to- day basis. Having identified the kinds of resistance to individualising discourses demonstrated by these men in relation to their lack of participation in work, employment rehabilitation programmes and retraining, it was also important to identify the discourses that the men utilised in constructing their identity. Although, as the previous chapter discussed, the men utilised some forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) in their construction of themselves as men, they did not have access to the kinds of cultural capital that is bestowed by, for example, being from a middle- class family, with the associated occupational and educational aspirations that it brings. Instead, the men focussed on family and community relationships. O'Doherty (2007) identifies the need to utilise social capital as a resource amongst the recipients of social care. His description of social capital includes family and community relationships, as well as membership of groups and work within the community.

These elements are explored in the three categories: Relationships and social networks; the family man; and the value of childcare.

<u>Relationships and social networks</u>

Interpersonal relationships were identified throughout the research as the most important site of identity construction for the men in the study. Maintaining relationships was considered more important than developing an occupational identity or financial well being for all of the men interviewed. This is also constructed as a personal value that the men always chose. One man explained to me, having discussed the reasons why Irish people had to immigrate to England for work, and why he came back to no work at home:

> *Mike: Em, well, what was good about here at the time? I suppose I was here. I was amongst my friends, amongst the people I know. Em. There was a load of us in the house, you know, and it was just easy like. Cause em Mommy was doing things for me*

you know! So I thought, why would I want to leave this? But that's what I felt like. Of course I was seventeen or something, when I first went over.

Lisa: and you missed your friends, so that was a big value for you. More important than money?

Mike: Em, Yep. More important than money because whatever money I had, em, it was no good, because I couldn't go out at the weekend. There were one or two people from work, but em they weren't my friends. This is the way I was thinking when I was seventeen "I wonder what my friends are doing". I just, I just, huh, got homesick. That was it.

This is in direct contrast to the picture of unemployed men as lacking social contact and experiencing relationship breakdown (Immink, 1998). A third of the men said that time for self and extended family was a positive advantage of being unemployed. The following participant mentioned the opportunity to take care of a parent:

Lisa: and is there any upside to being out of work?

Gerry: There would be. I mean there's more time for your (.) I suppose your personal grooming, more time for maybe a bit of travel if you want to, your own time for your family. You've more time to spend at home, say with a parent, especially if they're sick. Or whatever, you're there for them and they know you're there for them and I think they depend on you. And I think you get into that routine as well, that you're there for them and you have the time for them and for yourself. (..)

Lisa: So relationships are it for you?

Gerry: They're the most important yes. Very important, very important.

Despite what the men said about the usefulness of the social contact provided by work, the men in the study did appear to have extensive social networks of their own outside of a work environment. It is therefore possible that the men identified this aspect of work as important,

solely because this is the only area that is important to them, rather than because they lack social interaction in everyday life:

> *Lisa: And do you have a network of friends now?*
>
> *Tom: Em, at the moment, ahh, I do. I know lots of people. I have a good network now.*

The three examples that have been presented offer examples of the first two of O'Doherty's (2007) categories as being central to the experiences of the men. All of the men seemed to also be involved with some kind of group activity outside their immediate family circle. One was involved in his community through church membership:

> *Gerry: Yes, I would be involved in the church now. I've just got into the council of the lay Dominicans. I'm in that now for 20 years. You know I think that it facilitated me that I was unemployed and I did have time for joining the church and getting involved and learning more about my faith, which was very positive. And I think if I was working and away doing something, I probably wouldn't be doing that.*
>
> *Lisa: Am I right in thinking that's more important to you?*
>
> *Gerry: Oh yes, yea. Not being, em, smuggish or anything, but I think it would yea, I feel it's well, most important I suppose and I suppose if everyone really thought about it, the most important thing. The salvation of our souls (laughs).*

The remaining participants were all involved in some other kind of activity such as sporting clubs and raising funds for community projects. The following example shows how much pride the men took in their community involvement:

> *Lisa: And do you get involved in your community?*

Bert: Emm I used to get involved when I was minding the kids, I used to get involved with the national Tidy Towns[6] competition. We used to clean up a few evenings a week. When the kids were young I used to go out in the evenings. So that was another outlet as well. You'd be talking to people and that. I used to be involved in the local community centre as well. I raised £5000 for that back in the nineties.

Lisa: Really?

Bert: Yes, all on my own. That was quite a lot at that time. I went door to door for six months. Everybody knew me and nobody could refuse. That is the reason 'cause I'd be part of the community and everyone else. They praised me highly for it. I was the only one that kept a constant amount of money coming in. So it eventually turned into five thousand pounds. That was at a time when it was very important to get that. So like, we said in our area that we'd do it and I was determined to get the thing going, well started like. I've a lot of determination really, when I get a thing into my mind I like to see it through. With the help of all the community, of course.

This example of what O'Doherty points up as "Community and civic engagement" also presents this man as resourceful, capable and caring for his community in a way that they appreciate. It certainly resists any suggestion that he is a man lacking motivation and goals or one who is socially isolated (Immink, 1998). It also resists moral underclass and social inclusion discourses (Levitas, 2004) that suggest that either these men will not participate because they lack the moral will to do their bit for society, or that they lack the ability and motivation to make things happen in life. In addition, this quotation shows evidence of another of O'Doherty's criterion for social capital, trust. It would appear that he trusts that his

[6] Tidy Towns competition is a community based initiative in which towns of various sizes compete to be the tidiest town of their size in Ireland. It is run, primarily by volunteers.

community will get involved in activities for the common good and contribute to his fundraising for a community centre, because he is respected as a member of the community.

The family man

In relation to O'Doherty's claim that "reciprocal activities" and "norms and values" are also factors in the possession of social capital, the current category and the next one about childcare, indicate both. Some of the participants actively resisted the idea that childcare is not an appropriate male role. The role of family man repeatedly comes up in the interviews as one that is valid and desirable.

> *Chris: […] I think fellas are very happy nowadays to stay at home nappy change the baby, bring him out in the go cart, bring him down to the park, feed them.*

Taking care of children is constructed here as a real and viable role, that serves a useful function and ensures that children are cared for appropriately. In addition, some of the men see this as an inevitable consequence of the changes in the labour market:

> *Davie: […]Then a lot of them maybe they're minding kids, maybe their wives are out working. They can afford to do that now because there's a lot of house husbands and house partners at home with kids. They'd have to mind them and feed them.*

This suggests reciprocity over and above the traditional masculine roles the men espoused when talking about masculinity in relation to work. It would seem that whilst the men's social norms about appropriate masculine roles in the workplace accord with traditional norms and expectations in society, there is an overriding, relationship-based norm that is important too: the understanding that one must do one's part in the family. In other quotations there is also an acknowledgement that the man needs to be interested in the family home, and that this is a valid source of interest for a man:

> *Lisa: Why do you think it's becoming more widespread for men being at home?*

Joe: Emm I suppose (.) that em (.) maybe if the wife is working and they have children inside and if they have interest in the family home as well.

There is also active resistance to the notion that taking care of children is an exclusively female activity. Instead many of the men are utilising the relatively new, idea of "full time father" as a common occurrence in today's society:

Lisa: But that's from a woman's perspective. What about men? How has it [feminism] changed their lives?

Liam: I don't know has it changed life for them. It probably makes it easier for them because the women would be doing more work, that the men were doing before and all that.

Lisa: Like?

Liam: Like you could have a man and the woman could be working. He could turn out to be looking after the house and the kids, doing the cooking or (.) before you wouldn't have men doing that at all like. Ten or fifteen years ago you wouldn't have men doing that. And now they're full time fathers, most, a lot of them. You know. The wives are working and that.

Here the opportunity to take care of children full-time in the home is categorised as a positive advantage for men, whilst at the same time being described as easier for men than being the breadwinner

Despite the very masculine constructions of work roles utilised by the men, there was also resistance to the idea that work defined as feminine is unacceptable in the domestic sphere:

Lisa: You said earlier on that men would be embarrassed to be seen sweeping up and that, do you not think they would be embarrassed to be seen taking care of children?

Joe: No. Because they're not in the public eye all the time. They're at home on their own. The only people that would be calling to them would be friends or somebody. Do you know what I mean? Or somebody calling for something to the house. Whereas if you're inside in a bar, everyone's coming in looking at you, or in a shop or whatever. You know what I mean?

This participant makes the distinction between needing to be overtly masculine in the public sphere, whilst this is not necessary in the private sphere of the home. One participant, who describes himself as having been a house husband whilst his wife was out working put it like this:

Bert: Because, em, em, my factory that I was working in had kind of almost closed down and they got rid of me see. So I said "Now's my chance". My wife's is in a permanent job […]. She earned more. I've said it was more secure. I didn't mind. I was quite happy to mind the children.

The participant sees himself as seizing an opportunity, but also solving an emerging family difficulty:

Bert: It was Ok like. I'd have stayed there, I suppose, if it had stayed open. It was slipping away and it eventually closed down. I hadn't really thought about it, but at the same time the kids were coming up and we were just wondering what would we do with them. We didn't want to have to put them out to childminders and that. If we'd had to, I suppose we would have. For a while, anyway. But it worked out OK like. I didn't mind doing the job.

Lisa: And did you find there was a period of adjustment to being at home full time with your kids?

Bert: Sure I didn't really. I was always interested in my family (.) and what was good for them, so why not take care of them?

As a man with a stake in the status of homemaker, he constructs this activity as "the job", thereby resisting the ideological notion that homemaking has a low status.

Value of childcare

In addition to the role of care-taking being regarded as both desirable and legitimate for these men, there was also a strong suggestion from all of the men that this was a social value that was important. There was strong adherence to the social norm that children need proper care and attention. The sense of a strong feeling of the importance of children being cared for by one of their parents was also reiterated a number of times. This is particularly strongly expressed in the following quotation about pre-school care:

> *Lisa: And you think that's nice for them [men caring for children full time]?*
>
> *Joe: Well I always think that parents, well at least one of the parents should be home for their kids. You see maybe it is that the wife has a job, a good job, and maybe the husband was made redundant or something and can't get a job. Maybe he feels that he's better off in the house, one of them in the house. You know, looking after the kids and all that. There's nothing worse than throwing kids into a crèche. Internment camps, I call them.*
>
> *Lisa: Really?*
>
> *Joe: You'd be watching the mothers firing them in the door. "Get in there". Fire them out the door again at five o'clock. I think it is very bad for children. I mean they go to school long enough.*

This quotation draws on a recurring theme of contemporary common sense, that children should have the full-time care of a parent. There is also a sense that school is not a desirable place for children to spend their time in this quotation. In addition, there are a number who mention the enjoyment that men experience when taking care of their children:

Lisa: Right. And do you think it's embarrassing for men to be seen doing certain jobs?

Sean: Well you know, when we had kids I used to love pushing the pram down town.

Lisa: Why?

Sean: Amm, kind of a think it was nice. I just liked it. The first day my last daughter went out to school, we were waiting and waiting and then we went out the gate and em, oh she was in her uniform and everything and I just put my hand out to hold her hand going to school and no she wouldn't hold my hand. She was something like five going on fifty that same morning. But it was lovely.

Lisa: Independence?

Sean: Mmm

Lisa: So do you think that being out of work makes men spend more time with their families?

Sean: Well, you do give them more time, yeah. You have to. I mean, since I left my wife, I see my kids nearly every day. Or every second day or whatever, and em, we get on great.

It is interesting that this is in response to a question about doing jobs that are embarrassing. This man resists any suggestion that this might be applied to taking care of children by recreating this as a positive experience for himself. There is also a sense that these men have created for themselves a valuable and worthwhile role outside of the world of paid employment:

Lisa: Do you think that working full-time at home with the kids has been good for you?

Bert: Well it hasn't been bad anyway, and it has been very good for the kids like. To have someone there to kind of keep a check on them and bring them up the right way. I'd rather be with them than have them with somebody else. Some people, they just don't care. They just let them run around wild, I think anyway. They should be with their parents.

One man went so far as to suggest that fatherhood provides access to social status :

Gerry: Yes that's a good question. The roles in society are changing so much. I think it's a kind of a, especially if they're not married, I think it's a bit of a boast today, I think. Isn't it. To have a baby and show him off or her off. You know it's a kind of, I suppose it makes them feel better maybe and a bit of a status symbol too. That they have a partner and some fella down the road doesn't. I think there's a bit of that as well. That's a bit of macho.

Summary of Current identity choices

The discourses identified in this section suggest that the men in this study constructed their identities in terms of their relationships and social networks, their responsibilities as fathers to their families and by valuing childcare as a valuable and worthwhile activity. All of these elements accord with the characteristics ascribed by O'Doherty (2007) to social capital. The men are involved in their communities, they take care of elderly relatives, they dedicate themselves to their families and they take care of their children, not leaving them to the mercies of a childminder. This account certainly shows a strong resistance to the Moral Underclass type discourse (Levitas 2004), which would suggest they were morally deficient and not "doing their bit" and also would resist the social exclusion type discourse which suggests that the men lack skills and abilities, since they are clearly capable of making a community contribution as well as sharing in their family responsibilities.

Involuntary simplification

This final code examines the ways in which these men resisted some of the taken-for-granted assumptions about what it means to be a person in the social world. It identifies some of the ways in which the men constructed ambition, social status and materialism. The argument is made that these men are utilising some of the ideas put forward by the Voluntary Simplification Movement (Ezioni, 2004), a social movement which has rejected many of the aspects of consumerist society, including an identity based on materialism, because it trivialises identity itself. Whilst the people in Ezioni's categories have made a choice to reject materialism and status from the position of giving them up, it would appear that the men in this study have developed this value system as a result of not participating in these identity projects because structural factors meant that they never got the opportunity. For this reason I am describing them as a new category under this classification, namely: involuntary simplifiers.

Ambition

In the initial stages of the research there was very little indication that the participants felt ambitious. I asked each of them what they might have liked to be when they were a child and in each case there was a complete absence of remembering identifying with any particular occupational identity:

> *Lisa: And when you were a kid did you have any idea? You know how children speculate about what they want to be when they grow up..*
>
> *Sean: No, no, I can't remember, to be honest.*

All of the men actively rejected the idea that ambition and the pursuance of status were necessarily worthwhile activities. This was done in a variety of ways. Some talked about parental pressure on young people:

Gerry: I think it, it's very much a rat-race now Lisa isn't it, and points at school and trying to get into different careers and courses and colleges. And there is an awful lot of emphasis, obviously there has to be emphasis, but I think there's an awful lot of pressure on young people today, to excel and beat their peers. And a lot of them might be pushed into careers by their parents that they don't even want. And it happens that people have qualified as teachers and doctors and have never really practised that profession. It hasn't suited them. (…)

Some talked about the futility of constant striving:

Tom: You will never have enough and it just becomes a habit. It could become a habit for me. I'd get a job. I'd get my wages, whatever and then I'd be "This isn't for me, I want something better". Some people call that aspiring to success like. You know, setting their goals higher. But for me, like I'd never be happy. I'd get the letters after my name. I know I would, like. But what then? I know that I have to be happy with where I am today, otherwise the horizon will shift again and the bar will go higher.

Lisa: So what you're saying is, that ambition is em (.) it's not satisfying ultimately?

Tom: Ambition can be healthy, once it's in a balance. If you don't have balance with ambition you become em (..) you become obsessive.

None of the men were at all comfortable with the idea that a person's status is related to the kind of work that they do. Take the following quotation:

Lisa: OK. So do you think that the kind of work that people do influences how they are treated?

Chris: oh absolutely yes. Definitely. I think that, em, I think if you're somebody, say a person …. I'm trying to think I was going to say menial jobs, but there's no menial jobs really. Jobs have to be done, like. But say you have a bank manager and somebody that's not a bank manager. I'm not going to mention a job you know

because it would be unfair. So I would think the bank manager would be treated better, than someone in a lesser job, we'll say.

This man is deeply uncomfortable even acknowledging that some jobs have more status than others, because this is not how he wants to measure people.

Materialism

Bauman (1989) suggests that the development of personal identity has been trivialised through consumerism "individual needs of personal autonomy, self definition and authentic life or personal perfection are all translated into the need to possess and consume, market offered goods"(p 189). All of the men were also very critical of the goals of materialism and saw their active and ongoing resistance to using the possession of money and consumer goods as a source of identity, as personal progress:

Lisa: So do you feel on the other side that society and people in it, look down on you because you're not working?

Tom: T'would be my own stuff like. I know that no-one judges me because I'm unemployed. But em, I see people attaining success and I see people moving on and things like that and where I'm at now I'm (..)

Lisa: You're learning things that you think are useful right now?

Tom: Oh absolutely yes. Especially when you think that you're in a job and for me, I thought it was the measure of who I am. To be working have money, pay my bills.

This, "life journey learning experience" idea was very prevalent and is encapsulated by the following quotation:

Lisa: Money and self esteem, are they linked?

Mike: Ehh, (.) not today. It's a funny place to be unemployment. I took it for granted always that I'd work. I have a hard job at the moment to do nothing. I used to always be doing something. And I now realise that you don't have to be doing something to be something or to be someone. You know?

Lisa: OK. Right. So part of it is good, being not working?

Mike: Oh absolutely yes. Oh yes, the ability to actually sit and not do something, for me would be a very hard thing to do. I would always have been an up at eight man. For me to have day after day (well I get up anyway) but not to actually be somewhere, maybe to have time to myself. Sometimes it's hard like, because I have all this sitting with myself.

Another participant put it like this:

Chris: I think that even without parents. It's OK to be talking about now, you know, life, career, when you're a child and you don't understand about life and career, you're taking measures off of everything around you.

Lisa: And you mentioned that one of the measures is (..) the ability to buy stuff and own stuff?

Chris: Oh materialism, yes. Probably, what do you want, like? You want what you don't have. Have you got parents then or have you got (.) Be happy with your lot, early on. That's when you should stop looking. Otherwise the horizon keeps shifting all the time if you're looking for, what the neighbours have got.

This quotation encapsulates many of the ideas that the men expressed in relation to materialism. They rejected the notion that a person's value can be measured in monetary terms, and believed that constant striving for money was ultimately unsatisfactory because it can never be attained. This is very much in line with what Inglehart and Abramson (1995) identify as the growth of post-materialist values.

Quality of life and job satisfaction

The previous section is closely related to the notion of quality of life for these men. The men in this study constructed identity projects around family and community rather than around occupational identity or wealth. This was suggested by all of the participants in the study:

> *Lisa: It sounds to me like quality of life is more important to you than money?*
>
> *Tom: Absolutely yes. T'is very important. Look after your health and whatever. And em, meeting people and everything else is quite important. Like the saying goes "I don't care too much for money, 'cause money can't buy me love".*

Rather than constructing themselves as casualties of an inhospitable system, the men constructed themselves as living to the best of their abilities:

> *Lisa: So are there any upsides to being out of work?*
>
> *Liam: Plenty of free time. Get all those shopping and things done that I always promised I would do.*
>
> *Lisa: So you've made...*
>
> *Liam: You can be sure I have.*
>
> *Lisa: A life for yourself.*
>
> *Liam: Yes: well you see I have my house. There was a lot of work on that to be done. And I had travel then, to see a few places. I wouldn't say that to social welfare but…(joint laughter) You've more free time and less stress. I mean, I can come to town when there is no traffic, unless I strike it very unlucky, and em, you know I can stay any length of time I want like and I, you know, there's no big panic like that.*
>
> *Lisa: So there's quality of life in it?*

Liam: Oh quality of life yes. Unfortunately the financial side is the down side of it but, you can't live every way.

Lisa: OK, so really, if it wasn't for the money…

Liam: Oh we'd have no problem. I'd find things to do with my time. There'd be no problem that way. I'd be naturally curious anyway and I keep busy.

Lisa: And are you involved in your community and that kind of thing?

Joe: Oh I'd be involved in the soccer club like, so I have that side of it.

Lisa: So you'd get involved locally?

Joe: Oh I would yes, a lot around here.

Lisa: So you do have some social contact.

Joe: Oh I would yes, completely, but I'm just saying it's a different …if it was done in the day, but it's normally in the evenings now and the weekends. When you're working you're working during the day. If you were working a straight day, you wouldn't have time for other things.

Lisa: So ideally if you could afford to, shorter hours would be…

Joe: Oh perfect. I em, would prefer part-time if I could get it but, they don't even seem to be there now.

This man constructs himself as having developed a meaningful way of living his life and structuring his time and does not see that work would add anything to his life other than money. Indeed, the impact on his quality of life might well be negative. Another way in which the quality of life available to the men if they were working was related to the kinds of

work that were available to them (the men had all worked in either factories or in construction). There was a sense that this kind of work was not enjoyable. Many of the men expressed the view that there were a variety of jobs that they would find demeaning or unacceptable. This suggests that they believed that some work was less attractive than being unemployed:

> *Lisa: And are there some jobs that it's better to be unemployed than do them then?*
>
> *Mike: (..) em (…) it would be…do I think that there would be some jobs that it would be better to be unemployed than do? For me there would be a string (laughing) of jobs I would rather not do.*
>
> *Lisa:. OK. What?*
>
> *Mike: Emm (..) What wouldn't I like to do? Em. Work inside in em work inside in a bar or hotel. I don't think I'd like it. The hours. I don't think I'd enjoy the hours. I don't think I'd like (…) I don't think I'd like dealing with (laughing) I don't think I'd like dealing with people at all. It's actually that. A good friend of mine who worked in the bar work for years - used to wonder how did he control them. I'd go insane. I suppose working in a factory. Working in a factory, because I did factory work. I hated it. A conveyor belt system, where you're doing. You don't have to think. There's no think involved at all it's just…I was making carburettors for chain saws. And (ahh) you get a tray of these carburettors and you had small little components and you had to do so many of these in the tray in an hour and it was kind of (.) next one along you know. Any job basically that doesn't require thought em I would not do.*

This quotation introduces a discourse that was utilised by all but two of the men: the idea that work should be personally satisfying. Connell's quotation of Marx about working class occupations is interesting in this context:

> He becomes transformed into a simple, monotonous productive force that does not have to use intense bodily or intellectual faculties. His labour becomes a labour that anyone can perform. Hence competitors crowd upon him on all sides. (Connell, 1995 p 96).

This also suggests that although the men in the study are working-class, they aspire to the kinds of work that provides satisfaction normally associated with middle-class occupations. This would suggest a move away from the kind of instrumental attitude amongst working class men identified by Tolson (1977).

> *Tom: You know you train your job. You do forty hours a week at it and then your capacity to do it is like second nature. So your mind actually wanders onto something else, as escapism like. So instead of being and doing what I was at and integrating like, I'd actually plan my evening and my weekend and find myself working towards that.*
>
> *Lisa: So you were bored by your job?*
>
> *Tom: Yes. You find that like. A lot of it was escapism.*
>
> *Lisa: And was the concept of getting job satisfaction ever something you thought about?*
>
> *Tom: Never introduced once in my life! Not ever was I ever told, do what you're happy at Tom. (Joint laughter) You know, no one ever said that to me. "You don't have to stay there if you don't like it." It was always, I grew up in an environment where you made your bed and you lied in it. And that was it. Even my marriage was like that.*
>
> *Lisa: So you felt obligated to do things that didn't fulfil you in any way?*

This participant constructs himself as disenchanted with working-class models of work, having been excluded from the very concept of job satisfaction. As Glastra et al (2004) argue, in knowledge-based economies, employers need to provide opportunities for creativity for employees.

> *Liam: Yes, something that I would have a natural flair for. Something that I could be good at, that I would be striving to do. Although, I am naturally flaired at the assembly work, but I wouldn't necessarily enjoy it.*
>
> *Lisa: So you have done jobs all along that just came along, but you didn't get any enjoyment out of?*
>
> *Liam: Em, a few, yes. Yes, quite a few actually, yes.*
>
> *Others identified creativity and responsibility as relevant:*
>
> *Davie: I think that the ones I enjoyed really are the ones where I had a bit of responsibility like, em, when I was backing cranes or left alone to do my own thing. Let me be your own boss kind of thing. It's ok. But if you're working in a group, just em…it's ok for a few days, but after that it gets a bit tedious and what not.*

There was a sense that the working-class jobs that the men had been involved in or observed were intrinsically unsatisfying. In addition, a number of the men suggested that the ways in which control is exercised in working- class work- places was bullying, and that they did not enjoy this:

> *Liam: I think it's actually better for the em, for the em, jobs like, say working on building sites. It's good to have a few girls on site. I mean especially if they're in a supervisory capacity. It helps an awful lot.*
>
> *Lisa: Why's that?*

Liam: It just it breaks the … what do you call it again, the status quo of having someone shouting and roaring. Well I could say it's grand to have a lady in charge.

Lisa: Men are more aggressive?

Liam: Oh what. You're joking. The majority of the people I worked with, most of them are, kind of like going back a hundred years ago or something. Like out working like em, up in the Ryan hotel and em, a girl is over the foreman and it was just brilliant.

Lisa: Really?

Liam: Mmhmm

Lisa: What was different about the way she treated you?

Liam: Em like em if she asked you to do things for her there was no ploys and she had no fights. It was much better doing things for her, than for someone who would ask you impolitely.

Lisa: And why do you think men do it the other way?

Liam: Oh well there's that macho man thing. You have to prove something. Cause most of them are trying to prove something anyway.

Lisa: And why do you think men need to prove something?

Liam: (..) em, I think em well its low self esteem isn't it? If a person has low self esteem and he's made foreman he em, the world is his oyster kind of thing, to him. Well he's got men under him. It's brilliant. You know!

Lisa: Yes.

Liam: And they do it and they abuse it.

This quotation supports Lloyd's (1985) suggestion that working class masculinity is constructed around being tough, loud and good at fighting, and being better at doing than thinking. It would appear that these men have found this identity unsatisfactory and rejected it and the occupations that go with it, rather than be subjected to the kinds of male competitiveness and powerlessness associated with male working-class occupations (Seidler, 1991).

> *Lisa: So you're talking about the opportunity to express yourself creatively in your work.*
>
> *Mike: Well at work anything that's creative or anything that involves using your head. Or anything that, where you have to use your own initiative. I suppose basically not being told what to do. I don't mind something being explained to me. I don't like being told. If something is explained to me. If I don't know about something I'll ask about it. And that's fine. But do this, do that, do this, do that. No. (bursts out laughing). I think that may stem from my school days you know. Rebelling against it. Because I had that. Do this, do that, do this, do that. With a threat you know. And em May be maybe, I'm rebelling because of that. But I don't know. Maybe I just don't like being told what to do. (laughing) There's nothing wrong with that either. At least I don't see anything wrong with it.*

This would appear to indicate that the men in this study have rejected the kinds of monotonous jobs that were available to them as well as the kind of control mechanism employed in favour of a rejection of materialism and a focus on quality of life.

> *Tom: Em, yes. I'd rather be happy at work than not .. I'd rather be happy at work and getting little money than unhappy at work and getting big money.*
>
> *They focus instead on ways of finding contentment.*

Mike: Happiness in your home environment and contentment with what you are. But I mean you have to be happy with who you are and your own circumstances. Job. You have to be happy in your job and happy with your environment.

On using the time in creative and enjoyable ways:

Lisa: What's the upside?

Sean: The upside is you've more time, you've more time at home. If you want to do things. If you're a person that likes to stay at home, like gardening and that kind of thing. All the houses that you were getting twenty years ago from the council, there was plenty of room in the garden, so that you could do gardening. Or em, fishing, whatever you want to.

And on keeping a positive outlook:

Sean: So money doesn't make the person happy.

Lisa: So what does?

Sean: Yourself and your reaction. Your outlook towards life and everything. I mean if you had a great night out on a Thursday night before you won the Lotto[7], I'm sure you'd have a great time when you win the Lotto, but if you had a bad outlook, the Lotto would do nothing for you. I could be wrong. I don't know.

Lisa: so you thing the big thing is your outlook?

Sean: Your outlook.

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[7] National Lottery.

Summary of Involuntary simplification

This section makes the argument that in rejecting materialism and ambition as ways of constructing an identity these men are echoing many of the ideas put forward by the Voluntary Simplification Movement. Etzioni (2001) suggests that the people who actively resist the consumerist and status-driven identity projects are voluntary simplifiers He suggests three categories of participants in this social enterprise. “Downshifters” are financially well-off people who voluntarily give up using certain consumer goods and move to a less conspicuous form of consumption. “Strong simplifiers” may, for example, actually give up high paying jobs and live off savings, spending their lives doing voluntary work. They may also reduce working hours or switch to lower-paying but more rewarding jobs. This category also includes the growing number of people who take early retirement in order to have more leisure time. The third category is known as “the simple living movement”. Such people differ from the other two categories in that they have a clearly articulated philosophy and actively resist participation in all forms of consumerist society, preferring to use what they can produce themselves.

I would like to suggest a fourth category in addition to these three, that of the involuntary simplifier. These are men who, because of their social circumstances, did not have the opportunity to participate in the perceived meritocratic society. They have therefore developed a philosophy that has many factors in common with voluntary simplification, except the voluntary nature of the lifestyle choice. Occupational identity as a form of self definition became unworkable for this group because the kinds of work to which the men had access in factories and on building sites lacked stability, and an opportunity for creativity or for taking on responsibility. It was also found to be quite an unpleasant working environment because of the ways in which they were treated. The men reject materialism and ambition in favour of a focus on quality of life, and the formation of social capital as their primary means of identity construction. This suggests, in common with other categories of simplifier, that they have developed their own value system, which is divergent from mainstream opinion and rejects the idea of identity built on consumerist values.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This section will summarise the findings under the six broad codes of discursive resource that were identified. It will reflect on the usefulness of the findings for informing social policy and further investigations and will conclude by recommending the reintroduction of schemes similar to Community Employment, that were discussed in Chapter 1, in order to support the men in their formation of social capital (O'Doherty, 2007).

Before summarising the findings, it is important to return to the initial question posed by this research:

What is it about the way in which individuals in the target group (LTU men over the age of thirty-five) understand their experience that makes them less likely than other groups to avail of education, training and employment rehabilitation opportunities?

I attempted to access this information by focussing on three main areas:

- Individual understandings of or attitudes to work
- Beliefs about the impact of engagement with education and training
- Understandings about what it means to be a person in the social world, in particular what it means to be a man

Accepting and resisting common-sense assumptions

The first three codes in this analysis were grouped together in Chapter 4, under the broad heading of "accepting and resisting common-sense assumptions". As noted in Chapter 1, from a discursive psychological perspective (Wetherell, 1996), common-sense understandings can have a huge impact on the identity of individuals, by defining the available identity discourses upon which they are able to draw. In the case of these men, the common- sense understandings held by the many state-funded agencies who work with them, is that they lack the skills and resources to engage with the world of work and the meritocracy (Levitas, 2004).

Consequently, the solution to this problem is to use humanistic models of helping to empower them to participate. The three codes under this heading examined the ways in which discourses, demonstrating generally held assumptions about unemployment, masculinity and age, are used and resisted.

Unemployment and identity

Whilst the discourses that the men used to define themselves did, in some cases accord with common-sense assumptions about this group, there was also significant resistance to some of the commonly held beliefs. The men did acknowledge that structuring of time was a significant advantage of participation in the world of work (Jahoda, 1982). However, they also seemed to have found alternative sources of activity, as identified under the code of Meaningful Identity Negotiation. They did not regard work as a source of identity, nor did they regard it as a source of status (Jahoda, 1982). They also resisted suggestions that they lacked motivation and self-confidence, (Immink, 1998), or that they were morally deficient, as suggested by moral underclass discourses, or inadequate and lacking in ability, as suggested by social integration discourses (Levitas, 2004). The men in this study also seem to have rejected the work ethic discourse (Bauman, 2005) in favour of approaches which place an emphasis on quality of life.

Masculinity, identity and symbolic capital

In approaching this research, one of the possible lines of enquiry introduced in Chapter 1, was a reflection upon whether or not the reason for the lack of engagement by this group was precisely because the research participants are men; therefore they are unwilling to access supports because the price for doing so, in terms of personal humiliation as a man, is too high. There was little evidence that the men in this study were experiencing a "crisis in masculinity" (Franklin, 1984). They did, however; adhere to traditional working-class masculine roles. They drew upon the sources of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) that are generally available to men of their class: men are stronger than women, and work involving physical strength is manly work; what Connell (1995) describes as "hegemonic masculinity".

This suggests a specifically working class model of work (Lloyd, 1985) which portrays working class men as strong, and good at doing things. In the case of the importance of who earns the money, however, findings were somewhat contradictory, since half of the men thought it did not matter and the other half were somewhat ambivalent about the idea of giving up the symbolic capital accorded to the man as breadwinner (even if he hasn't had a job for several years). This use of symbolic masculine capital enabled them to avoid any sense that they were threatened as men by women who were taking up male roles, leaving them with no role (Farrell, 1993). In all cases the men in this study constructed themselves as regarding the impact of feminist thought in a positive light. They also did not regard work in the private sphere of the home (taking care of children and home-making) as exclusively female activities.

Age opportunity and symbolic capital

There was an assumption amongst all of the men that their age was central to their lack of participation in the world of work and the various statutory systems put in place to assist their re-education and re-integration into the world of work were of no use because of their age. Whilst they resisted any suggestion that they were unable to participate in learning due to deficiencies in skill (Owens, 2000) they did not see the relevance to the world of work (or indeed to life in general) of what they learned at school. They were aware of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) bestowed upon those who come from the kinds of families who use education as a means of establishing a position in the workforce, but believed that it was too late for them to avail of it because, even if they were to retrain, they were too old to start a new career. The kinds of work that they were used to, they contended, require physical strength and stamina, and they were past that, and the likelihood of being accepted into a new career, following re-education, was too remote to make the dedication of a number of years to the project a worthy risk. The men did not, therefore, benefit from the symbolic capital of the "age elite" (Bradley, 1996) usually accorded to middle-aged men who are in employment, precisely because they are not in positions of power. Instead, they were stereotyped, by themselves and even by the state (NEAP action plan) from a relatively young age, as being

too old. All the men presented the argument that men of their age are generally "set in their ways" and could thus not be re-educated. However, a proportion of the men would be interested in education for the purpose of enjoyment and personal interest.

Meaningful negotiation of identity

These three codes examined the discourses that the men actively utilised in constructing and presenting themselves. In place of the kinds of identity generally ascribed to unemployed men, the men in this study chose alternative discursive resources in their identity projects. They also strongly resisted a variety of discourses that are in common usage about them and also selected alternative discourses to those usually ascribed to them.

Occupational and educational opportunities and cultural capital

The men in this study strongly resisted any suggestion that they had failed to take part in a meritocratic society due to any deficiency on their part (Levitas, 2004). Indeed they actively resisted the suggestion that there is a meritocratic society at all. They identified reasons relating to family circumstances and poor economic opportunities in Ireland at the time they left school, as being most relevant to the kinds of employment they entered. They were also very aware of what Bourdieu (1984) describes as cultural capital: the kinds of beliefs and practices that enable families to pass on educational advantage to their children, and how this positioned them in the labour market. Without exception, the men stressed that they had been good at school, and though they acknowledged that aversive educational experiences may have hastened their exit from the school system, this was one of a number of factors relevant to the structure of Irish society, which meant that they did not stay in school and obtain the qualifications that would have prepared them for the knowledge economy (Boden and Miles, 2000). None of the men constructed themselves as lacking in ability or skills (Immink, 1998). Rather, they drew attention to the economic circumstances that prevailed in Ireland in the 1980s; their own family circumstances, and the occupational expectations and opportunities of the social class to which they belong.

Current identities and new discourses

In place of the identities that the men resisted, the men constructed themselves as men who were involved in their local communities, who had a range of relationships and who valued their families and the work of taking care of children. Despite the findings on the kinds of hegemonic masculinities the men constructed for themselves, work in the private sphere of the home and childcare were excluded from this. One man even suggested that having a baby was a status symbol for a man. There was a strong belief in the importance of family life, and a suggestion that the creation of a home for children and parental involvement in their care was essential for their well-being. The men also described involvement in a variety of activities within their communities, including fund raising for community centres, involvement in local sporting organisations, charity work and so on. This suggests that this group is involved in the formation of social capital (O'Doherty, 2007) and that this supports their identity construction. The findings also accord with Ball and Orford's (2002) finding that unemployed men engage in "work-like activities", since these men appear to dedicate themselves to family and community activities.

Involuntary simplification

The men also rejected consumer- based identity projects (Bauman, 1989), preferring instead to reject materialism and ambition as futile exercises; this is congruent with their rejection of the work ethic as a means of defining themselves. This discourse is similar to that utilised by the voluntary simplifiers identified by Ezioni (2001) except that the emphasis that the men put upon the structural factors that have shaped their available identities, has led me to identify them as "Involuntary Simplifiers". As such the men have found the kinds of working class occupations that they have experienced in the past, lacking in scope for creativity and job satisfaction and in no way adding to their quality of life. They have therefore rejected ambition, materialism and status in favour of quality of life.

Reflection on Findings

The kind of interpretative approach I have taken to this research leaves it opens to the accusation that it reflects my own pre-conceptions and assumptions. This is indeed a possibility. As identified in the methodology chapter, my inclination is to have some sympathy with any group I regard as excluded and I worked with unemployed people, specifically because I thought it was a helpful thing to do. However, my pre-conceptions and beliefs have been made explicit in a way which is not done in more positivistic approaches to research. Furthermore, one of the outcomes of the research was my own change in understanding about the nature of the experience of this group of men. Before I began my research, I too believed that participation in the world of work was a very central part of well being. The use of interpretative methodologies allowed me to examine, not only the resistance the men had to this common-sense assumption, but also the choices of identity project they had put in place of occupational identity. It allowed me to make explicit that whilst the men do believe that there are specific types of work that men should do in the public sphere, engagement in family and childcare duties is quite acceptable in the private sphere. It allowed me to find out that, whilst the men in this study did not value wealth and status, they did value community and quality of life.

Since this study was qualitative and exploratory in nature, there is no reason to assume that the men I interviewed are representative of long-tem unemployed men over the age of thirty-five more generally. There is, however, no reason to assume that they are not. In the case of previous research in Ireland that has attempted to identify the reasons that men over the age of thirty-five who are long-term unemployed do not engage with agencies (e.g. Owens 2000, Corridan, 2001, McGann 1999, Reid, 2001), for the most part data for these studies have been gained from men who *have* chosen to engage with services. This may explain why the findings about low self-esteem and low skills were repeatedly confirmed in this kind of study. The use of men who do not engage with services in the current study may give us a clearer picture of the alternative identity projects that the men who do not engage with services pursue. They are, as Cannan (1996) points out, neither fighting against state power nor

rebelling against it. They are just prioritising the things that they believe are important and rejecting discourses that do not allow them to construct an identity which preserves their self-esteem.

Further research might look at whether or not this particular pattern of discourse selection is unique to rural Irish men. The rejection of the work ethic (Bauman, 2005) as an end in itself may well be related to the fact that in Ireland, industrialisation was never a dominant form of economic organisation in rural Ireland (Sweeney, 2004). Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate whether or not Ireland's history as a collectivist and agriculturally based nation makes it more likely that meritocratic discourses (Levitas 2004) can be rejected in favour of structurally based ones.

Recommendations for working with involuntary simplifiers

An additional and overarching question for this study was: if the way in which existing services are provided is changed, would these men be more likely to engage with services?

In making recommendations it is important to take into account the following:

- The men in this study do not blame themselves for their place within society, and are not prepared to accept responsibility for structural influences on their lives
- They have rejected the work ethic in favour of quality of life
- They have experienced the work and supervision practices associated with factory and labouring work negatively
- They are interested in work that provides job satisfaction.
- The men value, and need to preserve, their masculinity
- There is a belief by the men and indeed a more widespread assumption in society, that these men are too old to start a new career

- The men in this study do not lack educational ability and would be interested in education for the purpose of personal interest

- Participants in this study constructed their identities around family and community activities, which take up much of their time

A possible reason that these specific findings were identified is precisely because the men in the study do not engage with services. Rogers' (1966) contention is that in order for a healthy sense of self to exist, it is necessary that the perceived self and the ideal self match closely. It would follow, then, that those who seek out services and engage with the meritocratic discourses, do so because they are unhappy with some aspect of their lives and want change. Those who do not engage with services have presumably negotiated an identity project for themselves which makes the best available sense of their social situations and allows them, as Goffman (1959) would have it, to preserve face.

The men construct themselves as manly men; as men who are fair-minded enough to value feminism as a means of equality; the kind of men who value community and family; who take care of their children and elderly relatives; the kind of men who do not measure themselves or anyone else by occupational status or by financial means. The men in this study selected discursive resources that allowed them to maintain an identity that is respected. In order to engage with services, these men would have to put on the mantle of the man with low self-esteem; the man with poor educational ability; the man who needs to be developed socially because he has very few social resources. In short, they must accept the individualising discourses that lay responsibility for structural factors with the individual. The initial question, then, about encouraging the men to engage with services needs to be reframed. What we really needed to ask was how could the potential of these men be tapped into?

In order to answer this question we also need to examine carefully the ways in which we provide care and support for those who are designated as disadvantaged. The model of care that is prevalent in most social care settings, including that of the Local Employment Service, utilises principles from humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1955) which emphasise

empowerment and personal responsibility. There is no doubt that practitioners in the field utilise this model with the best of intentions and with great sincerity. One of the major criticisms of the humanistic approach is that it is inclined to attempt to fit people into an imperfect system and make them take responsibility for their social circumstances (Stephens, 1996). In other words, it is doing the same thing as the individualising discourses identified by Beck and Beck-Gersheim (2002); it is putting responsibility for structural factors onto the individual. For future interventions to be successful, they must be structured in a way that allows the men to maintain their current identities. They also need to acknowledge that due to structural factors related to the Irish economy and Irish attitudes to age, education and change, these men have created alternative lifestyles to those organised around occupational identity.

This would suggest that, if the state is serious about removing these men from the welfare system, it needs to design an approach that would allow them to maintain face (Goffman, 1959). O'Doherty (2007) suggests that social capital is evenly distributed throughout society and that social care practitioners should utilise this resource when designing interventions. The findings of this research support this view, and suggest that any intervention should respect the strengths and abilities of the men in question.

As the research suggests, none of the men regarded themselves as being unable to learn. Indeed, they were quite positive about learning for the purposes of personal development. They were sceptical about the feasibility of engaging in employment-based training without a guaranteed job at the end of it and also want to work in an area which allows them scope for creativity and job satisfaction. Given that the men gain such satisfaction from the parts of their identity which involve the use of social capital, the possibility that these men might be offered part-time training, in areas that develop their caring skills within their communities is worthy of investigation. They would, of course, have to be guaranteed an outcome in exchange for their investment of time and energy in training, and the training would need to be part-time in order to facilitate the existing commitments that the men have become engaged in.

As discussed in Chapter 1, policy in relation to unemployed people has generally been based on "carrot" and "stick" approaches. As FAS acknowledge, the roll out of the National Employment Action Plan to men in this category (which might reasonably be regarded as a "stick" approach) was largely unsuccessful because, as the report acknowledges, it was targeted at the older age-group i.e. over thirty-fives (NESF, 2006). It would appear then that even if people are summoned in to engage with services forcibly, they will not be able to overcome their own assumptions about the importance of age, and indeed the unstated but implicit assumptions of the writers of the report.

Although Community Employment schemes in urban areas have been curtailed because of "lack of progression", it may be worth considering their reintroduction for this particular group, without the need for progression purely because they can be used to provide services to communities from within communities in a very cost-effective way. Although the payment for participation in this kind of scheme is only an additional €24.40 more than the current welfare payment for the men in this category (figures sourced directly, May, 2007), as discussed in Chapter 1, this was a popular option for unemployed men in this category.

Examination of the findings of this research makes it clear why this is the case:

- Money and ambition are not major motivators for men in this category
- The work is carried out within communities and thus facilitates the development of social capital
- The roles that were available fitted in with the men's gender identity, for example, school caretakers, athletic club trainers etc.
- The hours are short (20 per week), allowing for time to be spent with family and for quality of life to be prioritised over consumerist goals
- Opportunities for training are made available to all participants

In considering all of the findings of this research then, my recommendation is that the Community Employment schemes which were scaled down following a government decision in 2002 (FAS Annual Report, 2003) because they failed to achieve progression, be reintroduced, without the requirement for progression.

Long-term unemployed men could be recruited within their own communities to serve the needs of their communities. The needs of the area could be identified by the men, and could then be addressed through their leading of community involvement. This would facilitate the men's inclusion in the process – rather than using a process that does something to them; whilst allowing them to facilitate change of the social structures within their own communities. Such an approach would be vastly more effective than the approach of using a "stick" by summoning them into welfare or employment support offices to ask them to explain why they have not availed themselves of the opportunity to participate in the meritocracy, which, given their age is unlikely anyway. It would also have the advantage of providing services to communities from within them at a fairly modest cost, particularly in terms of wages.

Summary

In sum, the results of this research indicate that the models of intervention using humanistic style empowerment models which promote the individualisation of responsibility for working around structural factors which have conspired to exclude people in the past, are not working for this group. They encourage people to distance themselves from state services and also mean that society fails to benefit from the considerable skills and abilities that these men can contribute to their communities. A viable, cost-effective and worthwhile intervention would be the re-introduction of Community Employment type schemes for men in this category, without the need for progression, since participants on these schemes would be providing a valuable and cost effective service within their communities.

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1 UN Plaza, New York, New York, 10017, USA

Appendix A

Participant consent form

Consent to help with research

I _____ give my permission to Lisa Scott for her to interview me as part of a research degree she is doing in IT Tralee about what it is like for men who are unemployed. Because it is difficult to write everything down, I will allow our conversations to be tape recorded, but I realise that it is only Lisa who will listen to the tapes when she types up the interviews. I understand that I can stop being involved in the research at any time and that I can ask for copies of my interviews and the interview tapes back if I want to. It is not necessary for me to say anything private that I don't want to talk about and I can stop the interview at any time or change the subject. I also understand that I am the person who is the expert on the topic of my life and experience and that Lisa is doing research in order to learn from me. Although there will be some broad questions, I realise that I can talk about any area of my experience of being unemployed that I think is relevant.

I realise that the only people who will see my interviews are Lisa and her supervisor at the college, but that bits of what I say in the interviews might be used in the research report, without using my name or saying that it is me that said them. I also understand that my name and details will not be passed on to anyone at any time without my permission.

Signed

_____

Research Participant

Appendix B

Stimulus materials for pilot

Men's lives – some scenarios

Stephen is 46. He lives with his girlfriend in her council house on a housing estate. They have two children. She gets her one parent family book and is on a CE scheme where she works with older people.

Stephen gets the dole by signing on at his mother's address, where he also stays if he has an argument with his girlfriend. He left school at 15 and hasn't had many jobs since. He did get a job in a factory about eight years ago, he didn't like the supervisor, who always seemed to give Stephen the worst jobs. As well as that, it was mostly night work, which meant that he missed the darts and pool tournaments that he used to play in. From time to time he gets some cash in hand work from a mechanic he knows, but it isn't regular or well paid enough for him to give

John is 50. He lives in a house that he and his wife built on a site her father gave them when they got married. He married at 21, when his wife Cathy was 19. Their eldest son was two at the time. For a while he worked as a fisherman, but the money was too irregular, so he worked as a labourer for his brother who is a builder. Three years ago he badly hurt his back and was not able to do physical work anymore. After about a year he did a computer course which he enjoyed, but although he applied for a number of jobs, he didn't get one.

For the past three years he has been full time at home. His wife is the breadwinner and works cleaning a local school. She also gets work in the summer time in a local bar. He does most of the cooking and laundry at home and also did some childminding for a neighbour. He thinks

Jimmy is 55 and moved to Ireland from Glasgow ten years ago with his wife. They have two adult children, who are both still living in Scotland. Quite soon after he arrived from Scotland he got a job as a checkout operator in a large supermarket. He quite enjoys talking to people and is happy that he is sitting down and inside. The money isn't too bad and he gets a staff discount and regular pay rises.

His children visit regularly and he has developed a good social and enjoys a singing session in his local pub now and again. His wife is working as a secretary but misses the children sometimes and hasn't made as many friends as Jimmy has.

Interview questions for pilot

For each scenario:

Do you think he's happy? What do you think is important to him?

How do you think he is getting on from the point of view of:

His partner

Other family members

Society in general

Video Clip 1 – MacDonald's

Are there any places you would not work?

How do you think they might pass their days when they aren't working?

Video clip 2 - Dinner

Why do you think he was talking about doing a course?

Do you think it's difficult for him to cope with changes in his life?

Do you identify with him?

General

What kind of man do you most admire?

What makes a life happy and full?

Do you think it's difficult to change your life?

Research shows that unemployed men over 35 don't go to services like LES, VTOS, FAS and so on. Why do you think that is?

Appendix C

Letter of invitation to training course

Dear

Tralee Local Employment Service have designed a course specifically designed to meet the needs of long term unemployed men in Co. Kerry. Social Welfare have agreed to pass on this letter because they have your details in their data base, and we would like to offer you a place on the course. The course will last for twelve weeks and will run for six hours per week. There will be a number of options of subjects that will be available and the course will be run t centres in Tralee and Killarney. The subjects on offer are:

Landscaping

Forklift driving

Organic gardening

Computers

There will also be additional modules in personal development and welfare rights.

Please telephone the office if you would like a lace on the course.

Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Identity

Do you think people are born or made?

Can we decide who we are and how we turn out?

Is it difficult to change who we are?

Has much changed in your life in the last five years?

What do you think makes people happy?

Masculinity

Do you think that some kinds of work are more suitable for men and some for women?

Do you think that going on courses is different for men than for women?

Has feminism changed people's lives?

Do you think it matters who earns the money?

Have expectations of men changed?

Work

Do you think the kind of work a person does effects their personality?

What if you don't work?

What is the downside of not having a job?

Are there any advantages?

When you were a child what did you think you would be when you grew up?

Education

What influence do you think that your school days had on the rest of your life?

Do you think courses are useful?

Is there too much emphasis on qualifications?

Could you imagine yourself at college?