“Keeping myself to myself”

An ethnographic investigation of distance at a youth centre in Manchester, England

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Keeping myself to myself:

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Abstract

This dissertation is based on 6 months of ethnographic fieldwork at a youth centre in a suburb of Manchester, England. The area is a post-industrial ward, historically characterised by the dying industry previously dominating the area. Today, the industries are gone, and a vast number of the residents are still struggling to find work. The old factory buildings have reopened as daily markets and shopping centres, and manual labour in the industries has mainly been replaced by service sector jobs. The youth centre where I volunteered is one of the improvement measures set out to re-establish the local community. This thesis is an attempt to understand and interpret the individual experiences of the recent changes in the neighbourhood. The conduction of this research is primarily based on an investigation of the people I worked with at the local youth centre. I will draw parallels between political events and changes in British history and its effects on the neighbourhood, and the way people organise themselves socially, experience their everyday lives and the opportunities they perceive themselves as having. I will illustrate mechanisms for creation of distance utilised by individuals in order to establish perceived separation from people, places and social statuses they do not identify, or want to be identified with. In order to give my research more depth and validity, I have also investigated people’s experience of living in the local neighbourhood surrounding the youth centre. I consider this a necessity as the primary users of the centre, and the people I was working together with, were from the local neighbourhood. Of particular interest is the ambiguity in regards to people’s sense of belonging to this place where they lived and, at least for a vast majority of them, had spent their entire lives. This ambiguity took the form of an experienced tension between a deep sense of belonging to the local area and a strong insistence on the individual’s non-identification with the local area. I will also investigate how people were creating distance in confrontations with the class-status. I will discuss the argument made by some scholars before me that the resistance of middle-class values result in a strengthened working class identity. My findings suggest that the individuals commonly categorised as working-class did indeed distance themselves from the middle class, but also from their working-class categorisation. I will in this thesis explore the different nuances of this, the complexities that follow any socially connected group of people, which will necessarily consist of vast diversity.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

I was standing by the entrance of a huge hall with wide windows in front of me, ten feet or more above, with young people everywhere. It was my first meeting with the youth centre, the place where I conducted my six months long fieldwork in the spring of 2015. The youth centre is located in a suburb in the outskirts of Manchester, which I have decided to call Hayford. We were standing in a group of five eager, but nervous, soon-to-become volunteers, sent down to the ‘lion’s den’ for the very first time to get to know the youth centre, and the people within it. We had just about completed our two group interviews and training sessions to become volunteers, and we were finally ready to face our biggest challenge so far: the young people. The first meeting was taking place in the evening during a senior session, and the young people hanging around at the youth centre were teenagers, between 13 and 21 years of age. I was standing still, observing the scene for about a minute. The girls and the boys were keeping their distance from each other: I could spot some boys hanging around the pool table, playing or watching – waiting their turn. Others were playing table tennis or badminton in the huge open space in the middle of the hall. Some girls were sitting on a couch chatting and giggling, glancing curiously around the place, and I caught myself doing the exact same thing. There was a noticeably larger proportion of boys present, and some of them were simply just throwing a ball around, and at each other, drawing people’s attention. The session had just started, and as the young people were arriving through the main entrance, their mission seemed to be trying to find their group of friends as quickly as possible, escaping the absolute death of coming across as a loner. I believe the people struggling the most to find a place in the huge crowd of people that day, were ourselves: the newcomers. When I had been standing in the huge hall, commonly known as the recreational area, for a couple of minutes looking all bewildered, I realised I had to start my wonder about and try to get to know some people at the centre. I spotted a woman wearing one of the t-shirts representing the youth centre, and went towards her in hope that she might be able to help a confused newcomer. I had no previous experience working with young people, and was worried my approach would come across as a bit awkward. The woman greeted me, and I politely asked if she would be so kind to introduce me to some of the young people. She

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1 I have decided to use the term ‘young people’ throughout the thesis when referring to the young members of the youth centre.
brought me to the cantina, and walked me straight towards a table where five girls in their early teens were sitting together chatting, each sipping on a brightly coloured slush. The woman told me to sit down and have a chat with the girls before she walked away, leaving me alone with them. My approach seemed clumsy, and the situation made me feel awkward. I immediately began questioning my positionality (Okely, 2012, p. 126): how did I talk to teenagers? What do they want to talk about? Should I be the cool, young volunteer, or the strict and respected one? Or simply the neutral fieldworker, observing and taking notes? Unable to make a decision in the moment, I ended up feeling like the new girl in class trying to mingle with the cool girls. I was, however, quickly disguised as the old and boring woman, unable to participate in neither the gossiping, nor the slush drinking that was taking place around the table. After having sat with the girls for about ten strained minutes I decided to leave it at that, and walked over to a couple of volunteers playing with some building blocks together with some of the young people from the ‘inclusion team’; what I was later to learn was an initiative the youth centre offered for young people with additional needs. I introduced myself, and immediately received a positive and welcoming response when politely telling them that this was my first day. I spent the rest of my day in this safe zone, happily playing with building blocks together with the group of young people and support-group of adults. The initial aim of my research was to explore young people’s experience of growing up in a post-industrial area of England, so I decided to do my fieldwork volunteering at a youth centre. As my time in the field went by, however, when I got to know the people spending every evening there together with me, the aim of my research changed. The way I experienced my first day at the centre is largely a reflection on the rest of my six months in the field; I ended up spending more time with the adults working there rather than the teenagers. The majority of the data I use in this thesis is therefore based upon conversations and observations I made with the adults rather than the young people. They were more accessible to me, and they could tell me more about their personal experiences of the current situation living in a post-industrial working-class area of England. In this thesis I aim to understand how people are manifesting their social relationships in a place that has experienced large-scale changes in social structure during the past couple of decades (Hyatt, 1997; Dench et al., 2006; Jones, 2012) What proved to be a recurrent manifestation in these social relationships was the way in which people were creating different forms of distance. In this thesis I am going to argue for how people make sense of their social lives by distancing themselves from other people, places and social classes.
Aim of the thesis

This dissertation deals with how people create distance from people, places and categorization, in a post-industrial working-class area of Manchester, England. I have decided to divide this thesis in three sections, according to the three arenas where the manifestation of distance appeared to be most evident: at the youth centre, within the local neighbourhood, and in the confrontation of individual experience’s of the working-class status. By doing this, I aim to make a claim about the individual experiences of living in a post-industrial working-class area in today’s Britain. This thesis centres on the following questions: How do people create, maintain and experience distance from other people, the local neighbourhood and class-categorization, in a post-industrial suburb in Manchester? And further, why do people feel that the creation of distance is necessary?

The very first time I became aware of how people were taking distance from other people was when I discovered the great distinction between my colleagues at the youth centre. The employees were divided strictly into two groups, and I became intrigued to understand how they were maintaining this distinction. In chapter 3 I will elaborate on this distinction. In chapter 4 I will move on to explore how distance was emphasised within the social relationships in the local neighbourhood. People continuously stressed an identity of belonging to the local neighbourhood. The particularity of this process was the way in which it was carried out, through emphasising differences to those who, according to themselves, did not belong. There was a continuous exchange of identity of belonging, but rather than the sense of belonging being manifested in a shared group mentality, people were claiming their individual belonging to the place. People commonly stressed that their emotional ties to the neighbourhood was stronger than that of other residents. To emphasise a strong affiliation to the local neighbourhood was a way of claiming the right to be living in a place many residents perceived as overcrowded. Despite emphasising belonging to Hayford, people were also verbally distancing themselves from the negative characteristics that had become associated with it through television programmes and other segments of multimedia and popular culture. People were dragged between emphasising belonging, and distancing themselves from the local neighbourhood, and the people living there. Lastly, in chapter 5, I will look at the issue of class, and how people perceive the status of social class in today’s Britain. The central claim in this thesis is that the working-class cannot be viewed simply as a collective social class, held together by a shared working-class identity. In fact, people are
increasingly distancing from the working-class identity, in favour for an *every one for themselves* –ideology (Jones 2012, p. 47).

With this attempt I hope to contribute to the discussion on working-class identity in Britain. Some previous studies on social class in Britain have focused on togetherness and a shared sense of working-class identity (Evans, 2007; Willis, 1977). These scholars have commonly stressed that the working-class, through a history of manual labour in the industries and membership of the trade unions, share a common sense of togetherness and belonging (Evans, 2007, p. 32; Willis, 1977, p. 3). In contrast to this, however, other scholars have more recently argued that England have faced an individualisation of working-class identity, particularly after the event of the closure of the industries, and the manual labour in manufacturing being replaced by mainly service sector jobs (Jones, 2012, p. 144). Some have even suggested that the individualisation started even before this major event (Dench et al., 2006; Hyatt, 1997; Jones, 2012). I will use these writings throughout this dissertation and stress their insights and views on the changes in working-class identity, in order to say something about my own observations and reflections. As my research topic suggests, the social dynamic of the particular working-class area of Hayford was not characterised by a united sense of togetherness. The people that I got to know seemed rather to be distancing themselves from both each other and the community of which they lived. Even though my main observation and focus in this thesis is on manifestations of distance, there were indeed exceptions, where togetherness and belonging to other individuals was the centre of the social relationships. One of relationship such as this was the mother-daughter relationship. Close kinship ties such as that between a mother and her daughter proved to be coherent and strong, allowing for a distance to become an inferior part of the relationship.

**Key concepts**

**Distance**

It is necessary to clarify how I will be using the term distance in this dissertation in order to establish its grasp and limits. First of all, I find it important to present a brief analytical examination the relationship between *distance* and *difference*. In this dissertation I focus on how people are creating distance from people, places and social status through many different mediums, and amongst them, through verbal negotiations of difference between themselves
and other individuals. The *distance* can be a physical or perceived experience, whilst *differences* are commonly emphasised through the verbal language. Verbally expressions of difference become in this context a method for achieving distance.

I will draw on the Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad’s (1989) theory on ‘avoidance as a strategy’, based on her research from Norway (pp.117-18). Gullestad stresses that it is common for people in Scandinavia to avoid each other if they do not view each other as equal, or if the similarities are not yet established. Being socially accessible for another person presupposes an established similarity between the two people. When these similarities are not established, people will distance themselves from one another and thereby create what Gullestad have called ‘symbolic fences’ (Gullestad, 1989, p. 117). According to Gullestad, symbolic fences appear when a group of people are avoiding certain other people because they feel too different from them. The group in question have established certain social codes known only to the members of that group. The symbolic fences are not explicit, and therefore a newcomer might struggle to discover them. They become an obstacle for outsiders taking part in the given social community. When symbolic fences are hidden, *avoidance* becomes a strategy (Gullestad, 1989, pp. 117-18). I will later elaborate on how the people I got to know in Hayford were using ‘avoidance as a strategy’ in their every day language and decisions.

Gullestad (1989) also argues that ‘avoidance as a strategy’ is used to form a group mentality of belonging between the people avoiding the same things and people (Gullestad, 1989, pp. 117-118). When people use ‘avoidance as a strategy’ they are also creating a social group where similarities are emphasised, and differences undermined. She thereby argues that it is particular for people in Scandinavia to create social groups by stressing similarities between one another, and that equality is a requirement for social interaction (Gullestad, 1989, p. 119). In this thesis I will suggest a similar approach, but rather than suggesting that people create social boundaries by stressing similarities, I will argue that they were forming a group mentality by distancing themselves from other groups of people. The people in Hayford were emphasising difference instead of similarities, in order to place themselves in relation to others, but also to create social identities. When people were creating distance, they were also expressing what and whom they were *not*, and did *not* want to be identified with. It is through this action that they emphasised where they stood in relation to the people and places surrounding them. I will argue why creating distance does not necessarily create a group mentality between the other people creating distance from the same people/things. With this,
I am hoping to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of ways to discuss distance, belonging and identity in the context of working-class Britain.

**Class**

Throughout this dissertation, the term class is used only in reference to how the people I encountered related to it themselves, how they perceived the term and what it symbolised to them. The lack of a pre-established definition was necessary as people did not have one fixed, common conception of the term, but rather, the meaning of the term differed depending on the person I talked to. The term could even be used by one person with differing meanings within the duration of a single conversation. Not only did people’s definition of the class term vary, but with it people’s perceptions of belonging to a certain social class. Although my field was in an area historically categorised as a working-class area (Smith, 2012, p. 8), people whose families had been living in the neighbourhood for generations were telling me that they considered themselves middle-class, whilst pointing to other neighbours as underclass, and some even upper class. A woman answered my question of how she would use the class term to describe the local neighbourhood today: ‘Uhm, probably working… I’d say working-class. But… no, I wouldn’t say it was upper-class. Middle, definitely!’ Her ambiguity and confusion was highly representative for the answers I received from the majority of the people I asked about the class term.

The anthropologists Jeanette Edwards, Gillian Evans and Katherine Smith (2012) argue that studying class in Britain is challenging because the people they study refused classification, whereas the three anthropologists views class as a determined force in society that is crucial in people’s social lives within their society (Edwards, et al., 2012, p. 7). Smith, during her studies in Higher Blackley, Manchester, illustrates how the residents distance themselves from social classifications. When she tried to bring up the class issue for discussion, people became both confused and uncomfortable (Smith, 2012, p. 61). I recognised the same confusion, ambiguity and the discomfort as that of Smith when I asked people about their thoughts on the term class. But contrary to Edwards, Evans and Smith, I the people in my study did not reject class distinctions completely. People certainly recognised the existence of class categories, but the majority seemed to place themselves in other class categories than people seemingly in the same situation as themselves, thereby emphasising a distance between themselves and the social class they statistically belonged to. Like Edwards
(2012), I will also stress that class categories in England today are not necessarily as visible or fixed as many researchers have proposed (Edwards, et al., 2012, p. 12). I will therefore not to work with an understanding of class categories as fixed. I will rather discuss class from an emic (Eriksen, 1998, p. 45) point of view, as the only strategy I deem viable, in order to stress how they exist as individual perceptions that are ever-changing depending on the situation.

I will use the terms working-class and middle-class throughout this dissertation. When I use these terms I refer to the people or places carrying a categorical status as working–or middle-class. Therefore, when I am talking about Hayford as a working-class area, and the people living there as working-class people, I refer to working-class as the categorisation commonly used to describe the area, and the people who are living there. (See also: Smith, 2012, p.62).

**Chav**

I have known the word *chav* from the time I was living in London, two years prior to my fieldwork in Manchester. My understanding was that it was a derogatory term used for working-class people. When I came across Owen Jones’ (2012) book ‘Chavs’ I realised how much more common and complex the term in fact was. I had assumed it was a nickname for working-class children, made up by the middle-class university students of which I was surrounded by in London. When I read the book ‘Chavs’, and started talking to people in Manchester about the term, I realised how widely used it was, and that it had been around for quite a long time. When the word first found its way to the English Dictionary in 2012, it was described as ‘a young working-class person who dresses in casual sports clothing’ (Jones, 2012, p. 8). During my fieldwork I discovered more complex interpretations of the term, which will be presented later in this thesis. I want to stress for now, that despite the fact that the term is a negative labelling of working-class people, I have nevertheless decided to use it throughout in this dissertation because it was used by the people I got to know in Hayford. Although I personally distance myself from the usage of the term, and what it represents, I want to draw on the same terms that people used frequently. Therefore, when I use the term *chav* in this dissertation, note that it is from an emic point of view.

**Floor staff/office staff**

I noticed quite early during my time at the centre that there was a striking distinction between the employees. They were primarily divided by their positions and working space, between
those who were working together with the young people, and those who were working in the office. I have decided to use two different terms to visualise this distinction: floor staff - and office staff. These are my own terms, used to express the way I experienced the current situation between the employees at the centre. My colleagues would rather use terms describing each other’s specific positions, such as youth worker, volunteer, or manager. That being said, in conversations with the members of staff I also heard people using similar terms that divided the office and floor staff, such as the terminology of distinction that I have created.

When I use the term office staff, I refer to the people working in the office on the second floor of the youth centre. They mainly consisted of the managers, coordinators, executives and officers. They are responsible for the way the youth centre is being administered and organised, and all the decisions they make affect the people down on the floor as well as the youth centre in total. The office staff were spending most or all of their working hours upstairs in the office, and they were thus in large managing the youth centre without the individual experience of the consequences of their decisions. The office staff have permanent contracts with fixed nine hour days, a majority have higher education, and most of them did not have any experience with youth work. The floor staff consisted of the people working actively together with the young people, these were the youth workers, sport leaders and volunteers (including myself). They worked together with the young people, running, organising and assisting the activities. The floor staff seldom had higher education, and they earned considerably less than the office staff. As opposed to fixed hours, they worked on hourly wages during the evenings, when the centre was open for the young people. The floor staff and the office staff rarely communicated with one another, despite the fact that they work together in the same building. This lack of communication had consequences for the social relationships and dynamic at the working place, of which I will discuss in chapter three. The majority of the office staff were not living in the local area, nor had they grown up on a council housing estate. Most of them were alien to the area, youth work, and the lifestyle of the floor staff and the young people. I will discuss the significance of belonging to the neighbourhood as a means of identity amongst the floor staff in chapter 4.

Methodological considerations
This thesis is based on my own conceptions of the experiences I made and the people I met. My role in the field was decisive for all of my observations throughout my fieldwork, and also in structuring this thesis. An anthropologist can never omit her- or himself from the research results, because the experiences being made are individual, and attached to the individual researcher (Okely, 2012, p. 125). Anthropologists play a crucial role in creating the field, and it is our individual experiences that are being expressed in the analysis of the ethnographic account (Gupta and Fergusson, 1997, p. 216). I have therefore decided to lead the reader through my own chain of thought during the process of fieldwork. I want to make the reader aware of not just my findings, but the through process behind the decisions made, what hypothesis I had in advance, and how it potentially changed during the research. I believe this process is important for the reliability of the social science of anthropology, because the anthropologist is such a significant part of creating the research results (see also: Okely, 2012, p. 153).

**Data collection**

When I arrived in Manchester on a Saturday in the beginning of January 2015, my aim was to study the post-industrial working-class from the young people’s viewpoint. I had already been looking for youth centres around in the city, and sent some emails back and forth with the volunteer coordinator at the youth centre where I ended up working. When I came to Manchester I sent him an email saying that I was in town, and it did not take long before I was invited for a group interview. I went through all the normal procedures for a volunteer, and in addition, I also made sure I had approval to do research at the centre. The managers and coordinators seemed pleased to have me there, and I went through all the confidentialities and rules for conducting my fieldwork. They informed me that I was not allowed to meet with the young people outside the youth centre, because that was the ground rule for all volunteers. At first I was disappointed, because I believed that home visits would strengthen my data gathering. As the fieldwork started taking shape I realised that my main focus would not be on young people after all. I was not living in the neighbourhood, and thus I assumed that six months would not be enough time to let me get a proper insight in the daily lives of the residents of Hayford. I therefore decided to rather narrow my field to exclusively include what I observed and heard at the youth centre. It was when I made this decision that my field was shaped. During fieldwork the researcher needs to construct the field in order to narrow the otherwise ever flowing social concepts and relationships. The field is never a given
location, but social relationships always flow in and out of any place in time (Okely, 2012, p. 28). During the last couple of months of my fieldwork, I followed a job seeking-course for unemployed young people, and I was able to make some observations outside the centre. Otherwise, all the data I have gathered that completes this dissertation is drawn within the walls of the youth centre. I did not know at the time that I would focus to such a large extent on belonging, and peoples’ relationship to the neighbourhood. Gathering data from outside the centre therefore seemed irrelevant. Note in that regard that when I’m writing about people’s relationship to their surrounding area, my data is completely based on interviews, narratives and conversations I had with my colleagues on the floor. It is less an emphasis on observations from the neighbourhood than an analysis of similar dynamics inside the centre that are based upon participant observation as well as interviews.

After a couple of weeks of working I realised that getting to know people properly in the way I wanted to in order to get the data I wished to attain would be both challenging and time consuming. I therefore decided to narrow the field even further, and spend all my time and focus downstairs working with the young people and the floor staff. I concluded that it would be the only way I could build sustainable relationships with the people I wanted to include in my study. I will argue that it worked in my favour as I was able to go more in-depth on a narrow field, rather than scratching the surface of a number of different fields. To include all the potential fields this dissertation opens for would only have been possible if I had more time and space, to write a more extensive ethnography. With the decision to spend my time exclusively on the floor, I discarded the idea of including data from the office staff in my research. I will nevertheless discuss the floor staff in chapter 2, but rather than interpreting the relationship between the floor staff and the office staff using multi-sided fieldwork (Marcus, 1995), I will focus on the floor staff, and their relationship to the office staff by means of how this was expressed to me. The reader must bear in mind that my arguments might have come out quite different if being experienced from the office staff’s viewpoint.

I was granted permission to use the library space at the University of Manchester during the six months I spent in the city. My daily routine consisted of spending the first half of my day at the library, and from there I took the bus to the youth centre when it opened for the members in the evenings: 06:30pm for senior sessions, and 03:30 pm for junior sessions. The sessions finished late in the evenings, which meant I always had to write down my field notes the day after, working in the library. I tried to find a place to stay that was closer to the youth
centre, but considering the fact that it was lying on a council housing estate, it would make no sense to be taking up space where people were already struggling to maintain their housing. In the beginning I was disappointed by the fact that I was not living in the same place as that of the people I was studying. I viewed it as a failed attempt to embrace my role as an anthropologist in the field. When I later became used to my daily routine, however, I began to view my situation as a potential advantage to my research. The fact that I was able to withdraw from my field every evening, and during the daytime, gave me useful time to reflect on my experiences. I also consider it an advantage to be able to transcribe the interviews during my fieldwork, rather than back at home after completing my fieldwork. Being in daily contact with the people I interviewed, I was in a position to quickly settle or clarify any uncertainties I had regarding an individual’s position or thoughts in a specific topic.

I did not walk around with a note pad while I was at the centre, both because I wanted to focus on being completely present when doing volunteer work, and also because a note pad would possibly create a distance between myself and the other volunteers and youth workers at the centre. After all, my main mission was the opposite: to blend in as much as possible. I therefore decided to embrace an approach that would allow me to appear more as a natural member of the floor staff rather than being ‘complete observer’, following people around recording their behaviour (Russel, 2006, p. 347). I did, however, always have my note pad lying in my locker at the staff room, and from time to time I had to rush in there to write down some quotes or incidents that could be of a particular interest.

**Key people**

Names that will appear frequently throughout this dissertation are Katelin, Sarah, Joe and Rosie². These people were between forty and sixty years of age, and had been living in the local neighbourhood all their lives. They have become key people in this dissertation mainly because all of them, like myself, were working more or less every evening of the week, so we got to know each other quite well during the time we spent working together. They were also very talkative and responsive to my continuous curiosity and questioning. They seemed upset and frustrated by many things, such as changes happening in the neighbourhood, everyday struggles, poor economy, lack of jobs, and issues concerning the youth centre. Because I was

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² All the names of people in this thesis are anonymised.
so receptive to their concerns, I sensed that the relationship we developed was mutually beneficial. They could talk about their daily issues and frustration to someone who eagerly paid attention to what they were saying. I have decided not to call the people I got to know, who helped me completing this dissertation, my ‘informants’ or ‘research participants’, which are otherwise a common term in the discipline of anthropology (Russel, 2006, p. 196). I did not get to know them as informants for my research, but rather as my friends and colleagues, and to call them something else would feel like disrespecting the roles we assigned one another during the time we spent together. They were the people of whom I learned from, and the content in this thesis is based on their perceptions of living and working in the local neighbourhood and at the youth centre. I will not narrow their individual experience down to viewing them as primarily objects for my research. Note also that these key people should not be seen as fully representative for neither the employees at the centre, nor English working-class people, but they are rather a handful of people whom I got to know.

**Interviews**

In this thesis I have had great use of verbal communication as an analytical tool. Through interviews and conversations I have tried to grasp people’s perceptions and reflections of living in the local neighbourhood. Verbal communication has been crucial in order to produce satisfactory results and findings. If I did not know the language of the people I met, a dissertation such as this would have been impossible. After a couple of months of volunteering at the centre I had built close relationships to at least a handful of my colleagues, and thus I decided it was time to ask them for interviews. Part of my strategy was to make the interviews semistructured (Russel, 2006, p. 201). Semistructured interviews are following a plan of topics for discussion, but are also open for the conversation to follow new leads (Russel, 2006, p. 211). My aim with this strategy was to get people to talk to me like they would with a friend –without the nervousness that might appear when answering questions from a stranger. I wanted to remove the element of fear of giving the ‘wrong’ answer. The interviews thus became more like longer narratives about their lives, families, opinions, struggles and fears, and with this I was hoping to reach a better understanding of their lived experiences of living in Hayford (Russel, 2006, p. 189). In advance of every interview I had prepared a sheet with questions and subjects I wanted to touch during the interview. I almost always ended up not looking at them until the very end of the interview,
to make sure we had not missed any of it, only to discover that we rarely had. I did not take a lot of notes during the interviews. I started the interview asking if I could use the tape recorder, and after turning it on and laying it beside me on the table, we both quickly forgot that it was even there. The interviews were usually held at cafés or at the youth centre, and I always made sure we were in an environment where they would feel comfortable and with a none-formal atmosphere. The length of the interviews varied from one to two hours. Usually, within the first fifteen minutes the formality was broken, and the conversation flew freely. I arranged nine long interviews with a tape recorder, and I transcribed all of them at the Library, shortly after. All the quotes in this thesis are directly cited transcription from these interviews.

**Ethics and ethical considerations**

The question of informed consent was my main concern when approaching the field. I decided in advance that I would be dedicated to inform everyone I wanted to include in my study about my project. I had several conversations with the management about my research where I informed them about the plans I had for my studies. We agreed on the terms and conditions for how I would conduct the research, and at the same time complete my obligations as a volunteer. The people I talked to seemed interested in my project, and they let me know about activities that might be in the interest of my research, and also people I could benefit from talking to. When I started volunteering on the floor, the strategy of informing everyone about my research turned out to be received quite differently. Rather than my project being perceived as a reasonably interesting topic for a conversation, I noticed that bringing it up during a conversation either created a barrier between the people I talked to and myself, or they simply found it boring and uninteresting. The barrier appeared to be stronger with people who themselves had not received a university degree. I remember asking one of the sports leaders whether he had an educational background, and he, clearly upset by my question responded by telling me I should never think I was better than others just because I was educated. This was in the very beginning of my fieldwork. I was just trying to create a picture of the people working there, hence my clumsily phrased question. After this incident I realised that I had to be very cautious when asking questions that might appear as offensive, or reveal middle-class values (see also: Smith, 2012, pp. 67-69). His reaction also made me realise that higher education was a sensitive subject for many of the people living in the area, due to its tight association with social class. I will elaborate more on
the issue of education and embodying middle-class values when conversing with the individuals of Hayford in chapter 5. The other reaction I so often received when bringing up the subject of my research was boredom. The volunteers working at the youth centre would commonly do the work as a part of an education in social work. The education of social work requires a certain amount of working experience, and volunteering is a common option. Other people were working as volunteers alongside their studies in order to get work experience for their resume. People were therefore used to volunteers combining the volunteer work with their studies. The fact that I studied social anthropology, and was doing my fieldwork at the centre made me appear as no different from the other students volunteering. It did happen from time to time that people were questioning the fact that I had come all the way from Norway just to do volunteer work at this particular centre, but not even that drew much attention. I thus decided to blend in with the floor staff, rather than appearing as a researcher. But indeed, if the subject was brought up, or if my conversationalists were curious, I was happy to explain and inform them about my research. Before interviews I was always careful to explain the intentions of my studies in detail, and obtain oral consent of the people involved. I am confident that my status as a researcher, and my interviewees’ part in the project was known to all who assisted as my co-authors in this thesis.

A brief Note on Multiculturalism

When preparing for my fieldwork I had been reading literature on areas such as Hayford, some written decades before my fieldwork, others only a couple of years prior to it. They were all studies of the white, British working-class (Willis, 1977; Evans, 2006; Smith, 2012; Young and Willmott, 1965). One of the things that caught my attention during my first meeting with the youth centre was the multicultural diversity amongst the young people. At first I became somewhat disappointed: I was prepared to study the white, British working-class. I realised that it would be impossible at this particular youth centre. On second thought, I was embarrassed by my own assumptions, realising I had made a huge mistake assuming there would be such a thing as a white, British working-class in 2015 England. I do not write about the English working-class as primarily white because, I argue, the English working-class is clearly multicultural. I have thus decided to limit my field and research to a delimited territory, and the people using the space within it, instead of focusing primarily on people with the same ethnical background. The people represented in this thesis had diversity in background kinship history, but I have decided not to emphasise them here. I do, on the other
hand, write about people’s relationship to the local neighbourhood, and especially when focusing on belonging to Hayford. In this instance I mention people’s attitudes towards immigration, but it is not given that the negative attitudes I point out came from white people. The main focus is that they came from people who have been living in the neighbourhood for a long enough time to take ownership of it, regardless of skin colour.
Chapter 2: The context

This chapter provides background knowledge used for interpreting the ethnography and analysis of the following thesis. The emphasis will be on individualisation of the working-class, and I will illustrate how the process of individualisation has been a prominent part of ethnographic writings on the British working-class (Dench et al., 2006; Hyatt, 1997; Young and Wilmot, 1965; Jones, 2012; Edwards et al., 2012). The trend in highlighting the process of individualisation has also been met by other research focusing on a working-class togetherness and identity of belonging (Willis, 1977; Evans, 2006). I will include the latter in order to discuss how the history on the British working-class have been characterised by both a focus on individualisation, and an identity of belonging. I will begin this chapter with my own ethnographic description of the field of my research, and continue with an historical account of the emergence of the individualisation in working-class British identity. In the last part of this chapter I will introduce some of the trends in ethnographic writings on the British working-class, and place my own conception in relation to these scholars.

The field

Hayford

The neighbourhood of which I conducted my fieldwork has historically been categorised as a working-class area. This was primarily due to its major dyeing factory, providing work for the majority of its male inhabitants. In the recent years, the place has become a post-industrial site, with industrial buildings hinting back at its old industrial times. According to an article in The Manchester Evening News in February 2007, Hayford was rated the most deprived neighbourhood in England.\(^3\) Before entering upon my field of research I had come across a reality documentary series being recorded in one of the streets of the local neighbourhood, only a few blocks away from the location of the youth centre. The programme\(^4\), released in 2013, aimed to reflect the true lives of some of the residents of the local council estate. It has later been widely criticised for providing a stereotypical representation of council estate residents. I watched a few episodes, and concluded that the television programme’s aim was to ridicule its main subjects. I wanted to get in touch with some of the people appearing in the

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\(^3\) I will not cite reference to this article, in order to protect the anonymity of the geographic whereabouts of my fieldwork.

\(^4\) Also here I will not refer to the name of the television programme due to anonymity.
programme, but unfortunately, they had all moved away shortly after the release. Some of the local residents of the neighbourhood told me that the people appearing on the programme were never in fact actual residents of the neighbourhood, but had been moved over there for the sake of the filming. Many people I spoke with condemned the programme for representing the local community falsely, giving it a negative reputation. Others, on the other hand, told me it provided a fair representation of some of the people living in the neighbourhood, while at the same time giving much emphasis to the fact that they were nothing like these people themselves. They were just unfortunate to be surrounded by these kinds of people. On the whole, I exclusively heard negative comments about the television programme. It was apparent that the local residents, whether they saw the program as illustrative or not of their community, were affected by its content. The stigmatisation the neighbourhood has experienced has made its residents question their belonging. In chapter 3 I will elaborate more on this subject.

The youth centre

The youth centre where I was volunteering was an independently run charity. It was founded three years prior to my fieldwork, and every evening from Monday till Saturday they arranged activity sessions for the young people. Three evenings a week, Junior sessions were held for young people aged 6-13. The three remaining days during the week they arranged senior sessions for young people aged 13-21, (until 25 for those with additional needs). On Sundays there were family sessions during daytime, where parents could bring their children and whole families could come to play and do the activities together. The children coming in on Sundays were often very young, most of them between one and five years old. According to the youth centre’s own statistics they have about 1000 visits each week in total.

The youth centre was a huge factory-like building in the middle of the neighbourhood. It was painted in bright colours, and stood out amongst the surrounding council estate houses. It was lying right next to the main road cutting through the neighbourhood, and across the road from the area’s meeting point: McDonalds. There were always many people surrounding the McDonalds, and after dark, there were regular police patrolling around the store. There seemed to be a lot of trouble and minor fights between the boys hanging around there. When arriving the buildings main entrance, the bright coloured walls and the large space under the roof was the first things that would catch a visitor’s eye. Secondly, several walls were
decorated with huge graffiti-paintings, most of them portraying young people playing. All visitors were greeted in the reception behind the entrance door, and everyone, including the employees had to sign in upon arrival, and sign out when leaving. Behind the reception was the recreational area. This was a huge space with pool tables, badminton equipment, tennis tables, space for arts sessions and entrance to the outdoor space. Amongst the other facility rooms at the youth centre were: a sports hall, climbing wall, outdoor sports pitch, dance studio, music and media suites, arts room, boxing gym, fitness suite, sensory room, recreational area and a café. Most of the facility rooms were on the ground floor, together with the outdoor space with football and basketball courts. The first floor consisted primarily of the office space and meeting rooms, together with the huge sports hall. The office space had huge windows with a view looking down on the ground floor. All the main activities were being held on the ground floor except from activities that were held in the sports hall. The office space was clearly separated from the floor space, and thereby also from the floor staff and the young people.

**Historical contextualisation: Towards an individualisation of the working-class**

**Working-class labour**
During the 1950s, the main family income in industrial villages and sub urban neighbourhoods such as Hayford, consisted of manual labour. In the industrial areas before the 1980s, working-class people did not depend on education in order to secure their financial future. In terms of getting a job, it mattered more who you knew, rather than what you knew (Dench et al., 2006, p. 138). A working-class young adult would commonly get a job through family acquaintances rather than through experience, and educational skills were of lesser importance. Once a young adult finished school he could start working in the industries immediately, commonly at the same industry as that of his father, without any working experience or educational qualifications required (Young and Willmott, 1965, p. 92). A girl would commonly be restricted to remain in the home doing domestic service, but she could be employed through Cottage Industry, or also doing manual labour in some of the larger factories within the textile industry (Brunette, 2008).
During the de-industrialisation many working-class people struggled because the manual labour opportunities in the industries disappeared, and secure work contracts required an education. Today, the manual labour in the industries have mainly been replaced by service sector jobs, primarily in call centres or in supermarkets. These jobs are characterised by part time working hours, commonly during the evenings, and a salary close to the minimum wage (Nayak, 2006, p. 814). At the peak of mining, in the 1940s, there were about a million men down the pit, whereas today, there are nearly one million people working in call centres (Jones, 2012, p. 147). Working for the industries caused far more health issues for the labourers than the service sector jobs of today. Employment contracts in this sector, however, are far less secure, and the salary is even lower (Jones, 2012, p. 151). Along with the labour market, many other things have changed dramatically in the working-class social structure since the industrial times. I will now give a brief introduction to the historical events that have arguably contributed to an individualisation of the working-class.

The changes in working-class communities and family structures

The Conservative Party with the party leader Margaret Thatcher entered government in 1979. Soon after, they started a systematic closure of industries all over Britain (Jones, 2012, p. 48). The economic consequences of the closure of the industries were massive for the working-class Britons, and unemployment and poverty became severe issues in many neighbourhoods and villages around the country (Jones, 2012, p. 48). Not only had the industries been the main source of income for the residents living in these areas, but they had also been important for the sense of togetherness within the communities (Jones, 2012, p. 48). The majority of the men living in industrial areas had been working in the industries for generations, and through memberships of the unions, they had shared a common working-class experience. Many working-class people took great pride in these sentiments of belonging (Jones, 2012, p. 48). After the devastation of the industries, however, working-class became a status to escape from (Jones, 2012, p. 40). The miners had been the representatives for the union movement in Britain, and the defeat of the Miner’s Strike became in many ways a turning point for working-class Britain. Mining communities were in large built around the pit, and when the pit was gone, the roles people had within the pit dissolved, and with it, the roles people had within this community (Jones, 2012, p. 55).
Thatcher’s aim was in large to get rid of the working-class movement as a political and social force in Britain, to make space for an everyone-for-themselves model (Jones, 2012, p. 47). The author and political commentator Owen Jones (2012), in his book ‘Chavs’, paints a mainly negative image of what he describes as ‘Thatcherism’. He claims that ‘In 1979, Britain was one of the most equal Western societies. After three decades of Thatcherism, it is now one of the least equal’ (2012, p. xxiii). He argues that Thatcher’s ideology was based upon an idea that everyone is born with the same opportunities in life, and poor people have only failed to join the rest of society on their journey towards success (Jones, 2012, p. 62). Individuals were to compete against each other for their own winnings, and leave the sentiments of a collective working-class behind (Jones, 2012, p. 48). Thatcher confirmed in large his interpretation during an interview December 1978 when emphasising her view on poverty:

Nowadays there really is no primary poverty left in this country. In Western countries we are left with the problems which aren’t poverty. All right, there may be poverty because people don’t know how to budget, don’t know how to spend their earnings, but now you are left with the really hard fundamental character-personality defect (Dowden, 1987).

It becomes evident through this interview that Thatcher did not view poverty as a social problem, but rather a result of the individual’s own personal failure. Jones stresses that she attempted to turn the pride of the working-class into a longing for middle-class values (Jones, 2012, p. 60). In Thatcher’s Britain, the rich were to be glorified, and rewarded for their effort, whilst those who existing at the bottom of society only had themselves to blame (Jones, 2012, pp. 48, 62).

Even though Jones blames the policies and ideologies of Thatcher for the growing individualisation, and ‘the demonization of the working-class’ (2012), the process might have started already before Thatcher came in government. The emergence of individualisation was examined by Michael Young and Peter Willmott in the early ethnographic research from 1955 ‘Family and Kinship in East London’ (1965). They argue that the individualisation of the citizenship began already during the pre-war depression. Several one-industry towns were hit by the depression. People living in these industrial towns were dependent on work in one or several industries, and as these industries were facing a recession, many men had to move to other cities to look for work. A vast number of families were being split during this period
as a result (Young and Wilmot, 1965, p. 91). Furthermore Geoff Dench, Kate Gavron and Michael Young argue in ‘The New East End’ (2006) that the individualisation continued after the World War II. They mainly blame the changes in administration of welfare, and ‘meritocracy’ for the individualisation of the British working-class (Dench et al., 2006, p. 106). The welfare benefits that could previously only be attained with reference to family ties, parental or conjugal bonds, was now to be claimed by individuals for their own individual use (Dench et al., 2006, p. 106). This made it possible for individuals, and particularly young people to be financially independent. Welfare became more centralised and state-subsidised rather than community based, and the extended family ties were weakened as a result (Dench et al., 2006, p. 106). The authors concludes that: ‘The welfare state was moving away from rewarding service in the local community, and it was the young meritocrats, eager to escape from cloying family ties, who grasped most enthusiastically the personal freedom offered’ (Dench et al., 2006, p. 108).

**Council housing and the right to buy**

Not only the labour market, but also housing management changed during the 1950s. The state began to replace private landlords, which led to changes within family structures. When housing had belonged to private landlords, the contracts with the tenants were commonly informal (Dench, et al., 2006, p. 154). The landlords benefited from this arrangement, as they did not have to go through the fuss of advertising when they needed a new tenant, because members of extended families already known to the landlord could be taking over the house instead. Through this housing arrangement, families and close relatives were commonly living together or near by each other, renting from the same landlord. When the state increasingly took over many people lost this priority, and families were split as a result (Dench et al., 2006, p. 156).

One of the reforms implemented by the Thatcher government in 1979 was the commonly called right-to-buy scheme. It made it possible for council housing tenants to buy their own homes for an extremely low price. Many working-class people took advantage of this opportunity, and Jones (2012) notes that ‘a million council homes were sold in a decade’ (Jones, 2012, p. 60). He argues that the right-to-buy scheme was part of Thatcher’s project of making individuals responsible for their own success and failures. Those who failed to buy during this period of time faced huge financial challenges later on, when the average council
housing rent increased nearly four times since before Thatcher came into power (Jones, 2012, p. 61). Thus, housing became close to unaffordable for many working-class people, and the rising demand for council housing led to a large number of people remaining on the council housing lists for years (Jones, 2012, p. 61). Another change in the new housing policies was the demands for getting in front of the waiting line on the council housing lists. Prior to this, a person could get in front of the line by patiently waiting his or her turn: those who had been on the list the longest had the right to first receive a roof over their head. During the ‘modernisation of welfare’ (Dench et al., 2006, p. 48), council housing was instead given to the people in the most need of it. If you could prove your personal poverty and deprivation, you could jump in front of the line (Dench et al. 2006, p. 48). Housing was of great concern for most of the people I got to know during my fieldwork. Many claimed that the changes were in favour of the minorities. It is true that the minorities had a greater chance of council housing now, than during the previous regime, because despite being newcomers they often belonged to the most deprived members of a community (Dench et al., 2006, p. 48). Many people living in the area felt unfairly treated because of these renewed council housing policies. They claimed to have the right to such housings because they had been living there for the longest amount of time, and did not like that people moving in to the neighbourhood were getting benefits before them. People continuously talked about how challenging it was to get in front of the lines of council housing waiting lists, and a common topic for conversation was how to manage to jump in front of these lists. One solution frequently being brought up was to become pregnant. I will discuss this in chapter 4.

Susan B. Hyatt (1997) also discusses the challenges of council housing in her ‘Poverty in a ‘post-welfare’ landscape’. She argues that a result of the changes during the conservative government from the 1979 onwards is a shift ‘from government of the poor, to government by the poor’ (Hyatt, 1997, p. 217). She illustrates how the governance of Britain has made a shift from liberal governance with the welfare-reform, towards ‘advanced liberalism’ and the post-welfare state (Hyatt, 1997, p. 219). Where the focus was previously on governance by experts onto the people, commonly the poor, advanced liberal policies were focusing on individual governing by the people (Hyatt, 1997, pp. 218-219). Hyatt illustrates this by examining the shift in management of state-subsidised housing in Britain. The ruling conservatives during the 1980s imposed policies that were supposed to let tenants rather than trained professionals, be in charge of their own housing management. (Hyatt, 1997, p. 218). As a result of these new policies, public housing underwent a transformation from ‘a cite of
deprivation into a place of opportunity’ (Hyatt, 1997, p. 232). The thought behind these new policies was to give the tenants more ‘freedom’ and ‘individual choice’ to manage their own housing, and thereby also their own communities. With this responsibility followed new interpretations and understandings of poverty. Hyatt argues that with this change in housing management, poverty is no longer viewed as a social problem. Instead poor people are perceived as being given an opportunity to be in charge of their own management and self-fulfilment, and thereby also responsible if they fail to do so (Hyatt, 1997, p. 219). It becomes evident that the housing reform was one of Thatcher’s projects on the way towards an individualisation of society, encouraging poor people to be self-governing (Hyatt, 1997, p. 219). The issue of poverty is no longer viewed as social disadvantage in the community blamed on the government, but rather as a individual failure of the tenants and poor people themselves (Hyatt, 1997, p. 234). Rather than a project of social improvement, the liberal rule has allowed for an ideology of self-improvement (Hyatt, 1997, p. 233).

**Recent politics of todays Britain**

The current politics in Britain is characterised by two main parties: The wright wing *Conservative Party*, and the left wing *Labour Party*. There is a significant difference between the ‘Old Labour Right’, committed to improving the conditions for the working-class, and the ‘New Labour’, aiming to escape the working-class as a social force in society (Jones, 2012, p. 88). In the Old Labour, the politicians could have come from a working-class background, and have worked her –or himself up the political ladder through engaging in the trade unions (Jones, 2012, p. 88). The Old Labour recognised, and even worked towards a collective working-class identity. That is not to say that they were an all inclusive party: women and ethnic minorities were not always welcomed in the Old Labour. The New Labour, on the other hand, emphasise and idolise the individual’s ability to being self sufficient (Jones, 2012, p. 88).

In: ‘Introduction: the middle class-ification of Britain’, Edwards, Evans and Smith (2012) argue that the category ‘white working-class’ has emerged through thirty years of British political history. They stress that the categorisation became stigmatised during the 1980s and 1990s when the industrial villages and neighbourhoods were hit by the de-industrialisation during the Thatcher government (Edwards, et al., 2012, p. 5). Further, the categorisation reminds them of New Labours efforts to promote individual ambitions to find work, rather
than aiming at giving the working-class a compensation for all the jobs that got lost during the time of Thatcher government. The Labour Party was expected to help the trade unions rise again after they had been weakened. There was more than enough working-class people in Britain to be able to win a potential fight against the Thatcher government, and to claim back a decent standard of living if supported by the Labour Party (Jones, 2012, pp. 50-51). This fight, however, was impossible due to the fact that the trade unions, and the Labour Party were completely divided. At the end, the Labour leadership refused to support the trade unions (Jones, 2012, p. 58). Without the support from the Labour Party, the government was able to defeat any workers who tried to demonstrate and resist what was happening (Jones, 2012, pp. 50-51). In 1998, the centre-left political party Labour Party declared that ‘We’re all middle-class now’, and this statement received many protests (Edwards, et al., 2012 p. 5; Jones, 2012, p. 6). Many viewed this as an abandonment of the working-class people. The New Labour party was shifting from having been a working-class party, to no longer speak the language or to their needs (Edwards, et al., 2012. P.7). It has been argued that the current politics is now instead moving towards a ‘middle class-ification of Britain’ (Edwards, et al., 2012).

The New Labours’ decreased emphasis on working-class issues, lead to a political vacuum amongst the British working-class people. No party seemed to be standing up for the working-classes. Thus, in line with the decline of working-class support for the New Labour, a rise in the support for the far-right parties occurred, such as the British National Party, and the United Kingdoms Independence party (Edwards, et al., 2012, p. 4). After having experienced mainly negative changes during the Thatcher government, with increasing unemployment and poverty, one could assume that the working-class people would never vote for the conservatives again. The conservative leaders have arguably consisted of the wealthiest people in society, and, like Jones (2012) argues, they have commonly tried to weaken the collective power of the working-class. Nevertheless, a large part of the working-class is still voting for the conservatives (Jones, 2012, p. 43). During the time I did my fieldwork, the party won the 2015 general election, yet again becoming the majority party at the House of Commons.

Ethnography on the British working-class
An Anthropological study of working-class England is characterised by a focus on kinship, class and belonging. In the studies on kinship, the work of Young and Willmott (1957) ‘Family and Kinship in East London’ stands as a marker of one of the earliest ethnographies on the urban English working-class. Young and Willmott explore working-class families in suburban developments. They were amongst the first to suggest that urban renewal was not beneficial for traditional family structures. In 1945 Young and Willmott founded the Institute of Community studies, and their published works began with ‘Family and Kinship in East London’ (1957), and ended with ‘The New East End: Kinship, Race and Conflict’ (2006), written by Dench, Gavron and Young. In the latter, Young revisited his earlier research field from ‘Family and Kinship in East London’, where he and his colleagues were looking at changes in the community. They quickly faced the challenge of finding any continuity at all (Dench et al., 2006, p. 14). The authors argue that the significance of the extended family has been replaced by the welfare-state-friendly nuclear family (Dench et al., 2006, p. 13). They blame the evolving welfare state and meritocracy for the decline of local community life and family ties (Dench et al., 2006, p. 106).

Whereas Young and his colleagues provided one of the earliest researches using in-depth interviews and surveys in urban areas of England, Paul Willis (1977) became well known with his ethnographic description of a group of working-class schoolboys from his case study of a council estate in an industrial working-class town (1977, p. 4). Willis argues that the ‘lads’ are maintaining class division and cultural opposition through the resistance of school-culture, thereby maintaining loyalty towards the working-class. His study shows how the children were reproducing themselves as working-class. He suggests the school as an institution where the working-class identity is being exercised, and young boys are preparing for working-class jobs in manual labour (Willis, 1977, p. 2). In line with Willis, the anthropologist Gillian Evans (2006), in her ‘Educational Failure and Working Class Children’ similarly claims that young working-class children are resisting education and middle-class values (Evans, 2006, p. 11). She did an ethnographic research on schoolchildren in Bermondsey, London, and like Willis, Evans, also stress that the working-class status is conflicting with demands from educational institutions. She suggests that educational institutions are supposed to broker the class difference, but are, on the contrary, operating in

5 ‘Lads’ is a common term used about Working-class boys.
favour of the middle-class. This leads to working-class pupils commonly rejecting any adaptation to a middle-class lifestyle (Evans, 2006, p. 32).

One of the more recent ethnographic explorations of contemporary British societies is the work of Katherine Smith (2012) ‘Fairness, Class and Belonging in Contemporary England’. Smith did her fieldwork nearby to my own area, on a working-class community in Manchester, and our findings are equally similar. Smith explores individual articulations of ‘fairness’, and how they are manifested in concepts of belonging and otherness (2012, p. 4). I will use Smith throughout in this dissertation to draw out some of the similarities and differences between our findings.

Whilst Evans (2006) and Willis (1977) are arguing for a strong working-class identity, Dench, Gavron and Young are instead stressing the fact that the working-class is facing damage to the traditional family structures, which further leads to a decline of local community life (Dench et al., 2006, p. 19). I agree, on the basis of my findings, with Evans and Willis on their claims that working-class people in large condemning middle-class values, but I do not, on the other hand, argue that this is strengthening the working-class identity. In addition, like Dench, Gavron and Young (2006), I will also suggest that there are certain changes that have lead to increased independency within family structures. I do, however, not stress that the welfare state has entirely broken up the kinship ties. I observed that people indeed still have strong kinship ties, of which I will discuss in chapter 4. In other words, I argue that the working-class people in my study are both distancing themselves, as well as emphasising their belonging to their working-class equals, and their imposed working-class status. Smith similarly argues that people did not want to be categorised as working-class, but at the same time they emphasised their sense of belonging to the local neighbourhood. This was done through narratives about an imagined shared past, which helped evoke ideas of belonging to a social class (2012, p. 8; p. 55).

**Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have demonstrated some selected background research relevant for this thesis. In the historical contextualisation I have emphasised particular historical events I find significant for the discussion to follow. A certain knowledge about the history of a society increases a more profound understanding of the current situation, and of behavioural patterns
of the people living in these areas (Smith, 2012, p. 54). Although I have the uttermost respect for the work of the scholars represented in this chapter, one must always bear in mind that interpretations of history are subjective. The history presented in this thesis will also necessarily be so. The literature I have used to illustrate the history of working-class people are the authors’ and researchers’ own perception of that history. With this background knowledge, I will continue discussing interpretations of history from the viewpoint of the people I got to know during fieldwork, drawing on their personal narratives. I believe this to be a more fair way of presenting the history of the people of the inhabitants of the area where I conducted my fieldwork.
Chapter 3: Verbal and silenced negotiations of distance at the Youth Centre

Gullestad (1989) stresses that when people are creating *symbolic fences* they do it indirectly and often unwillingly. She argues that: ‘It is crucial to acknowledge the fact that the exclusion and symbolic fences are not established first and foremost in order to exclude someone, but rather to protect and manage social identity, defined within a certain reference group.’6 (Gullestad, 1989, p. 119). I will suggest that in my case, this was situational. When the people I got to know at the centre were exercising symbolic fences, they were sometimes well aware of its excluding effects. Some of the symbolic fences were utterly expressed with the very aim of creating exclusion and distance from another social group. In other situations where social codes were being exercised, exclusion was not necessarily a deliberate outcome. Within a delimited field, such as the youth centre, there exist a number of social boundaries. One person can be an insider within a particular social relation, and an outsider in another (Eriksen, 2010, p. 170). I will use my own experiences as a researcher in the field in order to illustrate how one person can challenge the social boundaries, go from being an outsider and, at least to some extent, become more of an insider.

In this chapter I will discuss how social boundaries were created and maintained between the employees I got to know at the youth centre. The main emphasis will be on the social boundary that was most evident at the youth centre, namely, the boundary between the floor staff and the office staff. I will address two main aspects of the social interaction that specifically characterised the floor staff, namely *gossiping* and *joking relationships* (Smith, 2012, p. 111). These two forms of social negotiations of distance were verbally expressed, and the chapter will be followed by a discussion on how the *absence* of verbal interaction could also create the same social boundaries.

The case of Andrew

I experienced from early on that the floor staff members seemed to be nervous around the office staff members, and they often avoided the office space. I experienced countless of

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6 My own translation
times that members of the floor staff would ask me to go and get something or someone from the office because they themselves were reluctant to enter the space. From the beginning I had a very positive and relaxed relationship to the office staff, as had quite a lot of contact with them due to my research. I was never intimidated by any of them, and I struggled to understand how some of my colleagues on the floor were. I realised early in the process that I had to study this relationship closer in order to understand the tensions. During my search I got to know Andrew, a 24-year-old man, with one foot in both social groups. As a former member of floor staff he had worked himself up to become a member of the office staff, making him an intermediate between the floor staff and the office staff. Andrew had been living in the local neighbourhood his entire life. Andrew had a bachelor degree in English literature, and after finishing his education he began to work as a primary school teacher. In addition to this, he took some shifts at the youth centre in the evenings as a youth worker. He told me that he disliked the teaching job, which led to him quit his job to work permanently at the youth centre. He considered himself as overqualified for the youth work because of his university degree, yet he nevertheless claimed to love working there. When I began volunteering at the centre Andrew had recently been promoted to a position upstairs in the office. With his new position, he was a connection between the local community, the floor staff and the office staff. He told me he considered it a challenging position to be in. When he got the job in the office he was worried about loosing his well-established relationship with the floor staff, and that people would begin to see him exclusively as a member of the office staff. To avoid this misconception he made sure he continued spending a great amount of his time on the floor, in order to remind the floor staff that he was still one of them. He did, however, also stress the fact that he enjoyed the work on the floor. When I asked Andrew to share his thoughts on my perception of the floor staff’s scepticism towards the office staff, he replied: ‘It’s because of the wages. If you earn less than a person, you automatically assume that person is your boss. So a youth worker going upstairs to the office will look around thinking everyone up there are their bosses.’ Andrew also stressed that a main issue was the diversity between the contracts; between the people employed through fulltime contracts, and the people employed on part time contracts. He explained that the employees working fulltime were working on permanent contracts, which is what everyone strives towards. The paid floor staff are hired on hourly wages, which means they have to work during inconvenient hours such as in the evenings or weekends. They would also earn less than the office staff.
Andrew made clear verbal distinctions between the office staff and the floor staff, similar to the observations I had made prior to our conversations. Andrew blamed the institutionalised and economic diversity between the employees for the social inequality between the floor staff and the office staff. His distinction made me curious to find out whether the floor staff had any particular reason to feel intimidated by the management in the first place. I did not understand why Andrew seemed to be taking for granted that everyone would naturally be intimidated by their manager. I later realised that the distance between the floor staff and the office staff was a result of both the floor staff, and the office staff were continuously distancing themselves from the other social groups. I will begin to illustrate how mechanisms for the creation of distance were being emphasised, by addressing a social phenomenon that was crucial in creating distance, namely gossiping.

Engaging in gossip

On a Sunday afternoon, about two months after I started volunteering at the youth centre, I found myself in a situation where I felt socially included for the first time. And it occurred as I was witnessing my colleagues gossiping. The floor staff arranged meetings with all the employees that had been working that day, before and after every senior session. The meetings had a high attendance, between ten to fifteen people. The leader of the meeting would have a sheet of paper with a set of questions that the whole group would answer in plenum, whilst the person in charge would be taking notes. The questions were aimed at helping to organise activities for the session ahead, to give feedback on how the day had been, and to discuss possible improvement measures. On this particular evening, it had been a very quiet session with few young people, and few members of floor staff present. At the end of the session the floor staff gathered for the regular meeting, and there were only five of us in total. I had been present at quite a few meetings such as this, but never with such a low attendance rate. We all sat down around the arts table in the recreational area. The conversation topics quickly revealed that everyone knew each other well, privately as well as professionally. The conversation was flowing more openly than at the other meetings I had previously attended, and it felt like I was present at a social gathering more than a job meeting. The woman leading the meeting, Sarah, was a person of a strong character. I had noticed her in particular early on because of her authoritarian attitude. She was a respected person at the centre. She was in her mid forties and had a slim figure, with thin hair at a shoulder length. Sarah talked with a heavy Manchester accent, and her language contained a
vast number of swear words. She was also an impressive storyteller. This evening she started the meeting by telling us a story about her son and his girlfriend who were having a fight, to the great amusement of her audience. After she finished her story, the conversation turned to revolve around issues at the youth centre. I could sense a resentful dissatisfaction amongst the small crowd in the way they were talking about some of their colleagues. One of the male volunteers started the discussion complaining about the centre not being run properly by the administration and the office staff, and that it resulted in cutbacks on funding. I became curious, and asked him to tell me more about the current financial situation at the centre. He explained that when the centre had opened they had received enough funding to last them for three years ahead, and now those years had passed and the time had come to send in new applications for funding. The centre was supposedly struggling to acquire a sustainable financial support, because they did not fulfil the demands acquired by the companies offering the funding. The man listed two main issues that were crucial in explaining why the centre was loosing money: Firstly, they did not have enough members coming in every week and secondly, they did not offer enough improvement measures aimed exclusively at the local community.

There were only members of the floor staff present for this meeting, and none of the people talking had any influence over the management of the centre. The man who started the discussion claimed that he would have done a much better job running the place and retaining the funding than current administration had done. He argued that the lack of members was a result of poor advertisement, and he claimed to have a lot more knowledge about improvement measures than the marketing executive. The other employees were laughing at his self-confidence, but they all agreed that the administration was not doing enough to improve the place. The conversation increasingly developed to become a stage for complaining and gossiping about the office staff. After a while I asked the first man who had started the conversation topic whether he had ever mentioned his ideas for improvement to the administration. He answered me, clearly upset ‘It has been mentioned at some staff meetings but nothing seems to be getting done about it! It’s like talking to that wall! I’ll get a better answer from that painting on the wall!’ This case does not only illustrate one man’s frustration, but during my time at the centre I would hear again and again similar verbal expressions for discontent with the management. Whenever I overheard or participated in conversations where the floor staff were talking about the office staff, they were continuously emphasising how neglected their opinions were, and that their work was not fully
appreciated. Throughout this meeting, the floor staff seemed to be maintaining the same
distance that they accused the office staff of creating. The act of gossiping emphasised what
Gullestad calls a ‘symbolic fence’. It created a clear social boundary between the ones
gossiping, and the people not taking part in the gossip – and creating distance between them.
When the floor staff were gossiping about the office staff, they were actively distancing
themselves from the office staff, seemingly aware of the consequences of their action.
Contrary to what Gullestad propose when stressing that people are not necessarily aware of
the fact that they are excluding someone else, I will argue that the very aim of the act of
gossiping is exactly to create a distance (Gullestad, 1989, p. 119).

What perhaps intrigued me the most about this meeting was the way in which my colleagues
were talking about the office staff. They would not have said the same things if they were
standing face to face with the same staff. In this particular setting, however, they allowed
themselves to blame the office staff for everything that went wrong, or that they were
dissatisfied with. On this note, I have decided to use the word *gossip* about this case, rather
than *complaining*, because an important aspect of these conversations was that they never
took place with the person complained about present. Max Gluckman (1963), in his paper
‘Gossip and Scandal’ stresses the positive virtues of the act of gossiping. He claims that the
act of gossiping maintains the unity and values of a social group (Gluckman, 1963, p. 308).
This would seem relevant for the case of the floor staff. When they were gossiping about the
office staff, they were also expressing their belonging to the floor staff as a social group.

Gluckman describes the general characteristics of gossip as a ‘culturally controlled game
with important social functions’ (1963, p. 312). One of the valuable social functions of gossip
in this particular case is arguably to bring the people who are gossiping closer together within
their social group (the floor staff), and thereby distancing themselves from another social
group (the office staff). After the meeting illustrated above, I was under the assumption that
everyone present must have had similar conversations together during earlier events, because
they all seemed to agree on the matter. They also seemed to have a common understanding
that what was being said would remain within the walls of the meeting room. I later learned
that this was in fact the case; the same conversation topics and act of gossiping reoccurred
every week when the same people were attending the meeting. This was a context where they
could express their frustration because they knew everyone present would agree. The
exception in the room on this particular day was, of course, myself. I was taken by surprise
by the fact that they didn’t seem to hold back on anything because of my presence. Perhaps
precisely because of this I felt socially included. Gossip presupposes a mutual trust between the people involved, and when my colleagues were gossiping in my presence, I was somehow also involved in this trust alliance. My assumption is supported by Gluckman when he states that: ‘[…] the right to gossip about certain people is a privilege which is only extended to a person when he or she is accepted as a member of the group in set. It is a hallmark of membership.’ (Gluckman, 1963, p. 313). The act of gossiping created an environment where the floor staff could share their experiences of feeling oppressed and underappreciated, thus allowing for a group dynamic where those involved become insiders, creating a distance between themselves, and the ones they are complaining about. Through the act of gossiping, the floor staff had a tool for making themselves less at the bottom of the working environment. It created a feeling that they shared something of importance that the office staff were excluded from.

Gluckman also stresses that because the act of gossiping creates such a strong group dynamic, performing the act in the presence of a stranger is the ultimate way of demonstrating a stranger’s place outside of the social group (1963, p. 313). According to Gluckman, such an event shows the stranger that he or she does not belong. He argues that the very fact that the newcomer cannot partake in the act of gossiping increases the feeling of standing outside the collective understanding and social interaction taking place (Gluckman, 1963, p. 313). I, however, experienced quite the opposite: exactly because the floor staff members were gossiping about the office staff in my presence, they made me feel welcomed as a member of their social group, by demonstrating that I was not part of the office staff, whom they were gossiping about. Even though I was a newcomer, and a ‘stranger’ in Gluckman’s terms, I did not feel I had to take an active part in the act in order to be accepted as a member of the floor staff. On the other hand, I could not have commented on their gossip or asked them to stop, because that would have made me an outsider and supportive of the office staff. I believe that I navigated the situation illustrated above by asking questions and being curious rather than engaging in the act of gossiping myself, or opposing it. As I spent most of my time with the floor staff, I naturally became included in their social group, rather than that of the office staff. My experience of being included in a social group through the act of gossiping might be particular for my case at the youth centre, because there were two such distinct social groups. Nevertheless, my experience corresponds with Gluckman’s first argument, that the act of gossiping is socially including.
‘Joking relationships’

After the event of discovering the social significance of gossip amongst the floor staff, I began to notice another important criterion for the social interaction amongst the floor staff, namely, what I have decided to call the *joking relationship* (Smith, 2012, p. 111). As an attempt to crack the social codes of the floor staff in order to achieve the preferred state of ‘going native’ (Okely, 2012, pp. 78-79), I began to pay attention to the particularities of the floor staff’s verbal interaction. In the beginning of my fieldwork I struggled somewhat to engage verbally, because I was not familiar with the broad Manchester accent, nor their way of talking to each other. I began to notice how verbal exchanges of rude jokes and insults between the floor staff and the young people were played out. The jokes and insults seemed to be part of a mutual relationship; the person the insult was being aimed towards was expected to give an equally insulting comeback. I realised that I also had to take part in this exchange if I was to become a more a natural part of the floor staff, rather than a stranger. It did not come naturally for me, as I was already struggling to get rid of my politeness and shyness. For me, being directly rude contradicted all my ideas of what enjoyable social interactions implies and requires.

One thing I noticed about the jokes in particular was that they were always being said out loud, as if to amuse the other people standing within an audible distance. And people certainly seemed to be amused by this. I soon realised that the other people around were in fact crucial participants in the joking relationship. The verbal interaction between the joker and the receiver could resemble a performance, in that it required an audience. The audience also had an important social function: they could join in and take part in the play. It was this act that differentiated the joking relationship from coming across as mere bullying: because the jokes were being said out loud, the audience could step in and support the person receiving the insult. If the comeback from the receiver did not appear as expected, other people around would support the receiver with a comeback towards the insulter – trying to save the situation from being of a bullying character. The aim was not to victimise the receiver of the insult. Therefore a comeback was necessary, usually followed by laughter from the participants in order to ease the situation. Smith (2012) has also mentioned this joking relationship in her research, and she grasped the emic term ‘having a barter’ (pp.111-136). While I never heard anyone mentioning this phrase at the youth centre, the joking
relationship I observed seemed to be a common understanding between everyone on the floor. It was an unwritten rule, understood by both the adults and the young people, although it was never talked about. It was simply the way communication worked on the floor. Smith elaborates on ‘having a barter’ as a medium for exercising power (2012, p. 127). She highlights the event of receiving the joke as the point when power is exercised: If the receiver of the joke takes offence, and does not have a comeback with a new joke or insult, the person thereby does not allow for any further relationship to be built between the two, she argues. In this event, the person performing the joke is being transformed from a joker to a bully. In my case, the significant event of participation from the audience in the joking relationship does not allow for the same power exchange that Smith stresses. The joking relationship I observed differentiates from Smiths’ perception of power exchanges as a relationship with only two people involved. This might derive from the fact that Smith is writing specifically about the relationship between elder people in specific settings, such as at the local pub, and my experiences are drawn from a youth centre, with young people involved. The interactions I observed might be understood as attempts to teach young people how to perform in joking relationships. It was important for the floor staff to show that they were strongly against bullying. At the same time, the joking relationship of such significance to the social interaction in the neighbourhood, that young people will sooner or later have to learn how to take part in it. Perhaps the event of several people being involved in the joking relationship is a way of teaching the young people how to play out the joking relationship. Thus the involvement of other people is a result of the floor staffs attempt to help young and more vulnerable people to cope with the particular social interaction that the joking relationship entails. My own observations on the joking relationship along with Smith’s notion of ‘having a barter’ shows significant characteristic to the social interaction in similar places. They also show that joking relationships cuts across age and gender, but is seemingly more attached to a specific place. The joking relationship was not only particular to the centre, but also significant for the social interaction in the local community.

When I became more comfortable at the centre I also attempted to take part in the joking relationship, noticing how people’s attitude towards me changed with it. I felt that I was increasingly becoming more and more included and accepted as one of the many co-workers on the floor. When I started feeling integrated in the social interaction through the joking relationship I also noticed that the office staff were not taking part in it. During one of the regular evening meetings with the floor staff, Sarah presented a situation where she
emphasised the differences in humour, a sign of the division between the office staff and the floor staff. She told us that she had witnessed one of the female office staff members struggling to gather a group of young people in the reception area in order to get them ready for an excursion. One of the male floor staff members was going to assist the group on the excursion, and Sarah was laughing when she illustrated his entrance into the reception hall to greet the young people: he had entered the room with his jumper turned around, the hood covering his whole face, sunglasses outside of the hood, whilst dancing and singing the iconic pop song from the early 90’s ‘Ice, ice, baby’. The irony that Sarah wanted to illustrate with her story was that the office staff member, clearly unimpressed by the performance, had been rather annoyed at the floor staff member, whilst the young people had been laughing and enjoying the show. Sarah was emphasising the seriousness of the office staff member, apparently without any good sense of humour, whilst the floor staff member was the funny and easy going one. She was thereby also affirming the office staff member’s status as an outsider when she clumsily tried to interact with the young people and the floor staff. This example makes evident Smith’s argument that ‘jokes may be an effective way for people to demonstrate pride in their group identity’ (2012, p. 149). When Sarah told the story to the floor staff members, it demonstrated the difference between ‘our’ group identity, in this context based on a shared sense of humour, as opposed to the office staff, who do not have a sense of humour. Smith, like myself, recognised that when people were not engaging in ‘having a barter’ they were left outside of the community group relationships (2012, p. 153). There lies a great risk of misconception when outsiders do not understand the social significance of the joking relationship. People exercising it might be mistaken for being rude and mean towards one another, and of having a lesser moral nature, as I myself first perceived the individuals participating in the joking relationship in the beginning of my fieldwork. After I realised the social significance of the joking relationship, it became clear to me just how important this interaction was for the social dynamic. This further enabled me to see the positive virtue of the joking relationship, such as its socially engaging function, being a social learning process for young people.

The joking relationships I observed had much in common with the act of gossiping. They were both significant criteria for social inclusion amongst the floor staff as well as between the young people. Like the act of gossiping, the joking relationship was not only socially including for the people involved, but also socially excluding for the people not taking part in the exchange. They were both expressions of ‘symbolic fences’ (Gullestad, 1989, p. 117),
because they emphasised social codes within a certain social group, making it difficult for outsiders to participate in the exchange. Unlike the act of gossiping, the way the joking relationship produced social boundaries was not something people practicing were necessarily aware of. The joking relationship was not deliberately aimed at excluding the ones who were not involved. When gossiping, on the other hand, the people involved were well aware of its excluding outcome. The joking relationship might rather be viewed as a ‘symbolic fence’ (Gullestad, 1989, p. 117), which is not visible for the people performing, but it becomes ever so visible for outsiders, like myself, and the office staff who were not integrated in this social exchange. It was in my first encounter with the joking relationship that my status as an outsider was performed.

Similar to this, it was during the infrequent interactions with the floor staff, that the office staff’s status as outsiders was being performed. Through engaging with the floor staff during an extended period of time, I was able to observe and, at least to a certain extent, adapt to the social interactions of the floor staff, such as the joking relationship. By doing this, I became more of an insider at the centre than the office staff had managed during the three years they had all been working together under the same roof. Drawing out social mechanisms requires first and foremost time spent together with positive collaboration and communication, which had clearly not been the office staff’s priority. The joking relationship illustrates how the same process from which I was at first excluded, I later became included in. Smith had the same experience when she engaged in ‘having a barter’ (2012, pp. 126-7). It is important to note that there were also other obstacles regarding my positioning that made it impossible for me to become a complete insider during the six months I spent at the centre. After I started taking part in the joking relationship, there were times where I failed to perform. This would expose, perhaps even reinforce, my status as an outsider. The social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are situational and not fixed. Nevertheless, I will argue that by at least attempting to participate, I was able to stretch the social boundary between myself, and the people I socially engaged with on the floor.

Lack of communication: demonstrating distance

‘So I think it’s a very big lack of communication. And has been from day one! So it’s an on going thing. The communication, -the lack of it is on going.’ Sarah expressed her frustration about the poor communication between the floor staff and the office staff. From Sarah’s point
of view, the office staff were deciding how the communication was to be carried out at the working place, and she emphasised that they were not engaged actively nor verbally with the work that is going on downstairs. In the beginning of my fieldwork I could more easily relate to the office staff. I believe this was because I had more experience within the working environment of an office rather than that of a work environment including young people. Perhaps also because I had done more academic work than working as a youth worker. As a result, in the beginning of my fieldwork I sensed that the floor staff viewed me as an outsider on the same level as the office staff members. Like I illustrated above, I managed to turn my positioning around slightly when I made an effort to become part of the floor staff through spending a lot of time engaging on the floor. Even though most of the employees from the floor and the office had been working together under the same roof for more or less three years, they have remained socially divided. The lack of communication and time spent together had lead to a lack of understanding, with social codes having developed quite differently within the two groups. Looking back at Smith’s (2012) discussion on ‘having a barter’, she refers to power as an exchangeable object, expressed through verbal exchanges between people (2012, p. 127). Smith claims that when people are engaging in ‘having a barter’ with outsiders, who might take offence by the act, the people joking are negotiating power (Smith, 2012, p. 127). Whilst Smith discusses power within verbal exchanges, the office staff demonstrated the very opposite; namely power manifested within the absence of verbal exchange. It was, essentially the office staff, and amongst them particularly the managers, who were in charge of how the centre was being run. They also had a certain responsibility for how the professional relationship and communication was to be carried out between its employees. Sarah was frustrated, and pointed the blame for the exclusion on the office staff. She stressed that it has been an attitude present from the very beginning. She therefore claimed it could seem as though this was a conscious strategy from the managements side, where keeping a distance from the floor staff was in the interest of the business. As I have tried to present, the distance between the office staff and the floor staff was being performed by the floor staff as well as the office staff. Sarah’s experience was coherent with the majority of the floor staff members I talked to: they all believed that they were being excluded from the office staff.

I began this chapter by describing a sense of intimidation from the side of the floor staff, felt towards the office staff. Poor communication is a likely cause for this. The floor staff might have experienced the office staff as intimidating because of the distance their silence
represented. The floor staff reciprocated this frustration of not being communicated with, by distancing themselves further from the office staff, through the gossiping and the joking relationship. With both social groups distancing themselves from one another, they will most likely never develop a shared respect for each other, but instead view the others as outsiders. The floor staff will continue to listen to advice from each other, rather than their managers, and continue to feel underappreciated and misunderstood by the office staff. I need to stress that I did not engage with the office staff long enough to grasp the particularities within their specific form of social exchange, but what I observed amongst the floor staff was that they created their own hierarchy internally. I will later elaborate on how the hierarchy amongst the floor staff was in many ways based on the sentiments of belonging to the neighbourhood. The floor staff used members of their own social group for council and advice, in lack of a steady and respected authority. These reflections made the conversation I had with Andrew clearer. Whilst he suggested that the floor staff were intimidated only because of differences in salary and contracts, I observed that there were other reasons for this intimidation. My find was that social boundaries were maintained through the process of both the floor staff and office staff distancing themselves from one another. I have now illustrated how the floor staff were distancing themselves from the office staff through the act of gossiping and joking relationships, and the office staff from the floor staff through their poor communication. These mechanisms all contribute to maintain the social boundaries established by acts of distancing.

**Concluding remarks**

I have attempted to convey how inclusion always also presupposes exclusion (Smith, 2012, pp. 55-6). Some times the exclusion of another social group is deliberate, such as when the floor staff were gossiping, while other times, the exclusion is not as evident to the people exercising it, such as when people were involved in joking relationships. Nevertheless, I will argue that the verbal expressions of the act of gossiping and joking relationships negotiate belonging towards a particular social group. My own experience of first appearing as an outsider, and after some time spent learning from the social codes amongst the floor staff, having the opportunity to achieve the status as more of an insider shows how these social boundaries can be challenged. Fredrik Barth (1982) argues that it is the boundaries between distinct social groups, and not the cultural features characterising the group itself, that determine the existence of a social group (Barth, 1982, p. 179). When the floor staff and the
office staff were demonstrating the distance between their own, and the opposing social group, they were also strengthening their own identity as a social group. Barth goes further to suggest that ethnical groups are developing in the way they do namely because of the existence of other social groups they are opposing themselves to (1982, p. 179). This is, in many ways, also true for the relationship between the floor staff and the office staff. The mechanisms for creating distance illustrated above were strengthening the group togetherness within each group, and the individuals within each group would commonly stress group-specific values shaped in opposition to the other group. Without these boundaries, there would arguably have been quite different social particularities between the employees at the centre (Barth, 1982, p. 182).
In the previous chapter I discussed how the employees at the youth centre were distancing themselves from one another, accentuated through the act of gossiping, joking relationship, and through lack of communication. I will now continue to draw on my observation and conversations with the floor staff. The main emphasis will be on their relationship to the local neighbourhood they lived and worked in. The previous chapter was primarily based on my observations and experiences of participating as a volunteer. The following chapter has mainly been shaped through conversations and interviews I had with the adults I worked on the floor with. As the data I have gathered for this thesis is limited to the youth centre, it is important to bear in mind that when I discuss people’s individual experience of living in the neighbourhood, it is based on conversations, rather than observations. I find this form of data gathering highly valuable as a source of research material on the same ground as observations. This is due to the fact that when people were talking about their relationship to the local neighbourhood, they expressed their experiences of belonging and distance, to both the place and the people in it. This also included the tensions between them.

I will begin this chapter by illustrating how the members of floor staff who lived in the area emphasised their sense of belonging to the neighbourhood. Furthermore I will discuss how the sense of belonging was also met by acts of distancing. The residents of the neighbourhood were torn between accepting and rejecting their community and the people living there. My aim is to draw out these tensions. Even though the majority of the people I talked to told me they wanted to move, there were nevertheless particular social and emotional ties that kept people from leaving or, I will argue, even wanting to leave the local neighbourhood. In the last part of the chapter I will emphasise how these ties were manifested in kinship ties, and more specifically, within mother-daughter relationships. Discussing family ties, my analysis will be limited to the female gender because I was only able to attain detailed data from women. I consider the mother-daughter relationships I observed as a crucial discovery in the discussion on belonging and acts of distancing from the local neighbourhood, because this relationship was the only one I observed where acts of distancing were never being emphasised. It was within this relationship that I observed the
key pillar of relationships in Hayford: where the togetherness and commitments were stronger than the desire for distancing oneself. Through a closer examination of the mother-daughter relationship, I will draw out the particularities of belonging in the absence of distance.

Identity of belonging at the youth centre

The office staff were as outsiders excluded from the collective understanding of the local community. With a total of 19 office staff members, only one of them was living in the local area at the time of the research. The majority of the floor staff, on the other hand, had either grown up, or was currently living in the neighbourhood surrounding the youth centre. Most of them knew each other from before the centre had been established, as friends, relatives or neighbours. Sarah illustrated this issue for me:

They’re [the office staff management] not getting people from around here. Some of them have never wanted to be a youth worker. Some of them have probably come here cause he’s once a finance guy or that kind of thing, so they probably never in a million years expected to be running round with the people down stairs?, cause that’s not the job they signed up for.

Sarah emphasised that the office staff were not working at the youth centre because they cared about the well being of the local community or had the passion to reconstruct it, but rather because they didn’t have any other choice. They had taken the job simply because of lack of better job-offers. When listening to Sarah, I realised that there was a significant connection between belonging to the neighbourhood and belonging to the youth centre. Looking back at Andrews’ situation as a man who had grown up in the area, and later became part of the office staff, it became even clearer to me how he would struggle to balance the two different identities. Even though Andrew spent most of his working hours upstairs in the office, he also frequently emphasised his belonging to the neighbourhood and the floor staff. Andrew’s situation illustrates the significance of the neighbours’ identity of belonging to the local community. He struggled when his position at the centre became conflicting with his identity of belonging to the neighbourhood, and with the floor staff. He understood that the floor staff would not respect him if he would distance himself from them, and completely

7 Note here that Sarah is using a ‘downstairs’ metaphor to illustrate the separation between the staff and the floor staff, similar to the way I had captured the terms in my own field notes.
embrace the identity of the office staff. He was therefore making an effort to keep his identity of belonging to the working-class of the local community that he wanted to be associated with. He did this by consequently emphasising the differences between himself and the office staff, and to spend as much of his time possibly down on the floor. He was both verbally and physically trying to distance him self from what he did not want to be identified with, namely the office staff as the outsiders of the community. Andrew exercised what Gullestad (1989) calls ‘avoidance as a strategy’: he was avoiding the office staff whenever he was not forced to work upstairs in the office space, thereby creating a ‘symbolic fence’ between himself, as a member of the floor staff on the one side, and the office staff on the other (Gullestad, 1989 pp. 117-118).

The local shopping centre

As I have previously mentioned, the floor staff member Sarah was a respected woman with a great deal of authority, not exclusively at the centre, but also in the neighbourhood. She had become a well-known figure in the neighbourhood through her commitment in arranging activities and engagements for improving the social environment of the area, and especially with young people. Sarah also had her own stand at the local market, where she told me she had been working for more than twenty-four years. The local market was located at an open space surrounded by an old factory building recently rebuilt as a shopping centre. The shopping centre was situated opposite the youth centre, within a walking distance of about three minutes. My first encounter with the local market was on a sunny Monday morning in February, about one month after my arrival in Manchester. It was only a few weeks before I started volunteering at the youth centre, and it was my first attempt at getting to know the local area. I had been walking around in the streets amongst the council houses and the very few, small local shops for about an hour when I decided to take a look at the local shopping centre. The streets were very quiet that day, and I had spotted only a handful of people on my way. I did not pass any more people than I guess you can expect from a Monday around midday. When looking for the shopping centre I had to walk around for a while, confused because I was searching for a huge building with a clear sign of the name of the shopping centre on it. I stood still for a while, looking at all the shops surrounding me, when I realised I was in fact standing by the entrance of the shopping centre. It was outside in a large open space surrounded by two-storey brick buildings forming an arc. There were shops in each building, and in the large open space in the middle, there was a roof I imagined once had
been a parking lot, and underneath it was a flea market. When I arrived at the shopping centre I was taken by surprise by the large amount of people there. The market was so crowded that if I didn’t know any better, I would mistake it for being a Saturday rather than an average weekday. There were people of all ages, from school kids to elderly people. It made me wonder how so many people were able to take the time off work and away from school on a regular Monday. I realised I was observing a place of great social significance to the community. The flea market was open on Mondays and Thursdays, and Sarah was working on her stand once a week, alongside the youth work at the centre. If Sarah was just as good a storyteller at the market as I had been witnessing at the centre, I had no difficulties in understanding how she would have made herself a familiar person to the residents of the local community.

The same status people had in the neighbourhood were reflected within the walls of the centre. Sarah had authority amongst the floor staff, because she was also authoritative in the neighbourhood. When I observed Sarah’s position at the youth centre, and heard about her equally important role in the neighbourhood, I assumed that she must take great pride in the neighbourhood, and have strong sentiments of belonging to the place. My assumptions soon proved to be wrong. Upon entering into dialogue with her and the other local residents about their relationship to the neighbourhood, I discovered great ambiguity in their expressed sentiments of belonging to the place. I will further attempt to explain this ambiguity by discussing the tensions that the local residents expressed to me; the great tension between belonging and distancing themselves from their own neighbourhood.

Narratives of belonging
Katelin, a woman in her fifties working as a youth worker at the centre, had been living in the local area her whole life. Katelin and her family had always been very close with Sarah’s family, and the two women were close friends and neighbours. For several years, Katelin had been the business-owner of a beauty salon that used to lie on the main shopping street of the area. Over the years some changes had been made in the neighbourhood that had also affected her directly: many people lost their jobs and could no longer afford to go shopping like they used to. The housing rent increased to the point where many shop owners were forced to close down their little shops on that street. Katelin’s beauty salon was the last shop
remaining, but in the end she had no choice but to close it down for good. Katelin sentimentally recalled:

They [residents of the local area] would come in to my shop, then they’d go in another shop, and like, everyone knew each other, then they’d go in another shop, going to the bakers, and doing this, and doing that, and the butchers, and we were all a happy community.

Her shop had closed seven years prior to our encounter. When all the shops were gone, new shops opened up where the old ones used to be, only this time they were primarily run by people fairly new to the community. Katelin told me the new shopping street was filled with ‘shops we don’t need.’ I asked her what kind of shops she was referring to, and she told me: ‘Mainly African hairdressers and West Indian food’. She was very upset about having to give up on her own business and to witness someone else ‘taking over’. When saying ‘shops we don’t need’ she was most likely referring to ‘we’ as the white working-class British people who had been living in the local area for generations. During the recent years an increasing number of people, mainly immigrants, had been moving in to the area, and the supply and demand had changed with it. Contrary to what Katelin proposed, my impression was rather that the shops that had taken over the old shopping street were running quite well, as there was in fact an expanding market for those kinds of shops in the neighbourhood.

Through the creation and performance of narratives about the history of the local area, people were manifesting their belonging to the place (Smith, 2012, pp. 54-55). People would glorify the old industrial times, and by doing this they are also influencing how the current state of the neighbourhood is viewed today (Smith, 2012, p. 55). If everything was better before, then a change had occurred to deteriorate the situation. The change most frequently mentioned was the ‘immigration’. The negative attitudes towards immigration did in particular account for the older generations (see also: Dench et al., 2006, p. 183). They were commonly claiming that the rising immigration was the most negative change the neighbourhood had faced during the recent years. I will use Sarah’s words as a reflection of the neighbourhood view on the matter as I believe they represented the opinions of a majority of the long-term residents of the area.

So it used to be just them family owned shops, you know, a very white community [Hayford] was. And then the shops got run down and people couldn’t afford their businesses no more.
And then a lot of black African people took the shops over, and they was all given, I think it was fifty thousand pounds to start a new business. So I know of a white, English woman who had to sell her shop, she had a lot of, you know, second hand trolleys and stuff like that. So her business closed because she couldn’t afford the rent, and they [immigrants] got free rent, - fifty thousand pounds to start the business up, and a few years of free rent! And they moved white people out of their shops, and run them down so they couldn’t afford it. And the black African people took [the main shopping street] over, basically. And I’m not being racist when I say that, because they have taken… they have taken the fully over, so now that isn’t really a safe place to walk because… It’s intimidating now because you have… if we had a bunch of [white] lads, like we do outside of McDonalds, a bunch of lads with hoodies on or whatever, they get moved away. But they’ll stand there, the big grown [black] men they’ll be like twenty of them outside a shop so you can’t pass, -they won’t move for you when you pass on the pavement. And there’s comments, there’s been some comments, real bad comments to people, they have told me when they have been walking past. And there’s a lot going on in them shops. Like, ehm, child sex and stuff like that. Me: ‘Really?’ Sarah: Yeah, yeah! Well, apparently just waiting for that… everybody else knows what’s going on. There’s alcohol sold in the back in shops that should have been banned. It’s all like a money cover-up. It’s hairdressers that are open till eleven o clock at night! Three of them in a row! Who wants their hair done at eleven o clock at night!? When Sarah was telling me about white people being forced to close their shops and black African people taking over, she is blaming the government for favouring immigrants, and repressing ‘white, English people’. Her frustration was evident when she was talking about ‘white lads’ being thrown away from the streets being accused of threatening behaviour when hanging out outside McDonalds, whereas black men were still allowed to be stand in groups outside ‘their’ shops to comment on people passing without any police interference. Sarah painted a picture of white working-class people being unfairly (Smith, 2012) treated by governmental authorities. She illustrated that the newcomers had taken over the streets, squeezing out the people who were already living there. When she stressed that ‘they have taken the fully over’, it can be interpreted as though she did not consider the neighbourhood as big enough for the co-existence of both newcomers, and long term residents. My observations are coherent with Dench, Gavron and Young’s observations in the New East End, when they argued for a strong connection between being hostile towards immigrants, and being rooted in the local neighbourhood (2006, p. 184). Sarah’s anecdote about the men on the pavement blocking people’s paths and making unpleasant comments is an illustration
of the same argument. It is understandable that Sarah was upset; after all she was forced to
close her shop, and in addition had to watch someone else start up a business in her old place.
It also helps to understand why she would be suspicious of the newcomers’ business activity,
and go to the somewhat extreme extent of spreading roomers about criminal activity going on
there.

Sarah painted a picture of the newcomers as intruders taking over her neighbourhood.
Gullestad (2001) elaborates on the issue illustrated above by drawing on the relationship
between the terms guest and intruder. She stresses that the metaphor ‘host-guest’ is
frequently being used when illustrating the difference between a host-country and the
immigrants living in the particular country (Gullestad, 2001, p. 53-54). As a guest, you are
obliged to respect the rules and regulations of the host. The host controls the premises in the
home, and therefore also has the right to be strict when the guest does not abide the rules. If
the guest does not adapt to the rules of the host, the status of the guest will change, to that of
an intruder, or an occupant. If the visit doesn’t work out, the host can demand that the guest
leaves. The line between intruder and occupant or enemy is therefore rather fine (Gullestad,
2001, pp. 53-54). The similarities between Gullestad’s guest-intruder terms resembles the
way in which Sarah was talking about the people who have not lived in the neighbourhood
for as long as she had. She was also talking about them as a form of intruders who were not
welcomed as guests in the neighbourhood that she called her home. Through language and
narratives, Sarah was creating a boundary between ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ (Gullestad, 2001, p. 58)
and thus demonstrated her own positioning as opposed to the newcomers’.

As Sarah was mainly negative about the rising immigration in the neighbourhood, so I asked
her to tell me about her experience with the children coming to the youth centre. My
impression was that they were getting along quite nicely regardless of ethnic origins.

I’m surprised how well that’s worked to be honest. What I feel that may be is, um… us as
adults living in this area have seen that change, the kids haven’t seen that, have they. I think
the kids are more acceptable than people who have watched their area being taken over and
change. So that kind of gets our back I think up a little bit more, because we can remember
how it used to be.
The narratives about ‘the good old days’ are in other words significant for taking ownership of the neighbourhood. Through narratives, Sarah justified her negative attitude towards immigration, they illustrate how much better it was before their arrival. This is in accordance with Gullestad’s observation on sentiments of belonging as commonly based upon kinship ties and similarities that goes far back in time through generations (2001, p. 56).

When I asked Sarah whether she could think of any positive effect of the expanding immigration, she held her breath for a few seconds, shook her head and sighted: ‘Oh, without sounding… unprofessional, [whispering] I just think they should stop letting them in, and get some of them sent back. I think this country’s absolutely tipping. See, it’s, it’s full isn’t it!’ Sarah seems to be of the opinion that those who have been in the local area for the longest amount of time have the right to remain, whereas the newcomers, can be ‘sent back’ to where they ‘actually belong’. Smith (2012) observed similar attitudes towards recent changes during her fieldwork in 2006, which was conducted in Northern Manchester. Smith used individual concepts of ‘fairness’ to explore how belonging and otherness was expressed and understood in the area she named ‘Halleigh’ (2012, p. 4). She noticed that the word ‘fairness’ was frequently used by the residents, and she decided to use the term in her analysis as a key concept for describing how people in Halleigh manifest their belonging. She explained that fairness: ‘[...] is embodied by individuals who are seen to have lived in Halleigh for a long time and are seen as having “paid their dues” with respect to the amount of time they have lived in Halleigh’ (Smith, 2012, p. 12). This resembles the way Sarah, and many other long-term residents had created narratives of a shared, imagined past, and thereby reproducing sentiments of belonging to the place. Smith accentuates how people are aiming to manifest their belonging to an area through narratives about the old days in the neighbourhood and talking about their family having lived there for generations. By doing so, people feel more entitled to dictate what fairness is, than the people who fail to perform these narratives and discourses of belonging (Smith, 2012, p. 12).

Sarah’s perception corresponds with my observation at the youth centre, of discourses of belonging as being crucial for acceptance and to obtain the status of an insider, both within the local community, and at the centre. Smith claims that individual expressions of an imagined shared past express status of belonging, and thus also exclusion and ‘otherness’ towards those who do not belong, such as what Sarah and Katelin express towards newcomers (Smith, 2012, p. 54). Sarah did not mention the people who were fairly new in
the area, and could therefore be viewed as outsiders, but who had been quick to learn ‘the rules’ and were therefore accepted as a welcomed part of the community. This is similar to what I, to some extent, achieved to some extent at the youth centre, and what Smith experienced during her fieldwork (2012, p. 123). When Sarah talked to me about the issue, she was talking about the ‘newcomers’ as one group of people posing similar issues for the community. Nevertheless, during other conversations I had with her she would mention some of her ‘new’ neighbours, or colleagues on the floor, as friends on the same level herself and the residents who had been born in the area. My impression was that there were indeed many opportunities for a ‘newcomer’ to become an ‘insider’. I have attempted to describe the process of how the long-term residents distanced themselves from the people they viewed as newcomers. It is nevertheless important to stress that the way the long-term residents were claiming belonging to the place was not manifested in shared group mentality between other long-term residents, but rather, people were emphasising belonging individually. People were also distancing themselves from people who had been living in the neighbourhood for just as long as they had. I will now discuss this observation further.

**Relating to a stigmatised neighbourhood**

Although many people were talking about the neighbourhood with sentiments revealing an attachment to the place, I also heard the same people complaining about being forced to stay out of a lack of other options. During the many conversations I had with the residents of Hayford about their neighbourhood, I noticed in particular a striking ambiguity: people would support their fellow residents in one sentence, yet in the next, blame the same neighbours for being lazy, criminals and benefit cheaters. There was a continuous tension during these conversations, between a person distancing her – or himself from the place of which they lived along with its inhabitants, and on the other hand, emphasising sentiments of belonging and pride. A telephone survey from 2010/11 carried out by the Manchester City Council, estimated that 59% of the Hayford residents were satisfied with living in the local area, whereas 68% of the residents claimed that they felt a ‘strong’ sense of belonging to their neighbourhood (Manchester City Council, 2011, p. 26). The people participating in the survey thereby reported far lower levels of satisfaction than the Manchester average, and they were less likely to say that they felt a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood. I will suggest that the ambiguity that the residents expressed about the area at the time of my research was strongly influenced by the stigmatisation the community had faced during the recent years.
Not only did the television programme mentioned earlier contribute to give the neighbourhood a bad reputation, but also, through several news channels, the area had been called out as one of the most deprived areas in Britain (BBC Manchester 2008; Viner, 2004; Irvine 2007). In the Ward Plan from 2014, the Manchester City Council ranked Hayford 3rd out of 32 wards looking at measures of deprivation. Deprivation-issues were including: ‘income, employment, health, education, skills, barriers to housing, crime and the living environment’ (Manchester City Council, 2014). There was certainly some truth in the news channels’ articles about the high level of deprivation in the area. I will, however, suggest that the negative branding of the neighbourhood had affected the residents’ relationship to their surroundings.

What did strike me as particularly interesting was the fact that I never heard anyone explicitly state that they were in fact residents of the local community. The name of the area was never mentioned to me by anyone. I talked with quite a few people that I knew were living right across the street from the youth centre, and I asked them to tell me the name of their local area. They would all say a different name than Hayford. They would instead refer to names of neighbouring estates, areas I knew they were not residents of. During a conversation I had with Sarah towards the end of my stay, she explained:

If anybody asks me if I’m from [Hayford] I say I’m not. I say that straight away, as it has a lot of stigma attached to it. Just the whole thing of saying ‘I live in [Hayford]’ has stigma attached to it. So when people say: well, you live here! I say: no I don’t. I live in [Fallowshire], or I come from [Greenleigh]. [Fictional names of neighbourhoods surrounding the local community].

Sarah made an effort to avoid any relation to the stigmatised name of the area, even though she was in fact both living -and working there. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, when I first got to know Sarah, I perceived her as a person who in many ways represented the neighbourhood. I was therefore surprised when even this person would not mention its name with any sentiment of belonging or pride. Although she complained about the state of her own neighbourhood, she also told me that she loved it there, and that most people living there were nice people. This polarity was evident with most people I talked to. I was confused, which I also perceived the residents to be. The ambiguity was clearly expressed during a
conversation I had with Rosie, a woman in her forties working in the cafeteria at the youth centre.

I love the area and I know people because I’ve been brought up in the area. And so, you kind of are settled. And obviously if I’d done better for myself and I had more money, I would… anybody I think, would have loved to move abroad. Definitely, definitely. If given the option, defiantly. I just think that because things are the way they are now… it’s not that I’m being snobby, it’s just that when we went out the other day, and we was just in like [Hayford] and stuff, it’s just the people that you seem to bump in to, and I mean, I’m trying to bring my children up nice, but… everything was just like… this woman to a little four year old, like: ‘fuck off! Move!’ And I was like: ‘Seriously, what?’ I would never speak to me four year old like that! I know it probably sounds like I’m being snobby now but… wish we didn’t live here.

In the first sentence Rosie claimed to love the area, and in the last sentence she wished she didn’t live there. This did not only confuse myself, but Rosie also seemed to be confused about her own opinion. She was clearly frustrated by her neighbours’ behaviour, but I will also suggest that her negativity was substantiated by the way in which the neighbourhood and its residents were being represented through the media. The picture commonly painted was one of a neighbourhood full of benefit cheaters, criminals, and antisocial people. It is understandable that the people living in Hayford want to distance themselves from this stereotype and demonstrate that they are nothing like the people represented in the statistic, even though many people at the same time might actually be satisfied with living in the neighbourhood amongst their family and friends. In the book ‘Chavs’ the author and political commentator Owen Jones (2012) accentuates how popular culture, such as the rising popularity of reality television programmes from council housing areas, contributes to the stereotyping of poor working-class English people as rude, benefit-cheating and lacking of moral behaviour (Jones, 2012, pp. 126-127). The sense of disempowerment felt by the local residents I got to know was subsequently internalised as they continuously talked negatively about their own neighbours, thereby reproducing the same stigma they were being exposed to. It might therefore seem as though the stigmatisation through media such as the TV-series had contributed to people questioning their pride in belonging to their neighbourhood.
The ambiguity of belonging and creation of distance from the local neighbourhood also opened for a brief mentioning of class perceptions. When Rosie is expressing herself negatively about her neighbours, she is worried she will be perceived as snobby. This illustrates a concern a lot of people seemed to be having: if you supported your neighbourhood, you could be mistaken as a representative of the negative statistics, but if you expressed yourself negatively about it, you could seem like a snob with middle-class values, which would suggest that you think you are better than the rest of your neighbours. Being perceived as a snob in the neighbourhood is not a sustainable way of maintaining a positive relationship with the people living there, as I, along with Smith, experienced during our fieldwork (2012, pp. 67-69). People living in the neighbourhood were continuously emphasising differences between themselves and the middle-class. Scholars who have done research on the working-class population in Britain, such as Evans (2006), Willis (1977), Jones (2012) and Smith (2012) have, like myself, suggested that the British working-class are taking distance from middle-class values. Some of these scholars have further drawn the conclusion that the process of distancing oneself from the middle-class leads to a strengthened working-class identity (Evans, 2006, p. 32; Willis, 1977, p. 185). I would, on the other hand, suggest, in accordance with Rosie’s comment above, that the resistance of middle-class values is not necessarily creating a strengthened working-class identity. The people categorised as working-class, in addition to distancing themselves from the middle-class, are also distancing themselves from people within their own social class. I will elaborate on this argument more thoroughly in a discussion on class-issues in chapter 5.

**Interdependency in Mother-daughter relationships**

A large proportion of the people I talked to agreed with Rosie that they would have moved away from the neighbourhood if they were only given the opportunity. I noted early on that no one seemed to actually attempt to realise this, despite clearly expressing a desire to move away. The majority of people I got to know from Hayford had relatives who had lived in the neighbourhood for generations. People would commonly tell me that they only continued to live there either because they wouldn’t leave their family members behind, or because of financial issues; they could never afford to move. The latter reason in understandable. People living on benefits often do not have any other option but to remain, as they struggle to save money with the limited amount of benefits they receive each month. And if they got the chance to move abroad, they would loose their right to benefits when leaving the country,
making them dependant on a safe income in the new country. Employed people would also struggle to move abroad, due to low payment and lack of secure employment contracts. The other reason given to explain not leaving the neighbourhood, based on family obligations, is what I will continue to discuss more thoroughly. A woman who frequently emphasised a desire to move abroad was Katelin. She told me that she had always wanted to move to Australia, but that she could not leave her mother behind. Katelin had been caring for her mother for several years, and she had always lived right next door to her in order to provide her with assistance. She wanted to move to Australia and take her daughter with her, but she could not afford bringing her mother as well. Leaving her behind was not an option. Katelin’s mother was tied to Hayford because she received disability benefits and housing benefits, which were crucial in providing her with housing. Katelin received carer’s allowance for looking after her mother. If her and her daughter were to move abroad, they would loose all their financial support, and Katelin would have had to provide for herself, her disabled mother, as well as her teenage daughter. Understandably, such a scenario would be impossible with the low income Katelin received from working part time at the youth centre. Katelin could have moved abroad without her mother, but the reason why she did not want to do that, I will suggest, was a lot more complex.

In post-industrial regions of England, such as Hayford, single parent households are quite common. In May 2011, the number of single parents claiming Income Support was at 4.6% (Manchester City Council, 2011, p. 18), but the total number of single parents is most likely even higher. It is fair to assume that a large proportion of these single parents are women. When the father is not involved in supporting for the child, a young, single mother will commonly seek assistance from her closest relatives, usually her own mother. I met several women who were single mothers, struggling to raise a child on their own. One girl volunteering at the youth centre was complaining one day about being the only girl in her group of friends without a child. The girl was 22 years old, and I was rather surprised this would be a concern for someone at such a young age. She told me she also wanted to get pregnant as soon as possible; she was only waiting for the right father for her child. Within her group of female friends, however, none of them were still involved with the father of the child. I asked her why she thought her friends wanted to have children at such a young age, and she answered me straight: ‘in order to gain independence.’ This conversation took place during one of my first days at the youth centre, and her answer did not make any sense to me at the time. I would have assumed the opposite: that from the moment you have a child of
your own someone else is depending on you for the rest of your life. A child means a life-
long responsibility that does not provide the mother with independence, but rather
attachments of dependence (see also: Dench et al., 2006, p. 116). I asked her to explain again
how a girl could gain independence from having a child, and she told me about the council
housing lists. A person can be on a council housing list for years without managing to get a
place to stay, because there is a very high demand for such housings. Having a child, on the
other hand, could put you at the front of the line, and you can also start receiving child-
benefits. In that way, a girl can be able to move into her own house and manage to be
financially independent through the process of having a child.

One of the girls I was volunteering with at the youth centre became pregnant during the time
of my stay. She was 31 years old and pregnant with her third child. She had an eleven-year-
old daughter, and a five-year-old son at five. She had raised both of them on her own, and
was looking to become a single mother of three. All her children had the same father, but as
the two parents were not getting along, they were no longer living together. One Thursday
evening during a sports session I was keeping her company at one of the benches in the sports
hall because she was tired due to her pregnancy. We began to talk about family ties, and she
asked me if I was sad about being in Manchester without my family, and whether I talked
with my mother in the meantime. I told her that I had not spoken to my mother since I
moved. She became very surprised, almost upset, and she seemed to be questioning my
relationship with my mother. I had to assure her that I had a very positive relationship with
both my parents. She responded that such a situation was completely unimaginable for her.
She talked with her mother at least once a day, usually in person. If a day would go by
without her being in touch with her mother, her mother would most certainly worry a lot, and
wonder if something bad had happened. I asked her if she maintained such a close
relationship with her mother for her own benefit, or to keep her mother company. She
explained that she looked at it as a mutual relationship. She depended on her mothers regular
assistance as a caretaker for her children, because she was a single mother of soon to be three,
and a student with a part time job. In addition to this, she also depended on her mothers’
sensitivity and moral support. She laughed when she told me she used her mothers’ reliability
as a substitute for the lack of a steady man in her life. She continued to suggest that her
mother used her for the same reason: to socialise, and for comfort. Their relationship was
grounded on a common interdependency, a reciprocity (Eriksen, 1998, p. 239) based on
exchanging services and taking advantage of one another. At present, the girl’s mother took
advantage of her daughter’s social reliability and in turn helped her out with daily duties such as looking after the children. When her mother would become older, the girl would in turn care for her, and their relationship would balance out (see also: Young and Willmott, 1965, pp. 50-53). The interdependency between a daughter and her mother seemed to grow particularly strong when the daughter had to raise her child as a single mother. This specific reciprocity that develops between a mother and her daughter might be the main reason why the daughter is equally tied to her birthplace and feels entitled to keep living there. The sentiment of reciprocity is what Katelin expressed when she told me that she could never leave her own mother. It is required of her to stay and assist her mother, the same way her mother had been assisting her when she was a young mother. It becomes evident that the independence a woman gains from leaving home, only leads to more long-term interdependence.

In 1955, when Young and Willmott (1965) carried out the study that later provided material for the book ‘Family and Kinship in East London’, they noticed in particular how important kinship ties were for the rich communal life in East London. They emphasised the strong ties between mothers and their daughters, and how it developed in particular through the females’ support with children and grandchildren (Young and Willmott, 1965, p. 39). They described a society built upon a matriarchy, where the eldest woman were the heads of the family, whether operating as a mother or a grandmother (Young and Willmott, 1965, pp. 48-49). When Young followed up the research in 1992 together with his colleagues Geoff Dench and Kate Gavron they concluded that ‘The local extended family was replaced by the welfare-state-friendly nuclear family […]’ (2006, p. 13). My findings suggest that people still do have strong kinship ties, and that these are indeed characteristic of social life in Hayford. Nevertheless, rather than extended matrifocal networks such as those described by Young and Willmott from the 1950s, strong kinship ties are crucial within the mother-daughter dyad. One of the changes in kinship ties that Dench, Gavron and Young pointed out which was also highly evident in Hayford was that marriages were no longer an important part of the household (2006, p. 109). Although this was true for the people I studied, contrary to their claim that the status of mothers has become weakened in working-class communities (2006, p. 116), I would argue that the changes in family structures have not lead to completely broken family ties. The mother-daughter relationship has, on the contrary, remained strong, and the role of mothers in kinship ties, equally strong. The relationship between the pregnant girl and her mother had a lot in common with the majority of the women I talked with during
my fieldwork. The close relationships between mothers and their daughters did not seem to
dissolve as the daughters grew older and moved away from home, but rather the opposite.
During each interview I had with Sarah and Rosie, both of them women in their fifties, the
interviews were interrupted by their mothers coming to pick them up on their way home.
These two women had been living on their own for at least thirty years, but their mothers
were still highly present in their every day lives. Despite the fact that there have been
significant changes in family structures since the 1950s, leading to a decline in extended
multi-generational ties that Young and Willmott describes, I would claim that the mother-
daughter relationship I observed during my research were equally strong, if not even stronger
than the ones described in Young and Willmott’s book from the 50s, than that of Dench,
Gavron and Young from the early 2000s.

Concluding remarks
In this chapter I have attempted to show how the long-term residents of Hayford were
expressing an ambiguity on belonging to the local area. On the one hand, they were
manifesting their sentiments of belonging through narrating about old days, and through
emphasising kinship ties. On the other, they were reluctant to be associated with the name of
the area, and they would therefore distance themselves from it. The ambiguity between
belonging the creation of distance that the residents expressed to me thus had one limit: No
woman I met distanced herself from her own mother. The limit was drawn at the core
relationship between a mother and a daughter. My observations thus had many similarities
with that of Young and Willmott (1965): the daughter might not be cut off from her mother
by marriage, having a child of her own, or, like the case in my study, by moving out of her
family’s home (1965, p. 60). Instead, the mother-daughter relationship might even be
strengthened by such events. In 1955 the two ethnographers observed a similar mother-
daughter relationships in East London, like what I observed in a suburb in Manchester today.
Although the extended kinship networks described by Young and Willmott differ
dramatically from my own observation, and the kinship ties have largely dissolved since the
time of their research, I will argue that the mother daughter dyad has remained strong, or
even strengthened as a link that joins separate nuclear households, such as my ethnographic
data reveals. It is nevertheless interesting that one of the same ethnographers of the first book,
Young later, in 2006, argued that the kinship ties had been destroyed by ‘meritocracy’ and the welfare state (Dench et al., 2006, p. 106). I will argue that in my case it is not as simple as a continuation of the 1950s extended kinship networks, or a pure individualisation of working-class people, but rather an increasing emphasis on the particular relationship between mothers and their daughters.

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8Even though Michael Young passed away in January 2002, before the release of the New East End, he was fully involved with the making of it until his death (2006, p.2).
Chapter 5: Understanding the English working-class from below

Even though I’ve lived here all my life, I’m like quite to myself. Don’t really feel like socialising and that, I just keep myself to myself - done it all my life.
(Katelin, 2015)

Upon approaching my field I was interested in issues concerning class, as my initial aim had been to study working-class identities in a post-industrial neighbourhood. After having spent some time in the field I felt slightly disappointed by the fact that I never heard the word class mentioned. It was only when I asked people about the class-term during interviews or conversations that I was able to grasp how the individual in question was relating to the term. Even when I asked them to explain how they experienced the term, the replies were characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity. This is not to say that people did not acknowledge the existence of class categories as such, but rather that they did not necessarily identify with them. The people in Smith’s (2012) research had very similar responses to the class issue (pp. 58; 61). Smith stresses that people had issues with receiving the status of a specific class, which further led to a very specific placement in the hierarchy of society (2012, p. 58). Smith accentuates that the term ‘working-class’ was used in reference to the inhabitants of the area when discussing them with parties external to the area (2012, p. 62). As the people I met would usually not identify themselves as members of the neighbourhood, but would instead distance themselves from it, and thereby also its class status.

Although the class-term seemed to cause confusion and ambiguity for the majority of the people I talked to, class categories, to a large extent, effect the social and financial status of people living in Hayford. I would argue that educational institutions and people’s attitudes towards education contribute to main of the structures of class. As I attempt to explain in chapter 2, when the industries were flourishing and dominating the labour market in working-class areas such as Hayford, people did not depend on education in order to secure their financial future. It could be argued that people’s relationship to education has been altered a very limited degree even with the decline of the industrial-based labour market. In Evans’
(2007) fieldwork on white working-class children in Bermondsey, South East London, she asked why working-class children are more likely to fail at school than middle-class children (2007, p. 13). Evans later answered her own question by claiming that it is because the educational system is in favour of the middle-class (Evans, 2007, p. 32). She stresses that members of the working-class aim to continue being working-class, whilst the educational system, and the rest of British society as such, are moving towards a ‘middle class-ification’ of Britain (Evans, 2007, p. 11). She continues to argue that working-class identity is strengthened through resistance of middle-class values: ‘Eventually I begin to understand that being of less worth in posh people’s eyes is part of what the pride of working-class people is all about.’ (Evans, 2007, p. 31). In this chapter I will elaborate on Evan’s assumption that the working-class share a common sense of identity and togetherness, and that it is strengthened through their opposition towards the middle-class. What will become evident is that my own observations and reflections are not always coherent with those of Evans. Therefore, I strongly agree with her on the statement that many working-class people are resentful in meeting with educational institutions. I have in this regard decided to use the educational system as a tool for illustrating the gap between the working-class and the middle-class.

**Education: A brief introduction to the class issue**

Evans points to the social and economic background of the working-class children’s parents, as one possible explanation for why there is such a lack of engagement from working-class demography when it comes to education. The parents themselves come from a working-class background, they might carry negative attitudes towards education because they never experienced it. This could lead to them having difficulties in supporting and understanding challenges their children will be facing at school (Evans, 2006, p. 13). The parents of school children today might have had a negative relationship to school when they were young, an attitude that could easily affect the way their children perceive the educational system and the importance of schooling. Rosie illustrated this for me during a conversation I had with her one day at the centre. She was upset about a recent incident her son had experienced at school with one of the schoolteachers. She told me:

He’ll come home and he’ll say: ‘I swore at the teacher.’ And I’ll ask him: ‘why?’ You know, ‘what’s wrong?’ ‘Well, she told me to shut up!’ It’s just like… If they’re saying that to them,
Rosie seemed to have a very negative pre-established attitude towards the schoolteachers, and she unquestionably took her son’s side in this, and presumably other incidents. She expressed a mistrust in and dislike of her son’s schoolteachers, and her attitude would most likely have had an effect on her son’s relation to his teachers as well. There could be several reasons why Rosie was so negative towards her son’s teachers. It could have to do with the fact that Rosie had a negative experience regarding her own education, or it might have been the fact that she viewed education as less important for her son’s future. It might also have had to do with the fact that she viewed education and the teachers as being in favour of the middle-class, a class and a set of values she wanted to distance herself from (Jones, 2012, p. 179). I would suggest that it is less a matter of the individual teacher herself, but rather about the whole educational system as such. Willis (1977) also argued that his study shows that working-class children behave oppositional towards ‘the structure of the school and the dominant teaching paradigm in the context of their overall class cultural experience and location’, rather than the teachers, or the content of education (1977, p. 189). When the students and their parents carry negative attitudes towards the school and the schoolteachers, more students are likely to drop out -with support from their parents. Today unemployment has become a severe issue in post-industrial working-class areas all over England. A major issue is the lack of jobs available for uneducated working-class people (Jones, 2012, p. 201). Evans (2006) and Willis (1977) both agree that working-class children are opposing the school system as a means of distancing themselves from middle-class values (2006, p. 12, and 1977, p. 3). Willis suggests that the school is an institution where working-class identity is being exercised, and young boys are preparing for working-class jobs in manual labour (1977, p. 12). This is in some ways similar to what Evans suggests when she claims that education is supposed to broker the class difference, but because the educational system is in favour of the middle-class, working-class children oppose themselves to middle-class values (2006, p. 32). Even though the two ethnographies were written nearly thirty years apart, their issues are still relevant today, as the example with Rosie shows. Evans argues that the educational system is failing working-class children, and that it needs to become better at adapting to the working-class children’s needs, preparing them for working-class lifestyle and jobs. Arguably, the educational system is not doing much to prepare working-class children for the working-class jobs they are going to be chasing after school. This, perhaps becomes even more significant now that the
working-class jobs are no longer secure contracts within the industries, such as at the time of Willis’ research, but rather low-paid service sector jobs with insecure employment contracts (Jones, 2012, p. 145) This will further be shown through my discussion on ‘chavs’ and ‘claiming benefits’.

I asked Katelin whether she believed class categories to be an issue in Britain today. She replied without having to think twice: ‘Definitely! Very much so!’ She went on to tell me about her son who had been offered a place at The University of Oxford, one of the most prestigious universities in England. He had attended an open day at the university and came back home telling her he was not going to accept the offer because he felt that he wouldn’t fit in. ‘Of course as a parent, I was thinking: ‘wow! He could actually go there!’ But at the end of the day, it was his decision, and his choice, and he said: “mom, I wouldn’t do it, -mix with them kinds of people”. ’ Katelin illustrated with this how her son, with his working-class background, did not want to mix with middle-class people. He therefore decided to avoid them, rather than to join them. As a working-class boy from a council housing estate, he was given the opportunity to join the middle-class, but he chose to decline. It becomes evident that even though working-class people might experience to be ‘unfairly’ (Smith, 2012) treated as opposed to the middle-class, they do not necessarily want to join the middle-class either. Katelin’s story supports Evans’ conclusion that the working-class are deliberately distancing themselves from the middle-class (Evans 2007, p. 31). I never knew the reason why Katelin’s son wanted so badly to avoid middle-class people his age; weather he had experienced negative encounters with middle-class people, or if he had been able to avoid ‘those kinds of people’ his whole life. Nevertheless, he was certainly not planning on getting to know them, but was rather making an effort to avoid them. This resembles what Gullestad (1989) called ‘avoidance as a strategy’ (pp. 117-118). Katelin’s son demonstrated ‘symbolic fences’ (Gullestad, 1989, p. 117) by distancing himself, and thereby reserving himself from social confrontation with the people that he did not want to be confronted with. By avoiding the situation, he did not have to reject them directly, nor have to interact with them and accept the differences. Katelin’s son was thereby demonstrating the existence of social class, and his intention of participating in the maintenance of the distance between them. Katelin used the story about her son to show how the existence of class boundaries are in fact highly present in todays Britain. Smith (2012) also noticed how people in her research distanced themselves from middle-class values. She had one experience of expressing an opinion that was perceived as ‘middle-class’, and quickly learned the consequences this would have for
her status in the neighbourhood (Smith, 2012, pp. 66-69). A casino was going to be opened in one of the poorest areas of Manchester. Smith was having a conversation with some of the residents of Halleigh, and she openly told them about her opinion of the casino being a bad idea. She predicted that people would start spending the little money they had at the casino. This would only lead to more poverty whereas money should go towards regeneration of the area. Smith was met with accusations that her opinion underestimated poor people’s ability to know how to spend their money. One of her conversationalists claimed that she was tired of hearing such ‘middle-class’ accusations that people like her needed help to manage their own finances. Smith acknowledged having carried ‘unfair’ judgements with this opinion, and she utterly regretted her statement (2012, p. 68). Middle-class values such as what Smith’s embody unfairness:

With the sigma attached to it, the ascription of ‘class’ is cause for offence. This begins to explain why, particularly ‘middle-class’ was used in Halleigh not simply as an insult, but also as a significant tool for differentiating systems of value and morals between individuals, values and morals which are mutually informing local and individual constructs of fairness (Smith, 2012, p. 65).

Smith stresses that fairness becomes a way of exercising common values and morals in the shared working-class experience. Thus, the working-class status is being exercised in the meeting with discourses on middle-class values (Smith, 2012, p. 68). This does not, however, include the distance many long-term residents were emphasising in relation to the newcomers. It also does not cover how the neighbours were distancing themselves from other working-class neighbours whom they regarded as immoral, criminals, or otherwise people commonly referred to as ‘chavs’, a notion I will now discuss further.

‘Chavs’

Jones (2012) argues that working-class people are continuously being demonised by the media, politicians and TV-shows, and this stigmatisation is being verbalised through chav-bashing (2012, p. xi; pp. 23-26). I believed to have some knowledge of the meaning of the term chav when I first approached my field, having read Jones’ book ‘Chavs’, and lived in London a couple of years prior to my fieldwork. I perceived it as a specific working-class image, characterised through certain types of clothing, attitude and lifestyle. I was quite intrigued by the term, as I, like Jones, understood it to be highly stigmatised. I therefore
wanted to examine what kind of relationship people in the neighbourhood had towards the term, and more importantly, the people being identified as *chavs* by external parties. People I had met in Manchester before I started my fieldwork in Hayford had warned me about the neighbourhood being a particularly *chavy* area, so I was eager to explore.

In order to provide an illustration of how the word *chav* is perceived, I will leave an explanation provided by Susan, a woman in her late twenties volunteering at the youth centre:

Some people just are that way… or some people are just being that way because of the environment. Cause for a long time I acted like one. I got the boots, and I got the stupid long earrings, and the scruffy bun on top of me head. And the shirt and the ripped up jeans, and I tried so hard. I was fifteen when I got back up [moved back to Manchester]. It was so hard to fit in with the kids. And I started talking like this [adding a thick mancunian\(^9\) accent]. The attitude is: don’t give a fuck. Don’t give a fuck. You’ll get into trouble: don’t give a fuck. And then tell your friends about it.

For Susan, chav is a stereotype, a nickname imposed onto a person by others. It can be used against you if you live on a council housing estate and behave or dress in a certain way. ‘Being chavy is a social behaviour,’ She continued;

It’s actually short for Council Housed And Violent. C.H.A.V –that’s what it stands for. Yeah, cause they live in council houses, and… It’s not a nice word to use. Because to me it’s insulting. If someone calls me a chav, I’d be insulted. Because I’m not like that. The thing with me is like… just because I’m from a council estate, doesn’t mean you have to be, like, stereotype. You don’t have to be a certain way. There are plenty of people living in an estate that aren’t chavy.

Susan did not want to be perceived as a chav, even though she admitted to having strived for that at an earlier time in her life. She also emphasised that she does not want people to believe that growing up on a council estate automatically makes her -or him a chavy person. She was thereby trying to reject some of the stereotypes made of working-class people, such as the ones Jones (2012) writes about. She pictured a chav as someone who dress badly, live on a council estate and have a nonchalant, trouble-seeking attitude. Her description

\(^9\) *Mancunian* is a commonly used word to describe the characteristic manchester-accent.
resembled many others I received when I asked people to describe a chav to me: that being a chav is something negative, someone you do not want in your neighbourhood, and most certainly do not want your children getting involved with. It seemed to me as though no one wanted to be perceived as a chav, nor would identify themselves as a chav. I was therefore quite surprised when I asked a boy at the age of 22 if he could describe a chav to me, and he answered me straight: ‘Me brother’s a chav!’ He continued by telling me about when he was kicked out of his mother’s home when he was sixteen, and went to live together with his chavy elder brother, the brother’s girlfriend and their son. After having lived there for a while he understood that his brother was involved with a large drug dealing business, and in order to avoid getting involved, he decided to leave and go live in a youth hostel instead. He used this example in order to illustrate to me that chavs are criminals and drug dealers, such as his own brother had been. The boy also described his upbringing on a council estate, and told me that all the boys had been friends when they were younger. As they grew older, however, and became teenagers they started defining themselves within different image-based groups. He listed the most common ones: emo’s, punkers, mosher and skaters. The boy had turned in to what he described as an emo. He emphasised that the exception to these teenage image-groups were the chavs. Chavs were feared amongst the other groups, because they were seen as trouble seeking criminals, and therefore as a threat to the neighbourhood. This seemed to be the core of the issue; people assuming that chavs were excluding themselves by distancing themselves from their surroundings by not abiding laws and regulations, with threatening behaviour towards others. This made me eager to know more about why they seemed to have a need for distancing themselves from the rest of society. I figured there must be a reason for why people want to create distance and isolate themselves from their surroundings.

The first time I was introduced to a group of so called ‘chavy’ boys it took me some time before I understood that they were in fact the very social group I had been told about. They looked very much like any other boys from the neighbourhood, -wearing worn out clothes, sweatpants and trainers. It was not until we started talking that I realised that they fitted the chavy-stereotype I had been told about. After having worked at the youth centre for about four months I joined a job-seeking course for unemployed young people. The course was arranged through the centre, but it was held during daytime, and not during the opening hours of the centre. It was aimed at young people in their early twenties, so the people joining the

10 Mancunian slang for rockers.
course were a few years older than the members using the youth centre. I was allowed to follow the employability course by helping out as a volunteer, assisting expeditions they arranged to different job locations. These expeditions were organised in order for the young people to see what kind of possibilities were available on the job-market. Some of the locations we visited had open positions that the young people could apply for at the end of their visit. I was granted permission to follow and help out on two sessions every week over a course of four weeks. On my first day we all met up in the meeting room at the youth centre. Six boys in their early twenties were gathered around a long table in the middle of the meeting room. One of the boys was skinny, wearing all black -even his hair was dyed black, reaching down to his shoulders with a long fringe. Beside him was a boy wearing a red leather jacket, bleached jeans, and with what looked like more than enough gel in his hair. I assumed the first boy could be labelled an emo, and the second one, a mosher. The remaining four boys looked like the majority of the boys I was used to seeing at the youth centre; wearing worn out clothes and having untidy facial hair. Chloe, the woman leading the session, had given everyone instructions to dress smart for the day because we were going to meet with the head chief of the working place. She was laughing warmly as she pointed at one of the four boys, complimenting him for his effort but also pointing out that despite his effort, he failed to follow through properly. On his upper body he was wearing a white shirt, tie and a tuxedo, and the bottom half was covered with grey sweatpants and worn out trainers. He was, however, the only one out of the four that had made an effort. The other three were, in addition to the sweatpants and trainers, also wearing tracksuits, trainers and quilted vests. These four boys are the ones I will focus on in this particular case, because it was these boys that I was soon to learn were being perceived as chavs.

Chloe was in her early thirties, and seemed to be comfortable, relaxed and talkative in this particular environment. She was sat at the end of the table, and the way she communicated with the group of boys made me assume that she was trying to maintain an informal setting.\footnote{She later confirmed to me that this was the case. She told me that the majority of the young people that came to join the course had a negative relation to education and authorities, so she did not want her course to resemble a formal school situation, to avoid scaring the young people off.} I understood from the conversation I overheard between four of the boys, that they all knew each other quite well from the neighbourhood. Chloe also knew some of the boys in advance from sessions she had previously held, of which I was later to be informed they had dropped out of. She welcomed one of the boys back into session, explaining to the rest of us that he
had not been able to finish the previous session because he had become a father mid way through. He was 24 years old, and this was his second child. He told us he was very motivated to get a job this time, in order to provide for his family. I was wondering about the lack of female participants in the room. Chloe explained that she had exclusively asked those who were interested in getting a job at the particular place to join that day. She had only been expecting boys to turn up, seeing that we were visiting a bacon factory. Chloe announced that the place had four open positions. She later told me they actually had positions available for all six, but she wanted to give the boys the illusion of a competition in order to motivate them. We took the tram to the bacon factory. About one minute into the walk to the tram stop all six boys pulled out hand-rolled-cigarettes each. The boys were laughing and joking about being back at a school trip again. Some of them had not been going to school for over five years.

Once inside the factory we were greeted by the manager who showed us around, attempting to illustrate an average day working at the bacon factory. After the guided tour we were placed around a table in a meeting room. I sat down together with the boys for a while, whilst Chloe and the manager had a conversation outside. We started talking, and I asked the boys which one of them had been unemployed for the longest amount of time. All the boys started laughing, pointing at one of them. The boy being pointed at told me that he had been unemployed for about four years -ever since he finished college. He didn’t have any working experience at all. I asked him how he was able to manage financially, and all the boys around the table started laughing again -louder this time. The boy told me he wasn’t sure if telling me would be safe, seeing that I was a volunteer. Then one of the other boys shouted: ‘He’s a farmer! He’s doing farming!’ It did not take me a long time to realise that for the past four years, the boy had been growing and selling marijuana for a living. I left the conversation at that, although a bit eager to know how he was able to be growing marijuana whilst living at his parents’ place. I turned the conversation to revolve around my home country, Norway. I explained to them that Norway is a very wealthy country, and one of the boys exclaimed; ‘Yeah, and we’re a poor country because of all the immigrants!’ His friend supported him; ‘That’s right! And people keep telling us that we can’t talk bad about them, when everyone knows it’s the truth!’ The second boy continued, telling us that he had been to several job-interviews where a ‘black man’ had applied for the same job, and the black man got the job instead of him. He called it discrimination. For the first time I experienced the racist-like comments I had heard that chavs were being accused through media and my middle-class
English friends (Jones, 2012, p. 194). The boys clearly felt that the rest of society was favouring immigrants over them, and so they made themselves victims in an imaginary conflict based on favouring certain skin-colors over others. This illustrate what I elaborated on earlier, that chavs feel unwanted by the rest of society, and they act upon it by distancing from the rest of society. Allow me to illustrate this with one other example.

On our way back to the youth centre, a ticket inspector came on the tram and went straight to the back where the boys were sitting, asking to see their valid tickets. One of the boys looked straight at him and told him that that they didn’t have any tickets. The inspector ordered them to leave the tram immediately as a result. Overhearing the conversation, Chloe was fumbling for the tickets in her bag whilst shouting to the inspector that she had valid tickets for everyone. The inspector looked at her tickets, approved them, and moved on further down the tram. The boys were clearly upset, and once the ticket inspector was out of an audible distance, the conversation between them turned quite aggressive. They claimed that the inspector had been discriminating against them because he had approached them first when entering the tram. One of the boys shouted: ‘It’s just because we’re white!’ All the other boys started laughing and nodding their heads in agreement. Chloe tried to calm the situation by telling the boys that the inspector was only doing his job, and we should all be respectful of that. -And besides, they always start their inspection in the back of the tram, moving their way towards the middle, because that makes more sense than the opposite. The boys continued claiming that they were being discriminated against, not only by the inspector, but authorities in general, based on the way they look and dress. One of the boys said that the police always stopped people like him, -white ‘lads’ wearing tracksuits and quilted vests. Chloe accused them of creating stereotypes about themselves, and told them that their experience was a misconception, and not rooted in reality.

The incident on the tram illustrates how the boys are verbally creating a distance between themselves and governmental authorities, here exemplified through the tram inspector. Interestingly, Willis made a similar observation during his ethnographic research on working-class ‘lads’ from 1977: ‘The most basic, obvious and explicit dimension of counter-school culture is entranced general and personal opposition to “authority”’ (Willis, 1977, p. 11). For the boys, governmental authorities such as the tram-inspector symbolise the structures of society as a whole. The boys told the tram inspector that they did not have valid tickets, even though they did, in order to come across as law-breakers. The boys feel neglected by society,
so they do not abide the rules and regulations society has inflicted on them. Not surprisingly, this attitude has lead to criminal behavioural patterns amongst the boys.\footnote{In addition to the challenges of getting employment, and in order to supplement the low income from the benefits, many young people start selling illegal goods, such as marijuana, to make ends meet. Just like the boys on the tram. This is also part of the reason why they so criminal activities.} It seems as though they want to live up to the \textit{chavy} stereotypes they have been assigned by others. This issue is highlighted when they are talking negatively of immigrants, blaming them for their own, personal issues. When the boys were accused for being racists, the ‘chav-bashing’ (Jones, 2012 p. xi) seemed fair (Jones, 2012, p. 137). The boys claimed to be discriminated against based on their appearance such as their skin colour and their style in clothing, but, like Chloe noticed, they also seem to be creating and maintaining the same stereotypes about themselves when appearing as law breakers. The situation becomes a vicious cycle when the chavs feel unwanted by society, and therefore distance themselves from it This leads to the rest of society to accuse them of not participating in the common good. With this cycle, the stigmatisation of the so called \textit{chavs}, and the usage of the word \textit{chav} will not see an end any time soon. The stigmatisation of the concept and who gets assigned it as an identity will instead continue to be perceived as all the more significant.

When the boys were collectively creating distance, it could be both a defensive reaction towards the exclusion they were being exposed to, and a way of strengthening their group-mentality internally (Willis, 1977, p. 23). This is what Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2010) calls a combination of ‘push’ and ‘pull’: the chavs are being excluded from society, but are all the more included within their own social group (2010, p. 187). It is a mixture of exclusion from the outside and inclusion from the inside. The boys are using ‘avoidance as a strategy’ through both verbal and physical creations of distance (Gullestad, 1989, pp.117-118).

Gullestad (1989) argues that ‘avoidance as a strategy’ is a way of forming a social group where similarities are emphasised. I will argue that these boys were instead forming a group cohesion not by emphasising similarities between one another, but through the process of emphasising differences to other people, such as governmental authorities. The boys were distancing themselves from the society that, from what they experienced, was neglecting and stigmatising them. Their distance might therefor be viewed as a defence mechanism, and as an answer to the injustice that they feel victims of. Instead of trying to fit in with the society that is excluding them, they are distancing themselves from it. This resembles the relationship I observed at the youth centre, between the floor staff and the office staff. The floor staff felt...
neglected by the office staff, and instead of trying to fit in, they were distancing themselves from the office staff. They thereby created their own social group, where belonging was a greater criterion for membership of that group. In his book ‘Chavs’, Jones (2012) writes that working-class people have gone from being ‘salt of the earth’, to ‘scum of the earth’, or in other terms, they are more likely to be called *chavs* (pp. 71-72). Jones blames the Thatcher government for changing individual attitudes into thinking that poverty and unemployment were individual moral failings for ‘the demonization of the working-class’ (Jones, 2012, p. xii).

**Distancing from governmental authorities**

The ‘chavy’ boys did not have much respect for governmental authorities, but they were instead creating distance between themselves and the authorities. I also noticed that within the local community, the respect and acknowledgement for governmental authorities was weak. One day Katelin and I talked about crime and drug dealing in the neighbourhood, and she told me that she experienced it as a common issue. I asked her how she thought the police were dealing with the situation, and she gave me an example to illustrate her own, and her neighbours relationship to the police.

Some of the people [criminals] come to where I live, and it’s sort of scary, but not to me, cause I’m used to it, so I accept it. Do you understand that? Because I can’t do anything about it because of where I live. Cause if they see me around talking to the police or… which I wouldn’t anyway, none of the neighbours would, cause then you would get a comeback. So there was an incident for instance, giving an example, last week when I came from work there was someone getting badly beaten outside my garden gate, I couldn’t get involved, I couldn’t even go outside, me daughter and me were both getting distressed listening to it when it was gong on, we couldn’t even call the police, cause by the time the police would be at my house, and then: ‘hello, who’s phoned the police!?’ You shut your door. You lock your door, and get on with life.

Katelin illustrates how the residents do not respect the police, or trust them to solve issues, but instead view them as someone you do not contact because being to friendly with the police will seem suspicious. The residents are distancing themselves from the police instead of taking advantage of them as a necessary resource in their community. Even Katelin, who clearly wanted to get rid of the criminals and troublemakers in her neighbourhood, did not
contact the police even if the situations would require her to, because she has learned the negative consequences of getting involved with them. It becomes evident that the residents of Hayford viewed governmental authorities with dislike, distrust or ignorance. Similar to my observation, Smith (2012) made the same reflection during her fieldwork, noting that most people did not know the purpose of the police (2012, p. 75), and that they rather turned to people they knew from the neighbourhood to sort out issues the police would otherwise have taken care off (Smith, 2012, p. 77). Smith further argues that people were also frustrated because they felt rejected by the government and bureaucratic bodies (Smith, 2012, p. 74). This was highly evident also in my field. Most people in Hayford distanced themselves from political and governmental authorities because they felt like nobody listened to their concerns. When I asked Sarah about her thoughts on today’s politics, she answered me: ‘I don’t really understand much about politics and stuff to be honest. I don’t vote because I don’t understand what they’re all doing. I don’t actually think any of them are any good.’ A vast number of the people I interviewed told me they had given up on politics, and did not bother to vote, reason being that it didn’t matter either way. The politicians are only concerned with themselves. Very few were happy with today’s politics, but it did not seem like they believed voting would make any difference. Katelin told me about the only time she had ever voted, and her family’s experience of Thatcher coming into government when she was a little girl:

I think I voted for Margaret Thatcher once. She was conservative, wasn’t she? Only because me dad made me. He took us all to the polling station ‘come on, let’s get her inn, let’s get her inn! We need some changes!’ Me dad was working at the time, but when she got in, nobody worked. Even me own father was on the dole for the first time in his life.

Katelin’s father and a large number of working-class voters wanted a change at the time, but during the government of Thatcher, the majority of the labour in the industries disappeared and people in working-class areas all over England lost their jobs (Jones, 2012, pp. 60-61). One issue I find significant in explaining the local resident’s lack of engagement in politics is the fact that the language of politics goes beyond the average vocabulary of most working-class people. Like Sarah expressed, she does not care about politics because she does not understand it. I will argue that there are clearly deficiencies in the way politics is being communicated to the people. The language of politics is largely exclusively aimed at middle- and upper-class educated people, people like the politicians themselves. When the language
is perceived as too complicated, people stop caring, and scepticism grows large. The political language of the UKIP’s (United Kingdom Independence Party) leading politician Nigel Farage, on the other hand, is more accessible and easy to grasp. He is commonly viewed as a ‘man of the people’, mainly due to his way of interacting with people in the streets and on camera, portraying himself as ‘being there’ for the English working-class (Blackhurst, 2014). He’s had interviews at a pub, chatting and laughing with working-class neighbours, and he uses a language easy to grasp for most people (The Economist, 2015). He thereby receives a lot of positive response from working-class people, because he speaks their language, and is claiming to put their issues at the head of his parties’ agenda (See: Liberty Channel, 2014). The other parties are not offering the working-class people any solutions that make sense, because they cannot offer them anything they want. Farage, on the other hand, offer solutions for the working-class that cannot be true, but nevertheless, they are experienced as solutions, and that seems far better than nothing. Farage’s approach might have contributed to the rise in popularity amongst the far-right parties in Britain. Jones (2012) argues that working-class people are voting for far right parties because other political parties do not seem concerned with working-class issues. He stresses that at some point in English history politicians, and especially the Labour Party, were concerned with improving the conditions for working-class people. Today, however, it is all about escaping the working-class (Jones, 2012, p. 10). The far-right parties are claiming to be there for the working-class, playing on the lost working-class identity. They are comfortable addressing working-class issues in public without seemingly avoiding the topic, like the other parties might be accused of doing.

Due to the fact that far-right parties are often also concerned with immigration issues, the impression that white working-class people are mostly concerned with getting rid of the immigrants is increased (Jones, 2012, p. 223). During the referendum debate with The Liberal Democrats deputy, Nick Clegg, Farage claimed that immigration: ‘Has left, I’m afraid, the white working-class […] effectively as an underclass. And that I think is a disaster for our society.’ (Liberty Channel, 2014). One of the results of the working-class people’s rising support for the UKIP, is therefore that many working-class people are being accused of hostile immigration attitudes, or for being straight out racists. Like I observed with the boys on the tram, and with Sarah, and many other people I talked with who had been growing up in the neighbourhood, they were in fact quite negative towards the growing immigration. I heard many comments during my time spent in the field of which I experienced as shockingly hostile towards immigrants. In an attempt to understand these sentiments without blaming the
residents simply for being racist, I will argue for a correlation between the negative attitudes towards immigration, and the negative or non-existing relationship many of them showed towards politics. Sarah, along with the majority of her neighbours struggled financially, and when witnessing newcomers moving to her own neighbourhood during these difficult times, it is understandable that the long term residents feel like they are facing competitors. Instead of questioning the current politics of the country, or the way the neighbourhood and its residents are being negatively portrayed through media, people point the blame to what they can see with their own eyes, like the rapid changes of the local community, such as the growing immigration. Politics and media are almost exclusively run by middle-class people (Jones, 2012, p. 28). What is being said is often beyond working-class peoples’ common understanding, which makes it more understandable that working-class people blame their issues on someone within their reach, like the immigrants in their neighbourhood. And when the same middle-class people tell them that they are wrong to have any opinions on this subject, when it is people like the office staff telling them what they can and can’t say about the changes in their own community, the frustration will understandably grow larger.

Immigrants are more accessible to the working-class than the ruling elites, because the immigrants are also categorised as working-class. It is therefore important to note that the reason why working-class people feel so strongly about immigration issues is not necessarily because working-class people are being straight out racist, but rather, it is a matter of poor and frustrated people wanting someone to blame for their frustration. Unfortunately, it seems as though the immigrants are getting much of the blame, rather than the politicians. The people I talked to in Hayford had experienced being left out of the discussion of politics, and they felt like they were not being communicated with. It is a matter of a whole section of people feeling like they were not being talked to, but rather being talked about. And when they do try to talk, they are commonly accused of being racist, complaining and lazy (Smith, 2012, p. 71). The same frustration that I observed was expressed by the local residents in Smith’s research (2012, p. 163). Smith illustrates that the people she got to know were constantly afraid to become accused for fostering racism (2012, pp. 71-72). Smith explores racism through the politics of ‘fairness’. She argues that racism is individual frustrations and anger with wider social conflicts (Smith, 2012, p. 218). She explores racisms ‘as imagined and perceived and as contemporary responses to the flux of modernity itself […]’ (Smith, 2012, p. 195). Even though I have decided not to use the word ‘racism’ when writing about the people being hostile towards newcomers in the neighbourhood, because like I argued, I do not view it as such, I find Smith’s exploration of racisms significant in relation to my own
observation. We both agree that it is a matter of attitudes that develop in particular amongst the people who view negative changes in their neighbourhood, and feel like they are also being neglected by the governmental authorities (Smith, p. 74).

Even though I heard multiple times immigrants being blamed for the issues of poverty and unemployment in the neighbourhood, I will again refer to my argument of this chapter; that the blame was also being pointed at other white working-class people. The issue is not as simple as ‘racism’, but a more general phenomenon of blaming and creating distance from other people in the area, that some times takes a racial dimension, and other times not. This is what Jones (2012) has called ‘the demonization of the working-class’, and he emphasises that the issue started with Thatcher’s political aim of splitting the working-class, in favour for a society built on an –everyone-for-themselves-ideology (Jones, 2012, p. 47). The utopian society was supposed to be built on independent entrepreneurs. What came out of this project was instead an ideology where poverty and unemployment were no longer considered a social problem, but rather individual moral failings. If people were poor, it was because of their own personal failings (Jones, 2012, p. xii). Jones stresses that the same negative representation of the working-class is being portrayed through British politicians and media (2012, pp. 23-26; 194).

‘Keeping myself to myself’

The post-industrial areas of Britain are the ones most highly affected by unemployment, due to lack of jobs to replace the ones that disappeared (Jones, 2012, p. 92). Jones argues that through media, political establishment and entertainment channels, the working-class have been portrayed as a benefit-cheating and lazy underclass, when the fact is that there are simply not enough jobs for every able-bodied person (Jones, 2012, pp. 23-26; p. 201). In 2011, the Daily Telegraph posted a survey showing that twenty-three jobseekers are applying for every job vacancy in the UK (Evans, C., 2011). In 2015 it was recorded that the amount of people experiencing employment deprivation in the neighbourhood was at 42.3%13 (Bullen, 2015). Despite the high unemployment rate, Jones argues that the majority of poor people in England are in fact working (2012, p. 203). The main issue is that the jobs do not have high enough salary to provide people with a decent standard of living (Jones, 2012, p.

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13 Employment deprivation is classed as the working-age population involuntarily excluded from the labour market through unemployment, sickness or disability, or caring responsibilities (Bullen, 2015).
92). Seeing this in addition to the unreliable employment contracts, people can actually benefit more financially from claiming benefits than from having actual work. Nevertheless, like I will stress later, the life as a benefit claimant does not come for free. The majority of the people I was volunteering with at the youth centre were unemployed. They were either volunteering in order to get some working experience whilst applying for work, or they had to do volunteering in order to receive their jobseekers’ allowance. Whatever motive, every unemployed person had to turn in to the jobcentre approximately every other week to prove that they were actively seeking work. This process was for many the only time they made any contact with a governmental institution. I will further elaborate on what impact this had on the people involved.

A volunteer I got to know very well during my time spent at the centre was Joe. He was a rather short, bald man who swore to his sweatpants on a daily basis. After getting to know him, I would suggest he was in his forties, but due to bad health and not many teeth left he looked closer to his sixties. Joe had been volunteering more or less three times a week since the youth centre opened. He told me he had been unemployed since 1998, because he was suffering from depression and epileptic seizures, and had been receiving Employment and Support Allowance for all those years. Today, on the other hand, the requirement for receiving such benefits have changed, and Joe was instead on jobseeker’s allowance. He now had to volunteer at the youth centre whilst applying for work in order to receive his benefits. Joe explained to me the feeling of powerlessness in managing his everyday life situation:

[…] Cause say you’ve got 250 people applying for one job, you’ve got no chance! It’s all over! You’ve got so many people going for the same jobs. And you’ve got the over qualified people going for the jobs just to try and get a job, and you’re just getting nowhere. And when you’re applying for jobs you’re not getting any feedback from the governed saying ‘sorry you’ve not been successful this time’, you’re not even getting that! Well you could apply for seventeen jobs a week, and get back nothing. And then you think: what am I doing this for? But you’ve got to do it to get you’re benefits. That’s what it all comes back down to.

Joe portrayed the labour market as one unit that he was struggling getting access to. For him, the labour market appeared as a united force without a face or a name, that decides who will have a safe financial future or not. Joe was left feeling completely powerless over his own
life situation. The feeling of powerlessness was combined with the sentiments of having to prove himself worthy of his benefits:

*Me:* would you rather say it is too easy, or too difficult claiming benefits?
*Joe:* It is easy, but its not, -if you know what I mean? Cause if they don’t think you’re making enough effort, they can sanction yah. Where you loose your money! They won’t pay you cause you’re not doing what you’re supposed to.
*Me:* How often do you speak with them?
*Joe:* Every week. Every Thursday. The advisor that I see, she can see that I’m not just sat on me backside. I’ve been doing courses and I’ve been doing working here. I’m constantly on me go. They’re seeing that I’m not just sat on me arse! That I’m actively seeking work.

Joe explained that he continuously had to prove to ‘them’ that he was making a good enough effort to earn his benefits. ‘They’ is a euphemism for the governmental and state run institutions, but it is not exactly clear whom ‘they’ really are. When ‘they’ are the ones controlling your daily economy, and therefore also your living standard, it could understandably leave a person feeling powerless. This can be viewed as a parallel to the relationship between the employees at the youth centre that I described in chapter 2. The office staff have secure contracts, but the floor staff can easily be replaced by someone better, and the applicants for such jobs are standing in line. The managers in the office are continuously evaluating the floor staff’s effort to see if they are doing their job, just like Joe had to prove to the jobcentre that he is earning up to the benefits he receives.

When discussing unemployment issues with the adults I got to know at the youth centre, I was surprised by the fact that very few seemed to have any sympathy for unemployed people –even people who were in fact unemployed themselves. The majority of people seemed suspicious of the intentions of other people claiming benefits. This observation surprised me, as I had rather been expecting people in the same situation, struggling with the same issues, to be supportive of one another. When I asked Joe whether he knew many other people in the neighbourhood that were struggling to get a job, he answered:

Yeah. But some of them, they don’t want the job, they just want to sit on their arse and have the benefit. They can’t be bothered getting a job. Why should they get a job when they are already getting paid for not having a job?
One could assume that Joe, knowing the struggle of depending on benefits for a living, would have sympathy for others in the same situation. He gave me this opinion after he had been explaining what a struggle it was for him trying to maintain his benefits. I was confused by what seemed to me to be conflicting attitudes towards benefit claimants. Rosie supported Joe on his complaint during another interview:

Do you know what… a lot of people say it’s because it’s not enough jobs and moan all the time, but I must admit; I’ve never been unemployed for longer than like two weeks or something. I feel like it’s too easy to get benefits. It’s just easy for them to get the money and sit at home.

Pointing out benefit cheaters and blaming unemployment on laziness were frequent responses when I discussed the high unemployment rates in the neighbourhood with the residents. Even Susan, having lived of disability benefit herself for a year, was blaming other women for taking advantage of the council housing lists:

On the council housing list -you’re pregnant, you go up. See? So it’s [about] getting a house. So, I know a couple of girls that just had kid after kid after kid, cause of child benefit. Just for free money. It’s like to say, you know, this isn’t me stereotyping… this is just… growing up in the area and knowing those girls… [whispering] sorry, but I’ve seen it: the parents want benefits.

Despite the fact that Susan grew up on a council estate herself, she accused other people who were also living on council estates and claiming benefits of being lazy. Susan, Joe, Rosie and Sarah all agreed that (other) people claiming benefits were not willing to try hard enough, despite the fact that they had all individually struggled with similar financial issues. Even people from similar backgrounds, belonging to the same class, continuously participated in the creation of this this split through their every day language. Even when people were supporting their fellow residents on some instances, they would also, in another instance, blame their neighbours for being lazy, criminals and benefit cheaters. Also here it becomes evident that even though middle-class values are being frowned upon, working-class people are also distancing themselves from each other. As we have seen, the negative attitudes towards working-class people are being maintained and reinforced, also within their own
social class. If the middle-class are providing people with a negative image of the working-class, like Jones argues, it would seem as though the working-class people themselves are also reproducing this representation (2012, pp. 28-29). This creates a separation amongst the working-class people, and they might be pointing fingers at one another, instead of questioning the people, or larger institutions reinforcing the negative image of them.

Concluding remarks

The one question I find highly significant to pose when discussing the boundaries between the two social classes is whether or not the resistance of middle-class values result in a strengthened working-class identity, like Evans (2007, p. 32), and Willis (1977, p. 136) argue. Remembering Rosie’s comment in the previous chapter, she mentioned that she was afraid to come across as snobby. Her concerns support Evans’ argument that the working-class people are distancing themselves from the middle-class (2007, p. 11). Having middle-class values is not viewed as something positive amongst working-class people. Nevertheless, Rosie also stressed that she did not want to be identified with her own neighbours. She was therefore distancing herself from both the middle—and the working-class people. When I asked Sarah whether she would use a class-term to describe her own neighbourhood, she responded: ‘Not really… I’m not really understanding your [question]… right, so would you call this a working-class area? No, not really. No, I’d call it [whispering] benefit cheaters!’ [Laughing].’ As I have attempted to show in the previous chapter, similar answers to that of Natalie’s were common when I talked to people about their neighbours and their neighbourhood. Such answers did not at all leave me with an impression that the working-class were standing together as a proud unit against the opposing middle-classes, like Evans (2007, p. 32) and Willis (1977, p. 3) suggest. Instead, the residents were also distancing themselves from the people who seemingly belonged to the same class category as them. When Sarah called all her neighbours for ‘benefit cheaters’, she was aiming to exercise a distance between herself and the people she was surrounded by, who supposedly share the same class category as herself. Even though I argue that there is a lack of pride and togetherness in working-class identity, I have also shown that there are indeed sections amongst working-class people, which are collectively strengthened through opposition to other groups, such as my observation of the ‘chavs’. The ‘lads’ are resisting governmental authorities, and large parts of society as such, which is crucial for creating a strengthened group mentality amongst them. Thus, Willis’ observation that the ‘lads’ are reproducing a
counter school culture, and thereby stand together as a collective group of individuals becomes evident also in the case with the ‘chavs’ (1977, p. 146).
Chapter 6: Concluding remarks

In this thesis I have explored some of the social dynamics that were evident amongst the people I got to know in Hayford, and I have argued that the core dynamic was mainly manifested in the act of creating distance. In the beginning of this thesis I asked how people create distance, and why people felt this was necessary. In order to discuss this, I have accentuated data gathered through observations, primarily through verbal exchanges, using interviews and conversations as my main methodological approaches. Getting to know the people living in Hayford, and through the many long and insightful conversations we shared, I have made an effort to acknowledge and show the perceptions of their every day concerns and struggles. My analysis has been based on the data I gathered from this, which has suggested that people’s ambiguity between sentiments of belonging, and resistance of any association with the same people or place is a crucial part of the way people make sense of their social world. I have used distance as a key notion, but as my analysis suggests, people were also torn between creating distance and emphasising belonging. What have been important to show in regards to the complexity of the situation are the exceptions. The exception I have emphasised was the mother-daughter dyad. In this relationship the strong creation of belonging through the kinship ties were opposing the otherwise prominent creation of distance.

Using the insights of Gullestad, I have discussed how people are creating distance through verbally emphasising differences from the people and places they do not want to be identified with. Gullestad argues that when people consider each other ‘too different’ from one another, they avoid each other, rather than confronting the differences (Gullestad, 2001, p. 36). Contrary to Gullestad, I have discussed how differences are being emphasised and expressed more or less explicitly. Differences are not being hidden, but instead continuously accentuated. The people in my study did not undermine differences through emphasising similarities between themselves and other people, as Gullestad’s research material suggests. Instead, people were emphasising differences in order to undermine similarities to other groups of people. In other words, people were commonly emphasising differences, and thus creating a distance between themselves and other social groups. Through this approach, they create and maintain their own identity, who they want to be seen as, and whom they most certainly do not want to be identified with. In some cases group coherence and affiliation
appeared between the people distancing themselves from the same people, place or social status, and other times it did not.

In chapter 3 I have shown how the boundary between the floor staff and the office staff was accentuated by the floor staff through social and verbal negotiations of distance. This was exemplified through **gossiping** and **joking relationships**. And furthermore, also how the office staff were creating the same distance through lack of communication. In chapter 4 I followed the interpretation of how distance was created and maintained with an exploration of people’s ambiguity between belonging and distancing from their neighbourhood. In chapter 5 I emphasised how people were creating distance from both middle-class values, but also from the working-class identity. In these analytical chapters, I have thus intertwined a carefully selected choice of literature to discuss the empirical data presented in this thesis. I have decided to use few ethnographic studies in order to be able to say something about my own reflections and observations in relation to them. The main argument I have stressed is that my observations have revealed is that having opponents and distancing from the same people, does not necessarily lead to a strengthened group identity. I have argued that the continuous way people were emphasising distance did not lead to a strengthened identity between working-class people, but people rather claimed to be ‘keeping themselves to themselves’.

Nevertheless, in some cases, such as between the chavs, or the floor staff, the resistance and opposition to authorities made them more defined as a collective social group.

This thesis has been an attempt to understand and interpret how working-class people in a post-industrial neighbourhood are making sense of their every day lives. I have taken into account some of the major changes that have happened during the recent decades; especially considering changes in working-class lives as a result of renewed political decisions, and thus also shifts in working-class identity. Although many changes have happened in social structure in Britain since the industries were dominating the labour market in working-class areas, the changes have only just began. One year after I conducted my fieldwork, the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum took place, resulting in the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union. This major event will affect working-class people in a number of ways that cannot be foreseen. I will thus argue that future investigation and research of the developments that this change will lead to will be crucial to make ways for new understandings of working-class people’s experiences and reflections of these changes.
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