

SOSTRIS: British National Report on Category IV

Struggling to start: Unqualified and Unemployed Youth in Britain

Susanne Rupp

1. Introduction

This report firstly gives an overview of the latest large-scale research on young people in Britain. The second chapter discusses the in-depth case analysis of Paul whose struggle to find a social role as an adult is influenced by the tensions between the two cultures in which he participates: black and white Britain. Five more cases, Chris (white-English), Mikey (black-Caribbean), Jessy (black-African), Rick (white-English) and Darren are then presented. The conclusions focus on the similarities and differences between Paul and the other cases. They lead to a few hypotheses about a moratorium period for young people from working class backgrounds.

1.1. Young People in Britain: Work or Full-time Education?

The following figures and results are from the Youth Cohort Study, a survey of 16 year olds in Britain, which began in 1986 with annual follow-up studies. The most recent follow-up study took place in 1996 (Payne 1997).

Joan Payne identified an enormous rise in the number of young people staying in full-time education during the 1980s. In 1983 less than 50 per cent of 16 year olds continued full-time education; in 1996 the number had risen to seventy per cent. There are three possible reasons:

- Firstly, the introduction of GCSE exams in the late 1980s for some people brought results which made them consider continuing education. Exam results have improved continuously since 1986.
- Secondly, the recession during the late 1980s and early 1990s led to the death of the labour market for young people and a rise in youth unemployment. Education then became an alternative to unemployment.
- Thirdly, the creation of special courses allowed young people who were formerly excluded from post-compulsory education to continue studying.

One of the cohorts was re-interviewed at the age 23. The researchers found that there are more problems now for this cohort than there were at the age of 16, for example low earnings or a high risk of unemployment.

Major post-16-routes

Men

	1989	1996
full-time education	43%	68%
jobs	25%	9%
GST (Government supported training)	27%	14%
at home	5%	9%

Women

full-time education	53%	75%
jobs	25%	9%
GST	27%	14%
at home	5%	9%

Roughly speaking about 10 per cent of young people are without employment and education. Some of the young women in this category are caring either for their own or for family members' babies (no figures available). Two per cent of them hold a part-time job, five per cent said that they were looking for a job or training, and three per cent described themselves as economically inactive. A few people in this group were also doing part-time courses. There is a highly selective group who run the risk of 'no education – no job' (i.e. a group with other problems such as learning disabilities). This risk of not finding work or not being able to continue education increases over the years.

Apprenticeship: the proportion of young people in formal apprenticeships has fallen; the absolute number has only slightly increased.

Level of parental occupation: for young people to find access to education often depends on the level of their parents' occupation.

	high	medium	low
full-time education	86	68	62
full-time job	4	9	10
GST	6	14	16
no edu/job	4	9	13

Regional differences: the North has the lowest staying-on rate and Greater London has the highest. There are no big gaps within the category of those without education or a job. However, there are more young people doing GST in the North which could balance a possible gap between the South and the North.

Type of job: most of the jobs which are available for young people are either clerical-secretarial, craft-related, within the personnel and protective services or in the sales business. There has been a decrease in the number of plant and machine operator jobs.

GST: the status of government funded training courses, and therefore their attractiveness, increased during the last decade.

Education: the staying-on rates are much higher for members of ethnic minorities.

Young disabled people: the study produces no data about young people with disabilities; young people in special schools are **not** covered by the study.

2. Interviews with young unemployed people

2.1 The setting for the interviews

Finding access to young unemployed people turned out to be very difficult for the British project. We tried to enter the social field of young homeless people (cf. 3.2.1.) but it turned out that longer and very intensive preparation is needed to gain access to this particular group of young excluded people. The interview with Chris, which took place within the social field of homelessness, also highlighted the issue of mental health problems as a reason for social exclusion. We also approached training institutions which specialise in courses for young unemployed people:

- **‘Pier Training’** is a training project in North Woolwich in the London Borough of Newham. This part of East London suffers not only from economic deprivation but also from geographical disadvantages as it is wedged between the River Thames, several railway lines, a motorway and City Airport, and is therefore separated from the cultural and social context of its neighbours Woolwich (south of the River Thames) and the other wards of Newham. Pier Training offers programmes and courses to people who have difficulties finding access to the labour market. Young people who are unemployed and not in full-time education can participate in these courses, e.g. the English course which offers them the opportunity to improve their communication skills. The courses are ‘open’ - participants are free to turn up - and most of the exercises are done individually depending on the participant’s skills. Jessy, Rick, and Darren were contacted through ‘Pier Training’.
- **‘Lennox Lewis College’** is a private foundation sponsored by the Hackney-born boxing champion Lennox Lewis. It was developed to address the needs of young people who have failed in the state school system and/or were in trouble. One-year courses train young people in subjects such as sound engineering and computing. The courses run full-time and in addition to the courses there are other activities available, e.g. a fitness centre. The college focusses not only on tuition but also on the personal development of the young people. Therapeutic interventions are possible if necessary. Paul and Mikey are students at Lennox Lewis College.

Apart from Chris all the interviewees were approached through their teachers. The interviewees were given a voucher for a book or CD. This is different to the other interviews of the SOSTRIS project where interviewees agreed voluntarily to an interview with no remuneration. These specific circumstances should be taken into account when reflecting on the difficult character of the interviews. At least some of the interviewees were more interested in getting the voucher than talking about their lives. It would therefore be jumping to conclusions to assume their often defensive attitude is simply related to the specific biographical stage in which they find themselves, i.e. in the midst of a critical period, without having yet worked out a biographical cast. They might well have the ability to speak about their lives and their experiences, but they might have hesitated to speak about it with the interviewer who represented the ‘official side’. Though the interviewees were told about the confidentiality of the interviews it might have been difficult for them to speak about difficult experiences and situations.

On the other hand these specifics of the interviews with young people shed a light on the transitory character of their situation. All our interviewees in this category are characterised by an insecure social status; they have not yet found an appropriate role in society. This characteristic makes it difficult for them to present themselves consistently in quasi-official situations such as these interviews. Our interviewees had

joined the educational system in order to change and improve their positions. Their transition period is based on this decision: at that moment they were neither losers nor winners, high-flyers or young offenders.

2.1. The in-depth-analysed case¹: Paul

2. 1.1. Paul's biographical data

In 1974 Paul's older brother is born in North London, followed by Paul in 1978. In 1982 Paul starts at the local primary school where he becomes interested in music and singing. In 1987 he moves to the local secondary school and his younger sister is born. At some point over the next three years he starts playing football for the under-13 team. He also continues his interest in singing, and performs in the choir at a Cliff Richard concert. Between 1987 and 1990 he sings in different bands (hip-hop, etc) and starts having problems at school when he forges his mother's signature. In 1994 he fails four out of his five GCSEs and stops singing. He starts a course at a local college (Business and Finance); he also starts smoking seriously, meets his girlfriend and goes to America to visit his family. Sometime in 1994 or 1995, Paul's' older brother is killed in the Caribbean. In 1995 Paul starts a Computer Studies course at another college which he doesn't finish. In 1996 his family move to another North London borough and later that year, he enrolls at Lennox Lewis College to do a 1-year course. He starts DJ-ing and making programmes. In 1997 he injures his knee whilst playing football.

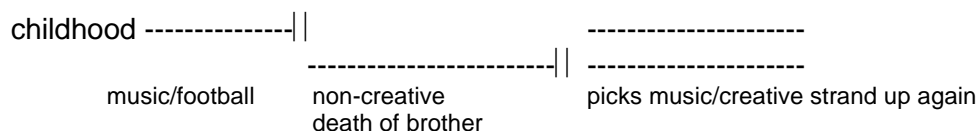
2.2. Results of the Biographical Data Analysis

We could identify three different phases in Paul's life:

1978 - 1994: childhood and early adolescence, including compulsory education, his failure in his GCSE exams, activities in football and music.

1994 - 1997: the period of post-compulsory education and preparation for a 'serious' adult role, without creative activities in music or sports, ending with the failure of Paul's business-career oriented strategy because of further failure in exams and probably also because of his emotional distress after his older brother's death in the Caribbean.

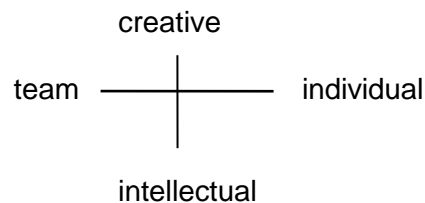
1996 - 1997: professional training in sound engineering at a college for young people who have failed at school, offering the option of both a creativity-oriented and a business-oriented career, resuming sports and music activities.



Paul's lived life is structured by 'competition' between two strands in his life (or a 'field of tensions'). We derived the following structural hypotheses:

¹ Roswitha Breckner supported the interpretation of this case as a methods consultant.

1. There is competition between music and school in Paul's life. This structures his experience at school and leads to a conflict between the expectations of his parents/the adult world and his individual trajectory.
2. There is a tension between collective orientation (Caribbean tradition, singer in a band) and the more individualised pattern of a 'multicultural' music industry (becoming a famous singer, the idea of a singer who is not part of a choir or a band) - team versus individual career.
3. There is a field of tension as follows:



The variety of options which might influence Paul's future horizon are as follows:

1. Orientation towards the team context: music will become a hobby (e.g. singing in a choir or playing in a band), he will not expose himself.
2. Orientation towards team *and* creativity: a career in music.
3. The individual/intellectual side is absent in the data: he is weak either at intellectual work or at exams. An orientation towards the individual/intellectual side is not a very probable option. If this option is verified, what has caused the change?
4. Separating ways: Paul sees the field of tensions as excluding alternatives. He either chooses music or a completely different way to make his living (this is confirmed by the first turning point but not valid at his present stage).
5. Paul gets stuck in the field of tensions: there is no successful professional training/career at all.
6. The individual/creative side predominates. Paul becomes a star and/or starts his own band.

2.3. Results of the Thematic Field Analysis and the attempt of a case structure²

2.1. 'Life as a race'

Paul tells his life story from the perspective of an adolescent who tries to find his place in the world, i.e. to find a role as an adult. The thematic field that 'life is a race' structures his presentation of his life story. This perspective refers to the years from

² This interview took, after the initial narrative, more the character of an unstructured interview. The conclusions derived from the thematic field analysis are therefore rather hypotheses than results but nevertheless of heuristic value.

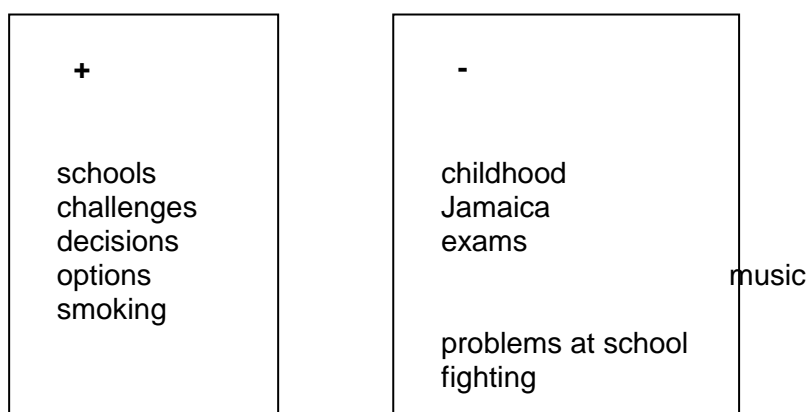
secondary school to his present situation and includes his future plans. He starts the very short main narrative with the statement 'there you go'. This is different to the more usual 'there you are' and implies a start or starting signal. Paul begins with his date of birth and then briefly mentions his younger brother. Co-present but not explicitly mentioned is his older brother and especially his violent death. This assumption is confirmed later in the interview when the interviewer prompts Paul to speak about the birth of his younger brother. He evaluates 'I was happy, happy to have a brother, happy to have a brother'. This evaluation is unspecific; it could refer to his younger *or* his older brother. Paul carries on: 'I had a- I've got, I've got, had an older one, but he died. He died in the Caribbean.'

Paul immediately continues his main narrative with a short report about Secondary School and College ('passed out³, just about in 95'). At another College he enrolled on a course in computer studies in order to have a better chance of finding work in computer stores, 'but then I didn't pass it, so I'm doing sound engineering, this year, out of my- for my music career, so that at least I've got two options, if I don't succeed in one, I can perhaps fall back⁴.' This passage is not immediately understandable. But it starts making sense in connection with the field of tension developed through the biographical data analysis. Paul refers to a career where either he becomes a star in music or, the fall back option, he stays with the herd and combines his knowledge in business studies with his skills in sound engineering.

Paul next introduces his activities as a DJ - the individualistic option - 'played out in raves', and briefly elaborates his initial narrative with his future plans, going on radio or 'maybe go abroad'. At the end of his initial narrative Paul refers to the 'training lap' at Lennox Lewis College again: 'just producing, just practising to make my own record, producing my own tracks'. He ends with an unfinished end evaluation: 'I'm just going to get in there, and it's going to be-'.

After the initial narrative we don't know whether Paul's birth and birthplace as well as his younger brother are included in the 'race' story or whether they are indicators of two more thematic fields. Co-present themes to these are family, the death of his older brother, and the separation of his parents.

Thematic Field: 'My Life as a Race'



³ This is a strange expression that derives from military tradition. Contrary to the original meaning - 'fainting' - it means 'finished' or 'absolved'.

⁴ Another term originating from military language.

This thematic field includes features of a fantastical promising young man who is probably white and who is entering a professional career. The themes which are left out describe in contrast the prejudiced young Caribbean man. *From these pictures we can conclude that the social field which encompasses Paul's presentation of his life story is a field of two competing cultures or, more specifically, of tensions between two cultures.*

The ongoing interview confirms this assumption. The first question in the second part of the interview refers to a theme which was left out in the initial narrative ('more about your childhood?'). Paul responds to it by referring to his childhood and by opening a second thematic field which could be structured by the distinction of 'the Caribbean and his family's life' and 'England and his own life': 'I've been living in England all my life'. Paul constructs his life in contrast to other people's lives, or more specifically, to his parents' lives. Paul continues with a short report about moving between two North London boroughs last year which was triggered by his parents' decision to separate.

Within the field of two competing cultures Paul constructs his life-story as a 'race'. This is caused by the experience of

- his failure at his GCSE exams
- his brother's death in Jamaica.

Our hypothesis is that Paul's interpretation of 'life as a race' is his way of coming to terms with the tensions between two cultures. He sees the need to choose the side which is meant to be less troublesome, the side of (professionally) successful people. However, these people are 'white'. Only a few black people find access to this world. Paul cannot fulfil the condition of being white, but he sees a sort of steeplechase (a race) which he has to pass in order to find access to the 'white' world.

How did Paul's idea of 'life as a race' develop? At secondary school Paul 'got into a bit of trouble there' but 'you know, there's a time for everything, I just buckled down and done my work.' However, at the final exam he failed: 'at the last minute I just crack up, that, when it comes to the final exams, then I just- my mind just went blank, and I was disappointed then.' Paul realised that continuous assessment would have been better for him, whereas an all-deciding final exam is difficult for him to cope with. *The idea of having an aim which he can reach step by step is Paul's repair strategy for his failure. However, this is a parcours (a show jumping course) but not yet a steeplechase.*

His brother's death in the Caribbean intensified Paul's perception of the world and his chances of finding an appropriate place for himself after passing a parcours. As already mentioned, Paul spoke about his older brother in the second part of the interview when asked about his younger brother. He further elaborates about his older brother: 'I never knew him that well, cause when he met his girlfriend over there when, when we was on holiday, and he just, and he decided to live over there, and from then on I never saw him.' His brother had obviously opted for the Caribbean side of the two conflicting cultures. But this experiment did not go well: 'he just got killed, ..., he was defending his friend.' His brother's death confronted Paul with the finality of life - a concept which is opposite to an adolescent's perception of an (nearly) endless life ahead. His brother's death introduces the issue of limited time in Paul's construction of life as a race: *the course turned into a racecourse which has to be passed quickly as there is not much time left.*

The perspective of 'life as a race' comes out clearly in Paul's memories of after he left school and stopped singing: 'When I left school, that's when I stopped, but, I still see, I still see my old band teacher. He goes, yeah, I should come and see him, *but I just*

haven't got the time, like, with my college work, and like, it's piling up all the time, yer know, I ain't really got much time.' Paul continues: 'But I told my music teacher like, if he can take out the gear then I can start singing for a couple of hours, to get the feel of it again, he hasn't got the time either, so-'. Paul expected his former teacher for more support which did not materialise. He does not speak about his disappointment though; instead he tries to escape the memories and resumes the race: 'it's lunchtime - I should go.' Paul's disappointment could be so deep and unspoken because this story represents his attempt to jump to the 'white-British' culture - the teacher in the story was the same one who put him in touch with Cliff Richard.

2.1.2. The experience of conflicting cultures: looking for his own way

There are a few hints in the interview that Paul experienced the world as conflicting cultures, e.g. when he refers to his father's experiences at school in Jamaica, and 'it is different from here, ... it's hard to explain but it's different like in many ways.' But what made Paul think that he - in contrast to his older brother - could join the 'white-British world'? Looking at the biographical data we see that he played once in Cliff Richard's band. Within pop culture Cliff Richard represents quite the opposite of independent and subcultural black music; rather mainstream white pop music, without sex and drugs and rock and roll but a 'goody-goody' whom old ladies look upon as the perfect 'son-in-law'. Singing in Cliff Richard's band must have been a contradictory experience for Paul: on the one hand it was a big success to play for such a famous singer, but on the other hand we can imagine that he was teased by his mates, a Caribbean boy singing for Cliff Richard! When Paul recalled this experience he stressed the positive side: 'that was excellent, I was- like a new experience.' Paul had had a new experience, and he had found access to the 'white' world.

Probably with the background knowledge that it is possible to find access to the 'other' culture Paul started to work hard at school and revised for his exams. After his failure he made a radical break and jumped to the other side. Paul decided to use the opportunities offered by post-compulsory education to 'repair' his bad GCSE marks. In addition he gave up music and football and focussed on a business career path. Only in the second year of this phase did he realise that this was not a feasible strategy: 'I couldn't cope, I told my Mum, and I told her what I was looking to do eventually was, and she goes "just do what you think is right", "and then maybe next year just like go back to it and do music", cos I've always loved music.' Paul's narrative on the talk with his mother reveals different perspectives. Paul had realised that he had to integrate both cultures in his life whereas his mother's perspective could rather be influenced by the idea of two incompatible cultures.

Applying for a place at Lennox Lewis College marks the beginning of Paul's own way: 'I know a couple of people who have come here, they recommended the college to me, I heard about the studio, about the facilities, all then, well, I'll give it a try, ..., it's alright, it's alright.' Paul resumed his interest in music but on a different level, not as a musician but as a DJ and music technician, therefore planning a professional career in the music industry which also combines individualistic and co-operative work.

2.1.3 Conclusions

Paul grew up in a social field of conflicting cultures. These were the black-Caribbean and the white-British cultures. The connotations were solidaristic and creative for the first cultural context and individualistic and intellectual-business oriented for the second cultural context. Paul had developed the idea that these cultures were

incompatible alternatives; this idea was probably influenced by his family. Paul saw the chance to jump to white-British culture and to follow a business career path via the access he had found to white-British culture through his music playing.

Paul's idea of a business career however was incompatible with his creative activities. He gave them up but became increasingly unhappy with his life. Eventually he decided to pick up the music strand again but on a different level - as an option for a professional career.

The course at Lennox Lewis College has the following meanings for Paul:

- it represents his attempt to combine the different cultures and to overcome the conflicting character of the cultures which form his social world
- LL College represents a similar attempt: it is founded by a black boxer who also made his way through integration of apparently conflicting cultures⁵ and it stands for education through mainly white teachers who nevertheless allow cultural diversity. They also work towards overcoming conflicting cultures.

3. The other cases

3.2 Chris

3.2.1 Foreword

When starting work on this category we tried hard to find access to young homeless people who in London are one of the most visible and problematic consequences of Thatcherite deregulation policy. We met Harriet Atkinson, a young woman who works voluntarily for a homeless charity. As this charity is mainly attended by older homeless people Harriet and I made several attempts to contact day centres and shelters in order to find younger interviewees but our progress was painfully slow. Finding homeless people as interviewees needs a long period of preparation in order to build up confidence, something we could not perform within the time and financial constraints of the SOSTRIS project. We were therefore rather pleased when 25 year old Chris agreed to an interview.

Harriet and I met Chris once together when we visited him in the shop managed. This was after Chris had found accommodation and work following a period of homelessness. Chris is a tall, dark-haired, charming young man. He told us that he was enrolling on a graphic-design course the following autumn. Though he was educated we chose him for an interview because of his earlier experience of homelessness. As he appeared to us to be an easy-going interviewee who was willing to talk Harriet decided to do the interview on her own (following a few training sessions in narrative interviewing). The following report is written by Harriet.

3.2.2. Report on the interview with Chris, written by Harriet Atkinson⁶

⁵ As far as I understand from the sports news, Lennox Lewis stands for a fair and intelligent boxing style (rather like the East German ex-boxer Henry Maske), as opposite to a Mike Tyson-style of boxing.

⁶ This is a slightly shortened version of the report written by the interviewer. The interviewee's name and a few data have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

(I asked him for his name and he said Chris Toffer which I took to be his name and surname as he pronounced it as such, but now I realise that he was probably only saying 'Chris-topher'.)

The first interview took place in the flat of a mutual acquaintance, the second in the office behind the shop where Chris works in Central London.

3.2.2.1. Before the interview

I had met Chris a couple of times before because of his visits to the charity for Thursday evening meals when he was homeless, and subsequently, briefly, when he volunteered at the project. I have also once shopped at the place he now manages with a group of people from the charity project. I set up the interview while with Susanne Rupp, after an abortive attempt to interview a young homeless man who did not turn up for an interview I had arranged in Victoria.

I knew that unlike several under 25 year olds who have had an experience of homelessness, Chris was likely to be a safe bet for turning up to be interviewed. The young man who I had arranged to meet before had been quite deeply under the influence of either drugs or alcohol when I arranged our meeting. It was not particularly surprising that he didn't turn up a week later to be interviewed. Chris, on the other hand, prides himself on his fitness and clean-living lifestyle.

I arranged to meet him for the first interview at the flat of a mutual acquaintance from the project. This was convenient because I had a day off and it was only three days after the conversation when we arranged the meeting. I didn't realise at the time that he would only have about two and a half hours off that afternoon. I arranged to meet him a second time, a few days later, but this did not happen in the end because the day before his mum got in touch with him again after several years and he planned to go down and visit her (he did not do this). Then the day that I should have been interviewing him his sister turned up after some months to see him. So the second part of the interview was rearranged.

The second time I did manage to meet him I went to his shop on a Saturday morning. Although it was his day off he was working in the office behind the shop. As the manager of the shop he was quite busy talking to friends and colleagues. He gave me a cup of coffee to drink while he did some paper work, writing some special offers on a board in very impressive italics and so on. He talked to me while having a laugh with the people in the shop and going about his duties. He also said that what he had left to say to me would only take about half an hour so I could just make notes while he was working. I insisted that it was necessary that I recorded our conversation. He seemed quite resistant to the idea, but said that we could stay in the office though it might be quite noisy because we would still hear the noises from the shop.

3.2.2.2. The interview

When I met Chris for the first interview he had come straight from a shift at work and he was about to go to another shift afterwards. He was quite business-like and was wearing his work shirt and tie, etc. He drank a soft drink and smoked quite a lot during the interview. When I made suggestions about where he should sit in order to be audible on tape, etc, I felt that he thought it was quite odd for him to take suggestions from me on what to do during the interview. He is clearly not used to taking orders from a woman and especially not from one who is younger than him.

He listened quietly and thoughtfully to the initial question (which I read to him after I had explained in my own words the kinds of things that the project was aiming to do).

In reply he gave me a fairly chronological description of his life from birth to the present day, and I realised then (as is suggested in much of his later descriptions) that he enjoys order and precision. He said that he was born in Gibraltar in 1971 and that his father was in the RAF (in retrospect I realise that his father did not feature much if at all after descriptions of his early childhood and that it was just his stepfather that he mentioned). He described how his parents divorced when he was eleven and that it was at this point that he moved back to Britain with his mother and sister and went to a private school.

He mentioned that the two loves of his life as a school boy were music and sport and that he excelled in these. He then swiftly moved on to talking about the three and a half years that he had spent in the Royal Marines. He said that these years, including the time he had spent fighting in the Gulf War, were the best in his life in many ways. He described the pain and suffering that he witnessed in the Gulf but believed it to be worth it as he was fighting for 'Queen and country'. He also mentioned that he had spent some time in Northern Ireland with the Marines.

He went on to talk about when he had to come out of the Marines early, having sustained an injury whilst in the Gulf. He said that 22 years was the maximum that he could have stayed in the forces but that he had been a failure because, due to an eye injury, he had to leave after only three and a half years. He had already been given three promotions, but this was all taken away. He had been offered a desk-job in the Marines but this was not what he wanted to do at all. When he came out he found the whole experience so tough that he went through counselling.

The worst thing about coming out, he said, was spoiling people's expectations of him. His mum had been particularly angry and he had lost touch with her as a result.

After leaving the Marines, he had settled in London and had worked as a bodyguard for music firms. For these jobs he had had to travel around the world with famous people, which he said he had enjoyed immensely. It was during this time, when he had been on a job in Australia for a week, that he had come back and found that the girlfriend he had been living with had run away with a neighbour of his. She had changed the locks, and emptied his bank account. The way in which he referred to these particular events (the crucial ones which account for why he ended up on the streets) are slightly uncertain. The first time he told his story he said that his girlfriend had changed the locks and that he, in effect, had been locked out of everything they had had. Later on, he said that his girlfriend had 'left' him, in a way that sounded as if the reverse had happened. Whatever the truth of this part of the story, I think that more may have happened than he told me (e.g. possibly getting in trouble with the police or something else) but I did not glean the real details from his virtually flawless version of the story.

(NB: It seemed to me that he believed it was not in his best interests, especially as things are now for him, to tell me all the worst things that he had done that had contributed to his situation. His story was about things that had been done to him that had changed his life (the Gulf War injury, his girlfriend leaving him, etc) rather than about things he had done.)

He said that having lost everything he had gone to the Council and asked for other housing but he was told he was low priority and that he would have to wait up to 18 months to be given somewhere. During this time he stayed on floors in friends' houses but then, having no fixed abode, so no possibility of finding stable employment (he had lost his bodyguard job when his girlfriend had left him), he found himself sleeping on the streets. This was only a short, four month period. He described this as 'the best turning-point of his life' - the time when he found God. He said that he had started

thinking recently that he had a calling to work with the homeless and that although it was a very tough experience it had been necessary. This was the only way he could think to describe the fact that he had changed from a man earning £40,000 to 'scum'.

He brought his main narration up to the present day by saying that at the moment he is happy. Two and a half months ago he got his present job as the manager of a shop in Central London but that this is only a stop-gap because he is waiting to start working with the homeless when he feels that the time is right.

Then, without any prompting, he mentioned other things which he thought were important. In particular he said that he had a natural talent for music and that after he had left school (where he had got Grade 8 piano very easily) he had gone to the Royal Academy of Music to do a diploma. This had taken him eight months to get (less time than it should have, he suggested). When had finished his diploma he had come to a fork in his career - should he teach music or should he go into the Marines - he chose the latter.

He also mentioned the time he moved to London after being in the Marines as very tough. He then mentioned that three and a half years in the Marines were like water under the bridge and that 'God saw what he did' but that people not in the forces wouldn't understand what he had gone through. He said that the camaraderie was like being in a family. I didn't know if what he had had done was something in the line of duty that the Marines had asked him to do or, perhaps, if he had been discharged for some slightly less honourable reason than sustaining an injury. This was the only flicker of scepticism I experienced at his explanation for being discharged from the forces.

His main narration veered a lot between descriptions of a chain of events and argumentations about what had happened to him. The way that he had made sense of his experiences of the last year or more were by seeing them as part of God's plan for his life and so argumentations almost became narrations as he explained his conversion experience as part of the sequence of events.

I asked him more about each of the parts of his narrative mentioned above (finding it quite hard to elicit narratives as he was very keen to give an explanation for his homelessness, which he saw to be a necessary, but momentary blip in his otherwise successful 25 years so far). I found that I sometimes had a run of good narrative-inducing questions but that quite often I would offer him the chance to give explanations which he readily took.

I asked him only a few external questions: about his experiences actually in the Gulf War which led up to him being discharged. I also asked him to explain the sequence of events which brought him off the streets and to living and working in the shop (he has a room above it). I asked him further about his family relationships and about his friends, and girlfriends - his present and his past one. He described being back in touch with his mother, his stepfather and his sister, events which are very much on his mind as they are happening currently. He said that his sister (who is three years older than him) is coming to work for him part time in the shop which he is very pleased about. His present girlfriend is one of the permanent workers at the SAFE project, who he seems to spend a lot of his spare time with. I felt that I had been fairly unsuccessful in asking enough about his relationships as I'm sure there must have been much more he could have said.

3.2.2.3 After the interview

That is Harriet's report on the interviews with Chris. A few weeks later a letter from Harriet arrived, from which I quote: 'It turns out, rather shockingly, that he was a very serious liar and that he was masquerading as someone who had been to public school, the Royal College of Music and was in the Royal Marines: he has done none of these things. In actual fact he turns out to be an 'unqualified youth'. He left school without qualifications (having been sexually abused by his father as a small child). He spent much of his first years after school in probation or in care, ending up with a spell in prison and then a spell of time on the streets. He was, ironically, a more suitable candidate for interview than I ever imagined. He has been lying to everyone about his life for several years (very convincingly) and recently had a mini-breakdown where he went to hospital saying he couldn't handle anything anymore. I don't know what to believe of what he says now. But he says he's planning to do an access course and then to go to university in a couple of years. This all explains why it was so hard to pin him down into giving an interview. And my wiggling small suspicions of him were confirmed overwhelmingly.'

3.2.3 Conclusions

In spite of our attempts to find a homeless youth for an interview we ended up with a 'fake' interview. However, it nevertheless highlights a dimension of social exclusion which we have neglected so far: the situation of the mentally ill. For the lack of psychiatric knowledge we cannot discuss Chris' case here in detail but only draw a few conclusions from the structure of his 'construct'.

Chris' invented life-story⁷ reveals a strong endeavour to be part of something without losing his 'special' identity. He described himself as a student but excelling in sports and music, as a student at the music college but faster than other students, as a soldier in the army but special because of being involved in the Gulf War. His injuries and early discharge, and also his religious conversion, make him a group member and a very special individual at the same time as having a 'calling'. Chris had developed a chameleon-like strategy in order to find access to a group. When we met him he had found access to the homeless and those who work with the homeless. He told a more or less plausible story about how he became homeless (there are many ex-army people among the homeless in London), and laid great stress on a self-presentation as an unusual homeless person at the same time.

Chris' construct was focussed on homelessness. Normally social workers, charity workers and journalists focus their questions on this part of their clients' life. On the one hand the biographical interview must have been quite threatening for Chris and would explain his hesitation about giving a second interview, as well as Harriet's irritation about some of Chris' answers. On the other hand we can interpret Chris' agreement to a biographical interview as an attempt to come to terms with his life and to find a way to tell his biography. His breakdown a few weeks later made this even clearer.

⁷ On first sight Harriet's experience looks like an argument against the narrative interview as the interview procedure allowed Chris to present a fake story. However, Harriet felt quite clearly during the interview, especially at the second meeting, that Chris had problems responding to her narrative-eliciting questions and presenting more detailed stories, but she attributed this feeling to her lack of experience as an interviewer. Chris' agreement to a narrative interview is also to be seen in the context of his attempts to tell the 'truth' which was not possible for him for some reason. In addition it would be interesting to see how Chris' fake story is connected to his life history. We could assume that the stories he told *are* connected to his life history - the crucial question would be to find out *what* the connection is.

Chris' fantasies about his future after his breakdown also confirm our assumptions on the meaning of 'reflexivity' we have developed so far in our project. Chris' idea of entering the educational track confirms the importance of education as well as the need for reflexivity. However, the opportunities for developing the kind of reflexivity education brings may not be enough for Chris to come to terms with his life.

Comparing Chris with other cases of our sample who suffered from mental health problems introduces generational issues to the discussion. In contrast to the other cases (e.g. Tony, Bill or Pauline) Chris is the only one who suffers at young age from mental health problems. Bill and Tony have to *reconstruct* their lives as we stated in our report on the early retired (Spano 1998:1). In contrast Chris has to *construct* his life which includes finding an interpretation for his past and a social role for the future.

3.3. Mikey

Mikey represents the third generation of Caribbean immigrants as his mother was also born in Britain. I met Mikey at Lennox Lewis College. He was suffering from a cold when I met him and sniffed a lot during the interview. As the interview took place in a not very warm room he kept his coat and his cap on, and as he is not very tall he looked quite forlorn.

3.3.1. Biographical Data

Mikey was born in 1979 in East London. His mother is of Caribbean origin but was also born in Britain. His family lived in poverty although they 'did raise food'. In 1981 a sister is born, followed by another in 1983. In 1990 Mikey is taken into foster care for the first time; his foster mother 'was alright'. He stays in foster care until 1992 when he goes to a children's home in Essex where he starts mugging. Around this time he goes to live in the Caribbean for a 'while'. When he returns to the UK he goes live with his family until 1994 when he is arrested for mugging and sent into foster care again. In 1996 he moves to a semi-independent unit and a place is found for him at Lennox Lewis College.

3.3.2. The interview

Mikey started with a short main narrative (about five minutes) giving a chronological overview of his biography. Asked about more memories of his childhood Mikey did not answer with a narrative but with a few argumentations. He evaluated his life story as 'happy with his Mum and everybody around', he had a 'good laugh with everybody'. Mikey does not remember a special situation when he realised their poor life circumstances, 'but you know it' that you are poor. He also cannot remember why he went into foster care, 'they just turned up one day'. A long pause followed. My impression was that Mikey was lost in his memories but was not able to verbalise them. He refused to talk about the foster care in detail but remembered then that he had 'lot of fights with the other children there actually'. He saw his mother regularly during his stay in foster care. He described his situation as 'not really homesick', but he would have preferred to stay with his mother.

At the children's home he 'caused too much problems over there as well'. When asked about the problems he answered 'don't know'. He paused and sniffed and said that his nose was blocked-up. He then continued that the children's home was the place where he 'probably met criminals' and turned criminal himself. His face showed a lot of

frustration when he told me this. I then asked him 'you don't like the memories of that?' and Mikey replied that he had not 'really thought of that for a long time, it makes me realise what it's like'. I responded that I tried to understand him and asked him whether he now sees it as 'meeting criminals, but how was it then?' Mikey answered that he 'looked at it as fun', he also started smoking there (I forgot unfortunately to ask whether he meant cigarettes or marihuana). Mikey carried on that he was young at that time, he was 'told to join the group', he did not think about it. The children's home was in Essex⁸ and he expected it to be racist, so he was glad that they accepted him. Mikey told me next about his first mugging which he evaluated as 'it was just so simple, unbelievable'.

Mikey was neither caught by the police nor did he tell his parents; nevertheless his mother sent him to the Caribbean. Mikey quoted her: 'better to be with family not with strangers.' The children's home did not intervene when he became deviant, 'they just did not care'. The police first arrested him when he was 15 years old.

Asked about the Caribbean Mikey blocked: 'there is nothing to say about the Caribbean, apart from different cultural shocks' (which he did not specify). He stayed with his aunts; his cousins lived in different places. Mikey came back to London for a holiday and then refused to go back to the Caribbean: 'I haven't been back since'. He stayed with his Mum and joined the 'old circle' again. It was then that the police arrested Mikey. They searched him and found a knife. Telling this Mikey went back to the situation and evaluated it repeatedly 'stupid, so stupid'. The police let him off on probation. He was arrested again but again he did not go to prison. As a consequence he had an argument with his mother who asked him to leave. He went into foster care again and from there he was transferred to a semi-independent unit, ending up 'here' at Lennox Lewis College where he studies sound engineering: 'it's alright'.

Asked for his experiences at school (as an external question) Mikey answered that he had done all right but he did not finish: 'nothing to tell about really'. He became more and more reluctant to answer further external and statistical questions. He does not know his mother's age, and his father lives with the family. He did not mention him during the whole interview. Either he just said his parents were together to stop me asking further questions or there is some meaning behind it. Eventually, when I told him that I had the impression that he did not want to answer my questions, I was very surprised by his answer: 'this is a bit personal now, you know'.

I finished the interview and excused myself for having him asked for his 'problematic story', and that I was interested in the whole story, not only the problematic part. Mikey answered, again surprisingly, that he 'had not thought about that for a long time, he had blocked it out', but 'it's alright, really'.

3.4. Jessy

Jessy is a pretty plump young woman who I met at Pier Training. Jessy was at once interested when I told her about the project. We started the interview shortly after my introduction. Unfortunately the tape recorder broke down, therefore only the first ten minutes of the first interview are taped properly. Jessy agreed to a second interview which also took place at the premises of Pier Training. The second interview with Jessy lasted about 45 minutes.

⁸ Essex is the county to the east of London, beginning at the fringes of East London. 'White Essex men' are the stereotype for intolerant and racist people, as opposed to a multi-cultural Londoner.

3.4.1. Biographical Data

In 1980 Jessy is born in East London. Her parents are from Africa; they probably came over in the 1970s and were married already. They have never told Jessy their reasons for emigrating. Her mother trained at college as a beautician; following the later repossession of their house she took two jobs as hospital domestics. Her father is a factory worker does not talk about his work. In 1985 a brother is born. In the mid-1980s Jessy goes to a nanny after school where she is tormented by one of the nanny's own children who locks her in a dark room. In 1992 Jessy's family's house is repossessed and they spend two weeks in Bed and Breakfast accommodation⁹. They then move to a 'horrible' house in an outer East London borough (mice, damp, an outside toilet and bathroom). At some point in the early 1990s Jessy goes to meetings of her parents' cultural association with her father and her brother. In 1994 her family moves to the London Borough of Newham. Jessy's mother gets cancer in 1995 and Jessy and her brother move to her aunt's house in an area of East London where many white working class people from the East End were rehoused.. Her mother returns home to recover; her father leaves the family and Jessy's mother and the two children then move to North Woolwich. In 1995/96 Jessy starts having sexual relationships with men, but doesn't have any stable relationships. She takes her GCSEs in 1996 which go 'not too well'; she only gets two C grades. She then goes to Islington College to do a B-Tec, but drops out. In the same year her mother becomes a born-again Christian. Jessy also becomes a born-again Christian in 1997 and starts singing in the church's Gospel choir. She also starts smoking, and her brother is sent to private school. In Spring 1997, Jessy starts attending courses at Pier Training in preparation for college (English, Maths, Computing and Typing). At the time of the interview her future perspective was focussed on wanting to go to college for training in music technology.

3.4.2. The interview

Jessy presented herself as an unhappy teenager crying out for love and acceptance. She started her self-reconstruction with the argumentation that her parents were both working, so that she was left with her brother. She then described her failure at school because her writing was 'messy' and the teachers could not help her. She had a 'pretty tough childhood anyway'. Next Jessy spoke about her failure at college which she left. She did not like it, people were very unpleasant, and she left though she was advised to stay. Her plans are now to enrol at another College in autumn to train as a music technician. She would also like to become a singer.

Jessy continued by giving reasons for her failure: her mother fell ill, the children then stayed with their aunt who was also a foster mother and had to look after other children. It is surprising that she does not give the disruptions following the repossession of the house, the debts and the many removals as reasons for her failure at school. Jessy only spoke in the second interview about the repossession when prompted by the interviewer. The repossession of the house was caused by her father who took loans which he could not repay. Her mother was 'very angry' and many arguments between her parents followed the event but no violence: 'I got just used to it'.

Jessy described her mother as now more supportive and as pushing her into education. She now also recognises the value of education and wants to improve her English as

⁹ the local governments used to send homeless people into Bed and Breakfast accommodation if there was no council accommodation available.

she likes reading and she would like to be able to use 'big words', 'there are a lot of big words'.

Asked for more detail about her childhood Jessy spoke about her lack of self-confidence which she saw as rooted in her childhood. She recalled the 'horrible nanny', and how she was locked in dark rooms at her house. The nanny's daughter picked all her favourite children and left Jessy alone in a dark room. Jenny's mother did not take Jenny's complaints seriously and thought her daughter was exaggerating. She described herself as 'yearning for love but always getting slapped in the face'. One of the sad stories she told me was when she attended a famous evangelical singer's concert. She was in the front row and the singer shook hands with everybody or touched everybody except her. She told me that people use to take advantage of her. She regrets never having had a proper relationship though that's what she most wants. She now hopes that God will help her.

Jessy described her father as never having loved her, but as a child, especially before her brother was born, she felt close to her father. Now she feels very disappointed and distant from him. He never spoke about his work; she only remembers him going out very early in the morning and coming back late.

Jessy herself has 'so much love in her which she wants to share with somebody'. But she always allows people to take advantage of her. A girlfriend makes her do things which she does not want to do, but she does not feel certain enough to refuse. As a child she was bossy but now she is too quiet.

Sad events Jessy remembered refer to her parents' treatment of her. She did not fulfil her mother's expectations as she is fat and therefore not meeting the aspirations of a beautician. Jessy's father took her and her brother to the meetings of the African association but when Jessy participated in a play and wanted to play a part he would not allow her because she was too fat.

Through the whole interview Jessy tried to place the interviewer in the role of a counsellor. I often used active-listening-techniques but refused to give her advice during the interview. After the interview I encouraged her strongly not to do anything that she does not want to do.

3.5. Rick

Patricia, the English teacher at Pier Training in North Woolwich, suggested Rick as an interviewee. He attends the English lessons very irregularly and therefore we cannot say that he continues full time education. Apart from his occasional visits to Pier Training he is unemployed. I met Rick a few times. He was not an attentive student at all. Often he was more or less disinterested, not finishing his work. Though his reading and writing were not bad he was easily frustrated if he could not solve a task very quickly. At another session he was over-interested, extremely helpful and supportive to everybody, and rather annoying with this behaviour. At one session he was completely disruptive until the teacher told him to leave the class (this was when Jessy was being interviewed in the other room). After his interview Rick asked for copies of the tapes. When I gave him the copied tapes he was very, very glad. From then on he gave me a smile every time he saw me.

We originally chose the interview with Rick for in-depth analysis. The presentation of Rick focusses on the biographical data. The interview does not give a basis for a case structure as Rick refused to speak about many life phases and themes. 'Boring' and

'not really' where his most often used terms during the interview (but also in his English classes). The only themes he presented in more detail were his experiences at school (problems, 'boring') and his football activities. The only 'narrative' in the interview was about when he was injured during a football match.

3.5.1. Biographical Data

Rick was born in 1977 in North Woolwich. His mother was 20 when Rick was born and is a housewife/unemployed. She is from East London and her parents live nearby. Rick's father is from Cornwall, where his parents still live, and is unemployed. He used to play football in a team but stopped when he was 19 or 20.

In 1978 a sister is born, followed by two more (twins) in 1980. Rick starts school in 1982 and as a boy and adolescent plays football. He moves school in 1990 and in the early or mid 1990s joins another school football team but gets injured. From then on he gets many injuries. Around the same time, Rick moves to another school.

In 1993 Rick's maternal Grandfather dies from asbestosis. Not long afterwards, Rick leaves school with no qualifications. In 1994 or 1995 his mother leaves the family and moves in with another man in a more affluent area of East London. She tries to have another baby. Rick starts drinking in 1994 and in 1995 he finds work as a painter (youth training project), but two months later he leaves the job. Around this time, Rick has a girlfriend for a few weeks or months. He gets another job (labouring) in 1996 but is laid off after a few months. He starts smoking. In late 1996 or early 1997 he gets left out of football trials at West Ham United because of his smoking. Then in 1997 a girl friend tells him about Pier Training and in the spring Rick starts English and Maths courses there.

1977 - 1993

Rick comes from a family which is characterised by the long-term unemployment of both parents. He grew up in an area of East London which was part of the Docklands and where, since the closure of the Docks, the unemployment rate has been extraordinarily high. The area is geographically isolated from the London Borough of Newham of which it is part. Access by public transport to the industries is more difficult than from other East London areas.

Looking at the area where the family lives, and also at the birth of four children within three years, we developed the hypothesis that Rick's parents 'actively' increased obstacles to finding jobs or, in other words, didn't have the skills which are necessary to find a job in East London (to look for accommodation in a more accessible area, to participate in a social network which includes information about jobs, to 'plan' children, etc). The quick succession of children especially led the family into a poverty trap which meant that they got more money from social benefits than they would from (unskilled or part-time) work. They could have developed special skills in getting the most out of the social security system.

Rick's father is not from East London but from Cornwall, an agricultural and mining area where the industry died even earlier than in East London. Therefore he is not connected to a social network in East London, neither the traditional white working class milieu nor the network of an ethnic minority.

There could have been a family conflict between Rick's mother and the traditions of East London, and his father who represents the 'Cornish' tradition. His father might have prevented his mother from working. Although Rick's maternal grandfather was

(probably) working he either didn't help Rick's father to find work or Rick's father refused to work.

Rick grew up in a family without a positive work model. He experienced the lack of the formal framework that is provided by employment. On the other hand as he grew up without a parent who was under time pressure and strain, it could also have been the experience of a laid-back/leisure culture, at least for the small child.¹⁰

The family is dominated by women which put Rick in a very special position as the only son. From the data we learn that Rick didn't get much attention from his mother who had - most probably - to care for the three little girls. Even at an early, 'oedipal' age, he didn't experience a close relationship with his mother. The family was characterised by gender segregation.

The data led to two alternative hypotheses:

- either there was a special bond between Rick and his father which led to Rick's involvement in football;
- or Rick's wanted to establish a special bond between him and his father and he therefore tried to excel in football.

In any case football has been the means for integration for Rick as school was difficult for him and he lacked social integration by his father's working life.

1993 - 1997

Rick's grandfather (m) died in 1993. He was the 'work' model in the family although he was not a positive work model as he died from work-related asbestosis. At about the same time Rick left school with no qualifications. Shortly after these events Rick's mother left the family and moved to a better part of Newham where she lives with her new partner. *These events mark a turning point and the beginning of a trajectory.*

The mother could have felt 'free' after her father's death, especially if she had started the relationship with Rick's father against her own father's will. It is probable that Rick experienced this event in a different way. He could feel resentful towards his mother because she left him, or he could feel guilty as he might have driven her out by leaving the school. The 'bad' feelings around this event are confirmed by Rick's drinking which started at about the same time. The need to do something to improve his own or his family's situation is confirmed by his starting work.

Rick left the job two months later. This proves the ambivalence between the self-destructive and activity strategies he experiences. His activities could be the beginning of either a strategy of combining drinking and intermittent employment, or a strategy of oscillation between drinking and working. The labouring job for a few months is another attempt to develop a working strategy despite the lack of an appropriate pattern provided by his family.

Rick might have taken responsibility for his sisters after his mother left. An increasing parental responsibility on the part of his father did not materialise in the data. Trying to take the breadwinner role and feeling an increased sense of responsibility could have brought Rick into a situation of role confusions (adolescent, brother, father and mother role...). Perhaps he felt forced to take on the adult role instead of the late adolescent one. This role confusion could be a reason for the short relationship with his girlfriend:

¹⁰ Another possibility is that Rick's father was a petty criminal and therefore often absent, but never 'working'. We can't prove this from the data. It could be that Rick couldn't talk about it. In this case football would be even more meaningful for Rick in terms of social integration (see below).

he tried to be a 'man' but it was too much for him to manage a relationship as well. On the other hand this data can be interpreted as Rick being successful in avoiding early fatherhood.

The situation must have been very stressful for Rick as he started smoking. It is connected to a change in Rick's strategy: as a smoker he can't pursue a career as a footballer. Smoking frees him from the identification with his father and a non-father-like lifestyle appears at the horizon (represented by the start of the courses at Pier Training). On the other hand, smoking and being left out of the football trials prove the efficiency of the destructive strategy - especially if there was a real chance to become a professional football player.

3.6. Darren

I was introduced to Darren through his English teacher at Pier Training. He agreed to the interview which took place in a separate room close to the administrative office. He was sitting opposite me, wearing a T-Shirt which showed the tattoos on his arm. He told me later that he had the first tattoo done on his 18th birthday. Darren was a tall young man, born in 1971 in East London. He grew up in a family with two older and two younger siblings. His mother worked as an office clerk at a company in East London and his father worked as a builder. The couple separated when Darren was ten years old.

Presenting his life story Darren focussed on his educational and working career. School was a 'horrible experience' for him. At the age of eight he suffered because of a violent teacher and from then on he continued fighting teachers and also started fighting with other children. He changed school several times before leaving at the age of 15. At college he attended courses in car mechanics, woodwork and metalwork but was soon 'bored'. He was more interested in working and easily found jobs over the next few years. On average he stayed for about six months to a year in a job. When working Darren started drinking, especially during a period of working nightshifts when he was drunk every weekend. He evaluated this period as 'medication' against the stress caused by the nightshifts.

This period finished when Darren lost his last job about six months before this interview took place. Since then he has not found another job. In 1994 he met his girlfriend who was a single parent with two children. At the time of the interview she was pregnant by Darren. Darren gave the impression that the experience of unemployment combined with his girlfriend's pregnancy had triggered his decision to return to education. He was rather successful and was expecting his first GCSE exam in Maths about two months after the interview. He regarded the period of unemployment and resumed education as a second chance. As he was quite successful in his studies Darren was quite optimistic about finding another job once he had passed his GCSE exams, disregarding the fact that he lives with his girlfriend in an area of East London with among the highest unemployment rates in the UK.

Darren represents the 'old' tradition of the white working class man in London's East End. After leaving school he worked as a manual worker, changing jobs frequently and easily finding other employment. Only when he reached the crucial age of about 25 or 26 did he experience a crisis through unemployment. This event matches the results of the Youth Cohort Study. Darren had to realise that the situation in the labour market had changed and that education could improve his chances. This step is accompanied by another event which characterises Darren's changing role: becoming a father made him realise that he had to plan his future.

4. Conclusions

Paul represents young people for whom the search for an appropriate place in society turns out to be difficult because they find themselves in a field of tensions between two cultures. Paul had tried to make a decision for one side, 'white-British' culture, and developed a 'parcours model' to reach this aim. His brother's death intensified the endeavour to reach his aim and added time pressure so the parcours turned into a race. Only when he failed repeatedly in the education system did he begin to realise his need for a model which integrates both cultures, a path he entered recently.

Mikey, Jessy and Rick seem to be more structured by the troubles in their families of origin. Mikey blocks out the problems in his family of origin as he does with problematic phases in his own life. Jessy connects her unhappiness with some of her childhood experiences but not with other problematic developments in her family. Rick looks absolutely helpless about his future role as an adult. He appears to be torn between his father's idea of a football player as the only appropriate male role, and his mate's or other people's idea of finding work or getting a better education.

Paul, Mikey, Jessy, Darren and Rick confirm the result of the youth study that unemployment is not the main problem for the adolescent age group as they can compensate for it through education. Paradoxically it is Paul, as the only one who has found a solution for his 'problem', who will soon be affected by the restricted labour market. Taking into account the restricted labour market for unqualified youth Mikey, Jessy and Rick no longer appear as the 'victims' of their specific constellations but rather as young people in a moratorium: they choose and try a variety of the opportunities the education system offers in order to bridge the gap between compulsory education and an adult working life.

There is also a tendency for a moratorium period for young working class people, which is not yet institutionalised. This leads to a major difference to the situation for young academics (see Category I, SOSTRIS project, Unemployed Graduates). The role of a moratorium for young academics is to get a professional qualification *and* to sort out their lives through institutionalised education. The role of a moratorium for young working class people is to delay sorting out their lives: the sooner they succeed in finding an adult role the earlier they will face unemployment.

However, in Darren's case it looks different: he presented his working experience as an unskilled worker as a moratorium period; now as he improves his level of education he is also going to sort out of his life. This is reminiscent of the case of Tony from the early retired category (SOSTRIS Working Paper 2). Thirty years earlier Tony went also through a 'moratorium', changing jobs frequently. This phase ended for Tony when he changed to an employer providing stable employment. Comparing Darren with the other cases of the sample we could say that different forms of moratoria for young people in Western industrialised societies have existed. Depending on the case drop-out periods, education or work can take the role of a moratorium where young people can try different roles. The danger for the current generation of young people is therefore less the experience of unemployment at an early age than the danger of unemployment as a young adult - after they have passed their 'experimental phase'.

5. References

- Payne, J (1997): Trends in Youth Education, Training and Work. Paper given at the TSA (Trust for the Study of Adolescence) Conference 1997,

'Adolescent Research: Implications for Young People and Youth Policy', London.