school, about work and about their own lives compared with those of young women, take centre stage, as I attempt to add empirical detail to the general arguments about young men outlined here and to establish the different ways in which young men in contemporary Britain make sense of themselves as they move from compulsory schooling into more adult independence. While the next chapter focuses on young men's school lives, the main emphasis of these chapters will be on their employment trajectories. Giddens, and the other theorists whose predictions about working lives were examined in chapter 2, have shown how uncertainty and risk have transformed the old certainties of working class employment. While middle class school leavers may face a more varied set of opportunities, albeit associated with greater uncertainty, for low-achieving working class leavers, admittedly a much smaller percentage of the age group than a generation earlier, the prospects of individual autonomy, let alone social mobility, are extremely limited. As MacDonald (1998) has noted in an assessment of the utility of debates about risk and individualization to youth research, although the pathways to independence for privileged school leavers might be compared to a journey undertaken by car, in which multiple locations are accessible, for the less privileged, the journey is better imagined as one undertaken by train, constrained by tracks that lead straight to a life of hardship and inequality.

4

Living on the Edge: Marginal Lives in Cambridge and Sheffield

> Place makes the most difference to the least qualified young people. (Roberts 1995: 45)
>
> The lives of different class groups are situated in different spaces and take place through different sites. (Charlesworth 2000: 220)

As geographers, sociologists and anthropologists have all demonstrated, place or locality, the set of socio-spatial relations that constitute the particular meaning of a place, is a significant part of the social construction of identity and people's sense of belonging, whether to a class, to a neighbourhood or to a spatially defined interest group. The significance is both material and representational. As I suggested in the previous chapter, young people's job prospects depend not only on their class background, their qualifications, their gender and their personal qualities but also on the place in which they live as they start their working lives. Clearly, starting to search for employment in a depressed local labour market restricts the range of possible opportunities, and for disadvantaged young people geographical differentiation is especially significant. As the fuller version of Roberts's claim at the head of the chapter (1995: 45) makes clear:

> Place makes the most difference to the least qualified young people. Those who succeed in secondary school are able to progress into higher education after which they typically seek jobs in the national labour market or, at any rate, in other areas apart from where they received their school

education. Young people who leave school at age 16 and 17 and enter the labour market are more affected by the local labour market conditions, whatever these may be.

These young people usually live in their parental home; they seldom have access to private transport and so they are often restricted to looking for work within their own locality, whether in the inner areas or the peripheral estates of large cities. And as I have argued, in these areas local social capital and networks of personal contacts in securing work are crucial. Even before the opportunities for labour market entry are a consideration, young people, especially those growing up in working class families, live tightly defined localized lives. While there is an interesting debate about the extent to which young people's attitudes and style in contemporary consumer societies are 'placeless', in the sense of common reliance on a postmodern pastiche of styles (McDowell 1997b; Skelton and Valentine 1998), a considerable number of ethnographic studies, often of young men and typically carried out in inner areas of towns and cities, have documented the spatial limitations of young people's everyday lives, revealing their rootedness in a small number of places. The majority of young people from a range of ethnic and class backgrounds, with the exception of perhaps the most affluent, still lead locally based neighbourhood-based lives, especially when they are still in school (Baumann 1996; Callaghan 1992; O'Byrne 1997; Pearce 1996; Taylor, Evans and Fraser 1996; Watt 1998; Webster 1996; Westwood 1990). Local ties, lack of transport, relatively low incomes, even though many young people are now labour market participants while still at school, and for young people from minority groups, fears of racial harassment, combine to tie them to their neighbourhoods (Back 1996; Bowlby and Lloyd-Evans 2000). In Britain, the extent of neighbourhood differentiation and its close association with access to compulsory schooling, for all but a minority (in 2001 only 7 per cent of children were educated in private schools), means that spatial patterns of class segregation largely confine children to close association and friendship networks with their peers. Class-differentiated patterns of speech, ways of being in the world, including bodily gestures and comportment, as well as differences in social attitudes and aspirations thus take a geographical form in Britain, and to a large extent are mirrored in noticeable differences in school pupils' examination success at the age of 16, varying, as I documented earlier, by region but also within towns and cities. Typically, results are lower in schools located both in the inner areas and in outer estates, where local authority housing provision is common.

To capture some this geographical differentiation, to explore its significance and to assess the impact of place-based identity in the construction of masculinities in late-modern Britain, the empirical research on which the rest of this book is based was carried out in different locations. I wanted to assess the different ways in which economic restructuring was reshaping the patterns of opportunities for young men coming of age at the turn of the millennium and struggling to find an acceptable sense of themselves as masculine as the labour market changed around them. For this reason, and following the long and honourable example of authors and commentators including Elizabeth Gaskell and Benjamin Disraeli, I adopted a North–South comparison. As more recent commentators have argued, among others geographers (Hudson and Williams 1995; Martin and Townroe 1992), economists (Erdem and Glyn 2001) and social policy analysts (Hills, Le Grand and Paichaud 2002), opportunities, standards of living and lifestyles in Britain continue to reflect a North–South divide. As I argued in chapter 2, the rapid expansion of high-tech and high-status jobs at the top end of the service sector has been predominantly a South-East phenomenon, whereas manufacturing decline and low-status service expansion has affected the old industrial heartlands of the country. While the annual average pay of full-time workers who had been in employment for at least a year in April 2001 was £24,067 in England, as table 4.1 shows, all the English regions with the exception of Greater London and the South-East fell below this average.

Table 4.1 Average gross annual pay of full-time adult employees by region, April 2001

Region	*Earnings*
Greater London	£34,777
South-East	24,944
East Anglia	23,176
West Midlands	21,705
South-West	21,194
North-West	21,164
East Midlands	20,686
Yorkshire and Humberside	20,567
North-East	19,831
English average	24,067
Scotland	21,110
Wales	19,901
GB average	23,607

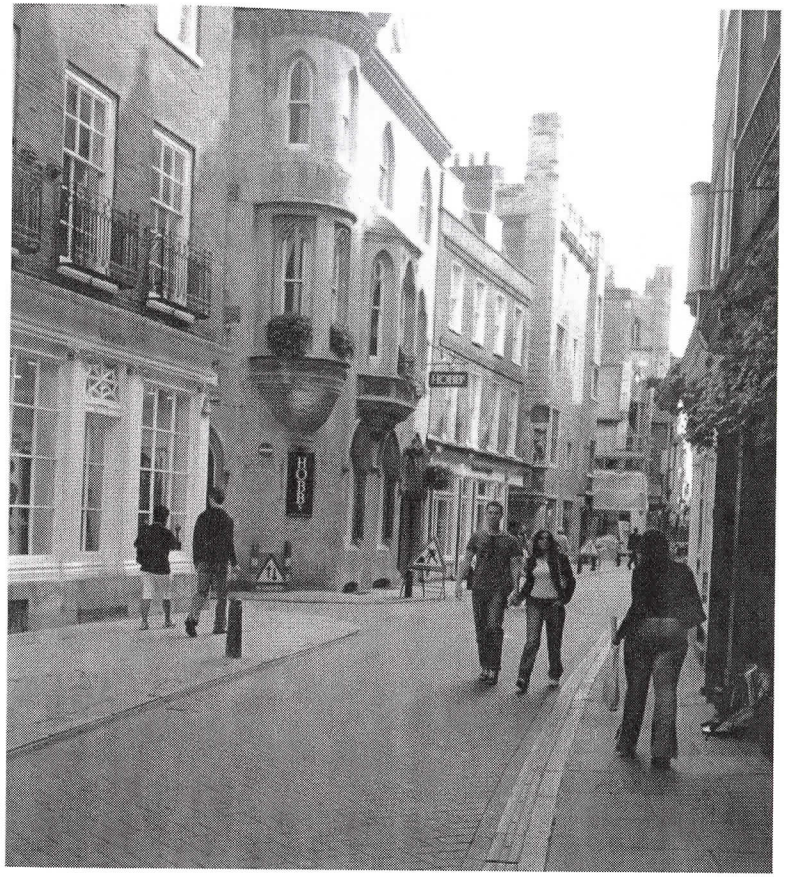
Source: Labour Force Survey data.

I chose to carry out the empirical part of the study in towns in two different regions: Cambridge in East Anglia and Sheffield in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. I decided to work in East Anglia rather than the South-East as the former region is the most rapidly expanding part of the country at present, where the rise of house prices, with the exception of Greater London, has been highest. For the less affluent in this region, then, dependent on low-income employment, the ability to establish an independent household is particularly difficult.

Two Cities: Manufacturing Employment Versus 'Servicing' Work

The differences between cities are probably more marked and certainly more noticeable to their inhabitants than regional differences. Within England regional loyalties and attachments are rather tenuous, with the possible exception of the 'Geordie' identity in the North-East. But even so, as geographers and sociologists have long argued, geography matters (Massey 1984; Massey and Allen 1984), especially at the local level. The industrial and social history of a place affects identity of its inhabitants, creating a local sense of place, or a local 'structure of feeling' the term used by the critical theorist Raymond Williams, which, as I noted in chapter 2, captures the dense network of locally specific connections that distinguish one locality from another. Cambridge and Sheffield could hardly be more different cities in their image, their employment structure or their local cultural identity. The nature and culture of local industries and working practices, especially the long dominance of a major employer – the steel industry in Sheffield and the university in Cambridge – affects the image and realities of the two cities. In the popular imagination, Sheffield is forever a dirty industrial town, whose decline was documented in the film *The Full Monty*, whereas the popular image of Cambridge is of a medieval university city, remote from the bustle and danger of manufacturing employment (plate 4.1). These differences continue to be reflected in local social practices and urban daily rhythms (Allen 1999), in gender divisions of labour, and political attitudes, despite the transformation of both cities into service-dominated economies (Crang and Martin 1991; Taylor, Evans and Fraser 1996). Traces of practices accumulate over time and seep into local consciousness and the construction of local identities.

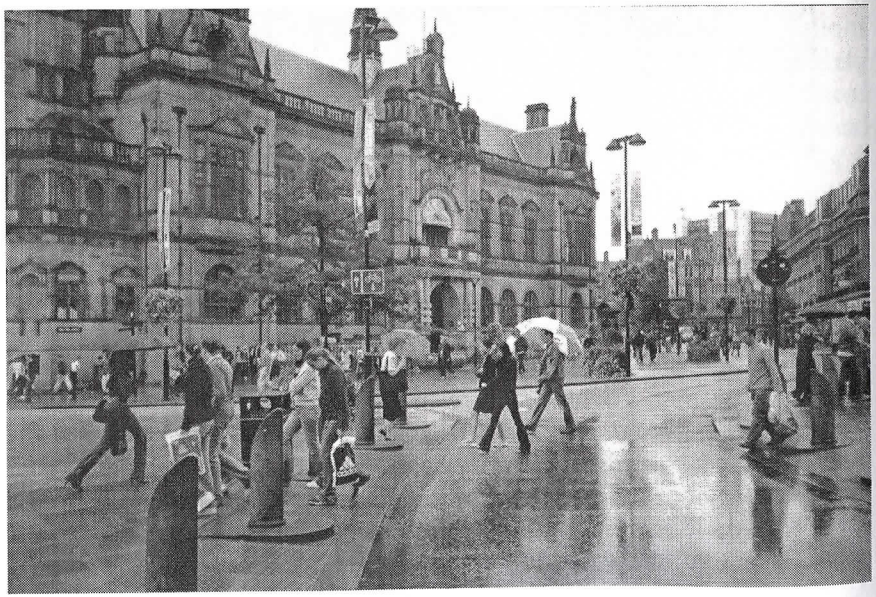
In Cambridge, for example, the local working class have long been defined in opposition both to the professional classes employed by the



4.1.1 Cambridge: Medieval shopping streets. Photo by author.

university and more recently the high-tech employees of the new science park firms (Massey 1997) and the students – town versus gown. A culture of service and deference developed, encouraged often by the provision of tied housing by the richest colleges for college 'servants', where generations of the same family worked for a particular college or for the university. Many of these college-based bottom-end 'servicing' positions have long been open to women, as well as to men. The city has had little history of male manufacturing employment with the exception of agricultural-related industries and some light engineering. It is, therefore, a labour market that has always had limited opportunities for stable and well-paid work for poorly educated young men: working in poorly

4.1.2 Cambridge: Kings College. Photo by author.



4.1.3 Sheffield: Victorian municipal city hall and square. Photo by author.

4.1.4 Sheffield: Industrial heritage and 1960s municipal housing. Photo by author.

paid service-sector jobs is a well-established trend. This labour history has led to a resident population that is overwhelmingly white, as well as Cambridge's small-town ambience and conservative traditions and politics, even though the city is now represented by a Labour Member of Parliament.

In Sheffield – historically a working class industrial city rather than a city dominated by a service-based economy – equally strong links developed between a local economy dominated by steel and cutlery and a local employing class – what Taylor, Evans and Fraser (1996: 35) termed 'an enclave of "community" and mutual dependence'. As the economist Alfred Marshall writing in the early twentieth century argued, in its heyday Sheffield was a key example of an 'industrial district' (Marshall 1920: 119) – a tightly geographically defined district with a highly developed level of co-operation and flexibility, and inter-industry linkages between cutlery and steel. In Sheffield, Methodism, rather than the

established Church of England as in Cambridge, was the most important religion and a sturdy self-reliance developed among the small craftsmen in the cutlery industry, compared to the deferential social relations of the university town. Sheffield was also a male-dominated city through its industrialization, where fewer women worked than in neighbouring cities such as Leeds where the textile industry relied more heavily, at least initially, on women workers.

The development of the steel industry throughout the nineteenth century led to the rise of a dual economy based on large-scale steel production and the smaller-scale cutlery industry. Steel dominated the landscape of the Don Valley, now the site of a Development Corporation that is attempting to resurrect both the local economy and the industrial landscape. From the mid-nineteenth century until the early 1980s, almost the whole of the East End of Sheffield was dominated by miles of steel plants and forges, as well as small workshops and engineering works, providing physically demanding work for fit men. Interestingly, Sheffield never became a company town dominated by a single employer but it remained a city with over 100 firms of varying sizes until the nationalization of some specialized steel firms in the postwar period. But even then, at least until the strike of 1980, industrial relations were not acrimonious. Instead of capital and labour facing each other as two monolithic and antagonistic blocks, there was localized negotiation within the numerous firms. Unlike Cambridge, Sheffield has long been a Labour-voting stronghold, where five of its six constituencies have regularly returned a Labour candidate by a large majority in the postwar decades. In the 1970s and 1980s, before the national resurrection of Labour as new Labour, local politics in Sheffield were dominated by a particular form of radical municipal socialism, gaining the city a brief but prestigious reputation as the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire. Somewhat ironically the leader of the local council in these years was David Blunkett, now MP for Sheffield Brightside in the former industrial East End of the city, and conservative Home Secretary in the second Blair Government.

As Taylor, Evans and Fraser (1996) documented, the old industrial heritage of Sheffield is reflected in derelict or empty sites and in a deindustrialized landscape. However, the city still reflects a residual 'northernness'. For example, the heritage of steel lives on in urban imagery (for example in the monument in the foyer of Meadowhall Shopping Centre (see plate 4.2)), in television advertising and street hoardings, and in *The Full Monty*. The economy, however, reflects the impacts of deindustrialization and globalization, as new flexible industries are developed, and service-sector growth accounts for the majority of new jobs. However,

4.2 Sheffield Steelmen: statue in Meadowhall Shopping Centre. Photo by author.

the city still ranks high on the list of Britain's deprived areas. The old heavy male employing industries and their associated camaraderie and political and cultural infrastructure of trade unions, working men's clubs and a particular form of traditional labour politics have been decimated. Women's employment has increased and Sheffield now has a more ethnically diverse population, with significant minority Asian and African Caribbean populations. Male unemployment rates, however, remain high, both among minority men and older white working class men. At the peak of unemployment in 1991, for example, unemployment rates stood at 40 per cent among the Pakistani and Bangladeshi population compared with 12 per cent among the white residents. At the same date, in Cambridge the average rate of unemployment was less than 3 per cent. At the end of the 1990s, the rate in Cambridge was less than 2 per cent, while in Sheffield it remained at just under 8 per cent.

Despite these differences between the two cities, however, for young men looking for their first job in Sheffield, the opportunities are now more similar to those facing the same cohort in Cambridge than they were in their fathers' generation. For Sheffield youths, who leave school at the

first possible moment, the old reasonably well-paid industrial jobs have disappeared, whereas they never existed in Cambridge. Whether these young men have a sense of themselves that is connected to the industrial histories of their specific towns and reflected in different attitudes and labour market aspirations is the subject of the final part of this chapter, where I explore their lives in the last year at school. By establishing a geographical comparison as the basis for this study, I do not intend to imply that there is a straightforward or simple relationship between the construction of local identities, including gender identities and the changing socio-economic context of a city or a neighbourhood, nor that gender identities are fixed, coherent or invariable. Indeed, as I argued in chapter 1, gender identities are continuously in production, mutable and spatially and temporally variable. However, as earlier research on masculinity has indicated, gender practices are inflected in local regimes of work and vice versa and, as Taylor and Jamieson (1997: 153) have suggested in their work on variants of masculinity in Sheffield, 'nostalgic evocations' of earlier industrial practices resonate through masculine imagery and practice. Whether these evocations continue to influence young men in Cambridge and Sheffield and are reflected in their job aspirations and decisions is an issue that informs the comparisons presented later in this and in other chapters. First, however, I want to outline the local areas in which I worked, the research methods adopted and some of the ethical issues raised in working with less-privileged young men.

Two Schools and Two Estates

Although Sheffield and Cambridge are distinguished by their different labour histories, the circumstances of young white men growing up in working class families in the two cities are relatively similar. Taught in the main in schools whose achievement rates are at the low end of the spectrum in their respective cities, white working class youths typically live in local authority accommodation on peripheral estates, with one or both of their parents. Urban theorists and analysts of contemporary cities have argued that whereas such estates were initially constructed for and let to 'respectable' working class families with household heads in manual employment, the recent rounds of economic restructuring have dismantled these older residential working class spaces. Many estates have become unstable, with a mobile population among whom growing numbers of families are in poverty. Campbell (1993), as I noted earlier, has defined such marginalized outer estates as 'dangerous places'.

Whereas the dangerous spaces of the Fordist era typically were defined as the inner city, urban scholars such as Sassen (2001) and Zukin (1995) have suggested that in many cities these latter spaces have now been transformed through residential and commerical gentrification and (re)claimed as both residential and leisure spaces by the 'new' middle class. Thus the inner areas in some of Britain's largest cities, often surrounding a city centre dominated by finance capital, might now be designated postmodern spaces where the growth of cultural industries and new forms of conspicuous consumption have made the streets safe for the aestheticized employment and leisure activities identified by Bauman (1998). In contrast, the spaces of outer estates, in many smaller as well as large British cities, have literally become post-industrial spaces occupied by the new working poor as well as the workless and socially excluded, where employment prospects have declined. These areas are sometimes the sites of localized unrest and racialized conflicts as the 'abject' white working class identified by Haylett (2001) protest at their perceived social exclusion in the 'new' Britain.

Both Sheffield and Cambridge exhibit some aspects of these characteristics of contemporary urbanization. While gentrification is less well developed in Sheffield than in the neighbouring city of Leeds, for example, inner areas are increasingly occupied if not by the new service class then by the growing number of students at the city's two universities. In Sheffield, however, inner city wards are still at present among the most deprived wards in that city (DETR 1998). In Cambridge the particular nature of the city – with its high demand for accessible housing in the inner areas both for gentrification by academic households and for renting by students at the city's two universities, its limited supply of decent-sized Victorian housing and the widespread designation of the inner part of Cambridge as conservation areas – means that low income households have been housed in the main on peripheral estates, in both local authority accommodation to rent and speculatively built housing to purchase for owner-occupation. Thus one of the differences between Cambridge and Sheffield is that in Cambridge 'inner city' poverty is actually located on the outskirts of the city. The area of the greatest concentration of both local authority housing and low incomes is in the north and north-east of the city. In Sheffield similar households, as defined by class and income level, live in inner areas as well as on peripheral estates of local authority housing. However, to achieve some degree of similarity I decided to focus on an outer city estate in each city, identifying areas where the majority of the children between the ages of 11 and 16 living on the estate attended a single school.

Drawing on Paul Willis's (1977) sterling example in his classic study of how young men learned how to labour in manufacturing industries, I decided to trace the transition from school, whether into employment, training or further education, of a sample of young white men who were designated as low achievers or underachievers. I interviewed a small number of school leavers three times in the space of about 18 months, talking to them in detail about their school and their home lives, their sense of themselves in this transitional period, and the mechanisms and institutions they used in their search for a job or a training place. I met them at three key stages: first in the final few weeks as they prepared to leave school, then between four and six months and, finally, twelve months after leaving. A longitudinal study is the best way to capture not only the changing nature of these young men's aspirations as the reality of daily working life or unemployment challenges their earlier assumptions, but it is also the only way to track their complex movements accurately as they become employees at the bottom end of the labour market. Although the national Careers' Guidance Service in the UK (a Government-funded service for school leavers) records the employment position of school leavers, it first does so in the November after the end of the school year in the previous June, by which time new employees may have held more than one job, tried and rejected college, or moved from work into unemployment. Through the co-operation of the head teacher and year 11 class tutor in a school in each city, I made contact with the 24 young men who were involved with this work over the 18-month period (details of the selection methods are included in appendix 1). In Sheffield the school, which I have called Park Edge School, had just over 1,000 pupils on its rolls at the beginning of the academic year 1998/9, whereas the Cambridge school – Fenland Community College – had less half this number. Both schools provide places for 11- to 16-year-olds, and both are regarded as 'underachieving' schools, with problems of low attainment on entry, literacy and numeracy levels, some behaviour difficulties and bullying and, especially at Park Edge, problems of authorized absences as well as truancy and exclusions. During the research period, Fenland Community College also experienced more serious problems, including a knife attack on a teacher and a pupil.

As might be expected because of the way of selecting the schools, their location and intake reflected the characteristics of the locality. In official reports[1] commenting on inspections of these two schools, they were described in the following terms:

> Fenland Community College is an 11 to 16 comprehensive serving areas of high social disadvantage. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals[2] is high by national and local standards at around 30 per cent. The standards of attainment on entry are low by national standards and are reported to be amongst the lowest in the country.
>
> Park Edge is situated in one of the most socially and economically deprived areas in the United Kingdom. The local community is characterized by significant unemployment. . . . 43 per cent of pupils are currently identified as eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. There are increasing numbers of ethnic minority students. 22 per cent are from ethnic minority backgrounds and 13 per cent speak English as an additional language. The instability in the local community is reflected in high levels of student mobility.

The main difference between the schools, therefore, apart from size, is the far greater ethnic diversity among the Park Edge pupils. Fenland, like Cambridge, is a dominantly white community. Indeed Ofsted inspectors omitted to record the proportion of minority pupils on its roll during their 1999 inspection, noting only that 'the proportion of students speaking English as an additional language is small by national standards'. School records suggest that less than 6 per cent of the pupils came from ethnic minority backgrounds, some of them, of course, with English as their first language.

Both schools recruit pupils who enter at age 11 with low standards of literacy and numeracy and, although each is successful in raising the self-esteem and confidence of students, their academic attainment by the age of 16, when they finish compulsory education, is low. In 1999, less than 18 per cent of all year 11 pupils at Park Edge School and 29 per cent at Fenland Community College (a remarkable improvement of the previous year's success rate of less than 20 per cent) gained five or more good GCSE passes in 1998 (at grade C and above) – the indicator of 'good' achievement – compared with the national average of 45 per cent. On a national points score constructed on the basis of achievement in school-leaving examinations at the age of 16, both schools fell into category E, on a scale from A to E, where A is well above average and E well below average. The corollary of this categorization is that both schools were at the bottom end of attainment levels in their respective city, where wide disparities are evident. In state schools in Cambridge the variation in 'good' GCSEs ranged from a high of 68 per cent to a low of 18 per cent. In Sheffield the range was greater, from over 90 per cent to 8 per cent as the city maintains a number of schools where pupils are selected on the basis of academic ability. In Cambridge, by contrast, the state schools are all fully comprehensive and select on the basis of local residence rather than ability. In

both the schools, in the mid-to late 1990s, year 11 girls had consistently outperformed boys, with a gender gap ranging between 6 and 16 per cent in the proportion of male and female pupils gaining good passes, until at the end of the decade Fenland Community College unexpectedly reversed this trend, which, as I argued in the previous chapter, is also evident at the national level. In 1999 the gender gap at Fenland was 6 per cent in favour of boys, and the school inspection report noted that the boys' performance between the ages of 14 and 16 had begun to improve at a faster rate than for girls. Thus they suggested at Fenland 'special attention should be given to raising the expectations of and standards achieved by girls'.

Overall in the city of Sheffield, only 37 per cent of 15- to 16-year-olds gain five good passes, lower than the national average, whereas Cambridge's average is almost identical to the average. This is reflected in differences in the proportion of pupils who decide to stay on in full-time education from the age of 16. In Sheffield 59 per cent of pupils stay on, compared with 68 per cent nationally and 77 per cent in Cambridge. Figures from Cambridgeshire Careers Guidance Service showed that of those not listed at school or in further education colleges at post-16, 14 per cent entered employment or training and 4 per cent were unemployed. A further 5 per cent had left the area or were destination unknown. In Sheffield, according to the Careers Guidance Service, 10 per cent entered employment, 20 per cent had some form of apprenticeship or careership involving employment combined with training, and 7 per cent were unemployed, while 4 per cent were unaccounted for. In both areas, more girls than boys continued in full-time education at school or in sixth form colleges, paralleling the national trends discussed in the previous chapter.

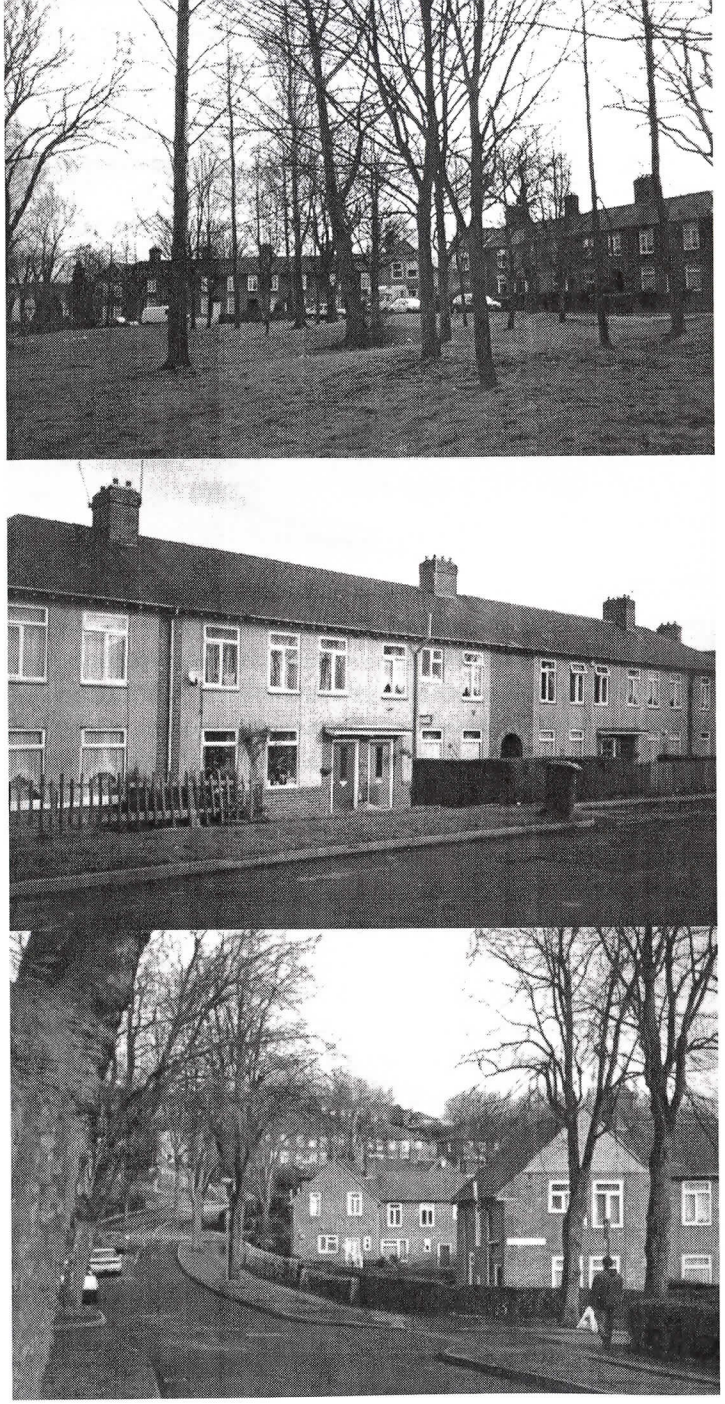
The estates where the boys in this study lived while they were at school are on the edge of the city and are both distinguished by ranking highly on a series of indicators of deprivation. In absolute terms, a higher proportion of the population of Sheffield than Cambridge lives in poor conditions and has low incomes. However, as the school inspection report noted, the Cambridge estate was the locality in Cambridge that is classified as the most deprived and has a reputation in the city as a dangerous place. In Sheffield, as I note, the poorest wards are still concentrated in the inner areas, but the ward containing Park Edge School was among the most deprived of the outer wards and, like the Cambridge ward, had an extremely small proportion of residents with educational credentials or sufficient social and cultural capital to help their children aspire to opportunities that they themselves had been excluded from. Each estate was troubled by higher than average levels of theft and burglary, by arson, street crimes, and antisocial activities such as car theft and joyriding: all of

which made daily life more complicated and less agreeable than in other parts of the respective cities. In both wards housing provision was dominated by the local authority: in Sheffield predominantly 1930s and 1950s houses, and in Cambridge a mixture of houses and flats built since the 1970s (plates 4.3, 4.4). In Cambridge, however, the outer edge of the estate abutted a new development of relatively low-priced new housing for owner-occupation. In each area the estate was served by a local shopping parade that provided a range of basic services. For many of the residents, especially for women and school-aged children, everyday life was a predominantly local affair, carried out within constrained spatial boundaries.

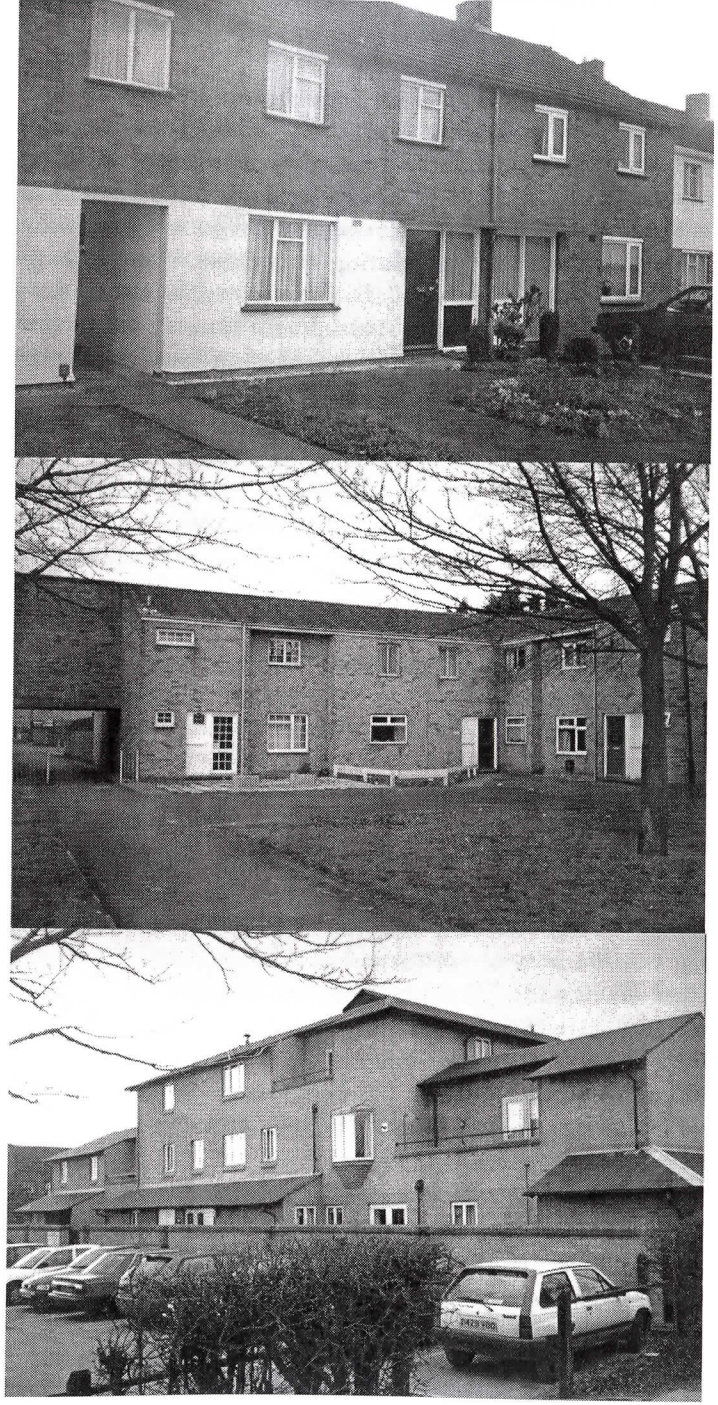
Doing the Research: Prior Assumptions, Positionality and Ethics

The main method that I used was semi-structured interviews based on a life history approach, somewhat similar to the approach adopted by both Connell (1995) and Mac and Ghaill (1996a) in their work with young men. As Connell noted, an interview-based life history approach seems to be the most successful method to use in these types of investigations. Whereas the chronological format of the life history seems straightforward and relatively unthreatening, providing identifiable pegs for the interview, the format of an otherwise relatively unstructured interview allows the ways in which young men construct and talk about their sense of themselves to emerge. I undertook all the interviews myself to ensure continuity and comparability between them. Collecting life histories is a time consuming method, even when the subjects involved are still in their teens but, as Connell (1990b) has argued, it allows the interplay of social structures, collectivities and institutional changes to be assessed at the same time as changes in personal lives, capturing the 'interplay between structural fact and personal experience that is at the centre of contemporary feminist social science' (Connell 1990b: 455), and so enabling connections to be drawn between materialist and post-structuralist analyses of gender identities.

While all interviewing raises difficult questions about positionality and ethics, perhaps interviewing children and young people is the most challenging, as the relations of power and authority so firmly place the interviewer in a dominant position (Fine and Sandstrom 1988; Valentine 1999). In Britain it is also important to be aware of the provisions of the Children's and Young Persons Act and ensure that under-16s are not interviewed without parental consent. Although I contacted the young



4.3 Peripheral housing estates in Sheffield. Photo by author.



4.4 Peripheral housing estates in Cambridge. Photo by author.

men through the auspices of their school, neither the school nor the interviewees knew who was included in the research – at least initially, as inevitably some participants learned the identity of others through friendship networks once they had been contacted. Each time I contacted the young men they knew more about who was involved, leading to mobile phone conversations during interviews when an explanation 'It's that Linda again' (McDowell 2001b) was sufficient explanation of why somebody could not talk just then. I tried to carry out the interviews in neutral spaces. As Allison James and her co-authors (1998) noted, the school is the most usual site for research about young people and significant life course events (see e.g. not only Willis 1977 but also Askew and Ross 1988; Brown and Gilligan 1992; Davies 1982; Delamont 1980; Edley and Wetherell 1996; Hammersley and Woods 1984; Hargreaves 1967; Pollard 1985; Thorne 1993; Whyte 1983). However, working in a school not only naturalizes the model of the developing child but, as James, Jenks and Prout (1998: 176) ask:

> As an age-based institution which is hierarchically organized into age classes and shot through with particular power relations might it not shape the form and style of the research process? ... Would our findings about sexuality, gender, ethnicity, friendship, bullying, play and work, for example, look different if they had been gathered outside the context of the school or other child-specific, age-based institution such as youth clubs or day-care centres?

This comment codified a set of vaguer worries that had persuaded me to interview outside school premises but also clarified an anxiety I felt about Paul Willis's (1977) study. Not only did he interview in schools (as well as undertaking a range of participatory observations, without discussing how his presence as an adult male transformed the social interactions inside and outside the classroom) but he also selected an identifiable group of non-conformist students who had established friendship patterns to observe.

I hoped to be able to include a range of young men with varying social attributes and different ideas about their future, not just the 'disaffected', although as I suspected through initiating a longitudinal strategy, it was the more organized who committed themselves to participate over more than a year. Even so, persuading 24 teenage boys to keep coming to meet me took considerable effort. The growth of mobile phone ownership was key to the success of the study as I was able to track down even the most recalcitrant among the youths and rearrange meetings at short

notice. Our meetings took place in a whole range of places, from pubs in the afternoon, cafes, a swimming pool, to public spaces in shopping malls. With their agreement, I recorded our conversations which lasted between 30 minutes and an hour and a half in most cases. This led to some embarrassment and subterfuge to ensure that nobody, especially their peers, saw the encounters. We often kept our back to the crowds or hid the recorder under the table. Inevitably, as I talked to the young men, hoping to be able to access through in-depth interviewing the meanings they attributed to their experiences and social worlds, the interaction between us was coloured by our different positions and perspectives. It is, of course, now widely accepted among human geographers interested in qualitative methods that each story is told to a particular person and that it might have taken a different form if somebody else had been listening. How and what we present of ourselves affects our interviewees' ability and willingness to tell various sorts of stories and, as Miller and Glassner (1997: 101) argue, based on their own work with adolescents, this is particularly important with young people: 'The issue of how interviewees respond to us based on who we are – in their lives, as well as the social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, class and race – is a practical concern as well as an epistemological or theoretical one.'

If we do not belong to the group we study we may not know enough to ask the right questions. As Miller and Glassner (1997: 102) note, 'the meaning systems of adolescents are different from those of adults, and adult researchers must exercise caution in assuming they have an understanding of adolescent cultures because they've "been there"'. For parents of adolescents this 'being there' might perhaps be partially updated through their involvement in the lives of their own children and their friends, but the warning is still applicable and differences of class, ethnicity, gender and locality remain in place. I was careful, based on experiences with my own son and his friends, to guard against making assumptions about the youths involved in this work. However, Miller and Glassner (1997: 102) also suggested that 'adolescents are in a transitional period of life, becoming increasingly oriented to adult worlds', with more in common with an adult researcher than have younger teenagers and children. As I met and then reinterviewed these young men in Cambridge and in Sheffield over the course of 18 months, it became increasingly evident that they were moving beyond their childhood, and even adolescence, as they began to take on responsibilities for their own lives and workplace decisions. Sometimes, they reversed our position, becoming the interviewer and asking questions

about me, both about my social circumstances and my opinions. I tried to answer the questions in the spirit in which they were asked and as honestly as possible. As the feminist scholar Sandra Harding (1987: 9) has insisted, interviewers should appear 'not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real historical individual with concrete specific desires and interests'. When these interests have a significant relationship to the interview process, it seems appropriate to reveal them.

In the early stages it was often difficult to encourage some of the young men to talk freely. Some of them were not verbally adept, perhaps unused to exploring their views and feelings with a stranger, or too often, as they explained, used to being told to 'shut up and be quiet' at school. As Charlesworth (2000: 138) noted in interviewing in Rotherham:

> asking people to 'speak' about their lives immediately institutes a difference. It immediately institutes issues of linguistic competence and introduces the spectres of the state education system and the normally encountered institutions in which its competent products work: the Department of Social Security, the Job Centre and the local council, none of which are well trusted.

A number of the participants wanted to establish that I was not a social worker or a 'lady from the council' before they shared some of the details of their lives with me. As the research moved into its second stage, however, the conversations became longer and freer and I think that most of the young men enjoyed the interaction. A number told me that they looked forward to meeting me again, welcoming the chance to reflect on their futures, as well as to comment on what they had told me on the previous visit. Indeed, a number of them talked to me in ways that seemed particularly frank and honest, although in some cases this was clearly painful to them and they told me things about their personal circumstances or about semi-criminal activities that I was not sure what to do with. I had initially assured them all of confidentiality and I was anxious not to break this. In all the interviews I was careful not to seem judgmental or to condemn or praise responses. I tried to make them comfortable enough to set their own particular views and responses into a wider 'cultural story' about their social world, situating incidents into pre-existing narratives and challenges to these – about changes in family life, or problems at school, for example, but in a number of interviews I was faced by quite complicated ethical decisions. In a small number of cases I suggested other adults or advisory services to which the young men in question might turn to discuss the problems that they had revealed to me. In all cases I have assumed that what each young man told me was valid, in the sense of representative of how they viewed the world and their place in it at that time, unless factual contradictions were evident (and in most cases I managed to sort these out with additional questions). In a somewhat similar study of young men undertaken in three areas of Britain – Newham, Salford and Leicester – Lloyd (1999: 10) noted that he and his interviewers had made the same assumption:

> We have taken young men's accounts and testimonies as valid. Given in particular, the media's view of young men, this is not an assumption that some would share. The combination of being young and male would lead some to be very doubtful about the truthfulness and accuracy of young men's testimonies, and we are also not so naïve as to think all young men are angels. . . . However, our experience has been that a general positive attitude towards most young men, brings the same out in them. We have approached young men assuming that they will talk openly and straightforwardly with us both about their attitudes and experience, and to a very large extent we think they have.

I was told about drug taking, fighting, semi-criminal activities and family problems, as well as about deeply held beliefs and feelings. These young men sometimes surprised me, sometimes I was shocked by what they told me but I also developed a considerable respect for them, as I hope will become clear in the chapters that follow. Some of them may have looked like ruffians or hooligans, tattooed and pierced, sometimes dressed to outrage conventional views – the sort of boys, as a Cambridge teacher commented early on in the research that 'you'd cross the road to avoid if you met them in a group' – but they all turned up over the year and often displayed courteous attitudes and helpful behaviour. All interview-based research is laborious and often stressful – there were difficult moments: for example, when I was suspected of drug dealing myself or challenged when taking one of these young men into a city centre hotel (see McDowell 2002). Above all, however, this research was enjoyable. As I shall show, there is a great deal to respect in the attitudes and behaviour of young men such as the 24 represented here: respect, that is, as I demonstrated in chapter 3, often denied to working class young men.

Before turning to an exploration of the attitudes and aspirations that these young men shared with me, I want to return to an issue about positionality, the relationship between interviewers and interviewees and the existing research about young men that I briefly raised earlier. It is

particularly noticeable that a great deal of the work about male youth cultures has been undertaken by male researchers who often focus on the deviant or the disaffected and their activities on the fringes of legality. As I have noted, for example, Connell (1991, 1995) argued that the impoverished environment and taste for risk of young white working class urban men in Australia and New Zealand produces a form of 'protest masculinity', distinct from and inferior to a hegemonic middle class rational masculinity. This working class protest masculinity seems to me similar to the versions of masculinity described by, *inter alia*, Bourgois (1995) in New York, Willis (1977) in Hammertown, Campbell (1993) in the North-East of England and to the numerous media stereotypes such as 'the lad' of lad culture, men behaving badly, and football hooligans discussed in chapter 3. However, the dominance of this type of tough and cocky working class laddishness may perhaps have as much to do with the preconceptions of the interviewers as with the 'lads' whom they interviewed or at least to the establishment of a form of male camaraderie between them, as feminist critics of studies of youth culture and the sociology of deviance have noted (Delamont 2000; McRobbie 1980; Skeggs 1997; Walker 1986). Male academics often seem seduced by the 'outlaw' subjects whom they study. Clearly, as a middle-aged woman I am differently positioned in relation to my interviewees than these young male researchers and, as I show later, I found a different set of attitudes among the young men who participated than many of these earlier studies of working class masculinity have suggested. While all narratives are not only a product of distinctive interactions, but are also a re-representation of the voices of those involved, a singular story – even the 'truth' – is not to be expected. But what is possible is to counterpose these different stories, and to compare and contrast the content and the conclusions in assessing the ways in which young men in contemporary Britain produce particular versions of masculine identities.

On the Verge of Manhood: Versions of Masculinity at School

A large body of school-based research has documented the significance of masculinity in schools in defining and policing both masculine and feminine identities and acceptable forms of interaction between pupils. Jordan (1995: 79), for example, has suggested that many of the disadvantages suffered by girls and women are 'the result of being caught in

the crossfire in a long-standing battle between groups of men over the definition of masculinity'. In recent research with school pupils it has been emphasized, in parallel with the wider debates about the social construction of gendered identities, that there is no single version of masculinity or femininity, but instead the occupation of, and insertion into, cross-cutting discursive gender positions and multiple regimes of power. In work on girls' friendship patterns (Brown and Gilligan 1992; Thorne 1993), for example, common versions of acceptable teenage femininity are encapsulated in the labels 'slags', 'bad girls', 'boffins', and 'good girls', which construct identities and identifications against, instead of in common with, other girls or boys. Students often position themselves in relation to something they are not.

Similar arguments about multiple gender positions are increasingly common in studies of boys at school (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2002). A dominant version of working class or 'protest' masculinity, similar to the earlier version of the 'lad', seems to have a continuing hold, against which most boys define themselves as similar to or different from. This form of laddish masculinity, with its emphasis on macho values such as physical strength, courage and toughness, seems hegemonic among young men. It has been identified in a variety of locations and has been labelled 'retributive' (Chapman and Rutherford 1988) and, confusingly, 'hegemonic' (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985) as well as 'protest' (Connell 1995). Edley and Wetherell (1996), for example, in interviews in the early 1990s in a single-sex independent, and so middle class, school in the Midlands, documented the existence of several separate, and sometimes antagonistic, groups of boys in the school. They found, however, that most of their interviewees identified themselves in relationship to a single version of masculinity – either as a member of the 'hard lads' or in opposition to them. The identity of the 'hard lads' was organized in the main around participation in sport and a whole set of loud and boisterous activities such as play fighting, drinking and small-scale vandalism. When interviewed about school life these boys saw it as unremarkable, as a series of 'good laughs' and even when people were upset or hurt it was regarded as 'just a bit of fun'. It seems, therefore, that these young men, although from a privileged educational environment, are rather similar to Willis's lads in a much less privileged school 20 years earlier, where there was a dichotomous division between the 'lads' and what Willis termed the 'ear' oles' – the boys in the same school and from the same background who conformed to the school's middle class educational ethos and were prepared to compete academically.

Boffs, hards, nutters and negotiating 'betweenness' in Cambridge and Sheffield

The schools in Sheffield and Cambridge proved to be no exception to other school-based studies in demonstrating the significance of an aggressive version of laddish masculinity. Almost all the school leavers to whom I talked identified themselves as members of or in opposition to the 'hard lads'. Here the most-commonly used terms in both schools to distinguish between the dominant groups were nutters/hards and boffs/boffins. Unsurprisingly, none of the young men in my study self-identified as boffs, although four of them did mention the importance of getting down to doing some academic work in the final weeks of their school career. Only 3 of the 24 boys included themselves in the lad/nutter/hard category:

> I suppose I am just a nutter really. I do daft things. I scream in lessons and once I cut me hand on a chisel, cos I just felt like it. (John, Cambridge).

The other 21 boys, however, refused this identity, even though sometimes what defined the 'hard' group or the nutters seemed to consist of minor infringements of school rules. Rick, a Park Edge pupil, for example, suggested that 'the people who smoke all hang out together, you know, at break time and that; they stand in a corner smoking or whatever. And they are usually the popular ones. I suppose you could call them nutters if you want a name for them.'

But most of the boys in this study were, they insisted, 'just normal' or 'average', trying to avoid both labels (boffs or nutter/hards), 'I sort of stay between the two of 'em, like' (Simon, Sheffield) and, in their view, this in-between group encompassed the majority of their peers. Rick also told me with an ironic edge, 'Me, I'm a good boy. I always go to lessons you see, but one of the girls said to me this morning, "You're a clever one, but you are not a boff."'

In both schools, there was a euphemistic reference by school inspectors to the 'boisterous environment' or 'overexuberant behaviour' outside the classrooms, as well as some evidence of bad behaviour and bullying. In addition, the problem of disruptive classroom behaviour, especially among boys, was recognized. These behaviours were used by the three self-identified hards/nutters to define themselves. They habitually engaged in what was on their own admittance antisocial behaviour, including various strategies of classroom disruption, as well as playground bullying and shoving, some fighting and breaking school rules about smoking. A similar range of behaviour to distinguish between hards and themselves was mentioned by the 'normal/between' group. But the line between the behaviour of 'hard lads' and the majority of the young men who insisted that they were not part of this group was fuzzy. Most of the 24 young men to whom I talked confessed to a range of disruptive behaviour inside and outside the classroom. However, in several cases they argued that they were wrongly identified as 'hard' or had been unjustifiably labelled as troublemakers at school by virtue of the fact that they were prepared to stand up for themselves against 'hard lads'. For example, Kurt in Cambridge told me, 'There's this kid who's really hard. He started on me once so I sorted him.' I asked, 'So, are you hard do you think?' Kurt replied, 'Nah, I don't think I'm hard. I just think if anyone starts on me I just ignore them. But if anyone pushes me too far I lose it.'

Most of the young men argued that it was important to be able to stand up for themselves and to hit back at bullies. A high level of physical interactions between pupils in both schools was readily visible from pushing and jostling in the corridors to fights in the playground:

> Yeah, fights are common. We go out round the back where the teachers can't see us. (Lee Cambridge)

This physical aggression is a part of the construction of a version of heterosexual working class masculinity that, as Mac an Ghaill (1996b) emphasizes, is based on expelling effeminacy. Bourdieu, too (1991: 96), recognized the links between class and gender in his comment on physically aggressive masculine working class attitudes and behaviour, which

> is undoubtedly just one of the ways of making a virtue out of necessity. The manifestation of an unreasoning commitment to realism and cynicism, the rejection of the feeling and sensitivity identified with feminine sentimentality and effeminacy, the obligation to be tough with oneself and others... are a way of resigning oneself to a world with no way out, dominated by poverty and the law of the jungle, discrimination and violence, where morality and sensitivity bring no benefit whatsoever.

This is a comment perhaps more relevant to a wider arena than local schools but it was quite clear that the young men whom I interviewed saw school as a place where toughness was valued. In most

cases, however, I would hesitate to argue as Willis (1977) did that any of these 24 young men – either the self-identified hards or those who were aggressive when 'pushed too far' – were 'mad, bad and dangerous to know'.

Among the group as a whole, more of a 'don't much care' attitude summed up their general response to school and its regulatory environment. The dominant feeling was one of 'well, you just have put up with it' (Paul, Sheffield) when I talked to them in the final weeks at school before moving on to what they all hoped would be a more agreeable life in the workplace, in further education or training or in a mixture of the two. Darren's heartfelt 'I just can't wait to leave school. It drives me mad' was echoed by most of his cohort. But inside and outside the classroom, the young men in this study were not in general troublemakers. Only 3 of the 24 had been arrested and cautioned, for example, and although a number of others engaged in a variety of behaviour bordering on the semi-criminal – petty theft, for example, or trivial damage to cars, smoking 'weed' or 'draw' – they had never been caught or punished. Only one student admitted that he had been involved with more serious drugs, and two spoke about heavy drinking that they themselves regarded as a problem. Outside school, almost half of the young men reported that they were as likely to go for a drink with their dads, or fishing with friends, as get involved in antisocial activities such as joyriding. Rather more common, however, were periods of exclusion from school ranging from a day for a minor misdemeanour to almost a term. Five of the 24 young men said that they had been excluded at some stage in their school career. Voluntary exclusion, that is truanting (or 'wagging it' as it is called in Sheffield) was even more common – almost all the young men reported that they had taken time off when they were meant to be in school, although as it was sporadic and for short periods, it was not seen as serious and only three had been in trouble with the school authorities for truanting. Most of them, though, made sure that their parents did not realize they had been absent, often attending school at registration and then leaving and often going as far as intercepting letters from the school to their parents. At Park Edge, poor levels of school attendance were a particular problem that persisted over several years despite the efforts of the school to reduce both authorized (that is with parental permission) and unauthorized absences. An external agency was employed, for example, to check first-day absences each term and there was frequent liaison between the school and the educational welfare service to discuss the family circumstances of the most infrequent attendees.

Sexist attitudes, boys as 'failures' and girls' success

By the end of the twentieth century most state schools in Britain were co-educational. Both Park Edge School and Fenland Community College admitted girls as well as boys, and mixed-sex friendship groups of girls and boys, as well as single-sex groups, were reportedly common in both the schools, although most of the students to whom I talked also spent a large proportion of their time, both on and off the school premises, hanging around in single-sex groups. In earlier postwar decades and in the 1970s, for example when Willis (1977) was exploring how working class boys were educated just enough to fill factory jobs, single-sex schools were more common and, since that time, a vast range of research has been published that attempts to demonstrate the difference that a mixed intake has on areas such as subject-specific achievement rates, attitudes to further study, the development of sexuality, and social relations inside and outside the classroom. As many of these researchers have documented, the school is, however, even when co-educational, an institution embedded within wider societal rules and regulations within which teachers and pupils draw on and reinforce dominant culturally specific heterosexist and patriarchal attitudes (Dixon 1997; Epstein 1993, 1997; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2002; Holloway, Valentine and Bingham 1999; Mac an Ghaill 1994, 1996a; Paechter 1998; Shilling 1991; Skeggs 1992), and, as I suggested above, a dominant version of laddish masculinity influences the social construction of feminine as well as masculine identities. In most schools, in a multitude of ways from humour to violence reflected in staff and pupil attitudes, in the institutional culture of the school, in its regulatory mechanisms and in everyday classroom and playground behaviour, assumptions about masculine dominance and superiority is maintained. Despite most schools having a commitment to equal-opportunity programmes of differing degrees of effectiveness, as I suggested earlier, the current 'problem' of boys' relative lack of success reflects continuing beliefs about masculine achievement, indeed the superiority that is a 'natural' correlate of being a boy.

In both Cambridge and Sheffield the local education authority has a specific commitment to equal opportunities, and in each of the schools anti-sexist (and anti-racist) policies were in place in, for example, the official school rules and in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. The inspection report at Park Edge explicitly mentioned the success of equal opportunity policies at that school, whereas at Fenland a more 'macho' culture in which boys' dominance was reinforced, as

well as evidence of positive role models among the male staff, was identified as part of the reason for the faster rate of improvement in boys' performance between the ages of 14 and 16. However, despite these differences, in the course of the interviews, the boys at both schools expressed a complex and nuanced set of reactions to questions about gender relations. While the majority of them consistently denied sexist attitudes and behaviours on their own part, and often had solid friendships with girls, they also held firm to a simplistic narrative of binary difference, usually based on trivial behavioural traits. None of them was reticent in expressing views about the differences between girls and boys and they were astonishingly cavalier in their assumptions of female inferiority. Neither academic nor popular versions of feminism seemed to have made any inroads on these young men's views of gender differences. Thus they variously described girls as 'stupid', 'wussie', 'gigglers' and 'screamers' and as 'sillier than boys' and when they commented on the mixed-sex groups in which they participated, it was noticeable that their considered view of the role of girls tended to be the traditionally feminine one of supporting the dominant males and basking in reflected (male) glory. In a comment on the girls who were 'in with' the 'hards', in Park Edge for example:

> Oh, the girls are just the girlfriends and that. They just stand about wi' em. (Darren)

Comments about girls in the year 11 group in Fenland Community College included the dismissive

> Well, girls have no sense, do they? (Wayne)

Some of Wayne's peers were more tolerant but similarly dismissive about what they regarded as typical female traits:

> They're OK, some of the girls in our class, but never tell 'em anything that's a secret. (Andrew)

And a puzzled, but typical male, response:

> Well, I dunno about girls; they're a mystery to me. (Gareth, Sheffield)

These comments largely support Mac an Ghaill's (1996b) argument that men become men by distinguishing themselves from the 'other' – including

girls and women – often through tactics of disparagement and through the abolition of all indicators of effeminacy in their own attitudes. Even so I was surprised by the levels of casual disparagement of girls of whom respondents disapproved. They included dismissal of the significance of a pregnancy, for example, 'Oh, she's just a slag. It don't matter' (Shaun, Sheffield), to a range of unkind comments about various attributes of the personal appearance of the girls whom they knew, although a small number of young men did speak more fondly of some of their female friends.

What was interesting, however, was the fact that almost all these young men were adamant in their rejection of the widespread belief that boys are now educational failures. I approached this issue prepared to hear a litany of complaints about successful, high-achieving girls and boys' relative failure, paralleling the dominant representation of gender differences at school in the popular discourses discussed in chapter 3, although I also expected that the young men would not be aware of the statistical differences in achievement rates between boys and girls in their own schools nor, indeed, in their own class.[3] However, this story of female success was not common currency in either Cambridge or Sheffield, although these young men seemed in the main to be well aware of their own specific educational limitations. For example, several students in both schools commented, usually disparagingly, on their own potential. 'I'm thick, me' and 'I'm not much good at the writing side,' as well as 'I wish I'd worked a bit harder sooner.' What was distinct, impressive and disturbing about the majority of interviewees was their clear-sighted sense of their own structural position as working class students in an institution imbued with middle class values about the importance of education. One of the Sheffield students spoke with resignation and regret, but an astonishingly mature insight, about the way in which he had been labelled as a troublemaker in Park Edge School:

> You know, once you have got a name, they sort of treat you right differently from other people in the class, right. They talk to you like 'It's him again. It's D. again.' I feel like I've got a sign on me head saying I've done summat wrong. (Darren)

Similarly, in Cambridge Kurt noted sadly that 'I get on everyone's nerves, I do,' adding, 'I think they are just waiting for me to leave.'

Both these young men are unaccustomed to speaking about their experiences and seem surprised that anyone might be interested in their views. Like the other boys, both of them were identified by their schools as low achievers and yet their comments exhibit a sensitivity and

self-awareness that is remarkable. Both of them exhibit a sense that their position at school is related to the way in which economic position mediates identity. As many studies of the impact of the culture of schools have made clear, from the classic early work of Bernstein (1971; and see also Bernstein 1996 for an assessment of this work) onwards, working class children often feel alienated by the values of the institution, with its 'hidden assumptions of student inferiority' (Wexler 1992: 133) and by their perceived treatment by teachers). Frequently they intuitively understand that they are marked by their class position, accent and attitudes in ways that lead to their being denied the resources of self-respect, value and inclusion and so they develop what Ball, Macrae and Maguire (1999: 33) term an 'estranged or damaged learner identity'. As John, another Fenland pupil, told me 'I'm just naturally thick, me so they don't bother much,' and Kevin at Park Edge echoed his comment: 'I'm no good at book work; I have a bit of trouble with reading and writing and that, so I'm left to meself mainly.' This is not to blame individual teachers at either school, who seemed to me on visits to be doing as good a job as possible in the face of almost overwhelming problems, including lack of resources, continual changes in the curriculum, new modes of evaluation and large classes of demanding students, as well as a high proportion of pupils with 'special educational needs' – the official designation of low achievers. But as Charlesworth (2000: 240–1) in a study of working class life in Rotherham has suggested, because teachers tend to ignore the less able or denigrate their efforts, these students come to 'understand their competence as belonging to the realm of nature [John's claim above that he is "naturally" thick], to the body, the realm of the physical'. Thus, in common with generations of working class boys, the advantages of a labouring body are privileged over those of the mind by some of the 24 when talking about their employment prospects. While economic restructuring has radically altered the labour market options facing 16-year-old working class boys, their school experiences seem to continue to reflect the attitudes and structures that teach these boys to expect a labouring life. This is confirmed by their participation in a range of vocational courses, especially at Park Edge during their final two years, which emphasize traditional masculine manual occupations such as gardening or house painting.

The labelling of these young men as 'low achievers' tends to be accepted by their families, thus confirming and reinforcing the schools' opinion of their abilities. The official reports on both schools mentioned the low participation among parents in school activities and events and in their children's education more generally. Few of the parents of the young men I interviewed attended school open days, nor did they feel able to challenge decisions by the schools, to exclude their sons for example. A number of the participants recounted tales of incidents that they perceived as unfair, including in Craig's case what seemed to be a serious issue of exclusion for most of the term before sitting his school-leaving examinations:

'We just left it, though. Me mam said she didn't want to go up to the school, so that was it. I think it had a bad effect on me, though. I went back to do the exams but it weren't much good.'

The working class family and the school thus together establish the horizon of possibility of working class youths' existence. As most of the young men told me, their parents just wanted them to get a job and to earn some money when they left school, although as I shall show in the next chapter, the actions of some mothers were crucially important in helping their sons to decide to combine work with some form of training. Working class parents, who have the same practical understanding as their children and so who lack both the authority to challenge the ways their sons are constructed at school as 'failures' or 'problems' and the resources to improve their opportunities, thus reinforce what Charlesworth (2000: 241) terms 'the symbolic violation of their children's dignity'. These young men told me that they did not expect to do well in their forthcoming exams. Indeed, two or three of the Park Edge students had decided to leave and look for work without entering, dismissing their relevance for 'people like us'. As Bourdieu has noted (1984: 387) it is often too easy to overlook the fact that educational qualifications are

> not experienced as purely technical and therefore partial and one-sided, but as total hierarchies, grounded in nature so that social value comes to be identified with personal value, scholastic dignities with human dignity... so that privation is perceived as an intrinsic handicap, diminishing a person's identity and human dignity.

Being labelled as a low achiever in adolescence is too often a deciding factor in closing off opportunities for social mobility in the future. As I shall show in the more detailed case studies of young men with different types of labour market attachment in chapters 6 and 7, this resigned acceptance of their own limitations restricted the ambitions and affected the working lives of those young men who joined the ranks of what I define there as 'disaffected and unattached workers'. When I met the 24 young men for the second time, many of them were reluctant to tell me their exam results, pretending to an insouciance that seemed forced.

But this is to get ahead of the story: while these 24 young men were still at school, although many of them seemed to have accepted the general opinion the school held of them, they did not relate their own disadvantage to a rhetoric of gender inequality. Most of them did not seem to be aware that girls in general, as well as those in their year group, at least at Park Edge, if not at Fenland, were likely to continue to outperform boys in GCSE examinations. A small minority, however, did comment on differences in attitude and motivation:

> Well, I think that perhaps girls work harder in school than boys. Boys are more immature and just mess around. (Simon, Sheffield)

But only one of the 24, also a Park Edge pupil was aware that

> It's girls who usually get better grades. (Richard)

Everyone else, including all ten boys at Fenland, thought that boys were just as likely as girls to be successful or not in the forthcoming exams. Nor did most of the respondents seem familiar with the gender transformation of labour market opportunities. Not yet faced with the reality of leaving school and the movement into the labour market or into forms of training, these young men felt that their prospects were at least reasonable, if not rosy. In general, they felt that both young men and young women had a good chance of employment in the local labour market, even if they were not among the highest achievers in their age cohort. There was, however, as I explore below, an awareness of gender segregation in employment opportunities. First, though, I want briefly to examine the construction of whiteness among these young men to assess the significance of those ideas about black style and white envy among school pupils in the construction of masculinity that I outlined earlier.

Deconstructing Binaries: Whiteness and 'Otherness'?

As I argued in the first chapter, young men in Britain, are caught within a complex and contradictory set of discourses about 'race' and racism. Notions of a multicultural society that are presented to these pupils in anti-racist educational material are contradicted by widespread popular discourses of national identity that depend on a unitary notion of the superiority of a version of Britishness. At the same time – as earlier work

in schools, especially in Greater London (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2002) but also in Leeds (Sewell 1997), has shown – white youths often both envy and fear popular representations of black style and toughness. At both Park Edge and Fenland Community College, white young people were in a large numerical majority, although in Cambridge their dominance was more noticeable. Less than 6 per cent of the pupils of Fenland Community College were from minority groups compared with 22 per cent at Park Edge School, reflecting the distinctive labour histories of each city. Both schools, however, had an anti-racist code of practice and each taught 'citizenship' in PSHE lessons. It seemed too, from the inspectors' reports that both schools had managed to create environments within which diversity, whether based on ethnicity, gender or ability, was valued. At Fenland, policies to integrate minority and disabled students were commended; and at Park Edge, the inspectors noted that 'the school strongly supports the development of the students' multi-cultural awareness. Students representing many ethnic backgrounds live together and relate harmoniously in a supportive environment'. Partly as a reflection of this environment, then, and of the formal teaching that they received, the young men to whom I talked initially were reluctant to voice their opinions about ethnic difference, seeming to be anxious lest I consider them racist. Rick's comment was typical among the Park Edge boys: 'Well, at school there's whites and some Asian and black kids but we just all hang about together. There's no racism in our school here.'

For some, their modes of engagement with whiteness were refracted through complex family and local social relations. Thus the common statement that 'I'm not racist, me' enunciated in both cities was qualified by a number of Sheffield respondents by 'How could I be? Me nan is black or my sister's husband, he's an Indian, I think, or perhaps a Paki.' The casual use of the derogatory term 'Paki' might perhaps be taken as racist or rather, as I think was intended, as an indication that his ethnic origin was, in fact, insignificant. For these boys, then, located within inter-ethnic familial networks, whiteness and otherness are part of an everyday negotiation of identity. However, in the school grounds and classrooms in both Sheffield and Cambridge, social and spatial separation between boys from different backgrounds was common: 'It just happens; it's not that we don't get on but perhaps we do different things.' In the streets outside Park Edge School, however, this spatial separation took a more serious form, often associated with punishment if territorial boundaries were crossed.

> Well, there some parks, like where I wouldn't go. That's where Asian lads hang out and if you go there, even just to walk through, they'll

> try and stop you, push you about a bit, and perhaps try and take something, your money maybe or your phone. (Craig, Sheffield)

And:

> There's, like, pubs and some of the clubs in town where the coloureds go. Sometimes there might be a bit of trouble, but it's not real serious, usually. (Darren, Sheffield)

This mapping of skin politics on to male territorial rivalries, however, tends to racialize local spaces, as well as reinforce anxieties about the associations between street crime and ethnicity, even though in the local estates where these boys grew up most of the semi-criminal and criminal activities, at least where an offender was apprehended, were perpetrated by white youths. As I shall show in chapter 8, however, a narrative about the inward movement of Others 'bringing down' the neighbourhood is common in both cities.

A discourse of white envy of black masculinity and style commonly found by researchers in multi-ethnic London schools was evident to a limited extent in Sheffield, although completely absent in Cambridge where none of the ten made any comments about ethnic difference and style. In Sheffield two boys, although one made only a brief reference in passing, made a series of comments that suggested they both resented and also envied what they defined as a black way of doing things. This is Pauly, claiming to be speaking for a wider constituency, exploring the reasons why he felt uncomfortable with what he regarded as many black, but also white, boys' mimicry of a black style, which he regards as inauthentic. The combination of his indignation, sense of exclusion, defence of a 'perfectly good Sheffield accent' and his definition of a black Other as 'Them' results in a complex narrative justification of his stance.

> Well, I am not a racist myself but I know that a lot of people think the way that I do and that's it really bugs me to see how they talk and how they walk and all their behaviour really. Not particularly coloured people, but as far as I'm concerned if they want to be like that, they go to Jamaica to do it, because that's what they are acting like. It's like a lot of, there's a lot of, I mean I've got friends that walk daft and talk daft and stuff like that and that's how I'd like it to be. I mean they were originally Jamaican but they are not now and they don't have to speak the way they do and they don't have to walk with a limp. It really bugs me to see it.

> There's lots of boys like that in school and what bugs me most is to see a white person trying to be like a black person. That really bugs me. There's quite a few of them. Some are old friends what I fell out with for various reasons. They hang round with black people and act like black people. There's like, can you imagine a Jamaican. A lot of the black people in our school do talk that way. They don't need to. They've got a perfectly good Sheffield accent but they talk in a black way. Well, not a black way, but a Jamaican way, if you know what I mean. And one of me old friends he started hanging about with them and he got talking like that and that's the reason why we've stopped being friends really because he got me so mad and then I told him I didn't like it so....
>
> He uses stupid words. It's, like, sort of words, like, I mean you might not have heard them but around Sheffield it's, like, you 'bloodclaut' or you 'raasclaut', something like that. It's daft. If they don't like you they'll call you it. You dirty raasclaut or something. Stupid slang words. It bugs me; I don't like it.

Asian boys seemed not to rouse the same passion in Pauly: 'Well, there's some name-calling: "You stupid Paki" or something like that. But we grow out of it. I mean most people mostly grow up by the time they are 16, 15, 16.' And as one or two of the other boys explained, Asian boys are the quiet ones, who tend to keep to themselves and who also do not socialize outside school, either through sport or in leisure activities involving drinking or clubbing. As a consequence, Asian young men are often regarded as feminized by their peers.

The significance of ethnic difference, then, seems to depend on the context, and on class and social position, and on the distinction between black and Asian identities. While in society as a whole, there are multiple and overlapping ways in which whiteness is differentiated from a generalized otherness, and situations in which the relation is not always one of dominance, in these two schools 'whiteness' is both dominant and largely taken for granted. However, unlike their undifferentiated attitude to gender difference, some of these young men were located in a more ambiguous set of relations and exchanges based on racialized otherness, both through friendship networks (disrupted on the grounds of difference, or rather its mimicry in Richard's case) or through familial connections. It is interesting that a rhetoric of 'natural' gender difference, and its association with relations of superiority and inferiority, was more widely accepted than a similar explanation of racialized difference. As

Shaun in Sheffield noted about ethnicity, 'well, we are all the same really aren't we, just all boys, after all'.

In Cambridge the negotiations of white identity were less problematic than in Sheffield, as the city is overwhelmingly white. Here, outside the specific confines of school and its local environs, social class was the key dimension of a differentiated masculinity in the central spaces of a city where the streets and leisure spaces are noticeably dominated by the middle class, largely white, student population. For the Fenland boys, class difference became a territory of contestation in some of the city's leisure spaces, where students were constructed as 'snobby' but also resented for their privileged access to local facilities, either based on income or student status that denied local youths the same privileges. In Sheffield by contrast, racialized differences are a more visible part of everyday life in the city and at school, and so a terrain for negotiation. Ways of performing a white class-based masculinity in leisure spaces are the topic of the penultimate chapter. In the last part of this chapter, the work experiences during school years, knowledge of local economic prospects and the labour market aspirations of the 24 young men are assessed.

Young men's attitudes to employment prospects and labour market change

It is clear that a particular, laddish, lackadaisical construction of masculine identity among working class school students remains dominant in Park Edge School and Fenland Community College. The 24 boys interviewed continue to hold to a version of masculinity that would have been familiar among their fathers, perhaps especially in Sheffield, when they left school between 20 and 30 years earlier. The key question that remains to be investigated is what these young men think about appropriate or acceptable forms of work that they judge will be congruent with their masculine identities. And how far will their aspirations and labour market expectations while still at school prove realistic once they start to look for work? To what extent are they aware of the shift to a service-based economy in the country as a whole and in their local labour market areas? Do they hope to achieve 'male' jobs in the manufacturing sector or are they prepared to look for work in, for example, the retail sector or in caring occupations traditionally regarded as 'women's work'? And how much difference does place make? Is there a pattern of less traditional expectations in Cambridge, given that many young men's fathers, as I shall illustrate in a moment, work in the service sector, even in 'caring' occupations? To answer these questions, I explored the 24 participants' knowledge of and views about current employment opportunities and prospects for young men compared to what they knew about those open to girls of their own age. I also asked each young man to speculate about his employment prospects now compared with those that faced young men 20 or so years previously, specifically asking about their father's experiences if he was still present in the household. I also explored the extent of working experience so far, including the types of temporary and casual employment they might have been involved in as schoolboys as well as the work placements they had undertaken through the auspices of the respective schools.

Part-time and casual employment was a common experience among the school leavers in both Cambridge and Sheffield. In Cambridge 8 of the 10 young men, and in Sheffield 10 out of 14, had some labour market experience. The range of jobs in each city is shown in table 4.2. The types of jobs undertaken in both cities are mainly in the service sector, with greater variety in Sheffield than in Cambridge. All the respondents had also had a short period of work experience in either year 10 or 11 at school, although some were unable to remember what they had done. However, about half in each city did recall the type of work and it was noticeable that in Cambridge all the placements were in the service sector, whereas the Sheffield school was still able to find some industrial placements, reflecting the differences in each city's labour

Table 4.2 Part-time and casual employment undertaken by final-year school students in Cambridge and Sheffield, 1999

Type of job	*Cambridge No. of participants*	*Sheffield No. of participants*
Paper round	3	3
Shopwork/shelf-stacking	3	1
Waiting/clearing tables	–	2
Call centre	–	1
Post Office sorting	1	–
Office cleaning/security	1	1
Packing in a factory	–	1
Painting and decorating		1
Not employed	2	4
Total	10	14

market history. The types of work mentioned in Cambridge included working in a college kitchen, assisting in residential homes for the elderly and working in shops. In Sheffield, placements in residential homes and shops were also mentioned but so too were placements in, for example, a light bulb fitting manufacturers and in a building merchants as well as temporary attachments to painting and decorating firms. Interestingly, despite their lack of experience in industrial work, when asked about their plans for the following year a number of Cambridge pupils, as well as several Sheffield students, hoped to find work or start a vocational course as a mechanic or engineer. However, only the Sheffield students seemed to be aware of the possibilities of the national modern apprenticeship scheme under which young people are able to gain both educational credentials and work experience. Two of the fourteen young men had applications in for an engineering apprenticeship at the time of the first interview. Clearly engineering apprenticeships are less common in Cambridge, but the Careers' Guidance Service had details of similar schemes in, for example, the furniture manufacturing industry and the water industry in and around Cambridge. What was interesting, however, is that Cambridge students were much more likely to be considering vocational (GNVQ) courses at the local further education college than their Sheffield peers.

The types of jobs and course being considered by the year 11 leavers in both cities were varied (see table 4.3) and included in each case transfer

Table 4.3 Post-school aspirations and plans for the year 1999–2000

Cambridge	*Sheffield*
Some form of mechanic (2 boys)	Car mechanic (2 boys)
Tattooist	Carpenter
Some sort of art course at college	Modern apprenticeship (subject unspecified)
Engineering course at local FE college	Modern apprenticeship in electrical engineering
IT course leading to job as a computer engineer	Painter and decorator
Radio or TV presenter	Art and design course (2 boys)
Bricklayer	Footballer
Not sure (3 boys)	Army
	Retail work, but must be in a sports shop
	Horticulture YTS
	Just a job, building work or something
	Not sure

to a local further education college, industrial and service-sector work. The ambitions of the 14 Sheffield students seemed perhaps more realistic than the Cambridge 10, including as they did a putative radio and TV presenter (John) and Kurt, the young man who longed to be a tattooist. Pauly, the potential footballer in Sheffield, for example, was already on contract as a junior to a national club that had promised him a placement on a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) with them later that year.

It seems clear that most of the young men in both cities, but rather fewer in Cambridge, had relatively clear aims and generally realizable prospects. Three students in Cambridge and two in Sheffield specifically mentioned a college course, while a number of others planned to combine employment and training. These preferences reflect the changed labour market opportunities facing working class men at the end of the century, compared with 20 or so years earlier when an overwhelming majority of men of their age and backgrounds who left school at 16 went straight into full-time employment. Indeed, when I asked these young men what they thought their chances of work were now compared to the experience of men of their father's age, they were quite clear about the differences. Although many of them thought that there were more and a wider range of labour market opportunities for young men now than when their fathers were the same age, there was also general recognition that qualifications are now more important in gaining access to a well-paid job.

> I would have thought that there is a lot more jobs around now what you need to be more qualified for instead of just going to a local shop[4] and getting a job straight away. I may not be right but as far as I'm concerned there's a lot more jobs around at the moment what you have to have certain grades for rather than 30 years, 20 years ago when you go into jobcentre and get a decent job. (Rick, Sheffield)

> There may be more jobs but there's more competition now, cos you need qualifications. (Simon, Sheffield)

But not all of them agreed about the general availability of jobs, especially in Sheffield where the decline of the steel-making industry has had such a devastating impact:

> There were more jobs when my Dad was young cos all the factories were there and there are none now. (Darren, Sheffield)

At the time of the first interview, however, none of the young men's fathers in either city worked in factories, although in Sheffield a number were employed as machine operators in, for example, a scrap waste recovery plant and a bakery, and another father was a forklift driver (see appendix 2). In Cambridge 7 of the fathers/stepfathers who were present in the home were in employment, another was unemployed and one father was looking after the children. In Sheffield there was also one 'house husband' and one unemployed father, and 11 fathers in employment. In Cambridge only one father had a job in the manufacturing sector – all the others were in service employment including cleaning, security, the Post Office and the police. In Sheffield, 5 of the 13 fathers with whom their sons either lived or visited worked in the manufacturing sector. The others had a range of service-sector employment including cleaning and taxi driving. One father in Sheffield was a local government officer but, as in Cambridge, the majority of men were in working class occupations and many of them had had experience of unemployment, layoffs and precarious forms of work.

Of the young men's mothers who were in paid work (all of them in Cambridge, compared with 8 out of 14 in Sheffield, reflecting the differences in traditions of women's work), all had jobs in the service sector and, as is usual with women's employment, they were concentrated into a very narrow range of occupations. In Cambridge all the women worked in some form of care (of old people or children) or in the retail sector, as did six of the eight employed mothers in Sheffield. One women had a professional job – she was a nurse; the other was an aerobics instructor. Five Sheffield mothers, according to their sons, were not working by choice and one was unemployed. It is hardly surprising, therefore, as I explore below, that most of the young men with whom I talked had an explicitly gendered perspective on employment opportunities.

A Gendered Job Market?

Most of the young men assumed that the opportunities facing them were gender-specific. They also held depressingly traditional views about gender-specific skills and abilities:

> I think there is more jobs mainly for boys really. There are mainly motor places and stuff like that and places where you have got to do heavy lifting and they're for boys, aren't they, cos they think they are stronger and that. [And referring to his own potential move into the building industry] It's work for men really. (Wayne, Cambridge)

Other interviewees noted that

> Girls go into childcare, and boys into things like IT. (Damian, Cambridge)

And:

> Only boys are interested in mechanics. (John, Cambridge)

The Sheffield students had equally firm views about the sorts of jobs that lay ahead of them and their female peers. For example:

> Well, women can't do the jobs that involve lifting and that. (Craig, Sheffield)

> Industry and engineering, they don't usually take girls on, do they? Most girls aren't interested in that anyway; they usually go for office work or journalism or something like that. Young men are better off; they get more opportunities. I think it's more boring for a young girl. They always seem to have jobs in offices and things. (Rick, Sheffield)

Whereas someone else noted that

> Women are secretaries, or work in old people's homes, or in clothes shops. (Simon, Sheffield)

A small number, however, thought that young women now had

> just the same chance as men really, cos I think there's not a lot of sexism in public jobs as there used to be. It's equal, I think. (Richard, Sheffield)

However, the clear majority of the young men interviewed in both cities had definite views about the suitability and appropriateness of different types of work for young men and young women. In the next chapter I explore whether they are successful in meeting their aspirations and what happens if they do not and are forced to take employment that is inappropriately gender-coded. I had also intended

to explore attitudes to race and racism in the labour market but found in the first interviews that this was not possible. While the young men were prepared to talk about racist attitudes and behaviour in their school, it became clear that they had little knowledge of the impact of racism and racial discrimination on the patterns of segregation in the labour market. For this reason I postponed the exploration and analysis of their attitudes about racism in the labour market until a later interview.

Despite the transformation in labour market opportunities in the British economy in the last two decades, almost all the young men whom I interviewed hoped to achieve employment in occupations that have always been regarded as male preserves. Where they do differ significantly from Willis's 'lads', however, is in their recognition that further training might be an essential prerequisite of this employment. It is also clear that the respective schools and the careers service in each city encourages students to think about attempting a vocational qualification, and provides advice and assistance to all year 11 pupils. There is little evidence, however, that the young men to whom I talked are looking for work in the retail sector, in leisure or tourism or the hospitality industry, despite the fact that these have been the fastest growing sectors for less well-educated workers in recent years and also areas where these young men themselves had found temporary part-time employment. Even the single respondent who identified shopwork as a possibility insisted it must be in a sports shop, in keeping with his preconceptions of the acceptable masculine identity associated with sport. As they began to think about employment, these young men had a clear sense of the sorts of jobs that they considered appropriate for men. They expressed no fears about finding a job and had relatively little sense of the extent to which economic restructuring had transformed opportunities for men and women. It was perhaps surprising how little they were aware of the changed economic circumstances that awaited them and they had no sense at all that they might not be able to achieve and maintain the traditional pattern of working class family life in which they were the main breadwinners.

These findings differ from Jordan's (1995) conclusions that young men nowadays are less optimistic about their futures than in previous generations. However, I do concur with the claims in recent studies that versions of a laddish or protest heterosexual masculinity performed in the different spaces in schools – from the classroom to the playground – remains crucial, and is perhaps even more significant and disadvantageous in the face of economic restructuring and the growing dominance of

service-sector opportunities for unskilled and poorly qualified school leavers, boys and girls alike. As Kehily and Nayak (1997: 84) noted:

> It may be that in today's economic climate young men are no longer able to attain a recognizable masculinity through manual labour, so are seeking to authenticate this identity in postures of heterosexuality. More research is required to determine the exigency of these claims, although we may speculate on the continuing presence and practice of 'lads' in school, despite changes to the manufacturing base. If they are no longer 'learning to labour' then what exactly are they doing?

On the basis of their study in the West Midlands, the authors (1987: 85) tentatively concluded that

> 'lads' are styling their heterosexual role identities in ways that affirm and consolidate their notions of manhood. It may well be that as long-term manual work declines, in a 'feminized' world of flexible workers and new technologies, male pupils are practising other ways of being 'proper' men that aim to accentuate heterosexuality beyond the emasculating existence of unemployment.

The low-achieving boys in year 11 in Cambridge and Sheffield schools in 1999 undoubtedly exhibited confidence about their sense of themselves as masculine, demonstrating neither ambivalence nor anxiety. Their behaviour in school, however, including truancy and exclusion as well as disruptions in the classroom, failing to do homework and, for many, poor exam performances lower down the school means that they were defined as 'low achievers' and expected to fail. Like many working class boys before them 'having a laff' at school seemed a more immediate goal than getting down to some hard work. Their teachers, parents and the young men themselves expected them to leave school at the end of the period of compulsory education and most of them were planning either to seek employment or some combination of work and training. In preparation for this, most of these boys had been involved in some form of work experience while at school as well as, especially in Sheffield, attending vocational training courses in, for example, painting and decorating, and horticulture. What they were not equipped with were the personal and academic skills necessary to attain any sort of job with a reasonable expectation of security, reasonable wages or career progression.

In the polarized new service economy, these young men were about to leave school without any of the skills necessary to gain access to high-tech work. The high-touch, servicing sector seemed to be their main

option but even here they had received little guidance about the sort of personal performance and management of emotions that are essential attributes of these jobs. Instead, they were in the main a group of poorly educated, energetic, aggressive and belligerent young men, apparently with little to offer to service-sector employers. But, on the verge of leaving school, these young men themselves were optimistic, experiencing no doubts that they would be able to find work consistent with their view of themselves as men and as workers and, in the longer run, as breadwinners and family providers. However, as the next chapters will show, as they moved into the job market their aspirations to seek and secure employment in male-dominated occupations were challenged by the realities of the dominance of low-status service work for young men unprepared to undertake further education or, in some cases, even to train 'on the job'. In the initial interviews, when the young men were still at school, the extent of the similarities of the lives and views of boys in each city was striking. However, in their transition from school into the labour market, important differences between the two cities started to emerge. These differences are the focus of chapter 5 where life after leaving school is the subject. In chapters 6 and 7, case studies of different pathways to employment are presented.

5

Leaving School: Pathways to Employment and Further Education

Unlike some other cultures, there are no initiation rites which mark the entry into adulthood; in our society the status of adulthood is partly ascribed and partly achieved. (Allatt and Yeandle 1992: 61)

Entry into the paid workforce marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. (Beder 2000: 124)

To become a fully functional adult male, one prerequisite is essential: a job. (US President's Commission Report, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society,* 1964)

In this and the following two chapters the decisions made by the 24 young men in the months after they finished school are the focus. Through a series of case studies, as well as an analysis of the choices of the entire group, I want to show the ways in which the relationships between the preferences and decisions of these 16-year-olds, their local contacts through family and friends and the structure of opportunities both in the immediate locality and in each of the two cities resulted in a series of specific pathways. As Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996: 149) in an earlier study of post-school transitions suggested, 'young people make career decisions within their horizons for action, which incorporate externally located opportunities in the labour market as well as the dispositions of habitus'. As I argued in the preceding chapter, these young men