The motivations, experiences, and aspirations of UK students on short-term international mobility programmes

by

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Thesis Summary/Abstract

International student mobility had undergone considerable growth over the last thirty years (OECD, 2015). Students who travel to different countries to study can be seen as an important group of people who develop the internationalisation of higher education. One type of student mobility, credit mobility, has come to assume greater importance recently. The number of credit mobile students, that is students who undertake a period studying or working abroad during their degree, has increased (European Commission, 2016). However, whilst credit mobile students form only a small minority of the student population, there has been a lack of research with young people who choose to participate in these programmes.

This PhD research is a qualitative project that explores the motivations, experiences and aspirations of UK students who have spent either a semester or year abroad. Firstly, this study explores the backgrounds and biographies of these students who choose to travel abroad for higher education. Secondly, the study analyses the experiences of these students during their stay overseas. And thirdly, careful attention is paid to the aspirations of these students after they have returned from their period abroad.

In this research, I demonstrate how young people attach significant value to student mobility by discussing it as an acceptable form of ‘authentic’ travel. Discourses around acceptable forms of travel, I show, stem from the habitus (Bourdieu 1986) of these young people. Secondly, I provide the first in-depth analysis of the key experiences of these students whilst abroad. Drawing on John Urry’s (2002) concept of the tourist gaze, I outline how new experiences away from home create a sense of adventure and novelty. Lastly, this research makes an original contribution to knowledge by developing our understanding of the aspirations of students who have completed a period abroad. Using Bauman’s (1996, 1998) theory of ‘tourism’, I demonstrate how young people who have studied and/or worked abroad become seduced by imagined mobile futures. I show how, for these students, their experiences create desires to continue living mobile lifestyles.
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

“…it was so cool; we hit this ridge and we literally just went, like, the sled literally just went flying through the air. And I remember it being so beautiful; so white; like, the sun was setting, and…ooooh….just being in that moment; just so, so happy, and it was great”

Leah, Canada

(1.1) Research Context
International student mobility is not a new activity in higher education, but its popularity amongst students worldwide has grown steadily and significantly over the past few decades. The OECD (2015: 360) reported that, in 1975, 800,000 students studied abroad worldwide. By 2012 (37 years later), the number of students studying abroad had risen to 4.5 million. Of course, significant changes within society have taken place within this 37 year period. Most notably, national economies have developed a growing dependence on other economies across the world, resulting in an internationalisation of economic activity across the globe. This has, it could be argued, created a world in which many aspects of social life, have become increasingly connected internationally.

The quote above from Leah, a student within this study, highlights the range of experiences people can now acquire through a widened accessibility of travel in an internationally connected world. Travel, it could be argued, has always, and continues to, make a strong impact on the way in which we, as people, think and relate to the world. But travel often also has a romantic quality attached to it; a sense that we want to experience new places because it gives us a deep sense of gratification. Narratives of travel are often littered with romantic adjectives. In Leah’s quote above, she uses the terms “beautiful”, “happy” and “great” to describe one of her key experiences during her year in Canada. Understanding why people enjoy travelling abroad, either to holiday, live, work or study, is therefore an important area to research.

Whilst modern travel has become accessible for many more people, other areas of social life too, such as education, have undergone profound change in an internationally expanding world. Higher education, in particular, has developed an
increasingly international character (Knight, 2003, Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) evidenced by the rise in international research partnerships across universities, increasing international dissemination activities (through international conferences) and a growing international student population, for example. Further evidence of the significance of ‘internationalisation’, within higher education, can be seen through the funding of this research project. Sponsored by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the proposal for this research had to fit into a “thematic and general area of interest” of the HEA. This project met the criterion of exploring matters concerning “internationalisation”. Students who travel abroad in some capacity for their higher education can be seen as an important group of people who drive the “internationalisation” of higher education. This research project focusses on the motivations and aspirations of this group of people.

(1.2) Rationale for Research
Student mobility can be undertaken in, primarily, two different ways: ‘whole degree’ and ‘credit’ mobility. Whole degree mobility refers to students who choose to complete their degree outside of their country of domicile. To date, sociology and human geography researchers have paid close attention to these students, exploring their motivations and aspirations for completing a degree away from their home country. Brooks and Waters (2009, 2010, 2011), Brooks et al. (2012) and Waters and Brooks (2010a, 2010b), for example, have explored the specific motivations and aspirations of UK students who have travelled to different countries for the duration of their degree, examining the students’ biographies prior to studying abroad and the way their experiences during their time abroad fed into their desires for the future. Similarly, King et al. (2010, 2013) and Findlay and King (2010) have also focussed on UK whole degree students, exploring the relationship between an (arguably) changing higher education and how these shifts might shape and impact on student choices.

Credit mobile students (and particularly UK credit mobile students), by comparison, have not received the same level of attention as whole degree students. Credit mobility though, as I discuss in more depth later in this chapter, has come to assume greater importance in discussions around international student mobility. This is, in part, due to universities actively promoting credit mobility to increase academic and employment skills, but to also ensure that students remain fee-payers at UK
higher education institutions (HEIs). Credit mobility, from the perspectives of governments and HEIs (as I discuss later on in this chapter) has therefore come to be seen as a particularly desirable activity for students to engage in. This also highlights another difference between whole and credit mobility – whole degree mobile students choose to study abroad before entry into higher education, whilst credit mobile students might often make the decision to study or work abroad during their higher education. For this reason, it could be assumed that motivations and aspirations for undertaking credit mobility might be different from whole degree mobility. This makes credit mobility an important area to investigate.

To date, Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) landmark study of European credit mobile students across Europe has paved the way for a small yet significant body of research that focusses exclusively on credit mobile students. Krzaklewska (2008, 2012) and Tsoukalas (2008), for example, have explored some of the motivations and experiences of ERASMUS students who choose to spend either a semester or full-year abroad. Other researchers, too, have developed research interests in particular aspects of the ‘study abroad experience’: Ambrosi (2012) and Van Mol’s (2012) research with credit mobile (ERASMUS) students have focused on whether either a semester or year abroad, in another European country, can develop a deeper solidarity with other Europeans (and the EU more broadly). King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), too, focus on ‘identity shaping’ through mobility, specifically with UK credit mobile students, analysing the ways in which mobility can extend perspectives beyond the ‘domestic’. However, whilst highly valuable, these studies are often dominated by a range of participants with different European nationalities (i.e. Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, Tsoukalas, 2008, Krzaklewska, 2008) or pay attention to only one part of the mobility experience, such as identity formation (e.g. Ambrosi, 2012, Van Mol, 2012, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). There remains then a significant gap for exploring the motivations and aspirations of UK students who choose to spend time abroad as part of their degree. Moreover, studies that do focus on credit mobile students often tend to focus on students travelling within Europe (for example, through ERASMUS). To date, there is no study that focusses on the motivations and

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1 ERASMUS (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) is the most recognised credit mobility programme. Commissioned in 1987, the programme (funded by the European Union) allows students to study or work abroad between different European countries through funded mobility placements for either a semester or year.
aspirations of UK students who travel to other parts of the world outside of Europe. This assumes greater importance when considering that the US, Canada, and Australia are, today, the three most popular destination countries for UK students studying and/or working abroad through credit mobility (HESA, n.d.). This study therefore fills a gap in the research field of international student mobility by exploring the motivations and aspirations of UK undergraduate students who take up mobility opportunities across the globe.

There is, however, a second significant rationale for conducting this research. With the exception of the body of work conducted by Brooks and Waters (2009, 2010, 2011), Brooks et al. (2012) and Waters and Brooks (2010a 2010b), there is perhaps a further need for a particularly sociological focus over issues around (credit) student mobility. C. Wright Mills’ (1959) idea of the ‘sociological imagination’ is fitting here – Mills (1959) suggests that a sociological perspective on social phenomena (what he terms ‘the sociological imagination’) allows the researcher to understand that people’s choices and experiences are not isolated, sporadic, or individualised. Instead, they are shaped by wider issues that operate at the structural level in society. By employing the sociological imagination, Mills (1959) suggests that the sociologist can come to understand how agency connects to structure. This research therefore pays close attention to how young people come to make particular choices at a particular time of their life, whilst, simultaneously, examining the social context and conditions that give rise to these choices. For this reason, this research strives to connect ‘history’ and ‘biography’ (Mills, 1959) – that is, a continuous attempt to understand how people’s agency intersects with social structure and vice-versa. This is, for Mills (1959), employing the sociological imagination.

(1.3) Aims and Objectives
The overall aim of this research is to explore the motivations, experiences, and aspirations of UK students on short-term international mobility programmes. In order to address this aim, three overarching themes are explored through forty qualitative interviews with UK (credit mobile) students who have completed either a semester or year studying or working abroad. Specifically the study explores:
1) The backgrounds of UK credit mobile students and how their biographies connect to motivations to study and/or work abroad – Through this theme, the biographical experiences of these students are analysed to explore what components are significant in forming motivations and desires to either study or work abroad.

2) The experiences of students during their time abroad – Through this theme, the study examines what, for these students, were the most significant experiences they had during their time abroad. This is pursued through understanding how students articulated their key experiences, focussing on topics such as friendship formation, academic learning and leisure time.

3) The aspirations and future plans of these students – Through this theme, the study analyses the effect a period spent studying or working abroad had upon these young people. In particular, there is a focus here on whether student mobility can facilitate further desires to travel abroad in some capacity upon exit from higher education. This theme also explores how a period spent abroad might affect a student’s sense of identity in an increasingly connected world.

(1.4) Thesis Structure
Chapter 2 discusses the academic literature that focusses on international student mobility. This chapter explores why students might want to study or work abroad as part of their degree in relation to the existing knowledge about, primarily, whole degree students. Examining two themes, ‘strategy’ and ‘adventure’, this chapter discusses how these motivations might impact the choices and decisions involved in studying or working abroad. This chapter also sets out a conceptual framework for understanding experiences abroad by using John Urry’s (2002) concept of the ‘tourist gaze’. This is followed by a discussion of how students’ experiences of studying or working abroad might impact the way in which they think about their (possible) international identities upon their return.
Chapter 3 outlines the methodological design of this research. This chapter provides the rationale for designing a qualitative study in order to explore the motivations and aspirations of UK credit mobile students. An account of the recruitment and sampling procedures is offered in this chapter, alongside a wider discussion of some theoretical issues involved in collecting and analysing the qualitative data for this project.

Chapter 4 is the first of three empirical findings and discussion chapters and addresses the first objective outlined above. In this chapter I explore how the students’ narratives about their lives prior to studying or working abroad contributed to shaping their motivations and desires for mobility. The chapter focuses specifically on the role of previous travel experience and family views towards international travel. In analysing the significance of these two factors, I draw on Bourdieu’s (1992) concept of habitus and Hodkinson’s (2008a) concept of horizons for action to understand how these factors help to explain student motivations to either study or work abroad.

Chapter 5, the second empirical findings and discussion chapter, addresses the second research objective above. In this chapter I pay particular attention to the theme of ‘adventure’ when studying or working abroad. When exploring the key experiences that the students discussed, I use John Urry’s (2002) ideas around the tourist gaze as a conceptual tool for understanding the significance of having an ‘adventure’ whilst abroad through studying or working. This discussion leads onto analysing how the idea of ‘difference’ can heighten other areas of the study (or work) abroad experience – notably, academic learning and friendship formation.

Chapter 6, the third empirical findings and discussion chapter, addresses the third research objective above. This chapter focuses on how the students’ experiences abroad impacted on their aspirations and desires for the future. Particular attention is paid to analysing the way in which the students often articulated their future mobility plans upon completing their degree. These ideas are analysed through Bauman’s (1998) concept of the tourist. This chapter then explores the significance of these student narratives in relation to current debates surrounding the question of whether
a period spent abroad can change students’ feelings about, and views towards, their own nationalities.

Chapter 7 draws the findings of this research together to illustrate the new insights gained from the discussions of the three empirical findings chapters. In this concluding chapter, I explore the significance of my findings in relation to the policy literature and academic literature that I begin to discuss below. Some policy recommendations and ideas for further research are also offered in this chapter.

(1.5) Policy Debate
In the rest of this chapter, I contextualise the debate around international student mobility by analysing how it has been used by different groups of people with different interests. This discussion acts as an extended introduction for thinking about student mobility and its relationship with contemporary higher education, moving towards, in Chapter 2, exploring the ways it has been researched by academics. I begin by developing some of the ideas raised so far in this chapter around how higher education can be seen as becoming increasingly internationalised. This leads onto a discussion of how international student mobility, within a culture of internationalised higher education, can be understood from the perspectives of, firstly, policy makers, secondly, national governments and, thirdly, universities. The discussion then moves on to examine how credit mobility (the type of mobility that this research focusses on) has been incorporated into the international strategies of universities. This is followed by analysing some of the current trends and developments in UK credit mobility specifically and ends by exploring whether student motivations are similar or dissimilar to the various policy discourses amongst different policy makers. This sets the scene for exploring the academic literature on student mobility in Chapter 2.

(1.5.1) Current International Education
Before turning the focus specifically to students who travel abroad for higher education, it is worth exploring some broader debates around ‘international education’ to understand the current context in which international student mobility takes place. Jane Knight (2003: 2) argues ‘…internationalization at the national,
sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education’. Within academic discussion, there is now a consensus that education, and particularly higher education, has become preoccupied with forming international strategies and agendas. Whilst HEIs have adopted different strategies for developing international perspectives or outlooks on their activities, there is an overall agreement that ‘globalisation’ has provided a strong undercurrent for developing these agendas and strategies.

Globalisation, as I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, has transformed many areas of social life today - social, cultural and economic activities are no longer restricted to nation states, but have instead become increasingly interconnected across the globe. As a result of, for example, improving information technology and a greater number of people moving across the world, higher education has undergone significant change. Indeed, these changes have led to the emergence of a ‘global field’ of higher education which has given rise to a number of influential global policy actors. Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 22) suggest, ‘…the values that national systems of education now promote through policy are no longer determined wholly by policy actors within the nation-state, but are forged through a range of complex processes that occur in transnational and globally networked spaces’. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for example, can be seen as a powerful actor that operates in ‘transnational and globally networked spaces’ (ibid.) The OECD’s aim, as they suggest, is to ‘…promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world’ (OECD, 2016). Some researchers though have argued that, through seeking to improve economic conditions in many countries, education has become a useful tool to develop the strength of financial economies. Brooks and Waters (2011) argue that, in the 1960s and 70s, the OECD’s understanding of the relationship between education and the economy was as an ‘…important driver to future income equality’ (Brooks and Waters, 2011: 26). However, in the 1980s, they argue:

‘...the nature of the relationship was seen differently: education was no longer promoted as a common good but as an instrument in global competition, and concerns for equality of opportunity were replaced by calls for flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the labour market’. 
Drawing on these ideas then, we can see that global policy actors, such as the OECD, have developed educational policies that strategically align with a neo-liberal form of globalisation. As this form of globalisation is primarily based on the global spread of capitalism (Giddens, 1990, Beck, 1992), education policies, as Brooks and Waters (2011) outline above, can now be seen as an important area of social life that has become a key resource for developing a strong economy in a global era.

If education has increasingly become “an instrument in global competition” (Brooks and Waters, 2011: 26), educational institutions have been forced, to some extent, to develop strategies in order to be considered ‘competitive’. This competition has required educational providers, particularly higher education institutions, to become international in an expanding global arena. Altbach and Knight (2007) address this question through their distinction between ‘globalisation’ and ‘internationalisation’. They suggest that ‘…globalization may be unalterable, but internationalization involves many choices’ (Altbach and Knight, 2007: 291). Whilst it is certainly contested whether globalisation is ‘unalterable’, these authors argue that globalisation refers to the various forces that structure and shape education, whereas internationalisation refers to the choices and strategies HEIs develop in response to those forces. This is similar to Rizvi and Lingard’s (2010) argument when they draw on Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ to outline how actors, at the national level, respond to the ‘global forces’ mentioned above. They suggest that ‘governmentality’ highlights the emphasis placed on ‘…the production of self-governing individuals, that is, individuals who act in particular ways as they are positioned by dominant political and policy discourses’ (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010: 137). This is perhaps an apt description of the current issues within ‘international education’. On the one hand, we can see HEIs as having the autonomy to make their own decisions in regard to forming internationalisation strategies. But on the other hand, these strategies are made within circumscribed ways. This is because HEIs form these strategies within ‘dominant political and policy discourses’ (ibid.). One example of this could be seen in the way in which HEIs establish international partnerships with each other. Whilst HEIs have the autonomy to choose whom they partner themselves with, these partnerships are often not made with the aim of gaining geographical diversity across the world. Instead, HEIs strive to align
themselves with international HEIs of similar status and prestige. Therefore, whilst universities have choice in their internationalisation strategies, they often make these choices within dominant political and policy discourses of competition and strategy.

This discussion also articulates with wider ideas associated with what academics have termed the ‘neo-liberalism’ of higher education. As Brooks and Waters (2011: 29-30) argue, ‘…central to the neo-liberal agenda is the belief that markets are much more efficient providers of services than public sector bodies, and that expenditure on HE…should be curtailed as much as possible’. If we therefore view global education as the spread of dominant political and policy discourses (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) and neo-liberalism as a process of decentralising education from the state, we can see how higher education has shifted into a market-like structure. This is because, if HEIs see a reduction in state funding, they are compelled to develop their activities to ensure income. HEIs then have to become both self-sufficient and competitive in order to prosper. This is how the political and economic aim of competition is successful in creating educational markets.

(1.5.2) International Student Mobility
The OECD (2015) report that, between 1975 and 2012, student mobility, worldwide, grew by 462.5%. Student mobility, in this sense, can be seen as a prominent feature of the growing internationalisation of HEIs. In the previous section, I outlined some of the significant changes that globalisation has facilitated in higher education. Indeed, when turning our focus to student mobility specifically, we can begin to see the various ways in which different policy makers have developed student mobility as a form of strategy in a competitive higher education arena. For example, national governments can be seen as viewing student mobility as an important activity for ‘developing human capital’ and a ‘mobile workforce’. Secondly, they might see value in mobility for developing a strong workforce for the economy, but might additionally view mobile students as people who can make a valuable contribution to the economy through paying fees, living and studying in various destinations throughout the country. HEIs, by contrast, might view international student mobility as an opportunity to both internationalise themselves, whilst, simultaneously, create a valuable revenue stream of income through tuition fees. In this section, I explore
these ideas in more depth, outlining how international student mobility has become an activity that is seen as desirable by several actors.

(1.5.3) International Organisations and Mobility
The discourses that surround international student mobility, from policy makers in particular, often focus on the ‘social good’ that a period spent abroad can have. Mobility can be considered as a ‘social good’ because a period spent abroad, it is argued, can develop people’s cultural awareness and employability skills for the labour market. Indeed, when analysing this stance on mobility, we can see the discursive techniques used to convey the ‘social good’ that mobility can bring - the OECD suggest, in their annual report on education, that:

‘...by providing an opportunity to expand knowledge of other societies and languages, studying abroad is an important cultural and personal experience for students as well as a way to improve their employability in the globalised sectors of the labour market.

(OECD, 2015: 352)

In this statement, the OECD places particular value on the role that student mobility can play to “expand knowledge” and “improve employability”. Developing further discourses around employability, the British Council suggest:

‘...one of the main arguments in support of outward mobility is that overseas experiences yield a more well-rounded supply of candidates as companies are increasing their demand for globally-competent employees that will help them compete internationally’.

(British Council, 2015: 7)

Drawing on both the OECD and British Council’s rhetoric above, we can see how these actors attach value to international education, through student mobility, to further develop economic activity and labour market success. If student mobility is therefore marketed as a desirable activity for economic growth, organisations such as the British Council and the OECD can be seen as placing increasing value on the
up-skilling of people – that is, making an assumption that people themselves and their skill-sets are crucial for driving economic success.

Indeed, the emphasis on these discourses has led to what many people have termed ‘knowledge economies’. In 1996, the OECD recognised that, with the increasing importance of technology, an "information society" was emerging. This society, they argued, required workers to commit to up-skilling and re-skilling with a commitment to lifelong learning (OECD, 1996). Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 81) are critical of the OECD’s perspective here, arguing ‘…what this view implies is that learning for learning’s sake is no longer sufficient, and that education does not have any intrinsic ends as such, but must always be linked to the instrumental purposes of human capital development and economic self-maximization’. International student mobility then, drawing on both the perspectives outlined by the OECD and the British Council above, can be seen as a desirable activity to develop human capital. For example, mobility can be viewed as developing competences in adaptability, flexibility and proficiency when entering the knowledge economies and markets. An investment in human capital, through international student mobility, can be seen as a good investment for developing and retaining stakes in markets. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 80) suggest, this system of thought:

‘…assumes economic growth and competitive advantage to be a direct outcome of the levels of investment in developing human capital. It suggests that, in a global economy, performance is increasingly linked to people’s knowledge stock, skills level, learning capabilities and cultural adaptability’

Therefore, whilst policy actors might promote international mobility as a ‘social good’ (i.e. for gaining intercultural awareness, cultural adaptability, etc), these ‘social goods’ are underpinned by wider aspirations to develop economic activity. When discussing social and economic aspirations through international student mobility, it is worth mentioning the significant role that the European Union have played as a key policy maker in this area. Whilst I discuss its role and significance in more depth later in the chapter, the EU, through its own mobility programme, has gone to considerable lengths to achieve what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) describe as “developing human capital”. This is because the EU has attempted, through student mobility, to equip young people with labour market competences that strengthen
Europe as a powerful economic player in the global arena. For this reason, we can see how the EU has integrated the social and economic aims of mobility to develop Europe’s financial and political strength in the world. I return to these ideas shortly.

(1.5.4) Governments and Mobility

We have now seen that policy actors portray student mobility as desirable specifically for strengthening the ‘quality’ of the workforce in a knowledge economy. National governments, too, might also subscribe to this rationale for mobility. However, they perhaps see a further value for mobility in terms of increasing their own national income through the ‘boost’ in economic activity students create when they study at different HEIs across a country. This connects back to wider ideas expressed in section 1 of this part of the chapter. If international education is becoming more marketised, international student mobility can be seen as a market product itself, with the potential to generate profit. Indeed, these ideas articulate with wider discourses around student mobility from national governments. In his forward to the UK government’s ‘International Education’ report, David Willetts, the (at the time) Minister for Universities and Science focussed largely on the economic benefit of student mobility. He suggested:

‘…overseas students who come to Britain to study make a huge contribution to our economy. Each student in higher education on average pays fees of about £10,000 a year and spends more than this again while they are here. In 2011/12 we estimate that overseas students studying in higher education in the UK paid £10.2bn in tuition fees and living expenses. They boost the local economy where they study – as well as enhancing our cultural life, and broadening the educational experience of the UK students they study alongside’.

(Willetts, 2013: 3)

In this statement, David Willets outlines the positive economic impact mobile students can have, not just in terms of the tuition fees they pay, but also their expenditure in the local economy throughout their studies. Only towards the end of his statement can we see a brief sketch of the ‘social good’ of international student mobility through “enhancing our cultural life”. The dominant theme in his statement
though alludes to a view that international students can be considered, and are, a valuable ‘cash cow’ for national economies.

It is worth mentioning briefly here that, over the last few years, the UK government has shifted somewhat in its stance towards international students. A current debate exists, particularly in media circles, of whether international students should be included in the UK government’s ‘net migration targets’ to lower the amount of people entering the United Kingdom. Whilst, as David Willetts’ narrative in 2013 lent heavily on education as an export strategy, the UK government is now perhaps starting to re-think whether the ‘cash cow’ model can be dispensed with in order to assist in reducing immigration. For many people in the UK, reducing immigration is a highly significant and topical political debate and therefore an issue that all political parties inevitably have to respond to in some way.

(1.5.5) HEIs and Mobility

Whilst national governments might have their own motivations for attracting international students to their countries, HEIs, too, can be seen as strategically sourcing international students to their institutions. Indeed, with HEIs being required to manage their own activities to ensure economic and financial success, international students can provide them with a valuable source of income through the tuition fees they pay. International students therefore become a key resource for HEIs to develop their financial and economic status. When turning to look at the current relationship between East and West mobility, we can see the flows of students between these areas of the world as examples of the marketisation of higher education. Western HEIs (that act as predominantly ‘receiving’ countries of international students) have developed a strong stake in the international education market through their ability to recruit students from the East (for example, China and Hong Kong act as predominantly ‘sending’ countries of international students).

Through attracting international students then, Western HEIs have developed an important revenue stream through these students. This process highlights how HEIs are in a market structure because they compete against each other to secure these funding streams. I now turn to examine some of the global flows of students (in terms of their countries of origin and destinations) to demonstrate how HEIs have developed higher education markets.
Figure 1 – The destinations of mobile students worldwide

Figure 1 shows the most popular destinations for mobile students studying in tertiary education outside their country of origin in 2013. When removing ‘Other non-OECD countries’, we can see that the US and the UK dominate the list of countries for receiving international students. In linking this to the discussion developed so far in this chapter, the US and UK could be seen as examples of strong competitors who have developed key stakes in the international education market. In addition to this, the OECD (2015: 352) highlights that, today, over half of all international students enrolled at HEIs worldwide (53%) are from Asia. For example, in 2015 over half a million (523,700) Chinese students went abroad to study (International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF), 2016) – the US received 328,547 of these students, whilst the UK received 94,995 of them (British Council, cited in Project Atlas, n.d.). In this sense, student mobility, on the whole, can be seen as a largely East-to-West activity. This pattern of mobility therefore has implications for the power relations between the East and the West because the West’s ability to attract large numbers of Eastern students reinforces a view that the ‘best’ education is concentrated in the West. I discuss these issues in more depth below.

The ideas raised in this section so far have highlighted the competitive nature of international education markets today. If large numbers of students are travelling...
from the East to the West in search of higher education, Western nations can be seen as the primary (economic) beneficiaries of international students due to their fees and spending (which increase revenue and profit). Today, as ICEF (2015) reports, ‘…the US remains the world’s leading study destination, and, together with the UK, Germany, France, and Australia, hosts about half of the world’s mobile tertiary students’. Verbik and Lasanowski (2007: 3) suggest that nations such as the US and UK remain the power-players in recruiting foreign students primarily through their recognition of ‘…how advantageous international higher education can be as an export service’. This again takes us back to the incentives for governments to ‘host’ international students for the economic rewards they can bring – much like David Willett’s (2015) view highlighted earlier. The international student market in the UK (and the West in general) is currently a multi-million pound industry that has built its success through continued growth in attracting students from a wide range of nations. This success can perhaps be found through their (Western nations’) ability to ‘…strategically target students in potentially high-yield countries’ (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007: 4), whilst offering students taught courses in English and an environment where they can converse, think, and live in an English speaking culture. If a Western education is therefore a sought after experience and/or credential, Western nations are well placed to develop and retain a dominant share in the international market.

It should be noted here though that ISM is not a one-way flow of student migration from East to West and indeed there is some evidence that mobility may be becoming more of a two-way relationship. Project Atlas (2016a) report that, in 2014, there were 377,054 international students studying in Chinese HEIs. Furthermore, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) (2015) suggest that, in 2015 alone, they received 124,896 international students. Although the majority of these students came from other Eastern countries, there is some evidence to suggest that there is a growing popularity in China as a destination, particularly amongst American and French students (Project Atlas, 2016b). In order to expand in the international student market, the Chinese government has set a target to ensure its universities

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2 It should be noted here that this figure includes students on short term courses in addition to students studying for whole-degree mobility.

3 Again, it should be noted that this figure is very likely to include students on short term courses in addition to students studying for whole-degree mobility.
host 500,000 (whole degree) international students by 2020. In this sense, China certainly does not act solely as a ‘feeder’ country for outward ISM movement and the country is currently working hard towards securing more students, particularly from the West, to its institutions (ICEF, 2012). Japan has similarly taken measures to ensure its market share increases through announcing their ‘300000 Foreign Students Plan’ which aims to increase its market share of international students from 140,000 to 300,000 by the year 2020 (University World News, 2014).

Whilst these points highlight a two-way relationship between East and West mobility, more generally there remains little doubt that the flow of mobility shows ‘…greater migration from east to west and from poorer countries to their richer counterparts’ (Brooks and Waters, 2009: 1086). For example, the most recent figures suggests that, in 2012 there were 4,250 UK students studying in China (British Council, 2014), whilst, in 2014-15, there were 89,540 Chinese students studying in the UK (UKCISA, 2015). In this sense, the power of the West to recruit Eastern students has outweighed the East's power to attract Western students. There are, perhaps, many reasons for this – firstly, global league table rankings are dominated by Western HEIs which occupy the ‘top’ places. Secondly, with respect to the UK and the US, being taught in English, and therefore being encouraged to ‘think’ and ‘converse’ in English may be a coveted employment skill for Eastern students when they return home. As English is often considered a ‘global language’, particularly in industry/business circles, holding a degree from a Western HEI, with English language and cultural competence is particularly valued by prospective employers in the East (Waters, 2006, Mitchell, 1997). These ideas, taken together, therefore establish a particular ‘status’ around Western higher education that is shared around the world – that is, a consensus that the ‘best’ education on offer in an international educational market is located in the ‘West’.

Western HEIs, particularly those who occupy the top positions in global rankings, are acutely aware of their status to attract high international fee-paying students. Cheng et al. (2014: 2) have argued that European and Asian HEIs have recently been given economic incentives by their governments to develop their “excellence” in their teaching and research activities. Such an investment, it is hoped, will lead to higher global league table positions which will, in turn, make their institution more attractive to international students. These strategies can therefore been seen as growing response from HEIs in their requirement to explore new ways
to maximise revenue. And this, again, highlights the marketising of higher education through the competition it invokes amongst HEIs.

(1.6) Credit Mobility

In the previous section, I have discussed the relationship between international student mobility and different actors who have an interest in international students: international policy makers, national governments, and HEIs. It is at this point that it is worth exploring some of the policy differences between what has been termed ‘whole degree’ and ‘credit mobility’. Earlier in this introductory chapter, I demonstrated how whole and credit mobility differs – whole degree mobility refers to students who move abroad for the duration of their higher education, whilst credit mobility refers to students who undertake mobility as part of their degree (awarded by their country of domicile). As the research for this project focuses specifically on credit mobile students, it is useful to analyse how policy has shaped credit mobility programmes and the ways in which it (particularly in the UK context) has become seen as a particularly desirable way to study (or work) abroad.

In 1999 the UK government launched a programme entitled “Prime Minister’s Initiative for Education” (PMI). This was a five-year strategy that aimed to increase the UK’s market share of international students by 75,000. PMI was largely successful, achieving its quota of incoming students and a second phase (PMI2), that ran between 2006-2011, was commissioned in order to ensure continued growth in market share of international students (by recruiting a further 100,000 students). PMI2 differed slightly in its vision of international education: instead of simply being concerned with recruitment and market share, it focussed on ensuring a positive experience of UK HE for international students. Three main objectives were prioritised for PMI2: ‘UK positioning’, ‘the quality of the student experience’, and ‘building strategic partnerships and alliances’ (AoC and British Council, n.d: 2). There was also a strand within PMI2 that focussed on the imbalance between the number of outward and incoming students to and from the UK. In this respect, PMI2 started to address the gap between the inflow of foreign students and the outflow of UK students. This was not done by encouraging students to seek study abroad for the whole of their degree (whole degree mobility), but rather through developing opportunities for UK students to engage in short-term mobility schemes (credit mobility). ERASMUS, dual degrees, and HEI organised exchanges were promoted
as the most desirable form of mobility throughout national HEIs within the UK. From a policy perspective then, credit mobility schemes were highly beneficial for UK higher education – by promoting UK outward mobility through these programmes (ERASMUS, HEI exchanges and dual-degrees), the government ensured that tuition fees were paid to UK HEIs, unlike through whole degree mobility programmes. In this scenario, students could still acquire ‘global competencies’ through mobility (as discussed above), but this would not be at the expense of losing money through students paying tuition fees to HEIs in other countries, or, from an economic perspective, other competitors in the market.

(1.6.1) Credit Mobility Programmes

When exploring the significance of short-term mobility schemes, the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) can be seen as the ‘flagship’ of credit mobility programmes. Established in 1987 by the European Union, ERASMUS aimed (and continues to this day) to organise opportunities for young people within higher education to spend a semester or whole year abroad as part of their degree. The programme had four aims: firstly, by uniting different European HEIs through ERASMUS partnerships, ERASMUS would facilitate partnerships between different European HEIs and therefore provide a more interconnected European market for higher education, especially in light of the growing competition from the North American market. Secondly, ERASMUS was seen as a desirable way for students to gain new knowledge of another country and culture not available from their domestic HE experience. Thirdly, ERASMUS was seen as a particularly good programme for developing a greater sense of European identity among young people, in hope that they would develop a stronger solidarity Europe (Klose, 2012). This ambition, for ERASMUS mobility, was congruent with wider ideas surrounding the ‘political project’ of the EU. The emergence of a European Union was therefore founded as an economic and political project in post-World-War II Europe. It was economic because it focussed on pooling the resources of different European nations to become a ‘big player’ on the global economic stage. Furthermore, it also encouraged workers to move to different EU countries wherever they were needed. In addition to these economic motives, the European Union also had political aspirations through making citizens of its member states feel a greater affiliation to Europe. I discuss the political aim of the EU in more depth in the next
chapter. The last aim of ERASMUS, for discussion here, was to enable future labour market mobility amongst young people who had completed the programme. Indeed, if young people completing ERASMUS were gaining cultural awareness and competences across different EU member states, it was anticipated that this might facilitate greater mobility across the labour market, again, driving the agenda for the political project of the EU. Today, the EU can be seen as expanding their vision for an integrated Europe even further – for example, the European Commission’s mobility strategy for the year 2020 has set a 20% mobility target for all EU members. In other words, the EU believe that, by 2020, 20% of all students graduating from member states should have some form of mobility experience. From this perspective, the EU has not changed its initial assessment in 1987 that student mobility is a useful and desirable activity for both students and member states.

Whilst ERASMUS has evolved in many areas since its establishment in 1987, it is worth examining the changes involved in the programme in 2007. In this year, it came to be placed under the EU’s wider ‘LifeLong Learning Programme’ for young people. Whilst ERASMUS’ core objectives did not change (in respect to developing deeper integration between European nations), the emphasis on mobility for labour market success came to dominate the ERASMUS landscape. In his discussion of this issue, Klose (2012) argues that the programme placed less emphasis on fostering a ‘European identity’ amongst participating young people, but instead focussed on mobility as a way to develop young people for labour market success. He suggests that, through

‘…the acquirement of knowledge and skills that would become important assets in the envisaged “knowledge-based” economy and society…ERASMUS has now acquired a new meaning as an economic advantage which is supposed to bring about a highly skilled and internationally experienced workforce’

(Klose, 2012: 45-46).

Whilst it could be argued that the economic objective that Klose describes above has always been part of the rationale for ERASMUS, his suggestion does highlight how, since 2007, the economic objective has come to assume greater priority. Further evidence for this can be seen through ERASMUS’ expansion from solely study placements into study and work placements abroad. ERASMUS work placements
(introduced in 2007) allow students to complete a work placement that lasts between two and twelve months. Students who organise and complete their placement receive a monthly grant and a large contribution towards their tuition fees for the period in which they are working abroad. The introduction of ERASMUS work placements in 2007 highlights the growing emphasis (by the EU) on international mobility being a valued activity for developing the knowledge economy. Recent statistics (which I analyse in the next section) demonstrate that the work placement opportunities have been extremely popular, especially with UK students. Hannah Deakin’s (2012: 5) research with UK students who had completed an ERASMUS work placement abroad helps to understand its popularity. She argues that work placements are particularly attractive to students because they offer increased employability skills. For Deakin (2012: 5), ‘…students are often worried about gaining employment after graduation and see the placement programme as an opportunity to gain distinction in the graduate labour market’. Whilst these programmes might give students advantage going into the labour market, the expansion of student mobility into work placements can also be seen as an attempt to develop young people as key agents for driving economic activity.

It is worth ending this section with a brief discussion of other forms of credit mobility, outside of ERASMUS. As mentioned above, whilst ERASMUS can be considered the flagship of credit mobility, it is important to remember that HEIs in past years have developed new partnerships with other (international) HEIs. I discussed earlier how the internationalisation strategies of HEIs can be considered as responses to global forces. As part of this, in recent years, HEIs have been proactive in securing a greater number of international HEIs to partner with. This, it could be argued, links back to the marketisation of higher education. If there is greater student demand for placements outside of Europe, HEIs can increase their number of international partners to satisfy student demand. But HEIs can also use student mobility to strengthen their own internationalisation agendas through forging these links and partnerships. This shift in increasing non-European partners demonstrates that there is a significant amount of credit mobility that takes place outside of ERASMUS. HESA (n.d) suggests that, in 2014-15, 12,330 UK students studied abroad through their university partners (excluding those established through ERASMUS schemes), whilst the European Commission (2016) report that, in 2013-14 (the latest data available) 15,610 UK students either worked or studied in Europe
through ERASMUS. These figures therefore show that, whilst ERASMUS is the most popular scheme to study and/or work abroad through, a large amount of credit mobility takes places outside of ERASMUS. This means that a significant number of UK students are travelling to non-European countries (as ERASMUS is a European programme). Current policy analysis and trends that focuses on UK credit mobility is often dominated by the ERASMUS scheme. Whilst ERASMUS students are included in this study, this research also pays attention to students who go abroad as part of their degree, but outside of the ERASMUS programme. This group of students have been under-researched compared to their ERASMUS counterparts.

In the last section of this policy-focused chapter, I turn to examine some quantitative data about UK students who travel abroad for part of their degree.

(1.6.2) Credit Mobility – Current Trends
Recent HESA (n.d: unpaginated) data suggests that, in the 2014-15 academic year, 24,185 UK students studied or worked abroad as part of their degree. According to Universities UK (n.d.), in 2014-15, there were 1.83 million UK students enrolled in higher education. This means that, during 2014-2015, 1.32% the UK student population studied abroad in some capacity. Breaking this figure down further, HESA suggest that, of this 24,185 UK students, 18,215 studied abroad, whilst 5,810 undertook a work placement abroad. When turning our attention to the destinations of these students, figure 2 (below) shows the most popular countries, worldwide, that these students travelled to:
Figure 2 – The most popular destination countries for UK students to study/work in

![Bar chart showing the most popular destination countries for UK students to study/work in. The US is the most popular destination, followed by Australia and Canada.](HESA, n.d: unpaginated)

Figure 2 illustrates the overwhelming popularity of the US as a destination for UK students. Whilst Australia and Canada can be considered as other popular destinations for UK students, the US, it appears, is the most common choice for students seeking an opportunity to study or work abroad. There are a number of factors that might explain the dominance of the US in terms of the number of students who go there. Firstly, it is an English speaking nation and students are therefore not required to have any additional language competences. However, linked to a previous discussion, the US may be viewed as the ‘best’ choice in the international educational market. This might be due to, as I previously discussed, the ‘status’ that surrounds Western institutions. Brooks and Waters’ (2009) research with UK students builds on these ideas. These researchers suggest that rather than seeing an international move for HE as going either, metaphorically, ‘up’ or ‘down’ in the education market (in terms of status), the US (by UK students) is seen as being equal to a UK education. For this reason, these authors argue that moving to the US for higher education is often seen as a horizontal or sideways move.

Even if we exclude the US from this discussion, when focussing on the most popular destination countries for all ERASMUS (not just UK students), a similar view
emerges in terms of the perceived quality of education that HEIs in different countries can offer. I develop this argument through examining figure 3 below.

**Figure 3 - The most popular destination countries for all outgoing ERASMUS students**

![Erasmus most popular destination countries 2013-2014](image Link)

(European Commission, n.d)

Whilst any student at a European HEI (in possession of an ERASMUS charter) can study in a large number of countries, figure 3 confirms that, of the 272,497 students who undertook an ERASMUS placement in 2013-2014, the majority of placements were concentrated in five countries. As figure 3 shows, Spain, Germany, France, the UK and Italy accounted for 54.1% of all ERASMUS mobility across all ERASMUS countries. In this sense then, students who travel abroad for credit mobility tend to, by and large, travel to developed Western European nations. This highlights that there might be a perception amongst students that these countries have ‘strong’ or ‘robust’ educational markets. Research into this area provides evidence for this argument – Findlay et al.’s (2012) research with mobile UK students demonstrates the importance placed on university rankings in their decisions of where to study. For these researchers, the ‘…‘elite list’ [of international HEIs] was not simply a minor feature of students’ discursive consciousness but a key strategic tool which they discussed at length in relation to the concepts of educational ‘value’ and ‘difference’ (Findlay et al., 2012: 125). This then goes back to an argument presented earlier that
focused on how the “elite list” of HEIs, in global league tables, tend to be located in a small number of Western countries. This therefore results in a system where status is attached to those countries whose higher education systems are seen as high quality – as Findlay et al. (2012: 128) suggest:

‘…the differentiation of HE at a global level will only increase as social processes produce an ever more distinctive global hierarchy of institutions in relation to socially constructed ‘reputations’ and increasingly sophisticated authenticity claims about what constitutes a ‘world-class’ university’.

Turning to ERASMUS UK credit mobility trends specifically, there has been a large growth in outward mobility in the last seven years – figure 4 (below) provides a representation of this growth:

**Figure 4 – Total number of outward mobile ERASMUS students between 2007 and 2014**

*Outgoing students*

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<td>Total</td>
<td>10,278</td>
<td>10,826</td>
<td>11,723</td>
<td>12,833</td>
<td>13,662</td>
<td>14,572</td>
<td>15,610</td>
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*Traineeships + Studies = Total outgoing students*

(European Commission, 2016)

When examining the difference between the number of students who travelled abroad in 2007/8 and 2013/14, we can see that there was a total outward mobility growth of 51.9% across the programme. This is a significant trend when analysing European credit mobility because it demonstrates, firstly, that there has been consecutive growth year-on-year, but, secondly, both study and work abroad (studies and traineeships) have grown broadly in line with each other. In other words, whilst studying abroad remains the most desirable activity, working abroad has not
grown at the expense of studying abroad. We can see this because both mobility programmes have continued to grow in a similar ratio to each other. Importantly, though, when exploring where UK students go within Europe, through ERASMUS, a similar picture emerges to the discussion above. In 2013/14, the five top countries students travelled to were (in order): France, Germany, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. This is identical to both the countries that receive the highest number of all ERASMUS students⁴ (as discussed earlier). British students therefore tend to travel in small international ‘circuits’ (Brooks and Waters, 2009) within the programme.

(1.6.3) Policy Initiatives and Motivations for Mobility

Whilst I have now discussed some of the initiatives for mobility (from a range of policy perspectives), against a wider backdrop of developments in international education, there remains a significant question of why students want to study or work abroad. If, as I have outlined in this chapter, there is a strong association between international student mobility and gaining skills for competitive global labour markets, motivations for travelling overseas as part of a student’s degree might be a decision based on ‘strategy’. For example, in the case of ERASMUS, the European Union might think that students are motivated by the employment benefits that a period abroad might bring. But do students themselves share these motivations when making mobility decisions? And, after completing a period abroad, are their experiences congruent with these policy aims? In turning to some of the research that attempts to answer these questions, we can begin to see that a slightly different picture emerges to the one presented so far; a picture that suggests that, on the whole, student motivations for studying abroad through credit mobility might have little in common with those outlined in policy.

⁴ It can be considered identical due to the Netherlands replacing the UK in the list of the most popular destinations for UK students. This is because UK students cannot travel to their own country for ERASMUS mobility.
Figure 5 – The importance of different motivations for undertaking credit mobility amongst UK students

(UK Higher Educational Unit & British Council, 2015: 18)
Figure 5 shows the responses to a survey that examined the “perceived importance of motivations for [credit] mobility during study” amongst a sample of UK students. What is significant here is that responses that included issues to do with strategising for success (for example, “potential to improve grade”, “prospects of working abroad” and “new contacts outside the UK”) were ranked as significantly less important than the seemingly more ‘personal’ reasons for going abroad. When exploring this issue further, figure 6 (below) shows the responses from UK students who were considering studying abroad prior to entering higher education (whole degree mobility):

Figure 6 – Factors in choosing a study abroad destination for credit mobile UK students

![Bar chart showing factors in choosing a study abroad destination](image)

(British Council, 2015: 14)

When examining the range of factors that influence the choice of destination for UK students, we can see that, again, seemingly more personal aspirations for travel are more significant than, for example, “tuition fees [being] cheaper than in the UK”, or “it hav[ing] world class universities”. Taken together then, Figures 5 & 6 present a view that, whilst policy initiatives stress the importance of mobility for academic and career development, students, it might seem, have more personal ambitions and aspirations for going abroad. But Figures 5 & 6 also highlight a wider issue when
exploring student motivations for studying abroad – namely, that these quantitative statistics, on their own, do not allow for a comprehensive understanding of the mindset and thinking of these students and their motivations and aspirations for studying or working abroad. There remains then a particular need for qualitative approach to explore the significance of the main motivations demonstrated in Figures 5 & 6. By listening to the in-depth narratives of students, we can, perhaps, gain a fuller understanding of the rationales behind their choices and decisions. This study is an attempt to fill this gap.

(1.7) Chapter Summary
This chapter started by exploring the way in which travel and education has undergone significant change in the era of internationalisation. International student mobility, I demonstrated, is an integral component of the internationalisation of current higher education. Whilst briefly outlining some of the studies that have provided a foundation for understanding international student mobility, I argued that there is a gap in this research area that focusses on the motivations and aspirations of UK credit mobile students. In the policy focussed sections of this chapter, I analysed some of the ways in which student mobility (and credit mobility in particular) is framed through different motivations by different groups of actors. In particular, I demonstrated the ways in which mobility has been increasingly seen as an activity to not only secure a valuable revenue streams for governments and HEIs, but one which also equips young people with the skills needed for the supposedly ‘knowledge based economies’. Towards the end of this debate, I began to analyse whether student motivations can be seen as congruent with some of the policy rationales put forward by policy makers, national governments and HEIs. However, this initial discussion into student motivations has left this introductory chapter asking further questions about the relationship between ‘strategy’ and ‘personal experience’. In other words, do these students go abroad as part of a ‘strategy for future success’, or, are their motivations framed by wider personal ambitions (such as independent travel, a sense of adventure, etc). Indeed, are these concepts related in any way? And in what ways can we perhaps begin to understand not only motivations for travel, but also the significance of the experiences of students when they spend a period abroad as part of their domestic degree? These questions provide the context for the next chapter.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

(2.1) Introduction
The previous chapter introduced international student mobility from a policy perspective. It discussed the ways in which the government and higher education institutions use student mobility to foster, nurture and develop their ‘stake’ in a growing global market. Whilst these debates are important, there remains a need for a deeper sociological insight into issues that surround student mobility – for example, how can we, sociologically, understand the types of students who go abroad to work or study? What are their motivations and aspirations for studying overseas? How can we understand the significance of experiences they gain whilst abroad? And what effect, if any, does studying and/or working have on students when returning to the UK? These questions set the focus and structure for this literature review.

The chapter opens with a discussion of whether student mobility can be seen as a form of strategy in order to position for success upon return. This leads into a discussion of whether mobility, in connection to the strategy theme, should be considered a socially classed activity. The discussion then turns to exploring another significant motivation for mobility found in previous studies: study abroad as an adventure. Within this section, I show how adventures abroad can still be seen as a form of ‘strategy’ in which they possess both personal and strategic value. This links into a wider discussion of how Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts of cultural capital and habitus can be seen as playing a crucial role in shaping desires to have adventures though student mobility. The focus of the chapter then turns to examining the experiences gained whilst studying or working abroad through analysing how a sense of adventure is established. This discussion, drawing on John Urry’s (2002) concept of the ‘tourist gaze’, outlines how and why various experiences gained in another country play an integral role in the enjoyment of student mobility. In the third section of the chapter, I explore the impact a period spend studying or working abroad might have on a student’s life. In this section, I analyse the literature on whether student mobility can change the way in which students think about their identity. I firstly examine whether time spent in Europe can lead to feelings of ‘European solidarity’. I then explore, through the work of Hannerz (1996) and Bauman (1998), whether student mobility can, firstly, develop a ‘cosmopolitan’
perspective or outlook in young people and, secondly, whether mobility inculcates a further taste for travel. This discussion explores a (possible) growing trend in which people seek to integrate travel into their lives in pursuit of a mobile lifestyle.

(2.2) Mobility as strategy
Recently, a significant body of work that focuses on UK students who choose to study abroad has begun to emerge. Whilst, as King et al. (2010: 46) argue, mobile students have ‘…almost [been] a blind-spot on the research map of social sciences’, there has been an increase in research on the significance of these young people in terms of their biographies, experiences, and aspirations. Researchers who have focussed exclusively on UK students have begun to explore these questions. King et al. (2010) and Findlay and King (2010), for example, have argued that motivations for studying abroad, for UK students, incorporate a number of issues – the two most important of which centre on ‘attending a world class university’ and, secondly, having a ‘unique adventure’. Ewa Krzaklewska (2008: 95-96) has found similar student motivations through her study of European ERASMUS students. She argues that motivations to study abroad can be split between the ‘experimental dimension’ and the ‘career dimension’. For Krzaklewska (2008), cultural and personal motivations constitute the former (i.e. to learn about new cultures, to have new experiences, to have fun, to have a break from the usual surroundings). The career dimension, by contrast, includes motivations such as improving marks/results upon returning home, through to developing academic knowledge, and international openness towards other cultures (which can be considered as key skills for future career opportunities). King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), too, have argued that mobile students’ motivations often centre on issues surrounding the quest to enjoy oneself ‘in the moment’, yet also collect valuable experiences that are perceived to be beneficial for the future. They argue:

‘…as regards both their motivations for studying abroad and the value retrospectively seen as accruing from YA (year abroad) study, three key benefits stand out: linguistic improvement, the cultural experience of living in another country, and general personal development. Career prospects are also seen as having been improved by the YA’

(King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003: 246)
The studies discussed here, that have focussed on mobile European students (and significantly British students in many cases), present similar findings on the two primary motivations – ‘attending a world class university’ and/or ‘developing professional competencies’ can be seen as a form of strategy. It is a strategy because it highlights how certain choices are made by these students to secure some form of advantage upon return. For example, this could be a means to achieving distinction when entering the labour market or seeking to secure the ‘best’ opportunities available upon exit from higher education. Students who gain mobility experience can, it might be argued, package their acquired skills into a convincing narrative when seeking employment. Mobility experiences, in this sense, serve the interests of the student; both in terms of their value to the labour market, which is often seen as becoming more internationalised (Archer and Davison, 2008, Fielden et al., 2007), but also the individual student’s professional future.

These ideas surrounding ‘strategies’ to accumulate new competencies through studying or working abroad can be framed through Brown and Hesketh’s (2004) concepts of ‘personal capital’ within an ‘economy of experience’. They argue that students entering employment (specifically those aspiring for the managerial professions) can no longer use their credentials to secure the ‘best’ jobs. Instead, the character and qualities of a person, not just their skills, is viewed as an important factor in the decision-making process of whether a candidate is suitable for the company – ‘…the self is a key economic resource, ‘who you are’ matters as much as ‘what you know’ in the market for managerial and professional work’ (pp. 35). Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue that employers have not completely abandoned an emphasis on the need for formal qualifications, or ‘hard currencies’ as they call them. However, the need for extra-curricular activities, charisma, and interpersonal skills (what they call ‘soft currencies’) has come to be seen by employers as crucially important in the recruitment process. Brown and Hesketh (2004: 36) argue that this change in recruitment is not as simple as suggesting that hard currencies plus soft currencies equals success. Instead, candidates have to package their currencies into a ‘narrative of employability’ – ‘…the self has to be packaged as a life story full of productive promise’ (pp. 36).

When focussing exclusively on students who travel from the East to the West for education, previous research highlights the various ‘strategies’ young people
engage in to secure both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ currencies. Waters’ (2006) study of Hong Kong students, who chose to study in Canada, demonstrates a clear correlation between mobility, familial expectation, and labour market entry. She argues that economic restructuring in the late 1990’s within Hong Kong led to considerable unemployment where people could not rely on successful businesses or financial assets as a way of protecting their middle-class status. Instead, ‘social success’ became synonymous with ‘academic success’. As a result of this, Waters’ (2006) interviewees became more concerned with academic failure, with an increasing view that a degree awarded by any other national HEI (outside of the three high-status HEIs within Hong Kong) would not give them equal opportunity. Therefore ‘…overseas education offer[ed] an escape [original emphasis] - a way out of a highly competitive, highly stratified and unforgiving local education system and an easier academic route’ (Waters, 2006: 184). In Waters’ (2006) research, the majority of her participants went onto successful careers, and several were offered a job in Hong Kong prior to completing their degree. In this sense, the motivations and desires of these students can be viewed as a form of strategy to achieve distinction in competitive domestic labour markets. Similarly, Waters (2007) argues that many employers within Hong Kong have been educated overseas and are therefore likely to favour those who have also gained a Western educational experience. Therefore, there is some evidence that Hong Kong employers place significant value on studying abroad, which furthers its appearance as a desirable activity to students in order to strategise for success.

From the perspectives outlined in this section, students who undertake a period abroad could be viewed as a significant group of young people who, through their mobility, are both conscious and calculating of their futures in trying to position themselves for success upon exit from higher education. Wider debates within the sociology of education have examined a range of issues around positional advantage in education – that is, how people, consciously or unconsciously, use the educational system to gain positional advantage. Power et al. (2003), for example, have shown that middle-class families often make educational choices and decisions for their children that, in their mind, place their children in the ‘best’ position for their future lives. Studying abroad could therefore be viewed as an activity that is undertaken as part of a person’s quest to position themselves for future success. This is a key area that this study develops through analysing the extent to which
student motivations reflect this theme of ‘strategy’ for positional advantage – in other words, what type of futures do these young people envisage for themselves when discussing their motivations, aspirations and experiences of studying, or working abroad? Are they similar to the highly strategic aims and aspirations of Hong Kong students? Or are UK students’ motivations more aligned with other factors that some researchers (Waters and Brooks, 2010b, Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, Tsoukalas, 2008) have identified; notably having some form of an adventure? Before moving onto the significance of ‘adventure’, it is worth framing some of the above discussion around a more central theme of social class, which, by and large, dominates the (sociological) field of mobility studies.

(2.3) Studying/Working abroad – a middle-class activity?

When discussing young people who, through their actions, position themselves for success (Power, et al., 2003) or use the educational system for positional advantage (Waters, 2006), previous educational research has demonstrated that it is the middle-classes who possess the ability to ensure the reproduction of distinction. Waters’ (2006) research, introduced in the previous section, is a good example of the reproductive nature of securing advantage though the education system. She argues that, due to the expansion of higher education in Hong Kong, a process of ‘credential inflation’ made it difficult for young middle-class people to secure advantage. Therefore, pursuing an overseas degree in Canada offered a way of achieving distinction when returning to gain access to the ‘best’ jobs in the labour market. For this reason, these findings can be thought of as reproductive because they highlight a series of processes that reproduce class division in society - those students (and their families) with the financial and cultural resources to secure distinction abroad (through way of an, often, Western degree) could be viewed as reinforcing social class boundaries because an ‘internationally educated’ elite continue to gain access to the ‘best’ careers. However, whilst this example might be the case in Eastern countries, mobility studies focussing on European (and British students in particular) have also, on the whole, found that mobility tends to attract young people from higher socio-economic groups.

King et al.’s (2010) comprehensive study of UK (whole degree) student mobility found that students who chose to study abroad tended to come from middle-class backgrounds. They can be described as middle-class specifically because:
‘...those [students] who apply for university abroad are: academic high-performers, from the higher social-class backgrounds, disproportionately concentrated in private schools and have ‘mobility network’ connections abroad’ (King et al., 2010: 31). Similarly, Ballatore and Ferede’s (2013: 525) study of French, Italian and UK credit mobile students found that ‘...participation is Erasmus is skewed. Erasmus students are disproportionally more privileged (higher socio-economic status) than their sedentary counterparts and have a richer history of family and study travel’. Studies that focus on students who study abroad (either for the duration or part of their degree), like the two mentioned here, often make specific reference to how student mobility tends to be dominated by these ‘middle-class’ students.

It is worth discussing in this section though some of the arguments made by researchers who suggest that the correlation between class and (Western) mobility is exaggerated. David Cairns’ (2014) research, which focusses on young European people considering international mobility, has shown that the parental occupation backgrounds of these students is often varied. In his research, Cairns found no significant relationship between a student considering mobility and their parental occupation. In other words, students with skilled or professional parents were no more or less likely to consider studying abroad. Instead, he argued that young people considering mobility came from a variety of classed backgrounds. Similarly, Collins’ (2014: 53) research with English speaking young people, who chose to teach English in South Korea, has shown that these mobility decisions often tended to be made in relation to their immediate economic circumstances. Rather than being considered “expatriates” or “mobile professionals” (terms he argues presume a middle-class status), Collins has contended that their mobility was a response to their need to pay off, for example, student debt and not anything more strategic. These findings therefore challenge the notion that young people who become mobile have access to large amounts of economic capital to fund their travels. Whilst it is important to acknowledge these important areas of research, it should be noted that, drawing on King et al. (2010) and Ballatore and Ferede’s (2013) findings into credit mobile students, in addition to the body of work on whole degree students by Brooks and Waters (2009, 2010, 2011), Brooks et al. (2012) and Waters and Brooks (2010a, 2010b), there is a general consensus that mobile students tend to come from middle-class backgrounds. Whilst Collins (2014) focussed on young people’s international mobility, he was not examining students who studied (or worked abroad through a
university programme). Similarly, Cairns’ (2014) research, which focussed on prospective mobile students, also did not study students who had actually studied abroad. Furthermore, his arguments also related to geographical peripheral areas of Europe (Portugal, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland). Whilst still interesting, his findings might not reflect the backgrounds of students from the dominant sending and receiving countries of European student mobility, as we saw in the previous chapter.

If student mobility is therefore an activity that draws in large numbers of middle-class students, it is important to analyse it as an activity rooted in issues of social class. This means that a deeper investigation into how young people think about studying abroad, and the value that experience will give them, is an important area for further research. We have so far seen that mobility could be thought of as a strategic choice in striving for distinction. We have also now seen that young people who make strategic decisions (such as the decision to study abroad), by and large, come from higher socio-economic groups. It should also be noted here though that, even if mobile students are not specifically motivated by issues surrounding strategy, their mobility experience may nevertheless result in distinction upon their return.

Whilst issues surrounding social class dominate both whole degree and credit mobility research, it is also worth mentioning the concept of gender. To date, very little research has paid any attention to the gendered experiences of mobility and whether motivations and experiences abroad differ according to a young person’s gender. In the next chapter, I expand on using gender as a sampling variable for this research.

At the beginning of this literature review, I also outlined how previous research has highlighted the increasing importance of analysing student mobility as an opportunity for young people to create a sense of adventure in their lives. I now turn to examine, in more depth, this important motivation and its relationship to ‘strategy’. In addition to this discussion, I also outline how the theme of adventure can be thought of as a concept that also has deep roots in social class.

(2.4) The Grand Adventure

Somewhat different from the emphasis on strategising, discussed previously, the idea that young people might move abroad to have a ‘unique adventure’ could be viewed as more hedonistic in its orientation. This quest of pleasure, as an end in
itself, might perhaps highlight a particular type of experience that young people, today, desire. Whilst the majority of the student mobility literature tends to focus on how young people gain professional competencies through their experiences, the body of sociological work conducted by Waters and Brooks (2010a 2010b), Brooks et al. (2012) and Waters et al. (2011) has developed our understanding of motivations for travel. Whilst the motivations of ‘strategy’ (the need to be strategic with one’s future) and ‘adventure’ (living in and for the moment) might, on first appearance, appear to contradict each other, the studies conducted by Waters and Brooks (2010a 2010b), Brooks et al. (2012) and Waters et al. (2011) demonstrates how international student mobility can fulfil both of these criteria, often simultaneously. Although their research focuses on students who studied abroad for the whole of their degree (whole-degree mobility) and not students who study abroad as part of their degree (credit mobility), their findings nevertheless play an important role in understanding motivations for travel (particularly for UK students). In their research with students who were either completing, or who had completed, their degrees abroad, Waters and Brooks (2010a: 226) argue:

‘…these individuals displayed very little by way of ‘strategic intent’ when it came to decision-making around overseas study. In fact, any sense that an overseas education would confer some ‘advantage’ (over and above a home-based qualification) was noticeably absent. Instead, for many interviewees, international education seemed to represent an active shunning of ‘life-planning’ and the responsibilities associated with employment. Going overseas offered opportunities for ‘excitement’, ‘glamour’ and ‘fun’ and a way of deferring the inevitable encroachment of a ‘career’.

The arguments made here resonate strongly with the theme of hedonism because Waters and Brooks’ (2010a) research demonstrates a “shunning of life planning”, instead opting to ‘live for the moment’. However, Waters and Brooks’ (2010a) do not completely neglect the idea of ‘strategy’ in their research. Instead, they go on to outline how, through undertaking an international education (often at world-ranking or prestigious universities), the students’ experiences will ultimately result in the production and reproduction of privilege as they move forward in their lives. These researchers therefore term their sample of young mobile people as ‘accidental
achievers’ – they are ‘accidental achievers’, primarily, because their motivations for studying abroad are not overtly strategic, yet the experiences that they accumulate through their time abroad will, no doubt, be of strategic value to them in the future.

The argument that Waters and Brooks (2010a) present above connects to a deeper discussion of adventure. The concept of an ‘adventure’, even if moving away from the concept of ‘strategy’, could still be explored as an activity that a particular type of people desire. Indeed, the notion of having an adventure abroad has historical connotations with the ‘The Grand Tour’. These ‘tours’ were established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to allow young men of nobility to travel to Other faraway lands in order to educate themselves in preparation for, often, diplomatic careers upon their return (Craik, 2003: 119). Gaining experiences of, for example, integrating with foreign Others, was seen as a means to achieve a rich cultural and educational experience at the same time (Smith, 2009: 35). The legacy left by these ‘Grand Tours’ then has perhaps established a particular type of ‘adventure’ to be had abroad; an adventure that places emphasis on gaining an in-depth depiction of what life is ‘really like’ in the country being visited. Eating local food abroad, but within the confines of a Hilton hotel, might, for example, be seen as inferior because there is little attempt to integrate or immerse oneself within that destination. Helene Snee’s (2014) research into young people’s ‘gap year’ experiences contributes to these types of debates. She argues that young people, who travel abroad as part of a gap year, view their type of travel as ‘good taste’. This taste, for a particular form of travel, she argues, stems from ‘…authentic, cosmopolitan experiences. A distance from tourism is required, and the connotations of inauthenticity associated with package holidays have resulted in more independent modes of travel becoming increasingly valued’ (Snee, 2014: 49). Snee’s argument here demonstrates that, although adventures can be viewed as a more individualised motivation for travel, the experiences accumulated through these adventures, nevertheless are often seen as a something that positions young people favourably going into the employment market. This is because ‘authentic’ travel is seen to develop skills in adaptation, immersion and often language skills in a way that is not possible to achieve through traditional tourism, such as a two-week holiday. Like the gap year travelling, studying or working abroad could be viewed by students as a ‘right’ way to travel; even, perhaps, an acceptable way to experience a new country. But in order to understand how experiences are perceived to be
acceptable or not acceptable requires us to analyse the ways in which value is attached to different activities (such as student mobility). Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘cultural capital’ and ‘habitus’ help to address these ideas.

(2.5) Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, and Mobility Capital

Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of ‘cultural capital’ can develop our understanding of how experiences abroad, pursued through an adventure, can translate into strategic value upon return. His concept originated from his research into the achievement and ability of school children. In neglecting the idea that academic success was due to natural aptitude, Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital focuses on how the accumulation of skills, competencies, and ways of thinking can be met by reward in terms of class status. For this reason, young people who have access to, and collect the ‘right’ type of cultural capital, acquire the skills and ways of thinking that are legitimated by the dominant social class (i.e. the middle-classes). Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital can exist in three states: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital refers to social characteristics that are acquired over time that, as its title suggests, become embodied in us. For example, the way we talk, what accent we have and the way we might verbally express our attitudes and opinions are all repeated actions that occur on a daily basis in our lives. But it is the repeated process of these things that leads to the embodiment of them, therefore shaping who we are and how we appear to others.

Cultural capital in its ‘objectified’ state refers to, for example, the material possessions we own or the way we might choose to decorate our home. These choices therefore give an indication to others about our sense of ‘taste’ which, as Bourdieu argues, is socially classed. Before analysing the last state of cultural capital (institutionalised cultural capital), it is worth exploring Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘cultural arbitrary’ and ‘symbolic violence’ as these are tied in closely to the idea of ‘taste’ as socially classed. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that no cultural work or activity is naturally superior or inferior to any other cultural work or activity. For example, there is no natural or rational reason why fine art is appreciated more than comic books. Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) argument that all culture is arbitrary therefore shows us that ‘taste’ is established though the particular practices of the middle-classes who have the power and ability to legitimise what should and should not be considered as ‘good taste’. These ideas are important for this research project
because they set up an investigation into how studying or working abroad might
come to be seen as ‘good taste’ in a way that other forms of travel might not.

If all culture is arbitrary, that is, there is no natural or rational reason why
some cultural activities/items are ‘better’ than others, symbolic violence, for Bourdieu
and Wacquant (1992), refers to the ways in which these distinctions are legitimised
by people in the social world. Using an example from the above discussion, some
people might argue that studying abroad is seen as superior compared to a two-
week beach holiday because the dominant social class have the power to legitimate
it as superior. Following on from this though, the power of the dominant class is so
strong in their practices of legitimation, that we often do not question why some
cultural works or activities are ‘better’. In other words, some people might see
student mobility as having more cultural and educational value compared to being a
‘holiday rep’ abroad, even if both activities may develop the same competences. The
ability of the dominant class to legitimate different forms of works and practices in
culture is therefore violently imposed on people, often unconsciously. That is why, for
Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), these processes are acts of symbolic violence.

The last state that cultural capital can exist in is through its ‘institutionalised’
form. This state refers to the various competences that we acquire from institutions –
for example, our academic credentials and qualifications might be seen as signifying
our competences and achievements in the educational system. These achievements
might then be used to assign categories of social class to different people – for
example, there might be an assumption that all people working towards a PhD are
middle-class (even though this may be far from the truth) because they are studying
for the highest academic qualification. Connecting back to the discussion on the
cultural arbitrary, it could even be suggested that ‘middle-class’ is simply a term that
is applied to PhD students because they are engaged in an activity that has
historically been legitimised by the dominant class. But, again, there is no natural
reason (i.e. the cultural arbitrary) why a PhD should be seen more (or less) middle-
class compared to other forms of professional or technical qualifications. The point
here then is that institutionalised forms of cultural capital are often used, just like the
other two forms of cultural capital, to form ideas about ‘who’ and ‘where’ we are in a
social class system. Cultural capital, in all of its forms, can therefore be viewed as a
concept that gives its bearer significant cultural competences, guiding and allowing
them to make the ‘right’ decisions in their life. But the concept of cultural capital is
also useful for understanding that the ability to do the ‘right’ things and make the ‘right’ choices is not always a conscious process. Instead, the accumulation of cultural capital is a process that is in continuous operation, yet, often silently working in the background for its bearer.

Whilst I have now explored some of the ideas behind Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, returning to Waters and Brooks’ (2010a) study of student mobility can help to explain the significance of the term ‘capital’ in the concept. As these researchers argue, the choice to study abroad is often made with no strategic aim. Instead, mobile students, they suggest, draw on more, seemingly, personal motivations to study abroad. And yet, as Waters and Brooks (2010a) outline, whilst the young people in their study gave more personal reasons to study abroad, such as undertaking a ‘grand adventure’, their decision to study abroad represented a form of cultural capital because it was something in that they could convert into economic capital upon their return (much like Waters’ (2006) study of Hong Kong students). For example, gaining access to the ‘best’ types of jobs and careers were common themes within their data. We can therefore see that, whilst their decision to study abroad (and experiences gained abroad) might not be taken as a singular indicator of their success, their mobility experience feeds into a wider collection of cultural competencies that are developed through the biographies of these students; biographies that are ‘in tune’ with the lifestyles of the middle-classes – i.e. access to the ‘best’ universities (and therefore the ‘best’ education available), the development of an international perspective and inter-cultural skills.

However, even if students are not directly pursuing student mobility for positional gain in the labour market, the very act of having a ‘grand adventure’ in a foreign country might still position them for advantage. This is because, through studying or working abroad, students might be seen as collecting cultural capital in the forms of new international perspectives and inter-cultural competencies. It could be conjecturally argued these competencies are valued and legitimised by the middle-classes. Returning to the ideas around the ‘Grand Tour’ are applicable here. Travel to Other countries, encountering foreign Others, often for an extended period of time, highlighted how cultural experiences abroad were seen to be educational (Smith, 2009: 35). The legacy of this then is that to gain a ‘culturally educated’ experience is an activity that continues to be legitimised by the middle-classes. Building on the issues that surround cultural capital is therefore important because,
as it appears, the concept plays an integral role in our theoretical understanding of student mobility.

Other researchers, who have focussed on international student mobility, have also drawn on Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital to theorise different aspects of student mobility. Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002), case study of ERASMUS students uses the concept to understand motivations for studying abroad, but from a different perspective than that of Waters and Brooks (2010a). Murphy-Lejeune (2002) explores how the young people in her study drew on their cultural capital (acquired before mobility) to guide their decision to study abroad. Rather than using the term cultural capital though, she discusses the concept of ‘mobility capital’ to discuss the biographies (before travelling for their education) of her research participants. Mobility capital, she argues, is comprised of four key elements: (1) family and personal history (for example, parental views towards mobility and whether there was a history of migration within the family), (2) previous experience of mobility, (3) the first experience of adaptation (when a young person travelled abroad for the first time), and (4) personality features (such as openness to change, desires to try new things, etc.). Whilst the components of mobility capital above could be viewed more generally as a guise for Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital, the components nevertheless demonstrate the various ways they might interact with each other in forming motivations and dispositions for mobility. Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) work into this area, whilst beneficial, still leaves certain questions unanswered in this area of research. I now address how my study will fill some of these gaps.

Firstly, my research project is the first to analyse the ‘mobility capital’ in relation to UK credit mobile students exclusively. The study can therefore explore which components, if any, are most significant for UK students. Furthermore, the study explores the range of ‘cultural competencies’, inherent within cultural or mobility capital, that the students possess prior to their period abroad as part of their degree. By extension, and going back to Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) mobility capital components, this study will explore the extent to which family, universities, and friendship networks play an important role in shaping desires for mobility. Whilst existing studies of international student mobility tap into these areas, there remains a need for deeper analysis of exactly who undertakes these study/work abroad programmes, their motivations and aspirations for doing so, and the experiences they accumulate. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, the vast majority of
previous studies have focussed exclusively on whole degree students (students who travel abroad for the whole of their degree). By contrast, these questions, ideas and theories, that surround cultural capital in relation to student mobility, can now be explored through UK credit mobile students.

(2.5.1) Habitus
Closely related to Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital is his discussion of, what he terms, ‘habitus’. If cultural capital refers to the various cultural competencies that a person can accumulate and draw on throughout their life to achieve distinction or advantage, habitus refers to the ways people analyse, think about, and make decisions in their life. A person’s habitus can be therefore be understood as a filter in which various experiences pass through and then form together to establish how a person thinks about, and relates to, the social world. As Pierre Bourdieu (1989: 18) argues:

‘…the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world’.

This means that habitus does not solely represent how a person subjectively understands the social world. Instead, habitus refers to the various ways in which people’s subjective understanding of the social world is influenced by social forces operating throughout society. In other words, habitus helps us make sense of how people’s agency is shaped by social structures and vice versa. Various sociologists of education have used the concept of habitus to understand, for example, people’s experiences of education. Diane Reay et al. (2009) have used the concept to understand the differing (classed) experiences of young people attending elite UK universities. They suggest that, for young middle-class people attending an elite university, there is a relative familiarity in the ‘field’ of higher education. For middle-class young people, who attend elite universities, their anticipations and experiences are largely congruent with their habitus – that is to say, they feel like they fit in because their experiences at an elite university are closely aligned with their subjective orientation towards ‘how things are’ in the social world. Therefore, for Reay et al. (2009), such choices and experiences, by these young middle-class
people, can be characterised as an ‘in-habitus’ experiences. By contrast, as Reay et al. (2009) suggest, young working-class people’s experiences of attending elite universities are significantly different. They maintain that, for this group, a period of adjustment and adaptation is needed in order to ‘navigate the field’. The feeling of being like a ‘fish out of water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) was common for working-class students in their study. This is because, referring back to the discussion above, these students were having to internalise their experiences (and therefore make sense of them) through their habitus that was not congruent with the social conditions in which they found themselves. Having to navigate the ‘field’ of an elite university was difficult when the objective conditions in which they were living differed markedly from the ways of thinking and relating to the social world (their habitus) accumulated prior to this turning point in their lives.

Building further on the concept of habitus, Hodkinson (2008a) and Hodkinson et al.’s (2012) concepts of ‘routines’ and ‘turning points’, within a young person’s ‘horizons for action’, provide a useful approach for understanding the way young people might ‘make sense’ of studying abroad. Hodkinson (2008a: 4) argues that ‘…what we can see is limited by the position we stand in, and the horizons that are visible from that position’. Here, then, Hodkinson is arguing for an approach to understand ‘choice’ from a similar position to Bourdieu. This is because the idea that what a young person can (metaphorically) ‘see’ is often determined by the social position in which they stand. For some young people then, their choices may represent ‘routines’ – that is, choices that are made that fit the narrative or biography, to date, of that young person. This is very similar to what Reay et al. (2009) would term ‘in-habitus’ decisions/choices. For others though, new opportunities, presented at various periods in their lives might represent a ‘turning point’ – that is, choices that would have, ordinarily, seemed outside of a young person’s life-path.

Applying Hodkinson’s ideas to issues surrounding student mobility is extremely useful, not least because they represent a lens through which to explore the nature of the choices students entering credit mobility programmes make. Are students who undertake mobility as part of their degree making ‘routine’ choices? Or does the opportunity to study in a different country present a ‘turning point’ for all, some, or none of these young people? Furthermore, an analysis of ‘choice’ through ‘horizons for action’ will allow a deeper understanding of Bourdieu’s (1989) concept of habitus. To date, only Brooks and Waters (2010) have developed the concept of
‘habitus’ to frame and understand UK student motivations for studying abroad, arguing that, for whole-degree students, international travel as part of a degree is considered normal (or a ‘routine’ in Hodkinson’s (2008a) terminology). This means, then, that dispositions to travel, in search of education, could be considered as ‘in-habitus’ decisions (Reay et al., 2009). However, a deeper analysis of this phenomenon is needed, particularly for UK credit mobile students, where our knowledge is limited. Furthermore, deeper questions persist in these debates: To what extent is travel normalised by this group of young people? How do they articulate and discuss their motivations, in relation to their habitus? – that is, how do they view their motivations and aspirations for studying abroad in relation to the various ways they understand and make sense of the social world? And, perhaps, most importantly, if dispositions for international travel exist amongst this sample of credit mobile students, where do these dispositions originate from in a student’s life? The answers to these questions will therefore not only improve our understanding of international student mobility, but also develop, on a more theoretical level, how young people’s habituses are shaped and changed by new opportunities available to them (such as the chance to study abroad).

(2.6) Understanding Experiences on a Grand Adventure
Earlier in the chapter, I used Waters and Brooks’ (2010a) research to provide a background for the theme of a ‘grand adventure’. ‘Adventures’ are, I argued, highly significant aspects of student mobility that warrant further investigation (specifically in relation to UK credit mobile students, where no research currently exists). However, in turning our focus away from motivations for study abroad, and instead thinking about experiences gained whilst abroad, the theme of ‘adventure’ takes on a new significance. In addition to Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) pioneering study of credit mobile students, Tsoukalas’ (2008) ethnographic research with ERASMUS students is one of the few studies, to date, to analyse the ‘adventures’ of students who study abroad in different European countries. Significantly, through his observations, he argues that the ‘…Erasmus period appears to involve unusual levels of license and indulgence and often a touch of emancipation as well…the students party and travel a lot and also do a number of other things that are out of the ordinary’ (Tsoukalas, 2008: 134). For this reason, Tsoukalas uses the term “intensive” to describe the experiences of students when studying abroad. Whilst Tsoukalas’ (2008) study is
important for understanding the types of experiences young people gain on their semester/year abroad, his research focuses on understanding the different friendship formations of ERASMUS students (a significant idea that I turn to shortly). However, this still represents a consistent omission from previous studies of international student mobility – whilst many studies outline and convey the significance of having a ‘grand adventure’, to date, no study has attempted to specifically outline how that adventure is created. For example, what are the processes involved in creating an ‘adventure’? In order to answer this question, a deeper insight is needed in order to understand what constitutes an ‘adventure’ for young people either studying or working abroad.

Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) research into European students who travel abroad as part of their degree (credit mobility) stresses the importance of ‘adventure’ in imagining life abroad. She argues, drawing on her empirical findings, that life abroad invokes “self-discovery”, where students can, for a limited time, indulge in gaining new experiences not available in their day-to-day lives ‘back home’. Similar to Krzaklewska’s (2008, 2012) finding of ‘experimentalism’ amongst credit mobile students, the quest for ‘self-discovery’ and ‘experimenting’ is bound up within the notion of ‘adventure’. As Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 99) argues: ‘…for some [students], adventure is like a game. It means enjoying the revelation of cultural differences. Travellers, in a way, anticipate encounters with the unexpected and the unknown’. Examining the specific ways though which different types of experiences when abroad constitute “encounters with unexpected and unknown” allows for a deeper understanding of the ‘grand adventure’.

To date, John Urry’s (2002) concept of the ‘tourist gaze’ is the most comprehensive framework for understanding how people make sense of the various experiences they encounter whilst abroad. Urry (2002) argues that when we go abroad, we constantly reflect on the significance of our new surroundings and compare them to our lives ‘back home’. This process, for Urry (2002: 1), establishes a gaze because, when we go abroad, we look and listen with “interest and curiosity”. Through gazing, people engage with their destination ‘…with a much greater sensitivity to visual elements…than normally found in everyday life [at home]’ (Urry, 2002: 3). Whilst using this concept might imply that students, who study abroad, are tourists (in the holiday-making sense), such a view would miss the manner in which the concept might be advantageous for analysing how ‘grand adventures’ are formed
and created. This is because the concept of the tourist gaze highlights the ways in which people experience being abroad and the impact these have on their ability to reflect on the significance of their experiences. As Urry argues, ‘…when we ‘go away’ we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in ways we appreciate, or at least we anticipate that it will do so’ (Urry, 2002: 1). The concept may also help in addressing the ways credit mobile students create and sustain their adventure, whilst expanding upon Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) findings that such students highlight a need to separate from the familiar or mundane and to ‘experience’, ‘discover’, or ‘experiment’ with a new setting or culture. In addition, the tourist gaze highlights how people’s ‘experiences’ take on new significances and meanings when abroad because ‘the abroad’ allows people to look at things with a mix of curiosity and inquisitiveness. This definition starts to address how the theme of ‘adventure’ is significant for studies of student mobility. Whilst ‘tourism’ is one ‘…manifestation of how work and leisure are organised as separate and regulated spheres of social practise’ (Urry, 2002: 2), credit mobility, it could be argued, is actually an activity where work and leisure spheres coexist. In this sense, the type of tourism that mobile students engage in, whilst similar to that of the holidaymaker, could be seen as a sort of vocational tourism where students create their adventure whilst simultaneously learning and working within the unfamiliar.

Returning to Krzaklewska’s (2008) study of a sample of European ERASMUS students, she suggests, in her discussion of findings, that ‘…what was striking was the notion of novelty, new stimulus, otherness or change: students wanted to meet new people, live in a foreign country, and see a different educational system’ (pp.90). This is significant because Krzaklewska’s argument demonstrates the various ways in which ‘being abroad’ can achieve this stimulus; a sense of ‘adventure’ that students, it appears, deeply covet. Similarly, Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 87) refers to credit mobile students as “attracted to difference” and argues that ‘…students expect the stay to be an experience, and they repeat the same words over and over again in their statement objectives: ‘to experiment’, ‘experience’, ‘new’, or ‘other’…’discovery’, ‘to discover’, ‘different’. Whilst studying abroad inevitably creates new experiences (Krzaklewska, 2008), it is important to understand that the act of ‘being abroad’ could heighten students’ sense of the things they experience, compared to back home. As Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 88) argues, these experiences are perceived to be ‘adventurous’ specifically because the routine or familiar is
viewed as restrictive for ‘experimenting’, ‘experiencing’, discovering, and so on. And, as we have seen earlier, the concept of the tourist gaze is a particularly good theoretical approach for understanding the distinctions between the routine and the unfamiliar.

(2.6.1) Students and the Tourist Gaze

The nature of having an adventure or gaining new ‘experiences’ may imply that the distinction between ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ is separated by difference. We have seen in the previous section, with particular reference to Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) findings, that many students crave new and novel experiences. Urry (2002: 13) argues one aspect of the tourist gaze includes doing familiar things in an unfamiliar context:

These ‘…all have particular significance if they take place against a distinctive visual backcloth. The visual gaze renders extraordinary, activities that otherwise would be mundane and everyday’. This is not to say though that credit mobile students indulge in (leisure) activities they would not necessarily do whilst ‘back home’. Instead, students perhaps view their adventure by doing ‘usual’ things, but against a “distinctive visual backcloth” (Urry, 2002: 13). In this sense, it could be the change in setting/culture that is seen to create and sustain the adventure. But when returning to empirical investigations of student mobility, researchers have uncovered interesting findings in terms of desires for ‘difference’. Waters and Brooks’ (2010b) study of 85 students, consisting of those who had either studied abroad (whole-degree mobility) or sixth-formers who were considering study abroad, found an interesting contradiction. They suggest that although their interviewees generally expressed a desire to experience ‘difference’, they also placed parameters and set clear limits as to what they would consider as acceptable difference.

A number of empirical research studies with mobile students can help to understand the types of experiences mobile students acquire whilst abroad, whilst further developing the discussion of ‘difference’. Tsouklas’ (2008) ethnographic study of the “life and times” of ERASMUS students in two European cities, like Waters and Brooks’ (2010b) study, demonstrates a lack of integration between international and local students. He argues that one possible reason for this is the way in which each group (local/national students and ERASMUS students) live different lives: for local students, ‘…their recreational life is firmly embedded in the standardized patterns of work and leisure typical of their society and does not exhibit the novelty and intensity
characteristic of the Erasmus students’ (Tsouklas, 2008: 140). One explanation for the lack of integration between local and mobile students might be found in language barriers. However, Waters and Brooks (2010b) found some evidence of a lack of integration between UK whole-degree students who have travelled to North America, Europe, Australia, and South Africa. The literature therefore paints a picture that, whilst a significant number of both whole-degree and credit mobile students want to experience a foreign culture to some extent, they do not want to ‘go native’ within it (although a small minority do – see Waters and Brooks, 2010b). These points also highlight wider sociological questions around the formations of friendships, particularly amongst young people today. If, as previously outlined through Tsouklas’ (2008) research, local (domestic) students’ lives are characterised by daily routines within their home country, it is largely unsurprising that newly arrived foreign students would want to befriend each other. These ideas chime with the arguments suggested by Graham Allan (1996) in his sociological work into friendships. He suggests that friendships between people are often built on the concept of similarity. Friendships, he argues, come to fruition when there is a sense of “equality” between people in the circumstances they find themselves. Therefore, building relationships with others in the same situation or circumstance (i.e. those also arriving in a foreign country) could perhaps significantly minimise the risk of isolation, emotional distance or, at worst, loneliness (see Tang et al., 2009: 23). This project therefore explores not only the extent to which friendships are formed between study abroad students (if at all), but also the specific reasons why these friendships are formed and under what circumstances.

The ideas discussed throughout this section raise key questions for this research regarding the extent to which integration with the host country (i.e. integration with the local culture its people) can be considered as an important experience in establishing the ‘grand adventure’. This is an important question for this project because, if experiencing and integrating with ‘difference’ is not a strong motivation for mobility, then what is the actual relevance for going abroad? To phrase this another way, what is the significance of going abroad to create an adventure if there is, as presented in this section, little integration between domestic and international students? The evidence from previous research presented in the above discussion therefore presents a paradox. Whilst credit mobility (and whole-degree mobility) studies often find students expressing a clear desire to experience a
new culture, it appears that \textit{integration} with the local might not be a vital component for that experience. This paradox is what could distinguish mobile students as \textit{tourists} from \textit{expatriates} through the idea that a lack of integration with the local, whilst befriending other foreign visitors maintains their identity as outsiders, constantly ‘looking in’ on the host culture. As Tsouklas (2008: 145) forthrightly suggests, ‘…Erasmus students primarily exercise their skills in international travelling or international partying…and not so much their skills in in intercultural learning’. Larissa Wood’s (2012) research with ERASMUS students, too, asks this question. Drawing on her data, she suggests, ‘…merely living and studying in a different country, or even partying, travelling and making friends with other international students, does not automatically determine someone an ‘active European citizen” (Wood, 2012: 132). In her argument here, Wood is providing two ways to think about mobile students - on the one hand, these students can be thought of as important migrants who help to develop and foster relations between countries. This was a similar view to the policy makers we saw in the previous chapter. But, on the other hand, student mobility develops little more than tourism because the students’ experiences are based on personal ambitions that include meeting other mobile students, travelling and partying. These points also bring us back to a key question raised earlier in this literature review regarding ‘acceptable forms of travel’. This is because these conflicting traveller identities raise further questions around the distinction between ‘cultural educated travellers’ (i.e. ‘The Grand Tour’) and standardised, mass tourists. This study therefore builds on whether it is integration with a foreign culture that is perceived to bring novelty/excitement, or, instead, the physical act of going and being abroad, gazing as an outsider with other outsiders. By focussing on this (apparent) dualism, the study can also explore a deeper question by examining what constitutes an ‘international experience’ for these UK students who choose to study or work abroad as part of their degree.

\section{(2.7) (Academic) Learning Experiences Abroad}

Whilst I have now discussed the important research that focuses on the experiences of students who study abroad as part of their degree, there remain wider questions surrounding the academic experiences of these students. To date, there is no comprehensive research that specifically examines the learning experiences of credit
mobile students. This forms an important part of this project’s focus because, as King et al. (2010) suggest, through their research with UK mobile students, many students state an important motivation to study abroad is the opportunity to experience a new academic or ‘learning’ culture. Although this might be an important motivation, it does pose the question of whether the academic learning component of their mobility is significant during and after mobility. Whilst there is little information on this area of mobility, returning to Tsouklas’ (2008) research of ERASMUS students is beneficial. In his discussion of the distinction between mobile and local students, he suggests:

‘...the life of local students is much less special, both at school and at home. The various activities they partake of at school are usually of an ordinary kind – repetitive lectures, anonymous classmates, standard assignments – and do not generate any strong personal experiences’

(Tsouklas, 2008:40)

Whilst it may be imprudent to assert that local students’ experiences do “not generate any strong personal experiences”, his argument might make sense when local students are juxtaposed against mobile students. Tsouklas’ argument highlights some of the ideas raised in the previous section that focussed on how being abroad can make ‘normal experiences’ seem ‘out-of-the-ordinary’. In this sense, the concept of ‘gazing’ may not just be restricted to friendships and integration with others whilst abroad. Instead, it might be possible that the tourist gaze can be extended to within the academic sphere. This is because the concept might help to understand the novelty attached to new surroundings and how all experiences (including academic learning) can be incorporated into a gaze. This is a key area that the study develops though the narratives of the participating students.

(2.8) Post-Mobility – Identity Politics

Within this literature review, I have now explored the significant bodies of work that have focussed on, firstly, motivations and dispositions for educational travel and, secondly, the experiences of these students who choose to study abroad. The final section of this literature review focuses on the important contributions of work that has explored how a period spent abroad can impact a student’s life. However, the
notion of ‘impact’ is multifaceted – for example, ‘impact’ can be explored through the students’ transitions back to studying in their UK university or their (perceived) transitions into the labour market, upon exit from higher education. Indeed, some researchers (Bracht et al., 2006, Deakin, 2012, 2013) have examined the professional skills that students can acquire through a period abroad. Deakin (2013), for example, has argued that employers often value student mobility. In addition to the competences that students develop over the course of their travel, this, she argues, positions them favourably when seeking employment after university.

However, from another perspective, ‘impact’ can be examined through a deeper sociological lens by exploring how a period spent abroad impacts the identities of these students – that is, an exploration of the ways in which these students think about their own lives through, for example, their ambitions, desires, even dreams for their futures. By placing emphasis on identity construction, themes of employment, future-plans and ambitions can still be discussed. But these discussions can take place within a wider view of identity through exploring the (possible) ways a period abroad can make these students think differently about the social world and their place within it.

One of these ‘identity frameworks’ can be seen through the work of Van Mol (2012), Ambrosi (2012) and Mitchell (2012, 2015). Connected to a discussion in the previous policy chapter, these researchers have explored impacts on identity through examining whether participation in ERASMUS can foster and develop greater identification with the European Union. Van Mol (2012) for example has argued that European mobility schemes help to deepen students’ feelings towards being ‘European’. He argues: ‘…since the context they (students) live in abroad is international, they encounter people from different countries, and all increase their supranational feelings’ (Van Mol, 2012: 172). From this perspective then, simply living abroad with other European students can lead to feeling more connected with Europe and even, perhaps, a view that there is something, metaphorically, ‘above’ their nationality of origin. Other researchers though, particularly when focussing on British students, have been more reserved in these types of claims. Ambrosi’s (2012) research with European students, like Van Mol’s (2012) research, presents a view that mobility can foster solidarity with Europe. However, when discussing British students specifically, he suggests that they (British students) ‘…have a more complex vision of what their identities might be’ (Ambrosi, 2012: 156). Ambrosi
argues that geography plays an important role in this “complex vision” because, whilst British students might discuss their perceived ‘connectedness’ to Europe through mobility, they often distinguish between “Britain” and “the continent” within their narratives. The result of this, Ambrosi argues, is that, whilst British students will often articulate their sense of connection with Europe, this is always done in relation to a division between Britain and ‘the continent’; a division that highlights a distinction of “us” and “Others”. Other researchers though, such as Mitchell (2012, 2015), have argued that studies that focus on European identity construction are often limited by the inclusion of British students whose ‘…attitudes towards Europe are often well outside of the norm’ (Mitchell, 2012: 496). This view, from Mitchell, highlights a particular view that British students are often different in how they express themselves in relation to their inter/national identities. This also articulates with wider discourses of ‘euro-scepticism’ that have often been applied to British people.

Sigalas’ (2010) study of ‘identity changes’ between incoming and outgoing ERASMUS students can be seen to substantiate Mitchell’s assertion of British ‘euro-scepticism’. Interestingly, his sample of outgoing students was made up of 161 students from nine British universities. Through his findings, he suggests that, whilst there was some evidence that ‘…increased socializing with other Europeans fosters a European identity…its impact [was] modest’ (ibid.). Sigalas’ (2010: 261) overall assessment was that ‘…the ERASMUS experience did not strengthen most students’ European identity over time’. From this perspective then, a period spent abroad may have little impact on the students’ sense of feeling, or being, European. This perhaps demonstrates that policy initiatives for mobility have made little impact in this area.

In drawing the findings of these (largely quantitative) studies together then (but with a particular focus on Ambrosi’s (2012) qualitative data) we could view British students as young people who, through their mobility, might often develop feelings towards being more ‘European’. But, simultaneously, there remain some euro-sceptic traits that linger in the backgrounds of their narratives that highlight a sense of difference towards other Europeans. Furthering the debate around identification and nationality, King and Ruiz-Gelices’ (2003) study of British students presents other areas of enquiry. In their conclusion, they suggest:

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5 It is important to note here though that the sample did not include only British nationals.
‘…YA (year abroad) graduates have a greater knowledge of, and interest in, European affairs than their non-YA counterparts. Moreover, they are somewhat more favourably inclined towards European integration, and a majority sees themselves as ‘belonging to a European cultural space. This predisposes them to travel more frequently to Europe for a variety of purposes (visit friends, business, holidays, etc.) than the non-YA sample’.

(King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003: 246)

King and Ruiz-Gelices’ view here, though, does require some clarification of whether European integration and European identity equate to the same thing. For example, whilst studying and living in a European country for an extended time might develop “greater knowledge of, and interest in, European affairs” and “predispose them to travel more frequently to Europe”, this does not necessarily mean that young British people might feel more European as a result of their mobility experience. This is therefore an area in which this study develops because exploring the parameters of being British and/or European will help to examine whether (if at all) students can develop supranational feelings at the expense of feeling British. However, King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 246) further suggest that their research findings ‘…are only indicative and gloss over a number of complexities and alternative outcomes relating to socialisation patterns before and during the YA (year abroad), and the possibility of dual or multiple identities’. An exploration of these (possible) multiple and/or dual identities, through this qualitative research, can therefore contribute new perspectives to this debate. Furthermore, whilst the findings of these studies help to explore (inter)nationalised identities, they often lack a focus on students who study outside of ERASMUS (and therefore European countries). This study specifically explores the (possible) identity changes of young people who study in other parts of the world, too. From this angle, the study can contribute towards a deeper understanding of the points raised in this section.

(2.9) Cosmopolitan Identities
An analysis of (possible) international identities, as I have outlined above, will contribute to our understanding of the political discourses that attempt to shape the way students identify with particular political ideologies (for example, feeling more
connected to the European Union as an EU citizen). Whilst examining how these political discourses might influence young mobile people, there remains another way to explore possible identity changes though these students’ experiences – that of the global, or even ‘cosmopolitan’ self. By exploring the concept of identity from this perspective, we can perhaps develop a greater insight into the types of identities international travel can create in young people’s views towards their future opportunities and future lives more generally.

Sociological inquiry into ‘globalisation’ is ubiquitous within the discipline today. Globalists, such as Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990, 1991) argue that globalisation has rapidly altered the way in which we not only live our lives, but also think about our choices, decisions, and futures. Indeed, for these authors, the processes involved with globalisation have established a sense of interconnectedness of various social relations across the globe. For this reason, globalisation has become a structuring feature of modern societies, redefining the ways in which people live their lives. If, as Beck and Giddens argue, there is an increasing emphasis on thinking about our lives ‘globally’, student mobility, it could be argued, is an activity that introduces students to these systems of thought. Some researchers have therefore started to analyse how these globalising processes have impacted the ways in which we think about the social world and our place within it. This growing body of literature has explored how our subjectivities (the things we think, feel, and reflect on) are shaped by the objective conditions in which we live (the supposed ‘global’ era). The concept of ‘cosmopolitanism’ can help to understand how these objective conditions can shape our subjectivities.

Many researchers have used the term ‘cosmopolitanism’ in different ways. Authors such as Beck (2002) and Archibugi (2008) have employed it in a political context to understand its potential to respond to the challenges globalisation has brought. For other researchers though, the concept has been used to understand the ways in which new identities are created through exposure to the ‘global’. Ulf Hannerz’s (1996) research into ‘cosmopolitanism’ is a good example of this. Hannerz argues that the term cosmopolitanism highlights a particular perspective that people can acquire through a growing exposure to the global. He argues that ‘…a willingness to engage with the Other…[and] openness towards different divergent cultural experiences’ (Hannerz, 1996: 103) are core components that can establish this perspective. Outlining his argument further, he suggests that ‘cosmopolitanism’
is a “cultural competence” in which people can develop ‘...a personal ability to make one’s way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting’ (Hannerz, 1996: 103). Student mobility could therefore be thought of as an activity that helps to develop this ‘cosmopolitan perspective’ – for example, “engaging with Others”, “gaining new cultural experiences” whilst “listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting” on those experiences could be considered as defining features of student mobility. Drawing on Hannerz’s points, credit mobility could be seen as a particularly good activity for developing a ‘cosmopolitan perspective’ in young people – by sampling this “engagement with the Other”, at a young point in their lives, the students’ experiences could contribute to a widened sense of (international) identity through their mobility.

Nevertheless, the idea of a cosmopolitan perspective has been attacked by various authors; as Rantanen (2005) argues, the term ‘cosmopolitan’ has been critiqued for being an “elitist” concept. She argues, ‘...it is not surprising that, when cosmopolitanism is defined in an elitist way, there is little scope for ordinary people to achieve cosmopolitan qualities’ (Rantanen, 2005: 122). The conception of cosmopolitanism I have outlined above can, in some respects, be analysed as “elitist”. For example, the idea of ‘engaging with the Other’ (Hannez, 1990: 103), whilst “gaining new cultural experiences” abroad represent opportunities for those who have the ability (in terms of both economic and cultural capital) to travel. This connects back to a discussion earlier in this literature review. As I have argued above, studies that focus on students who travel abroad for education tend to agree that is it mostly privileged students who take up mobility opportunities. If the concept of cosmopolitanism is ‘elite’ in its orientation, elite or privileged young people (such as students who study abroad) may gravitate towards it, not least if they are choosing to explore and engage with another country and culture through educational mobility. Interestingly, Hannerz (1996: 103) refers to a cosmopolitan perspective as developing a ‘cultural competence’ in relating to different countries and people. In his discussion of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986), too, talks about cultural capital as the development of “cultural competences” in a person’s life. This raises a significant question for this study because if cosmopolitanism can be considered as a set of cultural competences, it might represent a wider idea that cosmopolitanism is a form of cultural capital. In this sense, cosmopolitanism might represent a particular set of cultural values that are deemed to be legitimate for living.
the ‘right’ sort of life in, as we saw earlier from Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991), a
global world. How students articulate any value to their (possible) developing
‘cosmopolitanism perspective’ is therefore an important focus for this study.

(2.10) Travel as a lifestyle

Zygmunt Bauman (1996, 1998) has incorporated many of the theoretical ideas
raised in the previous section into his discussion on mobility within the contemporary
era. In connecting both mobility (i.e. accessibility of travel) and the global
connections that (metaphorically) bring places and spaces closer together, Bauman
develops a theory that mobility itself has become a highly desirable lifestyle for the
middle-classes. As he suggests, ‘…mobility has become the most powerful and most
theory lies his argument that access to elective forms of mobility (and therefore to be
mobile in today’s world) is a ‘ticket’ to social mobility. This relates to the discussion at
the end of the previous section – if the development of a ‘cosmopolitan perspective’
can be considered as a form of cultural capital, Bauman’s argument highlights the
way in which mobility has become valued, and legitimated by, the middle-classes.

For this reason, student mobility could be seen as ‘mobility training’, laying the
foundations for the type of lifestyle Bauman argues is highly desirable. However,
Bauman’s theory allows us to look at travel (or mobility) from a slightly different angle
than cosmopolitanism. If, as outlined through Hannerz’s (1996) work,
cosmopolitanism is concerned with ‘engagement with the Other’ and developing an
appreciation of different cultures, Bauman’s ideas demonstrate that simply being
mobile can be seen as a particularly attractive lifestyle which people can strive for. In
this sense, it is not so much ‘engagement with the Other’ which is deemed to be
important, but rather, from a more individualised position, the ability to simply travel
to and between different countries as part of a lifestyle. Bauman’s concept of
‘tourists’ can help to develop this further.

‘Tourists’, for Bauman (1996, 1998), are people who, today, are constantly ‘on
the move’. It is important to clarify here though that Bauman’s use of the term ‘tourist’
is different from Urry’s (2002) definition, discussed earlier. For Bauman (1996, 1998),
tourists are people who ‘…move because they find the world within their (global)
reach irresistibly attractive [original italicisation]’ (Bauman, 1998: 92). Drawing on a
case study of ‘jet-setters’, Bauman outlines how, with the stretching of social
relations across the globe (i.e. globalisation), people now have the ability to live their lives internationally. In this sense, we can see tourists as people who capitalise on the ‘benefits’ that globalisation brings – the ability to combine work and leisure (a lifestyle) that stretches across the globe has become a reality that people can now achieve. But Bauman’s (1996, 1998) discussion of ‘vagabonds’ (the opposite of tourists) serves to remind us that not all people have access to these touristic lifestyles. Bauman suggest that ‘vagabonds’ are people who, through no fault of their own, cannot become tourists. Due to the ever-changing conditions that globalisation brings, remaining ‘static’ in a fast moving world, for Bauman (1996, 1998), is problematic - ‘...the vagabond is a vagabond not because of the reluctance or difficulty of settling down, but because of the scarcity of settled places’ (Bauman, 1996: 29). The idea behind Bauman’s theory here is that all places and locations today are not exempt from the effects of globalisation. Locations that were once “settled places” can no longer exist. For example, mobility for jobs and increasingly unaffordable house (including rental) prices can be seen as areas of social life that can no longer guarantee people to settle, confidently, in their communities.

Bauman’s theory of how people live in today’s global world is not without its limitations though. It would be too simplistic to argue that there are two broad groups of people who either enjoy or do not enjoy the ‘benefits’ that globalisation brings (tourists and vagabonds). Indeed, returning to Collins’ (2014) work into how young people become mobile, has shown that mobility choices are often constrained by young people’s biographical circumstances at the point of decision making. For example, the opportunity to earn money or seek new employment are, for Collins (2014), crucial aspects that shape desires to move abroad. Rather than striving to acquire the status of a ‘tourist’ (in the Bauman sense of the word), Collins’ (2014: 52) work shows how young people’s decision making processes are often ‘...focused on more immediate concerns and challenges’ in their lives. Bauman’s ‘tourist and vagabonds’ thesis then, to some extent, overlooks the nuances of how people connect to the global world and undertake mobility (if at all) in their own lives. However, the tourism component in Bauman’s tourism/vagabond thesis is a particularly interesting lens to explore a group of young people who do become mobile: mobile students. As discussed in the previous chapter on mobility policy, many mobility programmes emphasise the importance of gaining an ‘international experience’ in preparation for entering the labour market. Similarly, emphasis is often
placed on the supposed benefits of living in, and adapting, to another culture. These
types of discourse, which often inform promotional material for student mobility,
could be seen as ‘feeding into’ Bauman’s (1996, 1998) arguments around the
“coveted” touristic lifestyles. His tourist concept may therefore be helpful for
exploring whether students attach value to international travel (and touristic
lifestyles) after their period abroad. By asking this question, this study can explore
the extent to which students do or do not see themselves as developing some
conception of a touristic lifestyle. Indeed, through using Bauman’s ideas of the
tourist, this study will be able to explore how these students reflect on their travel
biographies – that is, how students, who either study or work abroad, envisage how
future travel may play a role in their lives.

Whilst I have spent the last sections of this chapter exploring the possible
outcomes of mobility, it is important to recognise that there is some evidence to
suggest that mobility can have little impact in developing further vistas of travel -
Alred and Byram’s (2006) study UK of credit mobile students who were interviewed
ten years after their mobility to France is significant in this debate. In contrast to the
‘cosmopolitan’ or ‘tourist’, explored earlier, Alred and Byram found that study abroad
actually invoked a sense of belonging ‘at home’ (the UK) for UK credit mobile
students. Following on from this, Alred and Byram (2006: 230) further suggest that
study abroad ‘ten years on’ did not establish global vistas. On the contrary, their
participants viewed their mobility as a “reference point” which could be drawn upon
when needed in certain aspects of their lives. Alred and Byram’s (2006) study, in
many respects, contradicts Bauman’s (1996, 1998) theory of tourism. This debate
therefore creates an important focus for this research: to explore any possible effects
that a period studying or working abroad has on students.

(2.11) Chapter Summary
This chapter has provided a review of the key sociological concepts, theories, and
ideas to understand international student mobility. Focussing on three distinct
aspects of student mobility (before, during and after), this chapter has analysed a
mixture of empirical studies and theories to develop an understanding of how student
mobility is significant today.

I started the review through an examination of the significant areas that help
to understand ‘who’ these students are and why they might choose a period abroad
as part of their degree. Through exploring empirical studies of mobility, I demonstrated that travel could be thought of as a journey incorporating notions of strategy and adventure. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts of cultural capital and habitus, I outlined how the decision to study abroad could be framed around wider issues of what Reay et al., (2009) term ‘in-habitus’ choices or decisions. How students come to ‘choose’ mobility, I suggested, could be further explained by Hodkinson et al.’s (2012) ideas of ‘routines’ and ‘turning points’. By focussing on these theories, the discussion highlighted a significant requirement to understand the students’ biographies – that is, their previous travel experiences, educational experiences and their family backgrounds in order to gain a deeper understanding of why they chose to study or work abroad.

In the second part of the literature review, I turned to exploring a question that has received little attention in this area of study – namely, how an ‘adventure’ is created from studying or working abroad. As discourses around ‘adventure’ play heavily in empirical studies on mobility, I demonstrated how student mobility might have historical connections to ‘The Grand Tours’ established in the sixteenth century. Through Urry’s (2002) concept of the ‘tourist gaze’, I outlined how experiences gathered abroad can fit into a narrative of ‘adventure’, suggesting that experiences can become novel and stimulating when set against the backdrop of a new setting (Urry, 2002).

In the final part of this chapter, I explored the ways in which mobility can impact a young person’s sense of identity. Starting with a focus on nationality, I demonstrated, though the literature, that British students were a significant group to explore these ideas through. This was because previous research often mentions that British students’ views towards their own nationality are often unique in comparison to other countries. On the one hand, a period abroad may develop wider political identification with Europe (in the case of ERASMUS mobility). But on the other hand, some studies have reported that British students tend to see themselves as different from their European counterparts. This discussion led into a debate on whether student mobility can be seen as developing a wider ‘cosmopolitan’ view of the world or, from a slightly different angle, whether mobility has become to be seen as a desirable end for itself. As I demonstrated through Bauman’s (1998) concept of the tourist, mobility, it might seem, has become a coveted value for creating a particular type of lifestyle established by globalisation. In the next chapter, I turn to
outlining the way in which this project was designed in order to explore the topics and debates raised in this literature review.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

(3.1) Aims and Overview
This chapter outlines how the data was collected for this project. I discuss how a qualitative approach was suitable to explore the motivations, experiences, and aspirations of UK students on short-term international mobility programmes. By using semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection, an in-depth analysis of the following four research questions helped to address this overall research aim:

1) What are the backgrounds and biographies of UK credit mobile students?
2) What are the experiences of students during their time abroad?
3) What are the aspirations and future plans of these students?
4) How has the mobility experience affected the students’ views and feelings towards their nationality and identities upon return to the UK?

I begin the chapter by discussing why semi-structured qualitative interviews were beneficial for gathering in-depth accounts of motivations and aspirations for studying or working abroad. I then outline my epistemological approach to the research and argue that starting and finishing from a position of values helped in striving for ‘accountable knowledge’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993). The chapter then moves on to discuss the topic guide that was used for the interviews, providing a rationale for why particular themes were appropriate to explore the research questions above. This discussion leads onto how I conducted the interviews and I discuss my methodological approach that enabled me to collect rich and in-depth data. The chapter then focuses on how I recruited my participants, arguing that although using a form of purposeful sampling did have some weaknesses and limitations, it still provided the most appropriate technique for sampling within this project. The chapter ends by exploring the ethical sensitivities that were involved in this face-to-face research.

(3.2) Why Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews?
I believe qualitative interviews gave participants a great sense of autonomy to describe their motivations, experiences and aspirations. This meant that students
could convey and express their subjectivity in their own words without having to formulate and then collapse their experiences into the confinements of pre-selected choices such as in quantitative surveys. As Bryman (2008: 321) suggests, ‘…the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events – that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour’. By using this method, it gave me (as the researcher) an in-depth understanding of how an interviewee framed and described their experiences in their own words.

By using semi-structured interviews, I was able to cover a list of topics and questions that I wanted to address. For example, family background, specific motivations such as career prospects and adventure seeking were all issues I was keen to explore. Bryman (2008: 323) argues that when there is a clear and specific focus, the use of semi-structured interviews proves more fitting than unstructured interviews as these issues can be investigated. In the previous chapter, I outlined several significant themes and issues within this area of research. Therefore, the advantage that Bryman describes above provided a good justification for using a semi-structured approach. Similarly, a major benefit of qualitative research is being able to develop other researchers’ themes that they have uncovered in order to explore the strengths or weaknesses of those theories (Seal, 2016). Therefore, if there were no previous studies of international student mobility and/or a lack of theoretical concepts to use, unstructured in-depth interviews within a grounded theory approach might have been better suited. Whilst the number of credit mobility studies is limited, there were some significant themes, topics and issues to draw upon in designing the research. Therefore, fully unstructured interviews may have been too open-ended for what this project was trying to achieve.

Whilst I used a script of questions addressing the topic areas (see appendix A), I also encouraged participants to elaborate and further explain topics I believed were relevant as they came up in the interviews. This highlights the “semi” structured nature of the interviews I conducted. If I had carried out fully structured interviews, I would have had little (if any) flexibility to divert to areas of potentially interesting data that arose during the course of the conversation. At the other end of the spectrum, fully unstructured interviews are often completely led by the participants’ responses to the previous question, which would have limited my ability to steer the conversation towards areas I felt were significant. In this sense, ‘…the degree of
‘structuring’ is taken to refer to the degree in which the questions and other interventions made by the interviewer are in fact pre-prepared by the researcher (Wengraf, 2001: 60). Perhaps a better term to use is ‘light structuring’ to convey how I viewed the arrangement and structuring of the interview schedule. Whilst there was a topic guide that incorporated a number of questions under themes (as I discuss shortly), these questions were open-ended and designed to encourage participants to convey the meaning they attached to their decision(s) to study/work abroad. Also, the questions were sometimes asked in a different order in different interviews depending on the flow of conversation. However, the important thing to note here is that the key questions (and any supplementary questions deriving from the key questions) were asked to all participants. This allowed for a greater comparison when analysing the data.

Ioannis Tsoukalas’ (2008: 134) reflections on his experiences of researching ERASMUS students provide another justification for using a semi-structured, qualitative approach. He suggests that as study abroad is often the first time away from home, it involves a certain degree of emancipation whereby experiences become “physically demanding” and “sensually stimulating”. Tsoukalas (2008: 134) goes on to argue that “…the extraordinary character of these experiences implies that they cannot always be communicated in a straightforward way, for example via a simple verbal recounting”. This point is important as it demonstrates the need for a structured approach to asking questions about mobility, whilst also allowing participants the freedom to construct their responses as they see fit. For example, asking a respondent to “tell me about their experience of studying abroad” would have been so open-ended, it may have failed to capture parts of interesting data because it would have required the participant to collapse their whole experience into a short, answerable response. For this reason, I believed a better approach was to split up motivations and aspirations into separate manageable topics, as I outline in the next section. These topics allowed me to explore the themes I wanted to investigate, but also gave my participants the freedom to divert or expand on points they felt were important in constructing their story.

(3.3) Methodological and Epistemological considerations
By designing the study qualitatively the research exhibited an interpretivist epistemology through the suggestion that the interviews were methodologically
structured towards an ‘...empathetic understanding of human action rather than with the forces that are deemed to act on it’ (Bryman, 2008: 13). This epistemology resonates with the desire to, as discussed in the previous section, understand the motivations and aspirations of students. By understanding motivations and aspirations as choices that have meaning attached to them provides a good example of why adopting a position that understands social action as constructed behaviour by people complemented my research aims. Whilst this study could have been designed quantitatively, the methodological consequences would have been at the expense of being able to explore participants’ decisions to study abroad as choices with in-depth meaning behind them. A quantitative epistemology (i.e. Positivism) would have only been able to explore the surface reasons between motivations, experiences and aspirations. If such an approach had been employed, the study would have lacked the required depth and understanding to explore motivations and aspirations in relation to the biographies of participants. Whilst an interpretivist approach was beneficial in allowing me to build a design whereby participants could construct their own stories in their own words, this approach did suggest that I, as the researcher, could accurately capture the reality of their story.

The answer to whether this ‘reality’ was accurately captured inevitably rests within addressing the view that objective research was possible within this study. I treat the concept of ‘objectivity’ in the objectivist sense:

‘...the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness’.

(Bernstein, 1983: 8, cited in May, 2001: 9)

My theoretical position throughout the research process was that this definition was simply not achievable, because a value-free approach was unattainable. I define it as unattainable firstly because there is no ‘matrix’ or ‘framework’, as Bernstein describes, that can be understood externally to our subjective consciousness of the social world. Secondly, the concept of objectivity has long been entangled with the possibility of value-freedom in research. However, Malcolm Williams (2012: 60) identifies the paradoxical nature of value-freedom and objectivity: ‘...value freedom is the means to objectivity, but it then follows that if objectivity is a state which is
desired, then it is one which is valued – it has value’. Therefore, to claim that I started the research from a position of value-neutrality would have meant that I valued value-neutrality. In this sense, ‘the social’ can never be entirely separated from the ‘objective’ and therefore all research starts from a position of values [my emphasis] (Williams, 2012, Letherby, 2012). Due to the unattainable nature of objective research then, to have pursued and presented my findings under the guise of objectivity would have been an undesirable approach because uncovering objective knowledge, as I have outlined above, would have not been possible.

The argument presented so far has shown the impossibility of not only gathering objective data, but also designing my research free from values, subjectivities, and influences. For example, the key criteria I used for sampling (that I outline later in the chapter) were all subjective choices about how to achieve the best variation within my sample of credit mobile students. Therefore, by selecting and presenting that criteria as the most appropriate means to sampling participants, I was placing value on those concepts. Similarly, the research themes that formed the structure of the interview, which I discuss shortly, were things I valued for what I believed they would bring to the data analysis. Additionally, the way I analysed the data operating within those themes demonstrates how subjective decisions on my part, as the researcher, became things that affected the end result of my research (i.e. the ideas and arguments I make in the next three chapters). The crucial importance of these ideas then is that methods and methodology can never be separated from the researcher and this highlights the pivotal role that I, as the researcher, had in designing, collecting, and analysing the data. This, again, leads back to the argument that making objective claims about the research was, and remains, impossible.

With these points in mind, the discussion now turns to discussing what I considered to be a credible and possible epistemological approach that started and finished from a position of values. I believed this was important because, whilst not subscribing to the ideals of objectivity, there had to be a recognition and understanding of the processes involved with arriving at the claims and arguments I made and also how I substantiated those claims with the data being analysed. This means that, whilst I do not believe that I was objective across the research process, I did not actively ignore the crucial link between the arguments I made (in the findings
chapters) through the data (collected in the fieldwork stages). However, I instead adopted a position that focussed on my role in the knowledge construction process.

The view that ‘who we are’ and ‘what we do’ affects ‘what we get’ lends itself well to what Letherby (2003, 2012) calls ‘theorised subjectivity’. Theorised subjectivity calls for a continuous interrogation of the self as both a person and researcher through a process of auto/biographical examination and critical reflexivity throughout each part of the research process. In this sense, the research begins and finishes from a position of values. However, it is the conscious and reflexive process of how those values integrate within the research that establishes a dual-layer of theoirisation. For example, I could have theorised about why a specific part of a participant’s narrative was significant in relation to one of my themes. But, through ‘theorised subjectivity’, I could additionally theorise about how I came to form that conclusion through my own disciplinary training and auto/biography. Theorised subjectivity, for me then, was an epistemological approach that attempted to bridge values and objectivity through making my research value-explicit as opposed to value-free. If the latter was not achievable, then I believe the former was the closest I could get.

By using theorised subjectivity as an epistemological approach to exploring my role and involvement within the project, I was simultaneously striving for ‘accountable knowledge’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993). As Letherby (2004: 176) suggests, ‘…the key issue here is the relationship between doing and knowing: how the way that we undertake research (the process) relates to the knowledge we present at the end (the product)’. For me, this is what my project strived for. Whilst theorised subjectivity was not a method or methodology for data analysis, its value to my study was in its philosophical premise that the findings of my project (the claims, the ideas, the arguments, etc) were products of the reciprocity between the way I designed the research, my role in the data collection, and the interpretation of the data. This was, in no way, an attempt to abandon the integrity and academic rigour of the study. On the contrary, I believe this approach heightened both.

(3.4) Reflexive Position & Auto/Biographical Motivations

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6 It is worth mentioning here that these auto/biographical reflections were written at the start of my PhD, before the data collection process.
In striving for accountable knowledge within a framework of theorised subjectivity, I outline below some of my own motivations and subjectivities in relation to student mobility and on my educational pathway. This exercise, a key component of ‘theorised subjectivity’, positions me within the research project as both a person and researcher (if these things are even interchangeable) and is therefore meant to offer an insight into my own educational biography in order to form a greater transparency about the research product and my own educational journey.

My research interest has always and continues to centre on the choices young people make before and during higher education. This interest has grown out of a passion found for sociology when I entered HE, whilst paradoxically having no desire to study for a degree before (or initially during) my entry into higher education.

Having gone through my secondary education at an all-boys, sport-intensive school, entry to higher education was portrayed as a ‘natural’, logical step upon sixth-form graduation. However, having become so disillusioned with education by the end of sixth-form (I even dropped out for a period of time), I still applied to study for a degree, but with little regard for discipline and institution. I suppose, looking back on it now, with my ‘sociology hat’ on, I didn’t (but more crucially couldn’t) navigate the ‘field’ where others around me were seemingly gliding through it. I had no experience, expectations, or anticipations of what university might be like.

Upon arrival at the University of Plymouth, I was still largely unsure of why I had chosen to study for a degree, and, in all honesty, how long I would remain there. In my second year, I suddenly found a perfect relationship with sociology when asking myself the questions: “why did you even go to university?” and “why did you end up at university studying a subject you were not really initially interested in?” Sociology, coincidentally, allowed me to think about this question in a new light through my wider non-linear path into HE and (at times) turbulent relationship with education. It was then that I started to realise this was a discipline that really interested me and had something to say. My passion for the discipline grew throughout the remainder of my degree and it was no surprise that by the time I came to submit my Masters dissertation proposal, I chose to explore ‘why students decided to study sociology’. Whilst I have some other research interests, anything related to the choices students make in relation to their higher education continues to be my primary one.
Upon completing my undergraduate degree, I had largely decided to study for a Masters degree, either in sociology or social research. By this time, I started to look at different institutions around the world for complete an MA or MSc. Having been attracted to studying in either the US or Canada due to holiday visits with family and school trips, I settled on applying to McGill University in Montreal. I had visited Montreal a couple of times and was largely drawn by its cultural appeal. I could also imagine myself not only in a bi-lingual city, but at a new institution and new department. Compared to my undergraduate application process, I became much more instrumental in looking at the modules offered, teaching staff, and publication trends from within the department. My best friend from school had also moved to Quebec at eighteen and formed a career and family life successfully. Additionally, my parents had emigrated for a few years when they were younger and had always (and continue to this day) speak about their time-abroad in an almost romantic fashion.

The culmination of these things gave me romanticised visions for my own cultural biography (i.e. travelling to another country and living in the unknown). Never once did I think about the experience being a useful tool for ‘topping up’ my CV, nor think instrumentally about the employment benefits the experience could bring. Instead, the appeal was due to the academic, social, and cultural opportunities I felt I would enjoy more than anything else - it just seemed ‘right’. Therefore, if I was to go, it wasn’t for one thing, but for the ‘whole package’ –a new adventure in a foreign land for a specified length of time.

However, for me, it was the disconnection from home that provided the main obstacle in choosing whether to study abroad. My parents (my mum in particular), who are both from working-class backgrounds have always placed an importance on staying close together (although they would have been very supportive of my choice). I did not travel to McGill that year, even though I had completed half of the application and had discussed the idea with my personal tutor. My degree transcripts and references might have placed me in a favourable position to have been offered a place, I believe. However, my then girlfriend (now wife) had been offered a place on a PGCE course in the UK and I decided to pursue the beginning of my postgraduate
study at home. On reflection, it was these family and friendship ties that convinced me that to stay at home was the ‘right’ choice.

Today, I still wonder about how my life could have changed should I have applied and been accepted to study in Canada. Would my own aspirations for my future be different to what they are now? Would they be similar? Would have I even returned to the UK? At the time, I cannot remember thinking about these sorts of things. Whilst I have reflected on this recently, I don’t lament it. The thing I do lament, however, is the time around my application and initial entry into HE - I should have enjoyed it more as opposed to it feeling like an arduous task to get through. I just didn’t care about it then. It worked out in the end though.

I have now set out my rationale for using semi-structured qualitative interviews and have discussed my epistemological approach to the research. In the following sections, I turn to outlining the structure and content of the interviews and the way I accessed my target groups of students.

(3.5) Preparing and Gathering the Data

(3.5.1) Preparing the Interviews – Whilst my specific sampling criteria are discussed shortly, it is worth providing an overview and rationale for the main themes and topics I explored using qualitative semi-structured interviews. Although all of these areas were covered in each interview, the ‘light structuring’ allowed participants to bring up other areas they felt were relevant. Similarly, the ‘light structuring’ approach also allowed me, as the researcher, to expand on these topics when interesting data emerged during the course of an interview.

List of themes covered in each interview:

1) “Educational Background” – Did the participant come from a state or fee-paying school? Did they engage extra-curricular activities whilst in compulsory education? What were their academic qualifications? – This theme explored the role of the participant’s background in their decision-making process. For example, it explored whether their peers also considered studying abroad,
whether mobility opportunities were advertised/promoted within their school, and whether they were high achievers in terms of their educational attainment. Specifically, this theme explored whether educational attainment was related to the decision to study abroad.

2) “Family Background” – Did the participant have parents/siblings that had lived/worked abroad? Were parents/family supportive of their decision to study abroad? If so, how were they supportive? – This theme explored how family encouraged (or discouraged) mobility and the role this played within the decision-making process. It explored the specific role family played within the decision-making process of the participant.

3) “Previous Mobility Experience” – Had the participant been exposed to international travel throughout their lives and/or from an early age? – Many mobility studies suggest students who choose to study abroad are more likely to go if they have travelled abroad with family from a young age. This theme explored the frequency and experiences of travel pre-mobility (where applicable).

4) “Motivations” – Did the participant make specific reference to perceived future benefits for their mobility experience? Or did the participant see mobility as an ‘adventure’ at that point in their lives? This allowed an investigation into whether the sample were primarily motivated by the ‘adventure’ of going abroad or by the ‘employment opportunities’ they perceived mobility would bring (or a combination of both).

5) “Destination of mobility” – To what extent was the destination of a participant’s mobility important to them? Was it important at all? What role did this play within the decision-making process? – This theme explored the specific reasons why students chose their destination for mobility. It focused on the motivations for the destination such as cultural appeal, HEI appeal, whether they had family/friends at the same location, or a combination of these examples.
6) “Destination Research” – Similar to Point 5, but specifically addressing how the participant researched their mobility destination. Was their choice due to prior experience within that country? Was the participant’s decision based on recommendations from friends and family? Was it due to images from media sources such as the Internet or television? – This theme explored the way(s) in which students decided on their destination of mobility and the processes involved in that decision. This helped to further understand how students decided on their destination as this was important for policy actors, mobility organisers, and further research.

7) “Cost of mobility” – To what extent did the cost of mobility have an impact on the participant’s decision? – This was important for comparing whether cost was an important factor across different types of credit mobile students (e.g. ERASMUS students who are subsidised through a grant, and students travelling outside of Europe who are often largely self-funded).

8) “Ease of access to mobility” – How helpful was the participant’s HEI in supporting and/or organising their mobility? – This theme explored how the participant’s HEI advertised, marketed, and promoted credit mobility in addition to the impact this had on the decision making process of the participant. This theme also explored whether their HEI was supportive during and after mobility.

9) “Maintaining contact” – How did the participant maintain contact with family and friends (if at all)? Did they feel that the distance between the place of mobility and home was an obstacle in the decision-making process? Or did they feel comfortable with the distance? Related to Point 5, this theme was important as it addressed topics such as the perceived accessibility of different parts of the world. Specifically, this theme assessed whether distance was viewed as a concept to preside over when deciding whether to study abroad and the relationship this had with maintaining contact with friends and family at home.
10) “Adaptation” – When the participant initially arrived at their destination how did they adapt to the local culture? Did they feel ‘at home’? Did they integrate into the wider international and domestic community straight away or was it more of a process? Did they integrate at all within either community? What social activities did they engage in? – *This theme investigated how students viewed themselves within the local culture. Did they class themselves as living as a local or a tourist? Did they even draw on these concepts at all? Upon arrival, was the experience a ‘honeymoon period’ or a time of ‘culture shock’?*

11) “Language” – Where applicable, did the participant show a willingness to learn the language of their destination country? Did they take lessons prior to mobility? To what extent did they become competent in the language prior to returning to the UK? – *This theme explored students’ preparation for mobility and their willingness/reluctance to embrace and use the local language. This theme helped to understand the extent to which students immersed themselves within the culture of their destination.*

12) “Employment Opportunities” – Did the participant feel that they used their mobility experience within job applications and/or interviews? How did they describe the benefits of their mobility to employers? Would the participant consider applying for jobs abroad? What type(s) of careers was the participant thinking about (if they were at all)? – *Asking about their employment aspirations before and after helped to assess whether aspirations were shaped before, during, and/or after mobility. It also helped to explore what type of aspirations these young people had.*

13) “Learning Transitions” When the participant returned from mobility, did the way they think or approach learning within HE change? If so, in what ways? – *This was important for exploring how mobility could affect transitions in learning. The theme explored whether the students’ views/attitudes towards learning within the UK had changed upon returning. For example, it assessed whether they actively reflected on the differences in learning abroad, compared to at home.*
14) “National/Global Identities” – Upon returning to the UK, did the participant ‘feel’ that they have developed more of a global identity? Or did it re-affirm a sense of national identity? - This theme explored Bauman’s (1998) idea of ‘the tourist’ (outlined in the previous literature review chapter). It was also important for exploring my argument on tourism outlined in the previous chapter – were students’ experiences currency for developing a global lifestyle, or more of a ‘time-out’/’time-away’ from the familiar setting(s) of daily life?

(3.5.2) Gathering the Data - When conducting my interviews, I thought it was important to explore my participants’ mobility in chronological order. As I have argued above, although fully unstructured interviews were too open-ended for what this project was trying to achieve, my semi-structured approach still allowed for my participants to recount their narrative in a story-telling way in order to minimise the risk of the interview turning into a ‘question and answer’ session, where the flow of the conversation could have become severely weakened. I use the term ‘story-telling’ as the interviews commenced with the students telling me about their backgrounds and biographies up to mobility, followed by their experiences during mobility, finishing with their experiences post-mobility. This approach allowed them to recount their story to me in a chronological order of events and therefore like a story.

Asking my participants to recount their motivations and aspirations in this way and reflect on developments and trajectories over time enabled me as the researcher to understand their choices not only as particular choices made at a specific point in time (although I will explore this), but as part of their wider experiences and biographies. Asking my questions chronologically allowed me to contextualise their responses according to their biography that they had presented to me earlier in the conversation.

Whilst I believe exploring the data this way was more logical (as opposed to starting the conversation with talk on aspirations and finishing with biographical information), my choice to explore the experiences of students chronologically was also a conscious decision in striving for the dialogue to flow freely, with the hope it resembled more of a conversation than a question and answer session. I agree with Oakley (1981) who suggests that interviews can be defined as a “conversation with a
purpose”. Similarly, I think treating interviews as ‘conversations with a purpose’ helped to ‘…orchestrate an interaction which move[d] easily and painlessly between topics and questions’ (Mason, 1996: 45).

In recognition that there was always an imbalance of power between the researcher and participant (I was the person who had constructed the questions and steered the discussion), the ultimate power of the meeting between myself and a participant rested with me – participants knew that I was exploring their experiences as part of a PhD research project. However, I still wanted to create an environment where interviewees felt that they were participating in the research as opposed to one in which they were made to feel that they were ‘objects’ in the study. I define ‘participating’ as establishing a situation where interviewees felt comfortable to express their views and stories in their own words. I wanted participants to feel that they were contributing to a conversation, as opposed to a formal question and answer session. By striving to ensure that the dialogue flowed like a conversation, I thought that the data obtained were of better quality because the participants were more at ease, relaxed, and therefore willing to share their experiences with me. In order for them to narrate and discuss their story I believed there needed to be, on my part, a display of trust. By trust I mean that the participant felt at ease to narrate their story in detail. In other words, I wanted to ensure that participants felt that they could discuss and share their lives with me over the course of the interview. To lack this trust could have had implications for the willingness of a participant to share their story in a personal capacity. Whilst participants may have conveyed ‘snapshots’ or pieces of their lives, they may have become unwilling to share their whole experiences. Following a particularly feminist tradition then, the task for me as the researcher was to create a relaxed and comfortable environment with a specific focus on making the conversation feel natural and interactive. I discuss how I achieved this relaxed and comfortable environment later in this chapter.

I believe my approach to interviewing, I outlined above, also benefited from some aspects of my own identity, not least my status as a student. My participants knew that I was a student completing my own degree and I often got the impression that they were supportive of my interest in their decisions to study abroad. Having previously completed research interviewing undergraduate students, my experience showed that students trusted me as I was “one of them”, as opposed to a stranger asking questions about particular aspects of their lives. King and Horrocks (2010:
49), in their research, similarly tell of how one PhD student studying community nurses encountered problems with their participants remaining guarded and suspicious of her as the researcher, even though confidentiality assurances had been made. This student reflected that she was dressing too formally for the interviews and instead chose to dress more casually to emphasise her student status more clearly. Surprisingly, this small change ‘…did seem to contribute towards a more open and trusting atmosphere’. (King and Horrocks 2010: 49). This account certainly provides a case for demonstrating that how we present ourselves as people (and researchers) can impact on the way we are perceived by our participants and therefore have implications for the data they are willing to share.

King and Horrocks’ (2010) example, however, also raises two separate questions about how my existing identity and status as a student could have had implications for how my participants viewed me, and also the approach I took to make participants more open and trusting towards me. In terms of the former question, Hodkinson (2005b: 137) suggests ‘…insider researchers are liable, to some degree, already to share with respondents an internalised language and a range of experiences’. Although I was not a previously a mobile student, my participants and I shared a commonality in our own lives in two respects. Firstly, we were both currently studying for degrees and making decisions for our transitions into our careers. This therefore signifies Hodkinson’s idea of ‘shared experiences’. Secondly though, many of the participants in my study were liable to be close (within 10 years) to me in age – this was something that also might have affected how they related to, or viewed, me. This highlights that whilst my participants were students, my identity and status as a current student helped them to relate to me better as opposed to an older researcher or academic carrying out this project. This was because there was a similarity in the status between the participants and me. As Merriam et al. (2010: 413) argue, ‘…the power relationships embedded in the interview context… are subject to the influences of gender, educational background, and seniority’. Therefore, because the participants and I shared a status as students, the seniority was minimised. This, I believe, minimised the imbalance of power towards me as the researcher.

The second question King and Horrocks’ (2010) example raises (what can be done to make my interviews flow like a conversation and be more open/trusting?) was achieved by capitalising on my identity as a student as this was something that
helped to establish trust and rapport. For example, a casual dress style, initiating the pre-interview 'chat' with speaking about what they were studying, why they were studying for that degree and why I was doing a PhD were all things that represented and aided my presentation of self as a student. For me, this again addressed issues around 'seniority' because it allowed me to create a layer of trust and rapport before the interviews begun. This was because I could present myself as 'someone like them' (a student). Therefore, whilst this was not directly insider research, most notably because I had not personally studied abroad, I did see my identity and current experience as a student as potentially advantageous for, firstly, establishing trust and rapport and, secondly, having a closer understanding of the decisions students made in relation to their higher education.

Another aspect that impacted on my interactions with the students stems from my position as a white, (lower) middle class male. Firstly, as I noted earlier in my autobiographical reflections, my parents, are both from working class backgrounds. This, coupled with my time in higher education has resulted in, I believe, my classed identity being somewhat mixed. For example, from my accent you can tell that I am from the South of England, but it is somewhat neutral in terms of its signifier of a social class. In other words, I do not sound what is often caricatured as ‘posh’, but I also do not have the working class London ‘twang’ of line of my grandfathers. This form of accent neutrality, I believe, put me at an advantage when speaking to the students. This is because the way that I talk and converse could appeal to a wider spectrum of people compared to if my most visible class signifier (my accent) was very middle or very working class. In terms of my ethnicity, my status as a white male also impacted my interactions with the students. As the vast majority of my sample of students were also white, this inevitably created a normativity around discussing motivations and experiences of being abroad through a white lens. For example, because most of the students were white, there could have been a latent assumption on the part of the interviewee that I would understand specific motivations or experiences because I am also white. In other words, there could have been an underlying acknowledgment that I would understand what 'white people do when they are abroad'. To phrase this another way, the research dynamic could have been very different if I, as a white male, had only researched minority young women’s experiences of studying abroad. In this respect then, my ethnic
identity, like my classed identity, would have, to some extent, shaped the type of interaction I had with my participants.

It is worth noting here my use of the term ‘participants’ is a conscious decision to refer to how I, as the researcher, viewed my interviewees. Some researchers, historically, have chosen to adopt the title of ‘subjects’ or ‘respondents’ for those that they study. However, the term ‘participants’ relates to my choice to convey how both they and I played an active role in the knowledge construction process from the interview. In this sense, the interview was not a passive activity with a one-way flow of information from participant to researcher. Rather, it demonstrated how interviews were ‘…active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results’ (Fontana and Frey, 2008: 119).

I believed that a target of 40 interviews would give me the depth to explore a significant number of students’ stories, whilst also being practicable to achieve. In order to achieve a target of 40 semi-structured interviews, I conducted them through a combination of both face-to-face and web-chat software. Whilst I always strived to complete the interviews face-to-face, sometimes the practicalities (not least the funding to travel to multiple HEIs over the course of the year) made web-chat software (e.g. Skype and Facetime) a feasible solution to address some of these challenges. Out of the 40 interviews, 21 were completed face-to-face, whilst 19 were completed through web-chat software. In many ways though, conducting just under half of my interviews through web chat software brought a number of advantages. Mann and Stewart (2000: 18) suggest that two “important gains” from conducting social research through the internet can be found in, firstly, ‘extending access to participants’, and secondly, giving the research ‘wide geographical access’. In terms of the former benefit, I was able to recruit students who might not have necessarily felt that they would have had the time to arrange, and attend, a face-to-face interview. This meant that, through advertising that the interview could be completed through web-chat software, I potentially increased the response rate from UK credit mobile students – I would argue this was true because, my recruitment through the social networking site, Twitter, proved to be successful as my tweets outlined that the interview could be completed through web-chat software (I discuss this in more detail later on). Secondly, though, I believe that, through using web-chat software to complete the interviews, I extended the project’s geographical reach to include students from more universities, compared to if I had only completed the interviews
face-to-face. The web-chat interviews proved very successful for recruiting students from the north of England, for example, where it would have been impracticable for me to travel to different HEIs in this region, often for only one interview at each of these HEIs.

The face-to-face interviews were carried out within the participants’ own HEI. This decision achieved what King and Horrocks (2010: 42) view as the fundamental considerations in interview settings: ‘comfort’, ‘privacy’, and ‘quiet’. Conducting the interviews at an individual’s HEI did not require travel commitments from the students, thus minimising (but not extinguishing) the risk of participants cancelling our scheduled interview. Similarly, this approach also allowed the students to tell their stories in a setting where they were familiar and comfortable. Most of the face-to-face interviews were conducted in student cafes or bars on their campus – in many instances, these were spaces that the students had chosen themselves prior to the interview. These spaces, that are specifically designed for conversation and interaction, represented King and Horrocks’ (2010: 42) idea of locations that ensured comfort, privacy and quiet. These three factors were important - privacy required a setting where the chance of interruption was minimised and confidentiality could have been observed, whilst it was equally important to conduct the interview in a quiet area for the recordings to be accurately captured (and audible for later transcription). Arguably, student bars and cafes didn’t always provide the best setting for quietness (although interviews were always held in a quiet corner of a venue). However, this was often offset against the crucial concept of ‘comfort’. As King and Horrocks (2010) 42) suggest, ‘…this means physical comfort but also (perhaps more significantly) psychological comfort’. If participants were to discuss their biographies, the interview setting had to be a place where they felt safe and relaxed to narrate their story. As I have previously argued, I believed the data obtained would have been of better quality if the participants felt relaxed and engaged in a conversation-style interview. Therefore, by conducting the interviews within these types of venues, often sitting on sofas (in student bars) or ‘high back chairs’ in cafés/coffee houses, I thought that this allowed for a greater sense of talking and interacting. Whilst I accept that the participant no doubt felt like they were being interviewed, this approach did minimise the formal nature interviews sometimes exhibit.

Whilst interviewing participants within the grounds of their own HEI was beneficial to them, it did raise issues of feasibility for me as the researcher. Due to
this project being the research for a PhD, there was not enough funding or time to travel the country conducting interviews at multiple HEIs. Time and funding were important factors to consider within the research design, not least because these concepts ultimately dictated where I could go and how many different HEIs I could visit. Whilst the use of web-chat software helped to address this issue, I always preferred to conduct a face-to-face interview, to strive for, as outlined above, a ‘natural’ conversation (that was based on interaction between people). Therefore, the choices I made within these constraints were both practical and methodological. For example, if I had limited the research to one or two HEIs, this would have inevitably affected the range and representation of students within the project, thus presenting issues for reliability and validity. Therefore, the key issue became formulating a recruitment and sampling strategy that strived to gain a variety of different students from different HEIs, but one that was also able to manage the constraints of time and funding. The length of each interview was around one hour and ten minutes. The shortest interview lasted thirty-six minutes, whilst the longest interview lasted one hour and thirty-seven minutes. Within the next section, I outline what I considered to be an achievable strategy to complete these interviews.
(3.6) Recruitment & Sampling

Table 1
Demographic information of all students within the sample (sorted by type of credit mobility)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allocated Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Social Class</th>
<th>Interview Method</th>
<th>HEI</th>
<th>HEI Type</th>
<th>Location of HEI</th>
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<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>HEI (Study)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(3.6.1) **Sampling:** The interviews outlined in the above table were carried out over a seven month period (from January 2014 – July 2014). I believed it is was important to access a diverse group of participants who had studied or worked abroad in some capacity in different parts of the world (I outline the sampling criteria involved with this variation shortly). I was therefore aiming to recruit a sample of UK credit mobile students ‘…who represent a variety of positions in relation to the research topic, of a kind that might be expected to throw light on meaningful differences in experience’ (King and Horrocks, 2010: 29). Indeed, whilst UK credit mobile students represented an extremely small proportion of all UK HE students, I believed these students would be comprised by people with variation in their family life, education, and international travel experience. I believed that the sample for this project needed to have some degree of variation in the sampling criteria such as gender, destination, and type of HEI, specifically in order to extend my findings to different groups of UK, and perhaps other mobile students of different nationalities for comparison. Whilst convenience sampling would have certainly proved the least time consuming, such an approach could have limited the variation of different students within the study. Similarly, snowball sampling could have been used. However, the time for potential participants to have contacted me from their friends/peers referral(s) could have exacerbated the time constraints already on the project. In striving for some variation across the sample, I believed a form of purposeful sampling provided the best match to the project’s aims and objectives.

The sampling technique was purposeful because I was interested in ‘...developing a framework of the variables that might [have] influence[d] an individual's contribution and [was] based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself’ (Marshall, 1996: 523). Again, whilst credit mobility studies remain relatively rare, some of the literature (see Waters and Brooks, 2010a) suggested that mobility for UK students serves as a system for reinforcing middle-class advantage (as I discussed in the previous chapter). Similarly, as I demonstrated earlier, credit mobility placement numbers are often consistently higher at pre-92 universities (European Commission, 2016) whilst the option for dual degrees is still restricted to a handful of HEIs within the UK. This demonstrates that there was some knowledge of the characteristics of outgoing UK mobile students. I therefore sought to achieve different social characteristics within each sampling criteria ‘…to ensure that certain
cases varying on preselected parameters [were] included’ (Sandelowski, 2000: 250). In recognition that variation amongst students was needed, I decided to create my sampling criteria according to the social characteristics listed below. It is worth mentioning here that recruitment and sampling proceeded together, whereby interviews were carried out whilst, at the same time, sampling more participants within the sampling criteria I now discuss below.

**Gender**: This was important in sampling due to the need to explore whether specific motivations and aspirations were different/similar between males and females. This sampling criterion was also important for comparing whether destination of mobility was similar/different for males and females. The gender split within the sample was 30 females and 10 males. Whilst there was a significant imbalance here, HESA (n.d: unpaginated) data shows that, in 2013/14, 60.2% of UK credit mobile students were female (and therefore 39.8% were male). Therefore, whilst my sample of students was skewed more towards females, this was expected to some extent because more UK females tend to study abroad during their degree than males. However, this sampling criterion would still allow me to explore whether motivations and aspirations were similar or differed according to a young person’s gender.

**HEI**: Although this has been discussed more fully above, this was an important sampling criterion for showing any differences in findings between the home HEIs of the students. This sampling criterion had three categories for variation: ‘Russell Group’ Universities, other ‘Pre-92’ Universities’, and ‘Post-92’ Universities’. This helped to explore the destination of students from different ‘types’ of HEIs and the experience of mobility support from the participant’s HEI. As Table 1 (above) shows, the participants came from: One Pre-92 ‘Russell Group’ member in London, One Pre-92 ‘Russell Group’ member in the South of England, Three Pre-92 HEIs in the South/South-East, One Pre-92 ‘Russell Group’ member HEI in the South-West, One Post-92 HEI in the South-West, One Pre-92 HEI in the Midlands, and Three Pre-92 ‘Russell Group’ members in the North of England.

**Social Class**: By achieving a good variation in terms of the number of students in pre and post 1992 universities, I could potentially receive good variation in terms of the social class of the student sample. This was important because, as I discussed in
the previous chapter, social class is discussed extensively in student mobility studies. As Power et al. (2003) suggest, post-1992 universities were established to widen participation amongst young people in higher education. Therefore, through this approach, I would maximise my chances of recruiting both middle and working class students by sampling through universities that contained large numbers of middle class students (pre-1992 HEIs) and working class students (post-1992 universities). Whilst there are multiple ways to measure social class, such as the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) through to more modern approaches such as Savage et al.’s (2013) Bourdieu inspired model that incorporates cultural and social capital, I sought to measure social class through a student’s parental occupation and parental educational level. I selected this approach because it incorporated both the economic capital background of the student, whilst simultaneously the cultural capital background that a young person might be predisposed to. This is not to say though that economic capital and cultural capital go hand-in-hand – that is, high levels in one type of capital will result in high levels of capital in the other. However, I felt that, on the whole, conceptualising social class through parental level of education and parental profession would give me a decent insight into the classed background of a student. Whilst this was the approach I devised to measure social class, I did make a significant error when recruiting the students through failing to collect this information. I discuss this in more depth in the conclusion chapter. Due to this error, I instead measured social class through the students’ narratives when they discussed significant aspects of their backgrounds. This was achieved through a wide spectrum of experiences and events in their lives. For example, parental views towards higher education, frequencies and destinations of previous international travel and schooling background (public or private) were examples of some of the indicators I used to categorise social class retrospectively.

**Discipline studied:** This was an important sampling criterion as I believed there was a strong requirement to represent participants across the spectrum of different subjects. For example, sampling without this criterion might have skewed the findings because I could have potentially gained 40 interviews with students who were studying disciplines such as a foreign language/specific national discipline i.e. ‘French’, ‘American Studies’ or another discipline such as ‘Tourism and Hospitality’.
Students enrolled on these disciplines would have been more prone to study abroad as their degree content would have been specifically related to travel abroad. In some disciplines (i.e. language courses) there was often a requirement to study abroad during a student’s enrolment. Therefore, I believed there was a need to sample students according to their discipline in order to ensure that all students within the sample were not students who had an in-built mobility programme into their discipline prior to studying abroad. As the below numbers demonstrate, this approach was successful in recruiting a diverse group of students. The categories for this sampling criterion were: Languages disciplines, Arts and Humanities disciplines, Social Science disciplines, and Natural Science disciplines. The distribution within the final sample was as follows:

Languages courses: 2 Students  
Arts and Humanities courses: 17 Students  
Social Science courses: 18 Students  
Natural Science courses: 3 students

**Type of mobility:** Although this has been discussed above, this was an important sampling criterion for ensuring that the sample did not consist of mostly ERASMUS students. By including students who had undertaken HEI-organised mobility in the sample (in addition to ERASMUS students), this sampling criterion ensured that variation was achieved across different mobility programmes, such as study and work placements. However, as discussed earlier, through the four recruitment stages, only four students who had completed a work placement were included. Whilst this posed a sampling limitation within this criterion, a major strength of the study was the number of students who had completed a period abroad outside of the ERASMUS programme (see Table 1 for the distribution of the students’ destinations). The distribution within the final sample was as follows:

Study Abroad through HEI partnership: 25 Students  
Study Abroad through ERASMUS: 10 Students  
Study and Work Abroad (ERASMUS): 1 Student  
Work Abroad (ERASMUS): 1 Student  
Work Abroad (non-ERASMUS): 2 Students
Dual Degree: 1 Student

**Destination of mobility:** Following on from the previous discussion of the ‘type of mobility’ sampling criterion, most studies of credit mobile students have tended to focus on ERASMUS students and their findings are therefore limited to students who have travelled within Europe. As discussed above, a key aim of this project was to access credit mobile students who had travelled further afield and it was thus important to explore the experiences of students who had visited different continents. This made this sampling criterion one of the most important. In order to explore UK credit mobility outside of Europe, I strived to gain the best diversity available\(^7\). Whilst mobility within Europe was still of interest to me, I specifically attempted to recruit students who had travelled to other continents such as North America and Australasia. I believe I achieved good variation in this sampling criterion as the destinations (grouped by continent) of the forty students were as follows:

European Countries: 13 Students  
North American Countries: 21 Students  
Australasian Countries: 3 Students  
Asian Countries\(^8\): 3 Students

The sampling criteria outlined above acted as a means to achieve variation within the sample. Whilst I viewed this form of purposeful sampling as the most suitable approach for what this study was trying to achieve, it also needs to be recognised that gaining variation within each criteria was challenging, not least recruiting the work placement students. However, as I achieved diversity within my sampling criteria, the study was not therefore strictly limited to a convenience sample. I believe this outcome provided a decent basis for examining motivations and aspirations across a number of different types of students. Another advantage of this diversity is that, by having variation within the sampling criteria I have discussed

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\(^7\) Due to the time constraints of the project, I tried to gain a diverse sample without setting a quantitative figure on that diversity. For example, it would have taken too much time to ensure that I had 20 students who have travelled to the US/Canada, 20 students who have travelled to Australasia and so on. Therefore, whilst I had no specific target numbers for destination of mobility, it was important that I strived to gain a diverse range of destinations to achieve variation within this criteria.

\(^8\) For clarity, I have included ‘Turkey’ as a country within the Asian continent.
above, I believe certain claims and arguments I make in the following three chapters can be, to some extent, generalised to credit mobile students, particularly UK credit mobile students. I discuss this in more depth in section 3.7.

**3.6.2 Recruitment:** In order to conduct the interviews described above, the project’s target and recruitment strategy consisted of three related groups: HEIs, Potential Participants, and Gatekeepers. The students for the study were recruited through four methods: (1) through HEI international offices (2) through student message board forums (3) by posters advertising the project throughout my own HEI and (4) through the social networking site, Twitter. Within this section, I discuss each of those groups and how they each related to, firstly, targeting the types of students I needed, but, secondly, how I recruited students through them for interview.

**HEIs:** As outlined above, it was not possible within my timescale or funding to be able to visit multiple HEIs across the UK. However, I believed that there was a need to recruit participants across a range of different HEIs within the project (justification for this shall be addressed within the sampling section). Therefore, due to my location within the South-East, an initial sample of HEIs within the south of England was contacted through their international offices to gain access to UK credit mobile students. However, as this did not result in gaining 40 participants, I advertised the study on online student mobility message boards (details of which I describe shortly). Similarly, I also advertised the project on the social networking site, Twitter, asking students who had recently returned from being abroad whether they would be interested in talking to me about their experiences. Therefore, further HEIs across the UK (not just limited to the South) were included in the study. In total, students from eleven different HEIs, across the UK were interviewed - the status of these HEIs can be seen in Table 1. I realise that by limiting my recruitment to the above HEIs did not ensure a ‘representative’ sample of students across the UK. However, the decision to recruit through a number of HEIs in different locations around the country does show some variation. For example, if I had only recruited within London HEIs I would have already known that these students might have been more attracted to living a ‘cosmopolitan’ lifestyle.

Similarly, I believed it was important to gain access to students through a range of different HEIs with varying statuses attached to them (i.e. ‘old’ and ‘new’
universities). This was to explore any potential differences of mobility experience and
the type of HEI participants were completing their mobility through. Indeed,
accessing students through post-92 institutions provided to be extremely challenging –
this was probably, in part, due to the relatively small size and activity of the
international offices at these institutions. Russell Group and pre-92 institutions
tended to have more opportunities to study or work abroad across the world and
therefore more students taking up these opportunities. Similarly, gatekeepers at
Russell Group and pre-92 institutions tended to be more willing to distribute the
details of this study to their students. Recent statistics show that, in 2014, UK HEIs
that sent the largest number of students on ERASMUS programmes were all Russell
Group institutions (European Commission, 2016). After careful consideration of this
issue, I decided that increasing the number of students within the study (trying to
achieve a target of 40) was more important than focusing most of my resources on
recruiting more students from post-92 institutions (which, as I mentioned above, was
proving very challenging in the first instance). Therefore, whilst I accept that I did not
collect my data from a ‘representative’ sample of UK HEIs, there was variation
across the types of HEIs that are significant ‘sending’ institutions of credit mobile
students.

Participants: 40 participants were recruited through the four separate methods that I
mentioned above. The types of mobility these 40 students had participated in can be
seen in Table 1 above. When analysing the number of students according to the type
of mobility (see Table 1), there are both advantages and limitations of the
recruitment outcome. Taking the limitations first, it was disappointing that, despite my
attempts, I interviewed only three students who had completed a work placement
abroad. Even though I stressed in the recruitment emails to the international offices
that I was particularly interested in these groups of students, recruiting these
students provided little success. This was also the same for dual degree students - I
could only recruit one dual degree student for the study who was, at the time,
completing her ‘second degree’ abroad at the time of interview. This was, I believe,
due to dual degrees being extremely rare across undergraduate courses. This meant
that there was a very small target population to recruit from. However, more
positively, the numbers above show that I recruited a considerable number of
students who took up HEI-organised mobility programmes. As mentioned in
Chapter 1 and 2, most previous research with credit mobile students tends to focus on ERASMUS students specifically. Therefore, by gaining access to a large number of students who had travelled outside of Europe, I managed to speak to a significant group of young people who have, historically, been under-researched. This was therefore an original aspect of this research and therefore, I would argue, a positive outcome.

Gatekeepers: As discussed above, the main gatekeepers for this study were staff who worked in the international offices at the HEIs I targeted. However, after not recruiting enough students through this method, I turned to advertising the project through, firstly, mobility message forums (see list below) and then Twitter. The decision to advertise the project on certain online ISM message boards and Twitter was primarily to gain more students for the study. However, secondly, these recruitment methods also allowed more variation among students in terms of, both geographical location and university type. I felt this was a positive choice as it gave the study a greater diversity of students from different types of universities (in terms of status) as well geographic locations in the study.

Another justification for using online message boards was that the students who actively used these forums might have been more receptive to my invitations, compared to a generic email sent from their international office. If a student was a regular contributor to (or reader of) the themes and issues being discussed online, they might have been more willing to give their time to speak to me for the research.

The gatekeepers for this strategy consisted of the forum administrators of the internet groups where I wanted to advertise and recruit. Whilst I could have posted an invitation openly, without having to go through the administrators, I nevertheless contacted them in advance. This was to ensure my message was not treated as ‘spamming’ the forum. Similarly, one of the online forums had an ‘announcements’ section above the forum’s topics. I therefore sought, through an administrator, for my invitation for participants to be placed within this section. This technique, I thought, might have aided in extra-advertising as it would have remained on the home page of that forum for more students to view.

The message boards selected for advertising the study were:
http://www.internationalstudentforum.com/ - An online forum where ISM students provided help and advice for other ISM students.

http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk (Advertising within the ‘international lounge’ within the forum section) - Again, an online forum where ISM students provided help and advice for other ISM students.

https://www.facebook.com/pages/Erasmus/28357862504 (The ERASMUS Network on Facebook) - The largest online community of current and past ERASMUS students.

Unfortunately, though, this targeting campaign failed to recruit any students. To compensate for this lack of response, I sent several ‘tweets’ through the social networking site, Twitter. The rationale behind this recruitment strategy was to ask HEI international departments to ‘retweet’ a link to a website that I had created to document the aims and objectives of the study (https://studyabroadproject.wordpress.com). This meant that prospective participants (who might have ‘followed’ their HEI international department) could understand what the study was about if the retweet had interested them. This recruitment strategy, unlike the message board forums, proved successful and six interviews were completed through this approach. This strategy then, that was employed after contacting HEI international departments resulted in a welcome recruitment boost in the later stages of the fieldwork. In addition to Twitter, I also distributed a poster across my own university advertising the project to returning students. To my knowledge, this recruitment strategy resulted in only one interview and was therefore not a fully redundant activity, unlike the message board forums. Nevertheless, these four separate methods for recruiting students resulted in the target of 40 interviews being achieved. The numbers of students recruited through each of the four methods can be seen in Table 2 below.
Table 2 – Number of students interviewed through each recruitment method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment Method</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Through International Office</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Twitter</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Poster on campus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Message Forums</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3.7) Analysing the Data, Generalisability and External Validity

As this was a qualitative investigation, I adopted a thematic approach to analyse the data. I anticipated that 40 interviews would give me the breadth and diversity to explore a number of themes around the choices, decisions, motivations involved with mobility. Thematic analysis, in this project, required me, as the researcher, to understand the significance of the participant’s narrative in relation to the 14 themes I discussed earlier. This required an analysis of how their story weaved between these themes and how each theme interacted with others. This was why I considered a thematic approach useful - as I have argued elsewhere (Seal, 2016), thematic analysis involves locating patterns within data to understand how they might contribute to a wider theme that holds significance in relation to the research questions. In my research, I conducted a thematic analysis using, primarily, ‘a priori themes’. Whilst many qualitative researchers develop only data driven themes, the opposite of a priori themes, I analysed most of the data through the 14 themes I outlined earlier. This was a methodological choice because the themes that I discussed earlier were mostly derived from the existing findings and debates presented by previous studies on student mobility. These were therefore a priori themes specifically because they were areas of significance that had been discussed by previous studies. Because I had arranged these themes into a chronological order for the interview (starting with, for example, the participant’s background, following onto their experiences and then reflections abroad), I felt it was beneficial to analyse the data this way. For example, examining how reflections on the experience might have linked to background or how experiences gained abroad might have linked to the participants’ background gave me a deeper understanding of their story. Furthermore, using a priori themes were useful for strengthening or challenging the arguments and ideas presented by other researchers in this area (Seal, 2016: 455).
This, as will become clear in the following three chapters, was a particularly useful feature of the research design as I was able to explore what themes were significant for this group of young people.

Additionally though, using a priori themes meant that I could collect a significant amount of data within these pre-established themes from the first to the last interview. This was important for striving for theoretical saturation. Some argue ‘…a claim to data saturation is only appropriate when it can be demonstrated that researchers have gained a full understanding of the variety of experiences relevant to their research problem’ (Gibbs et al., 2007: 543). Whilst theoretical saturation is often discussed specifically within grounded theory approaches to research, it is still helpful in addressing the issue of how and when I knew that ‘all’ data had been collected. Indeed, I would argue that, by the fortieth interview, there was no new data occurring within the interviews. Whilst participants articulated their stories differently, their motivations, experiences and aspirations held many commonalities between them. This was certainly apparent by the last interview.

However, I did, in places, use data driven codes to embrace unexpected themes when coding. Although my a priori themes captured a lot of the data, there were moments where significant unanticipated data did not fall within any of the a priori themes. When coding data segments under the a priori themes, I sometimes came across repetitions and/or similarities that, I felt, were significant. One of these themes, for example, was the theme of authenticity (that I discuss in considerable detail in chapter 4. Discovering this theme came about through the students’ articulation of how their mobility experience would differ from that of a traditional holiday. Whilst chapter 4 goes into significant depth into this theme, it is worth highlighting here that the students’ narratives would often centre on this distinction. This was therefore an example of a data driven code because it emerged outside of my a priori framework for coding. I now turn to discussing issues surrounding the generalisation of this project.

Whilst ‘generalisation’ is usually a concept that is used to judge the success of a sample within quantitative research projects, I also believe that my qualitative research can demonstrate generalisable findings to some extent. Due to receiving some variation in most of my sampling criteria (in addition to the saturation of my a priori themes), the same study could be repeated, and, in theory, reproduce similar results. I can therefore make a plausible argument for my findings being
generalisable to some extent across different groups of credit mobile students. However, I was also conscious during my data collection that ‘...qualitative researchers must strike a fine balance between obtaining thick description from each case and obtaining comparative description from each comparison’ (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007: 249). This view also presents another strong justification for having used a purposeful sample. Through purposeful sampling I could use ‘thick description’ and exploration with a participant’s narrative whilst comparing their descriptions across the sampling criteria. Whilst I accept that generalisability of findings is important though, I also believed (for this project) that ‘...improved understanding of complex human issues [was] more important than generalisability of results’ (Marshall, 1996: 524). However, I do not think this should neglect the possibility for being able to generalise some of my findings later in the conclusion chapter.

Whilst I have argued for some degree of generalisability within the project, I believe a balance needs to be met between what can be concluded from the data I collected and what can be generalised from this data. By concluded I mean what the findings from this study have shown, and by generalisable I mean what specific findings from the data can theoretically be applied to wider groups of credit mobile students. In recognition then that conclusions and generalisations are inherently different, I agree with Mayring’s (2007: unpaginated) argument that generalisation is an important concept to think about when designing research. However, the researcher needs to clarify to the reader what arguments, points or inferences are being made with generalisability in mind. For example, one problem with generalising my findings to all credit mobile students can be encountered though my sample of HEIs. As I recruited all but one student from pre-92 HEIs, the generalisability of my findings is limited to some extent to these types of institutions. Therefore, it might be problematic to talk about all UK credit mobile students due to the small sample of pre-92 HEIs in this study. In other words, my study is not representative of all UK HEIs and therefore all UK credit mobile students (even though the majority of mobile students depart from pre-92 institutions). This does provide a challenge for the possibility for generalising my findings.

Another potential problem for generalising my findings is evident through studying students who have only completed mobility for a semester or year abroad (credit mobility). As with the above example, my findings can be theoretically
generalised to only credit mobile students. Indeed previous mobility studies on UK whole-degree mobility (see Waters and Brooks, 2010ab) and UK credit-mobility (see Deakin (2013)) have found different motivations depending on the type of mobility undertaken. However, as stressed throughout the introductory chapter, the major difference in credit mobile and whole-degree students is that the former group may often decide to become internationally mobile during their studies as opposed to before. This small detail could perhaps be responsible for a host of different motivations and aspirations between each group of mobile students. Therefore, any generalisation within this project can only apply to credit mobile students.

It should also be recognised that my sampling criteria are not the only concerns for the generalisability of the project. The individual circumstances of students at the time of interview could have also affected the validity of the project. As Marshall (1996: 524) suggests, ‘…the researcher should consider the broader picture: would this individual express a different opinion if they were interviewed next week or next month?’ When I was interviewing participants, there were often differences amongst the time between the students’ return from being abroad and the interview. The issue here was that this time lapse between mobility return and interview was different for different students and this therefore had implications for the internal validity of the project. For example, some students had returned from their mobility in the previous academic year at time of interview, whilst, for others, they had returned sometimes weeks before the interview took place. I therefore needed to recognise that views, memories, and emotions could change over time. This issue had theoretical implications too, not least due to the effects that time could have on a participant’s recollection of certain parts of their mobility or how they recounted their experiences.

Alred and Byram’s (2006) study of British Erasmus students ‘10 years on’ highlights some of the complexities similar to the above discussion. Whilst their participants recounted their experiences 10 years on, their participants had further developed individually within their family and career lives. As such, their research ‘…demonstrates that the YA [year abroad] can become a lens through which to consider later experience, a force which leads someone in an unexpected direction, and the experience which created’
Furthermore, Alred and Byram (2006) suggest that their participants’ mobility gave them a greater sense of ‘belonging’ at home. This provides a significant contrast with some of the literature discussed in the previous chapter that suggests mobility students might become, or at least envisage themselves becoming ‘tourists’ (Bauman, 1998) or cosmopolitan citizens (Hannerz, 1996). If Alred and Byram’s (2006) findings are part of a wider phenomenon, it could be suggested that the ‘intensity’ (Tsoukalas, 2008) of mobility experience lessens as time passes. This again highlights that the length of time from mobility might have had some bearing on how students recounted their experiences to me. However, whilst this could be considered a methodological limitation, it is also a broader methodological issue with all research and not just limited to my study.

(3.8) Ethical Considerations

Whilst I have now outlined a viable and feasible research design, I now examine the ethical considerations that surrounded the project. Whilst all social research studies contain ethical issues for consideration, I was always conscious that the interviews I conducted in this study could have potentially elicited information about the students’ lives that could have been viewed as private or deeply personal. I was therefore (and remain) in full agreement with a point made by the British Sociological Association that:

‘…although sociologists, like other researchers are committed to the advancement of knowledge, that goal does not, of itself, provide an entitlement to override the rights of others’

(BSA, 2002: Point 11)

I was sensitive to this statement and it therefore formed an underlying basis for all of my ethical considerations that I outline below. These considerations were given a favourable ethical opinion by my university’s ethics committee before the fieldwork took place.

(3.8.1) Responsibilities towards Research Participants

Whilst I have indicated above that this project strived towards a contribution to new knowledge, I agreed that this goal should not have constituted an end within itself at
the risk of harming participants. Therefore, if any participant stated (or I believed) they were becoming distressed within either the interview or immediately afterwards, I asked them whether they wished to firstly have break and/or (depending on the severity) whether they wished to withdraw themselves and all of their data from the project.

The interviews were carried out in a neutral-space for both my participants and myself. Upon contact with the student, I suggested either a café/bar on campus or a library study room/teaching room where the interviews could have taken place. This gave participants the freedom to choose a location that was known to them in a familiar setting.

All participants were advised of the possibility, prior to the interview, that the findings from the project may be published in a journal article, book chapter, or conference presentation. Again, this allowed participants the freedom to decide whether they wished to engage in the study. Similarly, I also advised all participants who was funding the project prior to the interview should they have wished to find out more about the funding body and its wider work.

(3.8.2) Informed Consent

All participants, prior to the interview, were given a participant information sheet that outlined the study’s aims and objectives and asked to sign a document informing me of their consent (see appendix B for both information and consent sheet). The consent form specified that they were aware of the research aims, objectives and who the research was being carried out for. Without a consent form, an interview did not take place (in the case of web-chat interviews, consent forms were returned to me via post). If a participant had stated that they did not wish to sign a form for any reason, they would have be thanked for their time and advised that they were free to leave the research project (although this did not happen in any of the interviews).

I also sought permission to post interview invitations from the administrators of the message forums I targeted. This was to ensure that my message did not get treated as ‘spam’. However, and more importantly, it was ethical and polite to request permission to post invitations.

(3.8.3) Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality
When I advertised the project via mobility message boards and Twitter, potential participants were asked to privately respond to my invitation. This was to ensure that they did not agree to an interview and 'post' their name on the message board(s), or 'tweet', where other people could have seen. If a participant did, by mistake, post an open reply, I believe it would have been unethical to interview that person because their anonymity and confidentiality could not have been ensured.

All participants were given pseudonyms within the write up process and this was explained to each participant prior to the interview. Similarly, a participant’s HEI was not discussed by name, at the risk of them becoming identifiable. Instead, for example, the University of Portsmouth (not included in this study) would be referred to as a ‘post-92’ HEI in the South.

Upon completion of the interview, I asked again if the participant was comfortable for me to use all of the data that had been discussed. The rationale for asking this was to address the issue that participants did not always know what they were going to say within an interview at the start and may, on reflection, have had reservations about something that they did not want to be documented in written form. Of course, all participants were given email and postal contact details for me and reminded that they could contact me directly to withdraw some (or all) of their interview data by a specified date before submission.

(3.8.4) Recorded Data & Storage

Interviews were recorded using two digital recorders (one used as a backup). Participants were asked before the interview commenced whether they were comfortable with the interview being recorded. Should a participant have declined, I would have asked them whether they were comfortable with me taking notes whilst in conversation. If a participant had not been comfortable with note taking, I would have aimed to write up notes upon completion of the interview. Both digital recorders were kept in a locked filing cabinet within my office that was only accessible to myself.

All interviews were transcribed by myself using a word processing programme. Transcriptions of all interviews were kept on one work computer at the University of Surrey that was password protected and one home computer that, again, was password protected. Therefore, any piece of information or item that
could have potentially revealed the identities of participants were either locked in a filing system or kept on a password protected personal computer.

(3.9) Chapter Summary
Within this chapter I have outlined what I considered to be the best approach to researching my aims and objectives that was both methodologically sound and practically achievable. By designing the study qualitatively, I was able to gather rich and in-depth data that explored students’ motivations and aspirations. However, I also argued for using a semi-structured approach specifically because I required some degree of comparability, whilst also having a desire to focus on certain topics I wished to explore. Due to having a clear focus on certain topics, I outlined that a form of purposeful sampling, firstly, helped in recruiting a number of different participants, but, secondly, enabled my findings to be (theoretically) generalisable to some extent. Furthermore, I have also discussed my epistemological position that strived for academic rigour, but also acknowledged the political complexity of values and subjectivity as something that addressed the limitations of objectivity. Instead, I have argued for an approach that started and finished from a position of values, recognising that critical reflexivity of myself as a researcher and person (through auto/biography) created a value-explicit, not value-free approach. Stemming from this Feminist tradition of thought was also my argument for an approach to interviewing that was characterised by establishing a highly interactive conversation. This approach, I argued, recognised that interviewing led to negotiated and contextualised interactions as opposed to an ‘unveiling’ of reality. However, this approach was linked to my belief that a ‘conversation’ style interview elicited a greater depth and breadth of data due to the comfort and relaxed style of the interaction in an ethically sensitive way. The culmination of these points, I suggest, allowed me to create a robust and feasible research project to explore the motivations and aspirations for credit mobile UK students. I now turn to examining the data that was collected through the research design this chapter has now outlined.
Chapter 4 – Before Mobility

(4.1) Introduction
Findlay et al. (2006: 303) argue ‘…it is well known that, in the UK, students are not drawn from a representative cross-section of the population but come disproportionately from middle-class and privileged backgrounds’. Indeed, other studies of student mobility, almost without exception, have found that students who opt for study abroad programmes (credit and whole-degree) tend to be high academic achievers, who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. For this reason it is often argued that, for young people who choose to become internationally mobile, study abroad programmes can be viewed ‘…as a continuation of an already elevated life trajectory’ (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013: 531).

This chapter explores these “elevated life-trajectories” (ibid.) through examining how the backgrounds and biographies of the young people shaped their motivations to undertake either a study or work placement abroad. Who comprises this small, yet highly significant group of UK students who decide to undertake a period abroad as part of their degree? And how do their motivations, choices, and decisions involved in becoming mobile fit with their backgrounds and life-stories? Previous qualitative studies of UK whole degree mobility (Waters and Brooks, 2010ab, Brooks and Waters, 2009, 2010, Brooks et al., 2012) have argued that a period spent abroad provides (whole degree) students with a valuable source of cultural capital that will reproduce advantage in their lives. However, they have also maintained that these groups of students, throughout their lives, have drawn on a significant amount of both cultural and economic capital in their decision to study abroad. This chapter builds on these ideas.

(4.1.1) A Life of Travelling – Cristina’s Story
Cristina, a Romanian born UK national, had attended a number of international and grammar schools throughout her life. After achieving three A stars at A-Level, she wanted to study for a dual-degree9 at her Russell Group HEI, and her second degree

9 Cristina’s dual-degree meant that she was studying for two separate degrees in parallel. One degree was at a Russell Group university in the UK, whilst the other degree was at a prestigious university in France.
at Columbia in New York. Due to a high risk of not being able to secure a place at Columbia because of the limited number of spaces on the course, Cristina instead chose to study for her second degree (as part of her dual degree course) at a prestigious HEI in France. Cristina’s parents, who had both studied at university, and were chemical engineers, had often had to relocate (internationally) when they were assigned new projects across multiple countries. For this reason, international travel had been a way of life for Cristina since a young age. She regarded herself as fortunate that money was not an issue when it came to deciding on her university education. When I asked Cristina whether the costs of doing a dual-degree (one degree in the UK and one degree in France) impacted on her decision to choose her course, she replied, “no, not at all. I mean I’m quite lucky in that I don’t really need to worry about that”.

Living abroad, relocating, and adapting to new cultures had been a way of life for Cristina from an early age. Her experiences of living transnationally constituted a seemingly normal and natural way of life. When asked specifically about her motivations to study for a dual-degree, it was increasingly apparent that Cristina’s biography had had a dramatic impact on her decision:

\[\text{Me: …why did you decide to do a dual-degree that had a period of time in a different country?}\]

\[\text{Cristina: Well I guess it was mainly because during my entire life, I lived in many countries. So, for me, I wanted to carry on with that. I wanted to be able to study in different cultures and see different educational systems….I was born in Romania then, uh, at seven I left Romania and moved to Poland; then from Poland moved to Egypt; from Egypt to Morocco; from Morocco to Qatar. Um, from Qatar to Norway; from Norway to the UK; from the UK to Malaysia.}\]

\[(\text{Female/Middle class/White British})\]

This quotation from Cristina highlights that her decision to study abroad was not a spontaneous choice to “study in different cultures and see different educational systems”, but rather a choice that allowed for a continuation of living and learning transnationally. Whilst there is no doubt that Cristina herself made the choice of whether to study abroad or not, her decision would have been somewhat normal in
the context of her life. Cristina highlights this normative view of transnational living, as her decision to study abroad would allow her to “carry on with that”. The way in which Cristina frames her life-experiences offers a key illustration of her pre-established transnational identity before studying in France:

Me: Do you think that those experiences have made you want to enter a career that’s internationally mobile as well?

Cristina: I’ve tasted that sort of pleasure of moving around and getting to know different cultures and, you know, different foods and everything from a very young age. And getting to know different people who think very differently. And I wanna continue doing that because I think that travelling is probably the best education you can get.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

In this quotation, we can see that Cristina possessed a wealth of experience in living abroad prior to her student mobility. This wealth of experience, no doubt, helped to establish a sense of normality to her decision to study in France - her “pleasure” at “moving around…from a very young age” highlights in detail that her “taste” for travel had been cultivated over a period of time. This cultivated taste for living transnationally therefore demonstrates the absence of an ‘off-the cuff’ or random decision to study abroad. Instead, Cristina’s instinctive decision to continue living and working abroad is a good example of Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts of habitus, forms of capital and field. In terms of cultural capital, Cristina’s transnational lifestyle developed an ability for “getting to know different cultures”. These repeated experiences and “tasted pleasures” demonstrate how, over time, they became ‘an external wealth converted into an integral part of the person’ (ibid.) – Cristina could relocate, travel, and live in different countries with relative ease, free of any apprehension or economic restrictions.

Later in the interview, Cristina told me how she had applied for summer internships at many top private banking firms in London. Cristina advised me that she had been offered all the internships she had applied for and had accepted a position at a well-known global investment company.
Cristina: (on successful interview at global investment company) Well I think they (interviewers) sort of valued that (study in France). But one of them had done a similar degree to me; only that instead of going to France, they went to Germany. So because of that I think we had a much stronger connection than if it would have been someone else who hadn’t had the same experience.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Cristina’s success at securing an internship in this highly competitive company raises two crucial issues for discussion. Firstly, her observation that the interviewers “valued” her study abroad provides an example of how it is “…possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital” (Bourdieu, 1986: 21). In this example, Cristina believed that her decision to study for her second degree in France gave her a competitive advantage over other students who had not studied abroad. Secondly though, Cristina also believed that as one of her interviewers had also studied abroad, this allowed for a “stronger connection” between them. Again, drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1986), it could be argued that this connection, which stems from Cristina’s acquired cultural capital, established a significant form of social capital. As Bourdieu (1986: 21) argues, social capital is a network of relationships that is characterised by ‘members’. This network “…provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit’. In Cristina’s case, both she and the interviewer shared a collective identity through their international “credentials”. Cristina’s international background, coupled with her qualifications and economic resources therefore presents a clear example of a young person whose significant amounts of economic, cultural, and social capital positions them for success in accessing the ‘best’ jobs and opportunities throughout their lives.

Cristina’s story has been analysed here to introduce the way in which young people can view the opportunities for international travel in an educational context. If Cristina’s story was representative of the other students interviewed within this study, the discussion would focus on how ‘elite’ young people draw on the significant amounts of cultural, social, and economic capital to which they have access to live transnational lives. The important thing to understand here though is that, whilst many of the themes in Cristina’s story foreshadow the discussion of this chapter, her
story was actually rare across the sample of the students interviewed in this study. Whilst dispositions to travel were inherent in a number of the students’ life stories, their biographies conveyed subtle differences that directed their choice to undertake a period abroad. For example, some students had experienced a significant amount of previous travel experience prior to mobility, whilst other students had experienced a small (or even minimal) amount; some students had supportive parents who saw value in the opportunity to go abroad, whilst other students outlined how their parents were sceptical or hostile towards the idea of studying/working abroad. The backgrounds, stories, and biographies of these students therefore form the basis for the discussion of this chapter.

Drawing on her empirical study of ERASMUS students, Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 52) suggests that students who decide to undertake study abroad often have pre-established levels of “mobility capital” (as I discussed in the literature review). Mobility capital, she argues, is comprised of four key elements: (1) family and personal history, (2) previous experience of mobility, (3) the first experience of adaptation (when a young person travelled abroad for the first time), and (4) personality features (such as openness to change, desires to try new things, etc.). In this chapter, I demonstrate how “previous experience of mobility” and “family and personal history” are the most significant driving forces behind the students’ choices surrounding their study abroad. By focussing exclusively on family and personal history, and the students’ previous experiences abroad, I develop Murphy-Lejeune’s model of student mobility, discussing, in considerable depth, how these factors can influence the decision to study/work abroad. Within Part One of this chapter, I begin by exploring the frequency and type of travel the young people within this study had previously experienced. However, I argue in this section that frequency of travel alone is problematic for exploring desires to study abroad. Instead, I outline how desires to study or work abroad are often located in a perceived quest for an ‘authentic’ experience that, in many cases, had developed from previous travel experiences. In Part Two, I turn to exploring the role of family in the decision to study/work abroad. Within this section, I argue that, for many students, dispositions towards international travel were often normalised and encouraged by their parents. However, I also discuss a minority of students in the sample where decisions to study or work abroad were made outside of the ‘family habitus’. Instead, where dispositions for travel were not shared by family members, I argue that universities
often played a crucial role in developing what was possible within the students’ lives. In Part Three, I draw on Hodkinson et al.’s (2012) concept of ‘horizons for action’ to further develop how desires for international travel are often rooted within a student’s habitus. However, I suggest that the habitus does not determine their choices, but rather helps to either confirm their choices through “routines”, or make new choices through “turning points” when they arrive at university.

Part One
(4.2) Previous Mobility Experience
Research studies that focus on the backgrounds and lives of young people who study abroad often pay significant attention to the previous experiences of international travel amongst their samples of students. Exploring past travel experience amongst the students interviewed for this study therefore provides a fitting starting point to explore their motivations to study or work abroad.

Whilst international travel is still a luxury for many, it no longer remains restricted to select elites. With an abundance of ‘travel deals’ online and in high street shops, one can easily find that intra-European holidays, particularly to ‘warmer climate’ destinations such as on the Mediterranean Sea, can be purchased at a lower cost than many domestic holidays. Similarly, the sustained growth in the European ‘package holiday’ has diversified and increased choice for consumers, presenting people with choices to suit all budgets. Whilst recognising that international travel remains an aspiration for many people, going abroad is no longer a privilege restricted to aristocratic young men embarking on their Grand Tours. With more people now going abroad, it is perhaps too simplistic to argue that young people who have experienced a different country (e.g. through holidays or school trips) are more prone to choose study abroad. In many respects, it seems logical to argue that previous experience of travelling abroad stimulates a desire for future travel. Whilst I shall demonstrate that this is true to a certain extent, I will also show how measuring previous travel experience quantitatively (i.e. how many times and where a young person has travelled) can overlook other important issues inherent in the students’ stories. Instead, a deeper understanding of the desires and motivations to study abroad, I shall argue, can be found in the students’ specific examples of experiencing life abroad. Whilst it is useful to explore the diversity of places that young people have travelled to before their educational mobility, this section will
demonstrate how the students in this study reflected on the ways in which their experiences contributed to a desire to undertake either a study or work placement. The discussion therefore presents a strong argument that, whilst the frequency of travel a young person has been exposed to might have an effect on the desire to study abroad, this alone does not fully explain the role previous travel experience plays in shaping motivations to study abroad. Within this section, I therefore demonstrate how previous experiences abroad can have a qualitative effect on the students’ inner desires to “extend horizons beyond the domestic” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 54).

With the expansion of accessibility in going abroad, it was unsurprising that every student within the sample had travelled abroad (i.e. outside the United Kingdom) at least once before his or her study/work-placement abroad. This was largely due to secondary educational institutions, as the majority of participants reported visiting France and/or Belgium for short visits with their school. When excluding school trips to neighbouring EU countries, the frequency of travel amongst the students, however, varied significantly – some students had only travelled once or twice to nearby EU countries; some students had travelled with their families to multiple European countries and further afield to other destinations outside the continent (primarily the US); whilst other students had either lived abroad previously, or travelled with their families across multiple countries and undertaken some form of independent travel (“travelling”).
**Figure 7 - Categorisations of Travel Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small Amount of PTE</th>
<th>Medium Amount of PTE</th>
<th>Large Amount of PTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- One or two holiday trips abroad with family premobility</td>
<td>- Frequent holiday trips within EU or US.</td>
<td>- Lived abroad before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Only visited France/Belgium (often with school)</td>
<td>- Some experience (one or two) of trips to different continents</td>
<td>- PTE includes multiple trips to different continents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- School trips only experience of going abroad</td>
<td>- Short trips within the EU (e.g. inter-railing”)</td>
<td>- Independent travel (e.g. Gap Year or “Travelling”).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Students | 25 Students | 12 Students

* PTE (Previous Travel Experience)

The following three extracts, taken from individual students, reflect the three categorisations in **Figure 7**:

**Richard:** Um, well the furthest I’ve been before Canada (study abroad destination) would have been France. So, um, usually though, the only holidays would be around the UK a lot…Canada was the first time I’d actually been in a plane…Um, but yeah, in terms of going abroad, I’ve only gone to France twice.

(Male/Working Class/White British)

(Small Amount of PTE)

**Amy:** The first time I ever went abroad was when I was five and that was Florida…I’ve been back to Florida a couple of times since then. Um, I went to Paris
with school and with family. I go to Spain a lot because my grandparents have a property in Spain. Um, I inter-railed after A-Levels around Europe.

(Female/Middle class/White British)
(Medium Amount of PTE)

Mira: I’d done some independent travelling when I as about sixteen or seventeen where I spent a month in Borneo…Um, we’d (family) been to lots of places in Europe. First it was mainly France and then we really branched out into really more exotic places. We’d been to Kenya, and Sri Lanka and, um, India, and America.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)
(Large Amount of PTE)

Whilst each of these extracts gives an insight into the frequencies of previous travel experience, it is evident that these experiences significantly differed between each of the students - Richard had never been on a plane prior to departing on his study abroad programme to Canada as his experiences of going abroad were restricted to a single neighbouring country to the UK (France). Amy, who studied in Italy, by contrast, had travelled within Europe with both her school and with her family. She had frequently visited Spain because her grandparents have a property there and she had travelled through different European cities on a short inter-railing trip. Although Amy’s experiences were significantly more varied than Richard’s, Mira’s story reflected a larger amount of previous travel experience: like Amy, Mira, who studied in Canada, had travelled to “lots of places in Europe”. However, her independent travel in Borneo, in addition to her cross-continental experiences in Asia, America, and Africa differentiate her from Amy, and obviously, Richard who had only travelled to one other country.

The stories outlined above largely reflected the frequencies and types of previous travel experience amongst the UK credit mobile students in this sample. However, it is important to clarify that these levels did vary: some students had travelled with family more than with their school, while other students had travelled with their school or their friends more than their family. Some students had gone to continents such as North America once or twice, while others had travelled to different continents more frequently. Unlike Cristina, who was analysed as an atypical case at the beginning of this chapter, the majority of students within the
sample were not frequent ‘jet-setters’ or experienced in transnational living. Whilst there were some examples of transnational living and/or large amounts of cross-continental travel (12 students), this group of young people did not represent the majority of the young people within the study. Therefore, whilst frequencies of travel experiences might affect a young person’s decision, there appears to be no simple relationship between frequencies of previous travel and the propensity to choose a study or work placement aboard. It is now worth turning our attention to the students’ actual experiences of being abroad and exploring their possible influence on the decision to study abroad.

(4.3) The Experience(s) of Previous Travel Experience
As discussed at the start of this chapter, research studies that focus on Western students who travel abroad for the whole of, or as part of their degree, suggest strongly that previous travel experience is related to the choice to study abroad. However, I have shown in section 4.2 that, due the large variation in previous experiences of travel, it is difficult to ascertain whether these frequencies had any effect on the decision to study/work abroad. Instead, I now demonstrate that it is important to understand how previous travel experiences can affect the way(s) in which young people think about international travel.

Me: And do you think that those [past] experiences [in going abroad], in any sense, were linked to your decision to do study abroad?

Suzie: Um, yeah it did…firstly because…obviously I’d been to America and enjoyed it there, which made me want to go back there specifically. But I think also…because I’d never really had a bad traveling experience, it had always been a positive experience for me. So I didn’t think that doing study abroad would be any different; it would just be an extended positive experience.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Holly: …Yeah it’s, like, exciting to learn about a new place. And I think that would warrant me to…travel [to] other places. So that probably did, like, start that in me…And it’s a positive experience to travel, like it’s not a negative, d’you know?

(Female/Middle class/White British)
Within these statements, both Suzie and Holly explained that their previous travel experiences were “positive” experiences. Their views were not unique; across the whole of the sample of students interviewed, almost all of the students remarked that their previous experiences abroad had contributed, in some way, to their desire to study or work abroad. But what made these experiences abroad so ‘positive’ for these young people? And in what ways did these positive experiences abroad stimulate a desire to study or work abroad?

When exploring how the students articulated the experiences they had accumulated through previous travel, stories of seeking authentic or ‘real’ experiences were common. Owen, a Social Science student at a Russell Group HEI, chose to go on an ERASMUS study placement to France due to his passion for learning languages. When I asked Owen where this passion for languages stemmed from, he quickly identified that his introduction to going on cruise holidays with his family was “definitely” the reason:

Owen: …um, a lot of people tend to go on, you know, a holiday for two weeks to a hot hotel with a beach near the sea. We use to do that until I was about ten years old and then my Mum and Dad had a couple of friends who said, “listen, we went on a cruise; try it”. [My] Mum and Dad said, “that’s gonna be awful. No way. But go on, we’ll give it a go”…. And like, I think for me, from the age of ten ‘till eighteen, I didn’t go on holiday in summer that wasn’t a cruise. They just fell in love with them…I don’t know why; they just did. And that was the same for me…the idea that you could go on a holiday…you could actually go to Spain, Italy, Greece, and France with four languages and although it’s not much, you know, especially ‘cause there was a lot of Americans on the boats, and you know what the Americans are like with languages…very, very arrogant…just like English people really. So just to be able to say “hello, how are you?” in whatever languages you were…you know, getting off the boat…it just…I thought went a long way.

(Male/Middle class/White British)
Owen’s story here is important for exploring how young people constructed their ‘positive’ previous experiences abroad. Firstly, Owen outlines what he considers to be a typical or traditional holiday (“two weeks in a hotel with a beach near the sea”). Once Owen constructs his version of a typical holiday that “a lot of people go on”, he confirms that he himself used to engage in this ‘typical’ tourism. But when describing his introduction to cruising, he views his experiences as different to the typical touristic activities he had experienced in the past. It is clear that he “fell in love” with cruises precisely because they allowed him to experience different countries and become exposed to different languages within a relatively short period of time. Owen realises that the ability to say a short phrase or sentence in another language (“hello, how are you?”) had a dramatic impact on the way he thought about different languages and countries. Moreover, his comments surrounding the “arrogant” American and British people, who did not attempt the local languages, serve to illustrate that he views his own experiences as different to the other tourists. For Owen, being able to speak a short phrase in the ports he visited served to make his experience “go a long way”.

Jess, a Social Science student at a pre-92 university who had completed a work-placement in the US, expressed similar ideas to Owen. Before entering higher education, Jess had taken a Gap Year and had travelled independently extensively. When telling me about the experiences she had gained on her Gap Year travelling, she mentioned twice that the travelling experiences had made her “more cultured”. At the second time of making this comment, I asked Jess what she meant by “more cultured”:

Jess: I think…when you’re out there you just immerse yourself in it. You…obviously you respect, you learn about all these different societal norms, which you have to follow because my personal opinion is that if you go somewhere else, you respect the laws of that country. You don’t go in there and…do things the same way that you’d do over in England. So like wearing long sleeves, and like stuff that covers your knee when you’re going into like temples and religious places, [and] like you eat their food. Don’t go to a different country and eat like a burger and chips. Like try the local. And I think…talk to the locals. Like, find out want they wanna do. And that’s what I used to do…like that’s my definition of cultured…like just learning about a different way of life.
We can clearly see here that Jess’ response is, in many ways, similar to Owen’s. For Owen, his ability to learn and speak the different languages at the ports he visited created his passion for languages. In Jess’ extract, she uses the word “immerse” to clarify how a person can become ‘more cultured’. Immersing oneself in the culture, for Jess, means living ‘like the locals do’ and it was therefore important for her to “learn” and “respect” “all these different societal norms” in the cultures she visited. However, the most significant aspect of her story revolves around how she views her own motivations and experiences abroad as different to other people. It is evident for Jess that “immersing” herself in the culture creates the pleasurable experiences of being abroad. Again, like Owen, she is conscious of what ‘other’ tourists do when abroad and, through her words, distances herself from these people: “don’t go to a different country and eat like a burger and chips. Like, try the local”.

After Jess had told me of her previous travel experiences, I was particularly interested to explore whether she thought there was a distinction between going on holiday and travelling. She replied:

Jess: Yeah. I define a holiday as a two-week, or like a ten-day vacation in like somewhere hot where you can either...(pauses)...but then people do it differently. I mean, like, whenever my family go on holiday we literally go to a beach resort and we will just enjoy the sun. Like, I think for most English people it’s to go out, get drunk, and enjoy the sun. And that’s fine. For me, travelling is when you actually...you’re kind of like on your own essentially. And you almost...explore.

Interestingly, Jess’ imagery of the ‘typical’ holiday is almost identical to Owen’s: resorts, hotels, beaches, and sun. Like Owen, she confirms that she herself had also experienced this type of tourism with her family. But again, after outlining her conception of ‘standard tourism’, she equates it with “getting drunk”, whilst enjoying the sun. After constructing a picture of what English tourists do, she is quick to identify that there is nothing wrong with engaging in this sort of tourism (“go out, get drunk, and enjoy the sun. And that’s fine”). But after expressing her opinion about
what “most English people” do on holiday, she returns to explaining that travelling and holidaying is different due to the former activity being concerned with *exploring*.

Other students also expressed how they had been attracted to ‘exploring’ through their previous international travel. Adam (Male/Middle class/White British) had spent two months after college travelling throughout Thailand, Hong Kong, and Australia. He explained that he “always wanted to get out and explore and [visit] new places, and [have] fun meeting new people”. Lydia (Female/Middle class/White British) suggested she had “always been… a kind of, like, seeking, explorative type person” and had done a little bit of travelling before going on her ERASMUS study abroad placement. For Lydia, “every time I do (go travelling), I kind of find that it really blows my mind open and makes me feel, uh…like [it] really fuels me”.

In some respects, the analyses of the students’ stories above reflect traditional debates in the sociology of tourism: ‘…a central element of any tourist experience is the juxtaposition of the normal day-to-day environment and the unusual and different experience that tourists can encounter while on holiday’ (Heitmann, 2011: 45). While all tourists might desire *difference* to some degree when going on holiday, the analysis so far has shown that students attached significant value to gaining an ‘authentic’ experience when they travelled abroad. Their experiences (outlined above) were not recounted and retold as simple visitations to other countries and cultures. Instead, their experiences were shaped by recollections of integration and inquisitiveness surrounding their visits. These students did not simply enjoy venturing to new places, but actively revelled in “exploring” (Lydia and Adam) and “immersing” (Jess) themselves in their destinations.

These points do, however, require clarification about what constitutes an ‘authentic’ experience. Cohen and Cohen (2012) have argued that the concept of authenticity continues to remain under-developed within tourist studies. They suggest that whilst some researchers have used it as an objective concept to explore whether various experiences can be considered ‘authentic’ (i.e. gaining an insight into the ‘real lives’ of others (Urry, 2002)), other researchers have instead focused on the subjective experiences of authenticity. The latter approach seems applicable to my argument because a subjective (or relativist) understanding of authenticity allows us to view it as a process in which people can subjectively come to feel whether they have strived for it, or even achieved it. Owen’s example of cruising (outlined earlier) is relevant here. From an objectivist position, some people might
argue that a cruise type holiday fits within a ‘standard tourism’ category, where authenticity is difficult to achieve through its package itinerary. However, for Owen, his experiences of speaking the different languages at the ports he visited allowed him to perceive his experiences as “original”, “genuine”, “real” and “trustworthy” (Cohen and Cohen, 2012: 1296). For Owen, these experiences were different to the holidays he used to go on “to a hot hotel with a beach near the sea”. Whilst, of course, some people could argue that Owen did not achieve an insight into the ‘real lives’ (Urry, 2002) of the people he met, his perceptions of achieving authenticity nevertheless directly contributed to, and shaped, his passion and desire to learn new languages. Authenticity, in this sense, should not be seen as an objective concept which people can either achieve or not achieve, but rather one that explores how people feel they have achieved it. It is these feelings and perceptions that therefore stimulate and further develop vistas of the abroad.

The above discussion has demonstrated that, in order to understand motivations to travel abroad, it is important to understand how young people view and construct their previous experiences abroad. However, with the exception of Owen (who developed a passion for languages through cruising), the above analysis consisted of students who all had some experience of independent travel (i.e. the group of students within the ‘large amount of previous travel experience’ category in Figure 7). Themes of immersion, exploration, and inquisitiveness, should be anticipated to some extent when analysing students who had previously ‘gone travelling’. However, as outlined in section 4.2, the majority of students within the sample (25 students) fell largely within the parameters of the ‘medium amount of travel experience’ category. It should be remembered that not all students within this category had undertaken some form of independent travel. It is therefore important to also explore the narratives of students who had experienced, for example, family holidays. Simon, for example, was a typical student who had a ‘medium’ amount of past travel experience. Whilst Simon (who studied in the USA) did not have any independent travel experiences, his narrative still demonstrated the theme of authenticity:

Simon: Yeah, I would go on a lot of family holidays usually to Italy where my Dad’s from, in Sicily…it’s a place called Palermo. That’s where my dad’s from. It’s not a typical holiday you’d go on maybe to Spain. It’s quite like a poor area. There’s not a
lot of opportunity. That’s why my dad left as soon as he could to find a job elsewhere. Um, no one speaks English there; they barely speak Italian because they all speak the [local] dialect. There’s, like, really few hotels so it’s really sort of, like, I call it my second home, not my holiday. And apart from that, we have been on a few holidays, like, to Majorca and a few of those. But most of the time we tend to go to Italy. Apart from holidays I’ve also been travelling a lot with my school. I did German and I went on a German exchange about four times.

(Male/Middle class/White British)

Simon’s experiences of visiting Italy again shares significant similarities with both Owen and Jess’ stories. Simon characterises his trips to Italy as a visitation to his heritage and juxtaposes these visits against his conception of traditional ‘mass tourism’. Although Simon states he has ‘holidayed’ in Italy, he is quick to distinguish it from a “typical holiday you’d go on maybe to Spain” as there are “really few hotels”. Again, like Owen and Jess, Simon defines his experiences abroad as something different to ‘typical’ tourism because “it’s quite like a poor area”. Instead, Simon constructs his experiences in Italy as concerned with integration into the culture, as opposed to viewing it through a holiday lens. This is why Simon suggests: “I call it my second home, not my holiday”. Towards the end of the extract, Simon mentions that, “apart from that (his experiences in Italy), we have been on a few holidays, like, to Majorca and a few of those”. This remark is vital to understanding how Simon views his previous experiences abroad – at the beginning of the data segment, where Simon outlines his “family holidays” to Italy, he is quick to clarify that his experiences of going to Italy were not a “typical holiday”. But when he states that he has been to Majorca and “a few of those”, he crucially does not follow it up again with his comment: “it’s not a typical holiday you’d go on”. His failure to make this comment therefore suggests that Majorca does constitute a ‘typical holiday’ in his view. Similarly, his subsequent comment that he had been on “a few of those [my emphasis]” suggests that Simon has his own ideas surrounding what constitutes typical, or standard tourism. And, in much the same fashion as Owen and Jess, Simon’s experiences of going to “Majorca and a few of those” again conjures images of resorts, bars, hotels, and sun. As we have seen throughout this section, many of these students consciously and subconsciously create images of what a typical
holiday consists of, whilst simultaneously outlining how their own previous travel experiences were different.

(4.4) Previous Travel Experiences and the Choice to Study/Work Abroad
The discussion in the previous section (4.3) focussed on how a number of young people in the study perceived their prior experiences abroad. This discussion, as I will now show, is highly relevant when exploring the students’ motivations for choosing a study or work placement abroad. For example, when I asked Grace what her primary motivation was for choosing study abroad in Australia, she immediately explained how she wanted to “explore somewhere new”. When I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by this, she replied:

Grace: I think even when you travel somewhere, you can go somewhere and do the tourist shit and be somewhere, but not really explore it…you know when you go [to] places with friends and you’re just kinda hanging out with them and, um, you know, you go out and you sit around and you people watch. And that’s great. But I think to fully explore somewhere you have to immerse yourself in something, which means being by yourself, meeting the people who are from there, doing the things that they do, and living there. And that’s what…that’s exactly what I wanted to do [in Australia].

(Female/Working Class/White British)

We can see here that Grace’s primary motivation for choosing a study placement in Australia articulated with the idea of gaining an authentic experience, as discussed in section 4.3. This is because her desires for “exploring” and “immersing” herself were significant factors that shaped her desires to study abroad. Again, themes of ‘exploration’ and ‘immersion’ are juxtaposed with a ‘standard tourism’. In this example, Grace candidly refers to standardised ways of experiencing the abroad as “tourist shit”. After outlining how “exploration” is difficult to achieve during a short travel or holiday trip, Grace goes on to explain how her desires to “immerse herself in something”, “meet new people from the destination”, and to “do things they (the locals) do” could be achieved through her study abroad trip.

Grace’s story was not unique within the sample. On the contrary, when asked about their primary motivations for study/work abroad, many of the students also
remarked about the significance of being able to live a different life in a foreign
culture. Chloe (who studied in Canada), for example, told me how:

*Chloe:* …it (study abroad) was an opportunity to see another part of the world that I
hadn’t yet. But I think an important part of it was that you were living in that
country…I think that’s what I enjoyed the most probably. It wasn’t the same as being
another tourist and just…doing tourist trails. [It was] actually living and integrating
yourself into that country and being like “ah, I have a bank account in Canada; cool
(laughs)”

*(Female/Middle class/White British)*

Like Grace, Chloe explains that her motivations for undertaking a study trip to
Canada stemmed from a desire to live in the country. For Chloe, “living” and
“integrating” herself in the country and culture would allow for something that could
not be achieved through just “doing tourist trails”. Her final comment: “ah, I have a
bank account in Canada; cool (laughs)” is also significant here because it provides
further evidence of her quest for authenticity. Of course, opening a bank account in
another country is not normally something associated with ‘standard tourism’.
Chloe’s choice to use the example of opening a bank account in a different country is
therefore an attempt to convey how she achieved ‘immersion’ in the culture; an
eexample that attempts to authenticate her motivations for choosing study abroad.

We can see, so far in this section, that motivations and desires for choosing
study abroad were often similar to how a number of these students articulated their
experiences of past travel. The significance of this finding is that, when exploring the
motivations of these students, an emphasis on living and integrating into their
particular destinations became, in the majority of the interviews, the focal point of
discussion. Adam’s story is a good example of how desires to experience another
space, or society, were central in the students’ motivations. Although I draw on
Adam’s story in more depth in *Part Two* of this chapter, his views surrounding his
choice to study in California emphasise the importance of living in a different part of
the world:
Me: …it’s clear that California played quite an instrumental role in your decision [to study abroad]. What was more important for you? Was it going to do study abroad? Or going to California?

Adam: Yeah…I think that’s a tough question…probably…(pause)…probably California in terms of being out there. And when I think of all the incredible experiences, the academic side does come across as like a bonus…[The academic side] was great and I really enjoyed. But if I hadn’t have been studying at all out there, I would have arguably had a better time as well. So I think…yeah…it was probably going to California that was more important.

(Male/Middle class/White British)

Whilst not discrediting the academic experience, Adam suggests that his desires to live in California were more important than the “academic side” of his experience. The important part of his narrative though can be found in his statement: “But if I hadn’t have been studying at all out there, I would have arguably had a better time as well”. Adam’s view here is significant because it emphasises the importance of travelling and living in a different country as his primary motivation. For Adam, simply living a day-to-day ‘Californian life’ for a year was a strong motivator in his decision to study abroad.

Adam’s juxtaposition of ‘living’ and ‘studying’ as two separate things was not shared across all the students, though. For some students, the academic experience was very much a part of, and ingrained within the day-to-day experiences of living abroad. Whilst I elaborate on this idea in more depth in the next chapter (Chapter 5), it is worth clarifying here that, for the vast majority of the students (over 80%), the allure of simply living in and integrating into the country of destination was the most significant motivator. In some extreme cases, such as Jess’, her decision to undertake a work placement in America was insignificant when compared to her desire (that was shaped through her previous cross-continenal travels) to live in America:

Me: How much did that experience of your year travelling abroad facilitate, or was linked to the choice to do an internship abroad?
Jess: It was like almost like a hundred percent, like…I saw that it (internship) was in America and I was literally like, I didn’t even…like it’s really bad…I read the description of where I would be in America, before I actually read the description of the job. If it had been that job in England, I wouldn’t have even looked at it. So yeah, a hundred percent, like a hundred percent.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

(4.5) Previous Experiences Abroad – New Insights

When analysing the role that previous travel experience plays in forming desires to study abroad, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) bases her argument on the “frequency of contacts” with foreign countries that students had experienced. Whilst I accept that “frequencies of contacts” with different countries and cultures can affect young people’s views towards international travel, I have shown how previous travel experience, measured quantitatively, provides little insight into why students study/work abroad. Instead, I have argued that we can gain a richer insight into how desires to study/work abroad are shaped through examining the specific ways in which students construct and articulate their experiences of being abroad.

One of the central arguments made throughout this section has focussed on how these students were often conscious of the “typical” places and activities that “other” tourists engaged in. In contrast, for these students, their previous experiences abroad were steeped in notions of independence, exploration, and integration with the cultures they visited. In section 4.4, I demonstrated how these quests to continue ‘exploring’ and ‘immersing’ were important in forming their motivations to undertake a study or work placement. However, one vital question is left unanswered here: what legitimised a study or work placement abroad as an activity that promised (or appeared to promise) the ability to ‘go beyond’ tourism? In other words, what made a study or work abroad programme attractive to these students? Helene Snee’s (2014) research into students who have taken gap years abroad can help to answer this question. She suggests:

‘…backpacking and other modes of independent travel are often framed as an alternative to mass tourism, offering more authentic experiences, and gap years can draw on the status associated with these travel practices. We can see parallels
between a desire to engage with the real life of the Other when travelling and a cosmopolitan openness to difference’ (Snee, 2014: 16).

Similar to the discussion earlier, Snee arrives at the idea that ‘authenticity’ is a distinguishing feature of independent travel because this type of travel centres on ‘a desire to engage with the real life of the Other’. It could be further argued then that, as independent travel programmes such as the gap year abroad appear to offer higher levels of authenticity, the people who actively seek its higher levels are often attracted to these programmes. Similar to the gap year ‘travelling experience’ that Snee’s (2014) research explores, mobility through study/work abroad schemes can also present themselves as something that is different to mass-tourism. Like the gap year travelling, there is perhaps a desirable status attached to forms of travel that appear to offer authenticity. Student mobility, it could be argued, has an attractive status attached to it for gaining authentic travel experiences. For example, the ability to live in another country for a longer period of time than a traditional holiday; the ability to integrate with people in the host society on a daily basis; and the ability to, in Jess’ words, “do the things the locals do”, all give study/work abroad schemes a status that goes beyond ‘mass tourism’. But it is worth reiterating my earlier argument here that, whilst it is difficult to assess what is (and what is not) ‘authentic’, the significance of the debate centres around explaining how an individual person strives or attempts to achieve their own sense of authenticity. Within this section (Part One), I have shown how these quests for authenticity came across strongly within many of the students’ narratives. And these quests are, I argue, significant in forming their motivations for travel.

The concept of status, that is, modes of travel that appear to go beyond mass tourism, can help to understand the attraction of mobility programmes. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1986), Snee (2014: 16) explains that the desire to explore the world through independent travel is a cultural activity that ‘…is now considered to be good taste’; a taste, one could argue, that is associated the middle-classes. These ‘acceptable discourses of travel’, shared by the middle-class, are now explored in greater depth in the next section that focuses on mobility motivations and the influence of family.

**Part Two**
“They (parents) thought it was fantastic. They’ve always been supportive of it. They thought it was a great idea”

(Amy - Female/Middle class/White British)

“I like rang [my parents and] I was like, “I might do a study aboard year in France” and they’re like “what?...that’s completely crazy. Don’t do it”

(Alice - Female/Middle class/White British)

(4.6) Family and International Travel
Drawing on data from their study of ERASMUS students, Ballatore and Ferede (2013) argue that those who participate in the ERASMUS programme have engaged in more family trips than students who do not study abroad. Through their survey data, they argue that this finding was significant for each of the three European universities they studied. Later in their discussion, they suggest that their ‘...findings provide evidence that Erasmus and non-Erasmus students are not starting off on the same playing field...students may be attending the same universities but Erasmus participants tend to arrive more advantaged and privileged than sedentary students’ (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013: 531). I have shown in the previous section though that, on the whole, frequencies of travel with family (and other forms of travel) only offer a partial explanation of motivations and decisions to study/work abroad. Instead, I have argued that dispositions towards international travel are created through a desire to achieve an ‘authentic’ experience when abroad. In this section, I build on Ballatore and Ferede’s (2013) quantitative findings by arguing that, whilst previous travel experiences with family have a significant effect on motivations for mobility, the influence of family in the decision to study abroad stretches much further. Instead, I draw on the data to develop a theoretical position that specifically outlines how discourses of travel are often shaped by social class and how ‘...family values tend to be passed on and particular dispositions towards travel are reproduced’ (Brooks and Waters, 2010: 154).

It is worth commencing by exploring one student’s story that is closely related to the discussion in the previous section (Part One). Sadie, a language student at a Russell Group HEI, completed an ERASMUS year in France. She told me how she had been a high achiever, achieving AAB in her A-Levels at her comprehensive
school in the Home Counties. Her father, who had been to university, and was now a principal at a college in London, was, according to Sadie, pleased with her decision to study in France because he “thought it was a great opportunity”. Sadie outlined how her dad had always been encouraging of going abroad and she used the example of how her father had taken a group of students to Marseille earlier in his life when he was a lecturer. Within the interview, Sadie was quick to outline that her previous travel experiences had been mostly with her dad. In addition to her school trips to France and Germany, she explained that, with her dad, she had visited Madrid, Nice, Los Angeles, and New York. However, her following comments though show that, for Sadie, her school trips did not create the same experiences as the ones with her dad:

Sadie: … [be]’cause you’re more within a group, [so] you don’t really interact with anyone. It was more like you travel in your group, so that wasn’t quite as interactional. Whereas, yeah, with my dad it would be like we’d go to a…we’d try and find like an authentic bar…that sorta thing [and] try and avoid the tourist route.  

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Much like the discussion in Part One, Sadie’s quest for authenticity allowed her to view her school trips and family trips with her dad as different. This is evident in the way Sadie outlines her experiences with her father as a quest to distinguish herself from what ‘other’ people did when abroad by “avoid[ing] the tourist route”. When I asked Sadie to elaborate on her conception of ‘tourism’, it became quickly apparent that her conscious attempts for “interaction” and to “avoid the tourist route” were not individual choices or preferences. On the contrary, her conscious attempts to achieve authenticity were ‘taught’ behaviours from her dad:

Sadie: …my dad always says, “avoid going to restaurants where they’ve got pictures of the food on the window because they’re clearly trying to attract tourists who don’t understand the language and can’t say “OK, this is this””. Um, so, yeah, we’d always try and pick somewhere which just had the native menus [and] not English [menus].  

(Female/Middle class/White British)
In this quotation, Sadie constructs a particular view of how to conduct herself when abroad and distances herself from her own conception of what mass-tourism involves. But the most significant aspect of her story revolves around the way in which she had gained an understanding, through her father, of how tourism ‘works’: “…avoid going to restaurants where they’ve got pictures of the food on the window because they’re clearly trying to attract tourists who don’t understand the language”.

This idea of ‘knowing how things work’, in Sadie’s example, is therefore a good example of how discourses of travel and social class are invariably linked. Sadie’s background, outlined earlier, could be categorised as middle-class; her father’s educational attainment (to HE level) and his professional occupation as a principal at a college would be the basis for this categorisation. Additionally though, Sadie was a high academic achiever who went to a Russell Group HEI. Whilst being a high academic achiever and entry to a Russell Group institution is not restricted to middle-class young people, entry to such institutions does tend to be largely dominated by students who have similar class backgrounds to Sadie (Furlong and Cartmel, 2009).

When exploring how Sadie constructs her ‘authentic’ experiences with her dad, we can begin to see a link between the middle-class and the ways in which they ‘do’ tourism. This middle-class approach, which can be seen in Sadie’s story above, attempts to avoid the ‘mass’ in ‘mass-tourism’ by instead seeking ways to achieve individualised and more authentic experiences (such as consciously choosing restaurants where the ‘other’ tourists don’t go). Sadie’s approach to experiencing the abroad therefore reflects Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) concept of ‘cultural arbitrary’ because, within Sadie’s story, we can see how she valued gaining, what she considered to be, ‘authentic experiences’ of the places she visited. But whilst there is no ‘correct’ or ‘right’ way to travel, Sadie’s discussion of her ‘authentic experiences’ highlight a construction of an ‘acceptable discourse of travel’ that was classed. This discourse of travel was classed specifically because authenticity (or striving for authenticity) is a practice that is legitimised by, in Bourdieu's terms, the dominant class. Sadie’s ‘acceptable discourse of travel’ could therefore be classed as arbitrary because there is no rational or logical reason for why authenticity should be the ‘right’ way to travel. But through Sadie’s story, we can see a cultural reproduction of taste in travel. Similarly though, like Annette Lareau’s (2003) study of how social class is acted out through everyday situations and interactions, Sadie’s story also conveys how she acquired a particular classed form of understanding of
what to do when abroad through her father’s guidance; a taste for a style of tourism that was constructed by her parent.

However, unlike the students’ previous travel experiences, specific family values that were attributed to international travel were not solely transferred through students’ physical experiences of being abroad with their families. Instead, family discourses surrounding international travel were conveyed in a number of ways, but still provided a window into the lives and upbringing of these young people. Ed’s (Male/Middle class/White British) parents, for example, said “how it was a good idea to experience different cultures and get a worldly view before I leave university, so I’d become a more well-rounded person”. Similarly, Lauren (Female/Middle class/White British) explained how her parents were “quite...not pushy...in sense of doing something different, but they’ve always encouraged me to go to different places whether is be another city in England, or to go to another country”. In other cases though, discourses surrounding family travel were expressed in seemingly insignificant ways (i.e. through ‘off-the-cuff’ comments or impromptu remarks). Jess (Female/Middle class/White British), for example, told me how her mother was “shocked” when she found out that Jess’ boyfriend did not have a passport. Alisha (Female/Middle class/White British), in contrast, was encouraged to study abroad in Australia by her “really supportive” parents. This encouragement, Alisha explained, stemmed from her parents who had seriously considered emigrating to Australia when she was sixteen, but had “missed the boat on that one”. These types of stories and narratives form the basis of the discussion within the rest of this chapter.

(4.7) The ‘In-Habitus’ Decision
Diane Reay et al.’s (2009) study of working-class students at “elite” HEIs can help explain the way in which the young people in this study conceptualised going abroad as part of their degree. Although Reay et al. (2009) focused on the decisions and experiences of students entering higher education (not travelling abroad), their findings reflect similarities to my own data in terms of exploring how young people comprehend a transitional event in their lives. As discussed in the literature review, Reay et al. (2009) suggest that, for middle-class students, higher education appeared relatively familiar, whilst for working-class students attending an elite HEI, a process of adaptation and learning was undertaken in order to navigate the ‘field’. For middle-class young people entering higher education, Reay et al. (2009) use the
term ‘in-habitus’ to characterise the “relative familiarity” of the ‘field’ for these groups of students. Defining his concept, Bourdieu (1992: 55-56) argues:

‘…the habitus [original italicisation] tends to generate all the ‘reasonable’, ‘commonsense’, behaviours (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities, and which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic characteristic of a particular field, whose objective future they anticipate’.

The concept of ‘in-habitus’ is therefore useful for understanding how the choices that people make are often made within the ‘possibilities’ and ‘regularities’ of their lives. Whilst Reay et al. (2009) use the ‘in-habitus’ concept to explain how some young people understand how higher education works, I believe the concept is also applicable to exploring particular dispositions to international travel, particularly when exploring how the family can contribute to an individual’s habitus. When I asked Cristina (Female/Middle class/White British) (who was introduced at the beginning of this chapter) whether her parents were supportive of her decision to study for a dual degree in France as well as the UK, she replied: “Um, yeah, I guess. They never really said anything”. Similarly, when I asked Ben (Male/Middle class/White British) (an arts student at a pre-92 HEI) what his parents’ responses were when he told them he was going to study in the Czech Republic, he replied: “I think, ‘cause they (parents) know that I had lived in Spain and Denmark, they didn’t really see it as, you know, like a big step…yeah…it was pretty easy going”. These types of responses provide weight to the argument of an ‘in-habitus’ experience of travel through the idea that crossing national boundaries is seen as part of a normalised life-trajectory. Whilst Cristina and Ben’s parental responses can appear rather dismissive or uninterested, it is precisely these apathetic and blasé sentiments that demonstrate a classed form of looking at international travel. For Cristina and Ben, the choice to go abroad was not so much a choice that required planning and calculation, but rather a normalised choice characterised by a continuation of a pre-established life of living transnationally; a ‘natural’ activity in the context of their lives. By applying Reay et al.’s (2009) concept of ‘in-habitus’ to explore the choices made by these young people, we can begin to understand how the choice to study abroad is not simply a
personal or individual choice, but rather a choice that is made in relation to what is perceived as possible within the students’ lives.

Whilst Cristina’s and Ben’s experiences are to be expected to some extent when exploring students who have previously lived abroad, the idea of an ‘in-habitus’ experience was certainly not restricted to those students who had lived abroad before. Other students also expressed this idea, albeit in more subtle ways:

Chloe: No, mine (parents) were really supportive because I’d done other stuff and I think they really wanted me to take advantage of any opportunities that are here and why not do a four year degree, go abroad, than just do a three year one? But they could see the advantages career wise and stuff. And plus they’re also quite into travelling, they’ve both lived abroad at points as well. So I think that was another thing, like I grew up knowing that they’d done these things like gone and lived in Africa and stuff and I thought I want to do that too. So, yeah, they were supportive. (Female/Middle class/White British)

Chloe’s narrative here provides evidence that her choice to study abroad was part of an ‘in-habitus’ decision. Although she herself had not previously lived abroad, she draws on her experiences where she “grew up knowing” that her parents had previously lived abroad in Africa. However, she concludes this sentence by stating that she “want[ed] to do that (live abroad) too”. This demonstrates that her parents’ previous experiences of living abroad contributed to shaping her own desires for international travel. At the beginning of her narrative, Chloe states that her parents were supportive of her decision and had historically encouraged her with other things in her life. However, she crucially explains how her parents “really wanted [her] to take advantage of any opportunities that are here (at her home university)”. Similarly, she states that her parents were “really supportive” of her decision and “could see the advantages career wise and stuff”. Chloe’s story is littered with themes of encouragement, support, and understanding from her parents. Her narrative therefore demonstrates how her parents understood why her choice to study abroad would be beneficial to her life as they were supportive of her decision to take up the sort of activities that, supposedly, give young people advantage going into the labour market. As Annette Lareau (2003: 60) argues, middle-class children’s recreational lives are often structured around activities. However, rather than being ‘time-fillers’,
parents ‘...are conscious of the advantages such participation brings to their children’ (ibid.). Whilst I am not arguing that studying abroad is an extra-curricular activity, student mobility could be considered something that could lead to positional advantage by participating in it. In this sense, it is an activity that (middle-class) parent’s might see advantage stemming from, much like Chloe’s story above.

Annie’s story is another good example of recognising how middle-class parents consciously reflect on the benefits of participation in different activities. Both of Annie’s parents had attended university and her father, a manager for an energy company, had actually lived in the same State (in the US) where Annie studied for a year. When Annie was younger, she moved abroad with her family due to her father’s job, completing her secondary education at an international school in Egypt. When I asked Annie what her motivations were for studying abroad, she outlined that she wanted to gain an “experience” of learning something new about both the culture she was visiting (the US), and herself. Later in the interview, Annie talked about “the study abroad experience” where she placed heavy emphasis on the “the”. When I asked her about what the study abroad experience consisted of, she replied:

Annie: The study abroad experience is being able to travel a lot, party a lot…(pauses)…get[ting] to know a new culture, and just kind of, like, do what you want without the same responsibility. Um, and I mean that because in (name of UK HEI) I got part-time jobs and I find the work a bit more demanding so I can’t go out on a blowout and write off a whole day. You just can’t do it. Whereas in study abroad, you don’t have that same pressure. So you can go on a blowout and if you don’t get up till two, you don’t feel guilty about it.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Whilst Annie’s motivation here is based around a discourse of ‘youthful escape’ (Waters et al., 2011), where she could enjoy being abroad at the expense of her structural constraints ‘at home’ (i.e. her part time jobs), Annie was conscious that this escapism, her quest for adventure, was not shared by her parents. Instead, Annie outlined how her father wanted her to ensure that there was value in studying abroad for her future life:
Annie: he (father) wanted me to think about it a bit more carefully than I was and not just [seeing it as a] sort of a year travelling. He didn't want me to do it like that. He wanted me to see it as “I would get something out of it educationally”

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Middle-class parental views surrounding the conscious advantages of becoming internationally mobile were also expressed in other students’ stories. Steven (who studied in Canada), for example, had travelled extensively through family holidays to destinations such as North America, China, and Australia. Additionally, he had gone on a European inter-railing trip with his friends. His degree-educated parents (a head teacher of a primary school and a communications manager) had a significant effect on the way Steven perceived opportunities abroad. When he began to outline his own motivations for choosing to study abroad, it became quickly apparent that his experiences also constituted an ‘in-habitus’ choice:

Me: That’s interesting that you said, since about age fourteen, you always knew that you wanted to do some kind of study abroad…sort of some aspect of going abroad during your education. Why do you think that was?

Steven: Probably parental guidance actually. I’ve always been told, um, abroad’s where it’s at really. And just to kind of reach out to the world in that way, which sounds cheesy. But I’ve always just been told by my family that, um, yeah…there are bigger and better things abroad; go see.

(Male/Middle class/White British)

On the surface, Steven’s narrative clearly demonstrates how his parents’ values attached to living abroad affected his own outlook and perspective of becoming mobile. However, his narrative also allows for a deeper understanding of his choice to study abroad as part of an ‘in-habitus’ decision. Whilst Steven states that his decision to study abroad was due to “parental guidance”, his comment: “I’ve always been told [my emphasis]…abroad’s where it’s at” is highly significant. This is because Steven demonstrates that his disposition towards international travel was cultivated over time by his parents. In this sense, his disposition to take up a study abroad opportunity was significantly shaped by his comprehension of going abroad.
as both possible and desirable. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1989: 18) definition of habitus helps to further explain how Steven’s desires for going abroad were shaped by his imagined possibilities:

‘…the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world’.

Bourdieu’s use of the term ‘internalisation’ is of particular relevance here. I have shown above that, within Steven’s life, his parents cultivated and nurtured a value in going abroad: “…there are bigger and better things abroad”, “abroad’s where it’s at”. However, it is the process of internalisation that helps to explain how Steven’s own perceptions and mental imageries of overseas destinations were shaped. His continued internalisation of his parents’ values surrounding being internationally mobile allowed him to ‘apprehend the social world’ (Bourdieu, 1989: 18) as a place in which international travel was possible, achievable, and desirable. Therefore, whilst Steven viewed his comment surrounding his parents’ encouragement “to kind of reach out to the world in that way” as “cheesy”, crucially, he does not go on to dispute or rebuke their comment. For Steven, becoming internationally mobile was both possible and desirable within his own comprehension of the social world. Similarly, by understanding Steven’s decision to study abroad as part of an ‘in-habitus’ choice, it helps to make sense of his first words to me in the interview: “…I think I’ve always known [strong emphasis], um, I’d like to do something international; go abroad”. It is perhaps therefore better to define Steven’s decision to study abroad as an expected probability in his life rather than a realistic opportunity.

Exploring the decisions to study abroad as ‘expected probabilities’, as opposed to ‘opportunities’, helps to further understand ‘in-habitus’ choices. Mira, a humanities student at a Russell Group HEI, who studied in Canada, explained that her parents were “very, very keen” for her to complete a placement abroad. However, like Steven, her opening words in the interview demonstrated that her story, in its entirety, would be rooted within an ‘in-habitus’ experience:

*Me: OK, I want to open it (the interview) with a broad question by asking why did you decide to go abroad?*
Mira: OK. Um, I didn’t take a gap year and I think I always knew when I was applying to universities all the universities and courses I applied for had like a period of study abroad, um, just because I knew that I wanted to travel. And also one of my sisters did a year abroad in Italy whilst I was younger. So we visited her a lot. And I think my parents were comfortable with me doing that and encouraged me to do so.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

Within this statement, Mira explains that she “knew” two things prior to starting her degree: firstly, she knew that there would be opportunities to study abroad as part of her course, and secondly, she knew that she wanted to travel. But after Mira outlines her desire to travel, she quickly explains that her own sister had completed a period abroad as part of her degree, and that her parents had encouraged her also to capitalise on the opportunity. This demonstrates that Mira’s personal desires to study abroad were specifically shaped by the value her family attached to going abroad. Whilst Mira clearly displayed a propensity to travel, it is important to understand that this propensity could not be divorced from the influence and guidance of her family. This would explain why Mira later suggested: “I think if they’d (parents) shown a lot of resistance I probably would have been less comfortable doing it”.

Mira’s idea of feeling ‘comfortable’ with her decision to study abroad therefore brings us to the central issue in defining a number of these students’ choices as ‘inhabitus’. Drawing on the student narratives in this section, we can begin to see how personal motivations, desires, and dreams for going abroad were often deliberated and sanctioned within the values and behaviours of a family habitus. This demonstrates that the nature of those decisions were, for the most part, reproductive, rather than transformative (Reay et al., 2001) because discourses surrounding going abroad were often conceptualised specifically though the values of an individual’s family habitus. The conception of habitus I have argued for ‘…can [therefore] be viewed as a complex internalised core from which everyday experiences emanate’ (Reay et al., 2001: 1.2) - Steven was always told the “abroad is where it’s at” and it was therefore unsurprising that he “always knew” that he wanted to do something international. Lauren’s parents always “encouraged” her seek out new places. Chloe’s parents always encouraged her to “take advantage of
any opportunities” at university. And Mira’s parents’ views towards international travel had “filtered down” to her.

For a small minority of students within this study, such as Cristina (whose story was analysed in the introduction) and Ben, their previous experiences living transnationally established a seemingly ‘natural’ ease to their decision to study abroad. Their decision to study abroad allowed a chance to continue living their lives across multiple countries. Whilst the idea of a ‘natural decision’ was not fitting for the majority of the students within my sample, I have shown, within this section, how a number of the students’ stories were constructed around discourses of acceptability - that is, their choice to study or work abroad was perceived an acceptable decision within the context of their lives. The chance to complete a study or work placement abroad was therefore a choice made within the regularities of the ways in which they perceived the world.

(4.8) The ‘Out-Of-Habitus’ Decision?
Within section 4.7, I have argued that exploring the decision to study abroad, for a number of students, could be characterised as an ‘in-habitus’ decision. The ‘in-habitus’ decision, I have suggested, is primarily shaped through the experiences gained from previous travel and family discourses surrounding opportunities to go abroad. Often, when these factors combine, I have shown how the decision to study abroad can seem enticing to students because a period spent abroad appears as an attractive activity within the ‘limits of their regularities’ (Bourdieu, 1992: 55-56). Interestingly though, a small number of students within the sample (around five) did not display or convey any sense of an ‘in-habitus’ decision. Instead, and in contrast to the ideas presented above, these students’ decisions and stories often came across as seemingly ‘out-of-the ordinary’ decisions in the contexts of their lives. Whilst I must stress that these students compromised a minority within the sample, their stories are important. By analysing their stories as extra-ordinary, or as part of an ‘out-of-habitus’ experience, they demonstrate how an individual habitus is not locked or unchangeable. Instead, by examining the narratives within this group of students, we can gain a deeper insight into how individual habituses can develop, change, and evolve.

Unlike the majority of the students in the sample, David (who studied in the Netherlands) had not travelled abroad with his family as a child or young adult. His
dad, a welder, and his mother, a cleaner, had last been abroad in the 1980’s. David explained that his transition from school into university “was a big step, ‘cause obviously I was the first one in the family to go (to university), [so] it was all new for both my parents and me”. When David told his parents he was considering doing an ERASMUS placement, his parents “were a little bit apprehensive about it” largely due to the economic implications of undertaking a period abroad as they were unable to provide him with financial help. But his parents’, and wider family relatives’ scepticism and hostility towards David’s decision to study abroad was not limited solely to the economic costs:

*David:* They (relatives) were sort of wondering sometimes about the point of why I was doing it by saying, like, “you’re already at university; you’re already going to come out with a load of debt at the end of it; um, you’re already going to have a degree, so why are you doing this?”

They’re (parents) quite UK-centric and…(for) their eldest son suddenly say, “Oh, I want to go and live in another country for ten months and study at the university there and do this, that, and the other”; that’s completely alien to them and I think that’s why they were a little bit apprehensive ‘cause they…like couldn’t really relate to it because neither of my parents went to university and neither of my grandparents, I’m the first of the family to go to university. And so, for them, I think it was a combination of initially how…“we can’t afford to pay or support you for doing this”, and, um, like, “we’re a little bit apprehensive about him going abroad because it’s not in our psyche to go abroad and travel and stuff like that”.

*(Male/Working Class/White British)*

Whilst the financial aspect of studying abroad was a significant worry to David’s parents, the other insights into his family habitus are of primary significance here. In contrast to the student stories analysed in the previous section, David believed that his parents’ negativity stemmed from their inability to “relate” to his decision to study abroad. With a lack of understanding, and inability to “relate” to David’s desires to travel abroad, the decision could not be ‘positively sanctioned’ by David’s parents because international travel was an activity outside of the ‘limits of their regularities’ (Bourdieu, 1992). This argument is supported by David’s own narrative when he
suggests his parents were “a little bit apprehensive about him going abroad”. This ‘apprehension’, it could be argued, stemmed from David’s suggestion of something that was “completely alien” to his parents’ own lives. When David suggests that it is “not in our psyche to go abroad and travel”, he confirms that his decision was outside the parameters of his own regularities and not in line with what ‘people like us’ (Reay et al., 2005) do. His decision to study abroad, out-of-synch with his habitus, therefore made David a “fish out of water” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), negotiating his personal desires against his family habitus.

Drawing on the details of David’s story so far, there is certainly a valid argument for describing his decision to study abroad as ‘out-of-habitus’. As I discussed in the previous section (4.7), ‘in-habitus’ choices were shaped by quests for authentic international, often through previous experiences abroad, and positive familial discourses of international travel. David’s story though, as discussed above, significantly lacked these components. However, as it went on, it became evident that his decision to study abroad was not made at random, and therefore not strictly ‘out-of-habitus’ per se. Instead, his desire to study abroad stemmed from, and was nurtured by, new experiences gained upon his entry into higher education. His individual habitus, as I shall now outline, underwent change through the institutional forces of his university.

To talk of ‘institutional forces’ though does, however, require clarification on the class discourses that are dominant in higher education. Power et al. (2003: 82) have shown that, in the 1930’s, participation in higher education was 7 per cent amongst young people, but by the end of the 1980’s participation had crossed the 15 per cent ‘…border’ commonly taken to mark the shift from an ‘elite’ to a ‘mass’ system. More recently, UCAS (2015: 33) data shows that, in 2015, entry to higher education amongst 18 and 19 year olds was 31.3%, therefore confirming a significant expansion of higher education. However, some researchers have argued that, with this expansion, the increase in the numbers of working-class students attending higher education is outweighed by the steep rise of the middle-classes entering HE (Lehmann, 2009). For this reason, universities (particularly pre-92 HEIs) themselves remain sites largely dominated by the middle-classes and based on middle-class ideals and values.

Michael Donnelly’s (2015) research into how schools prepare their pupils for higher education is significant when exploring the effect that institutional factors can
have on a person (and therefore their habitus). Donnelly (2015) argues that, within certain schools, there is a ‘hidden curriculum’ that conveys strong and implicit messages about the ‘types’ of universities young people should apply to. In one of the schools in his study, the school made no mention of alternatives to higher education after leaving school. Furthermore, there was often no mention of post-92 universities when it came to completing UCAS forms. Instead, the school focussed on their students going on to study a ‘hard subject’ at a Russell Group (or pre-92) institution. The significance of Donnelly’s (2015) research in the context of my discussion focusses on how ‘institutional forces,’ that are often dispersed throughout schools and universities, can shape the way in which young people think about their choices (such as doing a ‘hard subject’ at the ‘right’ institution). Donnelly’s (2015) research therefore allows us to see that these ‘institutional forces’ are not solely the sum of individual habituses at an institution. Instead, these forces can operate independently of the students; shaping and refining choices that are congruent with the ethos of an institution. Whilst the focus within this study did not directly explore how institutional forces operate, there is no doubt that activities associated with internationalisation are valued and encouraged by UK universities (as discussed in Chapter 1). In returning to David’s story, we can see now begin to see how these institutional forces began to change his individual habitus.

Interestingly, out of all the forty students interviewed, David (Male/Working Class/White British), was the only student to make significant reference to the ‘influence of friends’ at university in his decision-making process:

“But then, sort of discussing it with those friends that were going, it was then sort of the decisional “do we do study abroad? Do we do ERASMUS?””

“And I kinda thought, “oh, I’ll go along to that (introduction to study abroad) meeting and learn a bit more about it”…a lot of my friends went along as well.”

“I don’t think it was the international office per se that encouraged me to go. I would say it was more department and friends as well.”

It is clear here that David’s new university friendships played a significant role in his decision-making process. Whilst the above extracts from David’s story could be
interpreted as a minor aspect in his individual choice, I would argue that the role of his subject department and friendships were instrumental in his decision because they compensated for a sanctioning he did not receive from his parents, or other family members. This can be further explained through David’s response when I asked him what his primary motivation or motivations were for going abroad. He explained:

David: …at that time it was literally…my mindset was “I’ve been given this opportunity. I’m never going to get to do anything like it again. So I’m going to grab it with two hands and go for it”. Um, “a lot of my friends are doing it, that kinda inspires me to do it. I’m gonna go for it”.

(Male/Working Class/White British)

Within this extract, we can gain a clearer understanding of the significant influence that David’s friends exerted on his own decision to study abroad. This is because, when asked what his primary motivation(s) were, he specifically mentions the influence of his friends in his response. But his use of the term “inspire” to describe the influence of his friendship group helps to further explain that his decision to study abroad stemmed from, and was therefore embedded within, the institutional forces of his university. For David then, university introduced him to new and novel opportunities that had not been accessible within the regularities of his life before. But when he talks about how his friends “inspired him”, and how all of his friends were going to the study abroad meeting, David is actually providing a window into how the (middle-class) institutional forces of his pre-92 university developed and sanctioned his choice to study abroad. Whilst we do not know the class backgrounds of his friends, the ethos of higher education itself helped to develop his imagination of what was now possible within his university experience. Much like Donnelly’s (2015) research discussed above, these institutional forces helped shape David’s choice to study abroad.

In Part One of this chapter I outlined how previous travel experiences were significant when exploring the motivations of study/work abroad students. Although David had not travelled abroad with his family, he had done so with his school, and crucially, his university. Exploring David’s previous travel experience provides a different angle for analysing the importance of his HEI in his decision:
David: ...the only experiences I’d had outside of the UK were school trips to, as I said, Germany and Iceland, and then my university field trip to New York. And obviously yeah they were very good and I really liked sort of experiencing, like, being somewhere else by experiencing different foods, just different ways of life and stuff like that even though it was for a very limited period. But I think though, obviously with a school trip setting, it’s quite, um, sort of controlled what you can and can’t do. We had like set activities and stuff like that we had to spend our time doing set things. And obviously, like I say, it was shorter time-scales. I think the longest I’ve been abroad, before going to the Netherlands, was like about a week or something like that. And I kinda figured, well if I go, I can sort of grab this opportunity. I can fully attempt to immerse myself in the Netherlands and the way of life there and study culture there and stuff like that, so it’s something I’ve not had a chance to do before.

Whilst David’s choice was not an ‘in-habitus’ decision, we can still see the importance of previous travel experiences in shaping motivations for study abroad. But the most striking finding in David’s narrative is his explanation that his school and university trips were ‘restricting’ or “controlled”. Interestingly, David’s view is almost identical to Sadie’s (Female/Middle class/White British) story (analysed earlier). Although Sadie and David were starting their study abroad journeys from different ‘fields’ (in Bourdieu’s sense of the word), they both arrived at the same desire in their quest for authenticity; a desire to, in David’s words, “attempt to immerse myself...in the way of life there”. Sadie had already experienced her version of an ‘authentic experience’ with her father who had taught her to reject what they understood as mass-tourism (e.g. avoiding restaurants where the menus were in English). But, for David, his small number of experiences abroad through school and university travel, in addition to being inspired by his friends and his university department were, I would argue, instrumental in contributing towards his decision to study abroad. In other words, these institutional factors created a desire that, within David’s individual habitus, could be ‘positively sanctioned’. In closing David’s story (for now), it is worth concluding by viewing some of the institutional forces ‘at work’ when David discusses his school and university travel experiences:
David: I dipped my toe over the sea and kinda thought, “oh this is quite nice. I think I'll go and do some more and see more”. And I think it was almost like…being a (subject name) student, I think it’s kinda like…if you’re a good (subject name[er]) you are inherently curious about the rest of the world and sort of like other places outside of your home context. And I think, um, I just wanted to go out and explore. Like, wonder-lust; that kinda thing.

(Male/Working Class/White British)

Whilst David’s story was rare within the sample, there were a handful of similar cases where students had encountered ‘institutional forces’ conflicting with ‘family values’. Tanya, for example, was one of these students. Tanya had a limited experience of travelling abroad. Apart from a school trip to France and Belgium, she had not been abroad with her family until she was sixteen. After completing her GCSEs, she travelled on a short family holiday to Greece and then took part in a Swedish exchange programme when she was completing her A-Levels. Tanya’s gap year, after finishing her A-Levels, was spent working because she “got like a really good full-time job”. Neither of Tanya’s parents had gone to university and whilst her parents was “quite happy” for her to go abroad as part of her degree, Tanya’s parents, like David’s, held some reservations:

Tanya: So they were quite happy for me to go abroad for a year. I think they were a bit scared that I would go abroad and like it and then, like, not come back….I think they were kind of a bit worried that I would like I too much and that I would move abroad and leave them.

…I realised that my parents were quite like dependent on me to always be there for every occasion and it’s like “I’m not…I’m gonna grow up. I’m gonna have a life. I’m not always gonna be able to come home for every birthday and every event; every occasion”. And I was just kinda a bit like, well, maybe me going away for a year will kind of [be] the start of me not always being there.

(Female/Working Class/White British)

In contrast to David’s story, where his parents were worried about the economic considerations and travelling as being outside of what ‘people like us’ (Reay et al.,
2005) do, Tanya explains that her parents were worried her experience of going abroad would mark the start of her not always being close to home. Like David, her choice was not an ‘in-habitus’ decision because her motivations stemmed from a conscious rejection of the regularities within her family life: we can see from Tanya’s narrative that family closeness, shared dependence on one another, and being together for “all occasions” were coveted values for Tanya’s parents. However, for Tanya, the chance to study abroad, offered by her university, allowed her a chance to temporarily escape from these regularities. This theme of ‘youthful rebellion’ would appear to be accurate because when I asked Tanya whether her year abroad in Hong Kong was, on any level, a chance to demonstrate her independence to her parents, she replied: “that was a kind of unspoken or unsaid motive”.

Like David and Tanya, other students also commented on how their parents’ response to their decision to study abroad could be deemed more ‘negative’ as opposed to ‘positive’. Alice (who studied in France), for example, explained:

“I like rang [my parents and] I was like, “I might do a study aboard year in France” and they’re like “what?...that’s completely crazy. Don’t do it”

(Female/Middle class/White British)

When I asked Alice to explain why her decision to study abroad elicited a negative response from her parents, she responded:

Alice: It was particularly from my dad’s side. He kind sees it as a bit of a doss and because I had a fight convincing them that I should have a year out before I started uni as well. It’s kind of like we’ve always been at loggerheads…it’s like, I’m always like desperate to go away and go travelling and do something like that…Like, in their head that equates to “I can’t be bothered to work”. So then I [previously], like, worked hard [and] made money to go travelling and I think they just kind of didn’t really get the point of it. And then with the year abroad, again, it was just like “why? This is going to be more debt, another year from deferring from actually getting on the career ladder” and all that kinda thing. I think they didn’t see from my point of view the kind of (pauses) what the long-term benefits of actually doing it would be.

(Female/Middle class/White British)
Within Alice’s narrative, we can see how her decision to study abroad, like Tanya’s, was made against the values of her parents. But in contrast to Tanya’s story (which emphasised ‘closeness’ and ‘dependency’ between family members), we can see that the regularities of Alice’s family focussed on gaining qualifications, or “hard currencies” (Brown and Hesketh, 2004) to enter the workplace immediately. This is evident in how Alice’s father initially viewed both her decision to go travelling before HE, and her study abroad as something that was an obstacle to entry into the labour market. For students such as Alice, Tanya, and David, their decisions to study abroad all demonstrated elements of conflict within their habitus. On the one hand, their personal desires for travel were evident within their narratives. But on the other hand, these desires were discordant with the regularities and values within their familial habitus. In the next section, I expand further on how the university could be viewed as a site for transforming an individual’s habitus.

(4.8.1) From Habitus to Desires for Travel

I have now argued above that, in order to explore how and why a small number of young people choose to study abroad, an in-depth understanding of the role of family is important. The discussion in this section has demonstrated how individual choices (such as the decision to study abroad) are made within overlapping circles of family, friends, and institutions (Reay et al., 2001). Whilst I accept the final and definitive decision to study abroad inevitably rests with the individual student, I have argued that their choices are shaped and embedded within a ‘complex matrix’ (Reay et al., 2001: 8.2) of (sometimes) differing social forces. For some students, their decision to study abroad appeared easier specifically because their choice could be sanctioned within the individual, familial, and institutional habituses. For other students though, their decision was made harder by questioning what ‘was’ and ‘was not’ for them. Therefore, as Simon and Ainsworth (2012: 3) suggest, ‘…clearly, students choose to study abroad, but the choices individuals make are shaped and constrained by their social location and habitus’. In the next section, I develop these ideas by drawing on Hodkinson’s (2008a) concept of ‘horizons for action’.

Part Three
Horizons for Action – Routines

Whilst similar to Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’, Phil Hodkinson’s (2008a) concept of ‘horizons for action’ is useful for exploring the relationship between a student’s habitus and their subjective desires to study abroad. Hodkinson (2008a: 4) argues that ‘…what we can see is limited by the position we stand in, and the horizons that are visible from that position. Those horizons enable us to see anything within them, but prevent us from seeing what lies beyond them’. Therefore, rather than assessing the choice to study/work abroad as a free-floating individual choice, Hodkinson’s concept allows us to see the how desires for going abroad are produced from a student’s social location (or habitus). Whilst similar to the concept of ‘habitus’, ‘horizons of expectation’ allows a deeper understanding of how subjective desires and motivations (that form a habitus) are modified and shaped by the objective circumstances of students. For example, in their exploration of how young people made work placements decisions, Hodkinson et al. (2012) argue that their choices were sometimes characterised by “routines” or “turning points”. For the ‘in-habitus’ students, analysed in Part Two, the “routine” concept is fitting because, as Hodkinson et al. (2012: 4) argue, ‘…some routines confirm original choices, so that a pathway chosen becomes deeply ingrained’. Exploring in-habitus decisions as “routines” within ‘deeply ingrained pathways’ therefore highlights how the objective social conditions of the students’ lives allowed them to ‘see’ the opportunity to study abroad as a possibility within their horizons for action. The concept of “routines” is therefore highly applicable to students such as Cristina (Female/Middle class/White British), Annie (Female/Middle class/White British), and Ben (Male/Middle class/White British), who had previously lived and studied abroad prior to their university mobility. However, like the ‘in-habitus’ discussion in the previous section, other students who had not previously lived abroad also formed their desires for study abroad within these routines. Selena, who undertook a study placement in the US, was a good example of a student who had not previously lived abroad, yet still made her decision within ‘routines’:

Selena: …the fact that my parents were open to it and encouraging was a big factor. But also I’d always felt really stifled by my hometown. And…living in a place where there was like a big Pakistani community and there was an English community, but they were very separate. And there weren’t many other different kinds of people. So
I’d always wanted to get as far away as possible… And I guess America had appealed to me because you can be American and still be like… obviously everyone’s an immigrant originally…but you can still be like Vietnamese, or Irish, or Indian, or whatever you are. And so I guess that’s one of the reasons I wanted to go. [I wanted] to just meet different people.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

Selena’s story here is littered with themes of being suppressed or “stifled” by her hometown. Her unhappiness with a perceived inability for people of different backgrounds to integrate in the town she grew up in resulted in disillusionment with her day-to-day experiences. Selena’s imagination of ‘what was possible’ within her own horizon was expansive: America promised a significant contrast to her experiences in the UK because it represented a place where difference was celebrated under a national flag: “America had appealed to me because you can be American and still be like… obviously everyone’s an immigrant originally…but you can still be like Vietnamese, or Irish, or Indian, or whatever you are”.

Whilst we can see here that Selena’s vantage point established a view that there was something else ‘out there’, her previous experiences, choices, and background (the basis of her habitus) provided a crucial foundation in order to develop vistas of the abroad within her horizon for action. Selena was born in the UK to an English mother and Pakistani father. Both of her parents had been to university in the UK, and Selena’s mother had spent a year abroad in Paris as part of her degree. Selena told me that after her mother had completed her degree:

…she went off again when she graduated and she travelled a lot and lived in a lot of different places working. She taught in Scandinavia; she used to teach English. Um, she travelled round India and all sorts of places.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

When I asked Selena whether her mother’s experiences abroad had influenced her own desires, she replied:
the fact that she travelled a lot and been to so many different places and had so many different experiences and the fact that my parents tried to take me travelling when I was younger...it just made me want to get out there.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

It could be argued that Selena’s choice of words: “it just made me want to get out there” demonstrated an ease in her decision to become mobile. When going deeper into Selena’s story, she outlined that her own previous experiences abroad included camping trips to multiple European countries, an independent trip to Oman, and “living on and off” in Spain throughout holiday seasons. After outlining these previous trips in the interview, Selena remarked that:

…I always just like throwing myself in at the deep end and I thought, “well, I've been to different places before…and I know, you know, kinda how it works. I know I can get myself through an airport” and all that, like, small stuff.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

Whilst Selena’s comment may not appear to be significant here, her narrative provides a window into how desires to become mobile can transform from desired fantasies into objective realities. In Selena’s case, her knowledge (or cultural capital) of how travel works acted as a pathway to further develop and refine her desires to, in her words, “live the American dream”. Her accumulated knowledge of seemingly trivial things, such as ‘knowing what to do at an airport’, combined with her other life-experiences discussed above helped to widen her own imagined sense of desirable opportunities. In other words, her inner-desires to travel abroad to America, shaped by the vistas of life it promised, were not just internal romantic aspirations, but rather romantic aspirations with a possible (or probable) objective reality. This would explain the almost blasé overtone within her comment: “I think it was that I’d always wanted to get away as far as possible and California seemed like it could work. And so that was it”.

Within this section (4.9), I have drawn on Selena’s story to demonstrate how individual desires to study/work abroad, are often largely shaped by the social location of the individual student. Her story has been used as specific example to show how desires for going abroad can be cultivated and refined through specific
experiences within an individual’s biography. For these types of students (the students who made ‘in-habitus’ choices to live and study/work abroad), my discussion shows how their social location and habitus made these vistas seem possible because rather than simply remaining fantasises in their imagination, their horizons for action allowed them to actualise them. Mira’s story, like Selena’s, provides another example of how her desires for international travel developed from her social location within the world. In the interview, Mira explained that, with her family:

*Mira: we’d been to lots of places in Europe. First it was mainly France and then we really branched out into really more exotic places. We’d been to Kenya, and Sri Lanka and, um, India, and America. And we just kind of had done a lot and also my parents had travelled a lot with work, as did both of my older siblings, so I felt comfortable going to long haul destinations. I didn’t feel scared or fazed by it. (Female/Middle class/Asian British)*

We can see that her desires for studying abroad were shaped within the experiences of her own cross-continental travel and family who had all travelled abroad for work (one of Mira’s sisters had also studied abroad whilst at university too). Mira’s ‘horizon for action’ therefore situated her in a position of privilege because, prior to her study abroad in Canada, there was already a sense of ease and familiarity with going away. In her own words, she “felt comfortable going to long haul destinations; [she] didn’t feel scared or fazed by it”. Later in the interview though, Mira explained how her parents’ views of going abroad had “filtered down onto” her and how her parents:

*Mira: have [a] kind of, not necessarily stigma, but they do think that people who stay in one place for a very long time and who settle and don’t want to see the world, I think they do have a problem with that. I probably inherited that as well. (Female/Middle class/Asian British)*

It is here then where we can see the interplay of Mira’s social location, or habitus, and her developing vistas of the abroad – Mira’s desire to see the world and to not “settle” for too long in one location, was a view that was firmly within, and not over,
her horizon. And with reference to the discussion in 4.7, this view of what was possible within her horizon could be positively sanctioned by her habitus. But Hodkinson et al.’s (2012: 3) ‘horizons for action’ concept helps us to understand that whilst Mira’s imagination was influenced by her family habitus, her choice was not ‘…determined by some external force, or the result of unfettered free will’. Instead, her choice to study in Canada was fashioned out of what “was perceived as appropriate” within the available “external opportunities”. This is why Hodkinson et al.’s (2012) concept is useful because, in Mira’s story, we can see how her desires for travel continued to be shaped by the opportunities on her horizon. This understanding of motivations for mobility is slightly different from habitus because ‘horizons for action’ allows us to better see how subjective desires for travel are formed from the objective lives of these students. In Mira’s case, we can see that opportunities presented to her at university led her to make choices that were in tune with her biography. For the ‘in-habitus’ students then, imagining life abroad became a subjective desire that could be actualised, as opposed to remaining a fictional fantasy. Steven’s narrative below is a good example of how his desires for international travel stemmed from the routines of his pathway (see section 4.7 for his backstory):

Me: If you can think back to that specific point when you made your mind up, what would you identify then as your primary motivation or motivations for doing it (study abroad)?

Steven: Um, good question. Um…(pauses)…you know, I never really had that crystallising moment for me because it was just so obvious and such a given to me from the start. And I can’t even tell you where the starting point was. It just feels so ubiquitous throughout my whole life. Um, yeah…the primary motivation was just that great perception I have of going abroad and the opportunity to go and travel and do that kind of thing.

(Male/Middle class/White British)

(4.10) Horizons for Action - Turning Points
In the previous section, I have shown how the (in-habitus) students’ ‘horizons for action’ contributed to shaping their choices to study/work abroad. But when exploring
their subjective desires, or their vistas of the abroad, we can understand Hodkinson et al.'s (2012: 3) argument that young people's ‘...cultural background does not determine the choices they make in a mechanistic sense'. Whilst their backgrounds may have created “deeply ingrained pathways” towards certain choices, this did not mean that these students walked an inevitable path to studying and living abroad. Instead, these pathways helped to develop subjective desires, which could then be sanctioned by their habitus. These points therefore highlight that, ‘...while choices tend to be intuitive...they are also shaped by wider external conditions that operate of the person's immediate volition, but which form a strong contextual backdrop’ (Tomlinson, 2013:142). I would therefore argue that the choice to study or work abroad is not made within fixed social structures, but instead within social structures that operate differently in different contexts. When situating this idea through the 'horizons for action' lens, we can understand that what we see, and the position from which we see things from, can often change over time according to the social institutions in which a person is positioned. For this reason, there are often moments of change in young people’s lives where new opportunities (such as study/work abroad) can suddenly ‘appear’. Hodkinson et al. (2012: 4) term these moments “turning points” to refer ‘...to times when a person changes direction or at least considers such a change’. These ‘turning points’ are now explored through the students who did not explicitly fit into the ‘in-habitus’ group.

Grace, who studied for a year in Australia, showed a number of moments of change when discussing her background prior to mobility. Grace was the first in her family to go to university. Prior to entering her pre-92 university, Grace had completed her secondary education at a grammar school, where she discovered that she was a high academic achiever:

Grace: …at my school it was kind of…unless you were like the crème-de-la-crème, they kind of ignored you. So I didn't realise I was that smart. And then I got straight A’s at GCSE and I was like “oh shit, I'm actually really clever”...But you know when you don't think that you're anything and that you're doing that good. And then someone being like “actually hey, you know, you can do something; you can achieve something with this”.

(Female/Working Class/White British)
In terms of Grace’s previous travel experiences, the furthest she had travelled abroad with her family was to the Channel Islands. In her early life though, Grace went to France every year with best friend’s family, where she explained, “I was just basically a tag-along to keep her busy, but I was really lucky to have that”. When she was sixteen, Grace got a part-time job where she could save some money and begin to travel abroad with her friends independently:

Grace: A few of us got a Ryanair flight to Madrid and stayed there for a week…that kind of got me into the travel thing. And doing it independently…after that went to Amsterdam and thing like that. Just, you know, the kind of freedoms of cheap travel.

(Female/Working Class/White British)

We can see in Grace’s story above then that her life was not characterised by routines within ingrained pathways. Instead, her story conveyed different moments in her life where new opportunities entered her horizon. These moments did not have to be life-changing though. Instead, these ‘moments of change’ affected what Grace saw, and the position from which she saw these things. For example, through her grammar school, she was able to see that, with her academic ability, “you can achieve something with this”. In regard to her previous travel experience, her part time job when she was sixteen allowed her to see and experience “the kind of freedoms of cheap travel”. When applying these idea surrounding turning points, we can also begin to understand Grace’s opening narrative within the interview:

Me: So, I’ll open it (the interview) very broadly and just ask, well why did you decide to do a study abroad placement?

Grace: Because I could and, um, if I’m given an opportunity, then I’m not often one to turn it down…I’ve travelled before, but only within Europe and then one sort of trip outside Europe. I’d never had the chance to do extensive travelling or go that far before. And when I found out how I could get, you know, get my student loan, get all the funding, and get lots of support with the whole move; with the whole shebang to get out there…um, it was like an instant decision…I think I decided when I saw the prospectus that (name of UK HEI) did the trip to Australia.

(Female/Working Class/White British)
Grace’s narrative here is a good example of how the objective conditions of her social location underwent change (e.g. entry to HE), and with this change came opportunities that presented new possibilities within her horizon. This expansion of opportunity is highlighted in Grace’s statement that: “I’d never had the chance to do extensive travelling or go that far before”. But within Grace’s moment of change, or ‘turning point’, she also outlines how the chance to study abroad became a realistic opportunity within her imagination. This is apparent when Grace talks about the institutional factors that would assist in her studying abroad: “I could get…my student loan, get all the funding, and get lots of support with the whole move”.

Other students, like Grace, also told similar stories in terms of their introduction to seeing the opportunity to study abroad. Megan like Grace, was the first in her family to go to university (the same pre-92 university as Grace). Early in the interview, Megan told me of how she was interested in history and, when talking about her previous trip to Egypt, outlined how she had deeply enjoyed “like the history and all the buildings and everything that we saw there”. Unlike the significant majority of the ‘in-habitus’ students, Megan had not considered studying abroad prior to university. When she began to talk about her study abroad fair, her narrative articulated a moment of change that affected what was possible from the position where she stood:

Megan: Well there was a fair at our university, um, that was kind of in November in my first year. So I’d only been there (at university), kind of, like a month and a little bit. And they had all the stalls for different countries and [they] was, like, “you can go on a year abroad, or study abroad, or whatever”. And I had a look ‘round and I ended up…going around thinking, “OK, it would be quite a nice idea to, like, do it”.

(Female/Middle class/White British),

Again, we can see in Megan’s narrative that her entry into higher education changed her perceptions of what was possible within her own horizon. Her decision to attend the study abroad fair represented this moment of change in her life because, as her narrative demonstrates, she began to think outside of the regularities of her life. Megan’s statement: “I had a look ‘round and I ended up…going around thinking, “OK, it would be quite a nice idea to, like, do it””, taken literally, documents how she
visited the different stalls of the countries on offer at her university. But her phrasing that she “had a look ‘round”, in some ways, is an apt metaphor for her turning point in her horizon for action. This is because, by “looking around”, Megan was exploring the opportunities on offer from a new vantage position, established by a new social context (her university). And as she “looked around” the fair, surveying and assessing these opportunities, she came to realise that “it would be quite a nice idea to, like, do it”. It was at this turning point that vistas of the abroad began to fill her imagination, further developing and refining her motivations for choosing a study abroad placement:

Megan: …I was like “oh I’ll be able to do all [this] [and] I’ll be able to travel all over Italy; I’ll be able to experience the culture; I’ll be able to eat the food”. I think that was my primary motivation; [it was] just the fact that I was excited about going to live in Italy.

(Female/Middle class/White British),

The role that the university can play in helping to develop imaginative vistas of overseas locations can therefore be extremely important for some students. In section 4.8, I discussed David’s story, emphasising how his university department and friends were instrumental in his decision-making process. But his initial introduction to the idea of studying abroad, like Megan, demonstrates the pivotal role that HEIs can play in expanding horizons for their students:

David: And they (departmental administrators) emailed us saying, “oh, we have study abroad opportunities…we’re organising a meeting next Wednesday”, um, “we’re going to have a couple of people who’ve been on the year abroad in the past who are going to come and speak to you about their experiences; what they thought”, um, and stuff like that. And I kinda thought, “oh, I’ll go along to that meeting and learn a bit more about it”. And so a lot of my friends went along as well.

(Male/Working Class/White British),

David’s narrative here again demonstrates the beginning of a turning point, or moment of change within his life. But his narrative (and Megan’s too) also shows how turning points are not restricted to seemingly ‘big’ life events. Instead, small
turning points (such as being captivated by the contents of an email or study abroad fair) can lead to big moments of change within a young person’s life. It is at this point then that we can see the distinction between the “routines” of the in-habitus students, and the “turning points” of the out-of-habitus students – Scarlett’s (an in-habitus student) parents, for example, had moved to England from a young age and her dad, in particular, had always expressed a desire to live in the US. Scarlett (Female/Middle class/Asian and Black British), at one point, suggested, “I think maybe it (living in America) was one of my dad’s dreams and he kind of like suggested it to me kinda thing”. Scarlett told me how, whilst at her grammar school in London, she initially had wanted to study for the duration of her degree at an Ivy-League university due the “prestige” and the opportunity to have a “fresh start” because she “quite liked having fresh starts”. Before Scarlett enrolled at her Russell Group university in the UK, she had already experienced “quite a lot” of travel with her parents. Additionally, she had volunteered at a school in Australia when she was sixteen and had also completed a month in Peru as part of her school’s ‘World-Challenge’ trip. For Scarlett, these trips were “a really good experience like in terms of confidence and independence”. Scarlett’s habitus therefore allowed her to host the idea of studying abroad in America with ease. Her imagination, shaped by her accumulated experiences of her own travel and father who had imagined living in America, allowed her to actualise her desire to “re-invent” herself “and by going to America, that would allow me to do that”.

In many ways though, higher education institutions are key for understanding how particular choices are made for all of the students within this study. I have shown in this section that whilst choices are inseparable from the social structures and forces through which they are made, these structures and forces can be enabling/restricting in different contexts. Drawing on the discussion from this part of the chapter (Part Three), I would argue that higher education significantly contributed to the forming of desires for international mobility for all of the students. For the in-habitus students, such as Scarlett (above), higher education acted as a means for these students to continue in their “routines”; exploring their pathways and refining their international vistas. For students such as Grace, Megan, and David though, higher education represented a ‘turning point’ or a moment of change, because it enabled them to think about new opportunities in ways they previously had not.
Taken together, both groups of these students demonstrated a ‘narrative of reflexive self-identity’ (Giddens, 1991); negotiating choices in their changing circumstances.

4.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an in-depth analysis of the biographies of these young people prior to their study or work abroad experience. Building on Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) concept of mobility capital, I have shown how previous travel experiences and family influence are the two most important factors for shaping motivations for mobility. Whilst previous travel experiences play a crucial role in developing vistas of the abroad, I have argued that it is the quality of the experiences, not the quantity that shape aspirations for studying or working abroad. As I have shown in this chapter, study and/or work abroad opportunities offer an illusion of travelling the ‘right’ way through gaining an in-depth ‘authentic’ experience of the destination. In terms of family influence, I have drawn on Reay et al.’s (2009) concept of ‘in-habitus’ (and, by extension, ‘out-of-habitus’) to refer to the ways in which international travel was viewed by these students. Using the ‘in-habitus’ concept helps to understand how motivations for mobility are seen as appropriate in the context of their lives by these young people when they explore whether mobility is right for them. When out-of-habitus students are presented with novel and exciting opportunities (such as student mobility), I have shown how institutional forces, for example, through a young person’s university, can help to nurture and extend possibilities in their horizons.

Hodkinson et al.’s (2012) ‘horizons for action’ concept has helped to further understand the way in which people see (or cannot see) certain opportunities presented to them at different points in their lives. As I have argued throughout this chapter, young people’s choices are both enabled and constrained by the social position in which they occupy. For this reason, I have shown, through the data, that these students’ choices were being made within either ‘routines’ or ‘turning points’ in their lives. This discussion has therefore provided a sociological insight into how choices are mediated between the actions of people and the social structures that have influence over those choices. In many ways, my findings in this chapter have built on the claims of the others in this area, most notably because I have found that credit mobility, like whole-degree mobility, tends to be dominated by middle-class students. However, I have taken a theoretical approach to understanding the nature
of these choice by demonstrating that travel decisions, through habitus, are easily sanctioned when there is both a desire for authentic travel and positive discourses attached to international travel by family members. However, my findings into the out-of-habitus students is, I would argue, relatively new to the research field. Whilst I have shown that a minority of credit mobile students do not come from backgrounds with significant amounts of travel, I have also shown how the university and its culture takes on the form of an institutional habitus that can encourage students to see new opportunities on their horizons. I return to this in more depth in the conclusion chapter. In the next chapter of this thesis though, I turn to examine the experiences of these young people during their semester or year abroad.
Chapter 5 – Experiences Abroad

(5.1) Introduction
Studies that explore international student mobility often focus heavily on understanding students’ motivations to complete a period abroad. The previous chapter in this thesis has contributed to this debate. However, perhaps because of this strong emphasis on understanding the reasons for going abroad, attempts to critically engage with the students’ experiences of being abroad are often underdeveloped. Meanwhile, studies that do focus on experiences abroad often tend to explore the students’ time abroad through particular topics and issues framed in advance such as whether mobility increases European identity (Van Mol, 2012, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003) or how specific experiences gained through being abroad can be beneficial for future employment (Deakin, 2012, 2013). Whilst discussing these issues is certainly important for understanding international student mobility, analysing students’ experiences abroad through the lens of, for example, ‘employment’ or ‘European identity’ can sometimes neglect the way in which students, through their own narratives, articulate their day-to-day lives – what, for them, are the most significant experiences when they were abroad? How do they experience their time in their host country? And what shapes their day-to-day experiences? Furthermore, previous research that has explored international student mobility has, on the whole, neglected areas such as the academic learning experiences of study abroad students. Therefore, how do students experience life in a different academic setting and how (if at all) do they reflect on any pedagogical differences? These types of questions form the basis for this chapter and help to provide an insight into the lived experiences upon arrival in their host country for the duration of their stay.

In her study of ERASMUS students, Ewa Krzaklewska (2012) uses Tanner and Arnett’s (2009) concept of ‘emerging adulthood’ to theorise the activities and experiences of study abroad students. She argues that the study abroad experience is shaped by, on the one hand, experimental youthful exploration ‘...characterised by a lot of entertainment and diverse forms of ‘playing’” (2012: 84). On the other hand, it is characterised by a process of learning how to be an ‘adult’ through gaining competences in becoming independent – ‘...the [students’] narratives indicate that –
even if exchange students do dedicate a lot of time to socialising and cultural experiences – they consider ERASMUS also as a path to adulthood and an investment in their future careers’ (Krzaklewska, 2012: 84). In this chapter, I build on the idea that the specific experiences of being abroad crystallise around ‘…a time of freedom and adventure, full of novelties and exploration: meeting people, creating relationships, taking interesting courses at university, [and] travelling’ (Krzaklewska, 2012: 84). Whilst I show how the ‘year abroad’ indeed centres on creating an adventure in an ‘Other’ foreign land, I discuss how these adventures are created and lived by students on a day-to-day basis. As I outlined in Chapter 2, to date, many mobility studies have emphasised the adventure of studying in a different country; nevertheless there has been little attempt to critically engage with the ways in which young people create and articulate this adventure. This chapter explores three specific areas of the study abroad experience. In Part One, I outline the key experiences that the students talked about during their period abroad and then move on to discuss their narratives around “travelling” and “exploring”, reflecting the findings on motivations in the previous chapter. In Part Two I explore how experiences abroad (both social and academic) can be understood through John Urry’s concept of the ‘Tourist Gaze’, and argue that the novelty and excitement of being abroad had a significant effect on the students’ experience. Within Part Three, I analyse how friendships with both international and ‘home’ students resulted in different types of experience for the students. This section finishes with a discussion around notions of power and status associated with “Britishness”, and I demonstrate how a person’s British nationality can contribute and reaffirm a status as an outsider, looking in on their host culture.

Part One
(5.2) Understanding Key Experiences
When conducting each individual interview, I was particularly keen to open the section that explored the students’ time abroad (see appendix A) in a way that gave each student the freedom to express what they felt was significant in their story. For this reason, in all of the interviews, I began the experiences abroad section by asking each student to think about the time over their year (or semester) abroad and to identify what they felt were their key experiences. Across the forty interviews, the responses to this question were varied. However, a common theme was that the
year abroad represented a time where the freedoms and exploratory nature of international travel could be experienced. Similar to Krzaklewska’s (2008: 90) study of ERASMUS students, ‘…what was striking was the notion of novelty, new stimulus, otherness or change: students wanted to meet new people, live in a foreign country, and see a different educational system’. In many cases, the students used similar adjectives to describe their experiences of their year abroad – “amazing”, “incredible”, and “the best” were, more often than not, used to describe their time abroad. For some students, their key experiences were shaped by the friendships they had formed. For others, the experience of being able to travel to and visit different parts of the host country provided a key opportunity to form an “amazing” time abroad. However, for some students, the opportunity to simply live amongst other students on a new campus and attend new lectures constituted an experience in its own right.

(5.3) The Dominance of ‘Travelling’
When talking to the young people who had returned from their year (or semester) abroad, one of the recurring themes was how their experience of travelling to another country had allowed them to travel within their destination country (and sometimes to other countries too). The year abroad, for many of students, offered a chance to see new sites in their host country and explore the travel opportunities on offer. Some students travelled independently during or after their study or work placement, whilst others, almost by chance, ‘stumbled’ across the chance to see the wider country away from the campus or workplace. Jess, who self-organised her “travelling”, told me:

Jess: …when I left [my internship], I stayed in America for a month later, so I left (company name) a month before I actually left the country. And in that time I went over to the West coast and did like a Nevada, California, Arizona, Grand Canyon; all that type of shit. And it was great; so much fun.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Whilst Jess’ trips around the west-coast were self-organised, Katie, who studied in Canada, told me how she received an email at her university about an opportunity to go on a university trip to the US. Katie explained how:
Katie: *I had the best week of my life* (laughs). *Um, and I can honestly say that. I, um, out of pure fluke, I managed to get on random trip to go to Las Vegas and camp in the Mojave Desert. So I got to go, like, I had gone to Canada thinking “right, I’m going to go to Canada; I’ll travel Canada” and I ended up in California and Nevada and Arizona and I spent three days in Las Vegas.*

(Female/Middle class/White British)

After describing their experiences travelling, both Jess and Katie state how these experiences were “so much fun” (Jess) and “the best week of my life” (Katie). Statements like Jess and Katie’s were common and often interwoven within the students’ travel tales. Natalie (Female/Middle class/White British), who studied in Turkey told me of how her experiences travelling around Turkey were “probably one of the best experiences ever”. Steven’s (Male/Middle class/White British) experiences of travelling around the US were “great fun [and] definitely a defining experience”. Upon asking Alisha (Female/Middle class/White British), who studied in Australia, what her key experiences were comprised of, she replied: “the first thing that comes into my head is travel… [I] just saw the entire country; saw so much, and met so many cool people along the way”. These key experiences, shared by a large number of the students, correspond to the motivations for studying abroad that were discussed in the previous chapter. Themes of “always wanting to travel”, and wanting to “live and explore” a new culture were often emphasised in the students’ narratives when discussing their aspirations and desires for choosing a study or work placement abroad.

Whilst it is certainly interesting that experiences of travelling and exploring different locations often constituted the key experiences for these students, these findings are generally in line with other (Western) studies of student mobility (e.g Krzaklewksa, 2008, Tsoukalas, 2008, Waters et al., 2011). Furthermore, when understood within the wider discourses surrounding youth travel, these findings are, to some extent, unsurprising. Brooks and Waters (2011), for example, have argued that international travel (in a general context) has become an important part of young people’s lives. Rather than remaining an activity for the elite, Brooks and Waters (2011: 138) show how international travel can be seen as part of a lifestyle and/or part of a wider biographical construction for young people today. Clearly then,
gaining experiences abroad (and particularly the notion of “travelling” abroad) plays a significant role in many young people’s lives. The rest of this chapter though explores a variety of these students’ “experiences abroad” from a new angle. Whilst, like other mobility studies, I outline the types or experiences these young people had, I focus extensively on why those experiences were integral to the success of their year abroad - what made the various activities they participated in so “defining” (Steven), or “the best” (Natalie)? Through this discussion, I build on Krzaklewksa’s (2008) research by forming an argument that explains how experiences abroad become ‘novel’ and ‘stimulating’.

**Part 2**

**(5.4) The ‘Extra-Ordinary’ Nature of Key Experiences**

When I asked Leah to tell me about her key experiences she had gained over her year in Eastern Canada, she replied:

Leah: …it was the best year of my life…like even the things like the dog-sledding or going to Niagara Falls, or whatever…that was still just one part of it, you know. And a massive part of it was actually the small idiosyncrasies of the things like, you know, moments in classes where like we all had matching water bottles…it sounds really stupid, but it means a lot to me. And like going to ATM machines when they’re on ice, on a frozen river; that means a lot, which people are like “I don’t get why you find that exciting”.

(Female/Working class/White British)

Leah’s story here provides a good introduction to explaining how, for many of the students, their year abroad was an “amazing” experience or, in Leah’s words, “the best year of my life”. After Leah describes her experience as “the best year of my life”, she begins to outline the specific experiences that contributed towards her year in Canada as the “best”. Interestingly, Leah immediately chooses to use imagery of Canada (dog-sledding and Niagara Falls). Her choice to use these images perhaps demonstrates two things: firstly, they are used to convey a sense of having really experienced Canada – landmarks of a country, such as Niagara Falls, can often signify to a person that they are really *in* the country they have chosen to visit. For Leah, her choice to use the Niagara Falls imagery cements her view that she really
had experienced Canada. However, her choice to use these examples when beginning to describe her key experiences is highly significant because these examples convey typical imageries of what Leah perceived a ‘Canadian experience’ was comprised of. And by not elaborating on the finer detail of those experiences, Leah could have assumed that I, as the interviewer, understood that these ‘typical’ things would establish ‘an experience’. This is also evident in her use of “you know” after she outlines her trip to Niagara Falls and dog-sledding because this phrase could be viewed as Leah ensuring that I understood why these types of experiences would, of course, have created ‘an experience’.

Before moving on to examine the latter part of Leah’s narrative in the following section (5.5), it is worth outlining, in more detail, the significance of other similar experiences to Leah’s that a large number of the students described to me when I asked them to recount their key experiences. When I asked Richard (Male/Working class/White British), who also studied in Canada what his key experiences consisted of, he replied: “um, getting the girlfriend; um, snowmobiling; um, fencing; um, and then the course”. Upon asking Adam (Male/Middle class/White British), who studied in California, what his key experiences were, he outlined, in considerable depth, how his passion for ‘Ultimate Frisbee’ allowed him to join the university team. Whilst Adam had played ‘Ultimate Frisbee’ in the UK, his experiences in the team at his host university allowed him to travel to many other parts of the US as a player on the team. For David, who studied in the Netherlands, his key experiences were composed of “Dutch Festivals”, such as the ‘Sinterklaas’ parade in early December, ‘Koninginnedag’ (Queen’s day) in April, and the fireworks for New Year’s Eve. As he explained:

David: “…those sort of big celebrations, big festivities, [are] things that are a bit different that we don’t have in the UK [and] are kinda the things that are my standout memories”.

(Male/Working class/White British)

Similarly to David, Megan, who studied in Italy, explained how her trip to the Venice carnival was one of her key experiences. Before leaving to study in Italy, she had “read a book about the Venice carnival with all the masks and I was always
When I asked Megan to elaborate on why this experience was vivid in her memory, she replied:

Megan: “...there was a big group of us...and we just had such a lovely day and just (pauses) I saw people just standing in the street all dressed in kind of regency costume with the masks and it’s just phenomenal ‘cause of the effort they put into it. And it was snowing and it was a really, really amazing day”.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

When exploring these types of experience that were recounted by the students, it becomes clear that many of their stories and tales were bound up with notions of exploration, novelty, and rejoicing in the ‘difference’ that they experienced in comparison to their life in the UK. Like Leah, who talked of dog-sledding, Richard, who studied in Canada, talked about his experience snowmobiling, again highlighting the significance of Canada’s geographical and seasonal attractions. Megan talked about her “amazing” trip to Venice to watch the carnival, whilst David talked specifically about enjoying the ‘difference’ when experiencing the Dutch festivals that “we don’t have in the UK”. These ideas therefore reflect the findings of Waters et al. (2011: 464), who have argued that motivations for UK whole degree students are often formed with ‘...more sentimental and emotive goals in mind, tied to an underlying feeling that they would be somehow ‘happier’ overseas’.

When exploring these types of stories, it is perhaps, as David suggests in his narrative, the experience of ‘difference’ that establishes this ‘happier’ mentality abroad. For example, the ability to see, hear, and engage with “things that are a bit different” contributed to his “standout memories”. In his study of ERASMUS students, Ioannis Tsoukalas (2008: 134) argues:

‘...the ERASMUS period appears to involve unusual levels of licence and indulgence and often a touch of emancipation as well...students party and travel a lot and also do a number of things that are out of the ordinary’.

I have shown so far that students who study abroad ‘indulge’ and take pleasure from participating in ‘out of the ordinary’ experiences, such as carnivals (Megan and David), or dog-sledding (Leah). And, like Tsoukalas’ findings, many students
emphasised the ‘extra-ordinary’ nature of these experiences. In many respects though, discourses around the ‘novelty’ and ‘extra-ordinariness’ of these experiences should be expected to an extent. This is because, drawing on some of the narratives outlined above, gaining and collecting ‘out-of-the-ordinary’ experiences can establish feelings of novelty and enjoyment - for example, events, such as visiting Niagara Falls (Leah), playing Ultimate Frisbee (Adam) for a new team abroad, or attending national carnivals (David and Megan) were activities that have novelty attached to them specifically due to their status as ‘foreign’ and/or ‘new’. However, within the interviews, it was clear that the year (or semester) abroad was not just characterised by the pleasures associated with these ‘extra-ordinary’ events. Instead, the students also conveyed, in their own way, other seemingly smaller moments that contributed to their “amazing” time abroad. For many students, simply doing ordinary things on a day-to-day basis abroad significantly shaped their sense of adventure. Within the next section, I demonstrate how these ‘ordinary things’ became integral to the way in which their adventures were created.

(5.5) Key Experiences within the Tourist Gaze

At the beginning of the last section, I opened with Leah’s story and moved on to show, through other student narratives, how ‘out-of-the-ordinary experiences’ inevitably become ‘key experiences’ specifically because of the novelty attached to them. It is worth returning though to the second part of Leah’s narrative (pp.151) because, as she suggests in her own words, her ‘extra-ordinary’ experiences of dog sledding and visiting Niagara Falls “was still just one part of it”. Interestingly, Leah goes on to suggest that, “a massive part of it (her experience) was actually the small idiosyncrasies” of other parts of her experience. In her narrative, Leah goes on to give an example of visiting ATMs or cash machines on a frozen river. The way in which Leah discusses these examples is also important because, on two occasions, she shows an awareness that not all people might understand why she attached significance to these experiences – firstly, when talking about how these “small idiosyncrasies” contributed towards her overall experience, she suggests that “it sounds really stupid”. Secondly, when she talked about how things such as visiting an ATM on ice “meant a lot” to her, she quickly adds that other people “don’t get why [she] find[s] that exciting”. However, when exploring Leah’s story through John Urry’s (2002) concept of the ‘tourist gaze’, we can perhaps begin to understand why
seemingly trivial activities, such as withdrawing cash on ice, can create a significant experience for somebody. Furthermore, by exploring other student narratives like Leah’s, we can begin to understand that these types of experiences are not trivial, nor “stupid” (as Leah put it). On the contrary, these types of experiences, as I shall demonstrate, are very much ingrained in the way in which ‘the abroad’ was experienced for all students within this study.

Urry and Larsen (2011: 15) argue that “…tourist experiences involve some aspect or element that induces pleasurable experiences which, by comparison with the everyday, are out of the ordinary’. Whilst, like in the literature review, I am not suggesting that study abroad students are holidaymakers who travel abroad for purely recreational purposes, Urry and Larsen’s (2011) concept can help to explain the way in which seemingly trivial experiences, such as withdrawing cash on ice, can contribute to feelings of novelty within the wider “pleasurable experiences” of being abroad. For example, when I asked each student about their key experiences and common social activities outside of their ‘travel tales’, their narratives had a sense of ordinariness to them. Alice, who undertook a study placement in France, told me:

Alice: When I think of (name of study abroad HEI) and what I was doing when I was there, I just see myself with this big group of friends and just being in the city and the things that we did. I feel like we’d spent a lot of time not doing anything, if you know what I mean. Um…yeah…and eating and drinking a lot…that would be the key things…which probably aren’t the best things I should be saying seen as though I was studying a degree when I was there. But that was it, yeah.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

When reading Alice’s narrative, it seems, in many respects, illogical to argue that her experiences possessed an ‘extra-ordinary’ character - as outlined above, Urry and Larsen (2011) argue that ‘pleasurable experiences’ are fashioned from the ‘out of the ordinary’ character of such experiences. In Alice’s story though, she specifically states that she “spent a lot of time not doing anything”. And crucially, like Leah’s narrative earlier, Alice sought clarification from me that I understood what was meant by this: “I feel like we’d spent a lot of time not doing anything, if you know what I mean [my emphasis]”. Her use of “if you know what I mean” implies that there could be some ambiguity to her statement – “spend[ing] a lot of time not doing anything” is
something that Alice could have felt was an unacceptable discourse of travel to present and her phrasing is a way of anticipating this. Interestingly, at the beginning of her narrative, Alice explicitly states that when she thinks about her study abroad university and “what [she] was doing when [she] was there” (and therefore her whole experience over the year), she specifically mentions “eating and drinking a lot”, which, for her, were the “key things”. Again, this could seem a trivial observation, considering that eating and drinking are most definitely not ‘extra-ordinary’ activities. This is perhaps where we can begin to understand what is meant by a ‘gaze’ – due to a person’s location in a new, foreign social setting, a social process occurs whereby an individual has to constantly interpret, evaluate, and compare the experiences they have abroad in relation to what they do back home. This means that the tourist gaze is a cognitive phenomenon that places the individual at the centre of their experience abroad. Instead of simply ‘looking’ (such as when a person goes about their daily business when back home), the stimulus of new surroundings, people, and places enable an individual to become transfixed when experiencing them. This why this process is referred to as a ‘gaze’. This does not mean though that individuals simply become more reflective about the things that they are exposed to abroad. The gaze also “orders” and “regulates” what a person’s senses are exposed to (e.g. what they see, hear, smell, etc.). As Urry and Larsen (2011: 14) suggest:

‘…gazes organise the encounters of visitors with the ‘other’, providing some sense of competence, pleasure and structure to those experiences…It is the gaze that orders and regulates the relationships between the various sensuous experiences while away, identifying what is visually out-of-ordinary, what are relevant differences and what is ‘other’.

Whilst Urry and Larsen’s argument centres on encounters with local people, their point is also relevant to the way in which Alice articulated her experiences. When she talks about eating and drinking in her narrative then, we can begin to see exactly why this small experience was key to her story. Of course, eating and drinking would have been a daily activity for Alice. But when in France, this activity became Othered because, instead of an every-day mundane occurrence, it became an activity that took on new meaning because she was doing a familiar thing in an unfamiliar
context: As Urry (2002: 13) argues, doing various things abroad ‘…all have particular significance if they take place against a distinctive visual backcloth. The visual gaze renders extraordinary activities that otherwise would be mundane and everyday’. Within Alice’s narrative, she alludes to a ‘visual backcloth’ (i.e. a distinctive new setting) in which her experiences took on a new meaning: “I just see myself with this big group of friends and just being in the city”. When exploring something as simple as consuming food and drink, or withdrawing cash on ice (Leah), the tourist gaze allows us to begin to see how ordinary activities can become transformed into extra-ordinary events. In another section of the interview, Alice provided another example of an ordinary activity becoming transformed into an extra-ordinary event:

Alice: I definitely just kinda, like, love the culture and the style of it (French culture). I feel like it is somewhere that I can see myself living when I’m older because (pauses) even things like coffee (pauses) like, I dunno (pauses) you’ll kind of be there and I felt like (pauses) I enjoyed that aspect of life there probably more than I do at home…kinda just like going out for a drink, or going out for dinner…lunch or coffee is so much more enjoyable there than here.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Again, in Alice’s narrative here, we can see that she compares and contrasts an activity that she experiences at home to her new surroundings in France. But crucially, her comment: “I enjoyed that aspect of life there probably more than I do at home” demonstrates that, against the backdrop of a new culture, her gaze allowed her to attach new meaning to the activities she participated in. It is through this ‘gazing’ process that Alice came to realise how “lunch or coffee [was] so much more enjoyable there (in France) than here (UK)”.

The tourist gaze, however, is not just characterised by the way in which things are gazed upon when abroad. Instead, the gaze is a deeper phenomenon that captures the ways in which experiences relate to, and reflect, the pre-formed desires and anticipations of those experiences before departure. The experience of gazing is therefore also a mediation between the actual ‘seeing’ and ‘doing’ when abroad and ‘…the pleasurable dramas [people] have already experienced in their imagination’ (Urry, 2002: 13) prior to arrival at their destination. In returning to Alice’s narrative, she had told me earlier in the interview how she had:
Alice: ...kind of envisaged myself sitting like with friends having an espresso and red wine at night and that kind of thing. And it’s...I suppose...yeah...um...like I really love, like, style and fashion and I just think shopping there’s so much nicer.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Within this statement, we can see that Alice’s experiences (outlined above) were interwoven with her anticipations and desires surrounding her study trip to France. Her narrative here, like many other people before they travel abroad, is constructed through an almost romantic aspiration of experiencing the Other – i.e. drinking red wine at night, in France, sitting with her friends. When talking about their lived experiences abroad, other students also commented on how the experiences they had abroad were tied to the anticipations and desires they had formed prior to departure. Annie, who studied in the US, for example, told me how she wanted “something different to my every day here”. She went on to suggest:

Annie: ...partly, it’s from like...[on] the one side you’ve got the American films, media, which I know is very stereotypical and I know shouldn’t be saying that as a (subject name) student. But, you’ve got all the media, you’ve got all the parties, the fraternities, the red cups...all this kinda stuff that you think...it’s just so “is it like that?” because it’s so embedded into the movies we watch and things.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Annie’s narrative here shows that she had held a set of expectations about the types of experiences she might encounter over the course of her year in the US: “the parties, the fraternities, the red cups”. Whilst this does not mean that Annie held a prescriptive view of what she would experience throughout the year, it does again show how the adventure of studying abroad is mediated between the reveries of travel before departure and the actual experiences that took place in the destination. This is because, much like Alice’s story earlier, we can see that Annie indeed lived out her desires, with the tourist gaze helping to organise these experiences as something novel and exciting:
Interviewer: What type of social activities did you do? What would you typically do for social activities?

Annie: Play Beer Pong, go to house parties, and drinking games. And it was definitely the house parties. And then we went to bars quite a bit because I lived a street away from the strip. So we went to the bars quite a bit.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

When taken together, Alice and Annie's stories show how the gaze operates on two levels. Firstly, their narratives both demonstrate how the gaze positioned them at the centre of their experiences: simple, ‘ordinary’ experiences, such as eating and drinking, or house parties, became significant events because they required the gazer to constantly interpret and attach significance to what they were experiencing. But secondly, their narratives demonstrate that gazing is also linked to anticipated experiences that shaped the imagination of these students. The experiences that these young people gained abroad were therefore specifically related to how they imagined what they might have encountered and enjoyed whilst on their placement. The experiences of many of these students demonstrated how ‘…satisfaction stems from anticipation, from imaginative pleasure-seeking…people seek to experience ‘in reality’ the pleasurable dramas they have already experienced in their imagination’ (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 51).

(5.5.1) Tourist Gaze – A Useful Concept for Understanding Daily Experiences?

In the previous section, I have begun to outline how John Urry’s (2002, 2011) concept of the tourist gaze can help make sense of how seemingly ‘ordinary’ experiences are integral to the overall experience of studying abroad. My study is not, however, the first mobility project to explore student experiences in relation to the tourist gaze. Freestone and Geldens’ (2008) small-scale study of Australian credit mobile students also explored the significance of the tourist gaze, but these researchers dismissed the concept; stating that the tourist gaze “…is inadequate to conceptualise [student] exchange [programmes]’ (pp. 46). The ‘inadequacy’ they identify though is based on their understanding that the tourist gaze is limited to a literal interpretation of tourism as a recreational and leisure activity that is separate
from the domain of work or employment. They argue that, when exploring student abroad exchanges, the tourist gaze:

‘...fail[s] to capture the essence of exchange, that is, the continuation of study, the occupational work of the student, and the regulated pattern of attending university, the place of the student’s work’

(Freestone and Geldens, 2008: 43).

Freestone and Geldens (2008) outline an important point that ‘the occupational work of the student’ and the ‘regulated pattern of attending university’ are activities, which, on the surface, would appear to limit the utility of this perspective to understand the experiences of students. When combined with the longer duration of time spent abroad, compared to a more ‘traditional holiday’, it could be suggested that the tourist gaze indeed “fail[s] to capture the essence of exchange” (Freestone and Geldens, 2008: 43). By examining experiences as ‘touristic’, though, I am going beyond the simple notion that tourism represents a ‘relaxed holiday’. Instead, I use the term to capture two things. Firstly, I use it to convey that experiences abroad are often contrasted with everyday experiences in the students’ own country. For these young people, spending either a semester or year abroad represented a break from their day-to-day lives in the UK, even though many of the activities they engaged in were similar to ‘back home’:

*Jane: Well when you’re visiting, you’re sort of like oh you’re just there for a week and you just see the pretty parts; you just see the tourist parts; you just see the bits that, you know, they actively advertise to you. But when you’re a student and you actually live there, you see everything. Like you’d go to the supermarkets, you’d go to the shops, you like go to the cinema. You do all sorts of things that you’d do here, but you just do it in a different country.*

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Jane’s narrative is important here because she confirms that many of the activities that she did were similar to those she did ‘back home’: “you do all sorts of things that you’d do here [in the UK]”. This corresponds with Urry and Larsen’s (2011: 16) idea that, through gazing, people come to realise ‘...how the routines of life are
surprisingly not that unfamiliar’. But in order for that realisation to happen, a process of in-depth reflection that requires a person to compare what they are seeing needs to occur. Due to study or work abroad being longer in duration than an average holiday, these students had more time to make these comparisons, exploring how the differences abroad were actually, as they believed, similar to life back home.

This leads onto the second way I use the term ‘touristic’ (in the Urry sense of the word) – in addition to characterising the in-depth reflections of ‘difference’, the concept also captures the ways in which experiences abroad can take on new meaning when abroad. When I asked David, who studied in the Netherlands, what his common social activities were, he replied:

David: …we’d just organise stuff amongst ourselves (other international students), like, we’d go to the cinema, um, we’d do house dinners, brunches, and stuff like that… I think we did things like pizzas and the brunch we had at Easter… I think [it] was…it was really good and just doing stuff amongst ourselves that was really, really good.

(Male/Working class/White British)

In some respects, David’s narrative here could be literally interpreted as him doing these activities specifically because they provided pleasure to him - that he simply enjoyed cooking and eating with people. This claim, no doubt, would be valid to some extent. But this view would not explain why David mentioned these experiences as “really good” and “really, really good” after describing them. In order for these seemingly ‘ordinary’ experiences to be “really, really good”, there had to be a certain amount of novelty attached to them; that, somehow, these experiences were different in comparison to life back home. We might then suppose that experiences stop being touristic when they exhaust feelings of being ‘out-of-the-ordinary’ - that the gaze finishes at the point when experiences become either normalised, standardised, and routinised, or elements of standardisation begin to coexist with enduring elements of novelty. However, although many of the students told me how they settled into their destinations and established their own routines, the wonder and novelty of their experiences abroad never waned within their narratives. Whether a mobility placement lasted a semester or full year, the excitement of living in a foreign country, experiencing and taking delight in ‘new’
things was sustained through the duration of their stay. For that reason, the enjoyment, novelty, and wonder within those experiences become established through the ‘tourist gaze’. Although the length of stay inevitably resulted in the formation of routines for these students, their narratives did not convey any sense that things became standardised, normalised, or, crucially, ‘ordinary’.

Urry (2002) bases his conception of the tourist gaze on short-term, recreational holiday-makers. Interestingly, a number of students held conceptions of what tourism involved, but believed that their study/work experience allowed them to go beyond tourism (and therefore the tourist gaze). However, Chloe, who studied in Canada for a year, demonstrates how the tourist gaze was still integral for shaping her experiences:

Chloe: ‘…as a tourist, you might be there for like a one-day event. But as someone living there so you can get involved on projects and see them develop or, like, properly, like, get to know Canadian people and share experiences that you don’t necessarily get to do as a tourist. And you just learn much more I think about…I dunno…the country and the people and the culture…But it’s silly things like you wouldn’t necessarily know the milk came in bags if you weren’t living there because why would you need to go and buy food’.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Chloe’s narrative here provides a good example of the gaze at work. After Chloe outlines how tourism is different from “living there”, she talks about integrating with people and “learn[ing] much more…about…the country and the people and the culture”. But interestingly, she offers a seemingly trivial observation about how the milk is different compared to the UK. But this is not a trivial observation because, as Urry and Larsen (2011: 17) argue, ‘…gazing is not merely seeing, but involves cognitive work of interpreting, evaluating, drawing comparisons and making mental connections between signs and their referents’. For Chloe’s gaze then, her experiences were shaped by what Leah (analysed earlier) termed: “the small idiosyncrasies” of her experience. In order to create an experience abroad, there had to be a process by which seeing and interpreting was undertaken in relation to the perceived ordinariness of back home. It is within this process that the tourist gaze operates.
Whilst in agreement with Freestone and Geldens that study abroad exchanges are significantly different from the recreational tourism that Urry (2002, 2011) bases the tourist gaze on, it is perhaps limiting to dismiss the concept because of its use for understanding leisure tourism. To paraphrase a point made earlier, the tourist gaze is a particularly useful concept because it helps to explain the ways in which these young people experienced and sustained the sense of novelty attached to their time abroad. For this reason, there is no reason why the tourist gaze cannot be extended to other forms of travel, such as student mobility, because, at its core, the concept is useful for understanding the relationship between the gazer and his/her object (i.e. the student experiences their surroundings).

Similar to Freestone and Geldens (2008), Janes (2008) also discusses the relevance of the tourist gaze when studying students who travel abroad. But like them he also conceptualises the tourist gaze as a theoretical construct that is strictly for analysing the experiences of recreational, leisure tourists. For this reason, Janes (2008) argues: ‘…surely a student is a very different thing from a tourist: the former seeks enlightenment, the latter pleasure?’ (Janes, 2008: 23). However, this point perhaps misses the manner in which many “enlightenment” experiences abroad are pursued through pleasure. For example, I have argued so far that all experiences (however ‘significant’ these experiences might appear) are subjected to a ‘gaze’ whereby students take pleasure in the requirement to interpret, reflect on, and compare those experiences to, as Annie earlier described, the “everyday here (in the UK)”. Whilst I agree with Janes (2008) that the activities I have discussed above could be characterised as ‘leisure activities’, they nevertheless remain activities where the students had to think about them differently. Visiting bars, cooking, and eating out with friends are, of course, pleasurable activities, yet they represent new sites for the gaze to take focus. The tourist gaze therefore represents an opportunity to learn about these new experiences because they force the student to compare and contrast these experiences with back home. For this reason, students can certainly seek their own enlightenment through the pleasurable aspects of their experiences abroad.

(5.6) The Importance of ‘Difference’ in Learning
The discussion of key experiences, through the tourist gaze, leads neatly into discussing the ways in which the students experienced academic learning whilst
abroad. The tourist gaze concept, so far, has helped to demonstrate how ‘difference’ was integral to achieving new, novel, and exciting experiences. For many students, this exposure to ‘difference’, as I shall demonstrate in this section, also contributed to their enjoyment of their new academic surroundings.

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined how I opened the section of the interview that discussed experiences abroad by asking the students to tell me about their key experiences throughout the duration of their mobility. As I have shown in the previous section, the freedoms and novelties associated with international travel were significant themes in the types of responses to the question. However, when analysing these responses, only 12 students (out of 36 who completed a study placement), made any mention of their academic learning experiences within their narratives. Similarly, whilst some students went on to talk about their new academic environment later in the interview, many students did not talk about their learning experiences until I introduced it myself. This does not mean though that the learning aspect was an insignificant part of their experiences though because, of the 36 students who completed a study placement, 28 told me of how they had enjoyed their new academic environment and the new learning opportunities they were presented with. These findings might suggest then that, whilst the academic learning aspect was not as significant as exploring the host country (e.g. the ‘travel’ theme), the students’ learning experiences still made a positive impact within their overall experience of living abroad.

One of the areas where this positive impact was most significant was in the narratives of students who travelled to North America. Whilst previous research into learning experiences and/or pedagogy is scarce, some research (Waters et al., 2011, King et al., 2013) has found that the ‘liberal arts’ model of the US has been viewed by young people as a favourable alternative to the UK ‘single honours’ programme. My findings reflect the claims made by these researchers, as many of the students who travelled to North America outlined how they enjoyed more flexibility in their learning:

*Maria: I was like, “wow, this is really different”. And I was looking forward to it. I mean, I even did a music module whilst I was out there. I made sure that I had my (subject name) module credits all there. And then you could do anything you wanted*
after that, like, I did a music one and it was really good because it made you feel like 
you’re at uni [and] you’re studying, but yet you can do something that you enjoy.

(Female/Middle class/Black British)

Suzie: I could just take a class completely nothing to do with my degree just purely 
out of interest in that course…It’s just something that was different and that I thought 
might be interesting and there wasn’t those restrictions. Whereas at (name of UK 
HEI), if I was just like, “oh, I’d like to take an astronomy this term”, or something like 
that (pauses) they wouldn’t allow that.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Both Maria and Suzie’s narratives here demonstrate a sense of freedom within their 
learning – Suzie talked about there being no “restrictions” on the types of modules 
she could take, whilst Maria talked about how, after achieving her core credits in her 
subject, she “could do anything [she] wanted after that”. Taken together, these 
narratives reflect Waters et al.’s (2011: 463) suggestion that, for UK students in 
North America, there is a ‘…freedom, enjoyment and excitement that comes from 
being able to try out a range of subjects’. It could be further argued though that this 
freedom and enjoyment stemmed specifically from the ‘difference’ that these 
students experienced. I have argued so far in this chapter that the concept of 
‘difference’ is integral to understanding how feelings of novelty and enjoyment 
become established. Interestingly, both Maria and Suzie use the word “different” to 
characterise their new learning experiences (“it’s just something that was different” 
(Suzie), “I was like, “wow, this is really different”” (Maria)). Therefore, to some extent, 
the ‘liberal arts system’, which encourages experimentalism and flexibility in learning, 
resonated with the students’ desires for difference. This ‘difference’, within a wider 
discourse of international travel exploration, allowed the students to seek out and 
enjoy new opportunities that were available. Adam’s narrative succinctly captures 
this freedom to explore new opportunities:

Adam: (the liberal arts system) creates, like, a huge breadth of opportunity with the 
difference in courses I could take…And, um, it was really, um, I think a good 
opportunity in terms of just any inkling that I had of interest or “oh I wonder [if] that 
kind of interests me”…And it wasn’t a case of worrying if the credits applied or if I
was going to be able to use that, or if it would be beneficial...it was just “yeah, that kind of interests me; I’ll do it”.

(Male/Middle class/White British)

Adam’s narrative here, in addition to Maria and Suzie’s, reinforces a point made earlier in relation to Freestone and Geldens’ (2008) idea that the tourist gaze and study abroad are incompatible because tourism focuses on leisure, whilst study abroad focuses on ‘work’. The narratives here though demonstrate that the two concepts of leisure and work are not mutually exclusive because they show how there is an element of ‘...fun trying out different courses and subjects’ (Waters et al., 2011: 467). Therefore, the academic learning aspect of study abroad can be thought of as part of (and not separate to) a wider experience of living in a new country.

Another significant theme evident in the narratives of students, who had completed a study placement in the North America, was that the North American students demonstrated a different view towards education compared to UK students – Mira, who studied in Canada, for example, told me how her study abroad HEI was an “environment where people [were] more motivated”. Whilst Mira also told me how about her “amazing learning opportunity” were due to the diversity of visiting lecturers on her course, she discussed these positive experiences abroad in relation to her learning experiences at home:

Mira: In first and second year (at UK HEI) it was...like, everyone’s main priorities seemed to be going out, making friends, socialising, whereas in (Study Abroad HEI) it was very different...in the second year (at UK HEI) I didn’t know anyone who wanted to carry on with university and everyone was just here to get drunk to be honest. So it was a very different learning environment (at Study Abroad HEI).

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

Mira, however, was not entirely critical of the activities and mind-set of UK students at UK HEIs. After outlining the ‘mentalities’ of UK students, she suggested that, due to the high academic demand at her study abroad HEI, it was more difficult to socialise, “develop social skills”, or gain “confidence”. Other students, such as Jenny (Female/Middle class/White British), told me how she found it easier to study because of the “work ethic” of the other students. In the US, where Jenny studied,
she told me how academic success was celebrated, and “they (American students) wanted to congratulate you if you did well in a class”. This difference in mentality, shown by the American students, was enjoyed by Jenny, but she also told me how, upon returning home to the UK, she found it “difficult coming back and still having the work ethic of an American student”. Selena, who also studied in the US, also told me how she found it hard to adjust to the learning system upon return to the UK:

*Selena: Yeah. I feel bored most of the time. Um, and unstimulated but it really. I don’t know whether that’s the fact that I’ve had so many years of university or (pauses) but I definitely think that the teachers (pauses) they try. They do try to make things interesting. But the students aren’t as engaged. I mean (Study Abroad HEI) is a place that you have to work so hard to get to. You have to academically be at the top of your game. Um, and, you know, you pay a lot of money to go there unless you get state funded grants. So think people are very motivated and they definitely…everybody there seemed very driven and they knew what they wanted to get out of it and they were determined to do that. But I don’t get that feeling in classrooms here. You feel like everyone’s quite apathetic…and…yeah it’s quite un-motivational really.  

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)*

Selena’s narrative is important here because, at the beginning of her story, she begins to outline why she feels “unstimulated” in her classes in the UK. But as she begins to discuss how “the teachers do try”, she immediately (and throughout the rest of her narrative) provides a comprehensive account for why American students are so much more “driven” and “motivated”.

Again though, when understanding why many of the students who studied in North America talked about the contrast between both British and North American “attitudes” towards education, it is perhaps the concept of ‘difference’ that allowed the students to become more receptive and tuned-in to the differences in their new academic setting and the people within them. As I have argued above, the tourist gaze places the student at the heart of their experience because it requires the gazer to attach meaning and significance to various things encountered abroad. The narratives in this section have all shown that each student went through a process of looking, analysing, and interpreting those ‘differences’. But one significant part of this
comparison process, for the majority of students who studied in North America, was that they enjoyed the differences they encountered – even Kirsty (who told me she had no interest in the academic side of mobility prior to her departure) told me:

*Kirsty: …but retrospectively, I’m glad I had the experience being able to compare the North American academic culture to the culture here (the UK) because it is interesting, even if I don’t actually wanna do the learning.*

(Female/Working class/White British)

For this reason, it could be argued that exposure to difference, even when not anticipating any form of reward, can still have a positive effect on the overall experience. Like Waters et al.’s (2011: 465) findings, the students in this project, who studied in North America, found that they enjoyed the differences a North American education gave them, which consequently ‘…reflect[ed] the desire for a more ‘rounded’ university experience’.

Within this section I have shown how the concept of difference is important for not only understanding the social and recreational lives of students, but also the ways in which they experienced their academic life abroad. Whilst the concept of difference, no doubt plays a significant role in creating new academic experiences, I return to the theme of learning and explore it further in the following chapter.

**Part Three**

(5.7) The Significance of Friends

*Amber: the campus is more alive…like, there’s more going on all the time… the only way I can, like, really describe it is like university HD, like just turned up to one-hundred. It’s just way more fun.*

(Female/Middle class/Black British)

In the previous sections, I have argued that a number of experiences abroad are shaped through the pleasures associated with gazing. Whilst I have shown how the tourist gaze concept is useful for analysing many of the students’ social and learning experiences, there remains another critical factor for understanding how the students’ activities abroad became significant. In the student narratives I have
discussed so far, many students talked about their social experiences by using “we”, instead of “I”. Using the first person plural can tell us a lot about the ways in which these young people viewed their time abroad. Indeed, when exploring all the student narratives, themes of ‘making friends’ and ‘meeting new people’ were highly significant. As I will demonstrate in this section, new friendships often played an influential role in the experiences these students had abroad. But a commonality in the students’ narratives around friendships can be found in the ways in which all the students conveyed how these friendships directly contributed to creating ‘the study abroad experience’.

When I asked Elena, who studied in Australia for a year, what her key experiences were comprised of, she immediately replied:

Elena: I think that first night was very prominent for me because I met sort of my best friend for the rest of the year that night. Um, and she was such a huge part of the whole year that that is really vivid for me. And she played a role in every other memory that I have.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

We can see in Elena’s narrative that her memories and experiences of her year in Australia were based around the friendship she established on her first night. And this friendship was highly significant for Elena because, in her own words, her new friend “played a role in every other memory that [she had]”. Elena’s emphasis on how her friendship contributed to the sense of enjoyment of her year abroad was certainly not unique. A large number of students, in some way, emphasised how meeting new people and forming new friendships were pivotal to the overall experience of their year abroad: Selena (Female/Middle class/Asian British), who studied in the US, for example, stated how her friendship with two American students “[was] the biggest factor in the enjoyment of that year”. Alisha (Female/Middle class/White British), who studied in Australia, told me how she now had “so many friends over there now that…just the social aspect of it…the social side of it was really important for me”. Steven (Male/Middle class/White British), who studied in Canada, had earlier told me in the interview that one of his motivations for studying abroad had come about because he had “struggled” socially at his university in the
UK, and he had found it difficult to form friendships. When I asked Steven about his key experiences over his year in Canada, he replied:

Steven: *Um, I think for the first time as well I got myself a big group of lad mates, which was a new experience…a big group. And that was great. We went travelling together…there were nine of us and that was probably my first ever experience of just having a big group of just lads, which was great fun. That was definitely a defining experience.*

Steven's idea that his friendships with the other “lads” could be characterised as a ‘defining experience’ is perhaps a fitting description for understanding the extent to which the experience of meeting new people shaped the study abroad experience. When analysing narratives of students who have made the decision to study abroad, we should expect, to some extent, that new friendships and meeting new people could be significant. But when interviewing these young people, their activities and experiences over the year were often described in relation to what they did with friends and others. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I explore how friendships and integration with other students on the year abroad significantly contributed to the experience of living and studying in a new country. This discussion leads (in sections 5.8 and 5.9) to an analysis of how the students’ British nationalities become integral for forming friendships with home students.

**5.7.1 Friendships in non-English speaking countries**

When analysing the narratives of students who travelled within Europe (ERASMUS mobility) and, for the most part, anywhere else in the world, stories of making international friends were in abundance. For the majority of students who travelled within Europe though, these friendships were not stories of integration with the local students, but rather stories of friendships formed with other international students who were also on exchange at the university.
**Figure 8 – Degree of integration with locals or home students (students in non-English speaking countries)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition of Category</th>
<th>Limited or no integration</th>
<th>Some integration</th>
<th>Considerable integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students who formed friendships only with other international students</td>
<td>Students who formed some friendships with home students/local people, but these friends were not considered part of their “primary social group”</td>
<td>Students who formed friendships with a number of home students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Might have only spoken to one or two students in class, but did not form friendships outside of the classroom</td>
<td>Friendships with home students/local people were not sustained throughout the duration of mobility.</td>
<td>Their home student friends were considered part of their “primary social group”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Number of students* | 8 | 1 | 6 |

*: One student was excluded from the analysis as they already had home student friends at their destination prior to mobility

**Figure 8** (above) shows the number of students who travelled to non-English speaking countries and the amount of integration they had with local people and/or home students. The table can be analysed in two ways – firstly, we can see that the majority of students (8), who travelled to non-English speaking countries, had limited or no integration with local students. Secondly though, the number of students who achieved ‘considerable integration’ with local students could, at first glance, seem quite high, particularly in the context of the literature that has emphasised that international students (particularly ERASMUS students) tend to remain a detached group from local/home students (Tsoukalas, 2008, Wood, 2012). Analysing local integration though can be complicated by the fact that the students’ differing circumstances and motivations prior to departure could affect their chances for more
or less integration once abroad. For example, two of the students in the ‘considerable integration’ group were work placement students where their work duties specifically involved integrating with local people. Another student was a language student, whilst two other students told me that their primary motivation was to learn the languages of their destinations. For these students then, their circumstances and motivations could have prepared them for more interactions with local students prior to their departure. This means that only one student who travelled within Europe achieved, what could be called, ‘unexpected’ integration with local students and/or people in their destination country (this student was Natalie, whose story I analyse later in this section).

When looking at the category: ‘limited or no integration with locals’, the table in Figure 8 tends to reflect previous findings from researchers who have emphasised that international students typically socialise with each other (e.g. Tsoukalas, 2008, Wood, 2012, Brown and Richards, 2012). When exploring the narratives of these students, it became apparent that their stories were often similar – David (Male/Working class/White British), who studied in the Netherlands, told me how, although he mixed with local students to an extent, “it was skewed more towards internationals (students)”. Millie (Female/Middle class/White British), who studied in Hong Kong, told me that before travelling to the university, she thought she was “going to make lots of local friends”, but upon her arrival and throughout the duration of her stay “made friends with all Americans”. Tanya (Female/Working class/White British), who also studied in Hong Kong, explained how she made friends with Americans, but her friendship groups remained “predominantly English exchange students”. Amy (Female/Middle class/White British), who studied and worked in Italy, told me how she “had a group of friends who were very multi-cultural”. For her, this group, which was comprised of a number of other European students, represented “the ERASMUS group of friends I suppose you could say”. When asked about her ‘key experiences’, Megan (Female/Middle class/White British) replied: “creating a colony from (UK HEI name) ‘cause there was six of us [that] went from (UK HEI name) and normally there’s only one or two students [who] go from the university”. There are, of course, a number of practical reasons (which many of students talked about) why this ERASMUS or international ‘network’ occurs – firstly, the ‘ERASMUS Student Network’, that operates at each (European) university, often provides newly arrived students with a community in which to form initial friendships. Similarly, many
international students are often allocated international ‘halls’ accommodation, which therefore places them within the company of other newly arrived international students. Fincher and Shaw’s (2009: 1899-1900) research into international students’ integration into Australian HE also found that these issues were highly significant for understanding the lack of integration between home and international students. They suggest that home and visiting student segregation was, firstly, achieved through ‘…high-rise student housing into which international students [were] channelled, but secondly, ‘…through administrative practices within the universities such as orientation arrangements, and the proclivity of student clubs to be based on the national origin of their members’. Whilst it is important to understand the practical arrangements that can facilitate or restrict interactions with home students, this section instead focuses on the effect that ‘international friendships’ had on the study abroad experience.

In his study of ERASMUS students, Ioannis Tsoukalas (2008) also found that ERASMUS students, on the whole, formed friendships with each other as opposed to achieving any deeper level of integration with local or ‘home’ students. Through his ethnographic observations, Tsoukalas (2008: 140) argues that ‘home’ students’:

‘…recreational life is firmly embedded in the standardized patterns of work and leisure typical of their society and does not exhibit the novelty and intensity characteristic of the Erasmus students’.

Whilst my study did not explore home students’ lives in relation to international students, the young people in this study did often explain how there was a shared sense of ‘purpose’ between exchange students. Ben, for example, told me how he made friends with a lot of other ERASMUS students in the Czech Republic. He explained that:

Ben: …the ERASMUS community is quite, in places, you know, has this, “you'll know someone, who knows that person from somewhere”, you know. It's kind of like you meet a lot of people through that.

(Male/Middle class/White British)
Although he went on to outline how the language barrier was certainly a restricting factor for integrating with local students, he also stated that the lack of integration was due to international students having the same “inclination” to experience life abroad:

*Ben:* …*it’s quite interesting actually because in ERASMUS year you only have to pass because it’s a pass fail thing. So, you don’t necessarily have to get the best marks possible. Some people (pauses) their grades translate over but I think the majority it doesn’t. It’s just a straight pass fail thing.*

*Interviewer: Was that important for you?*

*Ben:* Um, it made it easier. So, you have more inclination to go out all the time, especially when a lot of other people are in the same inclination; they want to go and out and, you know, it’s cheap (referring to alcohol).

(Male/Middle class/White British)

For Ben then, by making friends with other international students, he could achieve a type of experience with “a lot of other people [of] the same inclination”. Trey, who studied in Iceland, also gave a similar response when I asked him why he befriended other ERASMUS students during his stay. He stated:

*Trey: Common goals; Common goal, common environment, situation, mind-set, approach, common interest, nothing to loose…we had the same goal to meet great people, to learn about new people, and learn about where we were at.*

(Male/Middle class/Black British)

Like Ben, Trey also confirms that there is a “common interest”, or shared “inclination” (Ben) of study abroad students, whereby international students prefer the company of each other specifically because, by forming a group and remaining together, they could explore their new surroundings together - in other words, they could achieve the “common goals” and “common interests” of an experience abroad. In many ways though, this idea of ‘shared goals and mentalities’ could be interpreted as contrasting with the authenticity theme discussed earlier. In the previous chapter, I outlined how,
for many of these students, the chance to study abroad represented an opportunity to achieve an ‘authentic’ experience of their destinations. However, from the narratives provided above, it could be argued that, by remaining within an inner circle of international friends, achieving an ‘authentic’ experience of the destination culture is problematic – if students integrate, for the most part, exclusively with other visiting students, does this not signify the opposite of striving for authenticity when abroad? Jennifer Craik’s (2003) work on understanding touristic desires can help to make sense of the narratives above. She suggests:

‘…although tourists think that they want authenticity, most want some degree of negotiated experiences which provide a tourist ‘bubble’ (a safe, controlled environment) out of which they can selectively step to ‘sample’ predictable forms of experiences’ (Craik, 2003: 115).

Craik’s idea of a ‘negotiated experience’ seems fitting here – although some of the students wanted new, exciting, and novel experiences, these experiences, in many instances, took place within an international student ‘bubble’. Of course, experiences within a “bubble” can still constitute novel and exciting experiences in their own right. But the theme of a ‘bubble effect’, interestingly, came up (without prompt) in a number of the interviews – Millie, who studied in Hong Kong, told me:

*Millie: I’ve come to Hong Kong for a reason. I’m going to make lots of local friends*. And then I made friends with all American’s, so (laughs). Uh, I would say that I kind of set out in my idealistic [views], like, “I’m going to make lot’s of local friends and I’m going to be really involved in the culture” and it’s just (pauses) it’s not as easy as it looks…there’s kind of like, um, an international student bubble.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Within Millie’s narrative, we can see two things that are important to the discussion here. Firstly, Millie’s idea that “making friends with home students” and being “really involved in the culture” constituted an “idealistic view” of her mobility experience confirms that this is symbolic of an ‘authentic experience’. Secondly, though, the way she phrases how she came to befriend other international students almost laments that she could not achieve the type of experience she outlined as her “ideal”: “it’s just
(pauses) it’s not as easy as it looks”. The idea then that international students tend to remain as an insular group holds significance for the tourist gaze because the friendships made between international students strengthen the notion of a ‘gaze’. This is specifically because these friendships reinforce the idea that these young people remain ‘outsiders’, constantly looking in on their host society. This also connects with what Urry (2002) calls ‘the collective gaze’. The collective gaze, he argues, describes the pleasures involved with gazing with other people (other tourists within his definition). If study abroad students come to represent ‘outsiders’, looking in, there might be certain pleasures associated with gazing at the same environment with other people of a similar disposition.

Whilst I have shown in this section how, for the most part, visiting students tended to achieve a ‘negotiated experience’ in terms of their friendship formations with other visiting students, it is worth examining Natalie’s story. Her story is important because it can be seen as an example of how integration with local people or students can lead to deeper feelings of an “enriched” experience; or perhaps even an ‘authentic’ experience abroad. But her story is also important because it allows for a further discussion of why friendships are seemingly easier to make between international students. During her study year in Turkey, Natalie explained to me how she stepped outside of the university and ERASMUS “bubble”. In addition to her studies, she told me how she spent time with a Turkish family (two days a week) teaching English to their daughter. Due to a national conflict at the time of her stay, Natalie noted how her accommodation became unsafe to remain in, and the Turkish family, with whom she had spent time, teaching their daughter English, became her host family, whom she lived with for the remainder of her stay. This relationship that Natalie built with her host family led to an unexpected opportunity to complete an internship within the Turkish Parliament. This experience, atypical for many students, had a strong effect on Natalie’s views towards her mobility experience:

_Natalie: I think my experience was enriched because I had that kind of outside experience that other people didn’t necessarily have. So like, because I worked at the parliament and because I lived with the Turkish family, it became a more kind of like unique experience, which I was really proud of really._

(Female/Middle class/White British)
Interestingly, Natalie uses the term ‘enriched’ to define the effect that her friendship with the Turkish family had upon her experience. Within her narrative, she talks about having an “outside experience”, which she was “really proud of”. Natalie’s views towards her mobility therefore reflect an underlying theme that, in one sense, integration with the local culture and people can lead to feelings and perceptions of a “unique experience”; one that is more rewarding than simply remaining in the international or university ‘bubble’ – as Natalie, later stated:

_Natalie: I think the kinda, like, stepping outside the university bubble and, like, the ERASMUS bubble as well, like, I think it’s quite unique because I think it is very, very tempting to stick with people you’re in the same situation as. And you’re not really kind of like integrating within the culture or whatever, so I think it was unique._

(Female/Middle class/White British)

When talking about her experiences outside of the university, Natalie believes these experiences constituted something different from what she perceived to be a ‘normal’ study abroad year. This is because she uses the word “unique” to define her experience. But in order for her to define her experience as ‘unique’, Natalie had to have some idea of the types of activities/experiences that would and would not be considered as ‘expected’ or ‘standardised’ during her year abroad. However, like the discussion earlier, she also suggests that it is “tempting to stick with people you’re in the same situation as”. This statement is significant for two reasons: firstly, Natalie’s narrative demonstrates that, like Ben and Trey’s stories earlier, there is a sense of shared goals, motives, and/or mentalities between study abroad students. Ray Pahl’s (2000) discussion of friendship can help to understand this theme of a shared mentality between study abroad students. He suggests that, at various points in a person’s life-course, friendships are formed through events which people experience together. For example, school, entry into employment, becoming a parent, or retiring, are significant “stages in the life-course” in which a person’s personal circumstances can facilitate interactions with others and “generate their own distinctive set of friends”. For this reason, Pahl (2000: 14) argues: ‘…friendship exists largely through an involvement in certain activities, which generates sentiments which, in turn, encourage further activities’. Through this understanding of how friendships
establish, we can understand why Natalie felt a “temptation” to “stick with people [who are] in the same situation” – this is because, as outlined in the previous chapter, study abroad students tend to share similar motives and goals of what they want to achieve when abroad (for example, “exploring” and “meeting new people”). Therefore, upon arrival, it is almost natural that the students form friendships with other people who also share these “common goals” (Trey) or similar “inclinations” (Ben). As I have shown through Pahl’s (2000) work, interactions (which are the basis for friendships) are facilitated when people who share the same desires come together in the same circumstances.

There is, however, a second theme that can help us to understand why study abroad students tend to form and maintain friendships with each other. Similar to the discussion above, it could be argued that it is “tempting to stick with people you’re in the same situation as” (Natalie) because there is an element of safety when forming friendships with people who share similar circumstances. Allan’s (1996) work into friendships can help to explain how, by forming into their own distinct group, study abroad students, almost instinctively, are making a ‘safe’ choice. This decision is instinctive to some extent because, as Allan suggests, friendships are based upon the notion of ‘equality’. He suggests:

‘...friendship, in whatever form it takes, is defined as a relationship between equals...within friendship there is little sense of social hierarchy or status difference. Instead the emphasis is placed firmly on similarity and equivalence.

(Allan, 1996: 89)

Using Allan’s idea here, we can understand that friendships between study abroad students are based upon ‘similarity’ and ‘equivalence’. Therefore, when arriving at a foreign destination for the first time, students seek other people who are perceived as similar and equivalent to themselves. By gravitating towards those who share similarities, friendships can be established because, as Allan argues, there is little requirement to manage status or hierarchical differences within the group. International students arrive, to a large extent, as equals because they collectively form the ‘outsiders’ within a new country. I return to examine issues of ‘status’ and ‘equality’ from a different angle in section 5.
(5.7.2) Friendships in English speaking countries

Figure 9 – Degree of integration with locals or home students (students in USA, Canada, Australia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition of Category</th>
<th>Limited or no integration</th>
<th>Some integration</th>
<th>Considerable integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                       | Students who formed friendships only with other international students | Students who formed some friendships with home students/local people, but these friends were not considered part of their “primary social group”. | Students who formed friendships with a number of home students.  
Their home student friends were considered part of their “primary social group”.  
Friendships with home students/local people were often formed at the beginning, and maintained, throughout the duration of their time abroad. |
|                       | Might have only spoken to one or two students in class, but did not form friendships outside of the classroom | Friendships with home students/local people were not sustained throughout the duration of mobility. |  |
| Number of students    | 3                         | 1                | 20                        |

When focussing on students who travelled to Anglophone destinations, the degree of integration with local people or home students changes dramatically compared with the previous discussion of students in non-English speaking destinations. Figure 9 shows that, for students who travelled to the US, Canada, or Australia, 20 (out of 24) students achieved “considerable integration”. Moreover, if the students who travelled to Canada and Australia were withdrawn from this table (therefore leaving students who travelled to the US only), every student would be in the ‘considerable integration’ category. Within this section (5.7.2), I explore the narratives of the students who travelled to Anglophone destinations, arguing that their stories of ‘considerable integration’ with the local people and/or students highlight conscious
efforts, made by the students, to achieve some sense of authenticity within their experiences. However, in section 5.8, I demonstrate how this authenticity is pursued ‘safely’ though travelling to, and integrating with, a familiar culture.

Like Natalie (analysed in the previous section), Holly, who studied in the US, also had experiences within the wider community off campus. She explained to me that at her university in the US, there was a scheme organised by the study abroad office that allowed international students to be paired with a local family for visits. For Holly, this opportunity had an effect on her experience within the US:

*Interviewer:* And how was that experience? A positive experience? A negative experience?

*Holly:* Yeah, positive; again [they’re] like just so welcoming, um, and so, like, interested in you. And like wanting to show you like other things, like, they took us to their church and, you know, wanting to show us different things. And they took us shopping and things like that…I think that was like really important and, like, from previous travel I suppose as well, like, ‘cause in Peru I lived with a family and I think it’s (pauses) I don’t know (pauses) probably that was already in my mind that that’s like important to just to do whilst you’re there like with other people as well as in the university environment.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Holly’s narrative, similar to Natalie’s, conveys that it is “important” (a word she uses twice) to see life outside of the university, away from the campus. This again suggests that there is a view shared by some students that integrating with the local people and/or home students is something that can lead towards achieving an authentic experience abroad. In some cases, students actually spoke about how integrating with local people was integral to achieving a sense of authenticity. Ed, who studied in Canada, told me how he made friends primarily with Canadian students. When I asked Ed whether this was an important part of his experience, he replied:

*Ed:* …that was partially the point of me going. I would have considered it a bit of a failure if I didn’t like meet any Canadian friends.
Interviewer: But why is that exactly? Because for some people they might be quite happy just to mix with other international students; why was that important for you?

Ed: Well I went to Canada for an adventure and you can't really say you've had that adventure without meeting the people who live there. I mean, you may as well just get lost in your own country, 'cause that [would] achieve the same effect. You...you know, you're in unfamiliar surroundings, but you're not with unfamiliar people. Whereas if you go to Canada, you expect to be in unfamiliar surroundings and surrounded by unfamiliar people, which necessitates the meeting of the people.

(Male/Middle class/White British)

Whilst Natalie viewed her experiences integrating with local people as “unique”, and Holly viewed hers as “important”, Ed explains how he “would have considered it a bit of a failure” if he had not had made friends with local students. In order for Ed to create his “adventure” in Canada, he had to encounter and live in an “unfamiliar surrounding” with “unfamiliar people”. Taken together, Natalie, Holly, and Ed’s narratives suggest that integration with local students and local culture constitutes something that can go beyond the ‘typical’ study abroad experience and is separate from the ‘shared mentalities’ of international students (discussed earlier). In some instances, students actually critiqued such ‘shared mentalities’, arguing that certain communities of international students could jeopardise the authenticity of an experience. Grace, who studied in Australia, was particularly critical of some aspects of the international student community she encountered upon her arrival. She suggested:

Grace: …all of the international students were only there for a short time, and they were...all very, like, “let's go crazy. Let's do this all the time”. Like, there was no kind of, like, longevity in it, or anyone actually wanting to do anything meaningful. I don't know if that's slightly exaggerating [it]. But, it was just like, “ah, let's go crazy; let's do this; let's take loads of photos”. They were just being tourists basically.

(Female/Working class/White British)
Grace’s use of the term ‘meaningful’ perhaps gives weight to the idea that, like the previous chapter has shown, there are ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ ways to travel. Within Grace’s narrative, she critiques the ‘shared mentalities’ of international students, arguing that their activities were not in line with achieving authenticity. Grace outlines the inauthentic nature of mobile students’ experiences in the latter part of her narrative when she again mentions how international students just “go crazy” and “take loads of photos”. Her last sentence, “they were just being tourists basically”, serves to illustrate that, for Grace, the types of things international students do, along with their shared mentalities, do not reflect striving to achieve an authentic experience of living abroad. This would also explain Grace’s later point she made in relation to making friends with Australian people:

*Grace: …anything that you did with the international crowd, you could just get out a guidebook and do it by yourself, which is what I did. But when I wanted to do something interesting with someone else, I’d do it with someone who lived there; who was from there.*

*(Female/Working class/White British)*

Grace’s ideas here demonstrate how she distinguished between the types of experience that were possible to achieve according to the people she socialised with. Within her narrative, she compares the activities and mentalities of other international students to what she perceived could be found in touristic “guidebooks”, whilst positioning local students as the people who could show her the “interesting” things. In this sense, Grace perceived that there was a benefit to integrating with the local students. By socialising with the local students, Grace could strive to ‘see how things really were’ in Australia. Whilst not as critical about other international students as Grace perhaps was, Adam, who studied in the US, also told me how integrating with the local students could lead to a more rewarding experience. He explained:

*Adam: I wanted to see what I had in common with Californian people and if I can get to know their lifestyle, rather than how exchange students live in California.*

*(Male/Middle class/White British)*
Like Grace’s views towards home students, Adam also states that he wanted to gain an insight into the lives of Californian people. Furthermore, he states that he wanted to see what he “had in common with Californian people” at the expense of seeing “how exchange students live in California”. Like the other student narratives analysed in this section, Adam’s desire to integrate with Californians highlights a significant difference in the amount of local integration the students had in Anglophone and non-Anglophone destinations.

The narratives of the students in this section (who travelled to North America) therefore, on the whole, contrast with those of the students who travelled to Europe and other countries outside of North America. In the previous section, I argued, through Pahl (2000) and Allan’s (1996) work, that the shared ‘goals and mentalities’ of UK students abroad helped to manage status differences and equality within those friendships. The narratives of the students who travelled to North America could therefore be seen as separate from the tourist gaze in some respects - if these students not only integrated with local students, but also desired this integration prior to departure, this might signify moving beyond the tourist gaze. In the next section (5.8) though, I demonstrate how integration with local students actually reinforced the students’ status as ‘outsiders’, following, in section 5.9, to situate these ideas specifically within a further discussion of the tourist gaze.

(5.8) Home Student Friendships - Power, Status and Culture

Annie: …you just walk around and you’ve got this accent and you just kind of do whatever you want. And people are like all over it.

Annie, USA – Female/Middle class/White British

When exploring how British students in Anglophone countries integrated with local students, it is worth taking up Grace’s story again, which was analysed at the end of the previous section on friendships. Grace, who talked quite negatively about the “let’s go crazy” mentality of other international students who just wanted to “take loads of photos”, is a good example of a student who made conscious attempts to integrate with local people and home students. When discussing how she integrated with these other people though, it was interesting how she talked quite openly about how her British nationality distinguished her from Australians:
Grace: I didn’t realise how much of a kind of currency being British is, in terms of employment especially. Um, I did some work experience out there in the (subject area) and as soon as I started speaking, everyone’s like “oh, you’re from England”. It was like “I love your accent”…But people thought it was impressive in a way that I didn’t realise. I still can’t really comprehend it why people like it so much. But, yeah, having an accent and being different whilst still understanding everything that’s going on was really (pauses) really kind of powerful.

(Female/Working class/White British)

Grace’s narrative here shows how she was able to draw on her nationality to illustrate her status as a foreigner – Grace talks about how people “thought it was impressive in a way that [she] didn’t realise”, whilst having an ability to remain “different whilst still understanding everything that’s going on”. Almost every student who studied in another English speaking country also commented on how their accent or British nationality marked them as different during their year abroad and, in many cases, like Grace, told me how they used this difference to their advantage – Leah, who studied in Canada, explained to me at length about how her status as a British student made her an object of curiosity to the local students at her university. Like Grace, she told me:

Leah: “I’m the token English person; I have a really cute accent; I say this really funnily and I make jokes about the queen”….like, I had such a defined, distinct, and prominent role on my year abroad…I enjoyed being a foreigner on my year abroad and I enjoyed the perks that come with being (pauses) not British, but having the accent I do sounding very English and, you know.

(Female/Working class/White British)

Leah’s narrative also illustrates the idea of ‘empowerment’ from being British. For Leah, simply being British gave her a status where she could “enjoy the perks” of her nationality, remaining a ‘welcomed Other’. Drawing on these ideas, I would suggest that for students who travelled to other English speaking countries, their British nationality transformed into a form of embodied cultural capital. Nationality and accent are, one could argue, specific examples of cultural capital in its embodied
state – a person’s accent, for example, is a physical sound that is used to converse, yet it still holds cultural value or currency as particular ways of speaking are often perceived as socially desirable or undesirable. Nationality and accent are therefore socially organised into a system of cultural hierarchy. Pierre Bourdieu (1986: 18) outlines how, in its embodied state, cultural capital ‘…derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner’. In this sense, a British nationality or accent possesses a scarcity value when situated outside of its natural context – for example, a British person in their own country possesses no scarcity value, but when in another country, that nationality can become distinctive, and “yields profits of distinction for its owner” (ibid.). Whilst it is not scarcity itself that is always valued, scarcity can heighten the appreciation of something already perceived to be cultured or high status. Annie, who studied in the US, recognised this when she attempted to understand how “the accent gets you anything you want; it’s crazy”. Similarly, Simon who also studied in the US, also reflected on why so many people took an interest in him. They suggested:

Annie: Americans just have this fascination with the British accent. Um, and I think it’s partly (pauses) I think what I’ve deduced it down to is [that] they see it as sounding posher; it comes down to that. They think it sounds more well spoken.  
(Female/Middle class/White British)

Simon: …they (local students) take an immediate interest in you, which I found really weird at first. Like no one cares about you being English in England. But over there, they’re really like, “wow, you’re English”.  
(Male/Middle class/White British)

Annie and Simon’s ideas here show how nationality and/or accent can be considered as forms of cultural capital. Both nationality and accent are ‘cultural’ because they can evoke “fascination” from others, but they are also a form of ‘capital’ because, firstly, they have a value attached to them, and secondly, they can be traded for cultural recognition or distinction:

Annie: …you just walk around and you’ve got this accent and you just kind of do whatever you want. And people are like all over it –
Richard: ...I just really liked the service I got off my accent.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Richard: (laughs). Like, with girls, like, on the checkout. I noticed I got better service when they realised I was British than I would have in the UK.

Whilst these narratives show how accent and nationality became a form of capital for these students, they also highlight issues of power and status that are attached to different nationalities. Brooks and Waters’ (2015) research into what they term the “hidden internationalism” of elite UK schools can help to understand issues surrounding the power and status associated a UK education and therefore the status attached to someone who has received a UK education. Their research demonstrates how an English education, steeped in notions of ‘tradition’ and ‘prestige’, has become a dominant marketing tool, particularly in appealing to prospective (wealthy) international parents and students who can ‘buy into’ this prestige. Brooks and Waters (2015) argue that this type of internationalism is significantly different from the activities of other countries, where internationalism is seen as a ‘higher status’ than the local or national. However, they argued that their sample of elite schools adopted the opposite view: ‘…while engaging with international agendas is deemed to be important, an ‘English education’ is positioned as of higher status than its international equivalent’ (Brooks and Waters, 2015: 220). Whilst their study was not directly concerned with international student mobility, their findings nevertheless provide an insight into the status and value of not only having a British educational background, but the value of being a British citizen in general. These points are further underscored by wider discourses of Anglophone education being seen as ‘desirable’ and ‘superior’, compared to their Global South counterparts. Marginson and van der Wende (2007), for example, argue that the global rankings of HEIs have led to a single league table for higher education worldwide. Western HEIs, who tend to dominate the top places in these rankings are seen as superior because ‘…the national identity of HEIs continues to be more
important in the eyes of the world than the institutional identity of the individual HEIs’ (pp.307). Nguyen et al. (2009), too, have argued that, on the whole, funding sources for national economic development imposes favourable views towards Western approaches to education. Countries who develop their educational systems through Western pedagogies are rewarded, whilst penalised if they do not. For this reason, they argue that, for leaders of higher education, across the globe:;

‘…their vision of educational development and standards of knowledge production are based on western epistemological schema and theories that are deeply rooted in, and informed by, colonial thought’.

(Nguyen et al., 2009: 111)

If national educational systems are organised into hierarchal systems of ‘desirability’, it follows that the result of these processes can also arrange nationalities (and therefore people themselves) into hierarchies of status. British people, particularly those who have received a ‘prestigious’ and ‘traditional’ British education, can be seen by others as possessing a symbolic status on the global stage. These ideas surrounding status and power were often found in the interviews, most notably in the narratives of students who had visited North America:

Mira: If I ever had to introduce myself at the beginning of a lecture, guaranteed at the end of the lecture there would be five people waiting afterwards to talk to me to talk about the Olympics, or the Queen, Kate Middleton, One Direction, anything. And because of that and because of my accent I stood out and people made a real effort to be friends with me, which was weird, but also really nice.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

Mike: My accent immediately marked me as different and they happened to enjoy my accent, which was an experience I liked…even in class they would often ask me to read out passages from the books we were studying just to hear my accent which was very ego-boosting to me.

(Male/Middle class/White British)
Steven: I think, in North America, there’s a certain mystique around Europe as well and then even more so around Britain, um, which you can play on fantastically.  
(Male/Middle class/White British)

Selena: I had problems being understood sometimes. But then also people would hear a British accent and be like “ooh I want to talk to you because you’re English”  
(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

The narratives of the students above show how nationality and accent affected the way in which these young people experienced other people abroad (and how they themselves were experienced). Moreover, they demonstrate how concepts of power and status were integral because they allowed the students to become conscious of their embodied capital and, furthermore, strategically use it to position themselves apart from their host culture. This means that many of these students were active in drawing on their cultural capital through using their Britishness to achieve a sense of status that, they felt, was reflecting how Others saw them. In this sense, they would often use their nationality to achieve distinction amongst their peers. These narratives present a paradox: although the students wanted to integrate with other international and/or local students, they simultaneously used their British nationality (as a form of capital and power) to mark themselves as different and distinct – Mira learnt that she could “guarantee” that “people [would make] a real effort to be friends with [her]”; Mike learnt that people would want to hear him speak in class, which became “ego-boosting”; Steven understood that there was a “mystique” around Europe, to which he could “play on fantastically”; whilst Mira learnt that people would want to talk to her because she was English.

We have seen so far in this section that issues of status that are attached to different nationalities are critical for understanding why British students experienced themselves as welcomed Others in their Anglophone destination. However, this discussion alone does not account for why the same levels of interaction between visiting and home students did not occur in non-Anglophone countries. This could be explained through exploring the significance of North America (and Australia) as sites in which there is a relative ‘cultural familiarity’ of the country, customs, and people. In their study of UK whole degree mobility, Waters and Brooks (2010b) found that there was a strong link between media images of place and personal desires for
mobility. They argued that this link was especially strong for students who travelled to the US and suggested that the ‘difference’ between the UK the US ‘…represented a ‘knowable’ difference’ (Waters and Brooks, 2010b: 572). Indeed, when asking the students in this study why Anglophone countries (particularly the US) appealed to them, a number of the students told me how they already had somewhat of a ‘familiar’ understanding of their destination, often through dominating media images of North America:

Adam: …I feel like it’s hard to say without sounding quite clichéd, but [there was] a kind of mystical draw about California through any kind of means; films, Red Hot Chilli Pepper (rock band) songs; whatever. It just seemed liked a place that I wanted to be and seemed like something that was really…like, a fun place and a special place that I felt I’d get along with.

(Male/Middle class/White British)

Mira: …I basically chose America because…I think I just had very romantic ideas of it and just from TV shows and stuff. I thought it would be great. I thought it would be like Dawson’s Creek (American ‘Teen Drama’ Series) or something going to uni in America.

(Female/Middle class/Asian British)

Whilst Adam and Mira’s narratives centre on their motivations and not their experiences, they are still crucial for understanding the ways in which their knowledge of their destinations could contribute to shaping their experiences abroad. Taken together, Adam and Mira’s narratives demonstrate that there was an expectation of difference, yet some prior understanding of what that difference might entail. Therefore, in comparison to the students who travelled to non-Anglophone countries, the students who travelled to North America and Australia perhaps felt safer to integrate with local students when they had a relative familiarity of the country and culture they were visiting, in addition to the lack of an existing language barrier. This chimes with Waters and Brooks’ (2010ab) assessment of the US and ‘difference’ because the students were therefore making friends with people who were different, but not too different. Whilst language, no doubt, plays a role in this, it is perhaps the different, but not too different culture that instils a sense of safety
when befriending students from countries such as the US, Canada, or Australia. When combined with points raised earlier in the discussion (where I explored how foreign Others are organised into nationalities of desirability), it is the idea of ‘cultural familiarity’ that can help to further explain why these students felt more inclined to befriend ‘knowable Others’ in their destinations. This idea of befriending ‘knowable Others’ can also help to explain the student narratives that focussed on integration as the path to a more ‘authentic’ experience of the culture being visited – if these students had some prior framework or reference points of the culture being visited (as I have argued), this inevitably affected their search for (and delight) in the ‘authentic’ nature of those experiences. This is because a knowable culture, the knowable ‘Other’, became a site in which authenticity could be pursued in a relatively safe way.

When exploring friendship formations between study abroad and home students, the concept of ‘cosmopolitanism’ is useful for discussing how these friendships operate within structures of power, status, and culture. Ulrich Beck (2002), for example, has gone as far to argue that there is now a ‘cosmopolitanization’ of society. This process, he argues, has resulted in ‘…transform[ing] everyday consciousness and identities’ (Beck, 2002: 17) for people, where both local and global issues now simultaneously affect how they feel and identify with the world. In this sense, people have become more connected to other countries, not just in terms of the accessibility though physical travel, but also through the ways in which various political, economic and cultural activities are now intertwined. These ideas are relevant because studies that focus on student mobility, in addition to key policy initiatives, emphasise that mobility placements are important for developing and nurturing this identification with new geographical areas (and people) outside of a person’s immediate national context (for example Van Mol, 2012, Ambrosi, 2012). This initiative is most evident in the European mobility schemes, notably the British Council’s oversight of UK ERASMUS placements. Although much research has been conducted on identification with Europe (as I discussed in the Literature Review chapter), it is important to explore how a particular type of ‘cosmopolitanism’ was established by the students I have been discussing in this section (the students who travelled to North America and Australia).

Kenway and Fahey (2007: 167) state:
‘...the word ‘cosmopolitan’ derives from the Greek *cosmos* (the world) and *polis* (city). This has been translated as ‘citizen of the world’, implying an identification with a world community rather than with a particular nation or people.’

Using this definition of the term, the narratives I have explored above can be interpreted in two ways – firstly, it could be argued that even though students became conscious of the value (or capital) associated with their British nationality, they nevertheless used it (along with their prior knowledge of their destination country) to integrate with the Others they encountered abroad. A view such as this perhaps indicates that the breaking down of national barriers and integrating with other nationalities is realistic and achievable. Whilst there is an element of truth in this, the narratives do not, however, reflect the idea of “identification with a world community” (Kenway and Fahey, 2007: 167). Instead, they demonstrate an attempt, as I have shown in the data above, to transform their nationality into a form of cultural capital when abroad – as all of the narratives above have shown, many students were aware of the advantages that their British nationality gave them (such as making friends and being singled out as ‘interesting’ by Others). These ideas also link to Ulf Hannerz’s (1996) arguments surrounding cosmopolitanism because he argues that simply being ‘on the move’ internationally is not enough to be considered ‘cosmopolitan’. One type of cosmopolitanism, he argues, is characterised ‘...where the individual picks from other cultures only the pieces which suit himself (*sic*)’ (Hannerz, 1996: 103). This, in some ways, is applicable to the points raised in this section. If students in Anglophone countries draw on their nationality to achieve the status of ‘desired’ or ‘welcomed’ from others, such as when Steven learnt that there was a “certain mystique around Europe...which [he could] play on fantastically”, these students needed to retain their position as outsiders to achieve this status. As Hannerz (1996: 104) argues, ‘...the cosmopolitan may embrace the alien culture, but he (*sic*) does not become committed to it. All the time he (*sic*) knows where the exit is’. This leads to students experiencing ‘the Other’, but often in circumscribed ways – the “non-commitment” and “knowledge of the exit”, within a knowable culture, becomes an attractive platform to build and create adventures away from home, again highlighting the pursuit of safe authenticity.
In many respects then, my findings share commonalities with the conclusions of Brooks and Waters’ (2015) “hidden internationalism” study. Whilst, as they argue, the internationalisation agendas of elite UK schools are important, they are hidden behind the powerful backdrop of a ‘British’ education. In my study, whilst meeting home students within the host destination was seen as important for the study abroad experience, it was equally important for students to use and draw on the power and status associated with their Britishness to achieve a sense of status when forming friendships. Consequently, when assessing ideas around cosmopolitanism, the outcomes of these processes contribute to “…reinforcing a very limited form of multiculturalism and internationalism’ (Brooks and Waters, 2015: 223). In some ways, this discussion of cosmopolitanism could be viewed as a criticism of how these students drew on their nationality to form friendships abroad. This is because, as I have shown, students became conscious that, by capitalising on the status attached to their nationality, they could use it to their advantage when forming their friendship circles; a sort of, as Hannez (1996: 103) terms, “narcissistic streak” to their ‘cosmopolitan’ experience. The term ‘narcissistic’ might, in some respects, be a good description for what I have outlined in this section. However, it would be premature to conclude that mobile students are narcissistic before examining the role of Others in creating cosmopolitan experiences. Returning to Urry’s concept of the ‘tourist gaze’ can offer some explanatory power to this discussion.

(5.9) Friendships, The Tourist Gaze, Status and Power
Throughout this chapter, I have used Urry’s (2002, 2011) ‘tourist gaze’ concept as a conceptual tool for understanding ‘difference’. Firstly, in sections 5.5 and 5.5.1, I used the concept to demonstrate how various types of experience abroad can take on new meanings and significance throughout a student’s time overseas. In section 5.7.1, I argued that, for students in non-English speaking countries, their integration with primarily other international students resulted in friendship groups that shared similar ‘goals and mentalities’ when abroad. However, in section 5.8, I have shown that local or home student integration is also predicated on the concept of difference - a student’s nationality and accent, for example, can make them distinct, which results in reaffirming their status as outsiders, constantly ‘looking in’ on their host society:
Annie: And I know this sounds really stupid, but people remembered me much more easier than I remembered them because I was just kind of the British girl. Um, [when] walking round campus, I had to stop and talk to a lot of people often. And sometimes I didn’t remember them. But in terms of the desirable factors, it just gives you this new confidence that I’ve never had before.

(Female/Middle class/White British)

Ed: My accent was quite the focal point when I would meet people there…like, very rarely would anyone hear the first thing I’d say because they’d just glaze over and say, “oh my god, are you from Europe?”.

(Male/Middle class/White British)

However, drawing on these examples from Annie and Ed, we can see how the ‘gaze’ is not just a one-way process where study abroad students ‘look at’ and ‘interpret’ the home students they encountered. Additionally, an important part of the gaze is also established through the study abroad students’ understanding of how they appeared to, and were experienced by, Others in their destination. Annie, for example, learnt that people would remember her much more easily because of her accent. This gave her a “new confidence [she’d] never had before”. Similarly, Ed learnt that, to Others, his accent became a “focal point” and that people would “glaze over” when he began to talk. These points demonstrate that if UK study abroad students are treated as different, they inevitably experience ‘difference’ throughout their stay. To put this in the context of the tourist gaze: when these UK students looked at their new “environment with interest and curiosity” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 1), they found that this interest and curiosity was reflected back by Others within that environment. Therefore, when forming these friendships with local students, the curiosity of ‘difference’, shared between both visiting and local students, became a platform to build interactions, integration, and friendships.

The idea then that friendships between visiting and local students are based upon shared curiosity provides a contrast to my discussion of students who travelled to non-Anglophone countries in section 5.7.1. In section 5.7.1, I argued that friendships with other study abroad students were based on shared goals and mentalities, in addition to representing a ‘safer’ choice to befriend other people who shared similar circumstances. However, drawing on the narratives throughout this
current section, it is clear that integration with students from North America and Australia took a very different form. Earlier, I argued, using Brooks and Waters’ (2015) research, that friendships with home students in Anglophone destinations were based upon and facilitated through the power, status, and cultural capital involved in being British. This might highlight that gazes (that is the way in which people interpret and apply meaning to their experiences abroad) become shaped by power relations that operate through them. In this sense, a student’s gaze (and what is reflected by that gaze) is not always a strictly individual or personal experience, but instead a process that is also shaped by wider structural forces. Whilst there was no language barrier for students who travelled to North America and Australia, my data shows that UK students’ gazes reflected notions of being welcomed and seen as ‘people like us’ (Reay et al., 2005) by the Others they encountered. Linking back to an earlier discussion in this chapter, gazes were structured by the hierarchies of status between nationalities. I outline this in more depth below.

Rienties and Nolan’s (2014) study of Asian students in the UK and Brown and Richards’ (2012) study of UK students’ views towards international students can help to explain why UK students and other Anglophone students formed significant friendships with each other. When analysing their results of integration between UK and Asian students at English universities, Rienties and Nolan (2014: 178) found that the students’:

‘…social networks over time did not necessarily become more integrated…[and they]… found an increased degree of segregation between (Confucian) international and host students at the end of their study in the Bachelor degree’.

These findings are significant because they demonstrate a similar picture to the arguments I have presented in this chapter in terms of local/exchange student integration when there is a language barrier (for example, ERASMUS students and students who travelled to Asia). However, Rienties and Nolan’s (2014) findings contrast when examining the considerable levels of integration I found between local/exchange students in Anglophone countries, where there is no language barrier. Similarly, Brown and Richards’ (2012) research into UK students’ experiences of (mostly south-east Asian, but also European, African and Middle-
Eastern) international students at UK universities shared similar findings. Whilst these researchers found some degree of interaction, they concluded that:

‘...it appears that the response to a multicultural environment is to interact with students of other nationalities at times and to gain relief and succour through conational interaction for the majority of students’ leisure time’

(Brown and Richards, 2012: 74).

Brown and Richards' (2012) research therefore demonstrates that, whilst a certain amount of integration does occur, both home and visiting students gained “relief and succour” though integrating with their respective groups. This is therefore similar to the points raised in section 5.7.1 where I demonstrated how friendships and interactions are often facilitated through shared circumstances. But again, these findings contrast with my findings into Anglophone student integration. To put these findings in the context of my discussion of the gaze, it could be argued that, when Brown and Richards' sample of students arrived in the UK, looking at, interpreting, and applying meaning to their experiences (i.e. gazing), they found that their gaze did not reflect the interest and curiosity that is shared between Anglophone students. It is therefore this perceived sense of equal status between Anglophone students that facilitates their strong interactions and friendships. As I have shown through many of the narratives in section 5.8, the visiting students’ gazes, more often than not, reflected curiosity, inquisitiveness, and fascination from the Others they encountered; a sense of being a welcomed Other. When framed within the wider ideas surrounding nationalities and status, where the notion of Britishness is seen as a possessing high status within the international arena (Brooks and Waters, 2015), it is, to some extent, unsurprising that other Anglophone students showed an interest in this status, or at the very least, perceived the British students to be of similar status in a hierarchical system of nationalities. When these UK students arrived at their host destinations and began to gaze at their new surroundings and people within them, they were not therefore guilty per se for using their nationality to achieve distinction; they were not, as earlier discussed, narcissistic cosmopolitans (Hannerz (1996). On the contrary, they simply became caught up in the status and power dynamics operating within the reflections of their gaze, whilst, all the while, integrating with a relatively safe, knowable Other. These processes also took place
against a wider backdrop of non-language barriers. When students arrived in other Anglophone countries with a set of expectations about what experiences they might encounter, it made it, to a greater extent, easier integrate with these ‘knowable Others’ when there was no language barrier to overcome. This might have led students to feel more immersed in that culture even though, as I have argued throughout this chapter, their experiences were largely touristic.

(5.10) Chapter Summary
This chapter has provided a fresh insight into the nature of the experiences of these young people abroad. I have shown, through the tourist gaze, that the various activities these students participated in abroad were organised through a process of comparing and contrasting the sights, sounds, and other sensory phenomena to what they had experienced in their lives back in the UK. The tourist gaze, I have argued, is a useful concept for mobility studies specifically because it helps to understand the finer details of how an experience is created, regardless of whether it is academic or social.

This chapter has also provided new insights into the role that friendships abroad play in the study abroad experience. Although I have shown that, on the whole, students did integrate more with home students than previous research suggests, I have shown that the majority of international and home student relationships occurred between Anglophone nationalities. These Anglophone friendships, I have shown, are often facilitated through a quest to gain a more ‘authentic’ experience of living abroad, even if that authenticity is pursued safely through a knowable culture. But I have also argued that, within those friendships, notions of power and status play an important role, which, for the most part, results in Western nationalities becoming a dominant group on the international stage. In the following chapter, I continue to build on some of these themes, but turn to analysing how the students reflected on their time abroad upon return to the UK.
Chapter 6 – After Mobility

(6.1) Introduction
Whilst I have now discussed the motivations and experiences of students who travel abroad to work and/or study, this final findings chapter focuses on the outcomes of the students’ mobility as they re-join UK higher education after mobility. Specifically, this chapter analyses, through the narratives, how the students’ experiences abroad affected the ways in which they thought about their lives and future opportunities.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated how, through family, friends, or universities, prior to their semester/year abroad, the students in this study developed international vistas of abroad. These vistas were characterised by romantic notions of what life abroad could offer for having an adventure. Chapter 5 has shown how the concept of the tourist gaze was useful for not only understanding seduction of going abroad, but also how the experience of being abroad was intensely enjoyable and fun for the significant majority of these students. The discussion of this final findings chapter builds on the themes of adventure and gazing by examining the significant effect that student mobility had on these young people as they talked about their (possible) futures. This chapter therefore explores how the students articulated their experiences after their period abroad.

The chapter opens with a discussion of how the students talked about the concept of ‘learning’ upon return. In this section, I argue that learning, in the academic sense, was highly nuanced. Whilst the classroom experiences were not significant per se, I outline how students thought about the concept of learning from a perspective that focussed on self-development for their lives after leaving UK higher education. Through Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of ‘tourism’, I argue that the young people in this study developed a taste for living mobile lives. Drawing on the data, I demonstrate how many of the students in this study were using their experiences of study abroad to outline how and why being mobile was important to their future. The importance of travel and the current educational discourses surrounding travel are discussed as important factors that also contribute to these student perspectives. The chapter closes with a discussion of the ways in which the students saw their national identities changing. In this section, I argue that a period abroad can make students feel more British. However, I also suggest that feeling
more British does not necessarily affect the future mobility aspirations of these young people.

(6.2) Changes in ‘Learning’ whilst Abroad

When moving into the final section of each interview, I opened the discussion by asking the students whether, when reflecting on their experiences, their views towards learning had changed. The responses to this question were often varied, but would typically centre on specific comparisons with UK higher education – both positive and negative. For example, when I asked Natalie, who studied in Turkey, how her learning had changed since returning from her time abroad, she remarked:

Natalie: Uh, yeah. It’s made me think of like our education system is a complete rip off because when I was there, I got like twenty-five hours of teaching a week. Um, and now I’m here (back in the UK) and I have four hours a week in my final year.

(Female, Middle class, White British)

Contact hours, staff availability and the technical details of modules were, for the majority of students, the most common things that were discussed in this part of the interview. But what was, perhaps, most interesting was the lack of discussion regarding any effect that mobility had had on their academic learning. In other words, for most of students (barring one or two), the classroom aspect of their semester or year abroad experience did not come across as a significant part of their experience within the conversation. Mike, for example, who studied in the US, was drawn to the country because of the, as he envisaged, differences in the American HE system (particularly the ‘campus lifestyle’ of US HEIs). But when reflecting on his learning experiences in a US institution, he told me how, due to the classroom based teaching sessions, the individual desks and writing assignments in class, the whole experience was “very much like being in school compared to university here [in England]”. When I asked Mike whether he enjoyed his learning experience, he replied:

Mike: I enjoyed it only in a sense that I found it easier than (name of UK HEI). And I had to work much less hard than I do here which allowed more time for social aspects.
A similar view was shared by Millie, who studied in Hong Kong. Whilst Millie told me that she enjoyed experiencing the difference in teaching compared to her UK HEI, it was not the most important part of her experience:

**Millie:** Um, well I was aware that learning would be quite different and I was aware that, like, in Asia there’s more of a focus on maths and business and economics and stuff like that. Um, but as I said, I was less interested in going for the academics. Um, but it was equally enlightening to see how subjects are taught.

(Female, Middle class, White British)

Mike and Millie’s narratives here both demonstrate that whilst the differences in education between two countries were positive, these educational experiences were not significant ones in their reflections – Millie, for example, talked about how she was “less interested in going for the academics”, but still found it “enlightening to see how subjects are taught [abroad]”. But again, in these conversations, the students did not go on to discuss these issues in any depth. This therefore often resulted in a surface level of conversation in this part of the interview. Although a small number of students in the sample would talk about feeling differently when in class at their UK HEI, there was little discussion of this area. Jane, who studied in Canada, captures this theme well:

**Me:** Did those experiences have an effect on your learning now that you’ve returned to (name of UK HEI), or not at all?

**Jane:** Um, I don’t think so. It just feels like a very separate time, if that makes sense. It’s like “oh I studied in Canada and now I’m studying in England” and they’re two very different systems and they just don’t crossover.

(Female, Middle class, White British)

Whilst, as the interviewer, I accept that I could have gone into more depth with this question with Jane (in addition to the other students) by trying to tease out any transitions in learning, I instead wanted to let the students take the conversation into
areas that they felt were significant. The idea then that learning transitions were, for most students, not deeply significant in their narratives is, I would argue, significant for the arguments raised in this chapter. Current policy discourse that focuses on promoting student mobility often highlights the importance of academic learning in a new setting for higher education. ERASMUS (n.d.) top “benefit” for studying abroad, they suggest, is to “…develop personally, professionally and academically [my emphasis]”. But, as Messelink et al. (2015: 65) argue, “…student motivations for studying abroad can differ from those that educators or policy-makers believe to be the most important”. Taking this a step further, I would argue that the students’ actual experiences (not just their motivations) are not always congruent with the outcomes of policy initiatives and aims (particularly around the aspect of learning). This is, to some extent, unsurprising considering the ways in which (credit) mobility is often marketed to prospective students. In their study of the University of Queensland, Sidhu and Dall’Alba (2016: 8) argue:

‘…University websites and promotional videos intended to encourage mobility reveal a series of potentially disjunctive messages. What is most obvious is the close resemblance of promotional materials to youth-oriented travel brochures which construct students as tourists engaged in various activities of consumption (shopping/bars/travel) and adventure…the visual imagery on the UQ Abroad (2016) site de-emphasizes traditional university learning. Scenes of lectures, tutorials or libraries are largely absent. This could be read as an institutional awareness that student learning takes place outside the rarefied university environment (‘informal curriculum’).’

Sidhu and Dall’Alba’s (2016) argument here is fitting because it helps to explain why there was little emphasis placed on learning transitions from the classroom experiences abroad. This is because the concept of learning, for these young people, was actually part of something larger than a narrow focus on learning in the classroom. Interestingly, in a couple of the interviews, the students asked me to clarify what I meant by “learning” when I asked them whether their “views towards learning had changed since returning to the UK”. In these examples, students were not sure whether I meant ‘learning’ from a self-development perspective, or ‘learning’
from a pedagogical perspective. The consequence of this unintended phrasing (on my part) was actually significant because it highlighted, even if just by two students, the lens through which students understood and thought about the concept of learning. This meant that students saw the concept of learning more broadly than I had envisaged. They did not see learning as something that was developed in the classroom, but rather something that was acquired through living and studying in a different country. Whilst only two students asked for clarification on this, several other students came to interpret the concept of learning more broadly. This is because, when asked about their learning experiences, they started to talk about their self-development and how they had 'grown' as people over the course of their mobility. However, it is important to clarify here the distinction between what the students felt were significant experiences and what could, objectively be seen as significant experiences in their education. In others words, the students might not have felt that their classroom experiences were important for their academic learning when, in reality, these experiences might have had a strong impact on their studies upon return to the UK. This chapter though pays attention to, and is guided by, what these students felt was significant about their learning experiences whilst studying and/or working abroad. As I go on in the chapter, I outline how the students’ narratives surrounding learning centred on using the mobility experience to create a new lifestyle that would, in their minds, secure their future happiness and success. This discussion therefore builds on what Sidhu and Dall’Alba (2016) above term a de-emphasis on traditional university learning, with a move towards learning from an ‘informal curriculum’.

(6.3) Setting the context: Globalised Lifestyles

In examining the concept of learning from the perspective of an ‘informal curriculum’ than that of ‘traditional university learning’, it is worth recapping a more general discussion I presented on globalisation and its effects in the introductory chapter. Globalisation, I argued, has radically altered the way in which we live our lives on a daily basis. Giddens (1990), for example, refers to globalisation as a stretching process whereby social relations become intertwined at both the local and global level. Issues that can appear, in some instances as local issues, can actually have significant effects at the international level and vice versa. Globalising effects, particularly the shrinking of time and space (Giddens, 1990), have had a profound
effect on the way in which people not only live, but also think about the wider world. Students, who travel abroad, can be seen as an example of people who help to stretch these societal relations across the globe. Students contribute to this stretching process because their presence in different locations across the world helps connect different locations, creating a more internationalised higher education system (Collins, 2014). Whilst many researchers have examined these changes from a policy perspective (for example global education policies), this chapter analyses globalising effects from a different angle. In the following section, I draw on the student narratives to explore how the students saw themselves as migrants or travellers in an era of global connections. Whilst existing research and debate in this area often takes a more macro view of students moving between countries (for example, seeing young people as agents for developing global connections), my discussion in this chapter pays closer attention to the identity development of these students – that is, the emerging transnational and global identities that these young people often articulated through their mobility experiences.

(6.4) Broadening Horizons

Natalie: I just (pauses) …’cause you kind of realise that the world is such a huge place and there’s so many different cultures and it’s just ignorant to not try and explore them or learn about them. And I think you’d be a bit ignorant to want to spend all your life in one country when there’s so much more out there to see.

(Female, Middle class, White British)

Natalie’s narrative here was representative of what many of the students reflected on when asked about how they felt about their period abroad. Whilst not all the students shared the sentiment about “ignorance”, there was an overwhelming feeling that the year or semester abroad provided students with a new outlook on the world; an outlook that very much centred on realising that overseas locations represented a space of increased opportunity after completing their studies. What is interesting in Natalie’s narrative though is that her learning when abroad was not related solely to the academic experiences she gained (like the discussion earlier). Instead, it demonstrates that experiencing the abroad for its own sake was a significant form of
Richard, who had never travelled on a plane before spending a year in Canada, shared a similar view:

Richard: It made me more open to international travel; like, it showed me it’s more possible to do it, um, especially like flights now that I know I can fly…Um, yeah, so it’s also shown me that I want to, um, see the world.

(Male, Working class, White British)

Like Natalie, Richard also arrives at the idea that his time abroad created an appetite for “seeing the world”, showing him that “it’s more possible to do it”. Richard’s narrative here demonstrates that, again like Natalie, his study abroad experience didn’t necessarily create a vision of what his future life might look like in terms of further study or employment. Instead, the study abroad experience helped Richard to broaden his horizons, showing him that there were more possibilities ‘out there’ upon completion of his time in Canada, whatever these might entail.

David, who I spoke about in considerable detail in Chapter 4, was a student who had limited experience of going abroad before studying for a year in the Netherlands. His mum, a cleaner, and his dad, a welder, were initially sceptical about his decision to study abroad because it wasn’t what “people like us” do. When I asked David to reflect on any possible changes in his outlook towards his life after mobility, he responded:

David: …like the year abroad kinda made me realise that there’s a whole lot more out there; there’s a whole lot more options so I don’t have to limit myself to say teaching in a secondary school comprehensive or something like that…I could perhaps get a job at a private school. I could go and teach abroad like my sixth-form form tutor has. So it’s just the realisation that there are more doors there; more doors that I think I never realised there were there before I went away. I think a lot of it is just broadening horizons, I think, for the most part.

(Male, Working class, White British)

Through David’s narrative here, we can see, like Natalie and Richard, he was reflecting on the future possibilities that his experiences in the Netherlands gave him. Crucially, his idea about the experience “broadening horizons” demonstrates the
significant effect that studying abroad had on him. This, in many ways, relates back to the discussion I presented in Chapter 4. Drawing on Hodkinson et al.'s (2012) concept of ‘horizons for action’, I argued that the decision to study abroad stemmed from either ‘routines’ or ‘turning points’. For the students who had travelled to a number of different countries, perhaps with family, friends, and school, their decision to study abroad was made within the routines of their lives; a sort of ‘in-habitus’ choice. For other students though, I demonstrated how the options presented to students upon arrival at UK higher education represented a ‘turning point’ that introduced them to new opportunities within their horizons. The significant focus within this argument was that, through these ‘turning points’, the students could see new things within their horizons that became both possible and desirable.

From the student narratives discussed within this section so far, it is possible to argue that the study (or work) abroad experience represented a significant ‘turning point’ for some of the students; an event in their lives that “broadened their horizons” (David), “showed more possibilities” (Richard), whilst learning that “there’s so much more out there” (Natalie). However, whilst it is certainly interesting to analyse how the study/work abroad experience fed into the ‘routines’ and ‘turning points’ for these students, we should, to some extent, expect all of these young people (regardless of routines and turning points) to talk about their experiences as something significant in their lives. For example, the experience of living abroad for a young person is likely to be discussed as a very significant part of their life shortly after returning to the UK. Furthermore, as these students are young people, this perhaps increases the likelihood that they will talk about it as something that broadens their horizons for their futures. However, these findings, as I shall demonstrate below, take on a deeper significance when situated within Bauman’s theory of ‘tourists and vagabonds’.

(6.5) Tourists and Vagabonds
In their discussion of internationally mobile students, Kenway and Fahey (2007) argue that Bauman’s concept of ‘tourists’, within an era of globalisation, is perhaps a fitting theory to describe students who travel abroad for higher education. They suggest that student mobility promotes travelling abroad for education as part of a “life-stylisation” that allows for enriching experiences and personal development. Whilst it is important to examine how young people seek to fashion these lifestyles
today, Kenway and Fahey (2007) are correct to point out that exploring these personal developments and enriching experiences needs to also focus on the cultural and social capital that shape them. Although Kenway and Fahey (2007) use Bauman’s (1998) concept of ‘tourists’ in their discussion of mobile students, they only use the concept to describe that they might fit the definition of a ‘tourist’. By applying Bauman’s (1996, 1998) theory to some of the narratives of the students in this study, we can gain a deeper insight into not only the lifestyles these young people build through their mobility, but also the accumulation of social and cultural capital during their time abroad.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, Bauman (1998) argues that mobility is now a defining feature of globalisation. Being ‘on the move’, he argues, is no longer a niche activity, restricted to a few people, but a defining feature for all people in contemporary society. Much like Giddens’ (1990) metaphor of globalisation as a stretching process, Bauman (1998) argues that globalisation has rapidly transformed not only the way we live our lives, but also the ways in which we view our own (possible) biographies in a global world. Bauman (1998) argues there are two broad types of people who respond to globalisation in very different ways. To recap from Chapter 2, there are the tourists – tourists are, for Bauman, the group of people who actively rejoice in the “stretching” (Giddens, 1990) of social life across the globe. In the conventional sense of the word, a tourist is someone who chooses to travel to new places to seek something other than his or her day-to-day experiences. Whilst similar to this definition, Bauman’s (1998) concept is used as a metaphor to explain that globalisation has established a type of touristic lifestyle that is now possible for a number of people in a mobile world. For example, as money, commodities and commerce stretch across the world, jobs and employment, too, follow this trend. For Bauman (1998: 92) then:

‘…tourists become wanderers…because they want to; either because they consider it the most reasonable life-strategy ‘under the circumstances’, or because they have been seduced by the true or imaginary pleasures of a sensation-gatherers life’.

Tourists are, as Bauman (1998) suggests, the “winners” of globalisation; the people who enjoy the mobility that globalisation requires. By contrast, Bauman argues, through his concept of vagabonds (the opposite of tourists), that the best
opportunities and lifestyles are pursued through tourism. For Bauman (1998),
globalisation creates uncertainty in the ways people live their lives – jobs, housing,
even friendships become, to some extent, more fluid and transient in the globalised,
postmodern, world. The people who lament these changes in the way we are forced
to live our lives are, for Bauman, the vagabonds. The ‘…(vagabonds) are on the
move because they’ve been pushed from behind’ (Bauman, 1998: 92). This “pushing
from behind” process is what Bauman uses to highlight the sense of control that the
vagabonds feel they have lost in the globalised world. Asylum seeks, displaced
through war or conflict, refugees, or even working-class communities are those who
come under the ‘vagabond’ label. For Bauman, they live in a world where
significance is attached to mobility (to enjoy the successes that globalisation brings),
yet they have no control over that mobility.

Bauman is cautious to point out though that vagabonds are not to blame for
not being able to enjoy the ‘successes’ that globalisation and mobility brings. He
argues that places and locations themselves, across the globe, do not allow people
to ever fully settle because communities now are under constant change, adapting to
globalising forces – ‘…the vagabond is a vagabond not because of the reluctance or
difficulty of settling down, but because of the scarcity of settled places’ (Bauman,
1996: 29). In some respects then, we can see Bauman’s thesis as a broad theory of
social class. The middle-classes are flexible and adaptable, ready to try new places
in striving to secure the ‘best’ professional and leisure lifestyles. The working-class
though, through no fault of their own, do not possess the economic, cultural or social
capital to live these available lifestyles. In the literature review chapter, I
acknowledged some of the limitations of this theory, notably Bauman’s (1996, 1998)
idea of a simple relationship between mobility and immobility.Whilst he discusses
how all people need to be on the move, his theory nevertheless presents a view of
society as constructed by the mobile middle-classes and the immobile working-
classes. And this is, as I discussed earlier, problematic.

However, in this section, I outline how and why a departure from Bauman’s
theory would be premature. This is because, I argue, his concept of ‘tourism’
highlights a growing importance of mobility, which is shared by young people. In this
sense, Bauman’s (1996, 1998) tourism theory can show how mobility discourses can
shape the objective lives of these young people. Instead of exploring the differences
between tourists and vagabonds (which I have argued is problematic), I build on
Bauman’s (1996, 1998) theory by applying my data to his conception of tourism. I do this by demonstrating how many of the young people were, in many of their narratives, doing what I term ‘tourist talk’ – that is, drawing on mobility discourses when articulating their future aspirations. I discuss the concept of ‘tourist talk’ in more depth in the next section. Bauman’s thesis is therefore particularly useful when exploring the specific ways in which the young people in this study believed that continuing to be mobile after leaving higher education would be a ‘right’ choice for their future lives. Such a discussion, I go on to demonstrate, also shows how, what Murphy-Lejeune (2002) terms ‘mobility capital’ is actually part of a wider form of cultural capital that can affect an individual’s habitus.

(6.6) Tourist Talk
When I asked the young people in this study to think about if and how their experiences had changed their views about international travel, it was striking how many of the students talked about their desires to continue with the international experiences that they had gained though their mobility. Almost without exception, every person in the study told me how they would either be open to a move abroad again, or that they would be moving abroad again. When talking about the other people she met “travelling”, Holly (Female, Middle class, White British), who studied in the US, told me how her experiences showed “how everyone’s mobile now in that sense and, yeah, it’s so easy in many respects to travel to wherever you want to go”. Similarly, when discussing how the study abroad experience had affected her views about her own life, Elena (Female, Middle class, Asian British), who had studied in Australia outlined how she “[wanted to] get out [of England] as soon as I can. And I wanna see, um, I feel like I wanna see more of the world before I settle for a bit in Australia”. Whilst these types of narratives can be explored through the ‘routines’ and ‘turning points’ theory, it is equally interesting to situate these ideas within a wider framework of Bauman’s ‘tourist/vagabond’ thesis. Holly and Elena’s narratives demonstrate here that they have acquired a perspective on the world that highlights how mobility is a significant, and even defining, feature of contemporary life – Holly told me how she realised that “everyone’s mobile now”, whilst Elena told me how she wanted to “see more of the world”. As is discussed in the literature review, Francis Collins’ (2014) work on young people who choose to work abroad highlights the need to understand young people’s specific reasons and circumstances surrounding
their motivations for travel. For example, employment opportunities and the repayment of student debt are both factors that, for Collins, played an important role in young people’s mobility decisions. However, in the discussion below, I develop an argument that highlights a growing belief amongst young people that going abroad again was a worthwhile activity in its own right. In other words, the young people in this study, when reflecting on their experiences of studying or working abroad were engaging in ‘tourist talk’. Tourist talk can be described as discourses that centre on mobility as a positive and, to some extent, important activity deployed by the young people as they enter a new period of their lives after leaving higher education.

Tourist talk may not always make specific mention of the reasons and circumstances surrounding the motivations to travel abroad. Instead, it can often be displayed through seeing value in mobility for itself as opposed to any direct personal or professional advantage. This then bring us neatly to analyse how these students, in their own way, were doing tourist talk in the interviews; that is, conveying to me, as the interviewer, how they wanted to live their lives upon exiting higher education, regardless of their specific circumstances at the time.

In his tourist talk, Ed, who had studied for a year in Canada, was considering a career in the RAF. He conveyed to me that his choice of career would involve international travel, often living and relocating to different parts of the world. Before turning to explore how Ed reflected on his study abroad experience, it is important to understand his first words to me in the interview when talking about his motivations to undertake a period of study in Canada. Like all the students in the study, I opened the interview by asking Ed why he had decided to study abroad. When asked this question, Ed replied:

Ed: Well partially because I was, uh, getting towards being bored of where I was and partly because I thought it would look good on my CV, to show that I’m a sort of adventurous person so that I’m aware of the world outside of university. So that would make me slightly more employable. So those were the two main factors.

(Male, Middle class, White British)

In Ed’s narrative, we can see Bauman’s ideas surrounding the ways in which people reflect on the importance of mobility as a requirement of globalisation. Firstly, Ed talks about being “bored” in his current location in the UK. By extension then, Ed
must have been consciously thinking about opportunities and possibilities that were possible elsewhere, imagining that life abroad could, possibly, cure his boredom. Secondly, Ed thought that, by going abroad, it would improve his employment opportunities by allowing him to become “aware of the world outside of university”. In addition to this, Ed’s narrative demonstrates his belief that being an “adventurous person” would be valued positively by future employers. Before analysing these points, it is worth contextualising his narrative with a short comment he made later in the interview that I will discuss shortly – when I asked Ed whether the distance between Canada and UK posed any physical or emotional issues for him during his trip, Ed replied: “Well, I felt as detached from them (friends and family) as I would do just being in (name of UK HEI)”. 

Ed’s story above then is littered with tourist talk – the emphasis that he places on mobility being beneficial for his future career in the RAF demonstrates his belief that being mobile is a key requirement of today’s society. Whilst this fact on its own is interesting, it is his comment about “boredom” that strengthens the tourist argument because it demonstrates that mobility is also part of a wider life-stylisation that is now possible to a number of (but not all) people. In focussing on his “boredom” comment, Ed’s narrative conveys a sense of opportunities and possibilities that he realised were achievable in his life. Mobility for Ed then offered something different; it offered a chance to design a lifestyle away from the place in which he was “bored”. And these opportunities are all part of a tourist’s life – as Bauman argues, ‘…the tourists stay or move at their hearts’ desire. They abandon a site when new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere’ (Bauman, 1998: 92). For Ed, Canada gave him new opportunities that would cure his boredom and provide an important source of capital that he could draw on for his future career. Importantly though, once living in Canada, Ed did not feel disconnected or ‘home sick’ from the UK. He described how he felt that the distance between the two countries was no more or no less than the distance between his home UK HEI and his family home town. This is no surprise when understanding Ed’s narrative though the tourist thesis – For Bauman (1996, 1998) it is, to a larger extent, easy to navigate and traverse the world, free of emotional or mental restriction, when you are a tourist in today’s globalised world.

When talking to Ed about how study abroad possibly affected or changed his views towards travel or living abroad in the future, it became clear that his
experiences had strengthened his status as a ‘tourist’. When talking about his future career in the RAF, Ed told me:

*Ed: I mean, I’m not afraid to just leave home for a long period of time with no prospect of being able to come back in the meantime. So, I’m not afraid. I’m not afraid to be posted to this base for an indefinite period. I’m not afraid to, you know, just move countries for months at a time, or even years.*

(Male, Middle class, White British)

Again then, Ed’s narrative shows that his study abroad experience strengthened his status as a ‘tourist’. In fact, his experiences living away from home, provided good training for his future life and career. This is because, after returning from Canada, he had achieved the ability to move from location to location without any sense of mental or physical restriction. Within his narrative, Ed realises that ‘tourism’ will become his way of life in the RAF. But this is something that he relishes, not laments – as we saw earlier, tourists, like Ed, can get “bored” when “new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere” (Bauman, 1998: 92).

Whilst Ed’s case study above is particularly interesting, some people may argue that his journey towards becoming a tourist started before his study abroad experience (Ed was, as I categorised in Chapter 4, an ‘in-habitus’ student). Ed’s narrative, although very interesting, should therefore be expected to some extent as his mobility to Canada could be seen as ‘routine’ (Hodkinson et al., 2012). But what was interesting within the data was the effect that the study abroad experience had upon almost everyone (both in and out-of-habitus students). And this effect was extremely similar to the sentiments being expressed by Ed – that of the world being more accessible, more appealing, and more possible. Chloe, who also studied in Canada, told me how:

*Chloe: Um, I’d say it feels more accessible but not because of the study abroad itself, but the travelling I did afterwards. So it was during that travel that, although I’d done a lot of travelling, I’d never travelled on my own before. And so I actually travelled on my own, I did some couch surfing, and like really pushed myself to try new things, meet new people and just, like, deal with the fact that I was on my own.*
Um, and so that, I feel, had made travel more accessible because I’m less scared now about, like, going off to do something.

(Female, Middle class, White British)

Chloe’s view of “going off and doing something” highlights her own ‘tourist talk’ when describing her experiences directly after her study placement ended whilst in Canada. Like Ed, she conveys how her experiences allow her to not be “scared” anymore about going to do something abroad. Her experiences of Canada demonstrate the effect this had on the way she viewed future travel as more “accessible”. But it is precisely this element of ‘accessibility’ that demonstrates Chloe’s journey to becoming a tourist – being a tourist, as I have outlined above, is characterised by the perceived ability to move and relocate relatively easily within the world. As Ed described, his career choice would require him to flow between places with ease. And his narrative, as we saw, documented how he had mastered this skill. Whilst Chloe’s narrative here is making no specific reference to a type of career, her tourist talk still centres on outlining how she can now travel independently and not be scared of it in the future. This aspect of ‘futures’ featured heavily in other students’ narratives. If the study abroad experience creates international vistas of the world, within a wider framework of tourism (in the Bauman sense of the word), we should, to some extent, see evidence of the people beginning to think about their (possible) futures in a globalised world. Trey, who studied in Iceland, was one of these people. When I asked Trey whether he would consider working or living abroad in the future, he replied:

Trey: Yeah, I was actually considering it already in Iceland. As soon as it came to like January [or] February, I was already looking at countries that would be feasible for my kids to grow up in; not because I have anything against England; I just don’t want to be limited to it; that’s all.

(Male, Middle class, Black British)

To clarify, Trey did not have any children (at the time of interview). When looking ahead towards his possible futures, he was hypothesising on how his family planning would be integrated within his (new) life as a tourist. This is because he talks about a “feasible” place where his (future) family could grow up, away from the UK. And Trey
most certainly outlines his future life as a tourist when he talks about not wanting to be “limited” by the UK. Trey’s comment here is alluding to a view that staying in the UK would limit his opportunities of what he could do with his future. Whilst he does not have “anything against” England, he believes that there are many more opportunities away from it. His comment is unsurprising in many respects when we consider that “…tourists move because they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly attractive’ (Bauman, 1998: 92). Movement, for Trey, was no doubt attractive, because, in his opinion, it would give him these opportunities in a highly mobile, global, world. For Trey, anything else would be “limiting”.

So far within this section, I have explored how participants’ accounts of their post-mobility outlook can be understood in relation to Bauman’s (1996, 1998) tourism thesis. This is because the student narratives have shown how student mobility can, to some extent, create globalised perspectives in their ‘horizons for action’. This means that, after completing a period abroad, these young people could envisage themselves travelling abroad again in their immediate futures. For these students, living abroad became both a desirable and possible activity to consider. And this, I argue, highlights Bauman’s (1996, 1998) concept of tourism through the significance placed on international travel to create an appealing lifestyle. However, the discussion of the chapter should not be interpreted as an investigation into how and when these young people will move abroad again. In other words, I have not argued that mobility will turn them into tourists. Of course, many of these young people may not ever move abroad again in their lives. Instead, I have shown how mobility, for different young people who choose to study abroad, can develop sometimes large, or sometimes small, significant tourist traits - that is, the way in which these students talked about their experiences was aligned with how Bauman (1998) describes this new, educated, global class of people who live the ‘best’ lifestyles available today. Under this conception of Bauman’s (1996, 1998) tourism, it could be further argued that the tourist is not only characterised by their physical mobility, but also by the discourses used to discuss travel. This is because, as I have shown through the narratives, talking about the perceived importance of travel and being internationally mobile positions these young people to adopt the values of the dominant class. People who construct tourist talk might, of course, become physically mobile. But it could also be argued that a person’s positive views towards travel (without the
physical mobility) still positions them as tourists because they are ‘in the know’ of how to live the ‘best’ lifestyles.

Whilst some of the data I have drawn on could be considered as overt examples of tourist talk, there were other moments, small moments in each interview that were highly charged with tourist talk. These examples that I outline below provide further evidence of student mobility as an activity that sets up a significant number of students, who travel abroad, for a life of tourism.

Me: Would you consider working abroad in the future?

Maria: Oh yeah, definitely. I definitely would, yeah. I just liked the whole difference of working abroad. I liked it. I would definitely work abroad if I got the chance to.

(Female, Middle class, Black British)

Me: Would you ever consider working abroad?

Jenny: Yeah. I mean, I’ve even considered going back to do a PhD out there with the idea to live out there for good, um, which kind of put me off a bit ‘cause it’s kind of scary taking such a big step. But I’d be very happy; more than happy to try and work abroad again in the future without a doubt.

(Female, Middle class, White British)

Me: If you did your teaching qualification after your degree that you’re doing at the moment, could you see yourself going back to Canada?

Jane: Yeah I think so, yeah. I mean, I don’t see why not. I mean, I probably wouldn’t actively look to go back to Canada, but like if an opportunity arose, I think I would probably take it pretty quickly, yeah.

(Female, Middle class, White British)

When looking at the narratives of Maria, Jenny and Jane here, we can see these small moments in their dialogue that provide evidence of a touristic way of life – Maria talks about “definitely” working abroad if she got the chance, whilst Jenny, who studied in the US, talks about a possible return to complete a PhD. Interestingly, like
Ed and Chloe (discussed earlier), Jenny also uses the term “scared” to demonstrate that she has overcome this trepidation of going away on her own. By not being “scared” of travel, Jenny is able to think about a further range of opportunities that would be available to her throughout her life. Jane’s narrative is, for me, the most interesting for the discussion here – the way she phrases her response, when I asked her whether she would go abroad again, is almost bordering on being blasé. It is perhaps ‘blasé’ because of the way she thinks about going abroad again. For example, phrases such as “I mean, I don’t see why not” and “I think I would probably take it pretty quickly, yeah” illustrate the ways in which many of these young people thought about going abroad after their studies. These small, yet significant, phrases, such as Jane’s ‘why not’ attitude highlight an ease in making decisions that, in the future, could take these young people across different countries and continents. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how the enjoyment of the study abroad experience was based on the concept of ‘difference’ – that is, if students were treated differently, their experiences were heightened compared to their day-to-day routines at home. We can see here, too, that when reflecting on their experiences abroad, these students enjoyed the difference that a mobile life gave them – Maria, above, specifically talks about enjoying “the whole difference of working abroad”.

What we see here then is a group of young people who, through their experiences, have developed a taste for living differently whilst also searching for places where new opportunities can take them, whatever those opportunities may be – in other words, ‘learning’ how to be mobile. And this, for Bauman, constitutes tourism:

‘…the purpose [of tourists] is new experience; the tourist is a conscious and systematic seeker of experience, of a new and different experience, of the experience of difference and novelty’ (Bauman, 1996: 29)

The final question to address in this section is why a period spent abroad as part of a university degree generated the ‘tourist talk’ I have described above. If many of these students had significant amounts of previous travel experience (as I argued in Chapter 4), it is important to understand why their tourist talk became more profound when discussing their post-mobility aspirations upon return. The answer to this question connects to a discussion in the previous chapter that focused on studying/working abroad as an ‘authentic’ type of travel. Whilst their previous travel
experience gave these young people confidence in making the decision to study abroad (and, to some degree, knowledge of the benefits of going abroad), the study abroad experience itself represented what it was ‘really like’ to live in another country for an extended period of time. As Bauman (1996, 1998) argues, tourism is a lifestyle in today’s world. Therefore, upon completing their study/work abroad placement, these students believed that they had gained a ‘real’ experience of living abroad. By gaining a ‘real’ experience of living abroad then, these students could discuss the value of mobility because they had sampled a type of mobility that is synonymous with the lifestyles that Bauman (1996, 1998) discusses.

(6.7) Travel as Changing Perspective

At this point it is worth going into more depth on why the mobility experience can change the perspectives of these young people. If, as I have argued above, the views and attitudes of these students towards further travel changed through completing a period of time abroad, an exploration of these changes is important. Whilst, to some extent, it is difficult to pinpoint an exact cause using the data, a theoretical exploration of these changes in perspective may still be valuable.

Drawing on Maria, Jenny and Chloe’s narratives above, one common theme across them is ‘learning to overcome something’ – Jenny and Chloe told me how they would not be scared anymore, whilst Maria talked about how she learnt to enjoy the difference of being abroad. These types of changes in perspective can perhaps emanate from a number of things: for example, independence and encountering difference. But exploring these issues raises the question of what is significant about travel for achieving these things. Whilst it is certainly true that these students could have achieved changes in their perspective from other activities aside from student mobility, travel (in the mobility sense) is, I would suggest, an activity that forces the traveller to reflect on their own identity and subjectivity. Being taken out of one’s day-to-day routine and comfort zone forces us to encounter emotions such as being ‘scared’, ‘nervous’, and/or ‘excited’. But it could be argued that travel is a particularly unique activity that stimulates all of these types of emotions and experiences in people. This, I believe, can be traced back to the historical associations of travel and the role of travel in a person’s life – as Urry (2002) outlines, the ‘Grand Tours’ of young, aristocratic men were based upon notions of learning, self-discovery, and self-enlightenment. Student mobility, itself perhaps a modern form of ‘Grand Tour’ as
discussed in the literature review, can be viewed as an activity that allows students to engage in discovering their identities and subjectivities. Although, of course, there are many other activities that could have changed these students’ perspectives, there still remains, just as there was in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, a seductive and romantic quality surrounding travel that allows various forms of self-exploration. Returning to Leah’s story (that was used to open this thesis) can help to explain the romantic quality established through her travel to Canada:

\[\text{Leah: (on dog-sledding) “...it was so cool; we hit this ridge and we literally just went, like, the sled literally just went flying through the air. And I remember it being so beautiful; so white; like, the sun was setting, and...oooooh...just being in that moment; just so, so happy, and it was great”}\]

(Female, Working class, White British)

In the next section, I go on to connect these ideas to how travel is increasingly being sold to young people as an activity that can give them advantage in their future lives.

(6.8) Being ‘Sold’ an International Ideology
In the first part of this chapter, I outlined how Kenway and Fahey’s (2007: 169) theory drew on Bauman’s tourist and vagabonds thesis to demonstrate how ‘...student travel becomes a form of travelling life-stylisation’. I, too, have argued that his tourist argument is appropriate for describing the effect that student mobility can have on students upon their return. However, I have presented a deeper analysis of this idea by arguing that these ‘life-stylisations’ are actually part of a broader life strategy that positions these young people in an advantageous position to benefit from what they perceive to be increased opportunities within a global world. Previous research on student mobility, for example Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) work, discusses gaining a taste for travel as catching the ‘travel bug’. But this ‘travel bug’ factor is actually, I would argue, part of a wider set of issues that help to explain the globalised lifestyles that some people, particularly young people, seek to fashion in today’s society. Exploring student mobility through this approach therefore allows us to understand student mobility as a sample of tourism. In this sense, whilst the term ‘travel bug’ might refer to personal dispositions for travel, tourism refers to the ways in which these dispositions connect to the advantages mobility experiences might
bring throughout people’s lives. After all, tourists are, as Bauman (1998) explains, the “winners” of globalisation. The implication here is that, through their student mobility, these young people acquire the cultural capital to build their careers, their social lives and their life-style in a global community, should they wish to. They are not bounded by national barriers because, as they believe, the ‘best’ lifestyles available are the ones that stretch across the globe. In receipt of their degree and travel experience, the young people in this study therefore go into the world in an advantageous position for two reasons: firstly, they can live as tourists (should they wish to). Secondly, through possessing a degree (and specifically a degree with a semester/year’s experience abroad), they will be more likely to gain access to the ‘best’ type of jobs in the labour market – as the UK government’s ‘Department for Business Innovations and Skills’ suggest, ‘...in 2015, graduates and postgraduates had higher employment rates, with a greater proportion in high-skilled employment, lower unemployment rates, lower inactivity rates and higher median salaries than non-graduates’ (Department for Business Innovations and Skills, 2016: 5).

Another significant reason for examining the young people in this study as tourists is the way in which they talked about going abroad (and mobility more generally) as a significant experience for their lives. In other words, one of the striking things within their narratives was the emphasis, and possible realisation, that continuing to be internationally mobile was a good thing, or even the ‘right’ thing, to do. Earlier in the chapter, we saw Holly who talked about looking at the other people travelling to the part of the US she was in, and how that made her realise “how everyone’s mobile now in that sense”. But the students in this study would often talk about how mobility was a good thing for them, but not really outline why. In other words, they took it as given that their future mobility choices would be the ‘right’ choices. Whilst many students talked about future mobility aspirations in terms of their careers, Grace, who studied in Australia, told me:

Grace: Because I’m going into something (career wise) where I have the potential to travel, I have experience in travelling. And I’m going to be keeping my eyes out for any kind of jobs that will take me back there (to Australia) ‘cause that is what I want to do. And even if not, then I will just, you know, take a few years out, get a working visa, go back there, and, I dunno, work in a bar.

(Female, Working class, White British)
It is interesting to note here that, for Grace, continuing to be mobile was key to her future happiness. She talks about her decision to enter a career that has the potential to travel away from the UK. But her closing comment is significant because it shows that, for Grace, mobility is integral to any of her future plans. This is evident through her comment that, if her chosen career does not materialise, she will “take a few years out, get a working visa, go back there [and] work in a bar”. Mobility, for Grace, is therefore a part of a life-stylisation that will (in her mind) secure her happiness, either through employment or travel by herself as she leaves higher education.

In order to understand why these students place so much emphasis on the value of going abroad and being mobile, there are perhaps two useful perspectives. Firstly, young people, as I have shown in the previous chapter, enjoy the novelty of difference. Travel, in this sense, is enjoyable as an activity in itself. But secondly, and crucially for this section, there is now a strong culture of internationalism that some young people are exposed to. In other words, young (predominately middle-class) people are now brought up in a culture where travel is emphasised as a means to secure the ‘best’ future. Again, this is similar to Bauman’s (1998) argument that tourism has become the way of life for people today in order to gain ‘success’. For example, when posing the question “Why should I go?” in regards to student mobility, the British Council, which oversees ERASMUS+ UK, suggests:

‘…this isn’t a gap year. It’s not your chance to get a cheap holiday. Yes, you’ll have a great time, and yes, you will get to experience life in a completely different culture, but it’s about gaining new skills to make you more employable in the future. You’ll meet new people, you’ll learn a language, and you’ll have something a little special on your CV that will help you stand out. So perhaps the question you should really be asking yourself is: why shouldn’t I do it?’

(British Council, 2017)

This statement from the British Council demonstrates the significance of mobility for young people in their lives. They quickly point out the employment skills it will equip them with, the value of the period abroad on their CV and ‘skills’ to make them more employable. But the Council’s rhetorical question at the end: “So perhaps the
question you should really be asking yourself is: why shouldn’t I do it?” illustrates that mobility, for young people, should be a natural decision and therefore one that requires little effort. It could be argued then that these young people have, to some extent, been sold an ‘internationalised ideology’. Katharyne Mitchell (2006), in her analysis of EU education policy, comes to a similar conclusion. She suggests:

‘…in the EU programs and discourses of the past several years one can see the production of a fast-paced, mobile, and interchangeable laborer and the simultaneous exclusion of those considered slow, particularist, and/or otherwise ‘different’, who cannot or will not keep up with the recent changes’ (Mitchell, 2006: 403).

Mitchell’s argument here highlights that the EU’s education policy is now based on the assumption of mobility and flexibility across Europe. In this sense, the EU’s views represent an international ideology because it believes that the strength of Europe (both politically and economically) should be pursued through increasing the mobility of people across the continent. This ideology therefore contains discourses surrounding mobility that create a correct way for people to equip themselves for their futures. Whilst not directly focussed on education policy, Sidhu and Dall’Alba (2016: 7) argue that higher education marketing slogans place significant emphasis on mobility as the ‘right’ choice. They argue these slogans:

‘…reinforce these positive narratives by their portrayal of mobility programmes as ‘global passports’. They construct an image of a borderless world with endless opportunities for intrepid student-travellers. A consistent emergent theme is that students acquire global competencies, which deliver global employability’.

These global discourses therefore help to explain why students, such as Grace above, place faith in continuing to be mobile, regardless of whether she fulfils her ambition to gain an international career, or “work in a bar” abroad. This idea that young people are sold an international ideology relates back to Bauman’s (1998) claim that tourism is becoming a way of life for a number of people competing for the ‘best’ employment opportunities and lifestyles. As Sidhu and Dall’Alba (2016: 2) argue, higher education markets the acquisition of “global competencies” as a
strategy for distinction. Therefore, if young people undertake a period abroad as part of their degree, their experience, in conjunction with these positive discourses of travel, makes it, to some extent, unsurprising that so many of these students wanted to continue to travel, regardless of the purpose of that travel.

(6.9) Student Mobility as Establishing ‘Privilege’

It is worth concluding this discussion by returning to the academic literature that focuses on student mobility and forms of capital (in the Bourdieussian sense). In Chapter 4, I demonstrated how mobile students often drew on their cultural capital when choosing to study abroad – family holidays, school trips, and family influence, I argued, was crucial to understanding dispositions for travel. Whilst I discussed different students and their varying amounts of capital, in this chapter I have shown that, regardless of whether these students were introduced to student mobility through their ‘routines’ or ‘turning points’ (Hodkinson et al., 2012), the effects of their time abroad were consistently similar across the sample – that is to say that, no matter what background these students came from, and no matter what their previous travel experience was, the students, bar one or two, all discussed how their experiences had made them open in one way or another to living, working, or studying abroad again. If, as I have argued, student mobility creates these dispositions for further travel, I therefore arrive at the same conclusions as Waters and Brooks (2010a). These researchers suggest that British students, who choose to study abroad, do not ‘strategise’ their decisions to secure success in the future, but rather see travelling abroad (as part of their degree) as an end in itself. They argue:

‘...if we accept that UK students’ decisions regarding study overseas are usually unstrategic and made with only the vaguest conscious notion of accruing 'profit', we nevertheless have to confront the fact that the choices they make will often result in the reproduction of middle-class privilege’ (Waters and Brooks, 2010a: 225).

Indeed the narratives that I have presented in this section, on the whole, have shown a lack of strategic decision-making in many instances. Instead, these students have opted, to a larger extent, to ‘go where life takes them’ upon completing their degrees. But these choices (or lifestyles as I have discussed them in this chapter), will perhaps result in, as Waters and Brooks argue above, middle-class privilege. With
respect to my sample, this privilege can be seen from two perspectives: firstly, the findings of this chapter could be viewed as travel further allowing class privilege for some of the young people in this study. For example, if these young people continue to be mobile, they will, firstly, be living a particular lifestyle that is legitimated by the middle-classes (e.g. Bauman’s (1996, 1998) theory of tourism). However, within this touristic lifestyle, these young people might be predisposed to enter higher status jobs that require mobility (they also possess a degree which is often important for entry into these jobs). This connects back to a discussion in Chapter 4 - for the students who were well experienced in travel (the ‘in-habitus’ students as I called them), their student mobility can fit into their wider travel biographies in securing distinction upon exit from higher education. This does not mean though that it is only the in-habitus students that might benefit from the reproduction of class privilege; for the ‘out-of-habitus’ students in this study, their mobility can establish a form of privilege directly from their travel experiences studying and/or working abroad. To use David’s narrative again (an out-of-habitus student):

…it’s just the realisation that there are more doors there; more doors that I think I never realised there were there before I went away. I think a lot of it is just broadening horizons, I think, for the most part.

(Male, Working class, White British)

We can see above in David’s narrative that student mobility has the capacity to broaden horizons for action. For example, gaining competences in adaptability, flexibility and integrating into a different environment are skills that have been acquired through mobility programmes. This has, I believe, extended the students’ opportunities of what they perceive to now be possible in their lives. David’s narrative above is a good example of this; he believed that his experiences gave him something that he didn’t have before: a widened sense of perspective that would, in his mind, allow him to explore more opportunities after he completed his degree. Mobility, for David then, broadened his horizons for his future. Whether David will go onto to do something in his life that he might not have done without his mobility experience is, of course, difficult to predict. Family commitments and financial stability are just two examples of circumstances that might affect David’s future plans. However, the notion of ‘broadening horizons’, realising there are “more doors
that (he)...never realised there were there before (he) went away”, I would argue, is the first step towards having more opportunities on his horizon. And these opportunities, in search of a ‘better’ future, I suspect for many of the students, will be international in nature, whatever that future may be. Grace (Female, Working class, White British), discussed earlier, provides a good example of this when she talked about wanting an international career, but was happy to take a bar job in Australia so that she could travel back there. In connecting Waters and Brooks’ (2010a) arguments to my own made in this chapter, I would argue that the cultural capital that all of these students accrue in their travels is congruent with tourist lifestyles that are seen as a ‘better’ to way to live. This is because their experiences are all part of a wider journey of learning how to live, in the ‘best’ possible way, in the global world.

To reiterate again, mobile lifestyles (in terms of elective forms of mobility) are seen as aspirational because the supposedly ‘best’ jobs and the ‘best’ opportunities are now spread across the globe.

Some studies will try to explore the numbers of mobile students who go on to international careers after completing their degrees. Whilst these studies, no doubt, provide insightful data, my sociological analysis in this chapter demonstrates that, to some extent, all of these students (bar one or two) have begun to think about their possible mobile lives differently, compared to the time prior to their departure. To have sampled tourism at an early age in their lives, perhaps, sets them up to explore more opportunities than before their mobility. It is also worth mentioning here that travel during higher education plays a key role in creating further vistas of mobile lifestyles. This is perhaps due to young people being required to think about what opportunities are attractive to them as they near completion of higher education. For many of these students, exit from HE will mark their [often first] full-time entry into the labour market. For this reason, the experiences gained through their travels will, perhaps, inevitably affect the way they think about the next stages of their lives post-HE.

(6.10) Feelings Towards Nationality

In the last part of this chapter, it is important to explore another area of the students’ lives about which they thought differently after a period abroad. Extending identities beyond a student’s own nationality is an area that is often researched by those interested in student mobility. In particular, the literature that focusses on ERASMUS
students often tries to assess the extent to which a period abroad can facilitate students’ wider identification with Europe and other European nationals. Indeed, fostering such an identification between European peoples was a strategic aim of ERASMUS as a mobility programme (Klose, 2012). Whilst a number of studies have sought to explore identity building amongst mobile students, the majority of these studies have focussed on ERASMUS students (therefore only assessing EU identity exclusively), and used a quantitative approach. These studies, whilst certainly merited, are nevertheless unable to gain a comprehensive understanding of why these students either believe (or do not believe) that their time abroad affects the way in which they think about their nationalities. The discussion I present below offers an extension to both the ERASMUS and quantitative literature that focusses on perspectives of identity. Due to my participants travelling to different locations across the globe (not just Europe), the qualitative discussion I present provides a deeper insight into how these young people thought about the experiences in terms of their nationality.

In defining a ‘European identity’, King and Ruiz-Gelices’ (2003: 238) description of “a sense of belonging to Europe” provides a fitting starting point. A wider commitment to thinking about European issues, perhaps with a broader perspective than that of a national interest, might contribute to this sense of “belonging”. King and Ruiz-Gelices’ (2003: 246) study of UK students, found that, on the whole, UK students who studied in other European countries ‘…are somewhat more favourably inclined towards European integration, and a majority sees themselves as `belonging to a European cultural space”’. Similarly, other researchers, such as Van Mol (2012), have argued that, whilst a period of time spent abroad can foster a particular European perspective in young people’s lives, this integration and perspective is multi-layered. Van Mol (2012) argues that identification with Europe can be established by the friendship networks that form between students of different nationalities whilst abroad. However, simultaneously, these friendships that form between students of different nationalities are enabled and constrained by structural forces at the political level. Students from countries such as Poland, Van Mol (2012: 219) argues, live in a culture that promotes the EU and European identity because of the nation’s relatively new membership (joining in 2004). Because students live in this pro-European culture (and have now grown up in it), there has become ‘…a strong presence of Europe in the everyday life of the
students’ (Van Mol, 2012: 219). Whilst a growing body of literature continues to explore if and how mobility can change a student’s perspective on their nationality, there is a growing strand of this literature that indicates that British students are often different from their European peers. Kristine Mitchell (2012), for example, argues that studies that focus on mobility as expanding international perspectives are often limited by their small sample size, but also their emphasis on British students whose ‘…attitudes towards Europe are often well outside of the norm’ (Mitchell, 2012: 496). Whilst British students may be “outside the norm” of other students across Europe, there is little research that explores why this might be. The focus of this chapter now turns to analysing the narratives of these British students who not only travelled to Europe, but also other countries outside of mainland Europe. This discussion, I would argue, provides a timely analysis of British students’ views, not least because, as of the 24th of June 2016, the UK chose to leave to European Union.

Towards the end of each interview, I asked every student whether their views towards their nationality had changed as a result of their time spent abroad. Whilst there were a number of different responses to this question, there were some common themes that occurred across the data. It is worth commencing with an analysis of some of the (ERASMUS) students who travelled within Europe – a group of young people who, as I have shown above, are often the focus of student mobility studies that focus on nationality.

When I asked Alice, who had studied in France, whether her experiences had made her think differently about her nationality, she replied:

Alice: Umm...no. I don’t think so. Maybe when I was there I felt really aware that I was English and there was like...(pauses) I know this was one of the things that when we were there is that, when we’d refer to Europe a lot of the time, we would refer to Europe as like the continent as opposed to, like, the EU. That was something that really annoyed people. Then it made me aware of it and I don’t think I’d do that anymore. In that sense, the nationality (pauses) I realised like I now see it maybe from the more like overall union point of view. So I maybe feel more (pauses) because of, like, the whole ERASMUS thing and I was so involved with European students, [I] probably feel more identity with being European. Yeah, so I guess.

(Female, Middle class, White British)
Alice’s reply to my question here is interesting because her opening response suggests that, through her experiences, she did not think differently about her nationality. But as she goes on to reflect on her experiences abroad (for example, when she would initially refer to others as ‘the Europeans’ and her “involvement” with other European students), she begins to contradict her initial answer. This is because, as the end of her narrative, she had ‘worked through’ my question, leading to the conclusion that, actually, as a result of her experiences, she “probably [felt] more identity with being European”. However, when I asked Alice whether this had led her to feel any more, or any less British, she replied:

*Alice: …I wouldn’t say that. I wouldn’t say that…I don’t think it’s taken away from the fact that I feel British, but I’m more (pauses) I think [I] certainly [developed] that identity to be also part of this European union.*

(Female, Middle class, White British)

Alice’s narrative therefore presents an interesting finding for exploring nationality. Whilst she, by her own admission, developed a greater European consciousness, this identity construction was not at the expense of her British nationality. Indeed, the idea of a ‘strong’ British nationality was prominent in other ERASMUS students’ stories. Trey, who studied in Iceland, told me how his ethnicity as a Black British person created a separation between the ‘Black’ and ‘British’ aspects of his nationality and identity, with the ‘British’ aspect taking centre stage. He explained:

*Trey: I’m British. I think even like it strengthened that ‘cause when you’re out there they don’t talk about you as the African, [if] you know what I mean…They talk about you as the English person; you’re English, you sound English [and] yeah you’re Black, but you sound and you look and your mind-set is English, you know. So that strengthened my British identity because that’s what I was identified as in Iceland.*

(Male, Middle class, Black British)

In both Alice and Trey’s narratives we can begin to see an important theme: rather than integration with other students fostering a ‘European identity’ at the expense of British identities, we can see that a period spent abroad has the reverse effect – that is, time spent abroad not only confirms a sense of being British, but actually nurtures
and develops it. Alice and Trey’s ideas around their own nationality substantiate some of the quantitative findings from studies in this area. Mitchell’s (2015) study of student feelings towards nationality found that the ERASMUS scheme, on the whole, increased students’ identification with Europe and feeling European. However, she termed the British students in her study the “outliers”, suggesting:

‘…not only were British students nearly three times more likely than students of other nationalities to begin the study thinking of themselves in exclusively national terms, but there was only a 15 per cent reduction in this number over the course of the Erasmus exchange, compared with a 51 to 76 per cent reduction for other nationalities’ (Mitchell, 2015: 340).

Mitchell’s (2015) findings here make specific reference to the idea that, whilst students of other nationalities might identify with being European more strongly after their time abroad, British students tend to retain their sense of being British. However, as I have started to demonstrate above, British students can actually feel more British after their time abroad. The key discussion question for this section therefore becomes why – why is it that, on the whole, many of the students described to me how their time abroad nurtured their British identities?

The answer to the above question could perhaps be found in a discussion I had towards the end of the previous chapter: when discussing friendships made abroad, I argued that the ‘status’ and ‘power’ of a person’s nationality can have an impact on the way in which they come across to others whilst abroad. Many of the students, particularly those who had travelled to North America, talked about their warm reception from home students due to, for example, their accents. When talking about their nationalities, the students in this sample returned to many of the themes discussed in the previous findings chapter to demonstrate how their British identities had become strengthened. Mike, who travelled to the US, told me:

Mike: I actually think that I’m more proud of being a British person before I left. So I’m not sure why that is but I guess it’s just the fact that they seem to place so much interest in my nationality when I went there which, in turn, has made me show more interest in my own nationality. Because before I went I was just another English person in a country of English people. And now that (pauses) I feel that when your
own country, you’re in your own country. But when you’re in another country, you’re part of the world.

(Male, Middle class, White British)

Mike’s suggestion here goes back to the idea that, if you are treated differently, you start to feel differently about your own nationality. As Mike suggests above, he was “not sure” why he felt more British after returning home from the US, but theorises that the American students “place[d] so much interest in (his) nationality” that it “made (him) show more interest in (his) own nationality”. This process therefore results in students having to consciously think about and reflect on what it means to be British and what things in their lives make them British. I discussed this issue in the previous chapter analysing the friendships between study abroad students. As Van Mol (2012: 169) suggests, ‘…it becomes apparent that mobile students discover similarities and differences with others through interaction’. But these ‘differences’, as the data above have started to demonstrate, actively instil and develop a sense of ‘Britishness’ amongst these young people. The types of interactions abroad can also affect how students perceive their own sense of nationality. Lauren, who completed a work placement in Spain, was a rare example of a student who had experienced ‘being different’ negatively. Lauren discussed, in considerable depth, the hostile abuse she received from a minority of local people where she was living. She explained:

Lauren: I had a lot of issues with the public in the sense that I’m blonde; that I’m very fair. So people, it sounds really stupid, but people would actually shout at me in the street, like, words like ‘foreigner’; it translates to foreigner what they say in Spanish. And so it made me feel like they’re segregating me from their community even though I’m working for them, I’m helping them to, like, get better. It did make me feel a bit annoyed, a bit aggravated at times; that they felt that they had the right to segregate me like that, just on the basis on my colour, my hair colour and things like that.

(Female, Middle class, White British)

Lauren’s story here highlights the extent to which ‘difference’ plays an important factor in reinforcing feelings of nationality. Like Mike, albeit from a very different
scenario, Lauren was continually reminded that she was different from the Spanish people where she was staying. This finding chimes with the arguments raised by Youna Kim (2011) in her study with South Korean, Chinese and Japanese women living and studying in the West. Kim argues that the women in her research, living in the West, often experienced Otherness and racism during their stay. These negative experiences therefore impacted on their sense of national identity, often strengthening their sense of belonging to their home country. She argues that the:

‘...women in this study are not becoming so much globalized with more expanded multicultural and interpersonal or mediated contacts with the host society, but are rather becoming re-nationalized...to a certain extent in a transnational social field’

(Kim, 2011: 95).

This argument is applicable to Lauren’s story through the idea that negative experiences towards difference can result in affirming or re-nationalising people’s affinity towards their own country.

It is worth elaborating here on something significant in Lauren and Trey’s stories above. Trey, for example, made specific mention of his Black identity and remarked that, through studying in Iceland, this made him more aware of his Britishness. For Trey, because people treated him as British, he reflected on his own conceptions of what it meant to be Black and British. What is significant here though is that Trey was only one of two students in the study to make mention of his race and ethnicity in relation to the study abroad experience. This, it could be argued, is an important finding within itself. Something that might account for Trey mentioning his race and ethnicity in relation to his experience is that, when looking at the sample of students in this study, most students were White. In addition to this, the majority of destinations these students travelled to were predominantly countries that were ethnically and racially White. In short, most of the students in this study were White students travelling to White destinations. It could therefore be argued that, across the sample of students in this study, there was a White normativity that was often operating in the background of their narratives. To develop this further, it is worth returning to Lauren (the only other student to mention her race and ethnicity when discussing her experience abroad). Although Lauren was White (and therefore part of the majority of the student sample), she experienced being an Other in the part of
Spain where she was completing her work placement. Because of her light white complexion and blonde hair, Lauren outlined how she was singled out in the neighbourhood where she lived for being different. Again, this shows a theme of racial normativity across the students because, when students were singled out or labelled as Others, they discussed (like Lauren) in depth their feelings and emotions towards this. However, as I have outlined above, the significant majority of these students were White students travelling to predominantly White destinations.

Lauren’s story though can also give us a good insight into the concept of gender. In the methodology chapter, I outlined gender as a sampling variable in order to explore whether there were any significant differences in the motivations and experiences of both male and female students. Importantly though, Lauren was the only student to make specific mention of how her gender shaped part of her experience abroad. As a young, white female, in a destination where the local people had darker skin and darker hair compared to Lauren, she remarked that she would often feel intimidated when she was singled out on the street for being different. But, to repeat, Lauren was the only student to reflect on aspects of her gender in relation to her experiences. To put this another way, with the exception of Lauren, there was no axis of difference between male and female students within the study. This, it could be argued, is an original finding of the study. Whilst it is difficult to explain why this occurred, I would hypothesise that Lauren’s status as a work abroad student, in comparison to study abroad student, might have had some bearing on this. In the previous chapter, I talked about the theme of the university as a ‘bubble’ that students such as Millie and Natalie discussed. The bubble, as they discussed it, highlighted that universities (and specially the university campus) acted as a small world that gave rise to new experiences and friendships. Due to campuses being concentrated of young people with a strong commonality (pursuing a degree and gaining new experiences), the experience of gender differences might be very different from Lauren’s circumstances. Lauren, by contrast, was living in the working class community in which she was working on her placement year. Away from the university ‘bubble’, and in addition to her Other status discussed above, Lauren was more predisposed to reflect on her gendered identity in a different way that other students did not remark or comment on. This is, I would argue, a theoretical way of understanding why there were no significant gender discussions amongst the majority of students with the exception of Lauren.
This discussion raises an interesting idea in regard to similarities and differences in relation to the young people's identities. Whilst the vast majority of students did not reflect on their gendered identities, they did talk extensively about their British identity when abroad and how this created a uniqueness to their experiences. However, this Britishness I have discussed in many ways then stands in contrast with the EU rhetoric on integration. As Sigalas (2010: 252) suggests:

‘...The philosophy of the ERASMUS programme is to bring students of different nationalities and cultures closer so they can learn from each other and ‘discover’ that they share a common European identity’.

The dominant theme in the data that I have discussed in this section rests on the idea that experiencing difference leads to feelings of being different. Even though Alice (Female, Middle class, White British) arrived at the idea of feeling more European by the end of her experience, she still discussed, in detail, the concept of difference before leading to her conclusion. Furthermore, her narrative lacked clarity as she used terms such as “maybe” and “probably” when she discussed feeling more European. The idea then that integration with students from different nationalities will lead to a unification of ‘European citizens’ is perhaps more of an ideal.

In some ways, these findings are not entirely unsurprising. Earlier in this section, I drew upon Van Mol's (2012) discussion to show how some people from different EU countries (for example young Polish people) have been brought up in a pro-European culture based on the political discourses that encourage young people to ‘make the most’ of what the union has to offer. However, the UK, has always, to some extent, been perceived to be 'Eurosceptic'. Spiering (2015), for example, has argued that the relationship between Britain and the EU has always been turbulent – political disagreements about the way relationships between EU states should be managed, issues of 'national identity', and Britain’s historical insistence on having a 'special relationship' with the US instead are, he argues, things that contribute towards a culture of hostility (or ‘Euroscepticism’) within Britain. This provides a contrast with other countries, such as Poland discussed earlier, where the EU has been portrayed as driving aspiration for employment and increased opportunity. But if the political discourses of the UK are sceptical, or even hostile towards a further
unification of Europe by portraying it as a hindrance rather than a platform for opportunity, then we must accept that these young people in this study have grown up in a culture that promotes the idea that “we” (the British) are different (for whatever reason) to “them” (Other Europeans). Therefore, with the UK exiting the European Union (expected at time of writing), it appears that the EU’s ‘European dream’, for young UK nationals, may come to be viewed as a historical ideal that did not fulfil its potential.

(6.11) Nationality and Tourism

In drawing the discussion together, the two central themes discussed in this chapter: tourism and nationality, might appear to contradict each other. Students wanted to continue to live a mobile life across different countries and continents, yet, simultaneously, their experiences made many of them feel more British. Nevertheless, these two themes, I would argue, may be seen as entirely consistent with one another. If the UK is to leave the European Union, this might not necessarily mean that mobility becomes less of a coveted value. To put this another way, the ‘European dream’, that is the identity discourses that focus on feeling European, is not directly related to aspirations for mobility. Tourism (in Bauman’s sense) is the desire to create a ‘better’ lifestyle that is, as I described earlier, ‘sold’ to young people through various educational channels and discourses – to use Trey’s narrative again, choosing to remain mobile is a choice that provides more opportunities and does not “limit” a person to immediate opportunities at the local or national level. But these aspirations for mobility, perhaps, do not require young people to feel more or less British. In fact, whether a young person feels or does not feel British is, to a larger extent, insignificant. Instead, the importance, as I would argue from the data discussed in this chapter, is located in the ways in which overseas locations are envisaged as presenting employment and lifestyle opportunities to these young people after returning from their mobility experience. With the vote to leave the European Union, EU ‘benefits’, such as ‘freedom of movement’, are often discussed as having one of the strongest negative impacts on the future opportunities for young British people as they move into the labour market. This is not surprising when we consider, as I have shown, the importance of having access to attractive opportunities to travel and work. David, an out-of-habitus student, succinctly captured this idea:
David: I know that I can quite comfortably go and live somewhere else now and move away from that. I kinda see myself more as, I suppose it sounds quite cliché, but almost like a world somebody who can feel at home almost anywhere pretty much.

(Male, Working class, White British)

His narrative is also important though for analysing the EU’s aspiration for wider political affiliations with Europe. This is because his ability to “feel at home almost anywhere” is not related to whether he felt a heightened sense of European identity. Like others in the study, David represented that whilst students may feel more British (as I have argued), they simultaneously feel that they do not want to be, as Trey termed, “limited” by what only the UK has to offer. The UK’s decision to leave the European Union (Brexit) is therefore, drawing on the data in this section, not so much a threat to the identities of young European citizens. It, instead, poses a threat to the availability of the professional and leisure futures that the young people in this study discussed; a threat to tourism because, as Bauman (1998: 1) states, today, ‘…mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values’.

(6.12) Chapter Summary
This chapter has provided a new way of examining the concept of ‘learning’ when analysing the students’ narratives. As opposed to examining academic transitions from a focus on pedagogical outcomes from mobility, I have instead argued that the concept of ‘learning’ is embedded in wider aspirations for where their mobility might take them and the type of lifestyles that might want to live. Using Bauman’s (1996, 1998) concept of tourism, I have shown the ways in which mobility and mobile lifestyles are increasingly becoming seen as a desirable means of achieving not only the ‘best’ jobs, but also a ‘better’ lifestyle in a, supposedly, global world. I have argued that the students in my sample constructed their own discourses of travel (tourist talk), that demonstrate their belief that their lives will be more rewarding for continuing to be internationally mobile. The international vistas that mobility creates therefore lay the foundations for a particular lifestyle these young people strive to create upon leaving higher education, regardless of whether they go on to achieve them or not.
In the second part of the chapter, I argued that mobility, for many students, can heighten or develop a young person’s feelings towards their own nationality. As in the previous chapter, I argued that experiencing difference and being treated as different is a significant factor in this phenomenon. However, I also demonstrated how political discourses, particularly ‘eurosceptic’ discourses, might have affected how young British people think of themselves as different to other member states in the international community. But this difference, I have argued, does not impact on their motivations and aspirations for further travel. Instead, mobility continues to create international vistas in the imaginations of these young people, where they seek to explore where a new adventure might take them.
Chapter 7 - Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I draw the discussion together that I have presented throughout this thesis to answer my research questions set out at the start. Whilst summarising each chapter, I also present the main contributions of this study when discussing each of the empirical findings chapters. This is followed by a section that draws on my findings to make some recommendations for policy makers and universities’ student mobility strategies. Finally, I present some key areas of my study that asks wider questions for further research.

(7.1) Chapter Summaries and Significance

In Chapter 1, I examined the role that international student mobility played in the expansion of international higher education. Through exploring how international higher education operates, I demonstrated how different actors have viewed and shaped student mobility to achieve different outcomes. Firstly, policymakers in national governments, I argued, promoted student mobility to aid and develop economic markets. For these policymakers, student mobility is desirable because it helps to develop a flexible workforce of people who are comfortable working internationally. Secondly though, student mobility can act as an important revenue stream through the boost students can provide by the fees they pay and their wider spending in local economies across their country. Furthermore, student mobility for universities is seen as deeply beneficial for HEIs in order to gain a competitive stake in the higher education market in addition to the revenue streams international fees create. Due to internationalisation being a benchmark of success for higher education institutions, having vibrant international activities ensures that they are competitive with other higher education providers. However, at the end of this chapter, I demonstrated that evidence from recent research indicates that student motivations do not always reflect either policymaker, government, or HEI initiatives for mobility.

In Chapter 2, I explored the previous literature that focussed on student choices, decisions and experiences of mobility. Through exploring themes of ‘adventure’ and ‘strategy’, I began to address the question of why students might choose to incorporate a period of either work or study abroad into their UK degree programme.
This was explored through three distinct periods of being an internationally mobile student: before, during, and after. In terms of ‘before’, I used Bourdieu’s (1989) and Reay et al.’s (2009) work to explore travelling abroad (through student mobility) as a choice shaped by the habitus of the student. Using this sociological concept demonstrated that mobility decisions were not isolated or free-floating choices but, instead, formed through the biography and history of individual students. When turning to examine the experiences of students abroad during mobility, I outlined that there was a significant gap in the literature when looking at this aspect. However, I argued that the narratives of students recounting their experiences abroad could help to answer why those experiences were so integral to the success of their travel. Using John Urry’s (2002) concept of the tourist gaze could help, I argued, to make sense of how students achieved a sense of adventure within their travels. Lastly, I examined the ways in which a period abroad might have an effect on a young person’s views about their own nationality. To be more specific, this discussion focussed on whether time abroad in another country might change a student’s feelings toward being British. However, I also explored, through Bauman’s (1998) concept of the ‘tourist’, whether mobility could be seen as creating a wider identification with travel as a way of life, particularly among young people today. An in-depth examination of these three areas (before, during and after mobility) set up the context and focus for the empirical findings of this study.

In Chapter 3, I outlined and justified my choice of a qualitative project to explore the motivations, experiences, and aspirations of UK students on short-term international mobility programmes. Adopting a qualitative approach, I argued, allowed for an in-depth exploration of the narratives of these students who had returned from a period of either work or study abroad. Because I conceptualised studying and/or working abroad as part of a biographical journey, qualitative interviews provided the best means to capture the richness and depth of those stories. I then outlined the structure of the interviews, which gave participants the opportunity to discuss their experiences in chronological order. In this chapter, I also outlined my purposeful sampling strategy, arguing that achieving variation across different social characteristics (my sampling criteria) would allow me to access a variety of students who had travelled abroad to study and/or work. This chapter set out the specific questions for this thesis to answer:
1) What are the backgrounds and biographies of UK credit mobile students?

2) What are the experiences of students during their time abroad?

3) What are the aspirations and future plans of these students?

Chapter 4 discussed the findings into the life of students leading up to their decision to either study or work abroad (question 1 above). Firstly, this chapter provided the first in-depth insight into the backgrounds of UK credit mobile students. Secondly, it presented an original exploration of students who had travelled to destinations outside of Europe and therefore outside of the ERASMUS programme. And thirdly, it offered a fresh insight into why these small minorities of students chose to travel abroad for educational purposes. Brooks and Waters’ (2010) research with UK whole degree mobility students has argued that students who tend to take up these opportunities are often from privileged backgrounds in terms of, primarily, their schooling and previous travel experience (often with family). Indeed, as I argued in Chapter 4, many of the students in this study came from families where international travel, as part of a degree, was legitimised as a positive activity and seen as beneficial for their lives. As part of this finding, I demonstrated how studying abroad was discussed as an acceptable form of travel through the discourses the students attached to student mobility, often comparing it to tourism. My analysis in this area has built on the body of work that has discussed the socio-economic status of these students, suggesting that, for these types of ‘privileged’ students, their decision to study or work abroad was largely congruent with their habitus – that is, their decision could be seen as ‘normal’ within their biographies. Diane Reay et al. (2009) have also examined how new opportunities manifest themselves within a young person’s habitus, resulting in an in (or out)-of-habitus experience. This led to exploring many of the students’ choices around their mobility as ‘in-habitus’ decisions. Hodkinson (2008a) and Hodkinson et al.’s (2012) concept of ‘horizons for action’ connected nicely to the idea of in-habitus decisions because it demonstrated how what seemed possible to a young person was enabled or restricted by the social position in which they stood – new opportunities (such as the choice to study abroad) that entered the lives of young people might have been seen as either ‘routines’ or ‘turning points’. Whilst much of the existing research on student mobility has largely painted a picture of mobile students as young people in ‘routines’ (as I also found in this study), I did
find a significant minority of students who fitted the label of a young person at a ‘turning point’ when deciding on whether to study or work abroad. This posed a significant question for the data: how was the decision to study abroad sanctioned without existing amounts of cultural capital (in terms of family influence and lack or previous travel experience)? The answer to this, I argued, was in the way in which the dominance of internationalisation at UK HEIs instilled a view in these young people that international travel was both possible and desirable. Much like Donnelly’s (2015) work in schools with sixth-form leavers applying to different universities, there was evidence that the values of an institution can create a ‘turning point’ (Hodkinson et al., 2012) for some young people. Where there was a lack of previous travel experience and family influence (in terms of legitimating travel as an advantageous activity), the institutional habitus of a university helped to sanction the decision of a student to either work or study abroad. This finding therefore provided a new way of thinking about student decisions involved in mobility because it highlights that, even if only for a minority of students choosing to travel abroad, HEIs have the power to be transformative and not simply reproductive. Students such as David, who I discussed at length in this chapter, emphasised how the institutional values of his HEI, the institutional habitus, allowed him to see something previously over his horizon. For these [out-of-habitus] students then, we can see how various structures (such as the university) can change and shape the agency of people. I return to this idea when discussing my policy recommendations shortly.

Chapter 5 provided what I consider to be one of the most original aspects of this project. As I outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), much previous research (for example, Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, Krzaklewska, 2008, 2012, and Tsoukalas, 2008) has outlined the significance of the experience for students completing either a semester or year abroad. However, these studies have largely ignored the specific processes involved in creating the novelty and adventure attached to those experiences. Chapter 5 addressed this issue directly by exploring how students created their adventure throughout the duration of their stay. When analysing the key experiences of these students, it became apparent that simply living, exploring and making new friendships within their destinations were the core components to establishing a sense of adventure. John Urry’s (2002) concept of the ‘tourist gaze’ provided a good conceptual tool to understand how these seemingly ordinary
experiences took on an extra-ordinary meaning for these students. This presents a
new lens to explore mobile students through because, through understanding
experiences within the tourist gaze, we can gain a deeper understanding of the way
in which young people experience and enjoy being abroad. This is because the
tourist gaze helps to explain why high value is attached to the various experiences
encountered whilst abroad. In other words, when many of the students in this study
would tell me about “small things” and then explain that they “couldn’t explain why
they were significant” to their overall experience, the tourist gaze allows us to
understand that very basic day-to-day activities all take on a new significance when
abroad. And this, I argue, offers a fresh way to explore the narratives of mobile
students. If, as I have argued through the data, students take the most enjoyment
from the supposedly ‘smaller’ moments of their university exchange – for example,
meeting new people, sampling the local culture, engaging in day trips, etc,
researchers in this field should look to develop theories (such as Urry’s, 2002) that
attempt to understand how experiences abroad create a deep enjoyment amongst
young people. Here then, the focus of mobility studies that seek to understand
the motivations and experiences of students should look beyond the parameters of the
academic exchange itself, and instead focus on the lifestyles and cultural
opportunities that are presented to students in their destination country. This is
because these are important areas that students placed the most significance on
when narrating their stories and therefore aspects researchers in this area need to
examine further. I return to this point shortly when discussing policy
recommendations.

In Chapter Six, I extended the debate from Chapter Five that focussed on
experiences abroad, but turned to examine the role that student mobility played in
developing young people’s views about travel as a desired type of lifestyle. One of
the most significant findings in this chapter was actually what the students did not
discuss in any great depth – that of their academic learning experience abroad.
However, through the data, I discussed how the theme of ‘learning’ was certainly not
redundant. Instead, learning, for these students, occurred in the processes involved
in living away from home and adapting to a new culture for an extended period of
time. These accumulated experiences, I argued, resulted in students engaging in
‘tourist talk’. Using Bauman’s (1998) tourism thesis was beneficial for understanding
how travel has become seen as a coveted way of life for young people today. Linked to these travel identities, an interesting and unanticipated finding emerged from the data – whilst these students expressed desires and aspirations to continue travelling after their studies, their experiences during their semester abroad often re-affirmed and strengthened their feelings towards being British. This finding, I argued, provided further evidence that students were not particularly concerned with forging new political identities (for example feeling more European), but were instead interested in developing their own travel biographies – the freedom to ‘come and go’ as they pleased across the globe. This finding, I believe, presents a significant requirement to re-think the outcomes that mobility can create amongst young people. Whilst national governments have often treated new political identities as a welcomed outcome of mobility, as opposed to a motivation specifically for mobility, other organisations have treated it as a defining feature of mobility programmes. Mobility through the European Union (ERASMUS), as I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, was historically predicated on the belief that mobility would develop and foster a greater identification with the EU and its member states. Whilst stressing that many of the young people in this study did not travel under the ERASMUS programme, the findings from this strand of the project highlight that the outcomes of student mobility are highly individualised and based on self-interest. In other words, the students in this study did not feel attached to a wider political or ideological standpoint that centred on creating an international community. Instead, the only wider attachment these young people felt was towards travel itself. This is because travel, these young people felt, would provide them with a more rewarding and lucrative lifestyle for their future self even though they made little reference to what rewards there actually might be.

(7.2) Synthesis of the Chapters
Before moving onto discuss the policy recommendations that stem from the findings of this research project, it is worth synthesising the main findings I have discussed above to provide some new insights into this field.

Current policy portrays student mobility as an activity that increases employability through the accumulated skills a young person can develop during their time abroad. In addition to this, student mobility policy often focusses on the value mobile young people can bring to a, supposedly, highly globalised labour
market. And yet, as this study has shown, student motivations often seem to bypass these policy discourses. Instead, student motivations were framed more emotively, ‘...tied to an underlying feeling that they would be somehow ‘happier’ overseas’ (Waters et al., 2011: 464) by gaining new experiences in a foreign country. However, it could be argued that the young people who have the ability to form these adventurous desires, for example to dream about living abroad for a period of time abroad, is restricted to a certain elite who have the cultural competences to make these dreams a reality. By and large, students who take up credit mobility opportunities can be considered as a group of privileged young people. They are privileged specifically because their decisions to study abroad often stem from their accumulated previous experiences of being abroad, in addition to their choices being sanctioned by their families (not to mention that they are also studying for a degree in higher education).

When these young people arrive abroad then, they do so with a certain set of anticipations and expectations about what their experience might entail. Because studying or working abroad involves living for either a semester or whole year in another country, there is certain status that is attached to this type of travel – an ‘authentic’ way to experience the abroad. Of course, ‘authenticity’ is a concept that is steeped in classed discourses of travel. Authenticity, as the data has shown, is often discussed as a ‘correct’ way to fully experience another country. However, because the young people who tend to take up these opportunities are privileged, as I have discussed above, authenticity becomes used as a rationale to justify the various experiences accumulated throughout their stay. Whilst, as I have shown through the data, many of the key experiences that the students discussed were not too dissimilar to those a short-term tourist might discuss from their holiday, the extended duration of a credit mobility programme is used to legitimise those experiences as something of high value. And this is because ‘living’, instead of ‘visiting’ a country, offers the illusion of authenticity; the illusion that they are travelling in the ‘right’ way, collecting the ‘right’ types of experiences.

When students spend a semester or year accumulating new experiences through the tourist gaze, under the guise of authenticity, it is unsurprising that these young people often craved similar experiences through further travel when they had completed their studies. This establishes two interrelated areas of sociological significance: firstly, their desire for further travel highlights the reproductive nature of
student mobility as a classed activity. For example, because these were largely privileged young people who chose to study or work abroad, their experiences accumulated abroad become legitimised as ‘cultural learning’ when narrating their stories. This has connotations with the Grand Tours of the 17th-19th young gentlemen – no matter what happened on those ‘tours’, the experiences could always be placed under a banner of education and learning. This also highlights that studying and/or working abroad is a form of elective mobility and not forced-migration. The ‘tours’ that these young people (in this study) engage in often resembles expatriate lifestyles where mobility is characterised by the choice they have of where to travel to and the duration of their stay, not to mention their freedom of choice as to how they spend large amounts of their time. In this sense then, because value is attached by the dominant classes to elective forms of mobility, such as studying or working abroad, engaging in it reproduces distinction for those who undertake it. This is because choosing to live, study and/or work in another country is perhaps legitimised as possessing higher cultural value than spending a two week holiday in the country. This links back to Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) concept of the ‘cultural arbitrary’ because we can see the way in which one activity is legitimated by the dominant class as ‘better’ than the other. Therefore, because these students have gained experiences and, crucially, competences in the ‘right’ way to travel, their discussions of their future lives living and working abroad again (as many of these students did) demonstrates how their tourist talk becomes bound within classed discourses of travel. Whilst many of these students could have discussed how their future travel might be comprised of holidays with family and/or friends, not one student offered this view. Instead, they articulated how they would keep ‘travelling’, living in new places across the world. In this sense, credit mobility can be seen as a platform or springboard to a particular lifestyle that Bauman (1998) calls tourism. But the ability to choose to travel around the globe in pursuit of personal advantage, happiness (or both), it might be argued, will always be restricted to those who have the economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to do so. And this is mostly what this study found: young people who were making the decision to study abroad within the regularities and routines of their lives.

It is worth remembering here though a discussion had earlier in this chapter – that whilst HEIs largely remain reproductive, they can also be transformative for young people, compensating for where some students have lower levels of the three
forms of capital. For example, David’s story highlights how his university raised his three forms of capital. Firstly, as an ERASMUS student, there was not only an economic barrier to his mobility (he would only have to continue paying fees to his home HEI as per normal), but an economic incentive to travel to the Netherlands (he would receive an ERASMUS bursary over the year). Secondly, in terms of his cultural capital, his school trips to Germany and Iceland and his university field trip to New York (that played a big part in forming his desires) gave him a cultural competence to even just host the idea of living abroad initially. Lastly, in terms of his social capital, David specifically mentioned his friendship network at university, telling me how they would sit together discussing where and whether they should go. This small example of how HEIs can be transformative (and not solely reproductive) links well to my policy recommendations in the next section.

Before outlining these recommendations, it is worth concluding what I consider to be the key contributions to knowledge from this PhD research. Firstly, I have shown how choices are both enabled and restricted by the habitus of a young person. More specifically, I have demonstrated that Bourdieu’s (1992) concept of habitus is useful for understanding how young people make particular choices in their lives and how travel for education is legitimated as an advantageous activity. Secondly, I have contributed to the small amount of research that focusses on the experiences of mobile students abroad. Drawing on Urry’s (2002) concept of the tourist gaze, I have demonstrated how young people experience living and/or working abroad by outlining how they create an adventure. As I have shown, the tourist gaze provides a useful framework to analyse why seemingly small moments of the travel experience are actually integral for having an adventure abroad. Through this research, I have demonstrated that students are particularly motivated by romanticised visions and anticipations of these adventures. Lastly, I have contributed to our understanding of young people’s views towards international travel. In this research project, I have shown how elective forms of mobility, particularly working and/or ‘travelling abroad (for long periods of time) is coveted by these young people. This, I have outlined, can be seen as part of a movement where significant value is attached to living global lifestyles, or ‘tourism’ as Bauman (1996, 1998) calls it. Even if ‘tourism’, in the Bauman sense, is a myth – in other words, an over-exaggerated belief the ‘best’ lifestyles are pursued through mobility, these young people have bought into this ideology. For these students, their experiences
of mobility make a strong impact on developing their imaginations of what becomes possible in their future lives.

(7.3) Policy Recommendations

Before outlining my policy recommendations for student mobility, it is worthwhile to ask whether studying and/or working abroad during higher education is an activity still worth pursuing by universities. If the majority of young people who enter these programmes are disproportionately from middle-class backgrounds, there is certainly an argument for scaling back on mobility opportunities, if not cutting them out from university activities completely. This is because student mobility could be seen as something that is simply used by the middle-classes to secure distinction and advantage. However, whilst some sociologists might advocate the withdrawal of these programmes, the significance placed on internationalisation by universities to stay competitive (as I outlined in Chapter 1) makes it clear that student mobility will remain an integral part of their international agendas. If student mobility continues to play a key role in the internationalisation activities of universities then, it is worth exploring how to make mobility programmes more diverse across both student intake and range of university partners. I now examine each of these two areas in turn, offering both practical recommendations for universities whilst analysing their sociological significance.

One key area that policy makers already focus on is increasing the number of outwardly mobile students. Of course, international relations offices across all UK HEIs would tend to agree that increasing the number of students is ‘good for business’. However, as student mobility in the UK is largely dominated by middle-class students (as my study found), my recommendation would be to not focus on increasing the number of mobile students, but rather making existing mobility programmes more socio-economically diverse. If gaining a greater diversity of students into mobility programmes can be achieved, perhaps policy makers can then look to expanding the overall number of mobile students. Expanding mobility programmes without first addressing the diversity of students will only result in largely privileged students collecting cultural capital through their Grand Tours. And this would contribute, I believe, to a greater disparity between young people leaving higher education through establishing a growing mobile elite.
The idea though that mobility creates distinction also needs to be treated with caution because, to date, there is no conclusive evidence that suggests that mobility leads to personal advantage (‘better’ jobs or higher salaries) upon exit from higher education. Whilst many international relations offices offer some anecdotal evidence that this indeed does occur, sociologists, are cautious about making the inference that mobility leads to personal advantage. This is because, as my study and other studies before it have shown, students who enter mobility programmes are often from higher social-economic backgrounds. These students then are perhaps more likely to gain access to the ‘best’ jobs and salaries upon graduation, regardless of their mobility. Alternatively, though, it could be considered that their mobility experience feeds into a wider narrative of achievements that sets them up for future success. This raises further questions about the value of mobility programmes. However, due to the significance placed on student mobility within HE internationalisation, I now turn to discuss some of my recommendations for widening participation in mobility programmes, which, as I have argued above, should precede increasing the overall number of mobile students.

One way to expand and widen participation in mobility programmes is for universities to secure further funding to establish scholarships and bursaries that allow more students to study or work abroad. If universities are committed to expanding opportunities to a wider diversity of students from different socio-economic backgrounds, funding of these opportunities, even if only partially, will help address the economic barrier that (what I have termed) the ‘out-of-habitus’ students face when thinking about studying or working abroad. Of course, it could be suggested that fully-subsidised mobility opportunities could be offered to those students whose families have low household incomes. This, I argue, would expand opportunities beyond ERASMUS (where the programme is fully-subsidised) as students would not be faced with an economic barrier should they wish to travel outside of Europe. This would therefore give working-class students access to the same opportunities as their middle-class equivalents. Whilst fully-subsidised places on mobility programmes might help widen participation in mobility, there remains a question of whether these would be the best use of university funds. One way to expand subsidised places would be to make use of local, national and international employers that universities have relationships with. If student mobility is a highly-
valued activity to equip young people with ‘vital’ skills for entering knowledge
economies, employers could see this as a good investment for their future workforce.

However, to argue that the economic barrier for many students is the biggest
obstacle would be to ignore another significant issue that this study has revealed. As
I have argued, being able to imagine, or even host the idea of living and/or working
abroad, is often restricted to a certain group of students. Universities then, I would
argue, need to advertise and heavily promote mobility opportunities to students as
soon as they enter higher education. This is because, when students first arrive in
higher education, universities can capture their imagination at a time when they are
often exploring what their new life in higher education has to offer them. This is
where universities can develop new students’ horizons for action (e.g. what seems
possible in their lives). If universities can normalise international travel as students
enter higher education, they might simultaneously expand young people’s horizons
for action. And this could lead more students to think that travel is both feasible and
desirable in their lives. For this reason then, prospective mobility opportunity talks
should not just be optional, sent by way of open invitation. Instead, they should be
heavily publicised by departments in their induction programmes where students are
required to attend. By showcasing what opportunities are possible to their students,
HEI departments and/or schools can develop vistas of the abroad at a time when
students are already exploring what their new lives at university have to offer.
This recommendation chimes with David’s story analysed in previous chapters because it
focuses on the role HEIs can play in shaping students' ‘horizons for action’
(Hodkinson, 2008a, Hodkinson et al., 2012). Whilst universities should heavily
promote their mobility opportunities, the use of students who have either worked or
travelled abroad through student mobility programmes should also be used.
Although returning students are already used at many HEIs, I would suggest that
greater use of a diversity of students from different socio-economic backgrounds
would be beneficial. This would establish, in my opinion, a greater transparency to
prospective students that student mobility is not for a particular type of student and
that anyone, regardless of socio-economic background, has access to either study or
work abroad. This might create, even if on a small scale, more ‘turning points’ for
students in higher education.

The recommendations outlined above, however, do not, on their own, help to
expand mobility opportunities for students (from all socio-economic backgrounds)
who have, for example, caring responsibilities. Mature students might have young children which impacts on their ability to experience studying or working abroad for a period of time. Similarly, students of all ages might have familial caring responsibilities which, again, are likely to provide a barrier to mobility. Whilst short term mobility opportunities do currently exist in many HEIs, they are often in the form of summer-schools which, for students with young children for example, are problematic due to them taking place in the school summer holidays. One way to expand short-term mobility opportunities, and therefore increase the diversity of credit mobile students, might be to integrate a short mobility placement (e.g two-weeks) into modules that students are undertaking during one of their semesters at their home HEI. This would ensure that mobility could be completed during term time and, crucially, that some form of academic credit could be received for the short-term placement. This type of mobility opportunity might therefore attract students with caregiving responsibilities and give them choices that they perceive as being realistic and attractive to them. Incorporating these short-term mobility programmes would also simultaneously help to drive the internationalisation of higher education further. This is because module leaders could ‘twin’ their module with an international partner and then have a two-way mobility programme integrated within them. This would, I argue, foster international activities between HEIs (which is what HEIs strive for) as well opening up mobility opportunities to students from wider backgrounds.

Whilst the above recommendations might help to widen the appeal of studying abroad for mature students (and therefore increase the diversity of mobile students), caring commitments might still pose a big barrier to the feasibility of mobility. One way to address this would be to increase what some people have termed ‘internationalisation at home’. This means that, rather than focussing on internationalisation solely through outward mobility, universities can increase the range of international activities on their own campuses and in their curriculums. For example, universities could strive, as many do already, to increase the international content of their teaching in order to bring world issues into the classroom. Secondly, universities could take steps to increase international student groups comprised of people from different nationalities to meet and discuss, for example, world issues. Similarly, universities could also increase, and heavily publicise, the amount of international conferences on their own campuses (both in terms of content and delegates). This might allow mature students, who often live off campus, access to
international spaces without having to travel. These activities demonstrate that internationalisation can happen outside of student mobility.

My last policy recommendation focusses on diversifying the range of university partners. However, this should not be confused with increasing the number of university partners per se. As my data throughout this research project has shown, the destination wields a strong power over the imaginations of students considering studying or working abroad. If policy makers take this finding literally then, there is a risk that universities will largely form new partnerships with HEIs that will help to increase their overall number of outward students. For example, if students are largely motivated by imagined adventures in a popular destination, a good university strategy might include maximising their partners in locations such as North America and Australasia. However, this would continue to allow students to travel in quite circumscribed circuits (Brooks and Waters, 2009) around popular destinations. Secondly though, this might lead to reinforcing negative power relations between countries. For example, a UK institution partnering itself with predominantly North American and/or Australasian HEIs may lead to a sense of Western imperialism. This is because students would be more likely to choose largely West-to-West mobility because of the range of partners concentrated in these countries.

One way to diversify the range of partners for students to travel to could be achieved by Western HEIs being encouraged, and perhaps offered incentives, to partner themselves with developing nation HEIs at the departmental/faculty level. The rationale behind this recommendation is that, if you simply have a list long list of university-wide partners, the majority of students will gravitate towards the more popular destinations. This would result, as I mentioned above, in largely skewed numbers of students travelling to other Western institutions. However, if universities can develop partnerships with non-Western (or global South) institutions at the departmental/faculty level, these partners can develop a closer and more personal relationship. Teaching staff in the department might become more knowledgeable about the partnership and therefore be able to transfer this familiarity to the students. This knowledge and familiarity, over time, might make students more receptive to the idea of studying in a non-Western destination. This, I believe, is a good approach for developing mobility outside of conventional West-to-West mobility. However, even if this didn’t result in large numbers of students travelling to these destinations, the closer relationship at the departmental/faculty level might still increase, for example,
the international content of teaching sessions, teaching mobility and the possibility of conferences between the partners. In other words, there is a large opportunity to ‘internationalise at home’ through this approach.

In many ways, my two interrelated policy recommendations are aimed at diversifying participation in credit mobility programmes. If credit mobility programmes are going to retain a key place in the internationalisation agenda of higher education, my recommendations have outlined how universities can increase both the diversity of students taking up these opportunities and widening the types of destinations they can travel to. These two points, I believe, will create new possibilities within international higher education.

(7.4) Further Research
Whilst this research was not the first study of credit mobile students travelling worldwide, it was the first project that focussed exclusively on UK students’ motivations, experiences, and aspirations. Whilst I have now outlined the new contributions this study has made, it is worth finishing this chapter by exploring the significance of the findings for further research in this area. There are two key areas to build on in order to develop both sociological and policy understanding of mobile students.

Firstly, one of the weaknesses of this research project can be seen in the small time period in which the data was collected. For example, the data was collected when students had recently returned from their experiences abroad. When discussing the theme of further travel upon their return (the basis for discussion in Chapter 6) it could be argued that travel featured prominently in their lives because they had recently gained it as a significant experience. Therefore, more longitudinal data is needed to examine the ways in which these students think about their possible futures. One question here centres on the idea of whether aspirations for future travel grows or diminishes as the time from their mobility return grows longer. In other words, do desires for further travel remain with a student long-term or short-term? Also linked to a requirement for longitudinal data is an opportunity to explore, qualitatively, the lives of these students after they leave higher education. For example, what careers do these students go into? Where do they go on to live? And, again, how does travel feature (if at all) in their lives after university. Whilst many HEIs and policy actors (for example, Go International) often produce follow up
surveys for students who have undertaken a period abroad and exited higher education, these surveys often focus on, for example, the salaries of these young people, understandably in hope that they earn more on average than non-mobile students in order to strengthen their marketing campaigns. However, qualitative research in this area would help to gain a deeper sociological understanding of the decisions that these young people make in relation to various aspects of their lives and the extent to which they are related to their mobility during higher education. Research of this kind would therefore examine, through the narratives of these students, the way in which their study and/or work experience abroad has (or has not) contributed to not only what they are doing in their lives, but how they think about their place within the social world.

The second area of further research is topical in the current political climate: ‘mobility post-‘Brexit”. Exploring how Brexit might affect mobility opportunities can be explored through examining the views of both UK students and universities. In terms of students, research could focus on whether student demand for non-European destinations increases as a result of leaving the European Union. Similarly, this opens new areas of possible investigation. For example, if European countries become less popular as study/work destinations amongst students (although this is only hypothetical), what continents and countries might see an increase in applications? In other words, if UK students are squeezed out of Europe (through Brexit), where do they seek to go instead? Researching the impact of Brexit from HEI perspectives will also help to gain new insights into how Brexit affects the response of universities. For example, the strong possibility (at the time of writing) that the UK will leave the ERASMUS programme poses significant questions around how both the government and universities might address what could be considered a ‘funding crisis’ for students – without membership of ERASMUS, there will be no universally funded scheme for UK students. This leads on to other questions that can be explored: will the demand for credit mobility programmes amongst students decrease in light of these changes? And how might universities respond by maximising new partnerships in, and outside of, Europe? Similarly, when the UK does leave the European Union, how do students, who go to live, study and work in Europe, feel upon their return? The types of questions will be of benefit to both policy and sociological thinking because it will allow an examination of how students will be making choices in changing political landscapes.
(7.5) Final Reflections

Before concluding this thesis, it is worth reflecting on, and examining, a number of important areas raised at different points of the project. Firstly, in terms of methodological reflections, it could be argued that a quantitative approach could have provided a number of benefits to the project. If, for example, I had designed a survey before the qualitative interviews, this could have helped to discover important areas of mobility motivations and experiences that were statistically significant. Moreover, this approach could have developed the framing of the interview guide by being able to hone in on significant areas discovered through a larger sample of mobile students. Therefore, the use of quantitative and qualitative methods could have provided a complimentary approach to developing a deeper insight into the motivations, experiences and aspirations of credit mobile students. Additionally, through carrying out a survey with a larger number of respondents, I could have gained a greater insight into the diversity of social characteristics of credit mobile students. This, I argue, would have allowed me to refine with greater accuracy my sampling variables because I could have examined where variation in those variables was needed in order to enhance the framing of my student sample for the qualitative component of the project.

Another methodological reflection that needs to be acknowledged was my major mistake in forgetting to gain the data needed to analyse each participant’s social class. When reflecting on this mistake, I am met with contrasting emotions. On the one hand, it is, for lack of a better word, embarrassing to have made such a fundamental error in my PhD research. But on the other hand, I hold the view that, although we, as social researchers, are researchers, we are still human and therefore inevitably liable to make mistakes. Rightly and wrongly, human beings make mistakes and this, I would argue, was a mistake that occurred and one that I certainly learnt by. Apart from needing to state obvious (that I will never make that mistake again in my research), I certainly learnt a great lesson from this: whatever you do (or do not do!), you have to still have to get ‘on with the show’.

My mistake outlined above, in some respects though, can actually be seen through a positive lens. This is because, I believe, my failure to collect social class data resulted in me having to pay particular close attention to the narratives of students in order to build up a picture of their social class. In this respect, rather than
focussing on objective measurements of social class (e.g. parental occupation and parental educational attainment), I focussed on, primarily, discourses and articulations of biographical experiences. By developing this approach, this fed directly into some of my original findings. For example, a significant part of my findings focussed on how many these young people articulated student mobility as a ‘right’ way to do travel. Building on this, I discussed how the concept of authenticity was crucial to understand the motivations and experiences of students going abroad. What this demonstrates, I would argue, is that the concept of social class is often played out through the subject matter being discussed with participants. In other words, this was a study about a particular form of travel. Due to focussing on the narratives of students to gauge their social class, I actually found that their social classes were often illustrated through the way in which they talked about certain aspects of travel, such as authenticity or a perception of how to experience a new culture in the ‘right’ way. This, I believe, has wider implications for thinking about social class because it develops Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) argument around the cultural arbitrary. This is because I have shown that students, with their classed identities, appropriate certain ways of experiencing or acting abroad and then legitimate it as a correct or right way. Of course, in further research, this argument could be developed by exploring whether objective measurements of social class correlate with the subjective dimensions I have developed though this research. This would, I believe, develop our understanding of social class further.

The last reflection for this section concerns my own positionality in the research. In my auto/biographical motivations discussed in chapter 3, I focussed extensively on my classed background and how this might interact with the way I approached the subject matter. However, as I have approached the end of the project, I have also started to think about how my ethnic identity has also interacted in the research process. As a white male, studying a group of predominately white middle class students, who have travelled to predominantly white countries, the discussions I have had in this project are inevitably framed through a normative white lens. This has led me to think about new opportunities for research that moves away from this white normativity. For example, conducting a study on the experiences of young minority men and women in White countries might provide very different findings to the one I have presented through this research. A research
project of this nature would perhaps provide an informative insight for comparative purposes with the study I have completed for this PhD research.

(7.6) Concluding Thought
This research project has now addressed the ambition in its title: to explore “the motivations, experiences, and aspirations of UK students on short-term international mobility programmes”. Whilst my research has provided new insights into this area, I have also shown how choices, experiences and aspirations are rooted in structural forces that operate throughout society. Nevertheless, I have also shown how young people’s choices and agency can be enabled and shaped by new opportunities that are presented to them as they enter a new stage in their lives. I therefore hope that I have been successful in bringing the sociological imagination to this empirical area of research.
References


Association of Colleges (AoC) and British Council. (n.d.) *Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education*. UK Government Department for Business Innovation and Skills.


European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) (n.d.) *Why take part?*, Available at: https://erasmusplus.org.uk/why-take-part (Accessed 17 February 2017)


ERASMUS Phenomenon – Symbol of a New European Generation? Frankfurt: Peter Lang, pp.105-126


Appendix (A)

Interview Guide

Ethical Statements
Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form
Free to stop the interview at any time
Free to not answer or skip any questions
You will not be personally identifiable from the research

Opening question to all interviewees:

“…so tell me about why you chose to do a study/work placement/dual-degree [as appropriate to participant] abroad?”

Pre-Mobility
Educational Background
- From a state or fee-paying school?
- Academic qualifications
- Frequency/Amount of extra-curricular activities done at school and/or college

Family Background
- Any parents and/or siblings ever worked/lived abroad?
- Were family/peers supportive of decision to study abroad?
- If yes to above, how were they supportive?

Previous Mobility Experience
- Frequency of travel before mobility?
- Where? What places?
- Experiences of mobility prior to study abroad
  - With whom? i.e. travel with family/friends/school or college?
  - Stimulating for further travel?
  - Any influence in the decision to study abroad?

Motivations
- “…think back to when you were considering study abroad. What would you identify as your primary motivation or motivations for deciding to spend time abroad”

Destination of mobility
- Destination/Place of mobility important?
- If so, why was it important?
- To what extent did it play an important role in the initial decision making process?
- What was it about the place/destination that was attractive?

Destination Research
- How was destination/place researched?
  - Any prior experience with destination/place?
  - Family/Friends experience with that place?
  - Recommendations from friends/family?
  - Sources for research – i.e. internet sites, media images through film, T.V?

Cost of mobility
- Did the costs involved bear any impact on the decision to study abroad?
- Their means for financial support?

Ease of access to mobility
- Choice of HEI important for Study/Work Abroad Option?
- Levels of promoting study abroad within HEI
- Helpfulness of HEI in organising mobility
- Helpfulness of HEI upon returning
- HEI’s views of study abroad important for decision-making?

During Mobility
“…so tell me about your key experience(s) during your study abroad”

Adaptation
- Initial emotions upon arrival
- Did they feel ‘at home’ straight away (if at all) or more of a process?
- Integration with international and local students?
- Types of social activities engaged in (if any)?

Maintaining contact
- Frequency of contact with family/friends ‘back home’.
- Methods of contact (i.e. phone/video chat).
- Did the distance between ‘home’ and ‘destination’ affect the experience in any way?

Language (where applicable for individual interviewees)
- Prior experience of the language?
- Willingness to learn the language?
- Competence of language upon return

Post Mobility

Learning Transitions
- Was learning in another culture an important motivation before travel?
- Did your experiences abroad have an effect on your leaning when you returned?
- Study abroad beneficial for experiencing learning in other cultures?
- Experience of study abroad changed views towards education?
Employment Opportunities
- Experience useful for career prospects?
- Experience useful for job interviews?
- If so (for both above), how?
- “…how would you describe the benefits (if any) of study abroad to a prospective employer?”
- Type(s) of careers interested in?
- (If not covered above) … Would participant consider working abroad?

National/Global Identities
- Feelings towards nationality
- Has your time abroad had any impact on how you feel about Britain or being British? If so, please explain.
- Has your time abroad had any impact on how you feel about other countries? If so, please explain.
- Has your experience changed, in any way, your views towards travelling abroad?
- Duration of mobility, on reflection, too little/too much/or just right?
Appendix (B)

Participant Information Sheet (November 2013 V.1)

Introduction

My name is Alex Seal and I am a PhD Researcher in the Sociology Department at the University of Surrey. I would like to invite you to take part in a research project that contributes towards my doctoral thesis. The research explores the motivations and aspirations of UK students who decide to study abroad at some point during their undergraduate studies. Before you decide whether you wish to take part in the research, please take time to read the information here carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

To date, there has been little research with UK students who have decided to spend time abroad as part of their degree. Furthermore, there is no research that specifically focuses on comparing the experiences of students who have spent time abroad as part of a study programme, work-placement, or dual-degree. This study is attempting to gain the first in-depth understanding of the experiences, motivations, and aspirations of students who have participated in these types of mobility. Exploring these experiences will help understand how study abroad can impact things such as employment and learning for students in higher education. I am therefore looking to interview students who have spent time abroad as part of a study or work placement to talk about these issues.

Why have I been invited to take part in the study?

You have been invited to take part in the research because your decisions and experiences of study abroad are important for gaining the first understanding of why some UK students are choosing to travel abroad within their educational careers. There are no right or wrong answers – I am simply interested in listening to your views and exploring your motivations, experiences, and aspirations regarding your choice to study abroad.

Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to participate. There will be no adverse consequences in terms of your education. There will be no impact on your assessment or class of degree if you decide not to participate. You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

We can arrange a suitable date and time for the interview to be conducted. Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes. You will not have to travel for the interview. Interviews will be carried out on your own university campus at a public location such as a library study room, quiet café, or seminar room. Prior to the interview I will ask you to sign a consent form, confirming that you’re happy to take part in the research.
The interview will be digitally recorded (but only with your consent) and then transcribed to enable detailed analysis of your data. Should I refer to or quote from the interview directly in my thesis or other publications, I will ensure your identity or university is not disclosed.

**What will I have to do?**

If you would like to take part please contact Alex Seal (the researcher) expressing your interest/acceptance to be interviewed for the project.

Email: a.seal@surrey.ac.uk

or

Post:
Alexander Seal
Department of Sociology
University of Surrey
Guildford
GU2 7XH

**What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?**

It is extremely unlikely that the interviews will cause you any upset or distress. However, I would emphasise that you are free to not answer a question, to stop the interview or to withdraw from the research project at any time without reason.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

I hope and believe that, by learning more about the specific reasons UK students choose to spend time abroad as part of their degree, the research will aid and help future students in making informed choices in their decisions to study abroad. However, discussing your experiences may help you to further understand your own choice to study abroad. This could be beneficial for discussing and articulating your experiences for upcoming/future job interviews.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes. All of the information you give will be anonymised so that those reading reports from the research will not know who has contributed to it.

Data will be stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

**What happens when the research study stops?**

As mentioned at the beginning on this information sheet, this research is being carried out as part of a doctoral thesis. Therefore, the findings will be written into the thesis. However, the findings may also be used for book chapters, articles, and other publications. I would like to emphasise again though that your anonymity is of paramount importance and you will not be personally identifiable within any findings published. Additionally, a ‘summary of findings’
will be available at the end of the study. This can be sent to you via email, post, or both at your preference.

**What if I have any question or concerns?**

Should you have any further questions stemming from this information sheet, or any concerns throughout the course of the project, please contact me and I will endeavour to resolve these queries or concerns.

Email: a.seal@surrey.ac.uk

Telephone: 01483 68 6977

**Contact details of researcher and supervisor?**

Postal address: Alexander Seal, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, Guildford, GU2 7XH

Email: a.seal@surrey.ac.uk

Telephone: 01483 68 6977

The research is being supervised by Professor Rachel Brooks, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey:

Postal address: Professor Rachel Brooks, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, Guildford, GU2 7XH

Email: r.brooks@surrey.ac.uk

Telephone: 01483 68 6987

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is being funded by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). For more information on the HEA, please see their website or contact me.

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/

**Who has reviewed the project?**

The study has been reviewed and received a favourable opinion from the University of Surrey Ethics Committee.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.
Consent Form

- I, the undersigned, voluntarily agree to take part in the study on the impact of international student mobility on learning and transitions to employment.

- I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the investigator of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the information given as a result.

- I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers are held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Name of volunteer (BLOCK CAPITALS)  ..........................................................
Signed  ........................................
Date  ........................................

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS)  ..................................................
Signed  ..................................................
Date  ..................................................