This is not working: an ethnographic exploration of the symbolically violent nature of everyday unemployment and job searching practices

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An ethnographic exploration of the symbolically violent nature of everyday unemployment and job searching practices

By

Gaby Wolferink

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

February 2017

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The Human Abstract by William Blake (1794)

Pity would be no more,
If we did not make somebody Poor:
And Mercy no more could be,
If all were as happy as we;

And mutual fear brings peace;
Till the selfish loves increase.
Then Cruelty knits a snare,
And spreads his baits with care.

He sits down with holy fears,
And waters the ground with tears:
Then Humility takes its root
Underneath his foot.

Soon spreads the dismal shade
Of Mystery over his head;
And the Caterpillar and Fly,
Feed on the Mystery.

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,
Ruddy and sweet to eat;
And the Raven his nest has made
In its thickest shade.

The Gods of the earth and sea
Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree
But their search was all in vain:
There grows one in the Human Brain
Abstract

This thesis explores the everyday experiences with unemployment and job searching practices in a so-called 'work club' in Northern England. A work club is a place, often a community initiative, where jobseekers who are finding it difficult to look for work independently can go to for support and assistance. These initiatives are encouraged to be set up by volunteers by the UK Department for Work and Pensions and its Jobcentre Plus and are aimed at reducing unemployment levels by helping people apply for jobs. Specifically, the thesis focuses on contemporary job searching practices and asks what Banterby SC work club, the fictional name of the field work location, can tell us about how neoliberal ideologies influence both these job searching practices as well as the way we think about the relationship between employment and citizenship.

Work clubs have only received scant academic attention, and this study shows how more in-depth explorations can provide us with some valuable insights. Specifically, because doing so helps us to look beyond policy formulations, framings and imperatives to the implications of neoliberal ideologies in peoples’ everyday lives. The study uses an iterative inductive ethnographic approach, focusing on one single site field work location, encompassing two hundred hours of field work, during which at least 96 jobseekers have visited the premises of the work club. The study’s approach to doing ethnographic fieldwork was based on viewing participant observation as ‘hanging out’; that is, more than merely being somewhere, but rather as engaging and being active in an informal fashion, something that the flexible and unstructured nature of the field work location suited very well.

Through this ethnographic, in-depth exploration, then, I do not only explore the observations and findings as offered by some of the previous scholars exploring work clubs, but also seek to connect the findings to Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic power/violence as a theoretical framework, which allows us to explore the wider implications of neoliberal governmentalities imposed on jobseekers that influence their everyday practices.
This study extends not only our knowledge of the lived experiences of unemployment, but also provides a contemporary insight into work clubs, and how Banterby SC work club has proven to be a valuable site of knowledge about everyday experiences with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices. It also extends the application of a symbolic power/violence lens by bringing it together with Foucault’s neoliberal governmentalities. Specifically, the study argues that neoliberal governmentalities influencing job searching and unemployment practices are a form of symbolic violence. This approach helps us to problematise job searching practices at work clubs in order to argue for increased critical attention on these sites. Furthermore, the study uncovers the extent to which a welfare system gearing towards a digital by default administration disadvantages many jobseekers who are finding it difficult to work with computers and navigate the internet. The study also addresses and explores to what extent compliance with symbolic power/violence is also shared by staff and volunteers of third sector organisations whose main goal it is to alleviate the burden of unemployment by assisting jobseekers to fulfil their job searching obligations as asked of them by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Jobcentre Plus. Finally, the study calls for more beneficiary-centred voluntary sector research, and proposes a new methodological model for exploring voluntary action and organizations, arguing for a more integrated analysis of the experiences of various actors.
Dedication

I want to dedicate this thesis to the people of Banterby SC work club who have shared with me their stories, included me in their endless ‘banter’ and who have supported me all the way through the field work and beyond.

I also want to dedicate it to all the people whom I did not have the chance to meet, who feel that this story is also their story.
Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis is the result of not only my own commitment and love for the topic and people whom I have worked with, but also of the love, support and understanding that a lot of people have provided me with over the course of the years. Although it is impossible to name everyone individually, I would like to thank the following people and organisations.

First, I could not have completed this project without the help of my two amazing and dedicated supervisors, Dr Daniel Sage and Prof Karen O’Reilly. From the very beginning you were an amazingly knowledgeable team who complemented each other brilliantly. You have always made me feel like I was your only Ph.D. student, answering to any question within a matter of hours, even saying ‘sorry for the delay’ if it went past 4 hours! You have let me develop my own ideas without losing your critical edges, and overall have shown me how doing academic research can be a great experience. I had read the most dreadful horror stories about doing a Ph.D. with self-absorbed supervisors who did not even acknowledge their students most of the time. If anything, Dan and Karen, you have proven the absolute opposite is also possible. You have been amazing. Thanks for everything.

Second, of course, there is my amazing Banterby SC work club. To all my ‘Clubbers’ a heartfelt ‘thank you’ for all the moments we have shared; good and bad. I will always remember the great banter, which told me that you had truly accepted me as one of your own. I hope my thesis does you justice. ‘Jerry’ and ‘Laura’, you have been absolute stars
in welcoming me into your world for almost a year, and I am humbled by your support and trust in me; as a person, a volunteer and as a researcher.

I would love to thank my wonderful husband René for his constant belief in me, which I could tap into if I had lost faith in myself during this long process. Although I would like to think I have not changed into an unbearable monster, it must not have been easy to cope with me from time to time. Without your great listening and reassuring qualities, I would not have been able to produce this thesis.

Also, I would love to thank my parents, who have always been my number one supporters. Having supported me through the good and bad in my life, you did not stop believing in me for one second, even if I doubted myself. We might not see each other very often, but knowing that you believe in me and will always be there for me was one of the things that helped me through all the long hours of writing.

The Twitter group of Shut up and Write has proven to be invaluable for the development of this thesis, especially in the last few months. Mostly we think of social media as a distraction, but this Twitter group has shown it can also be the very opposite. Especially when you are working from home and have to rely on yourself every single day, this kind of digital support is the closest thing you can get to working in a close-knit office community. Thanks for support, funny intermezzos and well done on your own achievements during our time together.
Even though I have worked from home a lot, I would still like to thank my colleagues, peers, and members of my cohort in the department. We all had our own projects, and were mostly very much entrenched in our own little knowledge bubbles, but when it came to general support, it was always a delight to meet each other, both formally and informally. I’m not going to name you all individually, as I will forget people, but you know who you are.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the South Yorkshire Community Foundation for introducing me to a variety of community organisations, including Banterby SC work club. Although it proved to be difficult to get together on a regular basis, and although my project focus has changed a lot since we first met, the thesis as it is now would never have been possible without your help.

And last but not least, I want to thank my 2nd year Undergraduate Course Adviser, who told me that, at the age of (then) 25, I would be ‘far too old to be accepted into a Ph.D. programme’, and ‘that I had to be realistic’. If anything, this did not discourage, but rather encourage me to pursue this dream of mine. Thanks for the extra bit of motivation!
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<td>CC</td>
<td>Claimant Commitment</td>
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<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<td>ESA</td>
<td>Employment Support Allowance</td>
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<td>ICTs</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
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<td>Jobcentre Plus</td>
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<td>VSC</td>
<td>Volunteering for Stronger Communities (programme)</td>
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<td>VSO</td>
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Chapter One. Introduction: Trying to make things work

1.1 Introduction

But what about all those people who just refuse to work? Who are just sleeping it off every morning and do everything they can to stay on benefits? Surely that is why the sanction system and Jobcentres exist and we should keep pushing those people to work and do their part, shouldn’t we?

(Reflexive writings, undated)

The question above is one of the questions that I have been asked a lot over the course of the previous years by friends, family and acquaintances when talking about my research. It showed to me how deeply rooted the image of the ‘stereotypical welfare recipient’ or unemployed individual is not only within UK society, but also in the Netherlands, where a lot of my friends and family are from. Unemployment and welfare receipts are topics that have been and are continued to be discussed in abundance. Often, politicians, echoed by the media, talk of employment and unemployment in connection to peoples’ attitudes, they connect it to ideas of success and failure, grit and idleness, deserving and undeserving people (Patrick, 2012b). These dualisms point to the existence of stereotypes of unemployment, and inform welfare policies that seek to steer peoples’ attitudes towards accepting that the epitome of citizenship is being in paid employment. Ultimately, these dualisms lead to the obscuring of what goes on in the realm of unemployment and job searching by providing a ready-made narrative. The actual stories behind the people who are living with unemployment remain hidden behind the “prejudiced depictions of benefit scroungers in tabloid stories and popular television programmes that dwell on the ‘titillating sins of the underclass’” (Shildrick et al., 2012b: 2), because it is implied that people need not look further than the provided dualistic narratives.

The ethnographic research reported in this thesis examines a group of people who, despite their individual differences, have one thing in common: they are all trying to make
things work. Empirically, the aim of this thesis is to gain an insight into the everyday lives of people who are living with unemployment and are frequenting what is called a ‘work club’, a place where unemployed individuals can go to ask for help with their job searching efforts. Specifically, I am interested in contemporary job searching practices and ask what work clubs can tell us about how neoliberal ideologies influence both these job searching practices as well as the way we think about the relationship between work and citizenship. In this research project I use the definition of neoliberalism as proposed by David Harvey (2005), who states that:

[neoliberalism is] a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the State is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices … [a role that] is to be kept at a bare minimum [leading to, amongst other effects.] withdrawal of the State from many areas of social provision (Harvey, 2005: 2-3, my emphasis).

In short, this means that the role of the third sector, including community groups such as work clubs, is becoming more important in helping individuals to deal with any socio-economic problems that they may encounter. Although I will explore this shift in responsibility from State to individuals, often coming together in community groups, in more detail in Chapter Two, it is important to note here that the success of neoliberalism lies in its ability to “enable [people] to believe that they can protect themselves from poverty and dependency through their own efforts, and therefore have a sense of security in an insecure world” (Valentine and Harris, 2014: 91).

My project is mostly based on participant observation in a work club, and is being supported by reflexive writings, reflecting on my own involvement as a volunteer in this work club. The purpose of this first chapter is to introduce the research project, to explain its rationale and to provide a guide to the structure of the thesis. First, I discuss the historical background of the work club, which provides the reader with a clearer idea of
what a work club is, after which I situate the current study within other research focusing on work clubs, foreshadowing the specific direction that this study takes. Secondly, I discuss how the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) understands and promotes the development of work clubs, as well as some core expectations that are placed upon them. After this, I proceed to introduce the work club that is central in this research project: Banterby SC\(^1\) work club. The final sections of this chapter set out the rationale for research setting and topic selection, after which an overview of the remaining chapters will be provided.

### 1.2 Work clubs: background and current research

Work clubs have, so far, only received scant attention in academic research, even though their origins can be traced to academia, as I will explain. A work club is a kind of ‘job search intervention’ (Liu et al., 2014), and is based on the American Job Club programme as developed by behavioural psychologists Azrin, Flores and Kaplan (1975). This standardised programme considered job counselling as “a learning experience which should be taught in a structured manner until the job was obtained” (Azrin et al., 1975: 18). Key starting-points for their Job Club programme were introducing job searching as a full-time commitment, and the structured group nature of the process, where people were expected to help not only themselves but others as well. This made the Job Club programme a highly structured and participatory initiative where discussion and sharing experiences to help each other to become more self-sufficient were paramount. As Azrin explained in 2002:

> The process of job-finding is viewed as a chain of responses from the initial step of identifying a possible job lead, each of the steps being taught and supervised in the Job Club session, rehearsed, and actually put into practice under the supervision of the Job Club instructor. Also included are modelling (imitation), self-recording of each of the job searching behaviours, progress charting, and “homework” assignments for out-of-session behaviours. The same rationale

\(^1\) This is a fictional name as to protect the privacy of my research participants to the best of my ability.
governs the conduct of the Job Club instructor analogous to that of the therapist in behaviour therapy; specifically, the Job Club instructor constantly reinforces the jobseeker using descriptive praise that designates the specific behaviour being praised. The instructor is always positive, praises any action in the direction of the final goal of obtaining a job, never criticises, and directs attention to future constructive actions rather than past difficulties (Azrin, 2002).

The first Job Club programme (1975) was supported by the local State Department of Mental Health, and was created to see whether continuously guided and positive support to change certain job searching patterns and behaviours could lead to people obtaining jobs. In other words, the Job Club programme was a method, and the Job Club instructor (in the first initiatives a professional paid employee, there was no mention of volunteers) a tool, to conduct the conduct of jobseekers; to shape their behaviour into accepting and acting upon responsibilities like a ‘good citizen’ would do. Referring back to Harvey (2005), this looks like a first step towards neoliberalisation of society and jobseekers. Although the Job Club programme was financially supported by the State, initially, something that within neoliberal ideology is something that should be avoided when possible, its aims were to create citizens that were able to act independently within the free market and free trade, by remaining or becoming financially independent through employment, which in turn leads to a decrease in welfare support necessity. This ‘conduct of conduct’ is what Foucault (1991) terms as governmentality:

… which is at once internal and external to the State, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the State and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the State can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality (Foucault, 1991: 103).

In other words, foreshadowing what will be discussed in Chapter Two, the implementation of the Job Club programme by the State can be considered a tactic of neoliberal governmentality because it ensures that its clients adhere to the responsibilities that are
set for unemployed individuals by the State, which is that they are obliged to regain paid employment as soon as possible. I will talk about governmentalities in more detail in Chapter Two.

The Job Club programme was launched in 1975 as part of an academic research project. It was deemed a success with 90 percent of the participants finding full-time employment, even though it was situated in a rural setting. This led the authors to conclude that it would be even more successful in urban areas where more employment opportunities could be found. Notably, excluded from participation in this study were people who were receiving unemployment payments (i.e. benefits), since according to the authors “their motivation was often low” (Azrin et al., 1975: 26).

Building on Azrin, Flores and Kaplan’s 1970s programme, some scholars have sought to explore further the potential and outcomes of the Job Club programme, including Azrin himself, revisiting the subject some years later (Azrin and Philip, 1979; Azrin et al., 1980; 1981). In these follow up studies they focused on disabled jobseekers (Azrin and Philip, 1979) and welfare recipients (Azrin et al., 1980; 1981). From these studies, they concluded that the set-up they devised was effective, with more people entering employment and fewer people being dependent on welfare benefits after taking part. Nearly two decades later, Sterrett (1998) linked self-efficacy theory² (cf. Bandura, 1977) to the Job Club methodology, and confirmed the Job Club methodology to be effective for enhancing welfare recipients’ (the research participants’) job searching self-efficacy after running his own Job Club experiment. However, this self-efficacy was very much dependent on the participants remaining in the Job Club setting, and many of them expressed to the researcher after the project had come to a conclusion that it did not affect their self-esteem, and that they doubted “their ability to be independent if their support was suddenly stopped” (Sterrett, 1998: 76), which in a way takes away from the

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² Self-efficacy theory, proposed by Bandura (1977) is concerned with predicting whether or not a person will be successful in completing a certain task and how psychological exercises could be used to influence this by enhancing a person’s self-efficacy, which in short is their belief in themselves to be able to complete a certain task.
conclusion that the Job Club methodology (overall) boosts self-efficacy. The set-up of the study was, at least to me, highly questionable, with participants being specifically selected for and obliged by federal mandate to participate in this five-week ‘job searching intervention’, offering a total of 30 hours of support after which results were collected using a questionnaire filled out by the participant. Although it is argued that all the participants had obtained employment after, or even during (n=2) participation in the job club, no details are available as to what kind of employment they had obtained, ultimately indicating nothing about whether they had secured permanent or long-term, well-waged employment that would indeed improve their financial situation.

After another considerable gap in Job Club programme research in academia, Kondo (2009) qualitatively explored the benefits of the Job Club approach for executive jobseekers, comparing two groups of five jobseekers each, where one group attended a job club (“clubbers”), and one group did not (“soloists”). The study was based on data collected through interviews, analysed inductively. Arguing that many career counsellors consider the Job Club to focus on “career searches of lower income workers”, Kondo states that the Job Club set up might be an overlooked initiative that could be beneficial to “executive-level clients” (2009: 29). Indeed, his findings suggested that ‘Clubbers’, as he designated them, felt they enjoyed the benefits of the Job Club in helping them change their approach to job searching by sharing experiences and learning to “view the job search as the gradual process of building an ever-widening network of contacts” (2009: 36), echoing the original set-up. Although his study focuses on a similar age group as the current study does, the big difference is found its clientele, who were after jobs that were not, as we will see in section 1.5, slowly disappearing due to the deindustrialisation of society. This thesis focuses on those people whose jobs are decreasing in number.

In a more recent, ethnographic study, Van Oort (2015) worked with two different organisations based on the Job Club programme which both had the intention of creating “flexible, productive, and disciplined jobseekers” (Van Oort, 2015: 1) in an attempt to help them succeed in their job searching efforts. By approaching these initiatives ethnographically, she argued that it was adding “… additional texture to the
understandings of another side of joblessness, that of contemporary welfare” (Van Oort, 2015: 14). A thought and approach that I share and wish to continue. Her field work organisations were both set-up professionally with multiple paid staff to lead them, focused mainly on middle-class audiences having more professional or executive job histories; both were highly structured with ‘elevator pitches’ (a short statement or description of a product or service that the person pitching can offer, in this case their skills and expertise to an employer) and group sessions, in which clients shared experiences and were encouraged to help each other, forming the basis of the weekly meetings. Constructing her argument, she used the theories of, among others, Foucault and Wacquant. Her overall argument is that in their attempt to create well-trained jobseekers, these organisations contribute to maintaining class differences and are even actively constructing what she terms as a neoliberal precariat, “socialising jobseekers into a world of precarious employment” by “teaching participants how to remain marketable and assume the costs of employability” (Van Oort, 2015: 14). In other words, by promoting and instilling in people the idea that self-responsibility and self-marketing are key in finding employment, these organisations are advancing neoliberal ideologies that situate the ideal citizen as an independent seller of themselves. Relating her arguments to discourses of contemporary capitalism she argues that her two fieldwork organisations have demonstrated “the enduring power differential between potential workers and employers” (Van Oort, 2015: 15). This is the first link made between neoliberalism and work clubs in the literature that addresses the workings of work clubs, which is an important link to make. Why this is the case will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two when I explore neoliberal ideology in more depth. Overall, Van Oort’s approach to study work clubs ethnographically has shown promise, as it allowed her to uncover certain power relations at a more everyday level that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. This thesis advances this study by conducting a similar approach to a work club that is different in two ways. First, it features a UK-based work club, and second, it features a different kind of work club: a flexible, unstructured work club as opposed to Van Oort’s highly structured job clubs. I will explain more about what I mean by flexible, unstructured work clubs in section 1.4.3. The most recent study, and the only UK-based study, exploring something similar to the
Job Club programme is Crisp’s (2015). In this study, despite not referring to the original concept by Azrin and his colleagues, he explores a network of work clubs set up in a city in the North of England in the light of policy reforms. In the UK, Job Clubs have been designated the name ‘work clubs’, which is the term that I will return to using from now on. The study draws upon data collected from 30 interviews across 10 work club initiatives: 14 work club participants, 12 work club staff members and four ‘stakeholders’ including Jobcentre Plus (JCP) staff, and staff from a local authority and a social housing provider. Comparing work clubs to State-led and monitored initiatives such as the JCP, interviews showed, according to Crisp, that “the rationalities and practices [of work clubs] were distinct from mainstream welfare-to-work provision in three main ways: the lack of a ‘work-first’ approach, their non-mandatory nature and their capacity to engage with vulnerable groups” (Crisp, 2015: 7). In other words, many of the initiatives did not constantly push people to look for work ‘no matter what’, did not require nor keep attendance, and (therefore) could welcome vulnerable people who might have been scared away by aspects of the highly-structured nature of DWP/JCP job seeking practices.

Still, despite these distinctive features and, especially the deviation from the ‘work-first’ approach, some work clubs from Crisp’s (2015) study emphasised that their main goal was to get people (back) into employment. The study also found that many work clubs in the sample were keen on achieving what they termed ‘soft outcomes’, especially when the clientele of the work clubs consisted mainly of vulnerable people; important outcomes for these work clubs were “… reducing social isolation and providing support and advocacy around non-work issues such as housing and benefits” (Crisp, 2015: 8). These forms of ‘holistic support’ are the kind of things that work clubs can bring to their localities, and in a way, can be considered a positive outcome. However, Crisp has also identified some very real limitations to what work clubs can achieve, as the work club “does not scale up to something which can in any significant way reduce aggregate levels of worklessness” (Crisp, 2015: 13). In other words, upscaling initiatives such as work clubs

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3 What is noteworthy here is that Crisp considers third-party involvement as ‘stakeholders’, implying that the clients and work clubs themselves are not considered ‘stakeholders’.
does not have a substantive effect on the underlying structural problems that are at the core of the work club’s existence. More specifically, he argues, the expectations placed on them originate from ‘supply side logic’, which means “… reframing the problem of worklessness as an individual problem caused by a lack of employability rather than a structural condition explained by a lack of employment” (Crisp, 2015: 7). Ultimately, Crisp argues, work clubs can be seen as a ‘flanking measure’, which does very “little to expose or challenge the wider political economy of liberalism and the spatially uneven outcomes it generates” (Crisp, 2015: 13). By applying Van Oort’s ethnographic approach to study a UK-based work club, I argue how looking closer at work clubs can show us the limits of neoliberalism, and that by studying everyday practices in work clubs we might be able to find ways to challenge the embeddedness of neoliberalism. In other words, if work clubs at first sight do not expose the inequalities at play here, because their existence denies the existence of structural problems situated outside the jobseeker, I argue that more systematic, rigorous and careful research into their everyday workings can do so.

As this overview shows there is a very limited body of research exploring the organisation and social significance of work clubs in recent academic debate. Additionally, in the research studies that have been conducted, there has been a strong focus on work club initiatives that follow the highly-structured template as proposed by Azrin and his colleagues, with research questions being limited to quantitative measurements of employment success. In the two most recent explorations of work clubs, Van Oort and Crisp have started to approach the phenomenon more qualitatively by connecting work clubs and their workings to wider socio-political issues. However, there are three key issues that are missing from these studies that this research project will address. First, this research project draws attention to a type of work club which differs markedly from the original, highly structured Job Club programme which up until now has been central to all known studies involving work clubs. Banterby SC is what I define as a ‘flexible, unstructured work club’, where jobseekers can ask for support on a walk-in basis, without any official registration and commitments. This deviance from the ‘original’, I argue, is a reaction to this highly structured nature, also found in the Jobcentre Plus, which, for many jobseekers, feels impersonal and threatening. I will elaborate on the specifics of this
flexible, unstructured nature in section 1.4.3. Secondly, this research project employs an ethnographic, participant observation method which up until now has not been applied to research UK-based work clubs. This approach aims to reveal the everyday obstacles that everyday jobseekers are facing and come to light in the work club, and to connect them to ideas of, among others, neoliberal governmentalities and self-responsibility. Thirdly, building on the ethnographic approach, this study utilises reflexive writings by the researcher, who volunteered in the research setting during the field work period, to explore shared experiences between work club volunteers and unemployed job searchers. This is a valuable addition, as normally, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, most volunteer initiatives and studies centre on the development and impact of third sector work on the volunteers themselves, rather than focusing on its impact on those they are supporting. If State agencies such as the Department for Work and Pensions paid greater attention to these shared experiences they could start to understand the limitations and outcomes of volunteer-orientated employment support initiatives, such as work clubs.

The novelty of my approach lies in its aim to explore work clubs focusing on the everyday practices and experiences of unemployment and job searching that they host. I am doing so by using elements from both Van Oort and Crisp, combining their differences in a more detailed study of a UK work club that looks beyond policy formulations, framings and imperatives. This ethnographic, in-depth exploration, then, not only aims to explore the (interesting but limited) findings as offered by Crisp, but also seeks to connect the findings to wider theory. Specifically, adding to Van Oort’s study building on Foucault, this study adds a Bourdieusian framework, introduced in full detail in Chapter Three, that allows us to study those everyday experiences and enables us to look beyond policy framings.

First, however, before introducing the research setting that will be the background to this in-depth exploration of the work club concept, the next section will discuss in more detail how the Department for Work and Pensions, understands and promotes the development of work clubs, as well as some core expectations that are placed upon them.
1.3 Work Clubs and Contemporary Politics

Despite the emphasis on work clubs as a response to unemployment, looking into the way the DWP advertises work clubs, it is not hard to see that its strategies and expectations are following the Azrin (1975) method, regardless of whether they have explicitly based their concept on the Job Club method or not⁴. Like the original concept, the DWP’s work clubs are focusing on highly structured and professional sessions, despite the DWP mentioning that individual work clubs should be tailored to fit the needs of the communities they are trying to help (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). On its leaflet’s front cover (see image 1.1, and Appendix A for the full flyer) a diverse group of smartly dressed and happy looking people are portrayed sitting behind a table while a man, smartly dressed with a shirt and tie, appears to be leading a shared session:


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⁴ As the DWP did not respond to requests to elaborate on their promotion of work clubs, it is unclear whether and if so how they relate their idea of the work club to the Azrin method.
This cover provides an image of work clubs as focused on formalized group activities for people who are seemingly looking for white-collar jobs with a smile and confidence, who enjoy being at the work club and share with each other their positive outlook on obtaining employment. This professional and positive portrayal of a work club not only mirrors the original Job Club programme where “… the instructor is always positive, praises any action in the direction of the final goal of obtaining a job, never criticises, and directs attention to future constructive actions rather than past difficulties” (Azrin, 2002). It also aligns with the message that the flyer conveys through its textual content, with suggestions on how to start up a work club, including structured circle sessions, where jobseekers share their experiences and advice with each other, and workshops. The leaflet also identifies the main reasons for setting up a work club in similar terms:

Why should I set one up? You would be helping local people find work and could have a really positive impact on their lives and others by helping your local community to become more prosperous. By giving up as little as a couple of hours a week you could help people work towards financial independence by building their confidence and increasing their chances of getting a job (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a: 2).

In the light of this thesis, the contents of this flyer are interpreted as aimed at encouraging working people to help other people to become like them, to make them feel good about themselves and increase their chances of getting a job so that they can become ‘strivers’ instead of ‘skivers’. There is a clear focus on independence and confidence, which, implicitly, the work club’s prospective clients are assumed to be lacking, and which in turn is supposedly the main reason that they are currently unemployed. In other words, the way work clubs are being advertised to potential volunteers who might start a work club places the blame of being unemployed on the individual as it implies that the jobs are there, and it is only the skills of individuals standing in their way of obtaining the jobs. Work clubs, then, are expected to:
…use local knowledge and resources to help unemployed people in their communities. They provide a place to meet and exchange skills, find opportunities, make contacts, share experiences and receive support to help them return to work (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013c).

Despite this rather inclusive and positive sounding description, the practicalities of setting up and running work clubs are much more complex, as the DWP does nothing more than providing those who want to set up one with some basic information and advice; funding for both material and human resources should be sought outside the State. The rationale behind such thinking will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Ultimately, these work clubs were put forward “against a backdrop of public sector funding cuts and welfare reforms that have radically reshaped the landscape of worklessness provision, especially at the local level” (Crisp, 2015: 4), leaving established work clubs to fight two wars: scramble for resources in times of austerity and working with and around welfare reforms that justify or require their existence. In reality, this means that work clubs are, to name but a few examples, short on staff and volunteers, are often struggling with finding a location that is suitable to host job searching practices, and are, because of all of this and further tightening of welfare reforms (see Chapter Two) struggling to cope with the number of people needing help.

Now that we understand the kind of work club the DWP promotes, and the expectations that are placed upon them, the following sections introduce the work club that is central to this study: Banterby SC work club. The sections provide a concise overview of the set-up of the work club and the organisation that runs it and some first (ethnographic) impressions to set the scene before introducing the people who worked and volunteered at Banterby SC work club and defining this work club as one that deviates from the standard, highly structured work club template that is promoted by the DWP.
1.4 Introducing Banterby SC work club

The thesis was originally positioned as a response to the Big Society agenda pursued by David Cameron between 2010 and 2015 in which the former Prime Minister argued that it was through volunteering that UK society could become stronger and more unified. The starting point for my thesis was to understand whether and how voluntary organisations were contributing to building stronger communities from the perspective of the beneficiaries of those voluntary initiatives, something that still resonates in its exploration of the work club as a place that, per the DWP, should contribute to building these stronger communities. Over the course of the development of the research project, I became interested in organisations that dealt with issues of unemployment. I contacted my gatekeeper, a local community foundation and funding body that had agreed to mediate access within voluntary and community initiatives for me (more information in Chapter Four), and asked whether they knew of any organisation that dealt with these issues specifically. They introduced me to a local Community Sports Trust connected to a large sports club which I will refer to as Banterby Sports Club (Banterby SC), who were running a work club, even though at that point I did not know, firstly, what to expect, and secondly, what exactly I wanted to explore about employment/unemployment except that I was interested in the role of volunteering in social change. Nevertheless, given that the area in which Banterby SC Sports Trust was operating is dealing with high levels of unemployment (as further explored in section 1.6 in this chapter), my main intellectual concern was with finding out how in this area people and community organisations were dealing with this situation.

The CEO of Banterby SC Community Sports Trust said that their organisation, like many others of its kind, uses sport and the image of the Banterby SC to promote community development and well-being. Their work is divided up into three main areas: education, health and well-being, and sport and community development. To paraphrase their own words, but maintaining their anonymity, it is through the ‘power of sports’ that they promote physical and emotional health, healthy eating, healthy lifestyle, learning, confidence building, social integration and community cohesion. Their main focus is on
getting children from deprived communities in the local area to engage in sports, to help develop themselves, and to offer them chances that they otherwise might not be able to get. These chances range from playing a sport for free for the younger children, to offering sports education and training schemes that can help them develop themselves in either the sporting world or any other future they might want to envision for themselves.

Banterby SC work club is only one of the few initiatives run by the Community Sports Trust that is mainly targeted at adults, although young people are welcome as well; indeed, anyone who needs help finding a job is welcome to use its services and facilities. The work club operated from two locations. The first was the Sports Club’s main facility, where the Community Sports Trust rented a room that was during those sessions only available to jobseekers. About 20 laptops were provided by the Community Sports Trust, along with a printer to print off CVs, cover letters and other documents. The second location was a community library in one of Banterby’s surrounding villages, Coalthorpe (also a fictional name). Here the work club made use of the available computers, a small fee (amount unknown) was paid to the library. Banterby SC holds no relation to, nor receives any support from the DWP or local Jobcentre Plus, apart from the latter regularly referring people to the work club for advice. The following section describes my first encounter with the main facility of Banterby SC.

1.4.1 My first impressions of Banterby SC work club

I made my first visit on there to meet with the staff and to see where I would probably be spending a lot of time over the upcoming year. My first impressions of the main location were as follows:

The large building looks modern, and has some great office and conference spaces in the central section above the reception area. It’s windy there, the large building works as some kind of amplifier I think; it’s always windy. There are lounges for executives looking out on the pitch, a large staircase leading up to them, and all over the place there are pictures showing great moments from both
fans and players during games. It looks really nice, and you get the idea that the club respects its fans as much as it does its players. Without fans, there is no club.

I had been there once before, for a running race starting from the stadium, but I had never been in the players’ lounge, where the work club is held. It is at the far left of the business section on the first floor and doesn’t look out over the pitch. It’s quite dark and secluded even, but perhaps that is what players want after spending a night out on the pitch. There is a long row of tables placed against one wall, where there are also a lot of sockets, for the laptop plugs. On a regular day, there are about 10 laptops set up. On the other side of the room there are three sofas for people to relax, and a large round table for coffee and tea making. There’s a cup in the middle where everyone is asked to chip in a few pennies to buy the milk, sugar, instant coffee and tea bags - ‘whatever you can miss’. So, whether it’s 20p or a pound you chip in, all is fine.

The sofas are also used for introductory talks with staff. People are offered something to drink when they come in, and are asked to sit down comfortably away from the laptops and just have a comfortable talk with them. It makes the whole setting almost homely, and nothing like an official course or something that is/feels obligatory. A lot of the people seem to feel at home there, either I guess, because it is this sports club they are supporting and/or because it is such a secluded area, I guess. The only people who come in during the session are the people who specifically come there for Banterby SC work club so the people don’t feel watched or judged. All in all, it is an ideal location for this kind of thing, in the middle of the community, accessible and at the same time secluded and safe, because apart from the occasional conference/session being held in one of the other lounges (they rent it out for events) there is no one there but the clients and staff/volunteers.

My overall first impressions were very positive, and the welcoming atmosphere described above was key in the development of this research project. The open and relaxed nature, along with the almost homely setting created by the coffee corner and the sofas were
important in fostering not only a secure and trusted atmosphere for the clients, but also allowed for many everyday practices and obstacles of job searching to become visible, be discussed and, thus, to be observed. Over the course of the research process my first impressions have not changed much, and rather were confirmed with each session I attended and helped at afterwards. It was a welcoming and open setting for anyone who found their way to the players' lounge. It was this welcoming and open setting, and the stories of the clients and staff that I had met and would meet, that I decided to base my doctoral research. In order to paint a clear picture of the set-up of the work club, the next section introduces the people who were and still are responsible for running Banterby SC work club or in one way or another supporting the work club.

1.4.2 The people of Banterby SC work club

Key to this thesis, of course, are the clients of Banterby SC work club. Banterby SC work club mainly caters for low- and unskilled unemployed people in a marginalised community where precarious work is the norm and people are looking for blue-collar jobs, which contrasts to the seemingly white-collar clientele on the DWP flyer posted on their website and distributed in Jobcentres (Prosser, 2015). This was not intentional and people of all walks of life and with various career histories are welcome and have frequented Banterby SC work club, but most clients encountering problems with contemporary job searching procedures tended to be those with lower skill levels. I will explore the reasons behind this in more detail in Chapters Five and Six.

Although this thesis will emphasise on a lot of obstacles that these clients were facing, painting quite a bleak picture of the situation these people are in, it should be highlighted that the clients of Banterby SC make up a complex, very diverse group of people, with a lot of different skills, histories and difficulties. In the thesis, they will often be referred to

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5 Precarious work being defined as “employment involving contractual insecurity; weakened employment security for permanent workers in non-standard contractual forms such as temporary agency, fixed-term, zero-hour and undeclared work are all included in this definition” (Prosser, 2015: 2).
as people who are low-educated and low-skilled, but this is not to say that the skills they have, and the knowledge they possess are insignificant. On the contrary, even though on paper many of them have worked in manual jobs, and often have no track record of formal education beyond secondary school, the majority of the people that I have met over the course of my time there were proud of (and good at) what they had done in the past, and passionate to continue their lines of work, especially those who had worked in the steel and coal mining industries in the area. The largest obstacle they face, as this thesis will show, is that the skills that they do have are disappearing and are less valued in a deindustrialising society (see section 1.5 for more information) than the skills that they do not have. Overall, the group of regulars that had formed over the course of the work club’s existence was a group of warm, welcoming people, who shared in their frustrations about not being able to find employment, but always tried to make the best of things, and to use humour rather than anger to deal with disappointments. A table with background information on the clients of Banterby SC work club will follow in Chapter Four.

When I started volunteering at Banterby SC work club, there were two people who were there on a (paid) contract basis: Jerry and Laura. The work club is led by Jerry. Jerry started his working life with the Armed Forces, and after his service he started working in steel works. After he had been made redundant in the early 1990s he retrained himself as an (un)employment adviser, providing training and advice to people who were long-term unemployed, ultimately landing a regional managing position at a national trade union initiative. Over the course of the years Jerry gained a myriad of professional qualifications related to training and support, and can be considered an expert on the unemployment situation in the area where Banterby SC work club operates. He is very passionate about helping people who find it difficult to deal with all the effects of unemployment, as he has been in this situation himself on several occasions. He was recruited to lead the work club three-and-a-half years ago, and has been working there ever since. The hours fluctuate every year depending on the amount of funding the Community Sports Trust can secure, from various sources, including the South Yorkshire Community Foundation who functioned as a gatekeeper for this project, to pay for the

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6 All the names used in this thesis are anonymised as to ensure the privacy of my research participants.
resources as well as the rent of the location.
Laura is a digital support worker who worked for a third sector organisation that sent its staff to work with smaller community initiatives such as Banterby SC work club. Laura also has a history in providing various kinds of training for people who wanted or had to switch careers, but over the course of the years she decided to focus mainly on digital support, teaching people how to use basic applications and how to navigate the internet. However, on the first day that we met, she mentioned that her contract with her primary employer was under threat, and that there would be a significant chance that she herself would be looking for work soon. Her predictions came true, and three months into my field work period her contract with the employer that seconded her to the work club was terminated. Because she enjoyed working at Banterby SC work club, she decided to stay on as a volunteer until she found a new job. She stayed on as a volunteer for another month before she had to leave, as her new job did not allow her time to volunteer with the work club alongside it.

Another person who worked there on a regular basis was Barry. I cannot go in too much detail for privacy reasons, but he works as a careers adviser at a national organisation that focuses on education and training and provides practical support to the local communities and community groups. He keeps the same working hours as the work club, but schedules separate appointments and has his own clientele. By partnering with Banterby SC work club he could not only share the room, but could also encourage his clients from outside the work club to take part in the work club, as well as helping people who initially came for the work club by giving them advice on specific training courses.

Jerry, Laura, and Barry had a significant amount of experience between them working with unemployed individuals. Even though Barry was working mainly on an appointment-based schedule, each of them valued the flexible nature of Banterby SC work club, and Barry tried to accommodate this as much as possible by helping as much as he could with people who would drop in for the work club. This meant that Banterby SC work club deviated from the ‘ideal-type’, structured work club that is promoted by the DWP in its flyers. In the next section I will discuss how exactly it deviates, and define the work club.
as a ‘flexible, unstructured work club’.

### 1.4.3 Banterby SC as a ‘flexible, unstructured work club’

Clients find their way to Banterby SC work club via a variety of ways, including word of mouth, flyers in public libraries and staff at the Jobcentre Plus (JCP) making people aware of the work club’s existence. The trademark of Banterby SC work club is that it is a ‘flexible unstructured work club’. As explained above, the initial philosophy behind the Job Club programme as developed by Azrin and his colleagues (1975) was that the programme would offer a highly structured environment, something that is, in a lot of ways, echoed in the way the DWP promotes the contemporary work club (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). The DWP’s work club recommendations do not follow the mandatory, intensive nature of the original programme, which required jobseekers to be present 5 days a week for two weeks, only excused when they have obtained an interview (or of course, when they have obtained a job). Still, the DWP suggests and encourages work clubs to focus around group learning and sharing, guided by a work club leader who makes sure that the sessions are structured, and everybody participates actively by interacting with one another. Although there are initiatives such as the work clubs run by Christians Against Poverty (CAP) that do maintain highly-structured sessions, what I found at Banterby SC work club was a highly flexible and unstructured initiative catering to the needs of people who feel judged and rushed by the approach of the Jobcentre Plus. This research project found that a work club that is based on a flexible, unstructured and informal walk-in set-up provides a safe haven for those who feel mistreated and misunderstood by the official institutions. This flexible set-up means people can come and go as they please when they needed help, and are under no obligation to talk about the details of their situation with anybody unless they want to.

Although this thesis focuses on one specific work club, I have explored similar work clubs and/or tried to gain access to them for additional fieldwork locations; this proved to be more difficult than expected. This was because not every work club was organised by a well-organised organisation such as Banterby SC Community Sports Trust. One work
club, organised by a community centre, stopped replying to my emails as the initiative they wanted to set up for young people did not go ahead, and another one did not grant me permission to write about my observations as it was a council-led initiative and were afraid the research might be critical of their practices. Nevertheless, I have been able to observe similarities between the various initiatives. In fact, all the initiatives that I have identified and to some extent observed from a distance appeared to have the same walk-in set-up as the work club that I have been working with, attracting clients with similar questions and facing similar obstacles. Mostly, they offer a go-to place for people who are experiencing difficulties finding employment on their own, and are often struggling with the expectations that the DWP and its Jobcentre Plus (JCP) have of them. People attending these work clubs do not have to participate in various group activities as with Van Oort’s (2015) study discussed above. They are welcome to bring their CVs, but if they are unable to make one themselves, staff and volunteers are there to help them to create one.

This flexible, unstructured work club has received no attention at all in previous academic research, at least not specifically. Yet, it does exist and it does try to provide valuable assistance that many jobseekers, apparently, feel they cannot get from anywhere else. It is, as this research will show, in this flexible, unstructured work club that the more everyday, unstructured, practices of job searching and unemployment can be observed, thus requiring an approach that can forefront those everyday experiences: ethnography. In the next section I talk more about the rationale for the flexible, unstructured work club as my research setting.

1.5 Rationale for the Topic Selection and Research Setting and Location

Initially, upon arranging access for the field work, I had not set out to specifically explore work clubs or work club volunteering. Rather, I was interested in voluntary action in general within the South Yorkshire area, and, using an inductive approach (see Chapter Four), I would refrain from formulating specific research questions until the field work would guide me to important issues worthy of further research. Ultimately, using this
approach, Banterby SC work club was selected as the only research site as well as a topic of this doctoral research project for both personal and professional reasons. Personally, I felt that, after joining the Banterby SC work club as a volunteer, I wanted to work with the stories of the people that I had met and that I would continue to meet over the course of my field work year. I had become personally invested in the work club as a volunteer, which not only led to a change in methodology, which I will explore in more detail in Chapter Four, but also to a change in research focus. My initial idea was to explore multiple voluntary organisations across the region or even country to conduct a comparative study, however I found that in doing so I would minimise the impact that I could have myself while conducting my research. If I were to only stay for a few weeks before moving on to the next organisation, I would not be able to volunteer and support while doing my research instead of aiming for my research and thesis to do so afterwards. I will talk about this in more detail in Chapter Four.

Professionally, I found that, firstly, as discussed above, there was a considerable gap in work club research wherein work club practices in the UK had received only limited attention, and flexible, unstructured work clubs such as Banterby SC work club were completely ignored in exploring job searching practices. Secondly, Banterby SC work club appeared to be a suitable location to establish myself as a qualitative researcher interested in social policy and welfare reforms.

As mentioned above, I discovered Banterby SC work club and contacted them through a local funding body which functioned as my gatekeeper, about which I will talk more in Chapter Four. The reason I contacted this local funding body, or more specifically, a funding body in this locality, however, is also important to elaborate on.

The choice to make South Yorkshire the location for my study was twofold. The first reason is that, as a former coal mining area, South Yorkshire is dealing with high deprivation levels; this has sparked a lot of voluntary action in the region to deliver its regeneration after the closing of the coal mines in the 1980s and early 1990s. The second is my personal relationship with the county, as it is where I live myself, just outside
Barnsley. Being able to support people and organisations that help people in my own local area was something that I find very important. Also, as I wanted to do a longer-term ethnographic study, which is demanding in terms of resources such as time, money, as well as emotions, I felt it would be ideal to seek out opportunities within my own locality.

South Yorkshire as a metropolitan county was established on 1 April 1974 after the passing of the Local Government Act 1972, and is part of the Yorkshire and Humber region of the United Kingdom. It comprises four metropolitan boroughs: Barnsley, Doncaster, Sheffield and Rotherham (see image 1.2 for overview).

Image 1.2. South Yorkshire.

South Yorkshire currently has just over 1.3 million inhabitants, of which 688,550 are part of the labour supply, which is the amount of people who are of working age. Out of this labour supply, 10.5% (72,200 individuals) are considered to be unemployed, which is higher than the national average of 7.2% (Office for National Statistics, 2013). A recent report on the current state of the former coalfields across England, Scotland and Wales shows that indeed Yorkshire and the Humber along with the other former coalfields, cannot provide the jobs needed to decrease unemployment:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Number of jobs in area per 100 residents of working age, 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GB Average</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Derbyshire</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Derbyshire/NW Leicestershire</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Warwickshire</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Staffordshire</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottinghamshire</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Cumbria</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fife</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffordshire</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lothian</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Wales</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayrshire/Lanarkshire</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalfield Average</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.1: National Job Density focused on former coal mining regions.** (Foden et al., 2014: 18)

As can be seen, although Yorkshire is not at the bottom of these statistics, 55 available jobs for every 100 residents of working age does show that the chances on finding a job within the locality is far from easy and straightforward, and the job density is far below the national average of 67 jobs per 100 inhabitants. It is of no surprise, then, that people who are better qualified move to areas where jobs are available, resulting in selective
emigration, leaving behind a residency having a low level of qualification. On average, 38% of the England and Wales coalfield inhabitants holds either no qualifications at all (20%) or an NVQ level 1 at the most (18%) (Foden et al., 2014: 21).

South Yorkshire has a strong mining history and mining was one of the principle occupations of the people living in this area. Coal mining not only provided jobs, but it also provided professional identity, in turn constructing a profession based community. Like in other places of the country, the closure of the collieries in the 1980s and 1990s has had a massive economic impact on, for example, the borough of Barnsley:

… hit by the virtual disappearance of a mining industry on which much of Barnsley’s 19th and 20th century development was founded, and prominent on the borough’s coat of arms, it has taken time for structural change to take place. The closure of local pits one after another and the knock-on effect on suppliers and shop-keepers was a massive psychological blow to communities built on hard graft and local solidarity (Around Town Online, 2005).

People, especially men working in the mines, were used to working in hard, but relatively secure, manual, work. After the closing of the mines in the 1980s and 1990s, it was not only the local economy that suffered, but also the community’s occupation-based identity. It is said that the area’s “mining history is long gone” (Around Town Online, 2007), with the last mine closing in 1992 (Jarvis MP, 2012) but even now, 25 years later, nostalgic sentiments remain. Old mine winding wheel memorials can be found in almost every village and the new Experience Barnsley museum collection and exhibition, for example, keeps (re)telling stories of how Barnsley became to be what it is now thanks to its industrial past (Experience Barnsley Museum, 2014).

Of course, as we have seen, South Yorkshire is not the only part of the UK that is still dealing with the effects of deindustrialisation, and is faced with high numbers of unemployed people lacking significant educational qualifications. As shown in table 1, there is not one former coal mining region where the job density equals the national
average, paralleling the experiences of areas with similarly declining industries such as the steel industry (Potts and Mistry, 2015). Ultimately, to summarise, it was the combination of proximity to the researcher, available resources to conduct the research project and the locality’s socio-economic background and developments that made South Yorkshire a good place to conduct a research project focusing on the everyday effects of neoliberal ideologies and unemployment.

So far, this chapter has provided an introduction to the concept of the work club as a place where we can explore the effects of neoliberal ideologies regarding unemployment and job searching on peoples’ everyday lives. It started by exploring its historical background which provided the reader with a clearer image of what exactly it is that work clubs do, or rather, are expected to do. This was followed by a review of the literature focusing on work clubs, ranging from the 1970s, when Azrin, Flores and Kaplan (1975) created the Job Club programme, up until the most recent studies by Van Oort (2015) and Crisp (2015). In doing so, I have highlighted that work clubs have only received scant academic attention, and argued that more in-depth explorations can provide us with some valuable insights. Specifically, I argue that doing so helps us to look beyond policy, and instead focus on the implications of neoliberal ideologies on peoples’ everyday lives. Through this ethnographic, in-depth exploration, then, I do not only aim to explore the observations and findings as offered by Crisp and Van Oort, but also seek to connect my findings to Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic power/violence as a theoretical framework, which allows us to explore the wider implications of neoliberal governmentalities imposed on jobseekers and work club staff and volunteers, influencing their everyday practices. This helps us to explore the complexities of unemployment and volunteering to support unemployed people in a way that interviews (Crisp) and the single use of Foucauldian governmentalities alone (Van Oort), I argue, cannot. The concept of symbolic power/violence will be introduced in Chapter Three.

As a backdrop for this in-depth, ethnographic exploration, Banterby SC work club was introduced in detail, including a description of the organisation and staff responsible for running the work club, some initial impressions to set the scene, and an explanation of
how and why Banterby SC deviates from the ‘ideal-type’ structured work club promoted by the DWP, and defined Banterby SC work club as a flexible, unstructured work club. This was followed by a detailed rationale for the topic selection, explaining the focus on topic of the work club, and a rationale for the research setting, elaborating on why South Yorkshire was deemed a suitable location to search for a field work location. The next, and final section of this chapter provides an overview of the remaining chapters in this thesis.

1.6 Organisation of the Thesis

The remainder of the thesis is structured into seven chapters, as follows:

In the next chapter, Chapter Two, research and thinking related to unemployment and job searching in a neoliberal society are discussed. Neoliberal governmentalities are considered in the way they are affecting general views on work and how these, in turn, influence social and public policies. The chapter starts with an elaboration of neoliberalism discussing its history and how politics, over time, has been de-socialised. This is followed by a discussion that relates the idea, or rather illusion, of freedom, as an incentive offered by those in power to be able to govern citizens. The chapter then turns to discussing neoliberal governmentalities. It discusses how governments control and govern the population in ways that go beyond well-defined policies, but ultimately do influence and strengthen their implementation, one of which is the creation and promotion of a negative stereotypical welfare recipient. This introduction of a ‘stereotypical welfare recipient’ leads the chapter into an exploration of more work and employment-related concepts, such as the work ethic and a related ideal-type citizen who is self-responsible and able to operate independently without State support. After this, relating to citizens being considered responsible for ‘fixing a broken Britain’, the chapter discusses the (perceived) role of the voluntary sector, starting with exploring some key discussions, but ultimately focusing on the relationship between volunteering and unemployment, identifying a gap in the literature. The chapter concludes with an introduction and justification of the main research question and sub-questions.
Chapter Three introduces the theoretical framework developed to explore the everyday impact of neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching. This chapter focuses on Bourdieu’s idea of symbolic power/violence, starting by considering everyday job searching practices as both meaningful and meaningless rituals. Bourdieu’s thinking is positioned to help understand the everyday interactions between the social and political constructs introduced in chapters One and Two. Building towards this idea of symbolic power/violence, the chapter proceeds to explore how some other Bourdieusian concepts (doxa, field, habitus and capital) are key to understanding how symbolic power/violence can be developed. Turning our focus to how symbolic violence can be justified and maintained, the chapter explores the concepts of the ‘punitive State’ and the dualism of ‘deserving’/’undeserving’ poor. The chapter then discusses some other studies that have used a Bourdieusian symbolic power/violence lens to study everyday experiences, and concludes with arguing why this lens is useful in studying unemployment and job searching practices.

Chapter Four, the methodology chapter, begins with explaining why an ethnographic approach is suitable for finding answers to the research questions introduced in Chapter Two using a Bourdieusian symbolic power/violence lens. It then continues to discuss the theoretical foundations on which this study is based. The chapter elaborates on the access and sampling strategy, already mentioned in Chapter One, and introduces Participant Observation as the main means of collecting empirical data. It also discusses some implications of doing this kind of ethnography in a ‘politically sensitive environment’, where research participants’ activities are related to sensitive political policies. The chapter then introduces the value of reflexivity in the current study in relation to positionality before continuing with an exploration of how the researcher decided to act in relation to her research participants. Furthermore, attention is being paid to the two more formal, in-depth interviews that were conducted with key participants, and specific attention is given to the process and experiences of ‘exiting the field’, which proved to have a significant effect on both the researcher and the research output. The chapter concludes with discussing the ethical considerations, focusing on potentially vulnerable clients, and providing more information about data collection and analysis.
The following three chapters, chapters Five, Six and Seven, provide and discuss the empirical data, and each is centred around one of the sub questions introduced in Chapter Two.

**Chapter Five** is centred on the research question “*What can flexible, unstructured work clubs tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities towards unemployment and job searching practices in everyday UK society?*” Bringing together observations with the concepts and theories from chapters Two and Three, focus is placed on a discussion of the performance of job searching, and the performance of the work ethic. The chapter starts with exploring how jobseekers experience the daily pressure to apply for jobs in order for them to keep their Jobseekers Allowance/benefits. It discusses how strictly monitoring and placing high expectations on, for example, the amount of jobs that jobseekers’ have to apply for, is mostly harmful for them because of the lack of acknowledgement of structural problems that jobseekers are facing, including an overall lack of jobs, the low-pay, no-pay cycle, their age and potential disadvantages and difficulties individuals might be facing.

**Chapter Six** is centred on the research question “*How does the digital nature of job searching as observed in Banterby SC work club fit in with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?*”, and problematises the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in three ways: firstly by considering them practical obstacles to finding employment, secondly by problematising their implications for surveillance and monitoring purposes, and finally, by problematising the role of work club staff and volunteers who are, effectively, taking ownership of work club clients’ job searching administration.

**Chapter Seven** is centred on the research question “*What can the shared everyday experiences of unemployment and job searching of both work club clients and staff tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?*” Based mainly on reflexive journal and notebook entries, supported by data collected from two interviews, this chapter explores how experiences of work club
staff and volunteer supports those of the work club clients. It explores feelings of shared hopelessness and feeling powerless and what these feelings say about the expectations placed on work clubs by the State, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Jobcentre Plus.

Chapter Eight, the concluding chapter, completes the thesis by drawing together the empirics from chapters Five, Six and Seven with the conceptual and theoretical framework provided in Chapters Two and Three. It does so by clearly highlighting the key elements that together give us a possible answer to the main research question. It starts with restating the research problem, after which its key contributions are presented. Specifically, this chapter illustrates how this study extends our knowledge of work clubs, and how Banterby SC work club proves to be a valuable site of knowledge about everyday experiences with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices. It also extends application of a symbolic power/violence lens into a new domain, and, as such, demonstrates the symbolically violent nature of these neoliberal governmentalities, which in itself is a contribution, as within work club research Bourdieu and Foucault have not yet been brought together to explore the extent to which welfare policies are impacting and harming jobseekers’ lives. Also, it discusses the problematic nature of a digital by default welfare administration for people who do not feel comfortable using computers and the internet. Furthermore, the study argues for a more beneficiary-centred voluntary sector research, and proposes a new methodological model for exploring voluntary action, arguing for a more integrated analysis of experiences of various stakeholders with a focus on the lived experiences of the recipients of voluntary action. Considering the potential impact that volunteers and voluntary organisations may or may not have, the chapter argues that Banterby SC work club found itself at the centre of a moral-instrumental dilemma, where it had to consider a short-term/long term trade-off between what it wanted to accomplish and what they were actually able to accomplish. The chapter then proposes some avenues for further research. The chapter, and thesis, conclude, with some final thoughts on the overall experience of volunteering with Banterby SC work club and writing up the thesis.
To conclude this chapter, I should say a bit more about the main title of the thesis. Overall, despite the wonderful and welcoming atmosphere that Banterby SC work club offered, the most persistent thing that was constantly lingering at the back of my head, going through all these feelings and experiences and trying to make sense of them, was ‘This is not working… is it?’ This led me to the main title of the thesis, ‘This is not working’.

This phrase is the summary of, and an interpretation of my experiences as a volunteer in the field, and not a conclusion based on something that I consider a ‘true’ record of events. It has an ambiguous meaning. The first points at, as mentioned above, my experience that the work club as a means to get people (back) into employment was not working. The second refers to the ethnographic nature of the thesis, the stories behind the job searching, showing what ‘not working’ is like ‘behind the scenes’. The constructs and theories that are introduced in the following two chapters were drawn together inductively when looking for ways to explore and explain the way my clients told me how they felt they were being treated as criminals and were compelled to perform the work ethic on a daily basis to prove they were not ‘scroungers’ (Chapter Five). They were drawn upon to help me interpret and analyse the feelings of anxiety towards computers that the clients expressed, and the unfairness I felt when thinking about how the digital nature of job searching was seeming to do more harm than good to the clients I was trying to support (Chapter Six). Ultimately, they helped me to make sense of the feelings of powerlessness I felt as a volunteer, realising that instead of helping to alleviate the burden of those I was supporting, I was rather just performing volunteering. Indeed, my role felt like merely helping people to perform the job searching ritual in order for them to avoid being sanctioned, rather than actually finding them employment opportunities (Chapter Seven).

All of this means that my study features an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995), as I wanted to know more about my experiences of volunteering at one single site: Banterby SC work club. An intrinsic case study finds its roots in an intrinsic interest in the subject, to explore that particular case on its own merit without (necessarily) wanting to address or generalise a problem. It is undertaken, Stake (1995) argues, “… not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about
that particular case” (Stake, 1995: 3). This does not mean that we cannot become interested in more general problems, or problems that could be generalised, but the main goal is to learn more about one particular case. Because of this approach, I did not start with a set research question, as an instrumental case study would do, where Banterby SC work club would have been identified as a suitable site for field work because of certain characteristics. Rather, the field site in itself was interesting, I had become personally involved with its practices, and the observations and experiences led to the formulation of research questions (Chapter Two). These questions would allow me to make sense of not only the things my clients told me about their experiences and feelings, but also my own experiences and my reflections on both sets of experiences.

The thesis’ main contribution to knowledge, therefore, is a suggestion of why things might not be working out in Banterby SC work club, a suggestion of the origins and causes of the feelings and emotions experienced by clients, staff, and myself as a volunteer. Things, that perhaps, but not conclusively or necessarily, could be explored on a larger, more general scale. Still, even if those feelings and experiences cannot be generalized outside the scope of this study (although future studies might enable such generalizations), that does not mean that they do not ‘count’, nor that they are ‘not important’ or ‘insignificant’. It describes how alternative versions of the lives of people on unemployment benefits can be uncovered and explored, and to elaborate on the intrinsic nature of this thesis, the clients of Banterby SC work club and the way they feel are important to me, and that is enough to warrant a closer examination of what makes them feel so powerless and hopeless.
Chapter Two. Framing Work Club Research: Creating 'the problem of unemployment'

2.1 Introduction

After exploring the idea of the work club and recognising its, so far, limited analysis in academia, it is important to seek out which key debates can help us to deepen our understanding of work clubs in the UK, and specifically those work clubs that are flexible and unstructured. This chapter provides the background information for this research project, and identifies the necessity for a new perspective on and detailed exploration of work clubs.

If we want to know more about why work clubs exist and what kind of role they play and can play in the lives of those who are looking for work, we have to know more about how we understand work, unemployment and how community initiatives and volunteering are being related to unemployment. How, for example, do political and social attitudes to work and unemployment shape the expectations of work club initiatives and their role in developing and supporting neoliberal job searching practices; where do these expectations come from, and are these expectations realistic?

In theoretically framing this empirical study exploring the work club as a space where neoliberal governmentalities towards unemployment and job searching practices and the everyday experience of them can be observed, it is only logical to start conceptualising these spaces by reviewing the current political climate in which the work club is operating. Therefore, the purpose of this literature review chapter is mainly to set the scene. It will explore key political influences that shape and surround the current work/unemployment discourse, and map the existing literature dealing with those themes that we can use in framing and exploring work clubs. Outlining what we know about the current political climate and how they have come about enables us to observe how the idea of the work club furthers a mind-set in which unemployment is an unacceptable period in someone’s life, regardless of the circumstances.
As discussed in Chapter One, neoliberalism is key to understanding how work clubs are expected to function, and how they are expected to address and alleviate unemployment levels across the country. The next section starts to explore neoliberalism by looking at its predecessors and development.

2.2 Governing society: from socialisation to the de-socialisation of politics

The following short historical summary looks at some general changes that can be observed when looking at the way ‘the social’ has been embedded in or separated from government and governing over the past two centuries. Of primary interest are the ways in which individual citizens are governed in relation to self-sufficiency and their status as members of the work force. Genealogical analysis of the ‘problem of governing society’ has been developed by Dean (2008) who starts with general European 17th, 18th and 19th century attitudes towards matters of security in relation to the nation-state. Dean (2008) states that “the security of the State depended on securing the quasi-natural and necessary processes of civil society, including those of commerce and industry, the economy, the population and so forth”; in this view, he continued, security was “often regarded as more fundamental than liberty, often [merged] with it, and, at the very least, bound to it in reciprocal relationships” (Dean, 2008: 28). This meant, in other words, that securing the nation-state revolved around its citizens and civil society (considered as individual citizens forming communities through mutual interests and other forms of association) who were expected and needed to act in support of this nation-state, as one, before they could enjoy the freedoms that would come with that. Ultimately, this made security mainly “a matter of defeating internal enemies” (Dean, 2008: 29) – people who defied the viability and prosperity of the nation-state and were because of this considered to be a threat to the nation-state’s welfare. These people were mostly considered those who did not contribute to society financially through work and taxation. These thoughts align with what we term ‘classical liberalism’ with its unconditional trust in a superior market, and distrust for an ever-failing government:
Dedicated to the protection of private property and the legal enforcements of contracts, classical liberals argued that the ‘invisible hand’ of the market ensured the most efficient and effective allocation of resources while facilitating peaceful commercial intercourse among nations (Steger and Roy, 2010: 3).

Within such reasoning, people could and should use the market to enhance their financial situation (and contribution) instead of depending on the State for support. In fact, they argued that “bad economic times always reflected some form of ‘government failure’ – usually too much State interference resulting in distorted price signals” (Steger and Roy, 2010: 3).

The first half of the 20th century saw, as a reaction to this view on the availability of State support and the State’s role in securing people’s well-being, the development of a ‘social domain’ and a ‘social way of governing’ that “combined collective responsibility and individual compensation for the ills or risks of the industrial economy” (Dean, 2008: 30). The wake of Great Depression of the 1920s saw the rise of ‘Keynesianism’, named after John Maynard Keynes. He called for a new ‘egalitarian liberalism’ and, without denying the importance of the market, argued that the State has a significant responsibility to its citizens, advocating “massive government spending in times of economic crisis to create new jobs and lift consumer spending” (Steger and Roy, 2010: 6). Keynesianism spread across the global North, and saw national Governments increasingly controlling the financial wellbeing of both citizens and the country itself. What is known as the Welfare State was developed by raising taxes for the rich to finance social support for those who needed it.

To summarize, the rise of the Welfare State can be associated with at least three important developments in approaches to governance:

1. Legislative discourses simultaneously addressing the regulation of working hours as well as working conditions, the establishment of public health care, and the introduction of benefits based on age, illness/disability and unemployment.
2. A realisation that the liberal political economy, previously thought to be able to
provide for all if people would only take responsibility and work had limits in providing a stable and prosperous life for all.

3. Establishment of a more elaborate and active focus on matters of social, educational, medical and philanthropic issues, as well as growing feminism and working-class organisation (e.g. trade unions, Labour party). (Dean, 2008)

The social revolution instigated by Keynes saw “spectacular economic growth rates, high wages, low inflation, and unprecedented levels of material wellbeing and social security” in the thirty years after the Second World War, only coming to a halt in the 1970s, with another economic crisis that did major damage to the country’s unemployment rates (Steger and Roy, 2010: 9). This economic crash, like the Great Depression, appeared a good time for diverging thinkers to put forward their ideas, and this time there were people calling to revive ‘classical liberalism’, causing the birth of ‘neoliberalism’.

The first wave of neoliberal policy-making took hold in the 1980s and was spear headed by US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who lent their names to respectively ‘Reaganomics’ and ‘Thatcherism’ as the US and UK versions of neoliberalism. As for the latter, the Prime Minister, following a de-socialisation ideology, sought to shift responsibility for individual well-being back from the State to the individual, and considered the Welfare State to be at the centre of economic instability and failure. Specifically, she argued that “well-trained and highly skilled workers would be easily employable while those with limited or outmoded skills would find themselves left behind” (Steger and Roy, 2010: 43). Over the following decades these views on self-responsibility, which I will talk more about in section 2.10, became increasingly widely accepted. The following section explores in more detail how ‘neoliberalism’ is understood.

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7 Reaganomics and Thatcherism both had different characteristics, specifically in their priorities/core beliefs, which mirrored each other. A concise overview of these differences can be found in, for example, Steger and Roy’s Neoliberalism. A very short introduction (2010: 25).
2.3 Neoliberalism

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand “I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!” or “I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!” “I am homeless, the Government must house me!” and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society?

There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people must look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour (Thatcher, 1987).

It is in these words, spoken by Margaret Thatcher in 1987 that we can recognise a template for how the DWP envisioned work clubs to be; as places where people are encouraged to start “helping local people find work and could have a really positive impact on their lives and others by helping your local community to become more prosperous” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). It is these words that are also regarded to be one of the “most infamous examples of general neo-liberal rationality” (Dean, 2010: 177, my emphasis). Dean (2010: 177) argues that in such a rationality, wherein it is said ‘there is no such thing as society’, “a certain relation between citizens as individuals and in their associations, society as incarnated in the national State” is rejected (Dean, 2010: 177). In other words, in such discourse the Government’s role in taking care of individuals who struggle is rejected, and instead it should be other individuals, who together make up society, who should be made and feel responsible to help their fellow citizens. What then is this ‘neoliberal rationality’ or ideology and where does it come from?

Providing a clear and concise definition of neoliberalism is problematic because of its highly complex nature, and is not, as argued by Anderson (2015), a catch-all designator for contemporary capitalism. Some argue that above all, in all its complexity, it is nothing
shy of a strategy widening the gap between rich and poor in ways that are not seldom obscured; a view that is omni-present in contemporary academic explorations of neoliberalism (Ferguson, 2010). Indeed, as Saad-Filho and Johnston (2005) put it:

… [neoliberalism] straddles a wide range of social, political and economic phenomena at different levels of complexity. Some of these are highly abstract … while others are relatively concrete. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to recognise the beast when it trespasses into new territories, tramples upon the poor, undermines rights and entitlements, and defeats resistance, through a combination of domestic political, economic, legal, ideological and media pressures, backed up by international blackmail and military force if necessary (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2005: 1-2).

This might paint a somewhat dramatic picture, but in their bluntness and almost theatrical vocabulary Saad-Filho and Johnston succeed in making their point clear: neoliberalism is a mixture of outspoken and obscured tactics. These tactics are omnipresent and put back people who were already at a disadvantage, including those who are struggling economically such as unemployed individuals. Therefore, neoliberalism is perhaps best understood as a multi-faceted concept. Within this research project I follow the definition of neoliberalism as stated by David Harvey (2005):

[neoliberalism is] a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the State is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices … [but] is to be kept at a bare minimum [leading to, amongst other effects,] withdrawal of the State from many areas of social provision. (Harvey, 2005: 2-3, my emphasis)

It is in the de-socialisation of politics as discussed in the previous section, pushing for and facilitating the "hegemony of the individualised ethic of self-interest" (Valentine and Harris,
that we can start to explore central questions about how work clubs are expected to operate and what sort of job searching practices they are expected to support and develop. Especially so if, as argued by Valentine and Harris (2014), “discourses of individualisation have gained such traction because they enable [people] to believe that they can protect themselves from poverty and dependency through their own efforts, and therefore have a sense of security in an insecure world” (Valentine and Harris, 2014: 91). Again, such rhetoric emphasised personal responsibility for any problem that one might face, however, this time, this rhetoric was tied in with an increasingly important market focus. In other words, the State should no longer be providing public services ‘for free’, but instead should be transferring these services to the market, transforming the citizen more and more into an active consumer who is made responsible for acquiring the means to improve their life. This philosophy was joined with a certain narrative of ‘freedom’ (Rose, 1999), proposing that being responsible also required people to be free to choose how to construct their lives. Yet for many commentators this freedom can be regarded as a tool to govern as will be explored and explained in the next section.

2.4 Governing through 'freedom'

Focusing then on issues of poverty and the Welfare State, highlighting how governments focus on individual deficiencies when addressing perceived problems or threats to the State, the drive for promoting self-responsibility becomes important. Pantazis (2016) argues that in the case of worklessness, responsibility was placed with the long-term unemployed, with “the Coalition [Government of 2010-2015] [assuming] that jobs existed if only people could be bothered to actively look for them” (Pantazis, 2016: 7). In a similar way, Rose (1996) argues that the emphasis upon individuals as masters of their own economical fate through employment runs parallel to a “set of vocabularies and devices” that are aimed at making sure people also take matters in their own hands when it comes to improving themselves in terms of skills-building and enhancing their employability (Rose, 1996: 339). In other words, we are now governed by the thought of freedom (Rose, 1999).
Within a State governed according to a neoliberal ideology, the preferred subject that, created *through* this neoliberal discourse, can earn itself the ‘right to live’ in a neoliberal society is what Foucault termed the *homo economicus*, who is “an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself” (Foucault, 2008: 226). Being this individual entrepreneur means “being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault, 2008: 226). In other words, a neoliberal drive behind society is aimed at creating citizens that comply with a discourse that makes those individuals the only ones responsible for their own success or failure in a capitalist society.

When talking about this responsibility to create their own success, often politicians refer to work as the main target and solution. As Pantazis (2016) recognised, “the promotion of paid work as a central means to tackle poverty became a key policy plank under the Coalition government” (Pantazis, 2016: 7), ignoring structural problems such as the lack of existing permanent jobs.

In a neoliberal work-centric approach, the power to change one’s life is herein placed in the hands of the individual; work (i.e. paid employment) will give you the power to not be reliant on anyone else but yourself, not on the State, and especially not when it comes to monetary support. In other words, it gives you the power to ‘be free’. This reading of power and freedom as something to be owned at the individual level and setting one free from being reliant on anyone or anything else appears to be a deception. Miller and Rose (2008) argue that “contemporary forms of power were built on a premise of freedom, a type of *regulated freedom* that encouraged or required individuals to compare what they did, what they achieved, and what they were with what they could or should be” (Miller and Rose, 2008: 9, my emphasis). The way that the notion of individual freedom is used is aimed at creating an assumption that “liberalism and neoliberalism limit the operation of government to allow a sphere of freedom” (Henman and Dean, 2004). Through studying *governmentalities*, Henman and Dean (2004) argue, we can understand how “liberal and neo-liberalism use freedom as a particularly creative ways of constituting strategies for the indirect shaping of conduct” (2004: 5). The next section will discuss neoliberal governmentalities in more detail, and specifically introduces the role of the digital within these governmentalities.
2.5 Neoliberal governmentality: digitising and marketising job searching practices

The neoliberal way of governing as defined by Harvey (2005) problematises the regulation of work, and in doing so problematises the regulation of unemployment and unemployment provisions (Dean, 2008). Neoliberal thinking essentialises the importance of the market (Dean, 2010), which means that “if the market teaches the manner in which we gain access to guidance regarding our conduct, then the way in which we gain access to guidance regarding our conduct will be through the construction of markets” (Dean, 2010: 187). This approach to government can be understood in terms of ‘the conduct of conduct’, also known as ‘governmentality’:

… which is at once internal and external to the State, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the State and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the State can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality (Foucault, 1991: 103).

In and through governmental tactics, neoliberal governments seek to “manage and optimise the productivity of its population” (Boland and Griffin, 2015: 33). As we have seen in Chapter One, the work club as rooted in Azrin et al.’s (1975; 1979; 1980; 1981; 2002) Job Club programme and promoted by the DWP (2013a) is meant to conduct the conduct of jobseekers. Work clubs and their staff are expected to shape the behaviour of jobseekers into one that counts as desirable and makes them a ‘good citizen’, which directly can be seen as a form of governmentality.

Foucault’s governmentality writings and the subsequent body of literature built on it, Henman and Dean (2004: 3) argue, give “attention to the more material means by which governmental objectives are realised. Diverse inscription devices and routine calculative practices all participate in the constitution of governable domains” (Henman and Dean, 2004: 3). One of the ways in which the State constructs and maintains a governable
domain of (un)employment, which will be further introduced later in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Six, is through digital technologies implemented to keep track of peoples’ job searching behaviour in order to correct it if necessary. Within the realm of unemployment, Boland and Griffin (2015) argue that:

... governmental interventions ... range from the forms that must be filled out by new [welfare] claimants, the architecture of social welfare offices, the surveillance and management of jobseekers within those offices, and even how the unemployed are spoken about in the media. Gradually, a dominant perspective emerges about the ‘unemployed’, conceived as a problematic population to be monitored and cajoled (Boland and Griffin, 2015: 33).

The way that public administration has been changed over the past few decades, focusing more and more on digital ways of monitoring unemployed individuals, is characteristic of a neoliberal governmentality, as it transforms the way welfare services are being delivered to whom (Henman and Dean, 2004). This fits quite well with another central aspect of neoliberal governmentality: the State making decisions on who is deemed deserving of already scarce State support, and who is supposed to be taken care of by the free market and/or themselves by reviewing information that must be provided by the individual themselves. In this case, the unemployed individual is responsible for documenting proof of their deservingness of State support digitally. Such a policy can be seen as a procedure or “tactic of government which make[s] possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the State and what is not” (Foucault, 1991: 103), continuously emphasising the self-responsibility of the individual, about which I will talk more later in this Chapter.

The self-responsibility of individuals to log and maintain their digital actions regarding job searching is also one of the main reasons that work clubs exist to begin with: to help jobseekers to cope with the modernising and digitalising nature of job searching procedures and welfare support monitoring and distribution. Hence, in a way it could perhaps be argued that the complicated nature of the administration that jobseekers are
expected to use in justifying receiving their benefits contribute to the existence of organisations (charitable or for profit) that are supposed to alleviate these complications. Chapter Six will discuss in more detail these digital complications and obstacles that jobseekers are facing.

In studying the way Australia governed unemployment and unemployed individuals, Dean (1995; 1998; 2010) discusses how, through the construction of markets, the government was able to connect unemployment with for-profit educational facilities and organisations, aimed at educating unemployed individuals back into employment. Specifically, the Australian Labour government of 1983-96, he argues, introduced closely monitored management of unemployed people to provide them with approved and structured access to various forms of job search assistance, which would allow the State to track and review peoples’ job searching practices. The consensus was that unemployed individuals, above all, needed to work on themselves, with the help of self-help initiatives such as training programmes, and, indeed, work clubs. This dynamic between State control and self-responsibility is key to a neoliberal governmentality, for effectively, the State effects control to ensure people take responsibility, making ever clearer the illusion of freedom as discussed in the previous section. Up until 1996, the importance of self-responsibility was all implemented within a contract that would tie the jobseeker to the State, and only by agreeing to the terms of the contract, would the jobseeker be ‘job ready’, albeit without a guaranteed job. Essentially, all that was expected of the jobseeker was that they would behave as jobseekers, to prove they were active citizens and active players in the labour market. After 1996, when a Conservative government took office, the contract between jobseeker and State was replaced by one that would tie the jobseeker even more to the market. This was done through a form of ‘reflexive government’; “a kind of double-play or reduplication, or a folding back of its objectives upon itself” (Dean, 2010) kind of government. This involved a circular paradox, wherein the contracts that would allow jobseekers access to support services were transferred to competing so-called ‘employment placement enterprises’, which would require jobseekers to become consumers of those same employment services in order to fund them. As Dean put it, the ethos behind this discourse became “if you require guidance and training in the practice
of freedom you must first exercise your freedom as a consumer of employment services to gain access to such guidance and training” (Dean, 2010: 188).

Although Dean specifically focused on the case of Australia, we can see how the same developments were made throughout the majority of Western countries, including the US and the UK, where under the leadership of Thatcher, neoliberalism gained traction (Dean, 2010: 190). The problem with situating self-help initiatives such as work clubs in the market, where they must compete for funding opportunities that are made available by, for example, the Big Lottery Fund, is that its services and its consistency are not at all guaranteed, as will be explored in more detail in Chapter Seven, where I talk more about the lack of resources that often threatened Banterby SC work club’s effectiveness. This makes both jobseekers and the initiatives increasingly vulnerable. Moreover, the role of jobseeker as a ‘free subject’ is paradoxical. It is argued that it is in the market, in this case of self-help initiatives, that choices can be made, rendering people ‘free’ to make their own decisions about their development and future. These choices are supposed to be ‘rational’ and should, following neoliberal market values, be based on what gives the individual the most substantial chance of improving his or her life, as defined mainly in economic terms. However, it is in this same market that these same choices and the activities tied to them will be monitored, making the jobseekers’ practices and especially performances calculable (Dean, 2010: 193), thus jobseekers become subject to specific rules set out for job searching. Ultimately, neoliberal ideology and governmentalities involve a balancing act between State control and personal freedom, whereby the former is used to impose the latter, which in turn defines the limits or illusion of the former:

If freedom is no longer the quasi-natural freedom to pursue one’s own interest in the market, as it is in classical liberalism and social forms of government, security is no longer principally the security of the economic and social processes that exist outside the State. Security has come to entail the security of governmental mechanisms (Dean, 2010: 258).

In other words, digitising and marketising the job searching process under the motto of personal freedom is nothing more than a governmental tactic that strengthens the power
of the State rather than empowering individuals. Furthermore, digitising the job searching process as a way to monitor job searching practices disadvantages people who lack the digital skills to use these digital mechanisms. Helsper (2011) described these people as the ‘digital underclass’, and has shown that people without employment are forming a significant part of this ‘digital underclass’, arguing that over the course of four to six years, people with low or no education levels and without employment have become worse off considering their access to ICTs and the use of the internet in particular (2011: 4). I will talk about the effects of what is often called ‘digital exclusion’ (Clayton and Macdonald, 2013) in more detail in Chapter Six, but it is important to note for now that not understanding and not being able to work with wide-spread accepted digital modes of job searching makes it difficult for jobseekers to compete in the labour market, making them appear unwilling to find their way back to employment, with the lack of digital job searching footprint as evidence. The research question that will address this issue will be introduced and discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

It is argued that it is through these developments of making jobseekers’ practices calculable through digitisation that certain mythical narratives and images of what it means to be unemployed have been allowed to develop (Cruikshank, 1999). The next section will explore a case study as presented by Cruikshank that questions and re-frames the origins of the stereotypical welfare recipient. Cruikshank’s case study, although located outside the UK, is relevant to this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, because, as I started this thesis, a lot of people, when talking to them about this research project, have asked me “… but what about all those people who just refuse to work? Who are just sleeping it off every morning and do everything they can to stay on benefits?” (Reflexive writings, undated). This image of ‘the stereotypical welfare recipient’ plays a major part in how society approaches unemployment, unemployment policies and their effects. This, as Cruikshank argues, ultimately plays a considerable part in maintaining and even advancing these policies, and therefore needs to be explored further. Secondly, the case study will help us in thinking about how the job searching practices as engaged in in the work club, as well as the way this research is framed, might help advance and/or maintain the stereotype of the jobseeker rather than resist it.
2.6 Cruikshank and the myth of the 'Welfare Queen'

By sharing the stories of Banterby SC work club I want to share a narrative of a group of people who are all different, and to emphasise that ‘unemployment’ and ‘receiving welfare benefits’ should not be made inseparable major parts of one’s identity, or parts of one’s identity at all. They are a social construct, a relationship defined by the State as soon as they are in receipt of welfare benefits, but people should in no way be defined by it, or used as tangible proof that, at least somewhere, a stereotypical welfare recipient that is justified by welfare practices exists.

In her book *The Will to Empower* (1999) Barbara Cruikshank explores how myths such as that of the ‘black welfare queen’ in the United States are often not the result of generalisation practices based on ‘real people’, but rather come into existence through accounting and audit practices instigated by the State. Cruikshank argues that it is not true that increasingly rigorous welfare practices are justified by a mythical narrative, but rather that it is the reverse that holds merit: that the welfare practices themselves justify stereotypes (1999: 106).

In short, these practices and her argument are built around how numbers and accounting have changed the relationship between the State and welfare recipients. Where, paradoxically, initially more rigorous checks and accounting were supposedly meant to only catch those very few fraudulent people who were taking away from the majority of people who are really in need, an increase of both the existence and accountability related to the terms of welfare receipt made the existence of the ‘welfare cheat’ tangible and real:

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\(^{8}\) Cruikshank argues, in more detail, that the increase of checks and the role of accounting (also) had to do with administrative errors made by the governmental body in the US responsible for regulating and distributing welfare payments. These errors, in turn, were in part made out to be blamed upon the welfare recipient, who had, perhaps even without any intention been victims or an erroneous system: "recipients often paid the price for agency errors much as if they were guilty of fraud" (Cruikshank, 1999: 112).
The new terms of welfare included random [quality control] checks, pre-eligibility screening for fraud and errors, and a shift in emphasis from criminal to administrative prosecutions for welfare fraud. Rather than undergoing jury trials and jail time for fraud, recipients were more likely required to pay back any “overpayments” they had received from welfare agencies, perhaps with fines attached - without any proof whatsoever that they had intended to commit fraud (Cruikshank, 1999: 112).

In short, in a way the State deals with *perceived* welfare fraud creates an unworkable situation, where there is a discrepancy between the (perceived) nature of the offence and the realm in which, supposedly, it needs to be addressed. For example, as the empirics in Chapter Five and Six will show, people feel as if they were labelled criminals solely based on the nature of their relationship with the State as welfare recipients without being given a fair trial to prove that they were in no way guilty of what they were accused of. The notion of innocent until proven guilty seems not to be a starting point for people accused of committing welfare fraud, and, as we have seen in the previous section, the burden of proof has shifted from the accuser to the accused, which in combination creates a dire situation.

It is in Cruikshank’s criticism of scholars and activists who argue that “… it is the welfare queen’s unaccountability, her voicelessness, her absence from the stage of politics that accounts for her status as a scapegoat” (Cruikshank, 1999: 105) that she makes an intriguing point, for this absence, according to Cruikshank, can be explained by the sheer fact *that she does not exist*. After all, how can anything that does not exist have a voice, and be able to present its own defence? The big difference between Cruikshank and many other theorists seeking to debunk the myth of welfare recipients in general, thus, lies in her persistent denial of mobilising the myth of the welfare recipient herself. That is, she argues, because in calling upon those who, according to others, indeed adhere to the description of this mythical category to defend themselves lies the acceptance of some form of ‘truth’ about this myth, “taking her for ‘real’” (Cruikshank, 1999: 106). Therefore, she continues, “a critique of welfare cannot simply call for more participation on the part
or in the name of welfare recipients in the definition of their own needs. … To ask [the welfare queen] to speak on her own behalf and to act in her own interest, is to foreclose the possibility that she could refute or refuse the terms of welfare” (Cruikshank, 1999: 107). In other words, it would make the myth we are trying to debunk a tangible reality; by asking people to defend themselves and to prove that they are in no way related to the stereotype, we leave room for the actual existence of this stereotype in other people. Over the course of my time with Banterby SC work club I have not met people who fit the description of the stereotype of the ‘skiver’ or the ‘scrounger’. Thinking about how I, then, frame this non-encounter is critical in debunking the myth. If I argued that the people whom I have met do not belong to the group of people who are considered to be compatible with the stereotype, I still acknowledge that the stereotype could still exist, but just not in Banterby SC work club.

Resistance then, following Cruikshank, “must take the form of a refusal to act as a [welfare recipient/unemployed individual], a refusal to be what our relations to the State have made us” (Cruikshank, 1999: 121). That is not to say that we cannot accept that ‘welfare’, ‘unemployment’ and their terms and conditions (measured by numbers) exist, but, as concluded by Cruikshank, “we must imagine a way of politically managing the fact that there is such a thing as the social construction of citizenship - that like welfare queens, all citizens are also subjects” (Cruikshank, 1999: 121). This means that we accept a relationship between the individual and the State, where the State supports those of us who need support for whatever reason, in this case because one has no income through being in employment. That does not mean, however, that that relationship should be able to define people’s primary identities as if they were one and the same, let alone one and the same as justified by the practices of this relationship. People are not benefits recipients, they are people who also happen to receive State support.

There is a lot to say in support of Cruikshank’s position that to ask ‘the welfare recipient’ to speak up for themselves, or help them in doing so, we acknowledge the reality of the existence of this generalised being. Still, from my perspective there is a fine line between giving people a voice or telling peoples’ stories and individual ‘realities’ and
acknowledging their attachment to the stereotype in some way, whether this is to deny or confirm them. Specifically, I do not wish to portray my research participants as ‘unemployed individuals who do or are good despite their situation’, nor do I aim to give a voice to the ‘real unemployed’. Indeed, I would argue that in doing so, by actively differentiating my research participants from an implied ‘mythical unemployed individual, I allow for this mythical or stereotypical welfare recipient to exist ‘somewhere’ outside of this study. This, in turn, would justify further development of practices such as welfare reforms which are supposed to tackle ‘the problem of unemployment’ by attacking the stereotypical welfare recipient. How this ‘problem’ has been constructed over time is central to the next section.

### 2.7 The 'problem of unemployment' in the UK

The ‘problem of unemployment’ in the UK is the topic of many contemporary political debates, echoed by the media, fuelled by statistics, and framed by stories. MacDonald and colleagues (2014a) state that UK politics brands unemployment as a ‘lifestyle choice’; a choice that leaves people dependent instead of independent and free to make their own choices. Politicians such as former Prime Minister David Cameron state that “work is – and always will be – the best route out of poverty” (Cameron, 2016), regardless of its merit. For low-skilled workers trapped in the low-pay, no-pay cycle, Shildrick and colleagues (2012b) have argued, this argument does not hold, as often it is the precarity of the jobs that keeps them on or below the poverty line. Yet, politicians seem to be able to get away with it exactly because of the rhetoric used.

Analysing the speeches and overall rhetoric of Iain Duncan Smith, Garthwaite (2011) asserts that although he mainly used phrases such as ‘independency’ and ‘responsibility’ in isolation (2010a; 2010b; 2014a; 2014b; 2015), the former Secretary of State implied them to be part of another dualism, adding to those introduced in Chapter One. This implied dualism leaves institutions such as the media as well as individuals, to think of people who do not fit that description as the opposite, such as dependent and irresponsible. By stating that “the system should deliver for people who want to work hard
and play by the rules”, the hidden message is that anyone who does not ‘work hard’ according to ‘the rules’ must be the opposite - ‘dependent’ and ‘irresponsible’ (Garthwaite, 2011).

In fact, such rhetoric, Hoggett et al. (2013) argue, “[attributes] responsibility for poverty and unemployment to the ‘negative agency’ of individuals, where people actively decide to not act, rather than to structural factors” (Hoggett et al., 2013: 568). It is in the “language of fairness” that the three main political parties in the UK have come to support the moral distinction and dualism of work and non-work, creating resentment at multiple levels, but mainly towards people who we have come to know as ‘work-shy’, “enjoying privileges in an improper or unequal way” (Hoggett et al., 2013: 577). This is nothing short of victim blaming and heroisation of workers, according to Cole (2008), regardless of whether work is indeed the only way out of poverty (Shildrick et al., 2012b). It is in the language used by political leaders such as Cameron that we can find what lies at the core of welfare reforms and the work/non work binary (Garthwaite, 2011). As Garthwaite (2011) argues, in stating that “… if people really cannot work, then they will be looked after” Cameron, like Duncan Smith, implies that he is sceptical about many people when they state that they are unable to work due to various disabilities (2011: 370). In a way, this contradicts the legal norm of innocent until proven guilty, making anybody who has no job and is in receipt of welfare support a suspected criminal and therefore a threat to society, threatening all that ‘hard working Britons’ stand for.

These ideas pervade mainstream political rhetoric of recent years, wherein a “growing dependency culture” is attributed as one of the major factors leading to a ‘broken Britain’ (Slater, 2012). It is in the wake of the neoliberal turn of the 1980s that the Welfare State has been framed as one of the main contributors to economic problems. Money was spent on people who, if they were successful market actors would be able to rationally calculate the consequences of their actions, but are instead framed as ‘welfare recipients’ content with being dependent on welfare pay-outs. The same ideas resonate in popular media through television series such as ‘Benefits Street’ (Channel 4), even mentioned by Iain Duncan Smith as an example of how bad the situation in Britain actually is (Duncan Smith,
2014a); thus upholding the myth of intentionally workless communities where three (or reportedly more) generations have never been in employment (MacDonald et al., 2014a; Macdonald et al., 2014b; Shildrick et al., 2012a). Furthermore, newspaper headlines such as “New Welfare Crackdown on Workshy” (Chapman, 2015), and “Help us stop £1.5bn benefits scroungers”, subtitling with “hundreds of thousands of scroungers in the UK are robbing hard-working Sun readers of their cash” (Sloan, 2010) are filled with ‘anti-skiver’ rhetoric. Bauman (2004) also agrees that this kind of vocabulary is aimed at vilifying unemployed individuals in order to turn them into a common enemy of society, creating and strengthening the binary discourse that holds that to work is good, not to work is evil (Bauman, 2004). The extent to which public attitudes toward unemployment and job searching practices are manifested in the everyday practices of the clients in Banterby SC work club will be central to Chapter Five. The sub-question guiding that chapter will be introduced and explored in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Turning back now to the origins of the binary discourse that to work is good, and not to work is bad, we have to look more closely at what is termed the work ethic; something that is often considered to be the most important personal trait of a citizen of working age. In terms of what this means for Banterby SC work club and its clients, we will see that work clubs can be seen as an encouraged method to combat the perceived ‘problem of unemployment’ and to shape, as already explored in section 1.2, the clients into ‘good citizens’ who display an, and behave according to, a strong work ethic. The origins of the work ethic are discussed in the next section.

2.8 The history of the work ethic

Despite the fact that in-work poverty is still a major threat to UK welfare, as it means that many people, despite being in work, “fail to earn the income required to sustain a decent standard of living” (Wills and Linneker, 2014), the work ethic is still considered an ideal moral attribute for individuals to possess; to work is good, not to work is evil (Bauman, 2004). This becomes clear if we look again at how David Cameron confidently states that “work is – and always will be – the best route out of poverty” (Cameron, 2016). Many
contemporary discussions on the *work ethic* construct, – the “commitment to the value and importance of hard work” (Miller et al., 2002) – originate from and draw upon the work of Max Weber. In 1904-05 Weber published *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he explored the possibility of “an inner affinity … between certain streams of the old Protestant spirit and the modern culture of capitalism” (Weber [1904], 2011: 75). When talking about capitalism, Weber argues that,

... the acquisition of money in the modern economic order is the result and manifestation of competence and proficiency in a *vocational calling*. ... This peculiar idea of a *duty to have a vocational calling*, so familiar to us today but actually not at all self-evident, is the idea that is characteristic of the “social ethic” of modern capitalist culture. In a certain sense it is even of constitutive significance for it. It implies a notion of duty that individuals ought to experience, and do, vis-à-vis the content of the “vocational activity”. (Weber [1904], 2011: 81-82)

In short: at its core capitalism requires individuals to have an inherent drive, or to feel an inherent *duty* to work and for work to be at the centre of their lives – a destiny that needs to be fulfilled.

Acknowledging that his aim could or should not be to produce a conceptual definition of the notion of capitalism, Weber argued it is the *business* ethos of capitalism that should be of concern to studying the Protestant ethic and its relationship to modern capitalism. For the purpose of this exploration he loosely defines capitalism as the “duty of the individual to increase his wealth” in which not complying with this “business ethos” is considered a “forgetfulness of duty” (Weber [1904], 2011: 79). In other words, in a modern capitalist society increasing one’s own wealth and bearing that responsibility is a driving force behind society as a whole. Therefore, not being able to contribute can be seen as shirking one’s responsibility, or even a crime. I will talk about the criminalisation and vilification of unemployment in more detail in Chapter Three.
The mere existence of work clubs and the Government’s drive for their development shows how embedded the idea is that having a job is an important aspect of life. The importance and prominence of work to one’s life is often captured in and measured using the term *work ethic*, defined as “a set of beliefs and attitudes reflecting the fundamental value of work” (Meriac, 2012: 316). As Miller et al. (2002) argue, this work ethic “reflects a constellation of attitudes and beliefs pertaining to work behaviour” (2002: 455). Still, regardless of an individual’s perceptions of work, many institutions that regulate daily life, such as the State, consider work and the work ethic as the key to good and responsible citizenship. In this view being employed is the ‘good’ thing to do, and being unemployed is evil and a threat to society (Bauman, 2004).

Connecting this to how I have already proposed work clubs as places framed by a coming together of neoliberal governmentalities, we can now argue that the work ethic and its role in society is as much part of this neoliberal framework. A question that needs to be asked, then, is to what extent these work clubs actually operate to unproblematically reproduce the neoliberal discourse in which they operate. In other words, is a work club a place that merely operates within a neoliberal framework that emphasises a strong work ethic, or does it also serve to reproduce in its clients these neoliberal values and its implied work ethic which they are supposedly lacking based on the general acceptance of the ‘stereotypical welfare recipient’? I will discuss this question in more detail at the end of this chapter. This research project is, of course, not the first to explore the work ethic and how society as well as individuals are influenced by it. Therefore, before we continue discussing in more detail how academia has understood unemployment, in the next section we have to look at how the work ethic has been addressed within the literature in order to establish what this thesis adds to these existing studies.

2.9 The work ethic in academic literature

Work, unemployment and welfare policies are increasingly being observed, problematised and criticised in academic literature. Because of the prevalence of the work ethic, as discussed above, the relationship between work, self-reliance and citizenship
has become key to how we feel about ourselves, but also how we view others in the light of what they do or do not do (Pimlott-Wilson, 2015). If unemployed people are ‘workshy’ and villains, those who work hard are the ‘heroes’, the responsible citizens. What constitutes a capitalist society and what makes individuals a responsible citizen in this society is mostly (economically) tied to citizenship based on work status, income and ability to navigate the consumer market independently.

Bauman (2001) argues that since the industrial revolution people have been forced to abandon communal-based types of working that promoted interaction and independence, to replace it by a routine that promoted obedience and subservience: “the question was not so much how to make the work-shy keen to work (no one had to teach the future factory hands that life meant a sentence of hard labour), but how to make them ready to labour in a brand new and unfamiliar repressive setting” (Bauman, 2001: 27). Products that can be bought need to be manufactured by people that would have to (want to) purchase them; the more people can and want to buy, the more people needed to meet the output needs.

Friedli and Stearn (2015) state that this coercive setting expands to the whole of society, which is reflected in so-called workfare programmes, in which benefit claimants are forced to participate in various initiatives varying from charities to public services in order to remain eligible for benefit receipt. They conclude that coercive programmes like this mainly advance the status of work (i.e. formal paid employment) as the primary duty of citizens, while devaluing a wide range of other activities and commitments, including volunteering.

Reacting to these kinds of exclusionary discourses of citizenship Patrick (2014) asserts that inclusive citizenship should be promoted where other forms of contribution to society are recognised, denouncing the sole focus on employment. Patrick (2012b) explicitly interprets the contemporary take on work ethic as a work-centric approach to citizenship. Indeed, key to many recent government administrations and their political programs, including New Labour, the Coalition Government as well as the current Conservative
Government, is the importance of work for individual citizens. What this constant highlighting of work as the primary duty of the responsible citizen does, Patrick argues, is create a dualism between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. As Patrick (2012b) states, “characterising work as the hallmark of the responsible citizen … has inevitable exclusionary consequences … even for those who are not expected to work” (Patrick, 2012b: 7); work is such a dominant moral discourse in the realm of citizenship that it is easy to feel uneasy if one is not ‘working hard’ and earning one’s own income. In fact, Patrick (2012b) continues, “operating a working - good; not-working - bad binary neglects inequalities and differences among citizens that can arise regardless of whether they are engaging in paid work” (Patrick, 2012b: 11). These differences include, for example, their backgrounds, family commitments (i.e. care) qualifications, locations and the job density in these locations; a persistent derogatory policy rhetoric and a punitive system of sanctions are not going to change this. But what is more, Patrick (2012b) validly asserts, that no distinction is made between the different kinds of paid work and whether or not working conditions and salaries are going to improve a jobseeker’s life; Patrick concludes that “rather than continually promoting all paid work, the Government would be wise to instead concentrate their policy energies and reforming strategies on considerations of how best to improve the quality of work available” (Patrick, 2012b: 13).

Shildrick et al. (2012b) found that despite the way the ‘low-pay, no-pay cycle’, in which people constantly go from living on benefits to working for a marginal salary and back to benefits, had been treating them, people would still pride themselves in saying that they have inherited the work ethic from their parents, and aim to pass it on to their own children as well. Indeed, the idea that being in employment is good, and always better than being unemployed had been instilled in them in such a manner that it is connected to all manner of social psychological benefits, wherein people value themselves and their lives in relation to their ability to conform to the value of work. This shows how persistent and all-encompassing the work ethic has become, overruling all negative consequences incurred in accepting any kind of work for any amount of time comes with.
The work of Shildrick et al. and Patrick has been highly influential in developing this research project. Their work has shown how through deploying qualitative research methods, alternative versions of the lives of people on unemployment benefits can be uncovered and explored. Their work is mostly focusing on lived experiences of worklessness and people living in the low-pay, no-pay cycle, arguing for “improving the quality and pay of those important and necessary jobs at the bottom of the labour market” (Shildrick et al., 2012b: 223), and touches upon job searching practices and community initiatives helping jobseekers. One key aim of this research project is to extend their contributions to continue to expose the ‘myth of the welfare scrounger’ in an attempt to make debates about welfare reforms and policy better informed by considering multiple experiences. In this thesis, I will extend this line of research by problematising in more detail by addressing the job searching practices as encountered in Banterby SC work club. In so doing I will highlight not only the existence of embedded structural obstacles to finding quality employment, but also how job searching practices can be considered structural obstacles towards finding quality employment and overcoming poverty.

How society views the importance of the work ethic is closely connected to our understanding of unemployment and self-responsibility, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Specifically, for the clients of Banterby SC work club, as the empirical chapters will show, this means that their responsibility to prove themselves as having a strong work ethic is inherently linked to their status as an unemployed individual or welfare recipient. Notably, their current status as unemployed appears to usurp their employment histories, and appears not to take in account external factors that may prevent clients from finding employment. One such external factor is the increasingly digital nature of State monitoring which was introduced in section 2.5 and will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six. This digital mode of monitoring job searching practices disadvantages many jobseekers who lack the digital skills to use these digital monitoring applications such as Universal Jobmatch, the primary job searching portal owned by the DWP and Jobcentres. Still, not

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9 Quality employment is employment that provides the working with a sufficient number of hours, stable contract and pay that would help them to become financially independent.
being able to operate the digitalised system that proves their perceived ‘deservingness’ does not exempt them from living up to the neoliberal expectation of self-responsibility. This ultimately connects the ideas of ‘the problem of unemployment’ as discussed in section 2.7 with the words of Margaret Thatcher, who stated that “… it is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour.” (Thatcher, 1987). The next section explores the neoliberal ideal that individuals take responsibility for their own lives, before moving on to more collective, non-governmental ways of ‘taking responsibility’.

2.10 Taking responsibility to ‘fix a broken Britain’

Tending to central questions about how work clubs are expected to operate is tied to thinking about what crucial part the de-socialisation of politics plays, pushing for and facilitating the “hegemony of the individualised ethic of self-interested” (Valentine and Harris, 2014: 84). Especially so if, as argued by Valentine and Harris (2014), “discourses of individualisation have gained such traction because they enable [people] to believe that they can protect themselves from poverty and dependency through their own efforts, and therefore have a sense of security in an insecure world” (Valentine and Harris, 2014: 91). In other words, it is assumed the State can solve ‘the problem of unemployment’ if people perceive unemployment to be a problem that they are responsible for themselves, and want to do everything in their power to avoid this problem. Dean (2008) would argue that this is because under neoliberal influences the collectivisation of risks (as was done through the Welfare State) “came to be viewed a risk itself to the performance of the economy, and hence risk had to be, at least to some extent, de-socialised, individualised and privatised” (Dean, 2008: 30). In other words, regardless of the origins of the problems that people are facing, it is argued and generally accepted that people believe that if they are willing to change their lives for the better, and to fix any problem themselves, they will always be able to do so.

Neoliberal ideology heavily emphasises the relationship between problem fixing and responsibilisation. The Coalition Government (2010-2015), for example, often used the imagery of a “broken society” (BBC News, 2011; Hancock and Mooney, 2013) in a myriad
of occasions and in a wide variety of contexts, including an unemployment context, arguing that it should be individuals who are responsible for fixing this ‘broken society’ and ‘the problem of unemployment’. Building on this notion of society in need of fixing, responsibility for action and change are placed outside of the government itself, something we can see in statements such as the following in a Cabinet Office paper titled *Building the Big Society* (HM Government, 2010), outlining former Prime Minister Cameron’s political agenda, arguing that “a ‘broken society’ now needs to be regenerated by voluntary participation and leadership in … fragmented communities at the local level” (Ishkanian and Szreter, 2012: 7):

... building this Big Society isn’t just the responsibility of just one or two [governmental] departments. It is the responsibility of every department of Government, and the responsibility of every citizen too. Government on its own cannot fix every problem. *We are all in this together* (HM Government, 2010).

Visiting or setting up a work club, it is argued, is about people taking matters in their own hands, either, in case of the former, by sorting out their own lives or, in case of the latter, to help others in their community to do so (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). ‘Taking responsibility’ is one of the most often used phrases in contemporary activation policies. The government is appealing to a person’s drive to fix their problems by emphasising this self-responsibility and by promoting a shared responsibility between them and their community:

We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want. We want society – the families, networks, neighbourhoods and communities that form the fabric of so much of our everyday lives – to be bigger and stronger than ever before. Only when people and communities are given more power and *take more responsibility* can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all (HM Government, 2010: , my emphasis).
It is in statements like this one that the public as well as the individual citizen are made the guardians of their own fate: not only should they have taken more responsibility in the past, they sure would have to do it in the future to correct what went wrong and made Britain a ‘broken society’. We can see this in the way that the flyer asks the public to set up work clubs. There is a promise of some minor, initial support from the State, but initiative and main effort to set up one should always come from the communities themselves if they want to become stronger communities, not the State.

Taking some time to reflect now, before we move on, it should be clear how an understanding of neoliberalism, governmentalities, digitisation of State communication and monitoring, as well as the myth of the stereotypical welfare recipient and a focus on self-responsibility are important reference points in exploring how flexible, unstructured work clubs such as Banterby SC work club can help us to understand and interpret the everyday experiences with unemployment and job searching practices. The lives of clients and staff of Banterby SC work club are inextricably bound to all those aspects mentioned above, as they are obliged to answer to a neoliberal State apparatus that directs and monitors their levels of self-responsibility, which is seen as a potential problem because of the persistent myth of the stereotypical welfare recipient and jobseeker. The persistent myth of the stereotypical welfare recipient and jobseeker, in turn, is informed by how society has come to value work, by which we mean paid employment.

Iain Duncan Smith, the former Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, argued the following in a speech on welfare reforms where unemployment benefits are portrayed as free hand-outs, and herein emphasises on the centrality of work as paid employment to ‘good citizenship’:

[Welfare reforms] should be about helping people to take greater control over their lives. For all those who are able, work should be seen as the route to doing so – for work is about more than just money. It is about what shapes us, lifts our families,
delivers security, and helps rebuild our communities. Work has to be at the heart of our welfare reform plan, or all we will do is increase dependency not lessen it (Duncan Smith, 2014a).

Arguments like this are building on the idea of the responsible and dutiful citizen as a positive role-model. However, this kind of rhetoric is filled with notions that, as argued by Pantazis (2016),

... sought to portray individuals, including those previously regarded as ‘deserving’ of social security support as ‘shirkers’ (in contrast to ‘strivers’), ‘lazy’ (in contrast to ‘hardworking’), and ‘profligate’ (in contrast to ‘provident’), and responsible, in different ways, for bringing poverty on themselves and their families. On the other hand, the structural deficiencies of the benefits system were highlighted as encouraging dependency and, ultimately, leading to poverty. (Pantazis, 2016: 4)

The problem that is constructed here is ‘the problem of unemployment’ as discussed in section 2.7, a problem for which the solution, according to neoliberal ideology, lies with the individual rather than in addressing potential structural problems that make individual attempts at resolving the situation impossible. The answer then, following Margaret Thatcher’s plea that “…it is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour” (1987), lies in voluntary sector organisations where society, uniting the power of individuals, to help ‘our neighbours’. This brings us to a final key aspect of this review, where I will look at how voluntary sector initiatives and their impact on society have been studied in the literature in order to locate how the current study helps introduce a novel approach to connecting voluntary sector research to unemployment-focused research.

2.11 Voluntary Sector Research

Voluntary sector research is highly diverse, and there are multiple academic journals focusing on a myriad of aspects of the voluntary sector that both forefront and advance
our knowledge of this important aspect of our society. There are some key debates in this area that have attracted - and are still attracting - a lot of attention, including the definition of volunteering, and what it means to be ‘a volunteer’ (Cnaan et al., 1996; Wilson, 2000; Hankinson and Rochester, 2005: 97; Snyder and Omoto, 2008; Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Hustinx et al., 2010). Over the course of time, many definitions of what volunteering is and what makes a person a volunteer have been explored and formulated. This is not a coincidence, since it is far from straightforward even for volunteers themselves to identify themselves as volunteers and to what degree (Cnaan et al., 1996). A common definition of volunteering follows that of Snyder and Omoto (2008: 3), defining volunteering as “freely chosen and deliberate helping activities that extend over time, are engaged in without expectation of reward or other compensation and often through formal organisations, and that are performed on behalf of causes or individuals who desire assistance” (Snyder and Omoto, 2008: 3). This way of defining volunteering contributes to a general perception of volunteering as ‘inherently good’, and makes it difficult for people to be critical of its outcomes.

Another ongoing scholarly debate is concerned with what motivates people to volunteer (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Wilson, 2000; Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Hustinx et al., 2010; Haski-Leventhal and Meijs, 2011; Jones, 2011; Nichols and Ralston, 2012; Holdsworth and Brewis, 2013; Francis, 2011). Even though the definition of volunteering as outlined above would lead us to think that people’s motives to engage in it are mainly altruistic, reality appears to be different. Smith (1981), for example, argues that pure altruism is a fallacy and that ultimately even altruistic acts are egotistic, and Musick and Wilson (2008) warn us about focusing on what people say about their motivations, as people try to adhere to the common ideal-type of volunteering as altruism, as not to make them look selfish in stating that they are aiming to get something out of the act of volunteering themselves.

Still, there is no or scarcely any mention of how more voluntary activity can benefit society from the recipient’s perspective (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008: 835), and although “altruism is defined as acting on behalf of others”, Haski-Leventhal (2009: , my emphasis) shows, “it is generally based on an egocentric approach and a homo economicus
perception of man, seen as a rational being who acts foremost to fulfil his or her own needs and interests” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2009: 292).

Thus, when talking about the impact of voluntary and community action in general, more often than not the impact refers to those who are undertaking the act of volunteering, considering volunteering an important and often transformative activity for the volunteers, diverting attention away from the question whether or not the goals external to the volunteer that drive the action are actually being achieved. Talbot (2015), for example, despite naming his study “The negative impacts of volunteering”, was merely talking about the effect of volunteering on, in this case, the scout leaders as volunteers, and how they felt overworked and burnt out. Furthermore, if there is any attention to impact other than centred on the volunteer, it is often the organisation itself being the scope of the study, where influx of volunteers, for example, is measured, as Edwards et al. (2001) did in their study of the impact of student volunteering on community organisations, asking “who is being served, the student volunteers or the organisation?”.

One prime example of focusing on the volunteer and outcomes without specifically looking at the external beneficiaries is the Volunteering for Stronger Communities (VSC) programme, reviewed by Bashir et al. (2013). This programme and report were of particular interest to this thesis and specific research focus as one of the first questions asked in developing this project was “does volunteering build stronger communities?” The VSC’s definition of building a resilient community had more to do with how volunteering programmes affect the volunteers originating from those communities and the organisations that hosts their volunteering instead of individual beneficiaries of the causes supported. For example, in its objectives it stated:

Creating more resilient communities: projects continue to see their activities as strengthening communities 'by default'. This occurs either through the direct support of Volunteer Centres to individuals in disadvantaged areas or by working with volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) that have social aims and objectives. However, there was also a clear sense that VSC had become less of a 'recession
project' [stakeholder] to support communities as originally envisaged. Instead, there was now a greater emphasis on improving individual employability. This refocus was considered appropriate as employability was seen as a more 'concrete and tangible' aim than supporting communities (Bashir et al., 2013: 8).

So, although there is somewhat of a realisation that voluntary activities are often seen as inherently doing good because their aims and objectives are social, the shift to more tangible proof of impact of voluntary action, and the entire project, for that matter, still centre on the volunteer and how the VSC programme can improve, among other things, employability of its volunteers. In other words, the question that is asked here is not along the lines of 'is volunteering doing any good in terms of carrying out its aims and objectives regarding the causes that they are supporting', which in the case of work clubs would mean to decrease the number of unemployed individuals in a community and with this the negative social effects of unemployment. Instead, the question mostly is whether the act of volunteering is doing any good for its volunteers despite the assumption that volunteering (the act) is inherently good for developing the volunteer.

The VSC’s focus on employability as a measurement for community resilience is typical of the place that the work ethic has taken up in our understanding of society and what it means to be a citizen, and of how employment rates are an indicator of a strong community. It appears that ‘good citizens’ are citizens who have a strong work ethic and are preferably employed or are otherwise looking for work, and strong communities are those that consist of ‘good citizens’. Even though voluntary organisations all serve a cause external to themselves and their volunteers to which they are aiming to provide support, there is hardly any academic attention as to the impact of those activities, and impact reports are limited to be created for and read by funding bodies in order to justify and secure more funding.

As Haski-Leventhal (2009) states, “[future] research on volunteerism […] can deal with new aspects, such as the impact of volunteering on society; […] the meaning of volunteering; and the relationship between the volunteer and the recipients” (Haski-
Leventhal, 2009: 293). Although there are some scholars that mention the importance of the role and experience of the recipient/beneficiary of voluntary action (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1983; Snyder and Omoto, 2008; Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Bornstein, 2009), little research is actually being undertaken into situations where the recipient is acknowledged as an active stakeholder and where the outcomes are related to their well-being. The lack of research into the effects and outcomes of work clubs, as discussed in Chapter One, is a silent witness to this. Although the DWP advertises the work club as a place volunteers “would be helping local people find work and could have a really positive impact on their lives and others by helping your local community to become more prosperous” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a: 2), there is no evidence that this is actually the case. This research project explores this claim by asking what unstructured work clubs tell us about the everyday experiences with neoliberal governmentalities towards unemployment and job searching practices. Specifically, it attends to the question to what extent Banterby SC actually operated to reproduce or defy the neoliberal ideology in which they operate.

One of the ways in which we can see how neoliberal ideologies have penetrated many aspects of society, including the voluntary sector, is by looking at how the relationship between (the act of) volunteering and unemployment is explored in academic literature. The next section will discuss this relationship.

2.12 Volunteering and Unemployment

Turning then to the relationship between voluntary action and unemployment, it is not uncommon to refer to volunteering as a substitute for or route back into employment. There are, for example, many studies exploring the (perceived) benefits of student volunteering for employability (e.g. Holdsworth and Quinn, 2010; Rothwell and Charleston, 2013; Rewri et al., 2016), studies that look into the opportunities of volunteering for the long-term unemployed (e.g. Goi and Jeroni, 2012; Griep et al., 2015; Rego et al., 2016), especially in relation to workfare (e.g. Kampen et al., 2013; Fletcher, 2014), and studies asking if volunteering can help those with (mental) health problems
back into work (e.g. Corden and Ellis, 2004; Qureshi et al., 2014). Although voluntary initiatives are supposed to be “helping activities … that are performed on behalf of causes or individuals who desire assistance” (Snyder and Omoto, 2008: 3), Day and Devlin (1998) argue that “everyone seems to ‘know’ that volunteer experience enhances one’s resume and leads to improved labour market opportunities” (Day and Devlin, 1998: 1180). In fact, it has been argued that once going into paid labour, on average, those who have volunteered previous to that will earn more than those who have not, as well as developing skills and networks that might prove useful in paid employment (Menchik and Weisbrod, 1987; Day and Devlin, 1998; Prouteau and Wolff, 2006; Hackl et al., 2007). Analysing volunteering and income following Menchik and Weisbrod’s (1987) investment model, Hackl et al. (2007) argue that,

... from an individual’s perspective, the existence of the wage premium is an important determinant of the decision to volunteer. Hence, our results can further be exploited as a striking argument in the recruitment process of volunteers for several organisations (Hackl et al., 2007: 100).

The focus on the benefits for volunteers and playing to these as a motivation for people to engage in volunteering risks the explicit needs of the beneficiary to become less important, which raises questions about who, in practice, is the real customer in the active volunteer market. Subsequently it also raises questions as to what are the motivations for governments to promote volunteering; is it mainly to support people or causes in need (i.e. the beneficiaries) where the State can no longer do so, or is the main motive and goal the effects volunteering (supposedly) has on its volunteers? For now it seems as if the latter is the case, which is supported by a disproportionate focus on employability and volunteers, as Kamerāde and Paine (2014) stress that the main goals of recent UK governments promoting volunteering through volunteer programmes is to enhance peoples’ employability and to decrease unemployment numbers, making the relationship between volunteering, employability and employment a complex one (Kamerāde and Paine, 2014: 264). We can see this in the Big Society agenda in two ways. Firstly it is promoting, as discussed in section 2.10, volunteering to build stronger communities as
well as, secondly the agenda actively encourages “unemployed people to think about volunteering as a way of improving their employment prospects while they are looking for work” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011), alluding to the benefits that volunteers can obtain from the act of volunteering. This of course is not necessarily a bad thing, as volunteering is often seen as a reciprocal activity (Musick and Wilson, 2008). However, the question this thesis asks is whether there is actually a mutual benefit that lives up to the advertised work club goals of reducing unemployment numbers.

In concluding that although volunteering might not significantly raise a person’s chances of securing paid employment but that it “still enhances employability skills and provides a meaningful productive alternative for people who find it hard to secure a paid job”, Kamerāde (2013) hints at the important outcome of volunteering on unemployed individuals from the point of view of government.

Still, if there are some silent calls for the beneficiary to be the main subject of inquiry when exploring the effects of volunteering, many of those who recognise this call appear to be conforming to the ‘status quo’ in voluntary sector research, continuing to focus on the volunteer. Similar to the VSC report as discussed in the previous section, Paine (2013) recognises and emphasises that volunteering, as an employability factor for volunteers, has no effect on labour market demands, rendering any possible positive employability outcomes useless. As she argues, “volunteering alone cannot tackle the structural inequalities which underlie the labour market - indeed volunteering is itself subject to those same inequalities - reducing its effect on employment outcomes” Paine (2013: 372).

Although this is a valid and important observation to make, what is missing here - in a more general sense - is an exploration of unemployed people as beneficiaries of the voluntary actions of others, especially if we consider the way in which the Big Society agenda and the DWP, following a neoliberal ideology, promote voluntary action as a way to solve societal problems. More specifically, what is missing in the current body of literature is research focusing on unemployed people as, by lack of a better description, more passive beneficiaries of voluntary action. This thesis then, fills this gap in the literature by exploring how work club clients as recipients of third sector support or
voluntary action are or are not supported through these initiatives. That, of course, is not to say that unemployed people should be regarded as ‘passive recipients of voluntary action’, but rather to make a distinction between unemployed people as recipients of help within the realm of unemployment and, in this case, job searching, rather than to focus on what engaging in the act of volunteering could do for them.

By promoting work clubs, unemployed people are considered a group of people that need help, provided by volunteers. This classification asks for questioning the outcomes of these initiatives in more detail, which is exactly what this thesis does: where the majority of voluntary action research focuses on the volunteer, the current research project focuses on the beneficiary. It does so in a way that explores not only the experiences of the clients, but also explores the experiences of staff and volunteers in relation to those of the clients. This aspect and the accompanying research question, will be explored in Chapter Seven. This thesis, therefore, is in a way concerned with asking these questions of impact, as seen from the perspective of the beneficiary. In this thesis, unemployed clients frequenting Banterby SC work club are just that; beneficiaries of voluntary action, instead of potential volunteers themselves. Practices that are being questioned are mainly focused around those that are offered and enforced (in the form of assistance) by Banterby SC work club, in an attempt to make sense of the use and merit of job searching procedures and practices as expected from the jobseekers by the State.

The next section will, based on the literature review in this chapter and the literature on work clubs as presented in Chapter One, introduce the main research question and the three sub-questions that were developed and alluded to in this chapter in more detail.

2.13 Conclusion: Formulation of Research Questions

As we have seen throughout this chapter, examining the scarce amount of literature on work clubs combined with the literature discussed in this chapter gives rise to a multitude of possible research questions. In keeping with ethnographic research, research questions were not decided on before starting the field work, and indeed were only
finalised during the analysis of the data and the writing up of the final thesis. This was because it was important for the research problem to be identified in the field through working with and talking with the work club clients, rather than hypothesised from my point of view. For example, if I had been working with pre-determined research questions, the obstacles that come with digital job searching, which is the key topic of Chapter Six, would not have been explored. Ultimately, the development of my main research question was the result of an iterative process, about which I will talk in more detail in Chapter Four.

Initially, the main research question was derived from my interest in whether and how voluntary sector organisations were able to make a difference in a neoliberal society where the State no longer wishes to be responsible for the social welfare of its citizens (Harvey, 2005). Instead, political leaders argue, it should be individual citizens themselves, if possible united into third sector organisations and voluntary initiatives, that should deal with these problems, or even prevent problems, such as unemployment, from either developing or taking a hold over people’s lives (Valentine and Harris, 2014). This led me to formulate the research question: What can flexible, unstructured work clubs tell us about everyday unemployment and job searching practices in UK society?

Subsequently, my review of the literature, conducted after spending some time in the field, led me to ask three additional questions, as a set of sub-questions, that I have already foreshadowed in the previous sections. The three additional questions each form the basis of one of the empirical chapters (Chapters Five, Six, and Seven), and it was through formulating these questions that I found confirmation that not only had I chosen the most fitting and important initial research question, but also that it would be in the everyday experiences of both Banterby SC work club’s clients as well as my own experiences as a volunteer that I could find the answers I was looking for.

The first question is: What can flexible, unstructured work clubs tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities towards unemployment and job searching practices in everyday UK society?
The formulation of this question based on the everyday experiences of work club clients with neoliberal governmentalities as experienced in the work club. The question, addressed in Chapter Five, seeks to explore how, for example, clients deal with the image of the ‘stereotypical welfare recipient’ as discussed in section 2.6, and how they feel about the welfare system operating in a time and area where more and more manual jobs are disappearing, as discussed in section 1.5.

The second question is: *How does the digital nature of job searching as observed in Banterby SC work club fit in with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?*

This second question was developed based on the increasing prevalence of digital methods of job searching and State monitoring of the job searching process, as introduced in section 2.5. As described by Helsper (2011), people without employment form a significant part of what she termed the ‘digital underclass’: people who do not have the skills to work with computers and/or the internet to perform the digital tasks that are asked of them as jobseekers. The question, addressed in Chapter Six, explores, first, how ‘digital exclusion’ (Clayton and Macdonald, 2013) makes it difficult for jobseekers to compete in the labour market, and secondly what kind of effect the help of work club staff and volunteers has on the job searching process in terms of client agency and ownership of their job applications.

The third and final question is: *What can the shared everyday experiences of unemployment and job searching of both work club clients and staff in a flexible, unstructured work club tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?*

This sub-question focusses on the *shared experiences of both work club clients and staff*. Chapter Seven, addressing this research question, will still forefront the experiences of the work club clients, but will use the experiences of staff and myself as a volunteer, captured in interviews and reflexive writings, to explore to what extent they overlap. This
focus is important for two reasons. First, there is an overwhelming neoliberal belief, which can be seen in both the Big Society agenda and the way in which the DWP advertises work clubs, that the voluntary sector can significantly address ‘the problem of unemployment’ as introduced in section 2.7. Secondly, on a related note, it is important to explore whether the experiences of the work club clients with neoliberal governmentalities can be supported by the staff and volunteers that are there to support them in their job searching practices.

In chapters One and Two, and through the introduction of the research questions in the current section, I have provided a conceptual analysis of the social significance of work clubs, drawing upon a variety of theoretical constructs as well as an analysis of policy discourse and history. The chapters have identified the complex and circular relationship between the continuing development of neoliberalism in UK (and wider Western) society and how, for example, our understanding of the work ethic informs the stereotypical image of the welfare recipient, which in term informs and supports welfare practices aimed at, to complete the cycle, embedding in society more intense neoliberal governmentalities.

What is missing here, however, is a way of approaching how these constructs interact in complex ways in everyday practices like job searching and visiting (or volunteering in) a work club. The notion of the everyday, embodied in these everyday experiences and practices, is key to this research project not only because it explains why an ethnographic approach was adopted, but also because one of its key aims is to forefront the experiences of work club clients and jobseekers. The work of Pierre Bourdieu, with its focus on practice, offers a way to bring together the various concepts introduced up until now. Specifically, it is in his work on symbolic power/violence that we can find an overarching framework that will allow us to explore the complexities. The next chapter will set out how looking at work clubs and job searching practices through a symbolic power/violence lens allows us to mobilise the different constructs as discussed in chapters One and Two to consider their complex interactions in the domain of everyday practice rather than linking them solely within a policy domain.
Chapter Three. The Unwinnable Game: symbolic violence as a conceptual framework for exploring the everyday experience of unemployment and job searching practices

3.1 Introduction

As an exploratory study into the everyday practices of unemployment and job searching, the study of work clubs spans beyond describing the formal procedures of an organisation to assist people in finding a job, such as a list and description of activities, resources and methods. This is illustrated in chapters One and Two, which reviewed bodies of literature that in one way or another can and should be connected to studying work clubs and the advertised expectations placed on them by the State. However, our goal is to answer the question as to whether work clubs are able to live up to those expectations of supporting people back into work. Therefore, I argue, we need to know more about the everyday experiences of job searching and unemployment of work club clients in order to explore how job searching and the expectations that come with it affect their daily activities and considerations. In fact, one critical question that follows from specifically mentioning the advertised expectations placed on work clubs by the State, is what can work clubs tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities towards unemployment and job searching practices in UK society? In other words, is it possible to identify an ulterior motive and expectation other than to reduce unemployment levels, especially if we acknowledge, as set out in section 1.5, that the obstacles to finding employment for many of the clients of Banterby SC work club are due to there not being enough jobs available in the area? One would expect that, given this low job density, ‘the problem of unemployment’ cannot be substantially reduced solely by simply helping people to apply for jobs. Applying a symbolic power/violence lens allows us to mobilise the different constructs as discussed in chapters One and Two to consider this question.

As discussed in Chapter Two, devices such as language, vocabularies, and imageries can be used to vilify certain parts of the population. Webb et al. (2002) support this idea,
in arguing that these devices can be used as a “battlefield” and as a “weapon” (Webb et al., 2002: 95), as a way to exert power and to define who is on the battlefield in what capacity: soldier or enemy. Studying these practices and devices shows that power is not only exerted directly through, for example, laws, policies, and welfare reforms, but also through more symbolic ways of creating a discourse that enables and maintains a particular world view as a moral guide to dispensing freedoms (Miller and Rose, 2008). As we have seen, for example, in Chapter Two, there is a close dynamic between State control and (perceived) personal freedoms, where freedom is not only promised, but also, paradoxically, regulated and dispensed by the State, thus making neoliberal freedoms a contradiction in terms (Miller and Rose, 2008). In other words, through symbolic assertions of power, institutions such as the State are enabled to vilify unemployment, making the actions and policies which draw on these vilification tactics to appear legitimate and well-founded, making it difficult to fight them. Set against these tensions, the function of this chapter is to explore how work clubs might be investigated using an overarching conceptual framework that uncovers how everyday discursive practices vilify unemployed individuals. I propose to use Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power/violence to understand how all these varied notions and debates come together in the everyday practices of a work club. If we want to learn more about the everyday interactions between work club clients and the social and political constructs, such as neoliberalism, the work ethic, volunteering and unemployment, introduced in Chapter Two, exploring job searching practices as rituals provides a useful starting point, which is where the next section will continue.

3.2 Starting to explore the everyday: ritualistic performances of job searching

Thinking of everyday job searching practices as rituals is a good starting point to introduce the value of the practice-based approach of this research project and the value of applying a Bourdieusian symbolic power/violence lens, as it helps us to understand the everyday interactions between the social and political constructs introduced in chapters One and Two. Being engaged in job searching practices either as a job searcher or as work club
staff, and having to adhere to certain procedures, I propose, could be considered as a ‘ritualistic performance of job searching’. In an anthropological context, rituals have been (broadly) approached as:

1. **habitual action** (any habit or repeated pattern, whether it has a particular meaning, which is where structural objects to finding employment come into focus);

2. **formalised action** (for example, the regular and *meaningful* pattern, in this case reproducing the meaningful ideal and actions of the responsible, active citizen);

3. **action involving transcendent values** (such as, in this case, for example, the construct of the work ethic, which is said to evidence proof that an individual is a ‘good citizen’). (based on Couldry, 2003: 3)

I argue that it would be reductive to think of job searching practices as rituals that neatly fit in one of these categories; instead we should look at job searching practices as fitting all these approaches at once, overlapping and interconnected.

The last two approaches to rituals, and in this case the ritualistic performance of job searching, will probably appear quite straightforward, especially when we allow them to overlap. If we consider that job searching derives meaning from the assumption that engaging in job searching activities makes a person a good citizen (as discussed in chapter Two), especially if this person is unemployed at the time of the activity, we can see that it can be considered both a formalised action and an action involving certain transcendent values. The first “involves a recognisable pattern, form or shape which gives meaning to that action”(Couldry, 2003: 3). In the case of job searching as a formalised ritual, we can argue that it is an activity that people in receipt of a Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) engage in daily and that, in the UK is regulated by the Jobseekers Agreement or Claimant Commitment, giving it a recognisable pattern. In case of the second, the transcendent values attached to this action, are mostly related to the previous, where the regular and meaningful pattern of behaviour derives its meaning from its implied
relationship to citizenship. Considering ‘employment’ as an ‘ultimate value’, based on the example of the ‘good citizen’ given above, the goal of the ritualised performance of job searching is to transcend into the realm of good citizenship.

Still, of the three aforementioned approaches to rituals it might be easy to dismiss the first, job searching practices as habitual action. This might be the cause because it implies to not add any significant meaning or value to the action that is performed, while the other two place the action within a wider social context in which the action is not only performed, but also defined according to certain rules, regulations and particular pursued outcomes. However, paradoxically perhaps it is the practical meaninglessness of job searching, including its lack of efficacy that indicates its social meaning. What I am talking about here is that “job searching” has become, or so I will argue in this thesis, in some ways a meaningless activity in certain areas because of the lack of jobs in many de-industrialised areas in the UK. In other words, unemployed people are expected to take part in this activity regardless of whether the desired outcome (obtaining employment) is realistically achievable, suggesting that is the ‘taking part that counts’.

What I propose, then, is that throughout our recent political developments, where society has come to rely on neoliberal values and approaches to work and employment (as discussed in Chapter Two), the practical meaning of the ritualistic performance has mostly disappeared, especially at the lower end of the labour market where manual and industrial labour are situated (and disappearing and becoming more insecure). This disappearance means it has been replaced by a political and moral meaning, informed by the importance of the work ethic as discussed in Chapter Two, which has managed to instil, in a way, job searching as a habitual practice, which people are taking part in to merely prove their willingness and deservingness of support, rather than expecting to find employment. Ultimately, I argue, it is in this partial loss of meaning, or perhaps a shift from practical meaning to political and moral meaning, that we can and should problematise the ritualistic performances of job searching as the rules of the game of job searching do not seem to be fair for everyone involved in playing it. This is where we must start thinking about who decides upon the rules of the game that is played on that playing field. The
next section will draw us closer to Bourdieu’s ideas that are crucial in understanding the workings of symbolic power/violence.

3.3 Introducing the rules of the game and how they are constructed

Engaging in ritualistic performances of job searching means following certain rules that are, supposedly, safeguarding the (politically and perhaps spiritually/morally) meaningful outcome of the practice. Why we have these rules, how they are developed by whom and what happens to people who do not or cannot conform to them are questions that concern ideas of power and domination in society. Bourdieu (1989) argues that the way we think about society, its rituals and rules, and how we navigate them, has to be led to the acknowledgement that the structures that surround us and our actions are as complex as they are interrelated; we have to “think relationally” (Bourdieu in: Wacquant, 1989: 39). This includes ways of thinking about how certain groups or individuals are being dominated, and how these power relationships come into existence and are able to be maintained. Most importantly, we have to do so without focusing on these power relationships as being composed of dualisms of, for example, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, for in doing so we will fail to recognise their complexity (Connolly and Healy, 2004).

When considering the make-up of our societies (and before I continue to discuss about how Bourdieu viewed power relations and domination by certain ideologies) let us consider the notion of field as used by Bourdieu, which he defines as:

... a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (\textit{situs}) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). Each field presupposes, and generates by its very functioning, the belief in the value of the stakes it offers (Bourdieu in: Wacquant, 1989: 39).
In other words, a field is a space of relational forces where actors compete for the power to determine the rules that are prevalent in said field, and in doing so rules are created, (re)inforced or transformed: “those who dominate in a given field are in position to make it function to their advantage” (Bourdieu in: Wacquant, 1989: 40). This means that a field is anything but a static entity or space, allowing for power to shift and actors to (re)gain (their) dominant positions. The goal for an individual, therefore, is always to be in a position where rules and rituals can be defined and/or safeguarded in order to protect one’s own position.

Within social fields, Bourdieu’s concepts of doxa, (forms of) capital and the habitus are crucial (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990). In exploring these three terms, perhaps it works best if we start to think of human agency and practice as the playing of a game, an analogy not only used by Bourdieu, but also by, for example, Jerry, the work club leader in Banterby SC work club, when describing job searching practices, as we will see in Chapter Seven. In an actual game, such as chess, or football, the field is concrete and tangible, a material construct with fixed boundaries that often comes with an explicit set of rules to which the individuals who wish to compete agree to adhere. Social fields, instead,

... are the products of a long, slow, process of autonomisation, and are therefore, so to speak, games ‘in themselves’ and not ‘for themselves’, one does not embark on the game by a conscious act, one is born into the game, with the game (Bourdieu, 1990: 67).

These social fields are not always clearly demarcated. Instead, smaller social fields such as that of, for example, education, politics and media, can overlap and/or influence each other. This means that the society one lives in, as a larger field consists of multiple intersecting smaller social fields. What is more, within these social fields the ‘playing field’ is not levelled: “it is structured and differentiated through the structure of access to different forms of capital - which are all the resources valued in the field by the various groups of social agents active in the field” (Ojha et al., 2009: 367). In other words, these
forms of capital\textsuperscript{10} can privilege those social agents who have managed to inherit or obtain them, allowing them to influence the social field’s rules of the game.

These rules of the game, or presuppositions, are what Bourdieu calls \textit{doxa}, and social actors operating in a field are judged on their commitment to adhere to these rules, making them not only rigid regulations but even more so tacit values by which people are judged. Doxa, then, serve two main functions: “first, limit the space of inquiry to a manageable level to make decisions, and second, provide legitimacy to social practices” (Ojha et al., 2009: 367). Thus, those agents who have acquired the most useful combination and amount of capital in a certain social field are able to control to what extent who can question or oppose their influence, claiming, for example, that ongoing deliberation with all stakeholders will not contribute to swift action, reaffirming and protecting their dominant position.

\textit{Habitus} is the terms used by Bourdieu to address \textit{agency}: how social actors \textit{act} within a social field and how these actions come to be. Habitus, in Bourdieu’s own words, is:

\begin{quote}
... understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a \textit{matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions}, and makes possible the achievements of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems, and thanks to the unceasing corrections of the results obtained, dialectically produced by those results, and on the other hand, an \textit{objective event} which exerts its action of conditional stimulation calling for demanding a determinate response, only on those who are disposed to constitute it as such because they are endowed with a determinate type of dispositions. ... Without ever being totally co-ordinated, since they are the product of ‘causal series’
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} These forms include cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital. This thesis does not seek to contribute to studies of forms of capital, nor to explore these in more detail as this is not necessary in understanding the general idea of how ‘the rules of the game’ are being constructed and enforced.
characterized by different structural durations, the dispositions and the situations which combine synchronically to constitute a determinate conjuncture are never wholly independent, since they are engendered by the objective structures, that is, in the last analysis, by the economic bases of the social formation in question (Bourdieu, 1977: 82-83).

The nature of human agency, Bourdieu argues, cannot be understood without linking it to certain practices and social fields, essentially saying that what we do is never an isolated decision, and even the decisions we consciously make are informed by the wider social structures we grew up in. This is not to say that individual actors have no say in how they act and that actions carried out within/through the habitus cannot be “accompanied by a strategic [conscious] calculation”; however, functioning as the starting point, Bourdieu argues, “these responses are first defined without any calculation, in relation to objective [rather than subjective] potentialities, immediately inscribed in the present” (Bourdieu, 1990: 53). So, it is to say that habitus does indeed involve choice and agency beyond the scope of what we might be inclined to do in the spur of the moment, but that these actions and choices are developed from a certain starting point that is indeed set and influenced by the habitus. Nonetheless, these actions and behaviours are limited to the possibilities that exist within certain habitus: despite the fact that choice is at the core of developing and emerging habitus, a habitus “tends to generate all the ‘reasonable’, ‘common sense’ behaviours” (Bourdieu, 1990: 55).

As Reay (2004) points out, “habitus [can be considered] a deep, interior, epicentre containing many matrices. These matrices demarcate the extent of choices available to any individual. Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds [themselves] in, their external circumstances” (Reay, 2004). Furthermore, as Lizardo (2004) puts it, we should consider habitus to be Bourdieu’s approach to a “socially produced cognitive structure, composed of systems of bodily operations that generate practical action in the world” (Lizardo, 2004: 393-394). In other words, the context in which we grow up and find our foundations will ultimately influence not only what we do, but even more how these actions have come to be through offering
us a certain amount of perceivable options for courses of action. The choices that we make every day are a selection of choices that have become inherent to our habitus over time. This, in turn, also makes us think about unemployed people’s past jobs, technological skills, demeanour, and how this affects their future (perceived) career paths.

What choices people (perceive they can) make is thus defined by the habitus, as well as the specific context of the field. The habitus, in turn, is influenced by the social fields it operates in, where the fields and their rules are influenced - or rather dominated - by a certain discourse that is developed to both appear ‘natural’ and ensures that the power to develop the rules of the game is maintained by the dominant group of the main field. The next section will therefore discuss in more detail how in our current society the dominant (neoliberal) discourse relating to job searching practices is being developed and promoted.

3.4 Defining and promoting the rules of the game: from a social to punitive discourse of support

The rules of the game, or ‘doxa’, are defined by those social agents who have acquired the most useful combination and amount of capital in a certain social field. Although I will not discuss the notion of capital in greater detail as it is outside the scope of this thesis to build on these concepts directly, it is important to acknowledge that without significant amounts of capital, whether that is social, economic, cultural or symbolic, it is impossible to influence a field in such a way that the outcomes might be beneficial. In fact, in line with general economic resources, those who are at an economic disadvantage can neither physically buy themselves the resources they need, nor use more symbolic ways of improving their lives. Indeed, it is those people who do have significant amounts of capital who decide what is ‘the truth’, or what is the ‘natural order of things’; they create the vocabulary, the stories and the yard sticks by which all agents have to measure themselves. A simple example here is the way the work ethic is being used as the defining quality of a ‘good citizens’. In most situations and fields, ultimately, it is the State and those in its direct service that possess these sufficient amounts of capital, and who write...
the rule book and the manuals for performing certain rituals, including the ritualised performance of job searching.

From the 1980s onward social approaches to welfare began to be viewed as problematic, which signalled the start of a shift from a social to a punitive discourse of welfare support, changing the rules of the ‘unemployment game’ significantly. Social approaches to welfare culminated in the formation of the Welfare State across the Western economies between the 1930s and 1950s, where in post-War periods, people were determined to eradicate mass unemployment and its effects. Therefore, following the ideas of, among others, Marshall (1950), welfare rights were unconditionally tied to citizenship status, and although citizenship was still, indeed, tied to both rights and responsibilities, the social rights of the citizen always outweighed the civic duties tied to citizenship (Dwyer, 2004). Welfare rights and policies were “viewed by many to be both outdated and likely to exacerbate passive welfare dependency” (Dwyer, 2004: 267). In the 1990s a ‘Third Way’ (Giddens, 1998) was being paved, and then Prime Minister Tony Blair, leader of ‘New Labour’ used it as a way to “draw together seemingly irreconcilable concepts, such as fairness and responsibility, or toughness and caring” (Wiggan, 2012: 386). It was argued that

…the correct role for governments to assume in relation to welfare is to encourage an “entrepreneurial culture” that rewards “responsible risk takers”. This new “social investment State” meets its commitments to social justice and equality via the redistribution of “possibilities”, rather than wealth (Dwyer, 2004: 267).

This entrepreneurial approach to citizenship resonates with the idea of the *homo economicus*, the individual as an ‘entrepreneur of himself’ (Foucault, 2008: 226). Being this individual entrepreneur, as discussed in Chapter Two, means “being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault, 2008: 226). In other words, a neoliberal drive behind society is aimed at creating citizens that comply with a discourse that makes those individuals the only ones responsible for their own success or failure in a capitalist society. One form of failure,
then, is to not find (a way back to) employment quickly enough. As argued by Dwyer, the UK’s leaders, inspired by Giddens, felt that people whom they considered to be reluctant to go back to work should be ‘encouraged’ to do so by implementing benefits sanctions. Within what New Labour introduced as ‘New Deals’ in 1997, targeting young people and long-term unemployed individuals, “failure to take up one of the four work/training options offered [resulted] in punitive benefits sanctions. Claimants could lose some or all of their benefits for a period of between 2 and 26 weeks depending on circumstances” (Dwyer, 2004: 267). By 2016, this period had been extended to three years.

We can see how sanctioning or punishing unemployed individuals for not adhering to the rules or doxa is being normalised by looking at the recent words of former Secretary of State for Work and Pension Iain Duncan Smith (2016):

> Seventy-five per cent of all those who have been sanctioned say it helped them focus and get on. Even the people in the Jobcentres think it’s the right thing to do ... sanctions are the reason why we now have the highest employment levels ever in the UK, and more women in work. What we say is, ‘we’ll give you all the support but at the end of the day we expect you to do something for it: go back to work, take the job, take the interviews’. And it works, talk to any of the advisers in the Jobcentres (Duncan Smith, 2016).

This quote, published only weeks before he resigned his post, caused a lot of uproar, where online newspapers such as Welfare Weekly (2016), and the original poster of this video fragment naming it “Sociopath IDS says people are thankful for being sanctioned” condemned these statements. Similar outrage has been reported earlier in 2015, when the DWP admitted to making up quotes from benefits claimants saying they were glad they were sanctioned, making them more active and more aware of their responsibilities (Rawlinson and Perraudin, 2015). They did so, the DWP said, “for illustrative purposes only” (Welfare Weekly, 2015).
The claims of the DWP defending its sanction regime, often using scrounger narrative vocabularies, are increasingly explored in the academic literature. For example, in a recent study MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong (2014a) explored the myth of ‘a culture of worklessness’, the statement that there are people who are third-generation unemployed, and that there are entire streets in neighbourhoods where nobody works and wants to work, as featured in television series Benefits Street (Channel 4). They found that next to it almost being impossible to find people who adhere to this exact description, the numbers as shared by politicians with the media do not add up: instead of the 90% of people in a particular neighbourhood being fully dependent on welfare benefits, they found that “(only) somewhere between 38% and 35% of households might be regarded as ‘workless’ on ‘Benefits Street’” (MacDonald et al., 2014a: 4), with the rest of them having at least one person in employment, and of those who are considered ‘workless’ the majority had aspirations for (re)gaining full employment.

The stereotypical welfare recipient, or rather its myth is perceived as a possible danger to society (see Cruikshank, 1999) at the same level as (organised) crime, which justifies intensified monitoring and surveillance. This is nothing new, and something that Foucault (1977) observed when exploring shifts in criminality and punishment in eighteenth-century France in his seminal work Discipline and Punish. By combining Bourdieu’s ideas about society being guided by certain rules and Foucault’s observations of a growing importance of surveillance to uphold these rules that we can see how power is not only utilised, but also enforced by those who have it. In Discipline and Punish Foucault describes a “shift from a criminality of blood to a criminality of fraud” as being related to, among other things, a society “embracing the development of production, the increase of wealth, [and] a higher juridical and moral value placed on property relations” (Foucault, 1977: 77), as described in Chapter Two as key characteristics the eighteenth-century nation-state depended on for its security and survival (Dean, 2008: 28). This shift called for “stricter methods of surveillance, a tighter partitioning of the population, more efficient techniques of locating and obtaining information: the shift in illegal practices is correlative with an extension and a refinement of punitive practices” (Foucault, 1977: 77). However, following Foucault, rather than prioritising the welfare of its citizens through these
measures and mechanisms, the State wanted to make power operate more efficiently. More specifically:

It was an effort to adjust the mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals; an adaptation and a refinement of the machinery that assumes responsibility for and places under surveillance their everyday behaviour, their identity, their activity, their apparently unimportant gestures; another policy for that multiplicity of bodies and forces that constitutes a population. What was emerging no doubt was not so much a new respect for the humanity of the condemned - torture was still frequent in the execution of even minor criminals - as a tendency towards a more finely tuned justice, towards a closer penal mapping of the social body. Following a circular process, the threshold of the passage to violent crimes rises, intolerance to economic offences increases, controls become more thorough, penal interventions at once more premature, and more numerous (Foucault, 1977: 77-78).

This description of eighteenth-century France sounds familiar. Although I would argue that in current UK society, violent crimes of the ‘criminality of blood’-type, are in no way tolerated nor could its punishments be considered mild, what I would argue is that (perceived) fraud is placed almost on the same moral level, and hereby used as a conduit for increased surveillance of the individual’s everyday lives. Foucault’s phrase ‘penal interventions, at once more premature, and more numerous’ Cruikshank’s (1999) critique and analysis of the creation of the ‘welfare queen’.

In *Punishing the Poor* Loïc Wacquant (2009) argues that contemporary welfare reforms and the “workfare revolution” is not merely a “mechanical response to economic changes”, but even more so, it is

… an exercise in State crafting aimed at producing - and then adapting to - these very changes. In other words […] the workfare revolution is a specifically political
project aimed at remaking not only the market but also, and above all, the State itself (2009: 103).

Wacquant asserts that parallel to reforms in the justice system, neoliberal oriented reforms have changed the way we view the relation between work and welfare (receipt), and have hereby slowly but steadily changed the rules of the game. Criminalising welfare receipts by making welfare dependency punishable is only possible through seeing and promoting the need for welfare assistance as unconnected to the poor condition of the labour market, the quality and pay of unskilled labour, and so on (Wacquant, 2009: 103).

Wacquant argues that if one were to look at peripheral causes for unemployment and people requesting social assistance, any blame would not rest upon the individual, but upon the State, in enabling an individualist neoliberal apparatus to take shape. In *Punishing the Poor* Wacquant (2009) focuses mainly on US policy reforms since the Clinton administration in 1996, but emphasises that this trend has caused major changes on both sides of the Atlantic, including in the UK (Wacquant, 2009: 77). This is something that in 2001 he considered to be preventable from happening at a full scale, hoping the American situation would function as a warning (Wacquant, 2001), but which has appeared to have happened in Europe despite America’s example-setting political discourse that overall has not decreased poverty levels despite a decrease in welfare recipients. In fact, the most telling result is that next to there being a decrease in the number of people receiving benefits and the stagnant number of people living in poverty, the severity of their poverty has risen significantly (Wacquant, 2009). This, ultimately, is in the hands of those who decide upon the rules of the game, and therefore who can make sure that implemented ‘solutions’ do not threaten the rule maker’s way of life. In this case, austerity measures and welfare reforms focus on the already disadvantaged people who do not even have the power to influence the system for their benefit, nor the power to actively make a case against this indictment.

In his essay *Crafting the Neoliberal State: Workfare, Prisonfare, and Social Insecurity*, Wacquant (2010) continues and reaffirms his exploration of the punitive neoliberal State.
In this paper he highlights that despite its rhetoric of slimming down the State, and government pushing the individual citizen to take charge over their own lives without interference from above, the penalization of poverty and dependency is a vehicle to create fractures between citizens, ultimately “corroding democracy” (Wacquant, 2010: 218).

Ultimately, the punitive turn can be considered an “exercise in State crafting” (Wacquant, 2010: 210), where instead of a slimming down of the State, the reality appears to be the creation of a “centaur State”, which is

... liberal at the top and paternalistic at the bottom, [and] which presents radically different faces at the two ends of the social hierarchy: a comely and caring visage toward the middle and upper classes, and a fearsome and frowning mug toward the lower class. (Wacquant, 2010: 217)

This discrepancy in treatment, Wacquant argues, shows itself in its aim to “contain the urban disorders spawned by economic deregulation and to discipline the precarious fractions of the post-industrial working class” (Wacquant, 2010: 198). This form of State crafting can clearly be linked to neoliberal governmentalities, as discussed in Chapter Two. While official channels and rhetoric of government speak of freedom found in self-responsibility (see section 2.4), symbolic practices, and even the supposedly separate punitive system, shape a narrative that vilifies the people who are unable to find work in a post-industrial society. In other words, in a society which is supposedly built on the premise of minimised State interference, it is still the State who decides who is deserving of this non-interference policy, who can be ‘free’ to live the kind of life the State wants them to live. Ultimately, the State, in this form, seeks to relinquish its (perceived) obligations towards the people without giving up its power over the people, as without this power, acceptance of the conditionality for (symbolic forms of) citizenship and support by the majority of the people would be difficult.

Dassinger (2013) talks about this same shift, “from post-war Keynesianism commitments of full employment and a strong social State to the subordination of all human relations
and activity to the market” (Dassinger, 2013: 219, my emphasis). Later, and it is useful to quote her at length here, she elaborates on this shift to individuals being subject to and only to the market:

… the neoliberal subject must be made to share political rationality that social needs must be subordinated to the unfettered operation of the market. That left unregulated, markets will function in self-equilibrious ways and create sufficient wealth to trickle down to all and that the satisfaction of human needs can only be met through private consumption. The social State must also be reconceptualised as nothing but unnecessary interference, squandering unnecessary resources, and heightening dependency through social protection. Finally, the neoliberal subject must come to understand their value can only be judged by the ability to either produce or consume, and that any state of dependency may be legitimately pathologised or criminalised. (Dassinger, 2013: 221, my emphasis)

Following Dassinger’s logic it could be argued that anyone who cannot be identified as a neoliberal subject in the way that their economic output does not accord with neoliberal market rules for good citizenship, is in violation of these rules, and therefore can be considered a criminal. In fact, as Bauman (1999) notes,

… Superfluous people are in a no-win situation. If they attempt to fall in line with currently lauded ways of life, they are immediately accused of sinful arrogance, false pretences and the check of claiming unearned bonuses - if not of criminal intent. If they openly resent and refuse to honour those ways in which may be savoured by the haves, but are more like poison for themselves, the have-nots, ...this is promptly taken as proof of what ‘public opinion’ ‘told you all along’ - that the superfluous are not just an alien body, but the cancerous growth, gnawing at the healthy tissues of society and sworn enemies of “our way of life” and “what we stand for” (Bauman, 2007: 41).
Ultimately, this rhetoric is arranging the neoliberal doxa in which punitive measures are legitimised through a vocabulary not just of an ‘us and them’, but rather of an ‘us versus them’, considering ‘them’ an enemy of ‘the people’ and the State, and threatening the foundations of ‘our’ existence. In this we can recognise the myth of ‘the stereotypical welfare recipient’ and the scrounger narrative as introduced in Chapter Two. It is through introducing such antagonists and stories that society is offered a readymade villain and scape goat who is always presumed guilty. In other words, punitive measures become ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ and so embedded into our daily lives that it becomes very difficult to observe and recognise flaws and complexities in the reasoning behind these measures, including for people who are at the receiving end of these measures. This is where Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power/violence can help us.

3.5 Legitimising Symbolic Power/Violence: Deserving and Undeserving

The rules that define job searching practices, or ritualistic performances of job searching, could be considered a form of what Bourdieu termed symbolic power/violence, which, in Bourdieu’s own words, is:

… the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognised as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety - in short, all the virtues honoured by the code of honour - cannot fail to be seen as the most economical mode of domination, i.e. the mode which best corresponds to the economy of the system (Bourdieu, 1977: 192).

Symbolic power and violence are therefore a form of domination that is “exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 167). It is a form of power monopolised by the State, which means that the State has “the power to constitute and impose as universally applicable within a given “nation” … a common set of coercive norms” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 112). This does not mean, however, that people can or will not overtly reject how they are treated or, for example, are
represented in the media, and will not (try to) defend themselves from harm or rectify misrepresentation (Thompson in: Bourdieu, 1991). However, individuals do accept the power that those words can have over, for example and in this case, their understanding and the experience of unemployment. They too, despite denouncing themselves as being part of the scrounger narrative or being an example of ‘the stereotypical welfare recipient’, believe that it is through paid employment that they will be able to have a better life, despite, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, seeing or even experiencing the negative effects of the low-pay, no-pay cycle (Shildrick et al., 2012b) on both their financial and emotional well-being. In a way, they are coerced into thinking that job searching is the answer to their problems, if only the answer to getting their status back from being called ‘scroungers’, and being ‘promoted’ back to ‘good citizen’. Therefore, we can see that the field of unemployment, its rules and its vocabulary are examples of coercive norms, and, together with the central role of work in society, they form an (informal) institution (i.e. discourse), which, in turn, “can only be efficacious if it is objectified in bodies in the form of durable dispositions that recognise and comply with the specific demands of a given institutional area of activity” (McNay, 1999: 99).

In short, the notion of symbolic violence, to Bourdieu, is key to understanding and exploring how certain inequalities are created and maintained. As put by Connolly and Healy (2004), “… it represents the way in which people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them” (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 15). It is therefore, they continue, important to recognise that Bourdieu is looking “beyond the crude dualisms of freedom/determinism and choice/restraint” that the State appears to be creating and maintaining (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 16). Whereas dualisms imply a clear distinction between violator and violated, “… the specificity of symbolic violence resides precisely in the fact that it requires of the person who undergoes it an attitude which defies the ordinary alternative between freedom and constraint” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 168). In other words, the jobseeker, in this case, is an active accomplice to the State in accepting the burden that is placed upon him/her to prove their worthiness of State support.
Bourdieu (2000) states that the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie was able to maintain their status by promoting “the distinction between the ‘deserving poor’ and the rest, who were morally condemned for their fecklessness and immorality [and therefore ‘undeserving poor’]” (Bourdieu, 2000: 79). Based on this analysis we can see, for example, how jobseekers often refer to themselves as being committed to their job searching practices in order to distinguish themselves from those who, according to them, are not. In doing so they are acknowledging the reality of the ‘welfare scrounger’ by pointing at others to escape the stigma themselves (see also Chapter Two, ‘Cruikshank and the myth of the welfare queen’). This is similar to what Shildrick et al. (2012b) found, for in doing so they are “denying their own poverty, casting the label onto others and then, denigrating and blaming those who were, they said, in this position … [highlighting how] the lives of others was often viewed as a consequence of individual culpability or of personal moral failure” (Shildrick et al., 2012b: 169). What we see here is that people are, or feel, obliged to display their positive attitude towards the work ethic (as introduced in Chapter 2). Indeed, by referring to how they value the ritualistic performances of job searching (as introduced in section 3.2) and measure the Other alongside this, they actively contribute to upholding the very narrative that is hurting them as much as the people they are trying to differentiate themselves from. This is where distinctions are being drawn where people are seen as either ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ of State support and compassion: where the ‘deserving’ are “industrious and disciplined”, and the undeserving are “lazy, undisciplined and criminal” (Valentine and Harris, 2014). This kind of thinking is, to continue Bourdieu’s quote at the beginning of this paragraph, making the notion of ‘competence’ a means to “determine and justify election and exclusion”, a distinction that is to be made “by the State alone, … through [so-called] rational, universal procedures” (Bourdieu, 2000: 80).

The deserving/undeserving binary is clearly closely related to what was discussed earlier in this chapter about punitive measures. If we want to come closer to an understanding of how people encounter and deal with these moral judgements surrounding their job searching behaviour on a daily basis and the effects they have, we should find a way to put these everyday practices and experiences in a context or framework that allows us to link the everyday to more conceptual notions such as neoliberalism, the work ethic, and
the general idea of and expectations placed on work clubs. Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power/violence provides this framework, for it is a notion that is centred around on (everyday) practices as shaped and directed by power relations that are anything but straightforward. The next section provides some examples of other studies that have used Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power/violence to explore everyday practices of and influenced by symbolic power relations to show how valuable his theories are for exploring everyday realities of misinterpreted or unrecognised instances of symbolic power/violence. By showing how certain ways of thinking and acting that might seem normal, but ultimately perpetuating symbolic power/violence relations, we can see how it could also be a tool to explore unemployment and job searching practices.

3.6 Earlier studies using symbolic violence as a conceptual framework

Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence has been used as the basis for many studies concerned with a wide variety of social injustices in a myriad of different fields of interest, including racism, gender inequality and class. Connolly and Healy (2004), for example, have utilised the concept to explore how class structures can function as a form of symbolic violence through looking at young school boys of various different social groups and their outlook on future studies and jobs. They conclude that symbolic violence provides a useful way of escaping and avoiding the dualisms of freedom and constraint, and in uncovering “… how power and inequality are not just external phenomena, but affect and reach into the very psyche of the individual” (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 30).

More specifically:

… through the internalisation of the social structures and processes of inequality that impinge directly on their lives, they have come to develop a world-view (habitus) that contributes to the reproduction of their subordinate position (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 28).

In other words, (symbolic forms of) power, imposed on them through persistent class structures, were internalised and was a deciding factor in how they would allow
themselves to develop, as certain actions or future perspectives were considered unachievable or unrealistic given their backgrounds.

Cooper (2012), focusing on State-led youth work practice in England, aimed at “[shedding] light on the way the operations of social institutions often conceal the power relations behind the violence of oppression and thereby add their own symbolic force to those relations” (2012: 53). She did so in showing that State-led initiatives operate based on the very (neoliberal) principles that are at the core of many of the problems that they are in turn claiming to address and solve, hereby concealing the power relations that legitimise these forms of symbolic violence. She argues that:

… by working to predetermined targets and outcomes, youth workers are abandoning critical youth work practice and, as a consequence, are complicit in stifling opportunities for young people to develop the resilience necessary for overcoming sources of oppression limiting life chances. … Symbolic violence occurs where social agents - for example, educators, social workers and youth workers - operate in ways consistent with the dominant culture and perpetuate ‘a conspiracy that maintains the illusion that education and schooling provide an avenue for lower classes to attain upward social and economic mobility’ (Cooper, 2012: 66).

In other words, working with disadvantaged youth based on predetermined targets and outcomes means that these targets are treated based on predetermined (perceived) causes of certain predetermined (perceived) problems. Therefore, working with disadvantaged youth according to specific expectations of how they both behave and should be supported based on this suspected behaviour contributes to reaffirming these expectations rather than to explore whether these expectations are based on merit.

Dealing with gender inequality, Jones (2015) sought to investigate how educators are at risk of “perpetuating taken-for-granted notions [with regard to masculinity in the field of entrepreneurship] … closing down opportunities for students and staff to challenge them
in the classroom” (Jones, 2015: 317). They conclude that educators should be careful in making comparisons between genders in the classroom for as they may risk reproducing certain attitudes to gender in specific roles such as that of the entrepreneur, appearing to be more fitting for men. Tyler (2015), in an argument to change the way we approach issues of class, proposes that we approach class not in terms of identity, but rather as ‘struggles against classification’. Academics and anyone dealing with sociological research has to, she argues, “… pay heed to the power of naming, the symbolic violence of classifications and the performatve effects of classificatory practices” (Tyler, 2015: 500) and ultimately, “engage in a scholarship of declassification [if we want to] contribute to the development of alternative social and political imageries” (Tyler, 2015: 508).

In a more context-relevant study, Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend (2014) have studied spatial mobilities in the light of workfare and activation policies in Germany through a symbolic violence lens. Workfare and activation policies are aimed at “emphasising the obligation of people in need of income support to engage more actively in the process of seeking work and to accept (almost) any job they are offered” (Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend, 2014: 326), and fit in very clearly with neoliberal ideologies surrounding self-responsibilisation and ‘deservingness’ as discussed above. Their findings include, among other things, that staff of the German equivalent of the Jobcentre are, despite them not necessarily wanting to do so, “crucial to the enactment of policies, both through their direct influence on clients and the realisation and legitimisation of policies entailed by their sociological action” (Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend, 2014: 340). This is an observation that could equally be true in the everyday practices of Banterby SC, where, as Chapter Seven will explore in more detail, despite staff and volunteers acknowledging the unfair situations of the work club’s clients, there was little or nothing they could do to change their situation.

Focusing on young people, and the language of risk and resilience that is used to talk about young peoples’ lives and futures, Foster and Spencer (2010) argue that symbolic violence is committed against young people “whose lives are presumably captured and finalised by this conceptual language” (Foster and Spencer, 2010: 126). By labelling
young people as being ‘at risk’, and encouraging them to be, despite their ‘circumstances’, ‘resilient’, young people are, without considering their personal views and experiences of their situations, are being imposed an identity by a dominant group of social agents. These social agents, ranging from youth scholars to community workers and policy makers, construct narratives that ultimately aids in the construction of a stereotype upon on which certain values, mores and ultimately courses of action such as interventions are developed and imposed. This resonates with the moral judgements related to the dualism of deserving-undeserving as discussed in the previous section; in labelling people as being part of a perceived problematic group of people, practices and violations are set up to become ‘the natural order of things’ in order to ‘address the problem’.

What we can and should take away from these studies for the research at hand, I feel, is that we have to be careful about how, in academia, we talk about jobseekers and unemployment in relation to certain perceived social problems in order for us not to subconsciously contribute to maintaining the symbolic violence that we observe, similar to the way we may be contributing to upholding the myth of the scrounger through acknowledging its existence by finding ways to prove that certain (groups of) people do not conform to that image.

3.7 Using symbolic violence to study unemployment and job searching practices

As demonstrated above, researchers have engaged with symbolic power/violence as a tool to explore what they perceive as social injustice, and it has been applied to a wide variety of fields, including the field of unemployment and policy making. Specifically, taking note of both Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend’s (2014) and Foster and Spencer’s (2010) application of symbolic violence as a conceptual framework, it is not difficult to see how this lens can and should be used in exploring job searching practices as well as exploring the work club as an institution in the UK. If it can be argued that in Germany Jobcentre staff reluctantly but persistently recreate and impose upon their clients the very policies that they deem harmful and unfair, the same could be happening in UK work
clubs. If the way young people are being ‘managed’ according to a single label (i.e. at risk youth, as discussed in the previous section) that is imposed upon them without considering their personal circumstances, narratives, or even their own perception and opinion of being labelled in that way - if that can be considered a form of symbolic violence, the same could perhaps be said for the way unemployed individuals and jobseekers are labelled and treated.

For anyone who has experienced for themselves, or has engaged with people who are engaging in contemporary job searching practices it should be self-evident that some power relations are at work within these practices. Through these power relations the actions of the jobseeker are regulated through rules (doxa) and in which the jobseeker has no other choice than to oblige, even if there is a suspicion or a feeling that the premise upon which these rules are being imposed on them is unfair and/or damaging their well-being. By using Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power/violence as a lens, this thesis aims to allow the reader to engage with the people of Banterby SC work club, to join the researcher in exploring how the game that jobseekers are expected to play is set up, and how these rules are or are not fair to all those entering the playing field. At the end of Chapter Two, a relationship between neoliberalism, governmentalities and the work ethic was identified, but it remained unclear as to how this played out in terms of the everyday experience of unemployment and job searching. I have, in Chapter Three, proposed that considering job searching practices as a form of rituals alongside Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power/violence might be a particularly useful way to understand this relationship. This approach draws our attention to the as yet neglected importance of the work club in understanding the everyday experience of job searching in a neoliberal society. Therefore, this study of work clubs goes beyond the clinical descriptions of procedures and rules to address how those work clubs assist people in adhering to those rules, and beyond focusing on procedural that were mostly central to previous work club research. What is at the core of the current study is its holistic approach to learning more about how and why neoliberal approaches to job searching procedures are enacted by jobseekers themselves and how work clubs as charitable community groups supporting people actually play a role in supporting these procedures that bring people to visit them
in the first place. To reiterate, this study is, in a way, bringing several aspects and approaches of previous studies linked to work clubs by Van Oort (2015) and Crisp (2015) together. Van Oort applied an ethnographic method, theorising through a Foucauldian lens, but focused on two highly structured organisations in the US, where Crisp, focusing on the UK, based his research on interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including work club clients, staff, and people from local authorities, including the Jobcentre Plus without using a specific theoretical perspective. Focusing on Banterby SC work club, situated in the UK, this study applies not only an ethnographic approach, but also introduces the flexible, unstructured work club. This kind of work club has, up until now, as shown in Chapter One, not received any specific attention, while, I argue, this set-up lends itself to exploring everyday practices of job searching through a theoretical lens as they are not structured through guided and obligatory group activities and workshops.

Connecting here, then, the relation between the concepts introduced Chapter Two and Bourdieu’s symbolic power/violence as discussed in Chapter Three, it is clear that using symbolic power/violence as a theoretical lens offers a way forward to answer the research questions introduced at the end of Chapter Two which all focussed on the importance of everyday experience, something that up until now has not been done in connection to UK-based work clubs. To be more specific, symbolic power/violence as a lens is a response to the limitations of the theorising and political discourse analysis of Chapter Two in relation to researching the everyday, individual experiences of such political discourses. In other words, it will allow us to consider the complicity of clients and the work club and those working at the work club in reproducing practices within a system that ‘do not work for them’. This in turn, justifies a (critical?) ethnographic methodology which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

3.8 Conclusion

The conceptual framework of symbolic power/violence that is utilised in this study allows for us to blend the experiences with job searching practices and procedures from both jobseekers and work club staff and volunteers in order to propose a way to study
neoliberal approaches to job searching practices and procedures, and how these are enacted in work clubs. Specifically, as discussed in the previous section, focusing on instances of symbolic power/violence within work clubs allows us to understand more intimately the everyday experiences of jobseekers with neoliberal governmentalities and the work ethic as a persistent and prevalent moral guide for reaching the status of ‘good citizen’, regardless of whether this is actually possible.

Therefore, this chapter has explained how the core principles of Bourdieu’s notion of *symbolic power/violence* provide a useful lens to extend the work already done not only by Van Oort (2015) and Crisp (2015), but also Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend (2014) who have also used Bourdieu to study unemployment and welfare in a German setting. It has started to frame the key themes as discussed in Chapter Two within this conceptual framework by exploring how neoliberal approaches to citizenship (in relation to unemployment) allow for a vilification process that in turn enables discourses of symbolic power/violence to be developed and maintained. More specifically, it has focused on Bourdieu’s metaphor of a ‘game’, and how the rules, decided upon by those who have acquired the most (important forms of) capital, are constructed in such a way that it is mainly that same group who devised that benefits from them and has the resources to adhere to them and/or is not affected by them. If anything, the myth of ‘the stereotypical welfare recipient’, as introduced in Chapter Two, is attractive because it sells us the idea that there is something simple we can do to protect ourselves from becoming part of that group, if only by overtly rejecting our perceived membership. The next chapter explores the research design, which allowed me to explore the everyday experiences with unemployment and job searching in Banterby SC work club.
Chapter Four. Methodology: A Reflexive Research Journey

4.1 Introduction: why ethnography?

The researcher, like his informants, is a social animal. He has a role to play, and he has his own personality needs that must be met in some degree if he is to function successfully. (Foote Whyte, 1988: 279)

The aim of this study is to explore what flexible, unstructured work clubs can tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities towards everyday unemployment and job searching practices in everyday UK society. The keyword in this sentence is ‘everyday’, which refers to the ways in which people experience, act, and think while going about their daily activities. The significance of the everyday, and the theoretical lens through which we can begin to understand Bourdieus’s symbolic power/violence, were already introduced in the previous chapters.

This study, therefore, employs an ethnographic methodology based on participant observation rather than (ethnographic) interviews. This approach enables me to obtain a dataset that is much more focused on in-depth observations of what happens when people are job searching, on the spot and as they do it, rather than what they recollect about what they did when looking for work in a work club, and ultimately, how I, as a volunteer, would be able to try and help them. Specifically, I would like to turn to William Foote Whyte’s and his reflections upon the development of his participant observation methodology for Street Corner Society (Foote Whyte, 1988) in which he explores and describes that social structure of an Italian slum in the US all the while being an outsider to this community. After some failed attempts to approach people for more formal ways of gaining information such as interviews, he was introduced to a gatekeeper. Foote Whyte explained to him that, after his first failed attempts at making contact, he “felt [he] could do little as an outsider. Only if [he] could get to know the people and learn their problems first hand [he] would be able to gain the understanding [he] needed” (Foote
Whyte, 1988: 291). The same is true for Banterby SC’s work club. Even though the environment is far less hostile and suspicious than a 1930s US Italian slum, the context, and especially the politically sensitive nature of the practices and topics discussed within the work club require me to partake as much as I can to learn about their lives first hand, rather than rely on perhaps reluctant information sharing with an outsider, in which issues might remain obscured or be simplified. This is important not only because of building rapport with the members of Banterby SC work club, but also because I do not want to risk missing out on crucial information that might be obscured when talking about practices in general or in hindsight. As argued by Ferguson (2016) in his study on social work in natural settings, most ethnographic research involving participant observation takes place away from the natural settings through observation and interviews. In his case, studying social work, most of the ethnographies following social workers take place in their offices, talking to them and observing them as they talk about their face-to-face practices outside the office rather than following them into the homes of their clients to observe their interactions and practices first hand, as they happened, leading to different data and a different point of view. Indeed, as Ferguson argues, interviews with research participants away from the action setting are “limited by the fact that they produce accounts of events that the researcher did not partake in” (Ferguson, 2016: 155), meaning that there might be issues that remain hidden to the researchers that might be obscured by research participants either knowingly or unknowingly. He takes inspiration from Longhofer and Floersch (2012) who defined this kind of ethnography as ‘practice ethnography’, of which the “primary aim is to explore the context, actions, thoughts and feelings generated by the structural relationships among practitioners and clients” (cited in: Ferguson, 2016: 155-156).

In the case of Banterby SC work club, the severity of certain obstacles might remain obscured by only asking about the jobseeker’s perceived obstacles reflecting on their behaviour and practices from a distance in time and perhaps in place, rather than trying to be a part of them as they happen within the work club context. Indeed, Crisp’s (2015) study of UK work club was based on interviews, and although certain obstacles were indeed acknowledged, there was hardly any mention of the digital by default nature of job
searching and how this was experienced by the majority of the jobseekers as one of the main obstacles. The current study, then, can be seen as an in-depth extension of his, exploring in more detail the daily practices as they happened. Ultimately, this decision, as I will show in more detail in Chapters Six and Seven, proved to be the foundation and the strength of this thesis, as without this approach I passionately believe that I would not have picked up on the problematic nature of a digital by default discourse that currently runs through the majority of government and welfare administration, as well as the intense feelings of powerlessness work club volunteers shared with the jobseekers.

Ethnography, as described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), “in its most characteristic form ... involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extending period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 1). Although conducting an ethnography can seem deceptively simple, doing ethnographic fieldwork is inherently unpredictable and can change you and what you had set out to do in its course (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). As Charmaz (2004: 987), following Goffman (1989), teaches us, we have to open ourselves up to the surprises and experiences that doing fieldwork can bring us, and by doing so we allow the unexpected to happen (Charmaz, 2004: 987). Indeed, the fieldwork I conducted brought me many things that were unexpected and surprising, mainly in a way that it taught me that what I had set out to do might not be as straightforward as I thought it was. This lesson was something that resonated well into both the analytical as well as the writing up phase of the study. In this chapter I will elaborate on the decisions I have made throughout the three years in which I have had the pleasure to work on this project.

This chapter acts as a guide to understand the reasoning I used in designing this research study. After a short exploration of my theoretical foundations in the first section, showing the complexity that comes with taking up an interpretive ethnographic approach, I go on to describe the process of obtaining access through my gatekeeper organisation, emphasising that obtaining access is an ongoing process that is not completed upon
entering the field for the first time. This second section also includes details of locating, providing some statistical details of Banterby SC work club, as well as a rationale for a single-site approach. The third section discusses the way in which I situated myself in the research setting in order to collect data; I discuss the use of participant observation and having conversations or ‘hanging out’ in order to collect stories and experiences of both the job club clients as well as myself as a volunteer-researcher.

Exiting the field has proven to be an important phase or process in this study, and is explored in more detail in the fourth section before I move on to section five to discuss positionality and reflexivity. As we shall see, all three issues are highly interconnected, and will lead to a diverse but complicated account, as my role as a volunteer-researcher impacted highly on the nature of the data-set as well as on the subsequent analysis and writing up. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the main ethical considerations and dilemmas that became apparent throughout the research process, as well as more in-depth detail about how the data were constructed, handled and analysed.

4.2 Theoretical foundations

From the beginning of this research project it was clear that the focus of the data collection should be on peoples’ lives and experiences, as I wanted to learn about how people experienced being the beneficiary of a charitable organisation. This aim remained the same throughout the further development of the research question, and ultimately found its confirmation in formulating the research questions, in which the everyday became a central focus point to explore the effects of neoliberal governmentalities on Banterby SC work club clients’ lives.

Epistemologically, the purpose and scope of my study implies an interpretivist approach which deals with the way people interpret, experience, understand and (re)construct the social world(s) they live in (Mason, 2002). Throughout the project, my interests became more focused, which ultimately led to a project that dealt with a very specific part of the social and political spectrum: unemployment and job searching practices. The political
context for the research implied a course of action that historicises the social ontologies incorporated in this study and centralises the role of meaning (Reed, 2011). In this case, for example, what people do and say related to job searching, unemployment, welfare provision, and the expectations that come with these notions are not just related to contemporary events; why people do what they do, *both consciously and unconsciously*, is shaped by what these notions *have meant*, have come to mean to them, and what sort of mechanisms and procedures they have created over the course of more than a century, and especially over the course of the last 30 years, which saw an ongoing process of state retraction. Their meaning is not derived from ontologically independent social events and forces (as in critical realism), but rather their historical meaning causes and influences (social) action. Reed (2011) explains this as ‘landscapes of meaning’, which forms, over time, a mechanism forcing social actions, and makes actors act both consciously and unconsciously in a certain manner (Reed, 2011).

Questions of how we are influenced by what we know and what mechanisms are operating in our social and societal networks are also reflected in the contention as to whether theory can ever come last in doing qualitative/ethnographic research (Mason, 2002), as we can never free ourselves, as researchers, of our theoretical knowledge and commitments, and data is never collected and analysed “in an epistemological vacuum” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84; Mason, 2002). However, acknowledging this important caveat, it is my belief that we can and should still strive to not let existing theory be the driving force behind generating knowledge of the social world. Rather, following Reed (2011), we should find its strength in the combination of theory and evidence, or more specifically, in an iterative interpretive exploration between the two. This fits well with both an inductive data-centred approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as well as, or perhaps even more abductive research approaches (Blaikie, 2000).

Although for this research project an initial literature review was constructed as to explore the theoretical and academic bodies of literature on for example volunteering and governmentalities (as discussed in Chapter Two), the field research was always going to determine the specific focus of the study, which is illustrated in the fact that during the
first months of field work my interests extended beyond the general social impact of volunteering to issues of unemployment. It was my experiences in the field that sparked the need to review more literature, which in turn sparked new directions for the research and fieldwork. This iterative dynamic between theory and empirical data happened throughout the project. It might feel safer to aspire to adhere to one specific research strategy, especially one that demarcates time and logistics in a structured manner, but for this kind of ethnographic approach, I feel it was more realistic to accept and acknowledge that a lot of research strategies do not simply fall within one specific approach following one specific path. Indeed, we should acknowledge we are, as social researchers, always “moving back and forth between the data”, rather than adhere ourselves to a strict and linear approach (Mason, 2002).

The main aim of the study is not to develop a new grand theory, but rather to utilise existing theories in a novel way which allows us to develop some links between work clubs and grand theories like Bourdieu’s symbolic power/violence. In other words, I seek to introduce the notion of symbolic power/violence as a novel way to highlight the importance and significance of studying everyday practices and experiences of job searching and unemployment as encountered in work clubs. By showing how Bourdieu’s grand theory of symbolic power/violence can be utilised in this context, this thesis aims to encourage more in-depth studies of work clubs. To set an example of how work clubs can be useful places to explore the everyday experience of unemployment and job searching, this thesis focuses on one specific work club: Banterby SC work club. How access to Banterby SC work club was negotiated and what this meant in terms of sampling is discussed in the next section.

4.3 Access and sampling

This thesis is based on a twelve-month period of participant observation, conversations and a small number of qualitative interviews within one work club in South Yorkshire. The research project started out as an inquiry mainly into voluntary action and how and whether it actually contributed to building stronger communities; I wanted to know more
about the effects of voluntary actions as experienced by its beneficiaries. I had identified South Yorkshire, my own locality, as an area where due to deindustrialisation, specifically the closing of coal mines, many communities could be classed as deprived, as the place to conduct my exploration. My original intention was to consider several different kinds of voluntary organisations that were, in one way or another, helping the area and its inhabitants by advancing its regeneration.

Although all of this is still, one way or another, an important part of the present study, I assumed that it would be key - as well as fairly straightforward - to separate the volunteer from the beneficiary, and that I would be able to solely focus on the experiences of the beneficiaries, as opposed to the majority of studies on volunteering that concerned themselves mainly with the benefits for volunteers (see Chapter Two). My starting point was that where other studies left out the beneficiaries’ experiences, I could simply do the opposite. However, what emerged throughout the development of the fieldwork was a project that focuses on the everyday practices of unemployment and job searching in a neoliberal society. Because I observed an overlapping of roles and ‘realities’ from a first-person perspective, I also became interested in how the experiences and emotions of my research participants could be linked to my emotions and experiences as a volunteer with the concepts of neoliberalism, governmentalities and the prevalence of the work ethic as discussed in Chapter Two. Also, I wanted to explore whether I could use theories of symbolic power/violence as introduced in Chapter Three to explain and interpret what I had observed; applying theories retrospectively to start with, and finding ways to adapt them to the context of unemployment and job searching practices. These developments led to a shift in focus, which in turn influenced my strategies for access and locating a fieldwork location.

For gaining access to Banterby SC work club I am indebted to the South Yorkshire Community Foundation. I approached them in July of 2014 as they appeared to have an extensive knowledge and network of voluntary organisations in the region, and could hopefully, in return for case studies, function as a gatekeeper by introducing me to organisations that would allow me to conduct fieldwork for an extended period of time.
The first meeting was successful: at that point I had still the intention to work with several organisations, so they brought me into contact with a social enterprise that worked with volunteers who were there via various different organisations and for various different reasons. It was through volunteering here that I got interested in the obstacles the people who were volunteering alongside me are facing when unemployed and looking for work within the region, as a lot of people there were, one way or another, involved in training programmes that were aimed at getting them back into paid employment. I went back to the Community Foundation with this information, and asked whether they were aware of any organisations or initiatives that were explicitly dealing with unemployment in the region. They were aware of one, and arranged a meeting for me with the CEO of Banterby SC Community Sports Trust, which I have introduced in Chapter One.

In this initial meeting with this sports trust, I was introduced to what the organisation as a whole tried to accomplish: to improve the communities in which they operate through people’s love for sport and the brand they were tied to. One of these initiatives was Banterby SC work club. When asking for more information, they told me that it was run by one paid member of staff, and one support staff provided by another third sector organisation, but that they could most certainly use some help. I explained that I was comfortable writing cover letters and CVs as well as working with computers, and would be more than happy to help them out for a while, in return for being allowed to use my experiences for my Ph.D. research. They agreed, and on Wednesday 4th of February 2015 I had my first session there. I would continue to volunteer part-time for this organisation for twelve months.

The original design for this study was a participant observation, combined with qualitative interviews across a variety of voluntary organisations in South Yorkshire. My intention here had been to focus primarily on the beneficiaries’ experiences, however my field work, and my encounters with issues of unemployment, led me to alter these initial plans. Throughout the weeks and months working within Banterby SC work club I felt that by focusing my attention mainly on the ethnographic field notes that I took while working with this particular organisation, and opting for a more detailed case study approach, I could
construct a richer account of how job searching practices are being shaped by, and themselves shaping, constructs such as unemployment, welfare and voluntarism (see Chapter Two). It is always somewhat unsettling, I believe, to make such a decision; one might feel that such a seemingly singular focus will not be enough. However, as stated by Inglis (2000):

… cultural analysis is always incomplete. The best we can do is to enlarge the hermeneutic circle by way of making our interpretations not bigger in area so as much as more comprehensive, taking in more, being more persuasive. As we have been told, we do not have to understand everything in order to understand anything, and a conclusive finale in the analysis of a corner of cultural life is rarely convincing, whatever kind of fiction is in front of us (Inglis, 2000: 116).

I am not aiming to construct a narrative that will reveal the final truth about all work clubs, all jobseekers, all volunteers and staff working in work clubs, and how they are affected by welfare policy reforms. It would be as unconvincing to state that what I have found at Banterby SC work club over the course of a year is ‘the truth’ as it would be unconvincing to claim to have found the truth after working with 30 work clubs over that same period. However, the best I can do is to make one possible description of a work club as elaborate and empirically rich as possible, in order to provide the reader with an interpretation that is based upon spending a significant amount of time within the context under investigation. As argued by Emerson and colleagues:

To view the writing of descriptions simply as a matter of producing texts that correspond accurately to what has been observed is to assume that there is but one “natural” or “correct” way to write about what one observes. Rather, because descriptions involve issues of perception and interpretation, different descriptions of “the same” situations and events are possible (Emerson et al., 1995: 5).

The “informing of informed opinion” is still, as Geertz (1988) states, “anthropology’s appointed task” (Geertz, 1988). The purpose of such an approach is to enable the
construction of an interpretive narrative that will generate greater trust and reliability with its reader to interrogate how everyday practices at a single site relate to wider policy, media and popular discourses. By spending a prolonged time within one organisation, and aiming to build emphatic relationships with its staff and frequent clients, I aimed to inform people about what I had found out there about the everyday practices taking place at Banterby SC work club.

I volunteered at Banterby SC work club from February 2015 until January 2016, interrupted by a 2-month forced break due to limited amounts of funding secured by the Community Sports Trust to finance the work club. The work club ran, for the period of February 2015 until July 2015, two sessions each week. A 5-hour Wednesday session in Banterby SC’s own facility, and a 2-hour session at a community library in ‘Coalthorpe’. Spread over a total of 5 months that combines to a rough total of 140 hours. From September 2015, when Banterby SC work club reopened, we had to make do with fewer hours: 2-hour sessions at Banterby SC and 2-hour sessions at Coalthorpe. A third location was added after this reorganisation, with 2-hour time slots in a community centre catering for the local Roma community on the Wednesday as well, however, after attending two of these sessions I found it was not helpful for my research, which was agreed to by the staff leader, as on most occasions nobody showed up for the work club sessions; he even preferred that time slot to be cancelled as to be able to offer more time at Banterby SC. Ultimately, between September 2015 and January 2016 I have conducted another rounded total of 60 hours of fieldwork. In the end, this brings the total to about 200 hours of volunteering, and 200 hours of field work. I like to mention the ‘volunteering’ part of it first. Not in the least because I wanted my Ph.D. project to be useful from as early as possible, and by offering my skills and time to help people in my own community for that amount of time, I feel very proud in achieving that. Doing a social sciences Ph.D. into volunteering might be the perfect way to combine academia with real community work, and perhaps, as I feel it is, the perfect opportunity to give back to the people you have gotten so much from straight away. My total fieldwork encompassed about 200 hours of volunteering.
In those 200 hours, a wide variety of people arrived through the doors of Banterby SC work club (See table 4.1 for details). Some of them were regulars, whom I would see and speak to every week, others would only show up one or maybe two times. The extent to which I have been able to support people and the amount of time I have spent with them individually differed from 1 hour for a couple of sessions, to only short moments of direct individual contact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clients recorded from 9 September 2015 - January 2016</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banterby SC</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalthorpe</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location Unknown</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1. Banterby SC work club clients as recorded from 1 February 2015 onward

As is clear from the numbers in Table 4.1, a majority of 78.1% of the clients to Banterby SC were male, whereas only 21.9% was female. As work club staff and volunteer, we have attributed that to the fact that the Sports Club was largely attended by a male audience, as well as the higher unemployment rates among men who used to work in industrial professions such as steel and coal mining. I spoke mainly to people who have been made redundant in predominantly male industries over the course of the last 30 years, and have up to now not been able to find the same job security they had in those jobs. I have decided not to emphasise any gender differences that appeared to emerge.

Even though I have only focused on their work club visits and our shared job searching practices, and have not researched in-depth background stories of the clients of Banterby SC, I have gotten to know those considered regulars and featuring in this thesis quite well. In order for the reader to be able to paint a clearer picture of the clients when reading the thesis, some background information on those clients featuring in the thesis can be
found in Table 4.2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ella</strong></td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>Ella is in her early 50s, and has worked in several factories for most of her working life doing quality control at the end of a working line. She is a quiet and calm lady whose self-confidence is severely damaged by some short time contracts that saw her leave, once even before she got started, as well as her lack of digital skills to find her way back into employment. She is a dedicated individual who wants nothing other than to secure a stable job and to be making herself feel useful again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jim</strong></td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>Jim is in his early 50s and has had a somewhat turbulent work history, including being fired because of an altercation at work. To the work club and its clients and staff Jim is a kind and almost timid man, who is very insecure about his future because of his severe reading and writing disadvantages (dyslexia). What frustrates him the most is the mixed messages he gets about his chances and the opportunities for re-training he should take: whilst being told that he needs to keep thinking about different career paths, work coaches also tell him that he has no good chances of getting an apprenticeship in the areas that he is re-training in. Jim is at the work club nearly every week, as he cannot log on and read through online job adverts on his own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caren</strong></td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>I have only met Caren a couple of times in the library in Coalthorpe. Caren is in her early 50s and has held a very broad variety of jobs over the course of her career,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and has also cared for her children and later on her ill parents. After her parents had died it was time for her to look for work again. She had taken some computer courses to help her along the way, which made her a bit more confident about the job searching process, but she was still very disheartened about the temporary contracts and zero-hour contracts out there that would not allow her to pay her bills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>Alan is a very kind and talkative man in his early 50s. He possibly has some learning difficulties, and attends the work club on most Wednesdays at the sports facility. He walks there from home, which is about 6 miles, but he enjoys it. He loves to talk about his walks he takes over the weekend, and tries to do some job searching when he is there, but often feels too ashamed and too much of a burden to ask for help, as he is one of the people who does not even know the basics of how to use and start up a computer. The company does him well, though, and we help him to send in an application on a regular basis. Alan is mainly looking for manual work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>Peter is in his late 40s and receives ESA because he has been deemed unfit for work due to an accident he had as a young adult. However, this does not mean that he does not want to work, or can work. He is allowed up to a certain amount of hours per week, but needs help finding those opportunities. He loves his part-time work in a public services role, and he is very dedicated to keep doing that kind of work as much as he can. Peter is quite a hand full, as he does not remember how to do things and how he can access his work accounts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to register for work, and is quite demanding when it comes to requiring help. Peter was one of the regulars, although from time to time we would not see him for a few weeks if he had some trouble at home with his girlfriend, which he would mention very often. He is very much dedicated to her, and making sure they both can live comfortably.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Leigh</strong></th>
<th>60-65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leigh is one of the older people in the group, very tall, and in his early 60s, who is looking for work. He is not in receipt of JSA as he did not want to be ‘part of the system’ any longer, and has been sanctioned before which made his situation worse. He and his partner could live on her income alone for now, giving him a bit of freedom to look for opportunities that would pay off. Leigh is one of the most open, kind and funny people in the group, and one of the regulars. He got me a bunch of flowers on my last day of fieldwork. He was mainly looking for maintenance jobs, and had a history in mining and construction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sarah</strong></th>
<th>50-55</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah is in her early 50s and one of the regulars of the work club. She loves her twitter and google maps, and knows her way around a computer quite well (for work club standards). After an accident she has had trouble with her leg and cannot walk properly and is often in pain, which had her on ESA for quite a while. Now that her situation is getting better, she is back on JSA and looking for work every week. She volunteers as a delivery driver, and wants to do something similar for paid employment. Sarah is one of the kindest people I have met, but she is quite insecure about her own talents and what she has to offer. She loves to ‘travel’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoff</td>
<td>45-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>55-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>55-60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of the time. The reason for him keeping to himself is because he is frustrated with his situation, and sees no immediate way out, all the while the people at the JCP tell him that he has to look harder and more often. Oscar is there on a weekly basis and can be considered one of the regulars. He is looking mainly for manual jobs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>Simon is one of the more vulnerable people in Banterby SC work club who is living with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He keeps to himself mostly, and his daily and even hourly activities are very strict; he finds it difficult to deal with unexpected occurrences, such as, for example, a broken down printer. Simon loves animals, and is an active member of a church for which he volunteers a lot. He is one of the regulars who is there every Wednesday. He always leaves at 11.30am as he volunteers at his church on that day as well. Simon really wanted to work with animals, but in reality applied for all sorts of manual jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>Ralph is in his early 40s and the opposite from Simon described above. He, too, is living with an ASD, but is very outspoken and hyperactive, in need of constant reassurance and confirmation. He is very friendly and cares about others, but finds it really difficult to keep to himself when the attention needs to be going to people other than him. Ralph was looking for manual work, but because he had very poor literal and numeral skills, he missed out on many opportunities where those skills were a minimum requirement, which frustrated him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mel</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>Mel is somewhere in her 40s, and we have only seen her one or two times, but she made an impression. I do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
not know much about her work history, but she was very frustrated and scared about the whole Jobseekers Allowance process and her agreement. When she came to the work club first the only thing she could do was cry and panic about little potential mistakes she could have made that would impact her benefits payments. She is a kind and quiet woman, smarter than the thought she was, but silenced and almost paralysed by her frustrations and the expectations placed upon her.

| Steve     | 45-50 | Steve is one of the work club regulars and in his late 40s. He likes a good laugh and is always interested in what others have done during the week. He has had an accident in the past, which leaves him to walk with a walking stick, giving him a limp. He dresses casually, but as soon as he has an interview for a job, he dresses up in a suit that is just a size too big, but still it makes all the difference. He is a ‘serial interviewer’, as he calls himself. He gets interviews on a regular basis, but many times misses out on the job itself. He is looking for anything he can do without his leg being a hindrance. |
| Alfie     | 30-35 | Alfie is one of the younger clients that visited Banterby SC work club. Like many of the older people he did not know anything about computers, and had only received very limited basic education. His reading and writing were far behind what they should be, and he even considered himself illiterate. He had worked as an electrician for years, but with tightening rules, and him not being able to read or write properly, he had lost his job. He only came in a few times, and felt very much ashamed for him not being able to read or write, but at
the same time was proud of the things he *could* do, which in turn left him frustrated about the lack of recognition for these skills. He was motivated yet frustrated, and a continuous confirmation of his skills being not enough did not give him the push to believe he could start new reading and writing courses.

Table 4.2. Short biographies of Banterby SC work club’s members.

| 
| **Table 4.2.** Short biographies of Banterby SC work club’s members. |

In the following section I will discuss how I have conducted the fieldwork itself, focusing on the participant observation and conversations, in more detail. Here I will also explain why I have chosen participant observation and interviews, and why I decided not to pursue more formal interviews with the clients of Banterby SC work club.

4.4 **Participant observation and conversation in a 'politically sensitive environment'**

Obtaining access is not the secret password to endless forms of information. Rather, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue, obtaining access is an ongoing process rather than a singular practical event that comes to an end after entering the field on the first day. What is more, they continue, “access is not simply a matter of physical presence or absence. It is far more than the granting or withholding of permission for research to be conducted” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 55), instead issues of access can reveal important findings, be it spatial, social or otherwise (Brown-Saracino, 2014). Therefore, the participant observation could be considered a constant practice of obtaining access to people’s experiences.

In his fieldwork within Queer Communities, Brown-Saracino (2014) for example, found that differential access to participants across a variety of sites “revealed the existence of space-specific orientations to sexual identity” (Brown-Saracino, 2014: 43). When it comes to being able to be considered a trusted conversation partner, to be able to *use* physical access to a space, successful access may depend on (a combination of) spatial and
cultural differences (Watts, 2014). As noted by Watts (2014) referring to research with people of African descent, for example, successful access may be negotiated by introducing ‘appropriate’ researchers to the setting, having a shared race/ethnicity, experiences and/or heritage (Watts, 2014: 193). In my case, I did not have this shared identity with my potential research participants. I am a (recent) Dutch immigrant in their region, who never experienced the mining history of the area directly or indirectly through stories of family and friends. However, I did learn about it along the way as I started to talk to people (in and outside the project) and read up on it, in order to be able to perform my interactions with a well-founded sensitivity to their culture and history (Watts, 2014).

The importance of strategies to develop rapport and research legitimacy in politically sensitive fieldwork sites are discussed by Browne and McBride (2015), who compared two, at first sight, distinct ethnographic fieldwork experiences in Palestine and prisons in Northern Ireland. The researchers advocate ‘hanging out’ as a way of developing trust when trying to recruit research participants in localities where due to various political reasons, the researcher might be considered to be a suspicious “Other” (Browne and McBride, 2015: 35). Although their specific methods were based more on what they call “chance ethnographic encounters”, where the ‘hanging out' happens in public settings in the hope of making contact with yet unknown future research participants, the gist of it, “culturally appropriate ‘hanging out’ greatly aids the chance of generating positive and meaningful relationships … leading ultimately to the requisite production of knowledge” (Browne and McBride, 2015: 39). Of course, it could be argued that most forms of ethnographic research involve or are based on ‘hanging out’, I believe that in specifically naming the activity ‘hanging out’, Browne and McBride capture the active nature of not only being present in the setting, but also finding a way to casually interact with the people present in that setting. ‘Hanging out’, for me, is more than merely being somewhere, it is engaging and active in an informal fashion. Although parts of my role as a volunteer were somewhat more formal, especially when it came to the practical help that I provided, the flexible and unstructured nature of Banterby SC work club asked of me to be as informal as I could be on most occasions. This was because Jerry, the work club leader, did not want Banterby SC to mimic the more formal nature of the JCP.
The work of McBride, who was seeking to engage with prisoners in a Northern Irish prison, holds similarities with the study at hand as it appeared that gaining physical access (after a lengthy administrative process) appeared not to be the most difficult part. For him, the most difficult task was to legitimise “a role [that] would help him to develop meaningful relationships with prisoners and staff in such a way that was not considered intrusive or invasive”, a role that he was qualified to do (Browne and McBride, 2015: 42). Ultimately, through luck as well as persistence, McBride was able to enter the prison as a volunteer art facilitator for an art programme running within the prison. With the art programme running on the same day a traditional breakfast initiative to get the prisoners out of their cells and to interact, and McBride being invited to join in, this gave him the opportunity to ‘hang out’ with the prisoners, the opportunity to “sit and talk with prisoners about life in prison, his research, football results and also encourage them to take part in the art project” (Browne and McBride, 2015: 43). By constantly being open to his conversation partners, both staff and inmates, his presence and engagements were legitimised, and hanging out provided him with the opportunity to become a visible and trusted actor in an otherwise very distrusting environment.

Upon entering Banterby SC work club as a place for me to contribute something to the community, as well as a field work site, I was welcomed in a very open and positive setting. I immediately felt comfortable, and it was not long before I was invited to take part in the everyday conversations as well as the ‘banter’ (making playful and friendly jokes and remarks at and about each other) that would appear to be vital in this job club and its regular clients. This ‘banter’ also was an inspiration for the work club’s pseudonym. Nevertheless, Banterby SC work club remains a site where political issues are highly important, and where, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, a lot of people are ‘fed up with’ the official (State-provided) services such as the Jobcentre Plus. A lot of the clients, at first entry to the job club, are worried that the job club is part of the State apparatus, and that its staff will report back to the Jobcentre Plus about their endeavours. Like Browne and McBride (2015), I therefore had to rely on positioning myself as a trustworthy individual with an honest interest in their lives. I had to “become a person [to them] rather than merely a researcher” (Browne and McBride, 2015: 43). Therefore, my form of
participant observation, or ‘hanging out’, was based on not only doing my job as a volunteer, which provided the perfect reason for being there, but also on being part of the little community they had formed of the months of its existence. Joining in with conversations on the sofas and drinking coffee with them in the job club space enabled me to become “a visible and trusted actor” (Browne and McBride, 2015: 43). The idea was that if new clients would see me interact with the group without any restrictions and vice versa, this way of being present would function to minimise possible feelings of mistrust and suspicion when I introduced myself not only as a volunteer, but also as a researcher. Indeed, over the course of the process, I experienced people vouching for me when new people would come in, saying things like “Gaby will take care of you! You’ll be in right good hands!” This boosted my confidence in interacting with new work club clients, and made it easier to tell them that I was not only a volunteer, and that I would use my experiences here and their stories (without any traceable references to their person without consent) to further my research project. Not once was my introduction as a researcher openly questioned after introducing myself, and the majority opened up even more, as to make sure that their experiences with job searching would be recorded.

Conversations were, therefore, an important part or even key to my development as a researcher. Those conversations were not recorded and were incorporated in my overall field notes which I wrote down in the hours after finishing a session. This led to the conversations being mostly represented as paraphrased in the notes, although sometimes, when I found something really startling or interesting, I would try to remember it as literally as possible, and would note them down using my phone, often after excusing myself to use the bathroom. There are many different ways to go about jotting down notes when doing fieldwork, ranging from openly handling a notebook all the time, to my personal preference of more overt and episodic, each having its own effects on the fieldwork setting, including possible expectations or reactions to what is or should be jotted down (Emerson et al., 1995). I felt that being as authentic a volunteer as possible, openly jotting down my notes would diminish my authenticity efforts, and might make people feel uncomfortable and very self-aware; even though they were aware of my double presence as a volunteer-researcher, I did not want to give them the impression
that I was jotting down their personal lives or perhaps secrets in detail. For example, some clients would often complain about their Jobcentre contacts, and how they ‘kept them happy by doing just enough not to get sanctioned’; if I were to jot down these events while they were still explaining their situation to me, they might feel their privacy was being threatened. By generalising those statements after the fact, in quick jottings, and sometimes well after I got home I would not endanger anyone’s privacy nor the feeling with my clients/research participants that they were under surveillance. Similar to my ‘hanging out’ approach as explained above, and me learning more about the local history, and in fact trying to use local ‘slang words’ and the South Yorkshire accent, this was all part of me building a (genuine) rapport. As O’Reilly states, “trust is something that is earned, over time, by being there, listening eagerly, taking part, sharing stories and food, empathising, and by learning the culture of the other so as not to offend or disrupt too much” (O’Reilly, 2012: 94).

Remaining sensitive to the sensitivity of their situation was also the reason I decided not to conduct any formal interviews with the clients of Banterby SC work club. Other researchers of work clubs have (partially) based their research with job clubs on interviews, such as Van Oort (2015) and Crisp (2015). In the case of Crisp (2015), he interviewed a total of four types of stakeholders (12 work club staff and 14 work club clients across a range of three different job clubs) which he recorded and transcribed and analysed with the help of contemporaneous notes taken during the interview. The report he developed through his research was not disseminated to a wider (non-academic) audience for fear “that participants could be easily identifiable, even if anonymised, with potential implications for future revenue if seen to go ‘off message’ by key funders operating in the city and beyond” (Crisp, 2015: 5). Van Oort (2015), on the other hand, combined participant observation with supplemental interviews, where clarification and confirmation could be requested if needed. I have considered and reconsidered many times conducting interviews as this seems such a ‘normal’ thing to do when doing fieldwork. With some regular clients, I felt that they would not see me as a threat to their privacy, however, ultimately, I decided against it, mainly for the reason that I was not interested in gaining structured information presented to me in a structured setting where
I clearly was the researcher rather than the volunteer. As soon I would sit them down in a secluded area, would press the record button and ask them the first question, I would lose my primary position as a volunteer, a position that, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, is key to the phenomenon that I wanted to study.

By performing the role of job club volunteer/staff for a period of ten months, and having conversations with staff as well as with clients, I had more than enough time and opportunity to check my own experiences and views with theirs, and to hear about their frustrations, also in conversational form, as part of the routine evaluation of how things were going and which clients needed support during the sessions.

It was in this bonding through my role of an active volunteer and trusted actor within the job club environment that I found that exiting the field was not as straightforward as I assumed it would be. In fact, the whole process of exiting the field was perhaps even more drawn out and telling of the relationship that I had managed to construct with both staff and clients. In the next section I will elaborate on this more before moving on to issues of positionality and reflexivity that also accompany the building of relationships within the field through deep engagement.

4.5 Positionality and reflexivity

For interpretivist researchers, conducting fieldwork is not considered a passive action that leaves the fieldworker going into a setting and waiting for data to be presented to them: “… we actively engage in identity construction and recasting” (Coffey, 1999: 26), not just of our research participants’ identities through narrating their experiences and stories inside a certain framework, but also our own identities. Despite my efforts and intentions to position myself as a volunteer-researcher, with an emphasis on my volunteer role, the sheer mentioning of ‘researcher’ comes with the implication that I, as a researcher, “occupy a space of betweenness” within the research setting, making me “both an insider and an outsider”, regardless of my legitimate reasons for being within the setting (Kohl and McCutcheon, 2014: 752). Kohl and McCutcheon (2014) argue for a model of “kitchen
table reflexivity” to help us deal with our positionality within our research. As they state,

... at times, as researchers we are so embedded within our work, it is difficult to
determine how our insider/outside status changes and how this impacts our
research. Simply acknowledging, as opposed to unpacking, one’s positionality not
only is self-indulgent but also does little to further our thinking in how one’s
positionality influences the research process at multiple scales. Kitchen table
reflexivity is one way; through the external reflexive engagement with our
positionalities and research by others, we can gain a better understanding of how
our states of betweenness impact our research (Kohl and McCutcheon, 2014: 753).

One of the most fruitful similar experiences that I have had during this research process,
was a discussion during a New Researcher’s session at a conference of the National
Council for Voluntary Organisations in Leeds in September 2015. During this session, we
talked about our position as researchers in voluntary action settings, and how we could
deal with exactly this insider/outside status through reflexivity without making it just about
acknowledging our positionality as a static statement of fact, which, we agreed, was a
severe understatement. The discussion that went on for almost half an hour and was only
stopped because of time, encouraged all of us new researchers, in discussion with both
accomplished researchers and practitioners in the voluntary sector, to find a way to
acknowledge a continuous and problematic positionality during a research study.

As stated by Kohl and McCutcheon, “even though it is not often discussed within the
academy, research is hard”, especially when the methodologies require the researcher
to “deeply engage themselves within their research communities” (Kohl and McCutcheon,
2014: 758). This deep engagement comes with so many different types of interaction,
information and influences, that when it comes to reflecting on our study and are starting
to work with our findings, it is key that we reflect on our own positionality, which by no
means is a static element within the research process. Many ethnographers who have
worked in the field have faced changes within their own identities, meaning-making
processes and perspectives (Coffey, 1999). By going through the process of entering, actively being in, and exiting the field, I have not only been on a journey of getting to know more about the lives of ‘the Other’, but I also was given the time and privilege of learning more about myself as a person as well as an ethnographer. These simultaneous learning processes call for an explicit exploration of the relationship between our (transforming) social positions and our claims (Lichterman, 2015).

Lichterman (2015) argues that even though reflexivity has become commonplace in neatly and clearly defined sections of ethnographic accounts, there are not many ethnographers who decide to share their reflexive voice throughout their studies (Lichterman, 2015: 2, my emphasis). In his words,

… reflexivity communicates to readers our recognition that knowledge claims are conditioned and partial [and often means] exploring the question of how our social positions may influence our knowledge claims (Lichterman, 2015: 2).

However, as Lichterman continues, arguing for the benefits of ‘interpretive reflexivity’ as proposed by Reed (2011), the more standard forms of reflexivity merely bracket the researcher’s position. Instead, interpretive reflexivity helps us to produce explanations that build on our interpretations of our presence rather than solely mentioning and making the reader aware of them. More specifically,

… if we ethnographers want to make our explanatory claims more transparent and disputable by readers, then we need to show readers how we came up with our interpretations, how we made mistakes and lucky guesses along the way to capturing other peoples’ meanings. That is what interpretive reflexivity discloses (Lichterman, 2015: 4).

By doing this, we reduce the need to be modest about our findings. This need is conveyed in more general interpretations of what reflexivity is aimed at, but by being overtly (and consistently) modest and questioning ourselves without a more elaborate reflexivity we
might be setting ourselves up for producing an account that seems insecure, uncertain and devalued by its own author. Instead of letting the reader decide on their own, Lichterman emphasises, interpretive reflexivity’s main aim is to propose a critical conversation about the claims, using those issues as valuable data in themselves. By doing so, we improve the way we deal with our reflections on our (developing) social position(s) and make them more useful instead of treating them as a necessary static statement in an ethnographic account (Lichterman, 2015: 5-6).

As a researcher, Burkitt (2012) states, our feelings and emotions are central to the reflexive process, affecting how we see ourselves as well as others in the world around us. We are, he argues,

… emotionally engaged with others in our social interactions and these emotional engagements regularly motivate our reflexivity through the reflexive dialogue we privately stage with the image and voice of others. In reflexive dialogue, feelings and emotions are not just attendants to reflexivity; they are the basis van motive for reflexive thought. Reflexivity does not emerge from out of nowhere, nor is its source the various founts of knowledge: behind every thought is the emotional-volitional sphere and this is true also of reflexive thought (Burkitt, 2012: 469).

So, what Burkitt (2012) proposes here is that as soon as we make (perhaps an emotional kind of) reflexivity a part of our ethnographic account, looking at how we have come to our findings and claims, we are tapping into the emotions and feelings that have been both the sources as well as the results of our actions and subsequent (reflexive) analysis of those actions. Typically, in reflexively looking back on and reporting and analysing our actions in and findings of our fieldwork, these emotions and feelings are the result of what we think others think of us, and how they react to us and talk about us. In an inner dialogue we imagine an internal conversation between our different selves and voices when thinking about the relationships we have engaged in, and how we view the relationships and imagine how others (have come to) view these relationships and voice their feelings and thoughts of us (Burkitt, 2012: 469). In other words, as Burkitt concludes,
Our own ‘self-feeling’ is coloured by the emotional stance that others take, and have taken, towards us, especially at key or formative periods in our lives, and something of this stays with us in our reflection on the social world and self. … Reflexivity is not just rational and involves rationalization; it is also relational, dialogical and emotional (Burkitt, 2012: 471).

Although Burkitt (2012) does not specifically talk about reflexivity on or in relation to fieldwork and ethnography in particular, the implications of his work on dealing with reflexivity are clear, especially in connection to the current study and the fieldwork conducted in relation to it. Burkitt’s work illustrates how we should not try to leave our emotions and feelings out of the reflexivity process in order to achieve a more (accepted) standard of validity by sounding objective and rational. Rather, how we feel, and how we feel about what others say and think or might say and think influences how we reflect on our findings and time in the field; it may perhaps be considered irrational to ignore this.

Therefore, the idea of reflexivity that I have chosen to adopt is that of an interpretive emotional reflexivity, in which I not merely include some concise information about my own social position and actions that have had an influence on both the data collection and its interpretation. Rather, through applying an interpretive, and emotional, reflexivity throughout the entire process and building on how my actions and emotions have influenced the research and field work, I will be able to use the subsequent data as an active part of this study. Documenting my actions, emotions and feelings of myself as a volunteer through reflexive writing is not only valuable methodologically, but even more so, they will contribute to achieving a deeper understanding of the volunteer who is working in such a politically sensitive context (Browne and McBride, 2015).

4.6 Act naturally

Doing participant observation comes with ethical and methodological considerations regarding how the researcher should position herself in the field. How should I dress, act,
and especially react to what my research participants tell me were questions that were constantly on my mind. As Mason explains, we have to prepare for social interaction: “you will be variously involved in observing, participating, interrogating, listening, communicating, as well as a range of other forms of being, doing, and thinking” (Mason, 2002: 87). In my role as a volunteer I was also as a ‘member’ of Banterby SC work club, which were two different things. The volunteering was the most formal activity but in using the word ‘member’ I refer to myself being accepted within the group of people that had made Banterby SC work club their safe place, or perhaps even an extension of their home. At the first meeting with the Sports Trust, I was told that I did not need to dress formally, so wearing jeans and a top would be acceptable. Soon after starting with them, however, I was encouraged by the clients to start wearing tracksuit bottoms and a t-shirt or hoodie: sports clothes, to match the outfit of Jerry, who was wearing a track suit branded with the sports club logo. The day that I showed up in my black track suit bottoms and hoodie a loud cheer went up: “you’re one of us now!” they said. Being a ‘member’ came with ways of interacting that I had to document on, but shifted, slowly but steadily, many observations in Banterby SC work club to include my own experiences as well, which led me to question how far I could openly react to what people told me about their experiences with unemployment and job searching practices:

My aim was to forefront the experiences of my research participants. … However, the longer that I was in the field, and the more I was struggling with my own presence and experiences as a volunteer and how I felt they were and had to leave an imprint on the project, the more I tried to marry the two viewpoints and kinds of experiences in a way that would still put forward the experiences and importance of the voluntary work for the recipients, not for the volunteer. Of course, I have been writing about my own frustrations, and that it was difficult for me, and depressing at times, not to be able to do something for the people whom I wished the best for, but that, I feel, was not centred about my own frustration with myself or my own role as a volunteer or researcher, but rather adding to the experiences of my research participants, in supporting them in their stories about how difficult it is to find solutions to the problems that they are dealing with (Reflexive Writings).
As indicated in the passage above I often spent time struggling with Mason’s (2002: 5) cautionary words not to focus on (possible) “ego-centric and confessional tales about myself” (Mason, 2002: 5). I explicitly did not want my project to be about me, nor solely about the volunteering side of things: my key aim when I started this project was to focus on the recipients of voluntary work. Still, the more I worked in the field and the more I became part of the work club community, the more I felt the drive to incorporate my own experiences in the data as they difficult to separate from the understanding the experiences of my research participants. This decision depended on how the contact with my research participants developed over the course of the fieldwork:

Taking in the scene during my first days of field work, I tried to be a bit more withdrawn, and to keep myself mingling in the research participants’ conversations to a minimum. I would ask them the questions I needed to know to help them, and listen to their frustrations and problems to learn what I would need to and could do for them. But soon I was clearly invited to become part of the community that had come to exist in that work club. I was included in the jokes and banter, people would ask me questions, not only because they wanted to know more about me, but also about what I thought about the anecdote about the Jobcentre they just told me: "...isn't that just ridiculous? What do you think?” (Field notes).

Not answering these questions or saying that it "was not up to me to judge" [to keep a neutral stance] would not be beneficial to developing a form of trust with the people who often were at their most vulnerable when they came to the work club. This relates back directly to Oakley’s (Oakley, 2003) work on interviewing mothers-to-be, where she discusses the complexity of interviewing by addressing the questions that her research participants ‘asked back’. She argues that:

…the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity into the relationship (Oakley, 2003: 252).
Although, in this case, we are not talking about interviews, but rather conversations, work club clients often asked me questions as the one described above. ‘Investing my personal identity into our relationship’ was something I could only do by answering them: this would not only help me build rapport, but would also allow me to be true to myself and my own identity meaning that the rapport I was trying to build was not based on lies, misleading the work club clients into trusting me. Often, one of the first things that people asked was "You’re not gonna to tell the Jobcentre, are you?" after telling how they [for example] had been unable to meet certain criteria for receiving their JSA. If they would get the idea that I was sharing the ideas of and agreeing with the way the Jobcentre had been treating them, that could mean they might not come back the following week, or would be reluctant to be helped by me, as they would not feel at ease with someone who might as well be sympathetic to the whole ‘system’ that in their experience was mistreating them.

As long as I was sure I was not putting up an act in an attempt to make people feel comfortable speaking with me, it was my judgement that I was acting ethically not only as a researcher, but also as a volunteer and as an individual. People often volunteer for causes that they believe are ‘worthy’ (Musick and Wilson, 2008), so if I wanted, as a researcher, to be true to myself, I would not have found myself volunteering within a work club if I did not believe the research participants were a worthwhile, indeed morally affirmative, cause. The more I learnt through working with these people, the more I became invested with the work club and the cause. I would speak of ‘we’ and ‘us’ when talking to others about my fieldwork about the work club, and the research participants had become ‘my clients’. I wrote about this often in the document that I kept for my own ‘reflexive writings’; the field notes document was aimed at exploring what had happened during a work club session, whereas the reflexive writings document was one that I used more freely to reflect upon certain events or thoughts that could (and did) occur outside of these sessions:

[In] reacting to the experiences of my research participants, I decided to do so in the most natural way possible. .... I would act as me, volunteer me, researcher me, and me-me, asking the questions I would ask as a volunteer to see where I
could help them, asking questions as a researcher that could help me understand their experiences better in order to report on them properly, and ask questions out of disbelief and shock about what they told me, because I was interested as a person. I would react to them as I would normally do. Which is what to me 'hanging out' is, and always will be (Reflexive Writings).

Because of the politically sensitive nature of the work club (Browne and McBride, 2015), I strongly felt that I could in no way do my research with the assumption that the researcher should be as non-responsive as possible when asking questions and helping or observing others to gather information in a way that would be repeatable and where preferably the same answers would be given or actions performed if another researcher had visited the scene on a different day at a different time (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). In fact, this view on the relationship between the researcher and the research setting made that one of my research questions focuses exactly on this interaction between clients and myself as a volunteer. Therefore, if I wanted to ‘hang out’ with my research participants in order to not only share in their experiences (Browne and McBride, 2015), but also create my own, I would have to actually ‘hang out’ with them in a way that was most natural to me by committing to the volunteering as I would do without the research context being present. Doing so came with data that I had not anticipated when I started this research project, through this personal engagement with the research participants, and within our conversations in which I, without restraint, voiced my opinion on the matter at hand, I found some key answers to questions that informed my research questions. My frustrations and discomfort, my views, were not merely my own experiences and beliefs, rather they were relationally constituted by my interactions with my research participants or ‘clients’.

Still, in order to get a more holistic view of the experiences from non-client side of the work club, it was necessary to talk to Jerry and Laura, who I have introduced in Chapter One, about how they experienced their role in the work club and their relationship with the clients. Although we talked a lot informally, both during and after work club sessions, I decided it would be useful to capture their experiences and views in a more formal way,
through interviews. The next sections describe how these interviews were prepared and conducted.

4.7 Interviews

Interviews are a very well-known and well-respected form of doing qualitative research, and often researchers embarking on a qualitative project simply assume that their study will involve conducting interviews (Mason, 2002). For the reasons outlined above, I decided to limit my interviews to two more formal interviews with the two other staff members, of which I have conducted one for both staff members working in the work club: ‘Laura’ and ‘Jerry’\(^\text{11}\). They offered an opportunity to talk to them in a secluded but informal setting about their role with Banterby SC work club, and their reflections on both the experiences of Banterby SC work club clients and their own, focusing mainly on expectations placed on jobseekers and job searching procedures.

A short list of broad questions was constructed before the interviews, but in explaining the procedure I emphasised how I wanted them to consider our interview to be more of a conversation about Banterby SC work club, and their experiences as a staff member and volunteer. I wanted to use the example questions to fall back on if we were going around in circles or if we found ourselves out of conversation topics. This allowed for flexibility, enabling me to go off on tangents or alternate paths of enquiry if something interesting came up, but would always keep my research focus in check.

One difficulty that arose during the first interview was related to the development of my research questions, which in early 2015 were not yet fully developed. However, if I wanted to interview Laura, I had to do it at that time, as she was leaving the organisation as a volunteer as she had found paid employment. This led to our interview being more of a

\(^{11}\) Although Laura and Jerry have given me explicit permission to use their real names within the research output, I have decided not to do this in order to safeguard the identities of the Work Club’s visitors as much as possible. Using the real names, especially of the Work Club leader, would make the location traceable, and therefore possibly the identities of some of the regular visitors.
conversation in which I, as the researcher, found myself talking a lot because I focused too much on the conversational aspect of the interview as I did not want it to become too formal, which became even more evident in the transcribing process. At the time of the second interview with Jerry, in August 2016, my research questions had been fully developed, and composing example questions was much easier by that time, allowing me to ask questions in a way that would “generate meaningful contextual and situated discussion” (Mason, 2002: 73). In that second interview I found that the questions that I had devised as a loose structure were, without steering the conversation towards the topics too much, all answered in a logical flow, indicating to me that I had found the right research questions and focus and had allowed for the right amount of flexibility (Mason, 2002: 70). These questions included: “How did you get involved with the work club”, “What is your perspective on the Jobseekers Agreement?”, “In your opinion, do you think the older workers of Banterby SC work club have a good chance of finding employment?” and “In your opinion, do clients have the right to be critical of the jobs that they are applying for and might or might not accept when offered?”.

The final interview with Jerry took place some months after I had officially left the field and had started the writing-up phase. I returned for the interview as I felt that I needed more in-depth answers and data from him than I was able to deduct from the field notes that discussed our conversations. Going back for the interview meant that I would go back for a morning of volunteering at Banterby SC. This reminded me of how difficult it had been to make the decision to exit the field, as over time, volunteering at Banterby SC had become such an integral part of my week, that leaving for the sake of my research project felt like abandoning ‘my’ clients. These difficulties of exiting the field are discussed in the next section.

4.8 Exiting the Field

The importance of acknowledging and actively exploring the process of exiting the field for this study lies in the impact it had on the way I would structure my thesis write-up, as well as forcing me to deal with the strong emotions, feelings and relationships that I had
experienced over the course of my data collection. Of course, I was aware of my emotions related to the voluntary tasks I performed and the relationships I developed with my research participants/work club clients. However, it was not until the task of withdrawing myself from the field as a volunteer in a group that had come to depend on me that these emotions transformed and intensified into an awkward internal battle between feelings of guilt and relief.Exiting the field influenced the way I started to review, re-explore and ultimately analyse my data, as well as finding new data in this reflexive exercise.

As soon as we start our field work, we know and have to realise that there will come a moment where we will have to leave, and especially when pursuing a Ph.D. this is dictated by the approach of deadlines for writing up (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). At the beginning of this research project I believed that getting access to ‘the field’, wherever that would be, would be the hardest part. Trying, thinking of Bourdieu’s notion of the different fields and habituses in which we operate, to play according to the correct rules of the game to ‘fit in’ seemed very daunting, and I was afraid that my own field of research would heavily influence or even compromise the work club field (or any voluntary sector initiative) that I would enter. However, as I discovered nearing the end of my data collection year, it was exiting the field that would prove to be so much harder than getting there. Exiting the field, to put it simple, is “to withdraw from the research site when empirical data have been generated over a period of time” (Michailova et al., 2013: 138-139). This is, as Michailova and colleagues (2013) argue, not a matter of a single act; instead it should be considered a process that can take up to a year, or perhaps even longer depending on the type of (ethnographic) fieldwork that is undertaken. One of their key points is that the act and process of exiting itself can be a powerful theorising tool, rather than assuming that all or most theorising happens after the exit has completed; “exiting is closer to the write-up stage than any other fieldwork stage and therefore also temporally closer to meaningful theorising” (Michailova et al., 2013: 140). This means that the emotions and experiences that come with the process of exiting can tell us a lot about the (emphatic) relationships we have developed with our research participants, and about how the fieldwork has shaped us both as people, and, more specifically, as academics. Relation building is key to ethnographic research, and especially perhaps when studying
sensitive topics such as unemployment with potentially vulnerable individuals, this relationship should be based on trust (Corbin and Morse, 2003).

The trust I had so carefully built up was tested when half way through the year, in July 2015, the project came to a temporary halt; funding for Banterby SC work club had run out, and they could no longer pay to use their location. Therefore, we had to wait for a period of nearly two months before we could continue our work. In a way, this first exit was an easy one, as there was no fieldwork to return to at that point; there was no choice. When it became clear that we had to suspend our activities for several weeks, being unsure of an exact moment where we could continue our efforts, a shared feeling of defeat combined with perseverance was noticeable. At first people were asking where they should go instead, and after I had given them some addresses of other local job clubs, the mood swung to one of confidence that we would soon be back here in our trusted location, with the same trusted people leading the gang, which by that time was just Jerry and myself. I felt trusted and appreciated, as well as a misplaced sense of guilt; although we did not have a choice in having to dismantle the work club for at least two months, I somehow felt responsible for providing ‘my’ clients with the help they need. Leaving them to continue their job searching in public libraries on their own without work club support did not feel adequate, but we had no choice.

Luckily, at the beginning of September 2015, we heard that the Community Sports Trust had secured some new funds, and that we could continue our efforts, be it on a different and shorter schedule: our hours at the main location were reduced from five hours down to two. Something, as I will discuss later in more detail, which did not go down well. Nonetheless, we were back, I was back, and things were back to how they used to be. With one exception: I did have to leave them within the next three months or so at that point in time. If I were to start analysing my data, being able to immerse myself in what I had collected over the course of nearly a year, it was critical to take some distance, one that could only be achieved by exiting the field completely (Burrell, 2009: 182). Still, it is the relationship that is developed and crucial to ethnography and participant observation, where the ethnographer participates in (parts of) daily routines of a place and develops
ongoing relationships with the people occupying this place (Emerson et al., 1995), that is difficult to define and let go.

Watts (2008) emphasises the debate that fieldwork provokes when it comes to the ethical considerations of sincerity in building rapport with research participants; therefore, she argues, “awareness of the potential for feelings to ‘disrupt’ even the most carefully made plans, should form part of the ethnographic researcher's ethical and practical toolkit” (Watts, 2008: 10-11). I found this very much true when I was about to announce the end of my fieldwork era in October of 2015. I did not feel ready to leave from a personal point of view, wanting to spend somewhat longer in the field for data collection/confirmation, but more importantly I felt that I had to show my sincerity by staying on for as long as I could. Yes, I did use the experiences I collected there for my personal and professional gain, however, I also felt that I developed close relations with the people there, both the work club leader and the regular attendees, and did not want to make them think that I have ‘used’ them; a sentiment in which I am not alone (Hall, 2009). The idea of staying in contact only as a means to gain more information sparks some persistent ethical considerations, as I will discuss in more detail in section 3.6.

Having to withdraw from the field after sharing so much of my time there, and sharing so many stories, frustrations and laughs with my participants only to disappear made me feel very guilty, even though it was time for me to go and begin my write-up. Furthermore, it was not just my research participants in the form of the work club clients I felt difficult to leave. Over the course of the year I had formed a great working relationship with Jerry, the Banterby SC work club leader:

I already dread leaving in a few months’ time, because that means that I have to leave Jerry alone, and if I saw what happened last week when I couldn’t make it to the library session Thursday due to illness, he was buckling under the workload. Imagine trying to help 10 people on your own in two hours, where realistically 45 minutes per person is required to make a difference... It’s madness. Complete madness if you ask me (Reflexive Writings).
This fragment was taken from my field notes at the end of November 2015. I had, by that time, already mentioned my leaving ‘in the near future’ to Jerry, but I did not want to state a date just yet. Not only because I felt that it would be nice to get some more experiences with the job club after they had to cut back their hours to see what impact that had, but also because it would absolutely break my heart. This man had been so kind, so trusting and amazing to work with. He has endless amounts of patience with all the clients, he really does what he can, where he can, trying to work in a field with decreasing funding and opportunities to make a difference, and has always been very supportive of me, both as a person, and as regarding my research. However, and it was good not to find I was the only person experiencing this, despite leaving the field came with a lot of mixed feelings, it also came with some sort of relief (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 122).

At the same time, I sometimes feel that I have had enough. I am frustrated with the system that I cannot circumvent, I am frustrated with some people frequenting the job club who should not be there for various reasons and I don’t want to risk taking those frustrations out on them, because mostly I feel they aren’t at fault. Some are, some are naive or [wilfully] ignorant and do not want to listen to what we tell them. They are completely out of the loop when it comes to thinking clearly about what in the end will get you what kind of job and what your chances are (Reflexive Writings).

All in all, leaving the field and disengaging from fieldwork is a lot messier, a lot more complicated and a lot less straight forward than people sometimes suggest. We “invest ourselves in our fieldwork”, Coffey (1999) argues, so, as she continues,

... it is inevitable and indeed proper that we will continue to have feelings, good and bad, about that period of our lives. Through remembering our fieldwork – in analysing, thinking, writing, reproducing – we are remembering a shared past. ... Quite properly, leaving the field never happens completely, as that would be leaving ourselves, our past, and our memories. Endings, and leavings are important aspects of the process of ethnographic fieldwork (Coffey, 1999: 109).
It is with this philosophy and sentiment that I would like to move forward to the next section, in which I will discuss the ethical considerations that were central to this research project. The first part of this process lies in the exploration of my (transforming) positionality through reflexivity, as it was in (thinking about) exiting the field that the importance of my emotions, feelings and relationships for and within this study started to become unmistakably apparent.

**4.9 Ethical Considerations**

When conducting ethnographic fieldwork, and working with research participants, covertly or overtly, researchers should always consider the ethical dimensions of fieldwork interactions, and ultimately related to the dissemination of the findings. For this particular study a situationalist approach was adopted, in which the complexity of the field is recognised, acknowledging that various social and political situations require various ethical considerations and decisions that cannot all be accounted for in a singular approach, or model, of research ethics (Hobbs and May, 2002). Rather, in adopting a situationalist approach, we account for the unpredictability of fieldwork, expecting every situation to be different, and to meet different people within these different situations. What we can do is make sure the practice fits our ethical standards, by asking ourselves questions such as “How far is my fieldwork practice ethical?”, “What does ethical fieldwork look like?”, and “How do I judge what is ethical fieldwork?” (Mason, 2002). The answers to these questions were always at the forefront of my thoughts in approaching Loughborough University’s ethical check list, which has been my main guide to developing an ethical research project. In addition to this, focusing on more sociologically oriented check lists, I have also consulted the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (BSA) (British Sociological Association, 2002). This check list ask the researcher to think critically about his/her encounters with their research participants, and demands a high standard of reflexivity towards the researcher’s position within the research project. For me, this meant that as volunteer I considered myself to be in a position of power, as my actions and activities as a volunteer directly influenced the job searching practices (and output) of my clients. Constantly acknowledging this
throughout the research process was key to developing an ethically sound research project: for me, the checklist is not a formality that one should dismiss after filling it out once at the beginning of the project, but should, on a regular basis, be reconsidered as opinions and circumstances might change along with the research focus and research participants (clients). Although in the end, I focused on a single site with no particular or specific vulnerable target group, I felt it was important to keep consulting the document and to hold my sample against the guidelines and checklist to make sure that I was doing the right thing as still a multitude of different people would visit the work club, including people who manifested behaviours consistent with learning disabilities and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). For this reason, the University’s ethical check list required me to ask for specific clearance for targeting people who might be classified as vulnerable for whatever reason. However, in this case, the people whom I have met that might be classed as such were in no way deliberately targeted, nor could it be confirmed that they had an actual diagnosis. As such, Loughborough University’s Ethical Approvals Sub-Committee indicated I would not need to retrospectively seek full ethical approval for my study.

My encounters with potentially vulnerable people were, as mentioned above, not planned; all these individuals were independently mobile, able to interact with society, and I encountered them in their normal daily activities which in this case was attending Banterby SC work club where I was volunteering to support them. These people, who may be classed as vulnerable because of their manifest behaviours, however, all knew about my dual presence as a volunteer and a researcher, and like the other people regularly asked me or joined in conversations with others about my progress, and were in no way unaware of my desire to include their experiences in my exploration of job searching practices and procedures. In committing myself to act in a ‘natural’ way in relation to my informants, I consciously decided to act and interact with my informants by becoming a volunteer first and foremost while I was in the setting, and even thereafter, allowing myself to speak and react freely and openly to what my informants shared with me. In doing so I was able to collect data that perhaps would have been out of my reach if I had chosen to try and remain as close to my researcher identity as possible. To this
end, I did make the decision not to use informed consent forms. I felt that asking participants to repeatedly sign informed consent forms would risk contaminating the ‘natural’ mode of engagement that I was after. Ultimately, I adhered to the BSA’s guideline that states the following:

As far as possible participation in sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated and used (British Sociological Association, 2002).

In practice, this meant that I would often talk about the progress of my research with participants, would explain to newcomers my dual role, and would see how they would react to this information. This means that sometimes I would just decide to help someone as a volunteer, especially when I felt that introducing myself as a researcher might introduce more stress to the client; those encounters and the stories they told me were not recorded in the field notes nor reflexive writings. Most of the times, however, I would openly, after some initial interaction, introduce myself as a researcher, tell the person more about my project and reason for being there, and if received positively, I would ask them more in-depth questions about their experiences with being unemployed and the realities of job searching. Still, like Foote Whyte experienced himself, trying to talk about the research in more specific terms was often more confusing than explanatory. Like his research participants, I, too, found that “people were developing their own explanation about me: I was writing a book [about the Work club]. This might seem entirely too vague an explanation, and yet it sufficed” (Foote Whyte, 1988: 300). Indeed, sometimes they asked me if they would ‘feature in the book’ I would be writing, and whether they would be able to read it after I had finished it. In response to such questions I have always replied that my main goal was to gather ‘general’ experiences, and that I might, indeed, use their specific experiences and examples, but that I would not attribute them to a traceable person, and that if needed names would be anonymised. In fact, it was only
after a significant number of hours of field work that I reversed my decision to use the real name of the organisation. They had allowed me to do so, however, with the stories and experiences I collected and the potentially vulnerable people I got to know, after a while I felt that in terms of my ethical responsibilities, I could not defend using so many of their stories in an account that would make their traceability all too easy; if someone were to visit Banterby SC work club covertly with my account as a guideline could jeopardise the privacy of my research participants, including perhaps their welfare payments.

In the relationship with my research participants as a volunteer-researcher, I have always considered the nature of my engagement with them to be reciprocal, without assuming that every single person that I would help would also give me something in return. In fact, by doing this I felt I was staying true to the nature of what it is, for me, to be a volunteer: to offer one’s services for the benefit of the other. However, if I did use their experiences, stories and my observation of them, after taking into consideration possible ethical objections such as cognitive disadvantages, I did not feel I was taking advantage of them; my drive to put my skills to good use was sincere.

Drawing on similar research done by Patrick (2012b; 2012a; 2014) in her doctoral study into the lived experiences of welfare reforms and papers produced from that study, it was important to remind people of both the reason for my presence within the Banterby SC work club as well as the limitations of my own capacity to change their situations for the better. I could offer them the service (as a volunteer) of helping them with creating and updating CVs and cover letters, and I could promise them that the ‘stories of Banterby SC work club’ would be used to develop a thesis on the realities of job searching practices and unemployment, but I could not promise that they would reach any further than an academic audience, despite the fact that I would very much like my research to have a wider impact on, for example, welfare and unemployment policy formulation.

Furthermore, also similar to Patrick (2012b; 2012a; 2014), my data collection and study were based on developing a certain degree of personal involvement with my research participants, as described in section 4.2 and 4.3. This relationship involved an ongoing
negotiation of boundaries, concerned with where I would draw the line on sharing personal information that would lead to people contacting me outside of Banterby SC work club. I found that by going with the ‘friendly flow’ of the job club environment in sharing selective personal stories, of, for example, holidays and weekend activities, but never asking too many personal questions myself, I was able to construct a relationship that did not come with expectations that I could not meet, such as clients seeking to contact me and ask for help outside the work club sessions. This relationship did however, also grant me the opportunity to keep talking to my research participants about my project, and the things I was working on such as conference papers and the thesis in general, enabling me to continuously emphasise my overt presence as a volunteer-researcher. It also allowed me to mention initial findings or observations in our conversations.

As these ethical considerations were a continuous process of negotiation and renegotiation throughout the entire project, I guided myself with the principles of legitimate access, informed consent and transparency, privacy, the right for people to ask of me that their stories are in no way incorporated into the study, and also how I would present myself to people in order to obtain the data I would need in relation to what it would be fair to expect from them (Yates, 2004: 160-161). I will touch upon these various instances of (re)negotiation of ethical considerations reflexively throughout the dissertation whenever they arose in key events.

4.10 Data and Analysis

4.10.1 Data Formats

Following Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) there are two interconnected activities that lie at the core of doing ethnographic research: “first hand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation” (Emerson et al., 1995: 1). Even though, as explained earlier, due to the nature of the field work and my role as a volunteer-researcher, I was unable to write
extensive field notes within the setting, I still produced field notes that were written contemporaneously, meaning that I would write them up immediately after the field work sessions came to an end. Instead of writing alongside events occurring that I may, in turn, miss due to my focus on the writing of yet another event, I focused my time in the field on actually “being there”, so that in my written account I could write about my “being there” (Geertz, 1988). Therefore, the typical written account of a field work day or session consists of a diary-type entry, incorporating as many “thick descriptions” to the situation at hand as possible (Geertz, 1973: 16). These thick descriptions include detailed observations of my research setting and encounters with work club clients as well as personal reflections made immediately after the event. Ultimately, most of the data collected consisted of textual field notes, telling the stories of the things I had heard and experienced in nearly a year’s worth of work club volunteering. Throughout the data analysis and reflexive process the data has been expanded to include those analytical and reflexive writings.

In addition to the field notes, written-up conversations, and reflexive writings that carried out continuously throughout the project, two elaborate semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

4.10.2 Data management

In typing up the field notes after the fieldwork sessions, a constant awareness of my research participants’ privacy has guided me alongside the requirement for a legal compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Although I used online data storage service DropBox for writing, as to allow me to work on my papers and thesis on in multiple locations, I have always kept the field notes that included participant’s stories offline on my desktop PC, and have backed them up in several offline locations, all protected by a password. Due to the nature of the data created, all data was produced and processed by myself, and no third parties were involved. This means that all through the process, from obtaining the data to analysing it, I have been able to immerse myself within the data, enabling me to continuously reflect on every step taken in the intellectual
development of this thesis (Mason, 2002).

4.10.3 Data Analysis

Identification of various initial themes that emerged from the field notes and field work itself made the choice to apply thematic analysis fairly straightforward. This choice also fitted well with the interpretivist/constructionist perspective to my research. Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a six-phase process to thematic analysis, which I have adapted into a seven-phase process with some minor process revisions to elaborate on the journey of data analysis for this study (see table 4.3). The two main changes are, first, the addition of a phase prior to ‘Familiarising oneself with the data’, as I felt that part of the initial analysis took place already in the fieldwork period of the study, as is key to ethnographic approaches. Secondly, allowing for initial themes to be formed within this phase prior to the coding of both the field notes and the reflexive writings, with the caveat that these initial themes are precisely that; initial. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that one of the pitfalls to thematic analysis is that themes have been generated from a few vivid examples that do not go beyond the specific content of the data, implying in their six-phase process that it is safer to have themes emerge after the first codings have taken place to prevent this from happening. However, throughout the process I have found it more than helpful to develop (and reject) certain themes that came to mind when writing my field notes and discussing the field work with peers and supervisors. It helped me not only to develop research aims and objects, but also assisted in keeping my research focused and keeping me from straying too far from what I had set out to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
<th>Linear/Iterative Process/Phase Direction</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Writing Field notes</td>
<td>Writing down the field notes already is an intimate process in which the researcher engages with the data</td>
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<td>(while</td>
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<tr>
<td>still in the field work phase</td>
<td>for the first time, allowing for first and initial ideas to be developed. These initial engagements are crucial to further focus and analysis of future events and field note writing. Tentative themes may/are likely to form.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Familiarising yourself with the whole ‘finished’ body of fieldwork data.</td>
<td>After the field work phase is rounded off, reading and rereading the data set as a whole (i.e. data directly related to the field notes, <em>excluding</em> further interpretations and reflections) is key to acknowledge the sheer volume of the data and its variety of contents. Noting down initial ideas about the ‘bare’ data, and writing interpretive / reflexive comments/notes that come to mind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Generating initial codes</td>
<td>The data-set we are working with here is a more complete data-set than the initial set, now <em>including</em> the researcher’s further interpretations and reflections. Bearing in mind the initial two engagements with the data in writing the field notes and (re)reading them, interesting features of the data are coded in a systemic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. Here it is best to draw back on the initial codes/themes/observations as not to create codes for too many singular events or features.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Searching for and revisiting initial codes and themes.</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes from phase 1 and reviewing earlier initial themes through the coded data to see whether initial ideas should be pursued or abandoned.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Reviewing themes from the 4th phase</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the data set as a whole, as well as research questions and (social) theories used to support the research, generating a thematic structure of the analysis and argument</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>Ongoing engagement and analysis of the data to refine the specifics of each theme, resulting in the clear</td>
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framework that will hold the key to conveying the argument in a structured, logical and convincing manner.

7. Producing the report

The final opportunity of analysis. Selecting vivid and compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a well-founded scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 4.3. Phases of fieldwork-focused thematic analysis. Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006).

The overt and active nature of my presence in the research setting required me to process the field notes after the event. Although this led to non-verbatim transcriptions of the events that had occurred that day, this in-depth engagement after the event enabled me to consider the time spent on field notes to be part of the participant observations and conversations, making it an on-going process that was not limited to my time in the field. Working on the field notes immediately after the events lead to early development of tentative themes that would help me focus my research and to inform the remainder of the data collection process without limiting the scope to merely the already (tentatively) identified themes: the iterative nature of my research design prevented me from creating a tunnel vision. Rather, it was in identifying various themes early on that I could, for example, find nuances to those themes later, or discard them as their implications would lead me too far away from the focus I was closing in on.

After finishing the field notes, the whole data set was transferred to an NVIVO project. QSR NVIVO is a widely-used software package for data management and analysis, and has many features to help researchers analyse their data, and one can make use of all those features or only a few, depending on the types of data, analysis and output needed. For this study, I have kept the digital support at a minimum level, and have limited my use of the software to manual thematic coding. The software allows for one or parts of sections to be included in multiple themes and codes, which is exactly what I needed it to do to create a coherent index of the themes and its instances. In short, I have used NVIVO
mainly as a digital coding archive, allowing me to keep an overview and enabling me to search and compare much more quickly than I would if I were to do it by hand in separate word processor documents, for example. However, other than these minor digital aids, I have chosen to keep as close to manually processing the data as possible, as to immerse myself in the data as much as I could. Ultimately, my data consisted of roughly 70,000 digitalised words, including field notes, reflexive writings and interview transcriptions. Not included in this word count were separate reflexive writings and ad hoc ideas written down in notebooks that I always brought with me.

Phase two consisted of reading and rereading the data as a whole for the first time, for which three levels of reading were applied: literal, interpretive and reflexive (Mason, 2002). In literal reading I’m interested in ‘what is there’, what have I written down, what words have I used, and what actions have I recorded. It is the most ‘literal’ version of reality as portrayed by the sequences recorded in the field notes for as far as literal readings are possible within qualitative research. To supplement and further explore the initial findings from the most ‘literal’ read and initial codings, I continued with interpreting the field notes, and reflect on those interpretations by connecting similar (and opposing) occurrences of events, as well as placing them in, among other things, contemporary welfare policy context, ‘reading though and beyond the data’ (Mason, 2002). In this in-depth reading and re-reading, further coding took place; a process that was anything but linear and involved going back and forth through the data, rethinking, re-coding and restructurung the themes that were initially identified.

It was in phase three that the actual coding and onset to focused thematisation were set out. Going through the data again, now supplemented by notes and (more) interpretive and reflexive writings, coding could now be applied to the extended data set. As my study does not only consider the events focusing on my research participants, further reflection on my own role as a researcher-volunteer were key to the data-set. The codes that were developed and used over the course of the analysis phase of the research project informed the development of the research questions as introduced in Chapter Two. The overview below shows a selection of the most important codes.
Informing sub question 1: *How are neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices manifested in the everyday practices in Banterby SC work club?*

- JCP experiences
- Job searching
- Lack of jobs available
- Precarious work

Informing sub question 2: *How does the digital nature of job searching as observed in Banterby SC work club fit in with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?*

- Lack of IT skills
- Digital maze
- Drive to work
- Computer access

Informing sub question 3: *What can the shared everyday experiences of unemployment and job searching of both work club clients and staff tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?*

- Volunteering
- Atmosphere
- Good effect of work club on clients
- Manpower
- Not JCP
- Powerless
- Guilt

In a way phase four to seven were all part of an iterative and simultaneous process of further coding and re-coding and using my data in the construction of my argument(s), by
which I mean, following Mason (2002):

… the construction of a perspective, an interpretation, or a line of reasoning or analysis, and, significantly, it requires this to be a relational process, in which the researcher is continually thinking about and engaging with those to whom the argument is being made as well as, of course, the grounds on which they think the argument stands” (Mason, 2002).

In other words, after the first three phases, which had to take place, I felt, somewhat isolated from other activities as to make sure the data set was the right one for the study at hand, the other four phases were, despite their distinguishable steps in every-day activities, not carried out in a linear (time) manner. Rather, they occurred and re-occurred in an iterative and inductive fashion, necessary to make new discoveries and links possible when seeking to engage not only with the data, but also with the research aims and objectives, prospect audiences and application/dissemination.

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have documented the methodological journey leading up to the construction of the empirical chapters that are to follow. I have sought to introduce the reader to both my train of thought as well as my ever-developing consciousness about the methodological and ethical implications that come with conducting qualitative research through methods of participant observation, conversation (or ‘hanging out’) and reflexive writing. The primary concern of this chapter that resonates throughout the thesis is the key acknowledgement that interpretive qualitative research is an ever-evolving, and the active role that the researcher plays in this ongoing process. Not only is the researcher partially actively responsible for the kinds of data she creates and selects by her presence and ultimately the production of the scholarly account, but more importantly, negotiating access, relationships and ethical dilemmas are elements of interpretive ethnographic research that are to be addressed on an active continuous basis, evaluating and re-evaluating stances, issues of informed consent and the possibility of encountering
vulnerable people in research settings that are in constant movement themselves.

Ultimately, this chapter has presented ethnography as a suitable approach for exploring work clubs, and especially for seeking answers to the research questions that focus on the everyday. Of course, using ethnography to explore the everyday is nothing new, in fact, doing an ethnography is all about uncovering everyday realities of peoples' lives. However, there are two aspects of this research project that support the claim that this research project has made a novel methodological contribution. First, as demonstrated in Chapter One, there has not been a previous study exploring work clubs ethnographically, which, with its suspected role as an intersection for the constructs discussed in Chapters Two and Three, seems like an approach that is long overdue if we want to get a more holistic view of how welfare policies guiding job searching behaviour affect people on an everyday level. Secondly, through this ethnographic approach, the reflexive exercises and writings of the researcher were decided to be incorporated not only as an ethical safeguard, but also to further uncover the suspected role of the work club as an intersection of the constructs discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Specifically, it is in the shared experiences of everyday practices and experiences with job searching and unemployment that this method finds its strength. As highlighted in Chapter Two, the majority of voluntary sector research, exploring the impact of voluntary action, focuses on the experiences of the volunteer in order to explore the role of volunteering in the life of the volunteer. This project, rather, questions the nature of the impact that work clubs and its staff/volunteers have on its clients, and utilises the experiences of staff and volunteers to explore how these can support those of the clients.

The three empirical chapters that follow this Methodology chapter are each framed by a research question as set out in Chapter Two, and re-iterated in the previous section. The first addresses the question “How are neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices manifested in the everyday practices in Banterby SC work club?”
Chapter Five. Performing the desire to work

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to answer the main research question that was introduced in Chapter Two: *What can flexible, unstructured work clubs tell us about everyday unemployment and job searching practices in UK society?*

Chapters Two and Three have developed a conceptual framework in which we can understand these flexible and unstructured work clubs that were introduced in Chapter One. Specifically, they have linked concepts such as neoliberalism, governmentalities and the work ethic, which are often studied at a policy and political level, to a theory that allows us to study them in an everyday setting: Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of symbolic power/violence. This is where the significance of studying a flexible, unstructured work club set up lies: as a place where, more than in a highly-structured version of the work club, the everyday practices of job searching and unemployment can be observed from the point of view of the jobseekers, as it is them who take the lead in how they want to approach their job search and spend their time at the work club. Chapter Four, then, building on the aim to study these everyday and individual experiences with the concepts introduced in Chapter Two, proposed an ethnographic methodology, which allows us to explore the everyday practices and experiences of clients and staff/volunteers at Banterby SC work club.

The three empirical chapters that follow now are structured around the sub questions that were introduced at the end of Chapter Two, and that emerged as fieldwork progressed. All three chapters consider issues of everyday experiences, with each focusing on a different aspect or point of view. Here I examine the sub question *How are neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices manifested in the everyday practices in Banterby SC work club as a flexible, unstructured work club?*
It is asking this question that ultimately leads to uncovering what, unfortunately, appears to be a matter of structural obstacles that the work club and its staff cannot address nor alleviate. Most of the sections in this chapter will discuss a variety of structural problems that prevent both jobseekers and Banterby SC work club from achieving their goals, including the unsupported assumption that many jobseekers lack a strong work-ethic, the lack of quality jobs (i.e. full-time jobs that come with a living wage and long term contracts) available in the area, but also age- and educational disadvantage-related problems. Consideration of these problems problematises the work club as a voluntary initiative with an achievable goal: to help people in their return to work.

The next section discusses how, in visiting a work club, it appears to be more important for jobseekers that they are encouraged to perform the work ethic than successfully returning into employment. In other words, focus is placed on performing rituals of job searching, directed by a narrative constructed and maintained by the DWP that stipulates that engaging in job searching practices on its own, without any guaranteed outcome, is enough to prove that one is deserving of State welfare support.

5.2 Helping people back into work or helping them to look for jobs?

The main goal of work clubs and work club staff is, according to the DWP, to be “committed to supporting [their] local community” as “pooling local knowledge and resources is a great way to help people back into work” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a: 1). In their flyer titled “Could you run a Work Club” (2013a) they set out some example requirements for people and organisations who might have the drive and resources to start a work club, but leave it up to the work clubs and clients themselves to decide upon which type of employment they are going to promote and pursue. The flyer appears, in my interpretation of it, targeted at middle class individuals who might be interested in volunteering, specifically people who are “committed to supporting [their] community and feel that [they] can play a role in helping local people who are out of work” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a: 1). The purported main goal of these work clubs then, is, to emphasise, to help people back into work. In addressing how to go about
setting up a work club the goals and starting points are elaborated on:

… work clubs should address the needs of unemployed people in the community. These needs will vary from one area to another and you could consider focusing on a specific need, i.e. supporting younger jobseekers, including school leavers and those just starting out. Combining existing expertise within a community could help identify local needs and lead to the development of a successful work club (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a: 3).

This formal policy definition of what a work club is or can be leaves the door open to a myriad of different set-ups and emphasises diversity across the different communities where people are looking for work. The information in the flyer contains ideas for potential activities and programmes to be initiated and led by a work club, and states that a work club “will operate in a distinct way according to the needs of the community it supports … [and that it] is the needs of the participants and the local community that should drive how they are run.” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a: 4). Suggestions for how to run a work club are mostly directed towards highly structured and interactive sessions where people share their experiences in a group and can learn from each other, judging each other’s CVs and cover letters for example, following the Azrin method (1975) as discussed in Chapter One. Sample activities include organising a work fair where employers can promote their companies and potential jobs, workshops in CV writing, advising people about volunteering opportunities and providing IT skills workshops, as “we live in an increasingly digital age, and basic IT skills can be vital tools in helping people back into the labour market” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a: 5). In Chapter Six and Seven more attention will be given to this recommendation and how this recommendation can and should be problematised.

Focusing on issues of providing people with information about specific jobs or organisations, the flyer encourages people interested in setting up a work club to contact local organisations and people, asking them to provide guest speaker sessions (again emphasising highly structured sessions), as well as attracting volunteers and asking local
businesses to organise “company tours, [as they] could provide a valuable insight into the world of work in their sector” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a: 6).

Ultimately, the flyer promotes an initiative run by volunteers and supported by some local businesses who can offer careers advice or jobs, and is positive about the amount of resources that could be made available by the community, such as space, volunteers and (access to) IT materials, as well as being very optimistic about the self-sufficiency of a work club’s clients. Drawing upon my ethnographic analysis of working with such a local initiative ten months, the remainder of this chapter will evaluate the outcome of Banterby SC work club against their explicit goal of helping people back into employment. The next section will therefore explore a question that seems straightforward: What sort of impact was noticeable during my time as a volunteer at Banterby SC work club? Asking and answering this question provides, as we will see, a starting point for exploring the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentality, the more elusive tactics of government that guide people into complying with neoliberal ideology, and shows the first signs of symbolic power/violence, the equally more elusive ways in which people’s lives are being violated with their own compliance, in Banterby SC work club.

5.3 What sort of impact was noticeable during my time as a volunteer at Banterby SC work club?

Like all voluntary and community initiatives a work club has an explicit goal, which in this case is to help people back into employment. It is also normal for these initiatives to focus on the good things that come out of them – to celebrate what they have managed to do for their clients.

What sort of impact did I notice? What kind of things have I seen happening around me over the course of the year that I have spent working with these people that I thought were good achievements? In trying to come to terms with these questions and answering them I decided to do some reflexive writing around these questions:
It is amazing to see how supportive this group is and has been, and how a group of regulars has developed that has created a welcoming and safe space for people struggling with unemployment and job searching. It is one of the places they can go to for support without being judged. It is one of the places that they are not judged based on their employment status, where they can have a chat and a cup of coffee or tea and get things off their chest without risking being frowned upon. Everybody has a story, and even though there is a lot of banter going on, nobody gets excluded. It also offers some form of structure to many of the client’s lives, knowing they have a place to go to; even though the work club is completely voluntary, many of them are making it a priority, a key event in their week. Despite the problems they are facing, and some grim discussions and conversations, some tears and a lot of frustration, there are always smiles and laughter to be heard. The regulars have made it a special place to go to, perhaps even more than the staff and the volunteers. It is in their drive to make something good out of a bad situation that this work club has managed to thrive (Reflexive Journal, July 2016).

However, when thinking about that for a moment, and looking again at what a work club ‘should’ be doing, which is helping people back into work, the very fact that a group of regulars has managed to form inside this work club is a sign that it is not working in the way it is supposed to. As I wrote in one of my notebooks after this realisation:

…the fact that there are regulars isn’t a good thing. So, they all ‘share’ in their powerlessness, feeling supported by each other, finding comfort, and some rhythm, but in the end no real change is being made, or can be made because of the structural problems that cannot be addressed by work clubs to begin with. There is no change and nobody is checking [the outcomes] of these initiatives, it appears. They are recommended by the Jobcentre, but nobody ever asked us whether it was working. So, in the end it is all about performing the work ethic, and performing volunteering (Reflexive Journal, June 2016).

In a way, the regulars of Banterby SC work club, and especially a man who I will call
Steve, who explicitly told us many times that the work club helped him to retain some sort of rhythm to his daily life as an unemployed individual, were showing how much the job seeking had become some kind of habitual action, a daily or weekly ritual that they performed. They did so not only because they were compelled to do so, and in doing it transcendental values of ‘good citizenship’ were offered which, Steve told me, he would always tell potential employers about, but also because it literally helped them to make them feel less ‘useless’. Steve often said that without this daily routine he would not feel the same, and would feel useless:

Steve has a schedule. A ‘work week’, in fact, as he phrases it. And he likes to tell people about it. I think he wants to make sure people understand how seriously he takes his ‘job as a jobseeker’, again, as he phrased it. He has his routine that he sticks to, both during a day as well as during the week. He goes to certain locations during the week, such as the [work club], on set days, between set times. … [You can see] he is just very proud of his strong work ethic. It keeps him from backing down and from losing his fighting spirit: “It’s way too easy to just sit back and sleep in and do the minimum, that doesn't make you happy either...” (Field Notes).

Research has often shown us that having a job is beneficial to one’s life in many ways, including providing structure, and being able to socialise with peers and colleagues (Rose et al., 2010), something the work club appeared to have provided. As Steve shows, it is the structure of a work week that he wishes to simulate by attending the work club and other initiatives, to continue to prove not only to the outside world, but also himself, that he is a hard-working individual, even though he knows that there are not much jobs available at the moment.

These sentiments fit in perfectly with what was discussed in Chapter Three, which explored how job searching could be understood as complex ritualistic performances following Couldry (2003: 3) and Bourdieu (1990). Specifically, it shows how these performances are habitual, formalised and transcendental at the same time, where the key lies in including a potentially meaningless mode of ritual (habitual) into the equation.
The job searching process, for people like Steve, had, in a way, lost its primary practical meaning of finding work, and had become habitual. Even though he was still hopeful of finding a job, he often said that the most he got out of this was that he would not feel bad about himself for not doing anything during a day, and it was “just something he did”. In considering it a habit, ‘just something you do’, the political meaning to this ritual is related to both the formative (the regular and meaningful pattern, in this case reproducing the meaningful ideal and actions of the responsible, active citizen) and transcendental (for example, the construct of the work ethic, which once possessed proves that an individual is a ‘good citizen’) approach to job searching. This is because in contemporary society, political rhetoric, such as the DWP’s view on work clubs, implies that engaging in a searching activity that will certainly lead to finding a job, not keeping in mind or acknowledging the state of the local labour market and other structural problems people might be facing.

To recall Chapter Three, with the institution of the political meaning attached to performances of job searching, and transforming these performances into a hybrid of habitual, formalised and transcendental action all at once, it could be argued, following Bourdieu (1990), that these performances are outside the control of logic. Logic, in this case, is related to the loss of the practical meaning to job searching: if there are no jobs to search for, the search in itself, for its primary goal of finding jobs, has become meaningless.

Over the course of my time with the work club, some efforts have been made by the Community Sports Trust organising the work club to measure the outcomes of the work club, mainly quantitatively. They wanted to know how many people had been visiting, and how many people had managed to find work since visiting the work club, so that they could use those numbers for future funding bids. Jerry, the work club leader, had created an Excel file in which he tried his best to keep some track of what clients found in terms of (temporary) employment, but in the end the flexible, unstructured nature of the work club, as explained in Chapter One, did not suit any rigorous tracking of people. I will talk more about the open nature of the work club in chapter Seven, addressing the flexible
set-up and limitations of the work club itself.

Ultimately the existence of a large group of regulars, again, was a testament to the fact that the work club was not working apart from providing a safe space. With the room at Banterby SC’s main location being secluded and out of sight for those who had no business there, clients would feel safe coming there asking for help and talking to other clients as well as staff without risking being seen or overheard by friends or acquaintances. It was also supporting the clients mentally, providing the clients with a sense of community and contributing to their wellbeing, as for example Steve for whom the work club was part of his daily routine, and helped him not to feel ‘useless’. The question here is of course why the work club is not working. For welfare critics such as Dunn (2014; 2014; 2015), the existence of a group of regulars forming in a work club, a group of long-term unemployed people, would embody existence of a culture of unemployment and ‘dependency’, proving that there are people with a low or non-existent work ethic who refuse to work and consider living on benefits ‘a lifestyle choice’. As set out in Chapter Two, the work ethic is at the core of neoliberal governmentalities, where the work ethic is seen as a key component of ‘good citizenship’ which needs to be encouraged and instilled in every individual citizen. Therefore, I will discuss the supposed lack of work ethic of the Banterby SC work club’s clients, and how an important goal of work clubs in general is partly intended to instil this work ethic in them over and above providing an effective route to secure employment.

5.4 Drive to work

Often the blame for unemployment is placed with unemployed individuals themselves. Political rhetoric, echoed by the media, is filled with language that portrays unemployed people, and especially those who are long-term recipients of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), as ‘work-shy scroungers’, having made a ‘lifestyle choice’ to be unemployed and ‘live their life on benefits’ (O’Hara, 2015). Although there is a substantial and still growing body of work that criticises this vilification process not only by exploring the lived experiences of unemployment (Patrick, 2012b; Shildrick et al., 2012b; Valentine and
Harris, 2014; Patrick, 2014), but also by, for example, debunking the myth of so-called workless communities as portrayed in 'Benefits Street' (MacDonald et al., 2014a), there are also some academics who try to counter or at least nuance these efforts. Dunn (2014; 2015), for example, argues that the majority of academic social policy research is left-dominated, and favours placing an emphasis on structural explanations from outside the individual for unemployment issues instead of seeking individual explanations, internal to the individual jobseeker. In fact, he and his colleagues argue that a lot of jobseekers remain unemployed voluntarily as they prefer unemployment over jobs that they find boring, underpaid or otherwise unattractive, and are less likely to agree with the statement that having almost any job is better than being unemployed (Dunn, 2014). I align myself with what Dunn calls left-of-centre authors, as my study contradicts his individualist criticisms of unemployed people.

Working in Banterby SC work club and talking to its clients, a completely different picture emerges to that painted by Dunn (2014). When asking people what they were looking for in terms of work, often it did not matter to them what work they could find. They would tell me things like Edward told me when asking about their work histories and what kind of jobs they had managed to secure over the past few years: ‘I just did everything, you know? Just anything I could do!’ Many of the clients also emphasised on them 'not being picky at all'. One particular client, Bob, said that he didn’t have many demands, just wanted work. He had just got ‘off the sick’, which gave him the right to Employment Support Allowance (ESA), and thought he had nothing to demand/ask from a job, he would do everything he’d get. It always made me sad, listening to these answers and stories.

Ultimately, many clients clearly felt and believed that they had no choice, and no right to place demands on the kind of work that they would want to do. This not only contradicts

12 The quotes in this thesis are always paraphrased unless indicated otherwise. As I did not do any recorded interviews with the visitors of Banterby SC work club, any such paraphrased quotes were noted down soon after our encounters.
with what people like Dunn hold to be true, that many jobseekers are picky and that they should ‘just accept any job when given the ‘opportunity’, but more importantly, it shows how they have internalised the idea that they are not worth anything more than the insecure and low-waged jobs that they apply for. If symbolic power and violence are a form of domination that is “exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 167), we can see in this acceptance of their fate as being not worth any choice for work that suits them a classic example of symbolic violence.

The use of ‘everything’ was quite consistent in the vocabulary of the clients of Banterby SC work club. They were willing to do everything and anything that was within their abilities. And with many of them, their practice supported their work, searching and applying for a wide variety of jobs and roles, and they often stated that even though they did not ever consider themselves doing ‘X’, it would always be better than doing nothing.

The job searching behaviour of the clients supported their claims of being willing to do anything: during the work club hours, they were always busy looking for suitable vacancies; they asked for help to make sure their cover letters on job applications did not contain any mistakes and would appeal to potential employers, and subsequently were clearly devastated and frustrated when receiving a rejection, or worse, hearing nothing back. Also, many of them had already proven over the course of their (working) life that they did not shy away from working, and working hard. Many of the people at the work club, in fact, had been in employment for years before they found themselves long-term unemployed. This was mainly due to, initially, the continuous deindustrialisation of the area, accompanied by the inevitable loss of many jobs, and, more recently, the global financial crisis of 2007/2008 (Foden et al., 2014). Leigh, a man just over 60 years old was in such a position. When talking about his own job searching efforts and work history, of which many years were spent in coal mining, he told me that:
The job market got even worse with all the people formerly working in the pits now trying to get hold of other industrial jobs as well. “It was tough, you know, back in the day when the pits were open, but when you finished school, you could just go down to the pit on a Monday and you’d have a job, an apprenticeship, but now…” (Field notes).

Like many others in Banterby SC work club, especially the older men, Leigh remembered the days in which the industrial jobs were aplenty with a mixture of fondness and reality. It was easier to get a job, as there were always more miners or steel workers needed, and it came with a kind of collectivism and support in its communities that is sadly missed: “an unquantifiable spirit that held these [mining] places together. A spirit which had developed over generations … The social institutions that characterised the places were all symbolic of that: the Co-op; the miners’ welfare; the club trip, the union” (Turner, 2000: 4). However, they would never shy away from saying that it was hard work, “the hardest work under heaven” (in: Pollard, 1984). Work club clients like Leigh had worked hard, under dangerous conditions, to provide for themselves and their families and despite it being tough and dangerous they expressed how they enjoyed being self-sufficient. Yet, Leigh, and others, now felt that they were being villainized for being ‘lazy skivers’, with people not looking at all the years they had worked, but only at their current employment status.

Of course, it is not only men who are in this situation, even though the clientele for the work club consisted mainly of men, there were also women who had historically proven not to be afraid to work, as per Dunn’s suggestions. One lady, who was close to retirement, was being pushed by the JCP to apply for as many jobs as she could and had to deliver proof of that, otherwise she would be sanctioned. Looking at her CV and listening to her stories, there was nothing that indicated that she was showing any resemblance to the picture painted by politicians and the media of JSA recipients who enjoyed being on benefits and did not want to work or contribute to society:
She had years and years of care worker experience, until her back gave in ... She had worked from about 1969 onwards, with a short break when she had her children (and her husband could then support them just fine), and had made the switch to retail in about 2004. She had been ‘on the sick’ for a while, but now had been deemed fit for work, so in order not to get sanctioned, she had to start looking for work … She has had it, she told us. She’s worked, hard, all her life, has had many physical difficulties over the years due to heavy work in elderly care, had Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), available to people unable to work due to illness or a disability, since 2014, and now, for a period of 4 months and 2 weeks she is pushed around and about by [the Jobcentre] to find work in order for her JSA not to be stopped (Field notes).

When talking to her I could see and feel her frustrations, and I shared those with her. With barely four months to go until her State Pension retirement age after having worked for over 40 years, she still felt she was being treated like a ‘scrounger’ as depicted in the newspapers, still having to prove she is deserving of receiving financial support. If anything, her work history should be a testament to her commitment to working hard if that is to be the yardstick by which we measure deservedness.

5.5 Drive ‘to make it stop’.

The majority of the people in Banterby SC work club had many years of employment behind them, but felt that ‘the JCP was a joke’. One of the clients told me that they were ‘treating them like shit’ judging them only on their current employment status. Many said how the JCP was pressuring them to take on any kind of work as soon as possible. Arnold, for example, told me that this kind of treatment was making it impossible for him to cope with going there and trying to comply with what the JCP told him to do; it was making him feel stressed and anxious. In fact, one of the most frequently asked questions from newcomers to the work club, especially those who had heard about it through the JCP, was along the lines of “are you reporting back to the JCP?”, showing that people genuinely
mistrusted and held grudges about the way they were being treated by its staff.

One man, Ali, desperately looking for work, expressed how going to the JCP physically made him sick. He told me that, when he goes there, and grabs the door handle, something inside him told him “do not go in there, it’s bad!!” Going to the JCP, he continued, does not give him a good feeling. He said: “it hurts, and it makes you feel very bad about yourself, and you cannot do anything about it…” Despite all of this, he said he had to keep going as he would take any chance that would get him out of this situation, so that he would not need to go to the JCP anymore.

Clearly the clients of Banterby SC work club felt that the way they were being treated by the JCP staff had a negative effect on them. For many the push to get into work as soon as possible from the JCP ultimately made the job searching quest about more than ‘just finding any job’:

Oscar was about 55 years old I guess, and looking for a job. “I just want to get back to work as soon as possible!” He needed his CV updating and had just gotten his Universal Jobmatch account [Universal Jobmatch is the DWP’s own preferred jobsite, where all those receiving Jobseekers Allowance are expected to create an account], but left it at home, so besides retyping his CV there wasn’t much at this time we could do. So, we sat down and ‘hit it off’. … He had only been ‘on the dole’ for a couple of times in his life-time. One period was a bit longer, 3-4 years, but that was about 20 years ago. Other than that, he had always found work very quickly, or did some part-time work as a mobile cleaner when there was nothing else for him to do, but at least that was a stable part-time job. But, as soon as he walked into the Jobcentre, he told me, he felt like he was treated like a criminal. “Sanction this, sanction that, just get to work now, it just makes you feel horrible, which is why I want to get to work as soon as possible again, because I don’t want them to make me feel like that, while I have always been a hard worker, always worked when I could and where I could, and was good at what I did. The only reason I lost my job was because I was made redundant, not because they weren’t
Oscar was frustrated that apparently, he had not proven his ‘worth’ through all of his years as an employed worker, and he clearly wanted a job to make the harassment from the Jobcentre stop: he did not want them to treat him that way anymore. This, in a way, plays into the arguments of politicians like Duncan Smith and academics like Dunn (Dunn, 2014; 2015), above, for it means that sanctions are indeed pushing people to find any kind of work. However, the work club clients are doing it for a completely different reason, as it seems as if the work club does not need to instil people with a good work ethic and support their development as a worker, as the majority of the people in the work club already had proven over the course of their life that they had a track record of working hard, and are genuinely trying to get back into employment. Instead, they are being pressured into performing the work ethic actively and continuously for the sake of it, regardless of whether there is any chance of them actually improving their financial situations. The question here is, if so many of people in the work club were willing to do anything to get them out of this situation and back into employment, why is it that over the full year that I worked in the work club, none of the regulars found permanent employment? After all, surely, as per the comments of commentators like Dunn, some sections of the news media, the DWP, and government, if they really wanted a job there would be a job for them?

I feel that, over the course of my time there, I have not met people who did not want to work. I have met people who were tired and disheartened and had lost all faith in actually finding employment that would help them pay their bills, and who, therefore, found it difficult to keep on trying. Making these observations, then, it is far too easy to end up trying to defend the work club’s clients using or resorting to the deserving/undeserving distinctions and stereotypes as discussed in Chapter Two. Following Cruikshank (1999), I do not wish to portray my research participants as ‘unemployed individuals who do or are good despite their situation’, nor do I aim to give a voice to the ‘real unemployed’. Still, I argue, a strong will to work is as much an observation outside the realm of these stereotypes and deserving/undeserving distinctions as it can be used within, and should
not be used to differentiate between unemployed individuals. Indeed, perhaps because of the open and trusting set-up of the work club, the clients that did visit more than once, and felt that Banterby SC work club was a place where they could voice their opinions, seemed all very candid and outspoken about their job searching and employment aspirations when having general discussions about their job searching activities and hopes for the (near) future. Dec, for example, said that it was without a question that he wanted to work, because, in his words, ‘nobody likes being bored everyday’, to which all those who heard this statement agreed. However, they also agreed that going back into employment would have to mean that their lives would be improved, instead of worsened; that the expectations of the JCP would be a bit more bearable if indeed finding a job would make them feel better about themselves, instead of feeling that they did not deserve anything else but precarious work, defined as “employment involving contractual insecurity; weakened employment security for permanent workers in non-standard contractual forms such as temporary agency, fixed-term, zero-hour and undeclared work are all included in this definition” (Prosser, 2015: 2).

Still, despite their unhappiness with the way they were being treated and expected to act and perform, the JCP expected them to perform the work ethic on a continuous basis, by applying for as many jobs as they could.

5.6 Five job applications a day

The DWP and the JCP require jobseekers to sign a Jobseekers Agreement, also known as a Claimant Commitment. One of the main things that jobseekers have to agree to when signing those commitments is how many hours a week need to be spent looking for work, as well as how many jobs they should apply for (HM Government, 2016). One of the perhaps most telling cases I have seen was two of my clients talking about how they had to adhere to a minimum of five applications sent a day:

Talking to me about his experiences of … Tony told me he felt useless and ashamed. “And then they want you to apply for 5 jobs a day”, he continues, “there isn’t even that many, but I will go look, and I will ‘go down’, you know, do jobs that
I would normally consider myself overqualified for, because I just want to work, I just want to make my own money, go to Tesco, and buy the things with the money I earned myself. That gives you a good feeling. Going to the JCP doesn’t give me a good feeling.

The guy next to him, Geoff, gave me a look, and started his own mini rant: “You know what my job adviser wants me to do? He wants me to go on Google Maps, search for ‘<place name>’ and go click on every red dot on the map, which is a company or organisation. He wants me to click on them, find out their phone number and call them to ask if I can send in my CV. I have to do about 5 a day of those. That doesn’t seem right? Does it? They want you to do something different every week, and I don’t even think it’s working, or that it’s going to get me a job… But I do it anyway, because otherwise I might lose my benefits” … (Field notes).

The sense of hopelessness from these two men was palpable. Many claimants I have met were set up for a minimum of five applications a day, and if they could not find them online, which often happened, they were sent off at random into the town to hand out their CVs to random shops and businesses, assuming that there are jobs just ‘out there’ and that people should be encouraged to look harder and put themselves ‘out there’ more actively, resiliently and persistently. They complied and did their best with our help. Yet, many of them returned week after week, as there simply were not enough jobs out there. As discussed earlier, recent numbers for the area in which the work club operated demonstrated only 55 jobs available per 100 residents of working age (Foden et al., 2014: 18), making it impossible for each and every one of them to find a job.

There were some temporary jobs that the work club leader had managed to locate, on an eight-week project. It was unskilled labour for just over minimum wage pay; this meant that anybody attending the work club could apply. The result of this, however, was that everybody in Banterby SC work club was applying for the same job: As I wrote in my field notes at the time:
Oscar has [had] no education whatsoever after primary school, apart from 2 certificates in health and safety. He has working experience, and had worked for many, many years, but he had been made redundant. He is applying to the same job all the other people attending the work club are, and I can only guess a lot of unemployed people in the region like him, are applying for it too (Field notes).

In the end about seven people from our work club managed to be recruited for the temporary positions, including Oscar. This provided them with some relief, but after those eight weeks we invited them all back to the work club, looking for jobs and listening to their stories of having to sign on for their JSA again. This was something Banterby SC work club had no power over: as I had explained to Oscar, “It’s rubbish, isn’t it? If I could change it now and here, I would do it… but I can’t…” (Field notes, August 2016).

So far, we have discussed, in this chapter, building on the importance of the work ethic in a neoliberal society (as discussed in Chapter Two), how clients of Banterby SC were supported by its staff and volunteers, what kind of impact this support had, and how this impact related to the goals that the DWP set out for work clubs; helping people back into employment (as an explicit goal), and instilling in clients a good work ethic (implicit goal). So far, we have seen that both the explicit and implicit goals appear to be unrealistic or even useless goals. Firstly, because the work club would only be able to help people back into employment if there were actually jobs available, and secondly because it appears that the work club does not need to instil in its clients a work ethic, for they already have one. In the end, all the clients were doing was in a way (forcibly) performing the work ethic within the work club, as they had internalised the neoliberal governmentality of work and employment: despite the lack of secure and permanent jobs out there that would pay enough for them to pay their bills, they still needed to perform these actions and adhere to their contracts to show that above all, they wanted to work. This ultimately means that performing the work ethic comes down to performing the desire to work.

The lack of jobs available was already hinted at in the previous sections, but a more in-
depth exploration focusing then on the need for secure and permanent jobs that pay enough for people to be able to pay their bills follows in the next section, where Banterby SC work club’s clients talked about wanting to find a job that would actually pay off.

5.7 It needs to pay off

The low-pay, no-pay cycle is one of the most devastating processes that unemployed workers are forced to go through (Shildrick et al., 2012b). Shildrick and her colleagues (2012b) define the low-pay, no pay cycle as “a longitudinal pattern of employment instability and movement between low-paid jobs and unemployment, usually accompanied by claiming of welfare benefits” (2012b: 18). Specifically, it is the succession of low-wage jobs (laced with spells of unemployment) that do most harm. Where often it is argued that any job is a good job and better than no job at all, and that low-paid jobs can be the stepping stone to something better, looking at how many people manage to get out of the low-pay, no-pay cycle tells us that those job stagnate rather than improve peoples’ chances of a better job with a higher wage (Shildrick et al., 2012b). As argued by Stewart (2007):

In terms of future employment prospects, low-wage jobs are closer to unemployment than to higher-paid jobs. The results in this paper suggest that not all jobs are ‘good’ jobs, in the sense of improving future prospects, and that low-wage jobs typically do not lead on to better things (Stewart, 2007: 529).

Many of the work club clients had experienced the cycle from up-close, and were now, warned by work club staff to be more selective in what they would apply for and accept. This might, at first sight, confirm Dunn’s (2014) scepticism that a lot of jobseekers remain unemployed ‘voluntarily’ as they prefer unemployment and benefits over jobs that they find boring, underpaid or otherwise unattractive. However, the work club clients often considered themselves to have no other choice, as signing off from JSA for a temporary job that pays minimum wage will cost them more stress and financial trouble in the long run than staying on benefits and looking for an opportunity that pays more and/or is
permanent. Sarah offers evidence of this dilemma:

She had been on and off benefits for quite some time now, being laid off for all sorts of reasons, mainly because low- and semi-skilled workers are aplenty and can be ‘used and tossed away as needed, or at least, that is what happens’ as she phrased it (Field notes).

This challenge did not stop Sarah from trying to find employment, but she did often tell us that she would not settle for anything less than a year for a ‘normal’ wage, because otherwise ‘it would not be worth all the trouble’, by which she meant that being offered a temporary, part-time minimum wage job, she would be more financially secure when staying on benefits. Sarah discussed how she felt used, like an inanimate commodity, picked up and thrown away when needed without any concern for their well-being. Even Banterby SC work club leader Jerry was cautioning people from applying for certain jobs if he knew that those jobs would put the clients at risk:

The [supermarket] vacancies in [village] we had seen the day before were talked down by Jerry, since [that supermarket] appeared to be in trouble and was closing down stores and firing people. He doesn’t want to encourage people to apply there at the moment because it might end up in another disappointment which could end them up at the beginning of a low-pay/no-pay cycle (Field notes).

Jerry, always on the look-out for opportunities for the work club clients, has helped many clients to do some temporary work and project-based work or seasonal jobs had all been shared by him with the clients that could afford to go off benefits for a while ‘to make some good money’, as he would phrase it. Still, he was also the first one to make sure people would not be taken advantage of, looking out for people whom he knew would be in financial trouble if they took a temporary job. Jerry was very much aware of the financial struggles that many of the Banterby SC work club clients were dealing with, and he, too, recognised, that the whole practice was mostly about performing the work ethic, showing willingness to work to prove that they were worthy of receiving State support. However,
sometimes, in doing so, in wanting to prove so badly that they were not part of the stereotypical welfare recipient narrative, they would accept any job without thinking whether it would advance their situations. So, in a way, Jerry would sometimes keep people from applying for, or even accepting a job, because he knew it would not make things better for our clients.

It also appeared that remaining on benefits for a longer period of time had some positive side-effects for JSA claimants. For example, the longer someone is claiming, the more access one has to additional funding for courses and working licenses, such as for example a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card, which someone needs to work in construction. The following client, Paddy, was a prime example of someone struggling with this obstacle:

He had had a few job offers from family and friends, working as a casual labourer in construction and the like, but to be able to accept these jobs he needs to get his CSCS card. He hadn’t been on benefits for long enough to get funding for him, his adviser had told him, and he needed to be on benefits for at least 6 months without a break. Well, that’s because every time he gets offered (and accepts!) a temporary job, he loses his benefits and the clock starts ticking again every time he has to go again if the person he’s replacing returns to work (Field notes).

Not only had Paddy not had the chance to save up money because of being stuck in the low-pay, no-pay cycle due to his drive to prove that he is not ‘work shy’, he also cannot reap the benefits of being on JSA for longer. This is because he needed to be on six months of continuous JSA in order to become eligible for financial support that would give him the certification he needed to get the kind of work that might get him out of unemployment permanently or at least for a longer period of time. Ultimately, his drive to get into whatever employment regardless of the lack of financial benefits that would come from accepting those temporary jobs got him into even more financial trouble and further away from the kind of work that he wanted to do and had experience with.
So again, as discussed in the previous sections, it was often not the lack of work ethic that was keeping people from finding their way back into employment, but rather obstacles that they were facing that they could not (easily) overcome. One group in particular found it difficult to get back into work, despite them having proven, over many years, their commitment to the work ethic: older workers. This group of people is central to the next section.

5.8 Older Workers

Perhaps because of where it was located, the majority of the work club’s clientele could be classed as ‘older workers’, “commonly, although somewhat problematically, defined as [people] over 50” (Riach and Loretto, 2009: 102), a classification that I will use here too. Research suggests that older workers have higher risks of being made redundant once in a job, as well slimmer chances of getting back into work, once being made redundant (Berthoud, 2003). This was surely illustrated throughout Banterby SC work club: for many of the clients the main reason for being in their position was not because they had been fired for not doing their work well, but because their employers were forced to cut down due to ongoing deindustrialisation as well as persistent global financial crises and recessions and had to let people go, and subsequently they found it difficult to back into work at their age, often expressing feelings of hopelessness such as ‘who would hire me at my age?’.

Ian, for example, highlighted the difficulty of applying for jobs at a later age:

He looked a bit sad when he continued with talking about how he, sort of, has given up. “I'm close to retirement age. Who would hire me? I’m 54 and only have 12 years of work in front of me. That might seem a lot to some, but it is not, especially not if you've got the choice between me and someone 20 years younger that you also get to pay less…” And, as he continued, “everything is focused on getting young people into employment anyway. Apprenticeship schemes, training, all
focus on creating jobs and opportunities for youngsters, but they simply forget about us. Yet they want us to work… How are we going to compete in a job market where we are obliged to apply for jobs that aren’t there, and if there are some, they are insecure zero-hour contract jobs or they will go to youngsters… That’s not fair, is it?” (Field notes).

This excerpt from my field notes demonstrates how powerless he felt and how he felt his age was a serious obstacle in trying to find work. He started working when he was 14, having worked (on and off) for 40 years, he felt he was very close to retirement age. Despite the government attempting to convince employers to hire ‘older workers’ by challenging assumptions that older people are less reliable due to health reasons and are in the way of younger workers chances of settling themselves in the job market (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013b: 4), most of the jobs we found that had the potential of becoming permanent through some in-house training or apprenticeships were still targeted specifically at young people. An example of this is an opportunity that arose with Ian’s voluntary job, where for a while it seemed as if he could be taken on to work there. Unfortunately, it was decided that the grant that would fund the position would only be made available to people under a certain age, which left him feeling rejected and demoralised. He still volunteers there, as it is what he loves doing, but that event did diminish his hopes of finding a new job.

The push for older workers to perform the work ethic and to prove their worth was exemplified by a discussion I had with Rachel, sometime during December of 2015:

What she then told me had me speechless: she was about to retire on the 1st of March. She was one of the lucky ones who was still able to retire at 63. She’s had it, she told us. … She’d have to learn [how to use a computer] within about 2 weeks, if she wants to stand a chance on the digital job market. And even if she manages to apply for jobs, what is she going to say and who is going to hire her knowing that she’ll be gone on the 1st of March 2016? … This lady has worked hard all her life, her CV is a silent witness to that, and is ready to retire in a few months’ time,
is it really that hard for JCP/the government to say: “you’ve done enough, it’s fine. We’re not going to waste any more (voluntary) resources on you and not going to make you feel like shit.” Because that’s what they’re doing. She told us that this whole thing is making her feel horrible, and she’s not the only one (Field notes, December 2015).

Rachel had come to Banterby SC work club as a last resort. As the field notes excerpt suggest she had already proven that she did not shy away from working hard during her life. She had been trying to find work as she did not want to lose her benefits until she would be able to claim her pension, but was unsuccessful.

Retraining and skills building are both part of the vocabulary of work and employment surrounding older workers. Jim had taken that aboard, and with the help of the JCP he had started a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 in Bricklaying, in which he had found his passion. He had worked in construction before until he started to develop health problems. When he talked about the course and his qualification his eyes lit up, as this is what he really wanted to do if he would get the chance. But here he ran into yet another obstacle, one that even the careers adviser who often operated from within the work club as introduced in Chapter One, acknowledged and warned him for:

Jim had his NVQ2 in Bricklaying, and wanted to do his NVQ Level 3. This would be a year-long course, two days a week. He loved it, he told me, and he was good at it too. However, he’s on JSA, and obliged to look for jobs and take a job when offered, any job. This could happen after starting his NVQ, even if it’s just a part-time or temporary job, meaning he’d have to stop his training course and instead go and do something he doesn’t want to do. He sounded sad and a bit desperate. … Barry [the careers adviser] said to be careful. To be realistic. To not to get his hopes up. … Jim is 55+, retraining himself, but for what? Barry said that people will not hire him, because he hasn’t got the experience and is too old. If they have the chance to hire someone younger or with more experience, they’ll do it. Besides, there’s loads of people working 20+ years in the trade now being out of work, so
the competition is fierce (Field notes).

Even though there is a push for people to work until retirement age because of a growing older demographic (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013b), and these people must prove their *willingness to work* until they are officially allowed to retire through retraining and skills building (Altmann, 2015), many older workers in Banterby SC work club felt unable to comply despite their best intentions, as they were both struggling to find suitable employment as well as finding it difficult to deal with the digital nature of job searching, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. These observations of obstacles faced by ‘older workers’ are highly problematic, especially when they are acknowledged by the same careers adviser that is supposed to help people back on their feet by advising them about (re)training options. As for Jim, finding training opportunities that would help him do so was his main hope for finding employment, as many other jobs, where basic English reading and writing skills were a requirement, was not an option due to his severe dyslexia, yet another challenge to employment that Jim, and other clients, faced.

5.9 Disadvantages and difficulties

Throughout the field work it became apparent that Banterby SC work club attracted a substantial number of clients who experienced, in one way or another, some form of disadvantage which influenced their ability to find work. Although I will touch upon how restricted levels of agency affect the job searching process in chapters Six and Seven, focusing on more practical complications, this section will deal with the more general limitations that prevent people from finding employment and hence contributing to the conjecture that the work club as a place to help people into employment is problematic, which is where we can recognise (and reaffirm) the main research question of this research project that asks “*What can flexible, unstructured work clubs tell us about everyday unemployment and job searching practices in UK society?*” Specifically, it explores how already disadvantaged people are becoming even more disadvantaged having to comply with neoliberal ideologies around self-responsibility.
We live in a society that is mainly centred around and built by and for non-disabled people (Oliver, 1999), it is therefore important that we examine the implications of this situation for people in society with disabilities. Over the last few decades, major steps have been taken to make society more inclusive for people with disabilities, the consistent wide-ranging exclusion of disabled people has thus attracted increasing policy attention in the UK (Barnes and Mercer, 2005). However, one of the areas in which this appears to be a clear work in progress is that of job searching practices. Two major disabilities that were encountered in the work club were, first, dyslexia and learning difficulties posing challenges with job searching practice based on written communication, and, second, mental conditions such as forms of autism, affecting capacities for clients to function in a 'normal' working environment.

Beyond a large group of clients who had more general reading and writing problems, the work club had four regulars that manifested symptoms consistent with but not definitely attributed to forms of disabilities such as dyslexia and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). Although it was outside the scope of the work club staff and volunteers’ expertise to arrive at diagnoses, beyond those provided by the clients themselves, we were able to make some informed observations that at least would allow us to try and work with these specific clients’ needs to the best of our abilities. Each of these individuals sought support within the work club, and close contact with them trying to provide that support revealed how their situations were ignored or the impact of their disadvantages misjudged by the DWP and JCP. This, in turn, provides another example of how embedded and non-discriminatory neoliberal ideologies towards unemployment and job searching are in our daily lives, and how clients were expected to conform to them on an everyday basis. The next two sub sections will provide more detail about these experiences, starting with those clients who displayed symptoms of dyslexia and/or learning difficulties.

5.9.1 Dyslexia, learning difficulties and educational disadvantages

There were many clients who had only had a very basic level of education (perhaps primary education only) and had developed only limited literacy and numeracy skills
before entering the job market at an early age and never really developed their reading
and writing skills; many of those over 50 shared this characteristic. For many of these
clients writing a short cover letter or email without any grammatical or textual errors was
an impossible task, and often reading through job vacancies was problematic due to
limited reading comprehension. People would often ask for help in explaining what a job
entailed. Many of them tended to write phonetically, leaving them, when unassisted, with
an application that would most likely result in rejection if the role demanded ‘good levels
of written English’, which was quite the common prerequisite. Clients often highlighted
how difficult they found it to write cover letters, CVs and enquiry emails, and how it left
them feeling ‘ashamed’ and ‘stupid’. Often these sentiments were followed by frustration,
saying that for the type of job they wanted they felt they did not need to ‘write flawlessly’.
A younger man, Alfie, who had left school to work as an apprentice building contractor
and could hardly read and write, told me that he would be able to wire my entire house
without a problem. He was good at that, he told me, and he was proud of it – and rightly
so – referred to it as an art. However, the only problem was, he told me with a sense of
shame, that he could hardly read or write. When he started his apprenticeship, he was
accepted without this being a key requirement, but, he told me, over the years rules have
become stricter, and they had to let him go.

Dyslexia and related reading and writing disadvantages were issues that had a significant
impact on the job searching process. Regardless of whether people like Alfie were
diagnosed with dyslexia or not, the shame and discomfort coming with not being able to
(properly) read or write meant that they also felt ashamed to seek specialised support for
this, let alone to practice more on their own, afraid to be confronted with their own
shortcomings even more frequently. Indeed, work club sessions emphasised how
debilitating these disadvantages could be. In many ways, the pressure put on some
people to take part in the job searching process was a constant reminder of their own
shortcomings, which in turn made it difficult for them to ask for help directly. Visiting the
work club was one step, but for many people asking for help was something they needed
to get to terms with. Jim was one of the regulars dealing with diagnosed dyslexia. He
often did not want to ask for help directly, as he felt to be a burden, taking away attention
from other jobseekers, but when offered, he would not reject help:

He was staring at his screen, which had the [Universal Jobmatch] log in window open. I had noticed that before, but I had to catch up a bit with Jerry [about the plan for today], get the kettle on, and well, get started. After ten minutes, he was still staring, so I went up to him to offer help. He could not log in. He, as are many there, had significant problems with reading and writing, and could not properly read a text, numbers, basically anything that you have to read. Writing is a problem too. He told me that his dyslexia cost him his last more permanent job after some reorganisation: there were more requirements, including things like reporting back to managers in textual form, probably with a computer too, something that Jim just cannot do, despite doing the rest of his work very well. … I asked him whether he had any extra support from the Jobcentre, and whether he had an official diagnosis of his dyslexia. He did have the latter, the Jobcentre had sent him on a ‘dyslexia course’, probably provided by Dyslexia Action, but I did not have the time to ask him about his experiences with that… Still, he was unable to look for or read through job vacancies, but was expected, he told me, to send out a minimum of five applications per week for his JSA to be granted, so I had to do it for him (Field notes, September 2015).

Although the minimum of five applications per week is fewer than the amount of applications non-dyslexic JSA claimants have to send out in order to keep their benefits, it is clear that the effects of his disability are being neglected or at the very least are going unrecognised as he could not complete five job applications a week without assistance. With only one work club session a week that he can attend, and needing help with every single step of the process, work club staff would need to spend at least a few hours with him individually, something that was impossible. This limitation in temporal resources available to Banterby SC work club will be discussed further in Chapter Seven. Still, what is more, if reading and writing are becoming more important in a changing work environment, even for roles that are considered to be accessible to people who are considered low-skilled, having cost Jim his job once before, his disability would continue
to limit him not only in his job searching efforts, but also in obtaining and maintaining a job. Even if he managed to be selected for an interview with help from the work club, with staff writing his CV and cover letter, if the role requires a good level of written English, Jim would not be able to meet that level, and would perhaps be rejected. I will talk about this issue more in Chapter Six where I discuss the problem of representation and agency that come with work club staff and volunteers helping clients create their online profile.

Jim’s was not an isolated case, and over the course of my year I have met many people who could not read or write properly and were therefore struggling with their job searching practices. Tim, for example:

[He would] sit behind his laptop for ages, in silence, staring at the Windows start up screen that says "Press CTRL Alt Del to start". He’ll just sit there, hands in his lap, staring, and every now and then looking around to see if anyone will meet his eyes, for he does not want to ask for help a lot. Perhaps because he doesn’t want to trouble us, and perhaps he feels embarrassed. He’ll sit there, until I walk up to him and log on for him (Field notes, April 2015).

When asking later why he would not just ask for help, his reply was that he ‘did not want to be a burden’, for, like Jim, he needs help with almost every single part of the process, due to his dyslexia. The letters and numbers on both paper and screen are a jumble to him, and typing his long numerical log-in from, for example, Universal Jobmatch was a real challenge. The work club could not help these people improve their skills, and even if the staff wanted and would be skilled enough to do so, they would not have the time. This goes against the expectations and goals that the DWP has set for those willing to start a work club, to “address the needs of unemployed people in the community” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). The needs of many of the clients visiting the work club went well beyond what work club staff and volunteers were able to address. These needs were also not limited to assistance with reading and writing, wherein staff might simply act as mediators for writing and reading (see chapter Six), but also included more complex conditions such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders.
5.9.2 Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) pose a significant challenge for some of Banterby SC work club’s regular attendants, wherein people with an ASD often display “difficulties with reciprocal social interactions and interpersonal communication, and may demonstrate unusual or repetitive patterns of behaviours” (Hendricks, 2010: 126). Although many people with ASD have a desire and ability to find paid work (Hendricks, 2010), something that was clearly displayed in the work club’s clients behaviour and drive, without adequate educational and employment support and workplace accommodations individuals with ASD will likely not be able to maintain or obtain employment (Westbrook et al., 2012).

‘I am beyond help’ was Simon’s witty but telling answer to my question as to how things were going after not seeing him for a while. He tried to make it sound casual, but the frustration and sadness in his eyes were apparent. Simon is a very gentle and polite man who lives to a very tight schedule. He always showed up at the exact same time for the work club, and left equally right on schedule to go to his next commitment. He would always have his same seat, next to the printer, so that he could print off all the vacancies he had applied for, so that he would have proof to show the Jobcentre that he had made an effort. He would put his evidence all in his organiser, and go through it all at the beginning of each session. As soon as someone sat in ‘his’ chair next to the printer he would get anxious and slightly panicked before we were able to calm him down and sit him down somewhere close to the printer, and would promise him that he could still do his printing. Simon was one of the people I met on my very first day of field work, and he would still be there when I finished my last, as well as when I visited afterwards to check in and tell them about the project’s progress. From the beginning, it was clear that helping Simon would be a difficult task:

The first person who asked me for some help was Simon, and he wanted to print
off an email to show the Jobcentre, and then also reply to it. After we had done the printing, I showed him how to go through with replying to the offer, which was for a website called ‘holidog’, where people can offer to take in a dog for a set amount of time while people are on vacation: it’s an alternative to taking them to the kennels during the same time, giving them a more friendly and personal stay. He really wanted the job. He showed me how he really loved animals, and he even had a really old photograph with him, showing him as a young lad with the family dog. This was his dream job, he told me, it would be just perfect (Field notes).

Simon was keen on getting a job, and listened, to the letter, to what the Jobcentre staff told him to do. It was probably part of his demeanour, generally taking things very literally and not being very good with jokes, banter and hints. Simon’s issues were issues that we could not solve. Often Jerry and I discussed his situation, arguing that it is people like Simon that should not need to be pushed around like this, spending the majority of their time chasing after jobs that they have no real chance of getting. Our ‘perfect solution’ for Simon would be to find him a volunteer position in an animal shelter where he would be able to walk the dogs and take care of the other animals there, and for the DWP and JCP to recognise his shortcomings without dismissing him. He would be such a valuable asset to an animal shelter, we thought. Yet, the JCP had deemed him fit for (regular) work and demanded him to look for jobs, and even though he was overall quite able to operate individually within the job searching process, we also knew we had to keep track of him as to not have him risk being sanctioned. We did so by regularly checking in when he was looking for work by himself, and to sometimes nudge him away from opportunities, like the ‘holidog’ website, as being accepted work as to not get his hopes up as well as have him ‘waste time’ on opportunities that would most certainly not improve his situation.

Ralph was the opposite of Simon, and perhaps the most frustrating and time-consuming regular in the work club. Like Simon he takes things very literally, so when the JCP told him he had to look for work, this is what he had set his mind to – on an obsessive level. Every session he would show up well on time, and would stay until the very end, trying to get our attention and help for the majority of his time there, as he did not want to disappoint
both the JCP and himself, as like many others there, all he wanted was to find a job instead of receiving benefits. But unlike Simon who kept to himself for most of the time, Ralph constantly interfered when we were helping other people, trying to enter the conversation by saying he had had a similar experience, for example, and then focusing the conversation on him:

He wants attention ALL THE TIME, from everyone, even if you’re having a conversation about someone else’s problems/case. Same happened today, when Jerry [was talking to another client about his training options], and he just kept asking for training for himself, something he had been doing already with [a visiting training councillor] subtly (which doesn’t work with Ralph) hinting at there being nothing for him at the moment [with her organisation], as his English and Maths skills aren’t what they need to be for further training. His problems are, to be fair, too big for the work club, and Jerry is going to have a word with him next week to try and restrain him a bit from becoming/staying so intrusive and demanding. And it is sad, because he means well, and this is one of the only places he feels comfortable, he told us today, he likes coming here, because he can be himself and there are friendly people there, but there are boundaries to what he can do, even within our free and supportive environment, because we have to be able to support everyone, and not just him (Field notes, October 2015 after the work club hours had been brought down from five to two).

Ralph often told the other clients and the staff that Banterby SC work club was the only place that he feels comfortable and accepted. Trying to find a middle ground for people like him is something the work club was known for with its clients and especially the regulars, but it was also something that we, as staff and volunteer, were struggling with, especially after severe time restraints were put on the work club’s operating hours due to cuts in funding as discussed in Chapter One, bringing the main sessions’ hours back from five to two. It is heart-breaking to see someone like Ralph, with such a drive to find employment, struggle with himself, and yet to say to him that he would not be able to come to the work club as he is taking up too much time would be unfair to him, because,
we asked ourselves, where do we draw the line, and who are we going to exclude based on what?

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the question *How are neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices manifested in the everyday practices in Banterby SC work club as a flexible, unstructured work club?* It has done so by exploring the key issues and obstacles that arose for Banterby SC work club’s clients when looking for work with the support of staff and volunteers. Specifically, this chapter has focused on how work club clients found themselves having to constantly prove their commitment to the work ethic up to a point where the main goal of their actions appeared to be found in the ritualistic *performance* of the work ethic, rather than actually getting back into employment. Following my interpretation of a ritualistic approach to job searching practices, as set out in Chapter Three, empirical data showed that the State has managed to transform job searching into a ritual that is habitual, formalised and transcendental at once by attaching a political meaning to the practice. Politically driven, the act of job searching is shaped into something that should be ‘habitual’, a ‘repeated pattern, whether or not it has a particular [practical] meaning’ (Couldry, 2003: 3). This became apparent in the case of Steve, as discussed in section 5.3, whose approach to job searching showed a complicated interplay between the three types of rituals as described by Couldry.

First, whether or not jobseekers like Steve had a realistic chance of finding (meaningful) employment, or to ‘win the game’, they had to *commit* to this repeated pattern to show how they considered it a ‘habit’, and through this how they saw the importance of a strong work ethic. This is where we can recognise the formalised and transcendental approaches to rituals: jobseekers kept to a certain protocol to job searching, which was often captured in their Jobseekers Agreement (formalised action), in order to be considered (and to transcend into the realm of) ‘good citizens’ (action involving transcendental values).
Secondly, to take it even further, and to look closer at how people like Steve were trying to win an unbeatable game, the way that people like Steve had internalised and accepted their job searching as a habit shows how in the end, the work club contributed to Steve’s ability to comply with the rules of the (neoliberal) game, and thus played a part in reproducing modes of symbolic power/violence. This is because the doxa of job searching, the rules of the unemployment game, are set by the State, which is setting out its neoliberal ideology using the DWP and JCP as tools. These doxa, ultimately, serve two main functions: “first, limit the space of inquiry to a manageable level to make decisions, and second, provide legitimacy to social practices” (Ojha et al., 2009: 367). Therefore, subsequently, social actors, in this case jobseekers, operating in the field are judged on their commitment to adhere to these rules, making them not only rigid regulations in a rule book, but even more so tacit values by which people are not only judged by others, but also by themselves. As argued by Connolly (2004), it shows “…how power and inequality are not just external phenomena, but affect and reach into the very psyche of the individual” (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 30). People like Steve, Ralph and Simon felt that they had to continuously show their commitment to the work ethic, not only to others, but also to themselves, for, as he described it himself, without the structure around job searching that he had developed he himself would feel ‘useless’, the opposite of the ‘good citizen’ that a neoliberal society demands. In other words, (symbolic forms of) power, imposed on them through persistent images of what it is like to be ‘a good citizen’, even when one is unemployed, were internalised and were a deciding factor in how they would allow themselves to behave and be seen by not only the outside world, but, perhaps even more tellingly, also themselves. This also clearly echoes the Foucault’s idea of (neoliberal) governmentalities, shaping citizens’ behaviour, ‘conducting their conduct’ to “manage and optimise the productivity of its population” (Boland and Griffin, 2015: 33). Good citizens are said to be productive citizens, and in order to be considered productive, one should either be working or prove their willingness to work.

We can see the same signs of the symbolically violent nature of neoliberal governmentalities surrounding job searching practices in the way that Paddy was unable of ‘winning’ the game in which he was trying so hard to find a job as well. He displayed
all the qualities that were asked of him, especially a strong work ethic, and he, like every other client, had taken it upon himself to ask for support with their job searching efforts, while realising that it was in accepting anything that they could get their hands on in terms of employment would probably set them back financially. As argued by Bourdieu, “… the specificity of symbolic violence resides precisely in the fact that it requires of the person who undergoes it an attitude which defies the ordinary alternative between freedom and constraint” (1996: 168). In other words, the jobseeker, in this case Paddy, is an active accomplice to the State in accepting the burden that is placed upon him to prove their worthiness of State support. They do this even if they know their actions can keep them, effectively, from receiving future support, as we have seen with the financial support that is available for applying for Paddy’s CSCS card, which he will only be entitled to if he is unemployed for a longer period of time, something that is quite paradoxical.

Engaging in rituals of job searching, then, is not something that the clients of Banterby SC work club are doing because they agree with them or because they believe it will bring them more financial stability. The general pattern emerging from the data is that the combination of the work club’s main goal of people getting back into employment and the reality of structural barriers for reaching that goal is problematic. The vast majority of the work club’s clients showed that they were willing to adhere to what the JCP asked of them, even if that would only mean that they would not have to contact the JCP again, as well as having proven that they possessed a strong work ethic prior to becoming unemployed. Alongside the presence of a strong work ethic, the research showed that the main structural barriers for people to get (back) into employment that came to light by analysing the data were the lack of jobs, the low-pay, no-pay cycle, age and impairments and disabilities. The latter are not structural barriers per se, but become structural when the unemployment support system embodied by the DWP and JCP (and perhaps also, ultimately, the work club), are unable to provide adequate support, accommodation and a thorough understanding of diverse individuals.

Knowing and acknowledging these structural barriers to finding employment, clients of Banterby SC work club were confronted with their inability to ‘win the game’ on a daily
basis as described above in the case of Paddy, for example. If symbolic violence is a form of domination that is “exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 167), then job searching practices and the expectations placed upon them as observed in Banterby SC work club can be considered to be an example of it. The way the clients of Banterby SC work club think about unemployment and job searching, how they interrelate and how they are promoted and maintained by the State, fit with the idea that symbolic power is a form of power monopolised by the State, which means that the State has “the power to constitute and impose as universally applicable within a given “nation” … a common set of coercive norms” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 112). Taking away from Chapter Two the work ethic as imposed as a coercive norm, we can see how Steve and Paddy, but also Ralph and Simon had internalised these norms and had accepted them to be true. Steve, specifically, displayed how, implicitly, he felt that he had to protect himself from being considered a criminal while knowing that finding new, stable, long term employment would be very difficult. Following Wacquant, as explained in section 3.5, this kind of thinking enables welfare receipts to become criminalized by enacting forms of symbolic violence, whereby the failure of people like Steve to find employment can be decoupled from the poor condition of the labour market, the quality and pay of unskilled labour, and so on (Wacquant, 2009: 103).

Many of Banterby SC work club’s clients as well as previous research highlighted the job scarcity while at the same being expected to send out a set number of applications. This led to people being tempted and encouraged to apply for part-time temporary jobs that would not pay them enough and would, ultimately, lead to more financial sorrow. Furthermore, many of those who frequented the work club were classed as ‘older workers’, and despite policies to promote dealing with an increasingly ageing working demographic, reality still appeared to favour the young, with many new learning opportunities and apprentice jobs being solely advertised for young people up to 25 years of age. Finally, a substantial part of the work club’s clients was dealing with a disadvantage, disability or impairment, either due to very basic levels of education or due to neurological conditions such as dyslexia or ASDs. How the work club staff and I as a volunteer dealt with those issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.
As explored in Chapter Three, the existence of these forms of power and the way they are imposed on, in this case, jobseekers, do not mean that people agree with how they are being treated and expected to act. As we have seen in this chapter, many jobseekers felt that they were unjustly sanctioned, and that the expectations put on them were unreasonable. The way in which Oscar, as discussed in section 5.5, felt he was being ‘treated like a criminal’, resonates, firstly with Cruikshank’s (1999) analysis of how welfare recipients are being framed as criminals without a fair and suitable trial as discussed in Chapter Two. In describing how the JCP staff focused on sanctions as their main tool to keep him compliant with what the DWP asked of him we can see how, in a way, he was guilty until proven innocent, which is rather the opposite of what it should be. This also falls in line with Wacquant’s (2009) exploration of a punitive discourse in welfare provision as discussed in Chapter Three. Armed with the ideal of self-responsibility the State forces jobseekers to accept any job or [to take part in any initiative offered to them], whatever the pay and working conditions, on pain of forsaking the right to assistance” (Wacquant, 2009: 59). In other words, they are considered and treated as (potential) criminals and ‘undeserving’ until they have no need for said assistance anymore.

What this study adds to work club and welfare research, then, is drawing together a Foucauldian and Bourdieusian perspective in studying unemployment and job searching practices. Not only can we recognise clear examples of neoliberal governmentalities guiding citizen behaviour encouraging people to display a strong work ethic, and can we see how certain policies, vocabularies and expectations placed on jobseekers can be considered a form of symbolic violence, but more importantly, it is in its close relationship and interconnectedness that we can see how inescapable and embedded both are, each drawing from and supporting the other in their survival, becoming perhaps even one and the same. It is through neoliberal governmentalities that the requirements for an ongoing symbolic violence are being safeguarded, while at the same time, it is through the complicity of those who are violated that is inherent to symbolic violence that neoliberal ideas are being able to dictate the rules of the game.
Banterby SC work club’s clients consciously rejected the assumption that it was mainly through active searching that they would find employment. They knew that even if they would try to send out the minimum of five applications a day, they could not do so as there were not enough jobs that would be both suitable to them as well as paying enough money. However, disagreeing does not necessarily mean disobedience. The power that is being exercised over jobseekers demands and is granted compliance (McNay, 1999), as without obedience not only sanctions would be imminent, but also their reputations as ‘good citizens’ would be at stake, not just with the DWP and the State, but also with themselves, something that most of the clients in the work club were very adamant about.

One of the most prevalent tools that jobseekers had to use to prove that they were ‘good citizens’ was ‘the internet’, accessed through either desktop PCs, laptops or smart phones, something that is not as straightforwardly universally beneficial for jobseekers. Helsper (2011) described the people who are not able to deal with these rapid digital developments as the ‘digital underclass’, and has shown that people without employment are forming a significant part of this ‘digital underclass’, arguing that over the course of four to six years, people with low or no education levels and without employment have become worse off considering their access to ICTs and the use of the internet in particular (2011: 4). Therefore, one of the most important and prevalent tasks of the work club staff that they could help clients with, was helping them navigate the digital world of job searching. The online world of job searching comes with a myriad of problems, including practical issues of people not having the skills to work with a computer or online, as well as more ethical issues concerning peoples’ representation in an online environment. This observation resulted in the second sub question guiding this research project: How does the digital nature of job searching as observed in Banterby SC work club fit in with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices? This is the question that is central to the next chapter.
Chapter Six. Digitization of job searching procedures

6.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the digital procedures of job searching, which are an inherent part of contemporary job searching procedures, and how being part of Helsper’s (2011) ‘digital underclass’, as introduced in Chapter Two, influences the Banterby SC work club clients’ job searching practice. This chapter focuses around the sub question of How does the digital nature of job searching as observed in Banterby SC work club, as a flexible, unstructured work club, relate to neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices? It problematises the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in three ways.

Firstly, it describes the practical obstacles that clients of Banterby SC work club are facing, focusing on issues that relate to debates of digital exclusion and how contemporary job searching practices are based on the assumption that the vast majority of people have a sound knowledge of ICTs, including how to navigate and use the internet in job searching procedures. It highlights how, for example, many of the clients of Banterby SC work club are finding it difficult to deal with what is considered the very basics of using a computer, such as logging onto a computer, and uses this starting point to emphasise how, if people are finding this difficult, further steps that people need to take to search for and apply for jobs are even more problematic.

Secondly, it reveals and problematises digital ways of monitoring job searching activities imposed on jobseekers as introduced in Chapter Two. Building on Foucault’s governmentality writings, Henman and Dean (2004: 3) argue that “… diverse inscription devices and routine calculative practices, [in this case digital ways of monitoring job searching practices], all participate in the constitution of governable domains”. In this instance, the State constructs and maintains governable domains of (un)employment through digital technologies implemented to keep track of peoples’ job searching behaviour in order to correct it if necessary. Although jobseekers have the option of filling
out a physical job searching diary, their online actions via Universal Jobmatch are still recorded and monitored through which a calculated decision can be made regarding the provision or withholding of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). This is exemplary of Cruikshank’s (1999) argument that numbers and accounting have changed the relationship between the State and welfare recipients.

Furthermore, thirdly, the chapter discusses the role of work club staff and volunteers as problematic when thinking about the embeddedness of ICTs in terms of Bourdieu’s habitus. Despite the fact that choice is at the core of developing and emerging habitus, a habitus “tends to generate all the ‘reasonable’, ‘common sense’ behaviours” (Bourdieu, 1990: 55), as introduced in Chapter Three. This displays some common ground with what is discussed in Chapter Five where we talked about more general practices of job searching and non-digital obstacles to finding employment, but, as this chapter will show, it is the digital nature of job searching practices that makes it even more difficult for jobseekers who are part of the ‘digital underclass’ to display ‘good citizenship’: it involves no human interaction, and is mostly based on digital in- and output, and they do not have to skills to use it.

The following sections present a short additional literature review focusing specifically on digital exclusion before presenting empirics that demonstrate the problematic nature of digital job searching practices as experienced in Banterby SC work club.

6.2 The Digital Divide and the Digital Underclass

The use of online technology in everyday life is becoming increasingly more important (Anderson and Whalley, 2015; Reisdorf and Groselj, 2015), and there is a broad consensus across various scholarly fields that ICTs are, thus, having a “profound effect on modern life” (Warschauer and Machuñia, 2010: 179). Policymakers are influencing these advancements by, for example, promoting the rolling out of broadband across the UK. They do so under the assumption that once people have potential access to broadband (potential because people would still need to pay for actual access through
fees and equipment if the lines are there) they will automatically become involved and increase their digital skills levels (Helsper, 2011). However, the evolution of the internet over the past 15 years from a luxury communication-based technology toward a fully integrated part of society’s administration and communication, supported by the State, has made access a valuable and almost obligatory service, which in turn makes non-access and non-use increasingly more problematic for individuals (Horrigan, 2011; Green, 2016; Clayton and Macdonald, 2013; Robinson et al., 2015).

Consequently, with this rise in embeddedness of ICTs, there has been a continuous scholarly interest exploring the relations between the digital divide and topics such as policy, poverty, unemployment and job searching, as well as in exploring each on their own merit (Horrigan, 2011; Bach et al., 2013; Anderson and Whalley, 2015; Van Deursen et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2015; Wanberg, 2012). During the development of what is called ‘Web 2.0’, where the internet transformed from a collection of static pages into a more interactive network connecting its users through social media and hereby enabling governments and other organisations to directly approach and be approached by the public, academics like Van Winden (2001) cautioned policy makers to, despite indications of certain opportunities for ICTs to combat social exclusion, downsize their expectations of ICT. More recently, in questioning the use of ICTs as a means for increased social inclusion, Clayton and Macdonald (2013) have argued that there are limits as to how digital participation can transform lives, especially in marginalised communities among jobseekers with manual and routine job histories do not have access to, nor the skills to access computers or the internet.

The lack of access to or skills to access the internet has often been attributed and related to a divide in socio-economic status. Zillien and Hargittai (2009), for example, argue that “a user’s social status is significantly related to various types of capital-enhancing uses of the internet, suggesting that those already in more privileged positions are reaping the benefits of their time spent online more than users from lower socioeconomic backgrounds” (Zillien and Hargittai, 2009). Furthermore, as argued by Reisdorf and Groselj (2015), we should focus not only on non-users of ICTs and the internet, but should
differentiate between levels of use as well. Having proposed three levels of use, low, regular and broad, they state that attitudes towards ICTs plays an important role in determining at what level of use people function. Helsper and Reisdorf (2013) found that individual reasons for people to remain or become non-users of ICTs and the internet are often complex, arguing that “for the majority of Internet nonusers, digital exclusion goes beyond a lack of access and that a wider range of indicators should be taken into consideration” (Helsper and Reisdorf, 2013: 97). In the realm of job searching practices, this could be, for example that people associate ICTs with a negative experience, meaning that they are less inclined to use them for leisure and other important activities.

Turning our focus then to digital skills in relation to unemployment, Helsper’s (2011) study shows how, specifically, people without employment are forming a significant part of this ‘digital underclass’, arguing that over the course of four to six years, people with low or no education levels and without employment have become worse off considering their access to ICTs and the use of the internet in particular. Policy makers pleading for the wider distribution of potential access should take heed of this, she argues:

The world around them has exponentially increased their take up of higher speed connections but this group does not seem to catch up. In terms of broadband there is thus evidence for the emergence of a digital underclass. As indicated before, high(er) speed access is important, but what counts is whether and how people use ICTs. After all, it is through use that individuals reap the benefits of digital technology and gain access to (government) services in which digital inclusion policies are or should be fundamentally interested (Helsper, 2011: 9, my emphasis).

Specifically, Helsper (2011) argues, the digital underclass consists mainly of “those without unemployment and education” (Helsper, 2011: 11). For example, her study finds that between 2003 and 2009, those without employment and education showed no improvement in their own perceptions of skill level (self-efficacy) regarding the internet, and access to broadband at home for this group of people has only risen by 22% (to 24%
of the entire group) whereas access to broadband in the other groups has risen significantly, with a rise to 60% (from 7%) for those who are low educated but employed and a rise to 90% (from 17%) for those who are high educated and employed. As mentioned above, Helsper found that it is not all about access, but breadth and ways of use also play an important role in maintaining a digital divide and a digital underclass; having access (either at home or elsewhere) does not guarantee people having the skills and/or confidence to undertake certain activities online, such as activities related to social services and policy:

Unemployed internet users with lower education levels have incorporated the internet into fewer aspects of their everyday lives over the years and, while their use has increased, they are becoming relatively more disadvantaged compared to other internet users. This is problematic for digital by default services because as other research shows, they are the least likely group to take up civic, economic and service activities online, even if they are internet users (Helsper, 2011: 11, my emphasis).

The rise in ‘digital by default services’ is significant and can be easily observed going to any .gov.uk website: from paying for vehicle taxes to applying for certain permits, all can (and should, policymakers argue) be done online, hence the drive and promises of politicians to make sure that “Britain [is] the most connected, the most wired up, the most digitally-advanced country there can be” (Cameron, 2010b). Services and administration practices around unemployment and job searching are also increasingly becoming more ‘digital by default’, which, as we can take from Helsper’s (2011) analyses, can have a significant effect on those people who are unemployed and less educated in ICT use.

6.3 Job searching in a digital environment

One of the arenas of everyday life in which the embeddedness of ICTs becomes ever-more apparent is that of job searching (Green, 2016). While for an increasing majority of the people in the UK, online job searching is a logical next step in digitalising their
administrative tasks, “digitally disadvantaged workers … face barriers to full participation in the economy their more digitally advantaged peers do not confront” (Robinson et al., 2015: 574). Even more so, it is argued that the narrowing of the digital divide is actually masking “the deepening severity of the divide, as fewer digitally excluded individuals fall further behind the rest of society” (Green, 2016: 11).

This chapter builds on Green’s (2016) critique of the expectations that are put on ICTs in connection to employability, and Boland’s (2015) argument that job searching practices can be considered a play in which the jobseeker is a theatrical actor, engaging in a performance that they have to enact repeatedly in multiple varieties until they find employment. It does so by examining the levels of assistance that Banterby SC work club’s clients need with online job searching, and, subsequently, problematises the role of jobseekers as actors in the theatrical sense of the word by exploring the levels of agency as available to the jobseekers because of their low levels of digital proficiency (cf. Bourdieu, 1990). It draws our attention to, for example, the direct and practical obstacles that jobseekers are facing when applying for jobs using computers, asking how do jobseekers who are part of the ‘digital underclass’ manage to send out applications if they do not know how to operate a computer? The Bourdieusian symbolic power/violence lens as introduced in Chapter Three, is utilised to analyse these practices, wherein jobseekers can be shown, within contemporary job searching practices, as being forced to accept to rely on other people to act on their behalf.

In focusing on the impact of ICTs on employability, Green (2016) touches upon a wide variety of aspects in relation to a myriad of stakeholders affected by technological change, including how both employers and workers are expected to utilise ICTs within recruitment processes. She argues the presence of a push for individuals to construct themselves as valuable assets, and talks about jobseekers as ‘sellers’ and employers as ‘buyers’, where responsibility for employability lies with the seller to make sure they meet the requirements demanded by the buyer. In order to sell oneself in the contemporary labour market, “digital literacy (i.e. the ability to use the online environment, to search and to make contacts, etc.) has become a central component of employability” (Green, 2016: 11).
10), which echoes the neoliberal ideal of the *homo economicus*, who is “an entrepreneur of himself” as described by Foucault (2008: 226). In other words, a neoliberal ideology within society is aimed at creating citizens that comply with a discourse that makes those individuals the only ones responsible for their own success or failure in a capitalist society, and the internet is a commensurate tool for enabling jobseekers to become this ‘entrepreneur of themselves’.

However, Green found that although, in theory, the internet is aimed at and thought to be reaching everyone, in practice older and/or lesser skilled people (skilled in this area) lose out to a younger and more qualified majority, which supports Helsper’s (2011) idea of a ‘digital underclass’. It was emphasised that with the assumption that most jobseekers and benefit claimants have access to PCs or smart phones the digital divide has become even deeper for those who are not included in this rapid labour market transformation. For the people in Banterby SC work club, both the ‘seller’/’buyer’ dualism and the normality of digital literacy as a prerequisite to be successful are problematic in a way that threatens their ability to act with agency in the job market, as it is through their digital skills that they are expected to perform the ‘seller’ role. The performance of a certain act is featured in Boland’s (2015) exploration of the labour market and what jobseekers are expected to do in order to succeed.

Putting up the act of being a ‘seller’ is what Boland (2015) theorises as a theatricalised labour market, where jobseekers develop an ‘act’ tailored to their desired job. He uses Foucault’s (1991) governmentalities perspective to explore how jobseekers are being shaped into self-responsible actors. It is through these neoliberal governmentalities, that knowledge and power intersect. What is described here is the way in which individual practices of job seeking are created (knowledge) and maintained (power). It is through “positing the labour market as the site of individual performance [that the State is able to] constantly [urge jobseekers] to reinvent themselves for new opportunities” (Boland, 2015: 348). Combining this with the competitive nature of the job market (cf. Wacquant, 2009), jobseekers are actors who are responsible for creating and adjusting their own “act”, their own personas, in order to construct themselves as a valuable asset for employers to
acquire, more valuable than other players in the field. Like Green (2016) he fore-fronts this expectation or even requirement to shape and manage their own scripts. However, this presents a largely unrecognised problem: in an ever-more digitalising labour market, marginalised non-ICTs users are unable to write their own scripts and to take ownership of their own acts. This chapter seeks to further explore and theorise this problem.

The growing embeddedness of ICTs and the assumption that, with this development, people will become more capable of being in charge of their own employability appears to be accompanied by a drive to render this presumed capability as an inescapable demand. As argued above, this is all part of a growing neoliberal governmentality that forces people to take "greater responsibility for their ongoing marketability" (Green, 2016: 13). Consequently, jobseekers are no longer merited on the basis of their skills in relation to the job at hand, which would mean success or failure would be (more) impersonal. Instead, as Boland (2015) puts it, "in a quasi-theatrical labour market the process of 'veridiction' which assesses the worth of jobseekers based on their [job searching] performance means failure is personal" (Boland, 2015: 348).

It is argued that it is exactly because the theatricality of navigating the labour market is prefigured through digital techniques that job searching becomes problematic for those people who do not possess these skills. They need support to help them cope and to advertise themselves in a way that makes them (appear to be) competitive and marketable. Although all jobseekers create fictional characters through their applications and in their interviews (and are expected to do so) (Boland, 2015), there are degrees of agency over this fictionalisation process which are increasingly bound up with competencies around digital technologies. Those who are less competent with such technologies are left to perform without rehearsal or a polished script when their act comes to show.
6.4 The difficulties of navigating the internet for jobseekers

Every work club session would start with us setting up the laptops. The laptops had a central role in the work club; basically, without laptops there was not much we could do for/with the clients, as everything, from writing CVs to finding job vacancies took place online. Ian was always there early to help us set up all the laptops, which involved turning them on, logging into Windows, and starting up the internet browser after which we would already open Universal Jobmatch, the central DWP-owned website for job searching. Doing this setting up of all the equipment was not just a service that we offered, nor was it just the fact that we had access to the log-in details of the laptops that were loaned to us by Banterby College’s digital department, but getting past an operating system log in screen was just one of the many obstacles that clients of Banterby SC work club were facing. Taking away that first obstacle, as the log-in details were the work club’s worst kept secret, was the least we could do to get people started.

Still, once logged on, clients have to know how to work with browsers, know where and how to enter their log in details for different websites, and then how to make sense of the large amount of information that they then have access to. A typical work club day would start with one particular client asking for my attention from the moment I entered the room, asking if I could help him “sign onto the work website to see if they had anything good on”. Peter, as I will call him, was on a zero-hour contract. Every time he wanted to work, he had to register interest for a particular event on the company’s website. Peter, however, was one of the people who could not get past the blue ctrl-alt-delete log-in screen that is common on Windows computers, and did not know how to type an @-sign. So, on a typical work club day, I would sit down next to him, and explain to him where I had stored his log-in information, what links he had to click and how he would be able to view the upcoming events that he might be interested in to work. “Gaby…. Can you help me please…” would become a regular start to a work club day. Peter’s situation was not unique. The majority of the people that visited Banterby SC work club were there for the same reason. They did not know how to type, which button to press on a mouse, how to open a browser, or even what a browser actually is. This is all part of the basic knowledge
that is needed to navigate a job recruitment site. In the following sections I will elaborate more on what kind of obstacles Banterby SC work club clients encountered.

6.4.1 The very beginning

Within Banterby SC work club some clients, mainly regulars, knew their way around a computer, but many of the clients encountered obstacles at the very beginning of their (digital) job search. For us, in Banterby SC work club, this very beginning was often the blue Microsoft Windows screen that asks the user to simultaneously press and hold the keys ‘control’, ‘alt’ and ‘delete’ that would then direct them to the log in screen where the user name and password for Banterby SC work club had to be typed before people were able to start their work. Although we often tried to keep the laptops logged in, some would, after a while, return to their locked state, something that was set up by the owner of the laptops (Banterby College) and could not be adjusted or turned off by us. So, when a laptop had not been used for about 15 minutes, it would go into locked mode, leaving a lot of people stranded until we had the time to get them started again. Alan was one of the clients who had trouble with what regular users of ICTs would see as the very ‘basics’ of computer technology:

Alan can sit behind his laptop for ages, in silence, staring at the Windows start up screen that says "Press CTRL Alt Del to start". He'll just sit there, hands in his lap, staring, and every now and then looking around to see if anyone will meet his eyes, for he does not want to ask for help a lot - perhaps because he doesn't want to trouble us, and perhaps he feels embarrassed. He'll sit there, until I walk up to him and log on for him. What does he want to do afterwards? Job searching or an online course about how to get online? If it is job searching, I have to open the browser, type in the address, his log-in code, password, his job search keywords, and, I also have to click through them and read them through with him, for if I leave him to it, the browser will be closed in no-time, leaving him logged off and back to where it all started again... (Field notes, April 2015).
Of course, we did not want this kind of thing to happen, but sometimes we were busy helping other clients, and so a computer would lock itself, and people like Alan would get stuck again. We showed him multiple times how to get past the log in screen, and everybody was told the log in details for the laptops, but many did not remember them, partially because they changed every once in a while by Banterby College that loaned them to the work club/Sports Trust, and if they did remember them, being case sensitive (including capital letters), many people like Alan did not know how the ‘shift’ or even ‘CAPS’ button would allow them to type capital letters.

Another example arose when clients who had just sat down behind a laptop that was still starting up encountered a log in screen of a Microsoft application that would automatically pop up. Again, this was not something that we could adjust, so like the start-up screen, we always tried to make sure the laptops would have an active browser open, preferably with the log in screen of Universal Jobmatch (UJ). However, when we were unable to do so, people would often get stuck trying to enter either their email details or their UJ details into that log in screen, and got frustrated because that was not accepted. They felt ‘thick’ and ‘incapable of ever comprehending what they’d need to do’. They often tried to make it sound funny, talking about being ‘thick’ in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, but their body language and eyes told another story: they felt they did not possess the skills to learn how to do these things that were deemed the very basics of computer technology. It would set the tone for the rest of the digital procedures that they were required, as part of their DWP/JCP mandated job searching, to engage in to secure their welfare support and hopefully secure employment.

6.4.2 A Digital Maze

One of the most pressing and apparent obstacles they faced because of their lack of computer skills was navigating the recruitment websites to find and apply for jobs. The flowchart below (Figure 1) is a depiction of a typical job application process at Banterby SC work club. The process starts with the assumption (and prerequisite from the JCP) that jobseekers have an account on UJ, which is supposed to be the ‘go-to’ recruitment
website provided by the government to simplify the application process. It is expected of jobseekers that they upload their CVs and other supporting documents to this website, as it is one of the ways in which Jobcentre staff monitor whether jobseekers keep their CVs ‘up to date’. This would be more acceptable if UJ was indeed ‘universal’ and would enable jobseekers to use their UJ accounts and documents to apply for the majority of the jobs offered on there. In most cases, however, UJ is only the beginning, as there are hardly any jobs advertised on there that allow users to apply for using all the documents and details uploaded to UJ. What typically happens instead is that jobseekers are expected to register with yet another job recruitment website, sometimes even two (as indicated by the red arrow in Figure 6.1) in order to send in a basic application. Once CVs are uploaded to UJ they cannot be re-downloaded again in the original format (Microsoft Word), making registration on external websites and amending CVs an unnecessarily difficult task.
Figure 6.1: Example flow Chart of Job Searching Process. **Source:** Derived by the author through experience of working in Banterby SC work club.

The most complex scenario that I have encountered, depicted by the red arrow (Figure 6.1 above), concerns clicking ‘apply’ on a jobsite after being directed there through UJ, only to find that you are being redirected to yet another website, often a recruitment agency where again you have to fill out your details again. I have seen many people give up if they were led to register on multiple websites, as they did not understand all the pop-ups and why they had to register on various websites to apply for only one job.

This ‘Maze’ is not restricted to the job searching process as a whole. Many clients found it difficult to navigate individual websites as well; they did not know where to find or amend certain information, or how to, for example, narrow down search results so that they would
only see job openings that were possibly relevant to them. Many of those websites, for example, have certain default settings for searches that they will always go back to after people want to amend their search. After one day where I had started to sort out Caren’s accounts when she was having the same problems as Peter, I wrote the following in my field notes:

[Those websites] do all sorts of things automatically, such as registering for emails, adjusting search radius back to 20 miles instead of the none or two she had filled out previously, by resetting the alerts back to daily instead of off or weekly with every single edit one does even if that does not involve the email frequency. They are setting people up for chaos in a part of the job seeking world that needs structure more than anything. It is disgusting that they are making it so hard on people to do simple searches. Today I even found website, Jobrapido, where I (yes, I!) couldn’t find a profile page to adjust preferences or anything. She had a log in, and that was it. Some alerts and searches, that were editable, and would be sent to her multiple times a day. The only thing I could do was remove them or disable them. No edits, no nothing. I removed them all, and marked the website as spam in her inbox. I couldn’t get her account disabled or anything like that (Field notes, October 2015).

The processes are incredibly complicated for the clients within Banterby SC work club to use, and were often setting people up for failure. This lady was getting increasingly ‘fed up’ with the way websites worked. She told me it was very disheartening to continuously receive emails that she did not even know she signed up for, and then not knowing how to cancel them.

There were various clients who also had trouble finding out about job opportunities on company specific websites. Many clients were keen on trying to apply directly with businesses, as they had done in the past, by walking into a store, for example, and ask if they have any jobs available. Even though there are still businesses that permit non-
digital job applications, on many occasions they would be told that “all the information is online, including the application form”.

He wanted to know how to find out whether ASDA, Tesco and the like are looking for delivery drivers. So, I showed him how to look that up, even though it wasn’t easy: those sites are SO NEW, and they want them to look SO fancy, that it is actually quite difficult for people with their IT skills to know where to look JUST for vacancies. Before they’re going to read about all the great job roles, they just want to know if there’s anything available in their area (Field notes, February 2015).

For experienced internet users finding out where to look for company-specific jobs is not difficult. Most of the times the company has a section at the bottom of the page where there is a link named ‘work for us’, or ‘store vacancies’, or people use a search engine such as Google to look for ‘jobs at Tesco’, and then get redirected to the careers website of this supermarket chain. For people who often have trouble reading and making sense of digital information, most modern websites look ‘intimidating’. Often clients clicked on the first familiar word they saw on those websites, which in the case of the client described above meant that he found himself looking at general job descriptions of for example a ‘customer service member’, where, as he said himself ‘he just wanted to see if there are any jobs in the area, and if so, he would look at them to see if they would be suitable for him’.

6.4.3 Lay-out

Another obstacle that the clients of Banterby SC work club encountered was the way in which many jobs were advertised on UJ and other recruitment websites. While it was expected that jobseekers would pay attention to detail when writing their job applications and CVs, recruitment agencies advertising their vacancies on brokering websites apparently were not obliged to do so, which in turn led to difficulties for many of the people looking for jobs who were dealing with reading difficulties. Instead of being neatly formatted, a lot of vacancies were difficult to read as presented in Images 6.1 and 6.2
below:

**Image 6.1:** Example of a poorly presented advert (unrelated to the locality to ensure anonymity). *Source:* Universal Jobmatch, June 2016.

**Image 6.2:** Example of a poorly presented advert (unrelated to the locality to ensure anonymity). *Source:* Universal Jobmatch, June 2016.

As discussed in the previous chapter, many of Banterby SC work club’s clients had reading difficulties either because of dyslexia and/or very limited formal educational backgrounds, and vacancies like these complicate the process even further, leading to further exclusion from the process and limiting their ownership over their communication and act. In image 6.1 a formatted text from another source was copied one-on-one to UJ, where apparently certain symbols do not work, meaning those are represented in ASCII code (as in ‘&#58;’). In both Image 6.1 and 6.2 no formatting was undertaken to structure the text for readability; this made such text very hard to read, especially if a potential candidate had dyslexia or limited reading and writing abilities.
6.4.4 Problems with log in details

The fieldwork showed that many of the clients had trouble managing the multitude of log in details that came with having to register for many different websites; People who are used to frequenting a lot of websites and are computer literate might be able to remember passwords and log in details, as this is typically something that works better if you do it more often. It is also safer to have a wider variety of user names and passwords for multiple accounts to prevent people who want to do harm to be able to have access to multiple accounts instead of just one when finding out about certain log-in details. This is encouraged by many websites that have certain requirements for creating passwords and user names, such as, for example, that a password needs to include in one password at least one capital letter, one number and one symbol such as an exclamation mark or an underscore. These requirements, however, differed for each website, so that while some allow or require the use of a certain symbol, others do not allow them to be used. These same restrictions and requirements hold for the creation of user names, whereas user names can also be already taken in the case of a very generic name, which means having to add some numbers to it, such as year of birth. This means that having one password and one user name that can be reused on every website, despite it not being safe to begin with, often is no option.

One of the many people who have to deal with these access issues is Alan. Alan is a very kind and talkative man who has, we found out, some learning difficulties. He frequents the work club on a regular, almost weekly basis, and combines these visits with regular appointments with the careers adviser who works from the same location. The first time that I had the pleasure of working with him, the careers adviser was busy and was running late, and could not help Alan: he often showed up without appointments, hoping that he could get some time in anyway. As I wrote in my field notes that day:

Alan always just shows up for the careers adviser, even if he doesn’t have an appointment, hoping to be able to get some help anyway. Most of the times he is able to fit him in with cancelled appointments or just quiet days, but with the careers
adviser swamped he asked me whether I could help him out for a bit. Alan is a complete IT-illiterate person. He can, if you don’t offer to help him or are busy helping others, stare at his screen for minutes, perhaps even hours, not knowing what to do or where to start, getting stuck at the ctrl-alt-delete windows log-in. He has, like many others, his pieces of paper where he keeps his passwords, but he doesn’t really know what to do with them. Even if I help him onto UJ he doesn’t know what to do. He cannot, under any circumstance, look for jobs himself. And with him so many others… (Field Notes, July 2015).

Image 6.3 illustrates how people like Alan are keeping their Universal Jobmatch details, often folded in their back pocket or in their wallets. When registering for Universal Jobmatch, you are asked to write down your log-in, so often they grab the nearest sheet of paper, or just a bit of it, write their details down and save it in their wallets. After a while this paper starts to fall apart, resulting in people not being able to access their accounts. As explained above, often you are able to choose your own user name on websites, which - although it is not fool-proof - is preferable over the 12-digit log in for Universal Jobmatch which is even more difficult to remember than an email address.

Image 6.3. Universal Jobmatch Log-in reminder example. Source: researcher created an example with fictional details.
Often this piece of paper is also used for other passwords, including accounts setup on various job recruitment websites. Clients typically wanted to keep all their information in the same place and so, over time, the piece of paper may get to look like image 6.4:

![Image 6.4. Universal Jobmatch Log-in reminder example 2. Source: researcher created an example with fictional details.](image)

Over the course of my time with Banterby SC work club I have set up many of the clients with email accounts to make it as easy as possible for them to access relevant websites. Email provider ‘Gmail’ allows for, for example, ‘starred’ messages that will always remain on top of their inbox, and immediately visible when they log in. By setting up an email account there, with all their most important log in details and direct links to the log in pages of those services, essentially all they needed to remember was their email details. The danger in that was if a third party gained access to their email, they would have access to all their accounts. The plus side was that, instead of having to recover multiple account details after losing the piece of paper, they would only need to recover their email addresses. However, many clients still lost their ‘starred’ message in a matter of weeks or even days, by not knowing how to go through their email, and deleting messages by accident. What also did not help was how many clients’ emails were completely clogged
with recruitment website daily email alerts and spam that they unknowingly set-up.

6.4.5 Email overload

With most job searching activities happening online, most of the communications within this process have moved to email. Recruitment websites now market themselves as being able to set up email alerts that will give job seekers a daily or weekly digest of the results of their search criteria, aimed at making it easier for people to find their job without having to perform the same search routine every time they log on. However, a significant problem for people who are not computer literate is that they do not grasp the idea of what such an email alert actually does, which is sending them multiple emails a day with new job vacancies that are related to that job search. For people who are used to working with computers and who have regular access to their email in order to read and reply to them this might be a helpful tool, as it saves the jobseeker the time of repeating the job search every time they find the time to actively look for work. However, for people who do not have the ability of checking their emails on a regular basis, and who do not possess the digital knowledge to work with this potentially useful tool, this automated alert leaves them with a massive email overload in their account which they often only check weekly or sometimes bi-weekly, making it very easy to miss important emails.

When searching for certain criteria on a recruitment website, the user is often prompted with a pop-up asking them whether they ‘want to save this search’, promising to make their lives easier by sending jobs they want directly to them. They often click ‘yes’, which creates a standard email alert, giving them a daily digest of all the new jobs that match those criteria. When they then try another combination of criteria or words, the same thing happens again. And so on and so forth. Websites allow their users to have dozens of alerts, so if people keep making these alerts, they will receive a lot of emails a day, all roughly for the same search criteria, on top of all the marketing emails these websites typically also send their clients. One of the people I have met who was challenged by this system was Peter. One day he asked me to scan through his email to see whether he had missed a message about him being able to work at an event as well as signing up for an event he was told about, as he is on a zero-hours contract with a large security
He managed to open his email, and in there I saw 3400+ unread messages. All generic emails from jobs.co.uk, indeed.co.uk, etc. At this point I felt it was stupid to start about that, so we just sorted out the link to the page when he could log onto the company’s website to register for events. Which we did, and then we found out that the event he wanted to register for, which was there the previous week, was gone now. That is the problem with people like Peter: they’re not online enough, let alone IT-literate enough, to keep track of these things. To be ‘on it’ constantly and to keep track of new jobs posted. To be fair, it is all quite bleak. … He had missed out on an opportunity to work there (Field notes, February 2015).

With 3400 unread messages in one’s inbox it is difficult to sift through the useful messages, especially if you are not online every day or only have a mobile phone for access. These messages were on top of a total of roughly 10,000 opened emails. The messages all start with “XX new jobs for <search criteria>, or are commercial emails sending generic information about the recruitment website. The next week when he was there again, and asked for help, it was a bit quieter, so I had some time to sit down and sort through all his email alerts.

So, what I told him, was that I would help, but that we were also going to completely clear out his email box, and cancel a lot of subscriptions that were sending him an email every 5 minutes, and that is not an overstatement. One every 5 minutes. Since he left home half an hour ago, he had received 49 of them from various websites. He hasn’t got a clue. He agreed to me emptying his inbox, albeit reluctantly (Field notes, February 2015).

Receiving so many emails was and is a very big problem for people who do not have the ability to keep track of their emails on a daily or even hourly basis, and who do not know how to manage their email subscriptions from various websites. However, the promise that came with the email alerts, that receiving them would give him more opportunities to work, was something that was fixed in his mind, as all he wanted was to work and he
needed to prove this not only to the Jobcentre, but also himself and the other work club clients. By cancelling subscriptions and alerts he felt that he would miss out on a lot of opportunities, which would not be beneficial in confirming his strong work ethic. In a way, this resonates with the theories of *ritualistic performances of job searching* as introduced in Chapter Three. Specifically, like Ralph and Simon in Chapter Five, Peter felt that he had to continuously show his commitment to the work ethic not only to the outside world, but also to himself, it made him feel good and ‘on the ball’, ultimately showing “… how power and inequality are not just external phenomena, but affect and reach into the very psyche of the individual” (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 30). Signing up for as many job alerts on as many sites as possible, in an almost compulsive manner, whilst often acknowledging that, indeed, he had never found employment through them, shows how the practical meaning of the ritualistic performance has mostly disappeared, and has been replaced by a political and *moral* meaning, informed by the importance of the work ethic as discussed in Chapter Two and encouraged by neoliberal governmentalities as discussed in Chapter Three.

It took me some time to convince Peter that he had already missed out on so many opportunities by having 3400 unread emails in his inbox, and that I could help him by setting up more targeted search queries, as well as sorting out all the replicated alerts. It took me nearly an hour to delete all the emails and to go through most of the websites he had registered on for email alerts. What I found was at least seven alerts on each website with roughly the same search criteria, only differing in word order. On one website, I even found 30 alerts set up. I brought it back to the bare minimum, with only some alerts on two of the websites that are most popular. A week later, however, he had already accumulated a few more, and his inbox had already expanded to about a hundred unread messages.

Most of the time, I discouraged people to set out alerts:

> In fact, I'd recommend all those people NOT to use search alerts and just do it manually. But then again, the Jobcentre expects them to set out those alerts, and
of course the websites themselves offer it all too often, to ‘save this search’, with some people ending up with dozens of the same searches because they always search manually AND have those alerts set up, leaving their emails clogged (Field notes, October 2015).

In a way, this act felt like my own little bit of resistance against the promotion of this ritualistic performance of job searching, where I tried to find a way for people to make their job searching more manageable. But the fear people had for the JCP was often too big for my solutions to last, as they were often told to set up more alerts by their job coaches at the JCP, who were the people checking whether jobseekers had done enough to qualify for Jobseekers Allowance. Registering for as many email alerts as possible was also encouraged by the websites themselves; as soon as jobseekers enter a search query, the website offers you to ‘save that search’, promising that by doing that they would not miss out on opportunities. Not wanting to get sanctioned for missing opportunities, they often clicked ‘yes’, where another alert was created, and another daily (at least) email would be sent to their inboxes. This, they felt, would help them to build a ‘file’ that would prove they were doing their best looking for jobs. This file was often created through the UJ site where an activity history, which is like a digital job seeking diary, could be accessed by their job coaches to see what they had done. In other words, these kinds of practices are making jobseekers’ practices calculable through digitisation, as argued by Cruikshank, certain mythical narratives and images of what it means to be unemployed have been allowed to develop (Cruikshank, 1999). If people do not log their activities online, it seems easier, and more convenient in terms of upholding the myth of the stereotypical welfare recipient, to assume that they have just not done it, or not done enough to seek help to log their activities, than to acknowledge that such a digital process is excluding those people who are already at a (proven) disadvantage. Details of how the digital monitoring was perceived and experienced in Banterby SC work club are at the core of the following section.
6.4.6 Job searching and digital monitoring and accountability

The move of job searching practices from analogue to digital has allowed for increasingly more rigorous monitoring of job searchers’ activities. Many of the clients at Banterby SC work club expressed on a regular basis that they were always busy thinking of how they had to show their job advisers at the Jobcentre that they had adhered to their Claimant Commitment, and had indeed spent their weekly time ‘wisely’ and committed to looking for employment. In other words, the clients had to prove every week that they deserved the financial support that they were given in the form of Jobseekers Allowance.

The monitoring of job searching activity was a crucial issue in what we called “Work Club 101”. As soon as clients would join us and ask for help with their online job searching, Jerry would give them the drill, telling them that, first, Banterby SC work club itself does not monitor them personally in any way, but does encourage clients to log their every move into the Universal Jobmatch (UJ).

It appears the only reason UJ exists is to try and monitor peoples’ job searching behaviour. Every week we see people who ask us to help them log their activities into the activity history, which records any actions performed on UJ automatically, but requires manual updates for anything else. Jerry is very adamant about this too. He told me he has seen so many people get sanctioned for not being able to ‘prove’ that they have done their job searching, he said, that he really tries to get people to fill out any little thing that they've done. “Visited us? Log it. Went job searching in the library? Log it. Browsed a local newspaper? Log it.” Anything should be in there, just in case. Either in the physical diary booklet they can use, or in the electronic version. Telling people about this often makes them slightly anxious, because they feel they will not be able to remember how to do it, and how to access the activity history online. That is why, as Jerry told me, we have to make sure that every time we do something for someone, we should log it for them (Field notes, October 2015).
Although I have seen some people who were carrying around a job searching diary many people did not have one of those, and were reliant on the digital way of recording things, which Jerry said was the preferred method. The location of this activity history log, however, was quite elusive, and not well-marked on the website, nor really well-explained by the JCP, in our experience. Many people who came to Banterby SC work club had no idea of its existence, or did know about it, but did not know where to find it or how to use it. Lisa, whom I met on my last official day of field work was one of those people who was very anxious about the JCP monitoring her every move:

After we had succeeded in uploading her CV to the website, she wanted to know how to properly log the visit. She looked and sounded anxious. She was very adamant about writing down her actions in multiple places: on UJ and in her paper booklet that she got. She was terrified that they might cut her JSA if she missed one tiny little thing. She even told us that she had heard from someone that you have to report on finding pennies on the street and picking them up, as ‘that would be counted as income too’. She ‘just didn’t want to run into any more trouble’, she wanted to be honest and fair, and was scared out of her mind that she would do something that could be considered illegal and fraudulent. “Can they really do that? Really? I should tell my job coach tomorrow that I regularly pick up pennies? If that counts as an income…!? Just to be sure” she said. … We continued with her UJ, that she didn’t really get. How to look for jobs, jobs that she could get, and how to apply for them if she wanted, and how to let UJ ‘know’ that she had looked at it, but couldn’t apply for whatever reason (not the right skills, too far a distance away from home, etc.). I tried to explain to her carefully how things worked, but it made her even more stressed out (Field notes, January 2016).

Next to the activity history, where clients could, in 250 characters, log what they had done in terms of job searching, UJ also had a drop down menu below every job vacancy that would allow people to explain to the JCP why they did not apply for a certain job, which to many people was as much a mystery as the activity history section of the website. Lisa had heard of this feature, but did not know how to work with it, but really wanted to
understand how to use it, as to make sure the JCP’s job coach would not miss any of her activity. She was both well-aware of the way she was being monitored digitally, but was very daunted by the fact that she did not know how to make sure that her lack of digital skills would not be the reason she was deemed ‘undeserving’.

What has become clear so far in this chapter is that there is myriad tangible, practical problems that arise when jobseekers with a lack of digital skills are expected to perform the majority of their job searching administration online. The lack of recognition or acknowledgement of the existence of this group of people, who do not possess the skills to perform digital tasks independently, despite the fact that it is shown that people without employment are forming a significant part of this ‘digital underclass’ (Helsper, 2011: 4), points at an exertion of power that knowingly violates jobseekers in two ways. First, it diminishes their chances of achieving the neoliberal ideal of independence which at the same time is demanded of them, which, in turn, is used as a proverbial stick to beat them with if a jobseeker is unable to provide digital evidence of their job searching efforts. Through placing the digital burden of proof in the hands of people who are clearly out of their depth in a digitising society, the State seems to have found a way in which the welfare practices themselves justify stereotypes instead of the other way around (Cruikshank, 1999: 106). Secondly, then, if jobseekers are forced to depend on help from outside, through for example visiting a work club, their chances of representing themselves within this process are significantly diminished. Therefore, in the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss how this lack of practical digital skill translates into problems relating to how far jobseekers still could claim ownership of their job searching correspondence and activities.

6.5 Caught in the act

Over the course of my year of volunteering at Banterby SC work club I have learned many things about what it means to be unemployed in a digitalising society. What struck me the most, however, is that people were forced to become or made to appear something they are not and had so little control over the persona that was constructed. When I started
my research by volunteering at Banterby SC work club I felt uneasy at what I was being expected to do. From day one I was confronted with the expectation that I would be able to write other peoples’ CVs and cover letters, and to navigate the online job searching process for them rather than with them. These experiences made me question my role as a volunteer and the effects that my acting on behalf of clients would or could have on their applications and potential interviews or perhaps further assessments where they were (again) tested for certain skills, including writing and reading.

6.5.1 Writing Cover Letters: it is not just the text

Writing cover letters is an important part of a job searching process, as it means having to present yourself to the best of your abilities, to market yourself as a ‘good hire’. However, with some clients mostly lacking ICT skills as well as having limited reading and writing skills, writing a cover letter that lives up to a recruiter’s expectations has proven to be difficult. One lady in particular, Ella, stood out. She asked us to figure out how to apply for a company that she had heard was taking on more people. I found her the website and email address, explained to her, after setting everything up apart from the email content itself, what should be in the letter, and left her to it for ten minutes while helping someone else. When she called for me, she was looking very proud at the screen, then back to me, and said “This is what I have, sounds about right, doesn’t it? Shall I send it?”

The email read:

‘Dear sir madam, i would like to work for your company on a fulltime basis ella’

This is where Laura, as introduced in Chapter One as part staff, part volunteer, and myself felt we had to ‘step in’ in order to enhance her chances of being considered for a job, but at the same time this is where I started to think about what it means for me and other volunteers in work clubs to help people write their cover letters and CVs, to help them make a good impression and to help them navigate the process. In a way, we were her ‘stunt doubles’, her stand-ins, to make it seem as if she was capable of doing certain
things that in fact she was not. While on paper, using a pen, it is easier for people to skip a line, and to make up their letter according to a traditional template, being able to do this on a computer requires an understanding of how online word processors (including those in browsers) work, including things as simple as the ‘enter’ key and using the ‘shift’ key to create capital letters.

Eventually, after sitting down with Ella for a while, my volunteer colleague Laura and I succeeded in writing her an email that not only explained how she had heard about an uptake in work and her drive to work there, but also looked organised and adhering to what is called ‘digital etiquette’, using the right greeting, closing and lay-out. After creating this email, we attached her CV and sent it. Somehow, we felt that this would improve her chances. However, afterwards, when talking to each other about how we had just helped Ella, we found ourselves struggling with the problem of how she had no ownership over the process that we had created. She was not capable of searching for job vacancies, nor of making a profile on a jobsite, creating a CV, and writing a cover letter. Yet, by pressing ‘send’ after writing that email for her, it seemed as if she could. It gave me mixed feelings of unease and confusion, which ultimately led to this chapter problematising these practices of digital exclusion.

Laura, Jerry and I have talked a lot about this issue, of people like Ella not being able to act independently and ultimately being misrepresented by us as having digital skills, and not only on that occasion. Ultimately, we were not able to find a solution nor did we find a conclusive answer to the question of whether it is fair to all the stakeholders involved, and if not, why not. The consensus was that there was no way to do it ‘right’. If we did not help clients write their letters and find vacancies to apply for (which is what Banterby SC work club is for), they would not be able to apply at all and would end up being sanctioned for not sending out enough applications. Some of the work club’s clients had experience

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13 The JCP and DWP expect those receiving Jobseekers Allowance to sign a contract (Jobseekers Agreement) in which they declare how many jobs a week a claimant will apply for. If the claimant does not meet their target they are at risk of being sanctioned, which means their allowances can be cut or removed altogether for a certain amount of
with being sanctioned, for various reasons, including not having sent out the agreed amount of applications, or even not being able to attend a weekly JCP ‘sign on’ because the job coach had sent them on a mandatory course on that same day. When talking about these sanctions, the clients always had a sense of disbelief about them, with ‘the system’. Having experienced the even tougher circumstances brought about by cancellation or decrease in Jobseekers Allowance, they could not believe that any good would come from them. They felt that there was nothing more they could do, and with the digital by default developments, it was not getting any easier to prove they were worthy of receiving support.

Sarah, a regular client, could navigate the internet up to a certain point, but was mainly experiencing problems when having to construct her own act. She was trying to get back into permanent employment after recovering from an accident that has left her with a bad leg. She thought her volunteering role that she held at that moment would not be worth mentioning as it is “not real work”. So, in helping her to apply for a job that day, my volunteer colleague and I not only wrote her a cover letter that reflected who she wanted to be, but we also amended her CV to include her years of volunteering. As I wrote in my field notes about that day:

We sorted everything out, and after that she couldn’t stop telling people how Laura and I had made her “sound amazing on paper”, which is just true, but something she wouldn’t write about herself if it was just her. She even gave me a hug to thank me for my efforts today. I’m not one for hugging, but this one was OK! (Field notes, February 2015).

We had made her “sound amazing on [digital] paper”, and she said it all looked so nice and professional, by which she meant things as digital lay-out – something that she would not be able to pull off herself because, next to having limited digital and writing skills, over
the years, being unemployed, her confidence had dropped massively, as she often mentioned. Despite her being very talkative normally, it took us about 45 minutes to get out of her what we needed for the letter, after asking question after question, assuring her that she did have qualities to share. She almost sounded surprised every time she managed to mention something she was good at or that she was passionate about, and was absolutely delighted and proud to read what we, together, had come up with. It really raised her self-confidence and the way she thought about what she could do instead of what she could not.

However, beyond helping people to send basic emails in response to online vacancies, to provide employers with the impression that clients know how to navigate the internet, and to write about themselves with confidence, problems of ownership of the act also appeared in the writing of applications. Formatting, correct spelling and grammar, use of certain phrases are all competences that many clients did not seem able to do on their own. When writing cover letters and CVs for Ella and Sarah, as well as for other clients, we used words and phrases commonly used within job descriptions to describe skill competences such as ‘hard worker’, ‘flexible’ and ‘excellent communication skills’, words that they themselves seldom used to describe themselves, or their spelling and writing would let them down. These phrases, and also knowing how to use them correctly are also associated with people who are entrepreneurial and possess the right work ethic, resonating with Foucault’s *homo economicus*, who is “an entrepreneur of himself” (Foucault, 2008: 226) as introduced in Chapter Three. Being this individual entrepreneur means “being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault, 2008: 226). In other words, a neoliberal drive behind society is aimed at creating citizens that perform actions that comply with a discourse that makes those individuals the only ones responsible for their own success or failure in a capitalist society. The following excerpt from my field notes on my first day highlights how I struggled with writing other peoples’ CVs and cover letters:

> It was difficult to do. Well, it was easy, but difficult to make something that could have been his. Even though I expected that everything I would write down would
not be representative of his typing skills. So, I wrote a short message, stating something as “Dear <name>, please accept my CV for the job of <job> attached to this email. I look forward to hearing from you and if there are any questions, please feel free to ask. Kindest regards, <name>”. He was so happy with that. We sent the email and I asked if there was anything else I could do for him. There wasn’t, at that point, and he couldn’t thank me enough! (Field notes, February 2015).

After trying to find a middle ground on many following occasions I came to the realisation that, probably, I would never be able to produce something that “could have been theirs”. The letter for this client was just a short note to go with a CV. However, on many occasions a more elaborate cover letter was expected:

When we applied for Jim’s job, I wrote him a nice cover letter. However, he himself is severely dyslexic... he couldn’t even comprehend the entire advert, let alone being able to write his own cover letter that would set him apart from other people with similar skills [that have nothing to do with ICTs]. This is the ever-lingering dilemma/double edged sword of me volunteering for them, and helping them with their letters. I do represent what they WANT to say, and what they WANT to do, but I do not represent HOW they would say it (Field notes, May 2015).

As demonstrated in Chapter Five, many of the clients in the work club had reading and writing difficulties, making it very difficult for them to read the unformatted texts that were often posted on the recruitment websites (as per previous section, images 1 and 2). Still, although we attempted to make their cover letters and CVs comply with this neoliberal ideology of the preferred subject that is ‘deserving’ of State support, it never felt as if we were doing ‘the right thing’, and instead of finding other ways to make the jobseekers stand out, we helped them to comply with rules of a game that put them at a disadvantage and favour those who have developed them (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990). This, I argue, is because jobseekers are asked to act in a way that is not part of their own habitus. To recall Chapter Three, the habitus is
... understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions, and makes possible the achievements of infinitely diversified tasks ... Without ever being totally co-ordinated ... the dispositions and the situations which combine synchronically to constitute a determinate conjuncture are never wholly independent, since they are engendered by the objective structures, that is, in the last analysis, by the economic bases of the social formation in question (Bourdieu, 1977: 82-83).

Those who are not only disadvantaged by, for example, learning difficulties as discussed in Chapter Five, but are also part of the ‘digital underclass’ are asked, or demanded, to transcend fields and perform actions that are not in line with their own habitus, and if they fail are penalised accordingly. However, while we could, as work club staff and volunteers, make it seem as if they had managed to cross those fields, had ‘transformed’ their habituses, in order to avoid penalties, we could not intercept and bear the burden of rejection, which is what I will talk about in the next section.

6.5.2 No response: brace for impact

For many of the clients the number one frustration was not hearing anything back after sending in an application. This was something that we as Work Club staff and volunteers could not prevent from happening, nor could we protect them from how this made the clients feel. Most of the job vacancies stated that if the applicant had not heard anything back within the next two weeks, they could assume their application had been unsuccessful. And if they would receive a rejection, individual feedback on why they had failed would not be given due to the high volume of applicants. On many days, I came into Banterby SC work club asking about our prior efforts to send in applications, asking if they had heard anything back. One day I talked to Geoff, who was a semi-regular participant. Geoff always tried to brush things off, and to not take it personally:
Geoff was there, the man whom I helped applying for a job last week. He hadn’t heard anything yet, unfortunately, but “well, it’s out of my hands now? You know? Can’t do much more than that now! I’ll just wait for them to let me know!” I hope he at least gets invited (Field notes, February 2015).

He never did, unfortunately. And the more (indirect) rejections he received, the less confidence he had in what he called ‘the system’. Many of the other clients felt the same; it was an often-repeated source of anger and frustration with the jobseekers. They felt that if they had to jump through so many hoops to get their applications in, to register on so many websites, and to send in detailed CVs and write them letters specifically for that job, some form of recognition of their efforts should be made by the employers. In my field notes after one such occasion I wrote the following comment:

They [the employers] are allowed to ask us to do the things we have to do, have to go through all this trouble [to apply for jobs], but they themselves, they don’t have to do anything, they can just ignore you [the clients]. The least they could do is let me know, even if it were just a standard message (Field notes, undated).

This was an often-heard sentiment. The jobseekers felt horrible because of it, and so did I. Having to commit to all the rules and regulations that would ensure their benefits and hopefully a job, all the while employers were free to ignore all those who did not make their cut. Surely if everything is automated, you would say they could send out an automated message to all of those who were not selected for an interview. Over time we had built up their acts, we had, in a way, taken ownership over their applications, and we had acted on behalf of them to the best of our abilities. Still, we could not carry the burden that the feelings of rejection had on them, which had the most impact when they did not receive a formal rejection to their application. Receiving a formal rejection would mean employers or society acknowledged them and their tireless efforts to get back into employment, they would often tell me. Now, they felt as if they were shouting into thin air.
6.6 Conclusion: Digital Symbolic Violence

This chapter has addressed the research question *How does the digital nature of job searching as observed in Banterby SC work relate to with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?* It has done so by exploring which problems arise when people who find it difficult, for various reasons, to work with computers, are forced to find a way to deal with the increasingly digital nature of job searching.

Correspondence and actions on behalf of the jobseekers by work club volunteers and staff is both necessary and problematic. It is necessary because without it people would fall back even further in a digitalising society where digital inclusion tactics fail to expand digital literacy among those who need it the most (Bach et al., 2013), as well as being at risk of being sanctioned for not applying for (enough) jobs, as we have seen in the previous section. It is problematic as not only does it not solve underlying problems, it also causes and contributes to forcing already vulnerable people to act outside what they perceive is possible within their own habitus. If the habitus “makes possible the achievements of infinitely diversified tasks” (Bourdieu, 1977: 82-83), it could be argued that it also makes certain tasks impossible or at least significantly more difficult to perform, let alone complete. Therefore, it is rather the systemic denial, first, of the difficulty or impossibility of transcending habituses and, second, the misrecognition or even wilful ignorance of the structural problem of digital exclusion that speaks to the governmentalities of job searching practices as discussed by Boland (2015). Indeed, they place the responsibility for failure to succeed in their job searching efforts on the individual rather than their context. Of course, in some way it could be argued that, similarly, some form of responsibility is placed on work clubs like Banterby SC work club. However not only is it, ultimately, still up to the jobseekers themselves to find the courage to go there, but it is also easily forgotten that work clubs can only operate if they have enough resources to offer the levels of support that are needed. Further, it can be argued that it is even a form of *symbolic violence* that is embedded within governmentalities, as ‘the conduct of conduct’ (Foucault, 1991: 103), that forces jobseekers not only to act outside
of their own habitus, but also, in doing so, to forfeit ownership over many of their job searching practices. Like I argued in Chapter Five, what this study adds to work club and welfare research, then, is drawing together a Foucauldian and Bourdieusian perspective in studying unemployment and job searching practices (see 5.10). By further embedding a digital by default approach into UK society, identified as in line with neoliberal governmentalities, the State not only makes it easier to both monitor and conduct the conduct of its citizens, but at the same time commits a symbolic violent act by imposing rules and practices on a group of people that, despite not being able to benefit from playing the game by these rules, will have to comply as non-compliance will only make things worse.

To recall from Chapter Three, symbolic violence is a form of domination that is “exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 167). It is a form of power monopolised by the State, which means that the State has “the power to constitute and impose as universally applicable within a given “nation” … a common set of coercive norms” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 112). This does not mean, of course, that people can or will not overtly reject how they are treated (Thompson in: Bourdieu, 1991): people will articulate that they are not happy with the situation, as they do, for example, when complaining about the all-encompassing presence of digital communication or how they feel JCP forces them to do what feels or is impossible. But, other than voicing an opinion about a certain injustice, individuals, and in this case jobseekers, do accept the power that these modes of thinking and state-crafting have over them, complying with them, sometimes by proxy through work club staff and volunteers, as they see no escape. Indeed, as non-compliance would result in sanctions, work club staff and volunteers feel it a necessity to take over the wheel and make sure, if clients do not know how to work with ICTs themselves, that the clients are not sanctioned, extending the symbolic violence to a by proxy level perhaps, where staff and volunteers are compliant with the rules for their clients.

Ultimately, we might say that the field of job searching, its rules, its focus on the digital, and its prescribed theatrical nature are examples of coercive norms. These norms,
Cooper (2012), following Bourdieu, argues that it is “this non-recognition [of these forms of violence] that makes the effects of such practices so intrinsically violent - particularly psychologically so - because their injurious effects are internalised by the individual without being externally recognised” (Cooper, 2012: 55). We can see this in the embeddedness and increasing levels of digital monitoring and general job searching practices, and the misguided expectation that jobseekers, whether or not with support from work clubs, will be able to deal with it, and if not, sanctioning them is perceived to be a solution to force them to comply. The State wants jobseekers to operate digitally, as this is the way in which monitoring is made easier, which, following Cruikshank (1999), in turn helps to perpetuate the myth of the stereotypical welfare recipient (because why else would we need monitoring if there were no perceived fraudulent recipients of welfare payments?), which in turn helps to uphold the regime and perceived need for close monitoring; a viscous circle.

It might seem fair and equal to impose the practices and meanings of a certain habitus, dominating, in general terms, a certain aspect of society, on everybody who encounters it. When it comes to the field of job searching, one jobseeker should not be seen as different from the other, and both of them should adhere to the same rules and guidelines. This is bureaucratic rationality (Weber, 1968). However, as Lakomski (1984) argues, the further removed a sub-culture is from the dominant habitus that sets the standards, the more damaging treating everyone operating within that habitus equally is; while they “lack the dominant culture to begin with, they are nevertheless measured and evaluated by its standards [and] since these standards are believed to be ‘fair and ‘objective’ [nobody doubts] their legitimacy” (1984: 155).
Again, as shown in Chapter Five, where we saw how those with learning difficulties were mostly expected to operate in the same way (even accepting fewer applications per week), treating all jobseekers as having the same gateway (digital) skills (Green, 2016) and all jobseekers as possible ‘irresponsible benefit claimants’ (Patrick, 2012b) are both legitimised in what has become part of the shaped beliefs and attitudes of society saying this is ‘fair’. This ultimately encourages further digitalisation of the job searching process for everyone, as well as an increasingly punitive and monitored welfare distribution system.

To prevent being exposed to material and symbolic degradation it is crucial that no jobseeker is hindered in finding a way to participate in the contemporary labour market. Work clubs provide practical assistance, and doing so they help jobseekers live up to the promise of applying for a certain amount of jobs per week, a promise that the JCP uses to determine whether or not they are legitimate receivers of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). The result of this, however, is that work club staff and volunteers become the owners of the act that is put up, obscuring the jobseeker, their voice, their history, as well as their true levels of digital literacy and writing skills, because they are expected to act outside what their habitus informs them to do. Again, this is not to say that habitus is a deterministic construct and that human agency has clearly demarcated limits. Rather, it is a “durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, [and] produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent on the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle” (Bourdieu, 1977: 78). However, I do argue that it takes a lot of self-confidence and perhaps even self-esteem to be able to transform oneself in order to transcend one’s habitus into one that appears or is alien to their initial habitus which does not allow them to engage in certain practices. As argued by Reay and colleagues:

... when habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, the resulting disjunctures can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty (Reay et al., 2009: 1105).
This is what Bourdieu terms the *hysteresis effect*, which holds that:

... practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that environment to which they are objectively fitted. ... imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause[s] one group to experience as natural or reasonable [certain] practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa (Bourdieu, 1977: 78).

We can see this clearly in imposing the digital by default developments on a group that 'objectively' is too far removed from the environment that can see the possibilities of, and can profit from digital advancements. We can see it in the way Alan could not get past the Windows log-in screen, we can see it in the way Peter managed (or rather, did not manage) his email alerts for jobseekers, or the way in which Ella was having trouble writing emails that would conform to the norm set out by people who feel comfortable operating in the digital field.

Indeed, it is the symbolic violent nature of neoliberal governmentalities promoting the work ethic and the digital by default developments that does not allow many work club clients to become this self-confident and independent individual that is seen as the ideal-type of the jobseeker. To remind ourselves of what was discussed in Chapter Two about neoliberal governmentalities, it is in governance through (the promise of) personal and individual freedom and self-responsibility that the State is able to regulate and minimise the instances of and extent to which the State itself should take responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. These ideas are communicated and embedded in society not only through political rhetoric, but also through bureaucratic practices depending on the individual citizen to report on their role in taking responsibility of their own welfare. Within the realm of unemployment, Boland and Griffin (2015) argue that neoliberal governmentalities:
range from the forms that must be filled out by new [welfare] claimants, the architecture of social welfare offices, the surveillance and management of jobseekers within those offices, and even how the unemployed are spoken about in the media. Gradually, a dominant perspective emerges about the ‘unemployed’, conceived as a problematic population to be monitored and cajoled (Boland and Griffin, 2015: 33).

Therefore, being constantly confronted with these digital practices and with this their own shortcomings as perceived in comparison to the ideal-type jobseeker, makes them feel like ‘a fish out of water’. Also, as we have seen in Chapter Five, many people felt that they had no choice but to apply for ‘everything and anything’ they could find in order to show they were willing to perform the work ethic, even if they knew it would not lead them to financial or even emotional improvements. This, effectively, shows how these governmentalities are keeping people from believing in themselves, that they are ‘good enough’ regardless of their employment status, and this, keeping them from finding ways and chances to (potentially) transform and improve their lives.

Digitally challenged jobseekers, affected by forms of digital symbolic violence, have to resort to finding stunt doubles, performing an act that they themselves have no ownership over. Of course, volunteers try to write an account that is aimed at bringing out certain aspects of the jobseekers that they would not write or say about themselves. As I did in my work with Sarah, I had to talk to her about herself and her job history to be able to construct a cover letter that in a way reflected what she was capable of if given the chance. However, it took me a while to find a way to get this information out of her. I had known her for a while by then, and had gained her trust, which meant that she trusted me in acting on her behalf, even though she still could not believe the outcome, saying she could not believe “how nice I had made her sound on paper”. I was glad that I had taken some time to carefully get to know her better and to dig a little bit deeper to uncover potential talents and experiences that she could use in a future job; recruiters inviting someone for an interview do not have the time.
Even though jobseekers are able to find “stunt doubles” to do the outgoing work through work clubs, the incoming results from potential employers cannot be relayed and unavoidable knock-backs have to be dealt with by the jobseekers themselves. Sadly, getting their job searching performances out on the internet and into the mailboxes of recruiters and employers by proxy does not mean the jobseekers themselves possess the strength and resilience attributed to their online personas that were put up online. As argued by Boland (2015), “unsuccessful jobseekers are implicitly insufficiently critical, creative or self-transformative” (2015: 347). This means that while jobseekers are able to and even encouraged to seek assistance and use ‘stunt doubles’ when entering the online job market, any negative result is likely to be internalised as those are felt to be their own failures rather than of those who constructed their acts.

This chapter has argued that the digital nature of job searching as explored by Green (2016) leads to problems of agency and ownership over the acts that jobseekers are expected to create and perform online in order to attract an employer’s or recruiter’s attention. Because many jobseekers at Banterby SC needed other people to act on their behalf in this highly competitive and fast-paced environment, the applications sent out by us as work club staff/volunteer are too far removed from the jobseeker’s true level of digital and writing skills often needed for a job to be even considered merely a form of ‘exaggeration’, but if they refrain from outsourcing their job searching performances to “stunt doubles” in the form of work club staff and volunteers, their chances of finding employment are zero to none and sanctions for not applying for (enough) jobs are imminent. Furthermore, this chapter has presented the under-researched work club as a valuable place to uncover the realities and lived experiences of job searching, and prompts further questions about Banterby SC work club as a place where acts of symbolic power/violence are being enacted and maintained, regardless of peoples’ unease with the problem of ownership in job searching practices. People often encourage others to ‘fake it until you make it’, but perhaps, in order to succeed, people should be in control of the faking themselves instead of being forced to rely on stunt-doubles, and have some chance of making it.
In the next chapter I shift the attention to the experiences of Jerry, Laura and myself with working in Banterby SC work club. However, instead of focusing on our experiences as to explore the *volunteering experience*, in the following chapter I demonstrate how our experiences can be key in further exploring those of Banterby SC work club’s clients.
Chapter Seven. Performing Volunteering: Reflexively exploring the powerlessness of voluntary action in a work club

7.1 Introduction

Chapters Five and Six have explored how neoliberal governmentalities developed the practices of job searching and the experience of unemployment in Banterby SC work club, focusing mainly on the experiences of the jobseekers. Through, as discussed in the previous chapters, linking neoliberal governmentalities to general and digital job searching practices, acts of symbolic violence have been brought to light. Chapter Five considered the way that work club clients approached job searching as *ritualised*, and showed how the State has managed to transform job searching into a ritual that is habitual, formalised and transcendental at once by attaching a political meaning to the practice. Chapter Six, building on ideas about digital exclusion (Helsper, 2011; Green, 2016) and (digital) monitoring of welfare recipients as (perceived) criminals (Cruikshank, 1999; Wacquant, 2009; 2010), used Bourdieu’s notion of habitus to show how jobseekers, who need work clubs and other forms of support to navigate the internet, are forced to comply in a discourse, as a set of rules and assumptions that dictates action, that is alien to them. They are forced to act outside their habitus, ultimately showing a neoliberal governmentality that enables and sustains *symbolic violence*. In short, those chapters showed how clients of Banterby SC work club through their drive to work as well as in trying to avoid dealing with the Jobcentre Plus (JCP), were limited in their chances of succeeding in (re)gaining employment not only by a lack of quality jobs, but also because digital procedures and practices were keeping them from acting independently and with confidence in the labour market.

The role of the staff/volunteer(s) of Banterby SC in this process has already been mentioned in those chapters, especially in Chapter Six where them taking over the majority of the activities of the digital parts of the job searching process was presented as
a sign of the symbolic violent nature of the governmentalities guiding those practices. This chapter, then, further explores the role of work club staff/volunteer(s). It does so guided by the third research question: *What can the shared everyday experiences of unemployment and job searching of both work club clients and staff in a flexible, unstructured work club tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?* Using data from the two interviews I conducted with Jerry and Laura (two work club paid employees), an important feature of this chapter is its emotional ethnographic style. Following Burkitt (2012), as introduced in Chapter Four, I believe that our feelings and emotions are central to the reflexive process, affecting how we see ourselves as well as others in the world around us, and drawing from that a significant part of this chapter will consist of not only data from earlier reflexive journal entries. Indeed, a major part of the chapter’s interpretative parts can be considered ‘on the spot’ reflexive journals, emphasising my ongoing reflexivity accompanying the interpretation of the data and the field work/project as a whole.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, the levels of engagement and the use of data originating from the researcher’s own experiences were critically reviewed through reflexive exercises and exploring the implications and possible pitfalls of doing ethnographic research. The supportive and inclusive atmosphere of Banterby SC work club, I felt, demanded an open and informal research approach, one that allowed for the researcher to become, in a way, ‘embedded’ in the research environment, and to be actively involved and engaging with the research participants in the most natural way possible. For me, this natural way would come through behaving and interacting with people as I would if I were a volunteer *without* the researcher role taking centre stage (Mason, 2002: 87). This does not mean that I was a covert researcher, instead it meant that I decided to consciously emphasize my volunteering role first when directly dealing with the work club’s clients. This course of action, ultimately, came with additional data that might not have been considered of interest if the focus would have remained solely on the experiences of the jobseekers. As argued by Coffey (1999) it can be valuable to use the ‘self’ and the researcher’s experiences as data and in the analysis, and therefore such a practice is nothing new. However, what is new is that these experiences and
observations are used in exploring the workings of third sector organisations, within the voluntary work literature, volunteer experiences are mostly used to evaluate the volunteer’s practices, developing capacities for employability, and how organisations can take better care of their volunteers (as discussed in Chapter Two).

Therefore, after careful consideration I decided that the experiences of the researcher can and should be used in exploring the experiences with the expectations put on jobseekers that are being acted upon or that are resisted within the work club as long as they focus on and are extensions to the experiences of the jobseekers and do not focus on the *volunteering experience*. In addition to the researcher’s experiences as a volunteer, data from two interviews with the other two staff members are also incorporated into the analysis presented in this chapter in order to create a holistic view of how the experiences of the those with whom I had been working in the work club could help us understand and underpin those of the clients.

This chapter starts with exploring reflexive journal and notebook entries written down over the course of the field work that demonstrate how volunteering in a work club appears to be no more than a performance similar to the performance jobseekers enact when they perform the work ethic as discussed in chapters Two and Five. It focuses on various ways that staff and volunteers felt were key to the work club not being able to come even close to its advertised goal of helping people back into employment. Specifically, the first two sections focus on the lack of available staff and volunteers and other resources such as time, which, with all the more structural obstacles as discussed in Chapter Five, made supporting people as much as possible even more difficult. The third section focuses on the staff and volunteers’ perception of their clients in the light of the ‘deserving’ / ‘undeserving’ binary and the ‘myth of the welfare recipient’. The final sections focus mostly on the feelings of powerlessness that I felt throughout the field work, and explores what these feelings and acknowledging them can do in terms of exploring the effects of neoliberal governmentalities on the everyday lives of the clients of Banterby SC work club.
7.2 "You and what army?": Lack of Staff and Volunteers

One of the most pressing issues that voluntary and community initiatives face is a lack of resources (Bone, 2012). Banterby SC work club was no exception to this. There are various different ways in which the scarcity of these resources can be categorized, the first of which is time a lack of staff available.

When the field work commenced, there were two people responsible for the work club: Jerry and Laura, as introduced in Chapter One. I was to be the third person, joining them as a much-needed volunteer. In recent political rhetoric, including the Big Society (2010 - 2015), David Cameron spoke of “an army of volunteers” (Cameron, 2009) that was ready to join forces in local organisations, and initiatives such as the work club, to make a change, and to ‘fix the broken Britain’ that I introduced in Chapter Two. From my experience, there was no army waiting to help. There were just two people for 10 hours a week, and one volunteer (me) who happened to have the time to help because she could combine volunteering with research that provided a stipend. After Laura had left because she had changed jobs, it was just the two of us:

And if it weren’t for me volunteering there for this research project, Jerry couldn’t have given him anything close to the attention he needs, something we still cannot do with the two of us. And that is where the government is going completely wrong (and that is just one thing): they expect work clubs to step in, to fill a gap that the government cannot or will not fill (any longer) [as discussed in Chapter 3], but it is impossible. Completely impossible to provide the help that is actually needed (Field notes, November 2015).

Often it felt somewhat awkward, thinking of myself as so important to this work club. I am always very cautious in thinking of myself as unmissable or a key player in a project, as I always aim to see things, firstly, as an overall team effort, and secondly because I do not believe I am irreplaceable. However, I also found out that it was only due to my special circumstances, researching as a volunteer, that I was able to be here. Talking about this
with Jerry a few weeks after I had joined them, I asked him whether he had tried to find volunteers to help in the work club before:

[He said] it is nearly impossible to find volunteers, [let alone some] that are capable of helping people out in this way, as most of the people who KNOW how to play the job searching game actually have jobs, 9 to 5 jobs, and cannot help out, and there is no money for more paid staff in the work clubs, so effectively people are being sent to local groups that do not and will not have the resources to help the people that need help the most in this entire process. Expectations are not realistic and problems will only get worse if people still get sanctioned for not doing enough, even if they attend job clubs [but] still cannot get our full attention, because to be fair, most of them need at least an hour of individual help in order to make some difference (sort out email addresses, CVs, set up searches, apply for jobs, sort out responses, and sometimes even more than that!!) (Field notes, November 2015).

With most of the clients needing at least an hour of individual help to set up the basics of digital job searching, as discussed in Chapter Six, and only three (and later on two) people trying to accommodate a wide variety of people and questions, I soon felt that the work club was set up for failure on its formal main goal of helping people back into employment; after all, we only had time to spend about 15 minutes per client if we wanted to give the majority of the clients in need of help at least some attention. This feeling became more pronounced when I was about to leave the field to continue my writing up phase. As discussed in Chapter Four, exiting the field was perhaps the hardest part of all – leaving ‘my’ work club. I knew that after I left it would only be Jerry trying to help as many people as he could in only two hours per session. As such, I felt immensely guilty for leaving:

I already dread leaving in a few months’ time, because that means that I have to leave Jerry alone, and if I saw what happened last week when I couldn’t make it to the [two-hour] library session Thursday due to illness, he was buckling under the workload. Imagine trying to help 10 people on your own in two hours, where realistically 45 minutes per person are required to make a difference... It's
When eventually I did leave, it was with a lot of mixed emotions. I did not know whether to be happy, or sad:

I left with a lot of mixed feelings. I had hoped it would be easier. Staying on would not be an option as I will need time to process my findings and experiences and start writing up without the burden of new data building up, if not on my field notes, then in my head and proverbial heart. We said our goodbyes and I promised to return on a regular basis to check in with them. I knew they would want that, and I wanted that too, but realising that I would indeed probably see them again if I were to check in two or three months later made me sad yet again. Jerry couldn’t thank me enough. He would miss me, he said, not just for the banter we enjoyed, but because we made a good team, him and me. Despite our many differences in terms of age and where we came from, we knew within a few weeks of me starting there that we would be able to bounce off each other, learn from each other, and put that to use in helping the clients of Banterby SC work club. I would miss him too, both for the banter and our collaboration. He had always made me feel part of the team, part of the community that is Banterby SC work club. When I got into the car and placed the flowers that I had got [from one of the regulars] on the back seat I let out a good sigh of relief, or was it sadness? I felt guilty for leaving them, guilty for not continuing and finding a way to keep on helping, but I knew it had to be done (Field notes, January 2016).

That last morning was one of goodbyes. Some clients had brought me some gifts, a nice card and even a bunch of flowers from Leigh. It made me feel appreciated as well as guilty.

In feeling guilty about leaving Jerry alone, and knowing that the amount of time he could spend with each client and the quality of this assistance would inevitably decrease, it became clear that these experiences show how problematic the expectations placed on
both Banterby SC work club and its clients are. Without the resources, either financially to hire paid staff, or in terms of volunteer availability, people who are hoping to find much-needed help and support in Banterby SC work club often have to make due with some quick hands-on help as to get their applications in so that they reach their weekly amount of applications. Although this was already discussed in part in Chapters Five and Six, these experiences reveal how despite the will to ‘do more’, the resources are simply not there. It was not just the lack of staff and volunteers that limited the potential impact of the work club supporting as many clients as possible. The lack of funds also affected the number of hours that Banterby SC could actually be run, which will be discussed in the next section.

7.3 "We’re losing something valuable here…": Running out of time

As discussed in the previous section, the limitations on staff available to run the work club meant that time spent with clients was scarce, especially when considering the limited operating hours of the work club. Initially, when I joined the work club in February 2015 until July 2015, Banterby SC work club ran for five hours on one weekday (10am - 3pm) and for two hours on another day in the community library in Coalthorpe (10am - 12pm), giving them a total of seven hours a week. Both locations required a small fee to, at the main facility, cover rent and, in the case of Coalthorpe use of the computers. I found it very strange that the Community Sports Trust, operating in the name of Banterby SC, still had to pay (a discounted) rent for the room. Apparently, according to Jerry, the relation between the Community Sports Trust and Banterby SC was more of a ‘marriage of convenience’, with the Community Sports Trust being able to attract more attention to its work by using the name of Banterby SC, and Banterby SC itself being known for engaging in community development; their finances and everything else were completely separated.

The exact details of this venue’s costs were not conveyed to me, but what is known was that it was a significant part of the overall limited budget available for operating the work club. In July 2015, all the funding the Community Sports Trust had secured from third
parties such as the South Yorkshire Community Foundation, gatekeepers for this research project, had ran out, and new grant and funding applications had still not been successful. This meant that the work club had to shut its doors between July 2015 and September 2015 until new funding had been secured. Unfortunately, the amount of money available had been reduced, so the hours in the first location were the first to go. This, especially immediately after this cut in hours, was a troublesome time for the work club. By that time, Laura had moved into a different job and could no longer volunteer, so from September 2015 onward it was up to Jerry and myself to attempt to run the work club and tend to as many people as possible. The lengthy excerpt from my research diary below describes one of the first sessions after the three-hour cut-back:

Today was one of the toughest days I’ve had at Banterby SC work club. It was emotionally draining, my patience was being tested to its limits, and everything just made me very, very angry. I got in at [10am], and luckily Jerry was back. He walked up to me and gave me a hug! I was happy to see him again, and I know he felt the same about me: we are a good team, because we are both there to help.

…

When I got in it was already quite busy, busier than normal, and people were already working; we have only two hours now, so there isn’t much time for socialising, everything needs to be done right away, if we want to help as many people as we can. And that amount is and will be limited with only two hours instead of the five hours we previously had… Before, people would walk in all through the morning and day, and now they all come within the same two hours. Of course, there were busy moments in the past, but not as busy as it is now, and to be fair and frank, it makes me feel like shit, it makes me feel really guilty, and that is not a very good place to be in.

…

We had to leave it at that [sorting out email and updating some CVs and log books]. I didn’t apply for any jobs for anybody today, and that felt horrible. I couldn’t give any of them my full attention, not even for 15 minutes … Jerry mentioned that we perhaps would have to start working with bookings for time slots, if it were to
continue like this… but, I said, “We’re losing something valuable here… if we do
that…” The power of [Banterby SC work club] was its atmosphere, the time we had
to spend time with those people to really help them, to provide them with an
atmosphere where they’d feel comfortable coming to, but all I could feel and see
now was frustration from everyone, basically, unhappy with the restrictions of
funding. It nearly made me cry, to be fair, sitting there between two people who
desperately needed help with their job search, and if I’d look around I’d see four
more people who I couldn’t attend to (Field notes, September 2015).

This excerpt of my field notes brings to light the frustration I felt as we were expected to
do the same work in less than half the time we had previously. The key problem and
outcome of having limited staff available is not being able to provide people who are
asking for help with adequate help; it is one thing to want to offer help that is badly needed,
but it is another to be able to actually do so. On many days, there were already eight
people waiting to get some help with their job searching efforts as soon as the work club
started at 10am. Such excerpts are probably the most frustrated entries that I made over
the course of my time volunteering in the work club. They were the culmination of feeling
frustrated for weeks on end with not being able to provide people with the amount of help
and time that not only I wanted to give, but also the amount that they would need to be
able to learn how to do it themselves so that in the future they could operate more
independently, if that was an achievable goal to begin with. This, for me, clearly showed
the cracks in neoliberal ideologies of individuals being responsible for their own lives, and
especially their own mistakes; it is one thing to acknowledge that some people need some
help, but yet another to expect that every problem and every flaw can be solved with ‘a
little bit of help’. Citizens, and in this case jobseekers, are expected to become the ideal
homo economicus, ‘the entrepreneur of themselves’ (Foucault, 2008: 226). They are
expected to find a way, preferably by themselves, to become comfortable and proficient
in acting outside their habitus if the situation demands it (Bourdieu, 1990). This is
something that to me, at this point, seems not just unfair, but even more so a violation of
their social and economic welfare in a society where, as discussed in the previous
chapters, structural problems (such as a lack of jobs, but also digital exclusion) that keep
them from succeeding are being ignored. The rules of the game are developed based on these same premises: the idea of the *homo economicus* as the ideal-type citizen, combined with a conscious failure to recognise and acknowledge structural obstacles that keep people from becoming this ideal-type.

The realisation that the work club was a ‘quick fix’ was a realisation that ran all through the project, and perhaps found its culmination in viewing its shortcomings through the eyes of a volunteer. There were days where we witnessed the effectiveness of the work club, when the jobseekers were enjoying themselves drinking a cup of tea and enjoying the banter that was so crucial to the work club, and one of the key strengths of operating it as a flexible, unstructured work club: people felt no pressure to participate in anything but socialising if they did not feel like it. However, those days, or even moments, were in stark contrast with the more typical reality of the work club wherein it was able to offer them nothing *more* than this safe space to share their stories and frustrations with others without being afraid to be judged.

It could be argued that, in a way, the flexible, unstructured nature of Banterby SC work club, and the important place that socialising played within it, defies the neoliberal governmentality that people need to be pushed into finding work as soon as possible in order to become a productive, self-reliant and consuming citizen (Boland and Griffin, 2015: 33). Worrying about peoples’ (social) welfare, we capitalised on this social aspect, and told people it was important to feel good about themselves, to socialise with friends and acquaintances, and that there was more to life than work. However, the lingering realisation that provided a stark contrast to this philosophy was of course that even though we *wanted* life for our clients to be about more than just work (despite the fact that we were operating a work club), we still had to make sure that they were able to live up to their Jobseekers Agreements in order not to get sanctioned, and the best thing we could do is to help them continue their search for employment. Ultimately, perhaps it could be argued that the welfare state has not disappeared, but has rather received a different meaning and a different protagonist. Rather than existing for the welfare of its citizens, the rules for welfare provision are directed at the State itself, to strengthen the State’s
position, at the cost of those who are powerless to defend themselves, if only by defying those rules.

Acknowledging these feelings of powerlessness was not an easy task, both as a researcher and a volunteer. Again, similar to the frustration with not having enough staff and volunteers available to be able to give adequate and professional help and advice to Banterby SC work club's clients, as discussed in the previous section, the fact that funding impacted on the number of hours that could be used to help these people put the limited staff available under even more pressure, making the sacrifices even more severe, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Limited time meant that we had limited time to sit down and listen to the stories of the clients, that they 'just wanted to get off their chest', which often was quite literally. The burden of unemployment and the job searching process weighed heavy on most of them, physically, displayed through shortness of breath and anxiety of having to sort everything out in their heads, and after being able to talk about it to someone who actually listened to them, people often were a lot calmer and more relaxed. As argued in Chapter Four, trying to keep a neutral stance would mean distancing myself from the clients, which could not only harm the ethnographic nature of my work, but also my interaction with the clients as a volunteer and therefore affect the level of trust that the clients had in me to help them with their job searching. The next section addresses in more detail what allowing myself to act 'authentically' towards my clients, instead of being a more distant and neutral researcher, meant for my experiences with worklessness and contemporary job searching practices.

7.4 "That's just rubbish, isn't it...?": Dialogues and Monologues of Powerlessness

So far, this chapter has dealt with the experiences of Jerry, Laura and myself focusing on quite practical and tangible issues, such as a lack of resources, but also our take on the stereotypical welfare recipient and whether or not we could recognise any of it in Banterby
SC work club’s clients. In this section, I focus more on feelings and emotions of powerlessness that we experienced, partially because of our experiences with and take on the lack of available resources and the way our clients were depicted in the media. Doing so will help us to further explore the shared experiences that are central to this chapter.

Dealing with feelings of powerlessness, as a work club volunteer, resulted in further questioning the workings of Banterby SC work club and the expectations that were (implicitly) placed upon it by the State. Whereas initially, as discussed in Chapter One, I wanted to primarily focus on the experiences of the jobseekers, the emotions and experiences that I dealt with myself forced me to re-evaluate my own stance, my own presence and my own beliefs even more closely than anticipated. Instead of documenting my own presence to mitigate my ‘bias’, my own experiences appeared to become part of the data, and I myself became an even more active participant in my own study. Being present was no longer solely a requirement to collect data originating from other people; rather, slowly my presence in the work club felt more as volunteer than researcher, and I felt that I was sharing certain experiences of powerlessness and hopelessness with my clients. This allowed me to ask and answer volunteer-specific questions that could shed a light on the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices, as reflected in the third research question, central to this topic.

On the 22nd of June 2016 I went back to Banterby SC work club for the first time since January 2016. I had to return some documents that I had borrowed, and also wanted to see how the work club was doing. I also wanted to personally keep them informed about the progress of my research and telling them (again) how grateful I am for them having me in their group for so long to collect my data. The following is my reflection on this return, incorporating both past and present events and experiences:

As soon as I entered the building I experienced a sense of familiarity. The same lady at the desk was there, the same security guard [who was there for the whole facility, not for the work club], the latter of which greeted me with some level of
recognition. When I walked up the stairs towards the room where Banterby SC work club is held I could not help feeling a bit nervous. Not because I did not want to be there, but because, well, I did not really know what to expect. [Jerry] had already told me that it was ‘same old, same old’, with a lot of familiar faces still being there or having returned from temporary employment opportunities. Somehow, I wanted it to be a lot better than ‘same old, same old’, and I was anxious to find out the truth. But when I stepped into the room, and peeked around the corner I could indeed see the familiar faces, who greeted me with a surprised but warm welcome. … I asked them how they were doing, and the answers were not at all positive. Sarah, [one of the regulars], said that the more they tried the more it seemed that obstacles were put in their way. Ian, also one of the regulars, said that would be a good quote for me to use, “obstacles being put in their way”.

Ian, dealing with these obstacles, was getting more and more frustrated with his coach at an employment support and training services company that he has to report to [in order to receive his Jobseekers Allowance]. He was told that if he had not found a job in the next month or so they are going to put him on a 30-hour per week workfare placement, for no pay, where the other 10 hours [left in a full-time working week] have to be spent job searching. He said he was ‘being a realist’: he’s 55 years old, and has 12 years of work ‘plight’ in front of him.

…

All I could do, as a person, because I am a person above all this, above being a volunteer or even a researcher, is show him my disapproval for the way that he is being treated, by telling him that I find it abhorrent to put such immense pressure on people who clearly want the same thing that the Jobcentre wants: to get them back into employment. “It’s rubbish, isn’t it…?”, I tell them, “I cannot believe that this is how it’s supposed to go, someone should be able to see that this is not fair, not working??? This makes me so angry!” I did so this morning, without thinking, and I have done so on many occasions over the course of my fieldwork. In the very beginning of being out in the field I tried to stay quiet and to just listen and nod when people would tell me about their stories. I was there to help and observe, but
not to let my own opinion of things get in the way of my data collection, it was about their stories, not about mine. But the more stories I heard from an increasing amount of people, the more I could not, instinctively, hold back my own frustration, disgust and anger at the way these people were being treated. Also, if I wanted the people I worked with to feel comfortable around me, and to see me as someone who was there to help them, I felt I could not get away with keeping my mouth shut, with keeping a distance. I was ‘hanging out’ with them, and in a way genuinely befriending them. How could I not share in their frustrations if I had indeed started to really grasp what the lived experiences of people visiting the work club were about? Wasn’t this one of my goals, to try and find out how they experienced their situation and to see [whether,] how and where volunteering could help solve or alleviate some problems? (Field notes, June 2016).

In explicitly telling them that I thought “it was rubbish”, I was being the volunteer that I would be without the research. Subsequently, I found that dealing with my own frustrations in the field notes and sometimes in separate reflexive writing entries, was not merely something to keep myself in check as a researcher as a methodological obligation, nor that it was something that was broadcasting a need to get my own story into this research project. In actively reflecting on the field notes and my experiences in the work club as a volunteer I found that these experiences were echoing and even enforcing a large part of the experiences of feeling hopeless and powerless of my clients that I had recorded simultaneously. This, for me, was important, as it suggested that if I, as a volunteer, who was supposedly there to support the clients, to help them back into employment, was feeling as powerless as they did, that there was, in fact, not much I could do to, that this, in fact, was not working. How I dealt with these realisations is addressed in the next section.

7.5 "I feel as powerless as they do"

Having gone through a transition from researcher as volunteer to more of a volunteer as researcher, acting naturally was what resulted in the richest of data. This, in turn, led me
to suspecting that in the end, all that I, as a volunteer, was doing was *performing volunteering*. Even if I *wanted* to more than just be a statistic, a confirmation that people do still volunteer to help other people, there was not much more I felt I could do than to turn up and volunteer:

So, I go there, every week, not just to write my thesis, but to volunteer as well, because one of my main aims for this project was to make sure I contribute to (my) community immediately throughout the years instead of just writing about it. I go there and I help out where I can while at the same time knowing that what I'm doing at that very moment isn't going to change the system, isn't going to change the world. We're teaching them to be compliant/how to work within the system, because we know that they (and even we) are powerless and cannot just decide not to go with the flow. Because if they don't they're sanctioned, lose their money and could end up homeless, starving and what not (Reflexive Writings, undated).

As a volunteer, partially because of the time constraints, I knew I could not make the difference I wanted to make when helping people. As discussed in the previous chapters, the most pressing problem that we had to address within the work club was *not to get people sanctioned*, instead of trying to helping people to find their way back into employment. Addressing this problem meant that we had to teach people how to operate within a welfare support system that did not work for them as it treated them like criminals just for executing their right for support. When talking to Jerry about these matters, I asked him what he thought the work club was helping the most, the jobseeker or the DWP and JCP:

Well, ‘the system’, these people are caught into, are trapped, once you start being in receipt of Jobseekers or any benefits, you're in the system. … I know of people that actually took their own lives, because everything they earned the government took off them. It might a bit of an extremist view, but there are some similarities, the system is bullying, and bullish… (Interview with Jerry, 17 August 2016)
Jerry, very often, was not afraid to hide his frustration with ‘the system’, and had seen, like me, the devastation in peoples’ faces after having dealt with welfare reforms and the DWP/JCP for a longer period of time. He would, like me, tell people how he felt depressed after they had told him their stories and how they had gotten into this situation. However, at the same time, he had also, over the years, learnt not to let it get to him too much:

It don’t get to me like it used to do. Because I can just walk away from it now, but, it never, there’s never been a time where I’ve been working here, and I’ve been tossing and turning in bed, because it don’t give me that kind of pressure, I.. the employment I’ve done in the past, because I know, I’ve done the best I can do in a short time, I’m more, I’m just a floater, really, now, and, I just accept it for what it is, and I help where I can. There’s nothing I can do about it (Interview with Jerry, 17 August 2016).

Jerry knew that neither Banterby SC work club as an organisation, nor himself as an individual, had any say in the situation, and had accepted that he could not do anything to change the practices of job searching and the expectations that come with it. He helps the people where he can, and that is in this case to help them function within the jobseeker support system without being sanctioned.

Again, like with the problem of ownership through a forced acting outside of the jobseeker’s habitus, as discussed in Chapter Six, Banterby SC work club assisted in maintaining a form of symbolic violence. If symbolic power and violence are a form of domination that is “exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 167), then the actions we performed as staff and volunteer(s) in the work club could be considered to be part of just that. The fact that the performance of volunteering and even paid community work are seen as inherently good, regardless of their outcomes, obscures that they are condoning and have become part of the symbolic violence practices against jobseekers.
‘Powerless’ is the word I have used most to describe how I felt about volunteering within the work club, and ultimately, I found that through “thinking about … how I experienced … the powerlessness of not being able to adequately help my research participants, I am finding some possible answers to questions surrounding impact and possibilities of volunteering” (Reflexive Writing). When trying to help Paddy, who I have briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, looking for jobs that would both pay the rent and that he could actually get to using public transport (as he did not have the money to pay for a license, let alone a car), ‘powerlessness’ was, again, the main sentiment that Paddy and myself shared:

It makes you feel completely useless and powerless. Like every day, I come to Banterby SC work club. I want to help, I really, really do, and by listening to them and eventually writing about them I hope I can do so, but I cannot change reality, I cannot create hundreds or thousands of jobs, and I cannot give them the skills they do not have over night. I cannot change the way the JCP works, and I cannot change the digital system. I cannot prevent sanctions from being given out to the wrong people for the wrong reasons. I cannot, I cannot, I cannot. There is so much I cannot do… Yes, in a way I am happy I can leave in two weeks’ time. But I am also sad that over the course I have met too many people who have stayed with Banterby SC work club. Glad they found their own little community and glad and honoured that they accepted me in their midst, as one of them, but sad that I didn’t see many of them go because I helped them write the application that got them the job they so desperately wanted (Field notes, January 2016).

My encounter with Paddy was close to the end of the field work period, and I felt bad about feeling some relief at the idea that soon I would be exiting the field to write up my research. Soon I would not have to deal with these feelings of powerlessness so directly, facing people that in fact I would not be able to help, apart from helping them to conform to a system that mostly hurts them even more, and kept them away from regaining power over their own lives. I would not have to face them and tell them that at this point the only thing we could do was get some basic applications in so that they had something to show
for at the Jobcentre, before going on with the next client for whom I would do exactly the same. I thought I would be free of feeling this guilt and powerlessness when I left the field, but reality appeared to be different.

What we can see here is the irony and ultimately the failure of a neoliberal approach that is supposed to empower people to take control over their own lives, but ends up destroying their sense of agency over their own lives. Being directed by and forced to conform to practices that do not only fail to take into account the complexities of job searching and unemployment, but also the complexity of individuals’ lives and circumstances, means they are having anything but control over their own lives, making decisions on their terms, doing what is best for them, which, at least to me, empowerment is all about.

7.6 Haunting Frustrations - Looking back at a year of volunteering

Doing an ethnography, for me at least, has proven to be a never-ending process; there is not a day that goes by that I do not think about how my experiences as a volunteer have influenced and still influence my world view, especially when it comes to the effects of welfare reforms not just on my clients, but also the goals and expectations placed upon the voluntary sector; on a regular basis I find myself frustrated with the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities in a field that is supposed to be about social action, something that, to me, neoliberal governmentalities are not.

I mostly look back on my time with Banterby SC work club as positive. I feel I have learnt so much about the world, about people, and about what it means to be unemployed. The people, both from the organisation as well as its clients, were amazingly open and welcoming, and within such a sensitive environment where people were dealing with a lot of different problems I was amazed to find such a level of positivity, determination and solidarity. At the same time, as the previous sections have demonstrated, it was also a time of frustration. This frustration keeps growing every day I write more about the field work in my thesis, analysing and interpreting my data. Where I had somehow expected it
to get better after leaving the field, having collected all the data that I needed I had come to the realisation that what I did in the work club was hardly affecting the actual problems that needed fighting. Indeed, I found that over time my feelings of sadness only grew stronger, not for my own sake, but for that of my clients. I have never thought about my own feelings affecting me and centring those feelings on my own well-being within this process; every hint of frustration I felt was for Banterby SC work club, for the clients I had tried to help. At the end of the day I would go home to my day job of being a Ph.D. student, receiving my university stipend, and without too much effort paying my bills and mortgage. Feeling powerless, both then and now, has become an extension, perhaps even amplifier, of how my clients must have felt and are still feeling.

The more time I spent analysing my field notes and reflexive writings to create a cohesive narrative about the realities of job searching practices and how Banterby SC work club, its clients and staff/volunteers deal with them, the more determined I became to get the message out that these practices need some critical re-thinking. Not once did I hear about the local JCP contacting the organisation to see whether what we were doing was actually helping, and the only thing they did was refer clients to us so that we could help them adhere to the rules that were bestowed upon them. In fact, it was something we complained about a lot, and sometimes it was mentioned that maybe we should take matters into our own hands and tell the local JCP that things were not working that well. However, Jerry said that it would probably be of no use, and thought the best chance we would have is me writing my thesis and trying to get the message out there: this is not working.

Looking back over my time at Banterby SC work club, I can see that I mainly contributed to maintaining a discourse that made ‘having a job or doing everything in your power to get one’ inseparable from ‘good citizenship’. I was a warden, making sure that people were enabled to perform the work ethic, regardless of them being able to find

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14 I have attempted to contact the JCP/DWP about their relationship with the work club and to ask for their input into this research project, but, unfortunately, I never received a response.
employment, to prove their worth. It is the performance of the desire that counts. In that same manner I felt that my presence in the work club was, on some levels, a performance too. Indeed, even though I was helping people cope with their job searching plight I felt that I was merely part of a performance, performing volunteering to help people back into work, as in the end, I felt my main task was to help people not get sanctioned for not being able to overcome obstacles that were outside their own power to solve. The next section will relate these observations more directly to notions of symbolic power/violence by linking them to the ritualistic performances of job searching as introduced in Chapter Three.

7.7 Rituals of 'doing good': sharing symbolic violence.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the voluntary sector and voluntary sector research are both highly focused on the outcomes of voluntary action for the volunteer, and despite calls for more attention to the experiences of the beneficiary (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1983; Snyder and Omoto, 2008; Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Bornstein, 2009), the literature taking up these calls is scant. In taking up the call by Haski-Leventhal (2009) that more attention should be paid to the impact of volunteering on society; [...] the meaning of volunteering; and the relationship between the volunteer and the recipients", I have found that working in Banterby SC work club as a volunteer or as a paid member of staff could, like job searching, could and should be problematised.

The practices of volunteers and staff (as community workers) should be considered a ritualistic performance affected and shaped by neoliberal governmentalities. Similar to the way unemployed individuals are being directed towards both a habitual, formal and transcendental mode of job searching, work clubs and their staff and volunteers are directed towards supporting those rituals and in doing so are performing their own. Recalling how I argued, in Chapter Three, that with the institution of the political meaning attached to job searching practices, we can also argue this is the case for practices of volunteering and community work. Following Bourdieu (1990), it can be argued that these performances are also outside the control of logic, exactly because they are constructed
and understood as ritualistic performances. Repeating Bourdieu’s own words:

… if ritual practices and representations are practically coherent, this is because they arise from the combinatorial functioning of a small number of generative schemes that are linked by relations of practical substitutability, that is, capable of producing results that are equivalent in terms of the ‘logical’ requirements of practice. This systematicity remains loose and approximate because the schemes can receive the quasi-universal application that they are given only in so far as they function in the practical state, below the level of explicit statement and therefore outside the control of logic, and in relation to practical purposes which require of them and give them a necessity which is not that of logic (Bourdieu, 1990: 94, my emphasis).

This means that, like the case of ritualistic performances of job searching, politicians supporting the neoliberal ideology in the UK have managed to construct a complex relationship between citizenship and volunteering and community work that allows for certain practices to be considered ‘good’ regardless of whether they make sense in a logical (or practical?) way. In other words, as long as the practices and the representations (of those practices) in a particular (part of) society convey the same message and attach to those practices a similar meaning, in this case that volunteering and community work are inherently good, they can be reproduced and used as a powerful tool in the assertion of power over others as was done in, for example, David Cameron’s Big Society Agenda (Cameron, 2009; Cameron, 2010a), where volunteering was promoted as a key solution to solving structural problems facing the UK and its local communities.

As in the previous section, in describing how he felt about his work, Jerry described how he knew there was nothing he could do about the situation that people were in; the only thing he could do was to help them live in sub-optimal conditions in order for them to not become worse. I shared his experiences, and felt that I had become part of a practice that had no practical use other than to help people stay in line with the system and to provide a volunteering opportunity for people. This became clearest to me when, after
exiting the field, Banterby SC Community Sports Trust, hosts of the work club, sent me a standard evaluation form asking how the volunteering experience had helped me. It asked me questions related to my confidence levels, my skill levels, my career choices and my work experience, and the only open question that was asked of me was whether volunteering has helped me with progression into education, employment or further volunteering opportunities. There were no questions related to the actual work that I had done as a volunteer, whether I felt that I had been helping the clients of the work club, what I thought was good about the set-up or whether I had any recommendations about the work club to improve it. Ultimately, their way of evaluating the success of my involvement was by focusing on my employability rather than the employability of the people they were trying to help back into work. These kinds of practices support the pervasive academic framing of the relationship between volunteering and unemployment as one where the volunteer takes centre stage, as discussed in Chapter Two.

7.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to answer the research question: *What can the shared everyday experiences of unemployment and job searching of both work club clients and staff tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?* It has done so by, adding to a focus on the experiences and stories of the work club’s clients, focusing on the experiences with the work club and its clients of the researcher and her colleagues Jerry and Laura.

This chapter showed how neoliberal governmentalities could be recognised in a lack of both monetary and human resources, an observation that is both exemplary and ironic. As discussed in Chapter Two, political rhetoric is filled with messages of self-responsibility, and ‘taking responsibility’ is one of the most often used phrases in contemporary activation policies:
Only when people and communities are *given more power* and *take more responsibility* can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all (HM Government, 2010: , my emphasis).

The irony of this quote can be found in many things. In the idea of communities of people based on individuals having to take care of themselves. In a fairness of treating everybody like a potential criminal or scrounger. In a lack of job opportunities. In a lack of opportunities to volunteer alongside jobs, and of course in the promise, or premise, of giving individuals and communities more power to provide fairness and opportunity for all, while at the same time leaving financial responsibility and opportunities to the market (Dean, 2008). Clearly, with funding being distributed on a competitive basis, both the quality and quantity of the support that work clubs such as Banterby SC are expected to provide cannot be guaranteed. Also, David Cameron spoke, in his Big Society speeches, about an “army of volunteers” that would be more than willing to contribute to ‘fixing a broken Britain’, also discussed in Chapter Two. However, next to there not being enough funding to pay for both the staff and the facilities, there were no volunteers available to fill the gap until I came along, despite trying to attract them in the past. Clearly this was because those who *have* the abilities to help people find work do not have the time because they have a job, and those who would *have* the time due to unemployment have, due to DWP/JCP system, to spend all of their own time looking for work.

The frustrations of Jerry, Laura and myself with the uncertainties that come with having to secure funding for support that is much needed clearly showed the realities of this supposedly ‘fair practice’ of neoliberalism. It emotionally hurt, perhaps myself more than Jerry and Laura due to my lack of experience with these practices, to see the work club being closed down, while at the same time hearing politicians like David Cameron say that “…we are all in this together” (HM Government, 2010), promoting neoliberal ideologies and agendas such as the Big Society as offering equal chances in life to everybody while actively stepping back themselves, which specifically takes its toll on the financial side of things.
Bringing these three empirical chapters, each of them very rich in data, together, this thesis now will move on to its concluding chapter. This chapter provides a summary of all the discussion presented in the thesis, connects them through a symbolic power/violence lens that was introduced in Chapter Three, and compares these insights to existing knowledge to revisit and answer the research question: *What can flexible, unstructured work clubs tell us about everyday unemployment and job searching practices in UK society?*
Chapter Eight. General Discussion and Conclusion: This is not working

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore what flexible, unstructured work clubs can tell us about unemployment and job searching practices in everyday UK society. This is a useful and valuable endeavour as, firstly, our current, post-industrial society is struggling with high levels of unemployment among low-skilled and low-educated part of the workforce, and, secondly, because work clubs are promoted as a solution to ‘the problem of unemployment’ (Qureshi et al., 2014).

This study was conducted with prior knowledge that, firstly, job searching practices are highly regulated within, through and around continuous welfare reforms (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014), and, secondly, that in the locality where the study was conducted, there were high levels of unemployment and poverty due to rapid deindustrialisation (Foden et al., 2014). The growing empirical literature on experiences of poverty and worklessness in the UK in general illustrates how, more and more, academics are looking to challenge statistics, political rhetoric and media representations of unemployment and poverty, and instead want to forefront the alternative narrative that can be constructed through talking to the people living with these problems (MacDonald and Marsh, 2004; Shildrick et al., 2012b; Patrick, 2012b; MacDonald et al., 2014a; Patrick, 2014; O'Hara, 2015). Furthermore, a growing, and diverse field of voluntary sector research illustrates how valuable our knowledge of, for example, volunteer satisfaction and motivations can be for the further development of adequate and ethical voluntary sector organisations (Waikayi et al., 2012; Bashir et al., 2013).

This chapter is devoted to the discussion of the empirical findings presented in chapters Five, Six and Seven in context of the relevant literature and conceptual framework introduced in chapters One, Two and Three. First, an examination of the literature has highlighted that:
1. Previous literature on UK work club initiatives is practically non-existent.
2. Previous voluntary sector literature has focused mainly on the volunteer and their experiences in order to develop a better understanding of ‘the volunteer’ and what voluntary sector organisations (VSOs) can do to attract and maintain more volunteers in order to carry out their work.
3. Previous literature on the relationship between the voluntary sector and unemployment have mostly focused on how the act of volunteering can provide unemployed individuals with certain skills to improve their employability.

Studying these factors in combination with and in relation to each other has provided important insights into the symbolically violent nature of job searching practices and procedures as prescribed by the DWP and JCP. In addition, this study has brought to light a possible methodological approach for conducting voluntary sector research, specifically, I have argued for a focus on organisations that deal with issues related to social and public policy reforms. Therefore, the study has made various contributions to knowledge:

1. Contributing to (UK) work club research, focusing on their role and purposes.
2. Contributing to our understanding of digital exclusion in job searching practices and connecting it to theories of symbolic power/violence.
3. Contributing to developing debates around unemployment and welfare with an ethnographic perspective.
4. Bringing together Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic power/violence and Foucault’s neoliberal governmentalities in welfare and unemployment research: work clubs operating within a moral-instrumental dilemma.
5. Contribution towards more inclusive research methods for voluntary sector research: comparing politically-driven expectations of impact with volunteers’ and beneficiaries’ experiences.
In this concluding chapter I will unpack these points and the contribution, by summarising the findings of the thesis and detailing the contributions to knowledge made by the research as introduced above.

First, the chapter restates the research problem, and reminds the reader of the research methodology, which is not only crucial to understanding the thesis structure, but also in understanding one of its key contribution. The chapter then proceeds to present a summary of the research, which illustrates and emphasises the iterative inductive nature of this research project, and how it should be considered an ongoing process of sense making (cf. Weick et al., 2005).

8.2 The Research Problem

For most people of working age who are unemployed, job searching is an activity that they are engaged in on a regular basis, especially if they are in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and have signed aClaimant Commitment in which they had to commit to applying for a set amount of jobs per week, spending a set amount of hours per week looking for work and improving their employment chances (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014). These targets are set and sanctions are imposed on those who do not meet those targets despite the lack of jobs available in areas with high levels of unemployment, especially in de-industrialised areas such as South Yorkshire which forms the backdrop of this research (Foden et al., 2014).

Many people who are out of work in these de-industrialised areas have enjoyed only basic levels of education (Foden et al., 2014), and have been engaged mainly in low-paid and low- or unskilled work that required no qualifications throughout their working lives, giving them only a slim chance of improving both their working conditions and income (Shildrick et al., 2012b). Yet, work club initiatives are developed and promoted, claiming that with their help people dealing with unemployment will be able to find their way (back) into employment, using local knowledge and adjusting their practices to what the local clientele needs (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). Questioning the validity of
the expectations placed on work clubs to support jobseekers in their job search, this research project's main research question was developed as follows:

What can flexible, unstructured work clubs tell us about everyday unemployment and job searching practices in UK society?

In order to answer this wider question, three sub-questions were devised, each exploring job searching practices and experiences with them from a different angle:

1. How are neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices manifested in the everyday practices in Banterby SC work club as a flexible, unstructured work club?

2. How does the digital nature of job searching as observed in Banterby SC work club, as a flexible, unstructured work club, fit in with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?

3. What can the shared everyday experiences of unemployment and job searching of both work club clients and staff in a flexible, unstructured work club tell us about the embeddedness of neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?

Exploring these research questions through ethnographic field work allowed for an in-depth insight into the lives of jobseekers attending a work club as well as from the point of view from staff and volunteers working in this work club. Indeed, as expected, and explored in 4.1 when arguing for the almost exclusive use of participant observation, this methodology allowed me to uncover, explore and problematise practices to a degree that with more distant interview data, I expect, would not have been possible. For example, I expect to have heard about problems with use of computers and the internet when asking about what people thought about how they looked for work, but the details as uncovered in Chapter Six would have remained hidden. I expect I would not have learned about the
little notes people use to remember their many log in details, how much of a maze Universal Jobmatch is, or how difficult to read certain job vacancies are for people experiencing literacy disadvantages.

These insights added significantly to the body of knowledge on welfare to work and job searching practices, work club practices and the voluntary sector with a focus on the beneficiary of voluntary action. A particular emphasis was placed on the experiences of work club clients, even when over the course of the research project the experiences of the researcher (as a volunteer) and the other staff members were included; the aim of sharing and exploring these experiences was always to complement and focus on the experiences of the work club clients, and not on the researcher (as a volunteer) herself. Most importantly, in doing so, the thesis found that contemporary approaches to job searching practices and procedures as observed in Banterby SC work club were or could be considered a form of symbolic violence, continuously disadvantaging already disadvantaged jobseekers. Chapter Five, for example, showed how rules and neoliberal philosophy guiding general job searching practices, despite being developed while ignoring or denying structural obstacles external to the jobseekers of Banterby SC work club, were complied with and internalised by those same jobseekers. In the same sense, as discussed in Chapter Six, promoting and restricting job searching practices to a digital by default discourse, ignoring the widening gap between those who are IT-literate and those who are not, violates the rights and diminishes the chances of the latter group, who in turn have no other choice than to comply. Finally, as highlighted in Chapter Seven, the expectation placed on work clubs and work club volunteers that they could contribute to supporting people (back) into paid employment and the promotion of work clubs as a possible solution to ‘the problem of unemployment’ does not align with the experiences of powerlessness shared by both jobseekers and work club staff and myself as a volunteer. Again, ignoring obstacles that lie outside the power of jobseekers and work clubs to address, a grudging compliance with the rules of job searching is unavoidable, as defying those rules leads to jobseekers being sanctioned, and both their emotional and financial situations becoming even direr than they already are.
The research questions were developed going from very broad (the main question) to some narrower instances (sub-questions) based on initial observations. As a result, the research was able to produce data that provide a detailed picture of specific problems and obstacles that jobseekers are facing, such as the digital nature of job searching and a lack of job opportunities, and whether or how a work club can try to alleviate these problems. This in turn allows the thesis to make a distinctive and original contribution to knowledge, exposing how Banterby SC work club, its staff and volunteers are only able to operate within the same framework as their clients, being forced to comply with the rules they know are not fair to them, and not being able to make structural changes that are needed to give them a chance, such as simplifying the application process for those who do not have the digital skills to deal with the current situation, or creating job opportunities to look for to begin with.

Throughout the thesis, empirics telling the stories and the experiences of both work club clients and the researcher (as a volunteer) were alternated and combined to depict a complete picture of the workings of Banterby SC work club. The main concern here has been to create a holistic view of how job searching practices and procedures were experienced by multiple agents operating in the same space. This has proven to be important, for shared experiences of powerlessness and hopelessness, as shown in Chapter Seven, give strength to the argument that neoliberal governmentalities towards unemployment and job searching practices are symbolically violent in nature. If symbolic violence “… represents the way in which people [themselves] play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them” (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 15), then work clubs, both attending them and hosting/staffing them are a part of this.

The power of the symbolic violence of job searching practices starts with accepting and internalising the importance of the work ethic and behaving how ‘good citizens’ should behave according to the State, displayed by people like Steve in Chapter Five. We can also see how in the flyers designed by the DWP to promote work clubs among potential volunteers, as shown in Chapter One, the image of the ‘good citizen’ and ‘good jobseeker’
are further entrenched. At first, it might seem as if the flexible, unstructured work club is a successful attempt at breaking away from this way of thinking about unemployment and unemployed individuals, offering jobseekers an alternative to JCP which for many jobseekers is the pinnacle of distant and impersonal advice. However, as has become clear throughout the empirical chapters, but specifically Chapter Seven, the neoliberal governmentalities surrounding and guiding unemployment and job searching practices are too prevalent to counter, and too embedded to ignore. Even though Banterby SC work club’s staff and volunteer(s) shared in their clients’ feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, recognising the unfairness of many of the clients’ situations, the only power they had was trying to prevent the clients’ lives from becoming even worse, through helping them to do what they had to do within the rules of a welfare regime built around the image of a stereotypical welfare recipient that appears to not exist at all (Cruikshank, 1999). There was no escaping “… those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them” (Connolly and Healy, 2004: 15). Even if perhaps Banterby SC work club was not morally accepting those ideas and structures, they had to act, and help its clients to act, as if they were, not wanting to risk clients being sanctioned over some ideological disagreement. This means that I am arguing that, despite morally opposing certain welfare reforms and its accompanying rules, Banterby SC work club found itself at the centre of a moral-instrumental dilemma, where it had to consider a short-term/long term trade-off between what it wanted to accomplish and what they were actually able to accomplish. The symbolically violent nature of neoliberal governmentalities towards unemployment, then, forced the work club and its clients to choose against their moral beliefs, opting for short term, direct support rather than long term change. I will talk about this more in the next section.
8.3 Key Contributions

8.3.1 Contributing to (UK) work club research

After their introduction in the United States in the 1970s as part of a research project (Azrin et al., 1975), only some limited research has been conducted to explore work clubs and their outcomes in more detail. However, despite many initiatives being developed over the years that may have found some inspiration from the original set-up, including a variety of work clubs in the UK, contemporary academic researchers, apart from Crisp (2015), have not paid them any close attention.

This study, then, extends our knowledge of work clubs, something that needed to be done given their scant attention in academic research. Specifically, it draws attention to the importance of unstructured, flexible work clubs as places where we can (empirically) explore everyday experiences and practices of job searching and unemployment. It has done so by building on different elements from both Van Oort’s (2015) and Crisp’s (2015) studies of work clubs as introduced in Chapter One, combining their individual strengths and foci into a more detailed study of a UK work club that looks beyond the ideal-type structured work club, and focuses on the everyday experiences of job searching that, as Banterby SC work club shows, can be found in work clubs.

I have combined the in-depth ethnographic method of Van Oort’s US study of two highly structured and well-organised work programmes to Crisp’s UK study which also included less structured work clubs, described by him as organised by ‘community providers’ (2015: 6). I have done so by focusing my attention at one specific work club, Banterby SC work club, and spending as much time as I could with them on a weekly basis. This allowed for “… additional texture to the understandings of another side of joblessness, that of contemporary welfare” (Van Oort, 2015: 14).

This combination of strengths addresses a limitation I found in Crisp’s study of UK work clubs, which only discusses the important features of the various kinds of work clubs and the extent to which they are able to deliver support on the scale that is needed to deliver
long-term change through interviews, not picking up on obstacles that are found outside the (perhaps predetermined) scope of the research project, which was to situate the work club in a particular political agenda (the Big Society). Even though Crisp emphasises the non-mandatory nature of support that work clubs provide, which is an important aspect of their success, and is valued by many of the stakeholders that were interviewed, there was little attention to the everyday experiences of jobseekers, and specifically, the everyday problems encountered by jobseekers that work clubs are supposed to address. As already explained above, the participant observation methodology proved to be a real strength in uncovering these everyday practices and problems. In becoming a part of Banterby SC and sharing these practices with the clients of Banterby SC through working alongside them to help them, I could experience first-hand what kind of obstacles the clients were running into, and how they were or were not able to deal with them, overcome them, and how they reacted to them. Furthermore, this not only was true for the clients, but also for myself as a volunteer in this work club. By taking on the role of volunteer, I was able to provide a first-hand account of my role there as a volunteer, and to portray what I experienced as the role and (perceived) purposes of the work club, which I found were much more in line with neoliberal politics than offering people an alternative that would suit their individual needs. The second most important contribution then, uncovered by this personal and participatory approach, is to enhance our understanding of digital exclusion in job searching practices brought about by the digital by default nature of the job searching process.

8.3.2 Contributing to our understanding of digital exclusion in job searching practices and connecting it to theories of symbolic power/violence

The second key contribution of this study is that it has uncovered the severity of digital exclusion in job searching practices. Due to my ethnographic approach, which, as discussed in the previous section, allowed me to observe the everyday obstacles that jobseekers were facing in Banterby SC work club, I learned there were more things that were keeping jobseekers from finding work than the more well-known obstacles such as
a lack of quality jobs (see 5.6) and older workers facing a labour market predominantly focused on young people (see 5.8).

While starting with a more general question, asking “How are neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices manifested in the everyday practices in Banterby SC work club?”, addressed in Chapter Five, soon it became clear that one of those practices could be found in the State’s aims to digitise most of its administration, and demanding citizens to do the same. This observation was explored further in Chapter Six, which sought to answer the question “How does the digital nature of job searching as observed in Banterby SC work club fit in with neoliberal governmentalities toward unemployment and job searching practices?"

This study has extended our knowledge of, and has drawn attention to the severity of the problems that arise when people who are not ICT-literate are forced to compete in a labour market that increasingly becomes more digitised. Specific issues, experienced on a daily basis by Banterby SC work club’s clients, were highlighted. Chapter Six explored which problems arise when people who can considered to be part of a ‘digital underclass’ (Helsper, 2011), of which a large group is also part of the low-skilled and low-educated jobseekers who frequent Banterby SC work club, are forced to find a way to deal with the increasingly digital nature of job searching. This problem, although identified by some academics such as Helsper and Reisdorf (Helsper, 2011; Helsper and Reisdorf, 2013; 2016) and Green (Green, 2016), had not yet been tied to work club practices specifically and how this problem affected the daily activities of work club staff and volunteers and the way they had to prioritise the nature and quality of their work/support. This was shown in Chapter Seven, where, focusing on the staff and volunteer-side of the coin, empirics showed how the need for elaborate support with digital job searching for clients could not be met by a lack of staff and time, in turn caused by a lack of funding, staff, and therefore time.

Ultimately, the study argues that the digital by default nature of job searching is an example of a coercive norm, which, in turn, is an integral part of Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic power/violence. Coercive norms form an (informal) institution (i.e. discourse),
which, in turn, “can only be efficacious if it is objectified in bodies in the form of durable dispositions that recognise and comply with the specific demands of a given institutional area of activity” (McNay, 1999: 99). The embeddedness of the digital in a myriad of aspects in everyday life has made the digital by default practice in job searching just one of the many durable dispositions of our time (Green, 2016). This embeddedness means that its use and championing is left unquestioned by many, which perhaps is also one of the many reasons that, using an interview approach, Crisp (2015) did not pick up on this important obstacle in his study of UK work clubs. Connecting work club practices to theories of symbolic power/violence, then, is another contribution of this study, which in turn is part of a wider unique contribution to welfare and unemployment research this study makes: bringing together Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic power/violence and Foucault’s neoliberal governmentalities.

8.3.3 Contributing to developing debates around unemployment and welfare with an ethnographic perspective

Another contribution of the study can be found in its contribution to existing research around unemployment and welfare. Contemporary researchers such as MacDonald, Shildrick, Furlong, Garthwaite, and Patrick have made substantial progress over the past few years in championing the use of qualitative research in welfare, poverty and unemployment research, and have shown that a focus on the lived experiences of people dealing with these issues offers us a valuable insight into a reality that is different from what politicians and the media tell us about unemployment and poverty. Their collective work on, among other topics, the myth of the ‘welfare scrounger’ and three-generations of worklessness as portrayed in Channel 4’s ‘Benefits Street’ (MacDonald et al., 2014a; Macdonald et al., 2014b; Shildrick et al., 2012a), the low-pay, no-pay cycle (Shildrick et al., 2012b), and the work ethic (Patrick, 2012b), have been a major inspiration and starting point for my research. One key aim of this research project was, therefore, to extend their research of unemployment and welfare, and to continue to expose the ‘myth of the welfare scrounger’ in an attempt to make debates about and decisions concerning welfare reforms and policy better informed. With their
research being based mostly on qualitative interviews, mostly framed in a longitudinal research approach, the data from which this study draws were collected mostly ethnographically to provide yet another perspective to the lived experiences of welfare reforms and unemployment.

I have done so, specifically, by researching a flexible, unstructured work club as a space where unemployment and its accompanying practices and experiences are lived and shared not only with fellow jobseekers, but also work club staff and volunteers. I took on the role as a volunteer which enabled me not only to interact with and observe the jobseekers that visited the work club for a longer period of time, but also to reflect on my own position as a volunteer in this field in which I was supposed to support jobseekers (back) into employment. This long term commitment enabled me to build rapport with clients and staff alike, and led to them inviting me into their everyday conversations and thoughts about what it felt like to be unemployed and looking for work. It allowed me to observe a coming, going and, unfortunately, staying of a variety of people who all had a story to tell, and often did so willingly. This, more than anything, encouraged me to try and find ways to think beyond or even without the stereotype, as argued by Cruikshank (1999).

My long-term presence at Banterby SC work club showed me that there is no such thing as ‘the unemployed’, implying them to form a homogeneous group. Rather, I have found, that they are merely people who are unemployed, which is only one aspect of their lives, which as just as complex as anybody else’s. The clients of Banterby SC work club, as set out in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, all struggled with a variety of problems, but not all were facing the same combination of obstacles. Some, like Ian, found their age was a significant obstacle to turning back into employment, but were quite ICT-literate. Others, like Alfie and Tim, were younger, but found themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place in the digital world of job searching because of their reading and learning disadvantages.

Furthermore, the ethnographic approach allowed me, as a volunteer, to share, to a certain extent, in their experiences, and as said before, to create my own experiences, contributing not only to research on welfare and unemployment, but also to voluntary
sector research, about which I will talk more in 8.3.5. Concerning the former fields of research, unemployment and welfare, it was in the shared feelings of powerlessness and frustration that I discovered the severity of problems and obstacles that jobseekers are facing in the contemporary labour market: obstacles that cannot be overcome simply by providing support and lending an ear to those who need more human interaction in an increasingly digital by default labour market. Before I move to discuss the significant contribution of this thesis that deals with this digital by default labour market, however, in the next section I discuss the study’s contribution to work club research specifically.

8.3.4 Bringing together Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic power/violence and Foucault’s neoliberal governmentalities in welfare and unemployment research: work clubs operating within a moral-instrumental dilemma

Bringing together Bourdieusian theories of symbolic power/violence and Foucault’s neoliberal governmentalities has enabled me to problematise job searching practices that have not yet received the critical attention in academia they deserve. Furthermore, it has allowed me to address and explore to what extent compliance with symbolic power/violence is also shared by staff and volunteers of third sector organisations whose main goal it is to alleviate the burden of unemployment by assisting jobseekers to fulfil their job searching obligations as asked of them by the DWP and JCP. Symbolic power/violence, as described by Bourdieu, is

... the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognised as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety - in short, all the virtues honoured by the code of honour - cannot fail to be seen as the most economical mode of domination, i.e. the mode which best corresponds to the economy of the system (Bourdieu, 1977: 192).

This makes this kind of power a form of domination that is “exercised upon a social agent
with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 167). This kind of power is more often than not monopolised by the State, which through this has “the power to constitute and impose as universally applicable within a given “nation” … a common set of coercive norms” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 112). This, this study has shown, resonates well with Foucault’s neoliberal governmentalities, which are

… at once internal and external to the State, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the State and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the State can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality (Foucault, 1991: 103).

In and through governmental tactics, neoliberal governments seek to “manage and optimise the productivity of its population” (Boland and Griffin, 2015: 33). By bringing together these two theories, where the former problematises the latter to the extent that neoliberal governmentalities, specifically regarding unemployment and job searching practices, can themselves be considered a form of symbolic power/violence.

Thus, within the realm of neoliberal governmentalities regarding job searching, this study has shown that through developing and distributing the ‘problem of unemployment’ as a guide to how citizens should act in the case of losing their income, the State is able to vilify and therefore violate all those who can be shelved under that category. They can be punished for their crime of having to rely on State support, unless they redeem themselves by complying with certain rules and regulations that prescribe a ritualised approach to job searching practices that appear to have no other aim than to support the narratives of the ‘problem of unemployment’ and the ‘solution of work’. This, of course does not mean that the clients of Banterby SC work club did not reject how they are treated or, for example, represented in the media, and will not (try to) defend themselves from harm or rectify misrepresentation (Thompson in: Bourdieu, 1991). This means complicity is being enforced through punitive means utilising digital methods (Cruikshank, 1999; Wacquant, 2009). As discussed in chapters Five and Six, they would often tell me
that the felt they were treated badly, treated like criminals, and that they felt it was unfair that they were expected to deal with the ICT-centred modes of job searching and welfare monitoring. Ultimately, they felt that despite doing everything, or trying to do everything that was asked of them, they were never going to make up for the fact that they were unemployed and receiving State support.

Hence, this study has found that the State, through its neoliberal governmentalities, is violating low-skilled and low-educated unemployed jobseekers in two specific ways. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter Five, the State, represented by the DWP and JCP, does so by continuing to ignore or deny the structural obstacles for people to get (back) into employment, and subsequently continue to promote contemporary digital job searching practices as the key method to getting out of unemployment. The obstacles to finding employment as discussed in this thesis appear to have no effect on how jobseekers are being expected to act and comply. In other words, it seems that it does not matter that there are no jobs available, it does not matter that the majority of Banterby SC work club’s clients does not know how to navigate digital job searching, nor does it matter that Banterby SC work club could not remove the aforementioned obstacles.

Secondly, by imposing on them the aforementioned punitive means utilising digital methods, and thus by moving job searching into the digital realm as well, the DWP and JCP are again ignoring or denying the digital divide and the existence of a ‘digital underclass’ (Helsper, 2011; Helsper and Reisdorf, 2013; Helsper and Reisdorf, 2016), widening an already existing gap in use of ICTs; while the majority of UK households do indeed have at-home access to ICTs and the internet, it is those who do not who find themselves into even more trouble than they already were (Green, 2016). This is another mode of symbolic power/violence imposed on jobseekers, for the State has imposed on its citizens the norm that digital service should be the norm for government interventions and monitoring. Specifically, as argued by Wacquant:

… the end of welfare as we know it has fostered the interweaving of social policy and penal policy at the bottom of the polarising class structure. It has placed public
aid programs under the same punitive ethos of *administrative compulsion* and punitive behaviourism that have traditionally organised criminal justice operations. (Wacquant, 2009: 107)

This, as argued in Chapter Three, also fits well with Foucault’s ideas about surveillance, describing earlier societal changes in eighteenth-century France using observations that still ring true, arguing that a “shift from a criminality of blood to a criminality of fraud” called for “stricter methods of surveillance, a tighter partitioning of the population, more efficient techniques of locating and obtaining information: the shift in illegal practices is correlative with an extension and a refinement of punitive practices” (Foucault, 1977: 77). Three centuries later it seems as if we have found the perfect mode of administrative surveillance, made compulsory under the notion of progress. Former Prime Minister David Cameron has said that the State aims for “Britain [to be] the most connected, the most wired up, the most digitally-advanced country there can be” (Cameron, 2010b), not realising or wanting to see that there are many people who are not and will not be able to personally comply with this ambitious plan (OECD, 2015). Policies and governmentalities like this cause and contribute to forcing already vulnerable people to act outside what they perceive is possible within their own habitus. If the habitus “makes possible the achievements of infinitely diversified tasks” (Bourdieu, 1977: 82-83), it could be argued that it also makes certain tasks impossible or at least significantly more difficult to perform, let alone complete. To recall from Chapter Six, agents who are acting in a dominant habitus “weigh their options in relation to specific problems” (Lakomski, 1984). The only options that jobseekers who are part of Helsper’s (2011) ‘digital underclass’ have, the agency they can claim, in an attempt not to be sanctioned for not managing to apply for enough jobs, is to *forfeit* certain levels of agency. Ultimately, their rights of taking ownership of their own futures are being violated. They are forced to take part in a digitised labour market they do not understand only *by proxy*. I argue that this kind of neoliberal governmentality can be considered *symbolic violence* as a form of power monopolised by the State, which means that, to recall, the State has “the power to constitute and impose as universally applicable within a given “nation” … a common set of coercive norms” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 112). By making digital administration
and surveillance the norm, using the advancement of ICTs that most society has gotten used to, those who cannot keep up, for whatever reason, and no matter how small the group is, are knowingly but silently excluded and disadvantaged even further.

The help of work club staff and volunteers, therefore, is also susceptible to symbolic violence towards both themselves and the jobseeker. As argued by Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend in their study on German Jobcentre staff, those in a position to provide support and advice are “emphasising the obligation of people in need of income support to engage more actively in the process of seeking work and to accept (almost) any job they are offered” (Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend, 2014: 326). They do so not because they believe this is the right thing to do, but because it prevents their clients from encountering more financial hardship. This, however, makes their roles “crucial to the enactment of policies, both through their direct influence on clients and the realisation and legitimation of policies entailed by their sociological action” (Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend, 2014: 340). The same, I found, applied to myself as a volunteer.

Neoliberal governmentalities instruct citizens to support their communities through volunteering. However, as I found, in my position as a volunteer I had no power to alleviate or remove the structural obstacles their clients are facing. This where, as a volunteer, I entered what I have termed the moral-instrumental dilemma, where I had to consider a short-term/long term trade-off between what it wanted to accomplish and what they were actually able to accomplish. The symbolically violent nature of neoliberal governmentalities towards unemployment, then, forced the work club and its clients to choose against their moral beliefs, opting for short term, direct support rather than long term change.

While I was still supporting and trying to alleviate as many of the problems their clients are facing as possible, my main concern was with the immediate obstacles my clients were facing, the short-term problems I could help them solve, rather than with the long-term problems which could only be addressed by addressing structural obstacles. For
example, as Banterby SC work club attracted many people finding it difficult to navigate the digital world of job searching, and we were limited in the amount of time they spent with individual clients, there was no time for me to try and work on a long-term solution. The long-term solution, in this case, would not only be showing people, step-by-step, how they would have to work with computers, but also allow them to build confidence in doing so. Instead, we often had to resort to prioritising our instrumental roles of keeping people from being sanctioned, focusing on the short-term support the work club could offer.

Therefore, they are, like their clients, symbolically forced to comply, and help their clients to comply, with the procedures of which they know they are mostly harming their clients. This is also the basis of the third and final major contribution of this thesis: shared feelings of powerlessness should be explored more when doing voluntary sector research, especially when focusing on organisations that help clients navigate the effects of social policy reforms, in order to evaluate their impact.

8.3.5 Contribution towards more inclusive research methods for voluntary sector research: comparing politically-driven expectations of impact with volunteers’ and beneficiaries’ experiences.

This study has contributed to voluntary sector research by shifting the focus from the volunteer to the beneficiary of voluntary action. As argued in Chapter Two, the majority of voluntary sector research is centred on the volunteer, and explores how the act of volunteering, for the volunteer, can transform lives and society. Although there are some scholars that direct our attention to the importance of the role and experience of the recipient/beneficiary of voluntary action (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1983; Snyder and Omoto, 2008; Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Bornstein, 2009), little research is actually being undertaken into situations where the recipient is acknowledged as an active stakeholder and where the outcomes are related to their well-being. The lack of research into the effects and outcomes of work clubs, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, is a silent witness to this.
This study, then, provides an example of a voluntary sector study that is ethnographic and holistic in nature, helping volunteers and voluntary organisations to speak truth to power in order to improve their services and influence public and social policy. It does so by providing a valuable and contemporary insight into a work club operating in a highly conditional welfare system, focusing on the clients and their obstacles, rather than exploring what work club volunteering could do for the volunteer. Indeed, previous research linking voluntary action to employment and unemployment has focused on how unemployed individuals can benefit from becoming a volunteer themselves to enhance their skills and labour market chances (e.g. Corden and Ellis, 2004; Qureshi et al., 2014). What was missing before was an exploration of unemployed people as beneficiaries of voluntary action, especially if we consider the way in which the Big Society agenda and the DWP, following a neoliberal ideology, promote voluntary action as a way to solve societal problems. Even though for third sector organisations it is of key importance that they learn how to manage and support their staff and volunteers in the best possible way, I feel their shared primary concern should be with bringing to light the impact of policy reforms on their beneficiaries, and by allowing themselves and their staff and volunteers to say that, if this is the case ‘this is not working’, together they can make a tighter case in favour of more inclusive and realistic policy reforms. In other words, I am arguing for voluntary sector organisations to speak up more about the ways in which they fail to address the needs of their beneficiaries, and what they believe the reason for this failure is. By hiding behind the potential benefits for volunteers, rather than to actively address their shortcomings towards their beneficiaries, the image of volunteering as inherently good is easier to uphold.

Considering the above, the methodological contribution of my thesis stands in proposing a new methodological approach to researching the (potential) impact of voluntary action. In a field where the volunteer and their experiences have taken centre stage in exploring the impact of voluntary action, I felt it was time for an approach that would allow the experiences of the volunteer with the work that he or she is doing to be, first and foremost, complementary to the experiences of the volunteer’s beneficiary. In this study of Banterby SC work club, the researcher’s feelings and experiences (as a volunteer) and those of
the staff were considered an amplifier for the experiences of the clients of the work club. The researcher’s experiences were captured in the field notes, separate reflexive writings, as well as in-text analyses in this thesis, making the volunteer experience within this thesis a multi-layered temporal endeavour; the experiences and reflections did not stop upon exiting the field, but were continued throughout the entire development of the thesis. Furthermore, two interviews with work club staff were conducted and transcribed, focusing on their role in relation to the job searching process and the clients’ experiences with job searching. Thus, instead of focusing on how the experiences impacted on the act of volunteering, the development of the volunteer and how these experiences could affect the organisation, for example, these forms of data were analysed in order to see whether or not the experiences of the volunteer aligned with those of the clients, and if so, what such an alignment would say about the significance of these experiences.

Figure 8.1 below provides a visual overview of this methodological approach that helps us not only to problematise Voluntary Sector Organisations (VSO) practices and expectations or to forefront the experiences of jobseekers through sharing empirical data, but more importantly, allows for a critical exploration of the shared feelings of powerlessness in relation to the State’s expectations of and prescribed job searching practices.
Figure 8.1: Venn diagram depicting the methodological framework used for exploring Banterby SC work club. Source: Derived by the author through experience of working in Banterby SC work club.

This model is based on the complex interplay between the constructs introduced in Chapters Two and the empirics collected in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. The outer edge, or box, represents the simplified research topic or focus, in which we can find the work club as a place where this topic can be explored, denoted by the dotted line. This study has identified three key stakeholder groups whose experiences, interests, and expectations play an important role in the work club: the jobseekers, the work club staff/volunteers, and the DWP/JCP (or State). These three key stakeholder groups are depicted by the three Venn diagram circles. Blue for the jobseekers, green for the work club staff/volunteers, and yellow for the DWP/JCP. The diagram focuses on the expectations of the DWP/JCP, whereas it focuses on the experiences of the other two stakeholder groups because no experiences were recorded or collected from the former group.
The expectations and interests of the DWP/JCP intersect with and influence and direct the other two stakeholder groups in a way that they are controlling the process and deciding the rules, which are based on the State’s versions of neoliberalism, the work ethic, the myth of the welfare recipient, responsibility as a core citizenship quality (each mainly directed at the jobseeker group), and its view on the role of the voluntary sector in solving societal problems such as ‘the problem of unemployment’ (directed at the work club stakeholder group). Intersecting with the jobseekers this leads to a relationship of mistrust and frustration as shown in Chapters Five and Six. Intersecting with the work club, Chapter Seven has shown that relationship is based on expectations from the State that do not align with what happens and can happen ‘on the ground’, which in turn also leads to frustration, but is mostly set aside, for the work club’s priority lies with supporting the jobseekers as much as they can. This, ultimately means that the State always wins, for it is their expectations that are leading. The State, thus, is deciding on the doxa, the rules of the game, that serve two main functions: “first, limit the space of inquiry to a manageable level to make decisions, and second, provide legitimacy to social practices” (Ojha et al., 2009: 367). The State, by leaning on and advancing its neoliberal governmentalities, has limited ‘the space of inquiry’ around unemployment and job searching practices ‘to a manageable level’ and by using ‘the problem of unemployment’ and the myth of the stereotypical welfare recipient, legitimacy to social practices and policy favouring those in power are being constructed and supported. Ultimately, combining the observations and separate relations above, this holds, that the central overlap, the intersection of all stakeholder groups and their expectations and experiences, show how this is not working due to the whole relationship being based on symbolic violence, as discussed in the previous section.

This model can be adapted to fit as a model for researching voluntary and third sector organisations working with beneficiaries on policy-related issues:
Figure 8.2: Venn diagram depicting a methodological framework for exploring third sector organisations working on policy-related issues. Source: Derived by the author through experience of working in Banterby SC work club.

This general model as presented in Figure 8.2 is a valuable and significant contribution to the literature because it offers new ways to study the impact of policy reforms and the expectations placed on citizens that come with them. Current studies such as those of Patrick (Patrick, 2012b; Patrick, 2014), MacDonald (MacDonald and Marsh, 2004; MacDonald et al., 2014a), and Shildrick (e.g. Shildrick et al., 2012b) try to break the silence mainly by fore fronting the lived experiences of those who are considered disadvantaged by policy reforms in a certain way, but fail to carefully look at how the experiences of those in the third sector who are trying to help them can support their claims of being violated in whatever way. In other words, third sector staff and volunteer experiences should be used to evaluate more than their development and the development of the organisation itself.
8.4 Limitations, Future Directions and Implications for Policy and Practice

This thesis focused specifically on jobseekers and volunteers who came together in a single work club in South Yorkshire. The use of a single site case study inevitably comes with certain limitations, which warrant the need for further research (Mason, 2002). Indeed, further research could (and should), for example, expand on the current study to include either multiple work clubs in the same geographical area, or work clubs in different geographical areas. They could also include a variety of work club set ups, ranging from highly structured to unstructured, flexible work clubs in order to explore the differences in approach, and subsequently their impact and how clients experience attending them. Such extensions would allow for studies that might help not only with making generalizable statements, but also to explore whether and how certain localities require different approaches to address specific local needs, including the needs of local people and their experiences with the work club’s set-up and structure. I will talk about this in more detail in section 8.4.2.

Still, the findings of the current study, summarised in the sections above, allow for a number of recommendations to be made for future research, as well as some potential policy implications (combined with the recommendations for future research). The findings illustrate that, in order to fully understand how job searching practices and procedures as set up by the State are working out in practice, we need to explore these issues from a holistic perspective. The ethnographic field notes as well as the interviews with staff highlighted significant factors that should be taken into consideration for both policymakers and academics who are committed to advance the debate on fair and inclusive social policy reforms fit for UK society. Below are some recommendations that policymakers may consider in order to improve their knowledge of the impact of their policies, which are then followed by some specific recommendations for future research.

8.4.1 Recommendations for Policymakers

By focusing our attention on organisations such as work clubs that work on the front line,
assisting people who are in one way or another dealing with the effects of worklessness (and poverty indirectly), we can start to get a grasp on the problems they face, such as digital exclusion and the lack of quality jobs available, in trying to adhere to policy regulations set out based on assumptions made away from the field. This thesis has explored some key issues that are and should be key to our understanding of welfare policies, its current reforms and in thinking about any future paths that could and should be taken. For example, it has not only showed how problematic the push for a digital by default welfare system is widening the gap for those who are not IT-literate, but also that the lives and experiences of unemployed individuals are more complex than the one-size-fits-all welfare reforms make them out to be, building their narrative and policies on the scrounger narrative.

Therefore, policymakers should avoid the stereotype of the ‘scrounger’ as this influences the vilifying and bullying of jobseekers through job searching practices and procedures that are doing more harm than good: they enter the harmful low-pay, no-pay cycle because many jobseekers are encouraged and tempted to accept ‘just any job’ in order to prove that they are not this ‘skiver’, nor ‘the stereotypical welfare recipient’. As MacDonald (2013) argues, in order to advance social change, especially in the realm of poverty and worklessness, we need to ‘forget’ some of the key ideas and phrases that are prevalent in this realm, such as ‘cultures of worklessness’ and ‘welfare dependency’. Instead, we should, as he argues, “concentrate on what the issue is, which is a lack of decent opportunities for people. So it’s not just about there not being enough jobs, it’s about the quality of jobs we need to provide for people so that they can move out of poverty on the longer term” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013).

In addition to that, or perhaps subsequently, policymakers should return to real individualised forms of support, rather than trading in stereotypes that leave individuals to fight a narrative ignoring the complexities that should be recognised in a society supporting the rights of the individual. This would mean recognising individual backgrounds and potential disadvantages by not imposing on them a supposedly one-size-fits-all approach of job searching rituals. This study has shown that, if anything, all
clients of Banterby SC work club that I have met were in one way or another willing to return to the job market. Yet, policies and procedures are all devised around the idea that people are playing ‘the system’ and are deliberately failing to find employment. We can only find our way away from the stereotype, as argued by Cruikshank (1999) if we do not treat people as suspects, asking them to defend themselves against the accusation of them belonging to the stereotype, for this is to acknowledge, and perhaps perpetuate, the (possible) existence of this stereotype. Rather, we should forget this stereotype altogether and just look at people and their individual stories and backgrounds if we want to move towards a successful and inclusive society where everyone can contribute and can feel validated, regardless of their employment status. Where people like Ralph and Simon from Chapter Five, who were dealing with suspected Autistic Spectrum Disorders, are allowed to be different and not pushed into practices that devalue and ignore the abilities and passions they do have. Where people like Lisa from Chapter Six, who was afraid about picking up pennies from the street, can stop living in constant fear of being considered a scrounger, constantly needing to prove that they are not part of the scrounger narrative.

Of course, this is difficult to realise in the current situation, with cuts in JCP staff, which means that client-job coach contact is cut back to the absolute minimum, with no time to get to the bottom of individual stories and experiences. This leaves us with a ‘chicken-or-egg’ situation: do we need to remove the stereotype (and if so how) in order for JCP strategies based on a punitive welfare support system to be changed, or do we need to change the current welfare support system to allow for people to realise the stereotype is a myth. Either way, policy makers, I argue, should become actively involved in creating a society that upholds an innocent until proven guilty approach, informing its welfare policies and support networks.

Furthermore, the DWP should review its main online system ‘Universal Jobmatch’, as users across the sample, including staff of Banterby SC work club and myself, have experienced a lot of difficulties navigating this website. Specifically, I recommend that no external links are allowed, meaning that all jobseekers logging onto Universal Jobmatch
will be able to complete their application process without having to leave the website, and by only using the information they provide on this single website. If the DWP is committed to help people back into work, without thinking about the actual availability of work for a moment, the least they could do is make the online process as easily accessible for everyone as possible. By allowing action paths as the one displayed in Chapter Six, Figure 6.1 on page 189 to exist, people feel lost, discouraged and that their commitment to the work ethic is not taken seriously, often saying they were trying the best they could, but that 'Universal Jobmatch' was far from 'Universal' and was working against them instead of with them.

8.4.2 Recommendations for future research

Whilst working on this research project, I have had to keep myself from pursuing many tangents that would either slightly shift my focus and/or would make the study more elaborate. Therefore, I have to make some recommendations for future research:

Given the small scale of this research project, researching various different kinds of work clubs would be the logical next step. There are many local and larger nationally organised initiatives that run work clubs having access to a variety of levels of resources, basing their assistance on a lot of different approaches, ranging from the highly structured Azrin Job Club approach to the more flexible unstructured walk-in work club such as Banterby SC work club that was central to this thesis, and everything in between.

Building on the previous recommendation, attempts could be made to include the voices of the DWP and the JCP in these research projects to give staff, managers and policymakers the opportunity not only to have their say, but also to attempt to bring various stakeholders together more directly, engaging with each other directly instead of reacting to observations and assumptions made from a distance, often by third parties such as myself. Even though I have attempted to contact the JCP and DWP for comments on the descriptions of the clients of Banterby SC work club, no reply was given to my requests for contact. Larger scale, longitudinal projects supported by government research council
funding, could render research on this topic as more attracting for them to collaborate in, and to make sure their voice is heard as well. Crisp (2015), for example, has succeeded in opening doors to including stakeholders from the JCP where this study has failed to do so. Even though for this particular study it was not deemed crucial, some comments from the JCP or DWP on the organisation and experiences of Banterby SC work club could have been useful. If there were to be a larger-scale collaborative research project, exploring the experiences and expectations from the viewpoint of all stakeholders involved in order to, for example, evaluate the role and expectations placed on work clubs, an inclusive and collaborative research plan supported by a larger research council would hopefully encourage participation.

A third recommendation is based on the question as to what extent clients (and staff) were aware of themselves performing the work ethic, and performing job searching practices because they had internalised neoliberal governmentalities and ideologies connected to the work ethic and how we think about unemployment. Many jobseekers at Banterby SC work club clearly said or implied they were proud of their work ethic and did everything to make sure they were not ‘mistaken’ for ‘stereotypical welfare recipients’, adhering to the scrounger narrative shared by politicians and the media, suggesting they had indeed internalised these governmentalities and ideologies. More in-depth and focused interviews, focus groups or diary studies with jobseekers could perhaps explore this question.

A final recommendation would also use a collaborative method, but would be aimed at seeking out potential solutions that would help jobseekers who can considered to be part of the ‘digital underclass’. Meeting with peers at the Tackling Inequalities event, held on the 7th of November 2016 at the University of Leeds, there was a lot of talk about how we can address the inequalities we observe. The motto of the event appeared to be that it is not enough to offer the research and observations, it is also not enough to offer (ideas about) potential solutions. Instead, what we, as social policy academics, should do, is to combine forces with the voluntary sector, campaigners and stakeholders, but also academics from other fields, such as for example Design Schools and Computer and
Information Science, to actively develop these possible solutions combining focus groups, interviews and ethnography. One avenue that I am pursuing at the close of this study is to assemble a group of people who want to develop a digital solution that requires very low levels of digital skills, which can be used by any jobseeker, recruiter and potential employer.

8.6 Final Thoughts

“Digital by default? I am pencil by default!” is one of the quotes from I, Daniel Blake (Loach, 2016) that hit home hardest when watching this critical film by Ken Loach. The film criticises the UK welfare system and tells the story of Daniel Blake. Blake is an Employment Support Allowance recipient who has had a severe heart attack and whose GP and cardiac specialist deem him unfit for work. However, the independent health assessor employed by the DWP deems him fit for work, which prompts his ESA payments to be discontinued, places him on Jobseekers Allowance and catapults him into the world of (digital) job searching in a welfare to work discourse. The quote above was Daniel’s reaction to JCP staff explaining to him how he had to apply for jobs digitally, and that non-digital methods would not be (as) successful. This, as we have seen in Chapter Six, but also throughout the thesis in general, echoes what many of the people of Banterby SC work club felt. In some ways I felt that the film reflected my thesis perfectly, addressing the various problems that jobseekers are facing, including the digital nature of job searching, sanctions, surveillance and the overall assumption that if only jobseekers looked hard enough, the jobs would be there for the taking. In fact, for people who wanted to know what my research was about, I would now say they should watch I, Daniel Blake. Still, the film does nothing to theorise what is happening and how ‘we’ can allow it to happen if ‘clearly’ something is wrong with the welfare system if people like Daniel Blake can exist; it merely shows that things are not working, something that of course very important to start with.

Researching Banterby SC work club has provided both a singular and complex view of how job searching practices are being experienced. Singular because my research
focused on one single organisation, but complex because I explored the experiences of many clients of the work club alongside the experiences of myself as a volunteer and those of the paid members of staff. In a way, I was able to make it this complex because of its singular approach: by focusing my attention and devoting my time to one single organisation I had the unique opportunity of bonding with that organisation and the clients that I would meet throughout my year of field work.

I started writing this thesis as one where I was adamant on focusing solely on the recipients or beneficiaries of community and voluntary action, where I was afraid that incorporating my own views and experiences would take away the focus and lime light from those who I wanted to help bring out their stories to a wider public. However, if anything, as I have re-iterated throughout this thesis in abundance, it was in my interaction with and connection to the clients of ‘my’ work club that I found ways to make my experiences support their claims of feeling violated, rather than to draw away the focus to yet another account of ‘volunteering experience’. My field work encounters have taught me a lot about job searching practices, about volunteering and about unemployment. But mostly, it has taught me a lot about people, which for me is the most important thing to take away from this research project, not just for myself in this learning process called a Ph.D., but also for my (future) audience. As soon as we forget that everything we do, think or envision about social welfare, about social support and about how we can make communities, countries and eventually the world a better place, always comes back to individual experiences, we are losing something valuable. If we forget or ignore the complexities that individual experiences bring to the table, we risk becoming more obsessed with numbers and stories that try to capture ‘the whole’ of something, like Cruikshank’s ‘Welfare Queen’, like Duncan Smith’s ‘scroungers’, and the media’s ‘the unemployed’ as a homogeneous group.

*This is not working* is the main title of this thesis and has, which, I hope by now is clear, a double meaning. *This* is not working, showing what jobseekers feel it is like to be unemployed and obliged to spend many hours a week looking for work. This is *not working*, focusing in on the powerlessness of Banterby SC work club staff and myself as
a volunteer, unable to do anything about the structural problems that would make a real difference in the lives of the work club’s clients. Even though it could be argued that, to some extent, the work club is working because it helps people from being sanctioned, and that it is sometimes helping people into, albeit mostly temporary, jobs, it is still trapped in the moral-instrumental dilemma when it comes to favouring short- or long-term problems to address. The work club is, for reasons outside its abilities, still failing to get people out of long term unemployment and into jobs that pay enough for them to be able to turn their chances around.

When it comes to unemployment, job searching practices and the expectations placed on jobseekers by the State, I feel this thesis has shown that we should work towards a general practice that embraces individuality, diversity and does not violate people on the basis of things that are out of their control, whether these are structural obstacles to unemployment in the area they live in, or that fact that they do not have a sufficient understanding of ICTs. Of course, I know that apart from offering a methodological option for researching community and voluntary organisations that work with people affected by such neoliberal policy reforms, this thesis does not provide us with a well-marked path as to how we can achieve this kind of general practice.

In acknowledging this, I argue that it is crucial that academics and stakeholders (i.e. clients, work club staff and volunteers, DWP/JCP staff and representatives) get together to explore this on a larger scale. We have to look into a variety of UK work clubs, talk to more work club clients, to more work club staff and volunteers, to create an elaborate view of what is happening across the nation, to see how national policies are affecting individual people on all levels, from the local to the national, and, perhaps the global, in order to see what is working and what is not. If we want things to work, we have to rethink the way we look at ‘the problem of unemployment’ and ‘the solution of work’, or perhaps find a way to completely do away with both, especially if more and more manual jobs, for which most of the clients in ‘my’ work club were qualified, are disappearing.
If there is anything that flexible, unstructured work clubs can tell us about everyday unemployment and job searching practices in UK society, it is that there is no such thing as ‘the unemployed’. Therefore, most importantly, perhaps, we should do away with referring to unemployed individuals as ‘the unemployed’, as it implies that this is a homogeneous group of people for which we should and can find ‘the solution’. Instead, we should strive for a ‘real’, non-neoliberal ideal of celebrating individualism, where people can be just that: people.
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Appendix A – DWP ‘Could you run a work club’ flyer

Could you run a Work Club?
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2. Could you run a Work Club?

Could you run a Work Club?

If you are committed to supporting your community and feel that you could play a role in helping local people who are out of work, the answer could be ‘yes’.

If you think you or your organisation have the relevant skills and experience to help people back into work then you could set up a Work Club. Perhaps you have experienced unemployment yourself and recently returned to the local labour market or maybe your organisation has experience of supporting people who have?

Whatever you feel you might be able to contribute, getting involved in a local Work Club offers the perfect opportunity to share your experience and support your community. Pooling local knowledge and resources is a great way to help people into work.

What is a Work Club?

Work Clubs come in all shapes and sizes, but they essentially provide unemployed people with a place to meet, exchange skills, share experiences, find opportunities, make contacts and get support to help them in their return to work. No two Work Clubs will be the same as they should reflect the needs of the members and their community.

Why should I set one up?

You would be helping local people find work and could have a really positive impact on their lives and others by helping your local community to become more prosperous. By giving up as little as a couple of hours a week you could help people work towards financial independence by building their confidence and increasing their chances of getting a job.

Legal information

Work Clubs are private organisations and are responsible for:
• all matters relating to their establishment and running
• any issues or complaints about the Work Club
• ensuring the Work Club complies with legal requirements, such as the Disability Discrimination Act, Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act and the Data Protection Act
• maintaining health and safety standards at any Work Club
• the cost of any checks, such as Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks.
DWP and Jobcentre Plus are not liable for any issues arising from a Work Club.

This document is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have tried to ensure that the information is correct as of December 2010.

It is possible that some of the information is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law.
How do I set up a Work Club?

**Work Clubs should address the needs of unemployed people in the community. These needs will vary from one area to another and you could consider focusing on a specific need, i.e., supporting younger jobseekers, including school leavers and those just starting out. Combining existing expertise within a community could help identify local needs and lead to the development of a successful Work Club.**

Working in partnership with other local groups and organisations could lead to the development of an innovative model for a local Work Club that is able to have a positive impact in the community.

**What do I need to do?**

This document provides some basic advice on some of the steps you might take to establish an effective local Work Club. Working with other groups and organisations in the community you will be able to determine much of the detail to ensure that the Work Club addresses the needs of local people.

Remember these are only suggestions about how a Work Club might be run.

1. **Finding a venue**

A venue that’s free of charge would be ideal. It should be somewhere that doesn’t have too many distractions, such as a public building like a library, community centre or place of worship. Anywhere with a reasonable sized room/area could be suitable.

You might also ask the local council or a local employer to offer the use of a room on their premises to host your meetings. You should stress that Work Clubs are not for profit and aim to provide additional support for local jobseekers, helping them to find work. You might also like to do some research on local employers to identify if any have Corporate Social Responsibility policies or play an active role in supporting the community already. Supporting a local Work Club might well fit with this type of policy and these employers are likely to be the most receptive to approaches for support.

You might want to consider if you will need any IT equipment when sourcing a venue.

2. **Getting started**

- At the start, regular meetings will be important to members and leaders and will help to build rapport and team working. Once the Work Club is established the group could meet less often and make use of email or telephone to keep in touch.

- You might even explore the possibility of setting up an online forum for your Work Club in order to stay in touch.

Co-ordination of the group might involve arranging meetings, promoting the Work Club and keeping things moving. One person in the group could be the co-ordinator or the role could be shared or rotated. For example, a local employer might run a meeting of the Work Club on their premises and would take the lead that particular week.
How do I set up a Work Club?

Preparing a programme of activity

Each Work Club will operate in a distinct way according to the needs of the community it supports. Working with local partners and participants will enable you to capitalise on local knowledge and resources when developing a Work Club that meets the needs of the members and the local labour market.

These are just a few ideas on how you might want to run Work Club session but remember it is the needs of the participants and the local community that should drive how they are run.

- The club should meet to enable members to share each other’s job-hunting and career experiences, and to encourage each other in their job search. Meetings could be structured as follows:

  **Beginning:** members spend a few minutes sharing the results and achievements of the previous week’s job hunting.

  **Middle:** members ask for support from each other in specific areas, which could result in a themed session (e.g. interview skills, CV writing, dress for success, etc.).

  **End:** members each set a goal to be achieved by the next meeting (e.g. add ten contacts to their network list, rewrite CV, do two mock interviews, research three new potential employers).

This is just one example of a possible meeting structure. Individual Work Clubs will develop their own structures that may change over time to reflect the needs of the participants and the wider community.

There are a wide range of events and activities that you may wish to incorporate into your Work Club. Here are a number of ideas that you might want to consider:

- **Jobs Fair**
  - **Aim:** This is a good way to drive local awareness of the Work Club, bring together all of those involved in supporting the Work Club and attract a good number of participants. A range of local organisations including Jobcentre Plus, Further Education establishments, voluntary sector groups and employers amongst others could all be represented. This would provide participants with a range of support and opportunities and the chance to engage with these groups in a relaxed atmosphere. This could prove a useful exercise to gauge the level of support for the Work Club amongst local groups and organisations who may wish to get involved. It could also encourage them to take the lead in the delivery of the Work Club in future or take the lead in delivering sector specific or themed/focused sessions.

- **Job Journey Planning**
  - **Aim:** A workshop to help people plan and really think through their journey back into work. Members set out a specific goal or focus for their job search to the rest of the group and talk about the kind of job they want. They talk to one another to help them analyse their own skills, abilities and interests and then plan how they will gather knowledge of the employers they want to approach.

  **Optional:** It might be worth approaching a local voluntary organisation with experience in supporting those out of the labour market to help facilitate this session.
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- **Interview Skills and Mock Interviews**
  
  **Aim:** To improve soft skills (e.g., presentation and communication). This could include tips on question preparation, displaying a confident attitude, handling difficult questions and presenting yourself positively. Honest but positive feedback is an essential part of the mock interview process. The group could evaluate responses together and try to come up with better ones.

  **Optional:** Local employers have expertise in this area, regularly interviewing candidates for local jobs. It might be worth asking if they might be able to share this expertise with the Work Club. Employers will have a clear idea of what they are looking for in a successful candidate at interview, this insight could prove invaluable to those seeking work and help to build their confidence in an interview situation.

- **CV Workshop**
  
  **Aim:** To provide advice and guidance on the main principles involved in preparing a strong covering letter and CV. Advice could also be offered on filling in application forms. This could be offered to the whole group or as one-to-one help.

  **Optional:** Engage with local employers or voluntary organisations who might be able to help deliver this type of support.

- **IT Skills workshop**
  
  **Aim:** To provide IT and job search skills. We live in an increasingly digital age and basic IT skills can be vital tools in helping people back into the labour market. From setting up an email account to learning how to apply for jobs online, many participants could benefit from this type of support.

  Many jobs are now only advertised online and some companies only recruit using online systems.

  **Optional:** Building on a CV workshop, support in producing a word processed CV and covering letter which could be attached to online applications might prove useful for jobseekers. Searching for job opportunities online is quick and effective; this workshop could also focus on providing participants with the skills they require to use online jobsearch tools.

- **Career Talks**
  
  **Aim:** To offer an opportunity to hear first hand from guest speakers about what it is like working in various fields. This will help to improve confidence levels and encourage goal setting and could be delivered by anyone who is currently in work. An employer could provide an insight into a particular sector whilst jobseekers might be able to identify with someone who has recently secured employment and can share their experience of returning to the labour market. This might also be a good opportunity to seek advice on salary negotiation, CVs, covering letters, interview techniques and company research.

- **Volunteering Opportunities**
  
  **Aim:** To make people aware of the potential benefits of gaining experience through volunteering, which often provides opportunities to develop basic skills and can help strengthen a CV.

  **Optional:** Local voluntary organisations might welcome the opportunity to showcase their work to the Work Club and to demonstrate the potential benefits of volunteering. You might also like to signpost volunteers to opportunities offered through Jobcentre Plus.
How do I set up a Work Club?

**Dress for Success**

Aim: This represents an opportunity for a more light-hearted session to highlight how what you wear can improve confidence and job prospects. There could be a focus on selecting and sharing ideas on interview attire.

Other suggested Work Club activities include:

- Members could bring in their CVs, both in order to evaluate each others and so they can be exchanged and distributed when opportunities arise.

- Ask each member to research an aspect of job-hunting and share the best ideas with the group.

- Members could explain which career websites they have found useful and why to the group.

- The members could test their knowledge of job hunting techniques by taking online tests for jobseekers.

- There is a wealth of information available on the internet which could be used to support any of the activities outlined above or indeed any others that might be offered to participants. When preparing sessions it might be worthwhile having a look for fresh ideas, expert advice and general guidance.

- Developing Work Clubs specifically for 16 to 24 year olds to focus on the particular issues that young jobseekers face, especially by those with little or no work experience. This might involve supporting young people to make choices to move into apprenticeships or to take up work with training or work experience.

**Getting help from other organisations and volunteers**

- Fostering links with other organisations, for example the local Citizens Advice Bureau, Chamber of Commerce or other representative groups, could enhance the Work Club offer. You could contact the managers of local organisations to see whether they could be interested in getting involved with the Work Club. You may find that they are very supportive of any social action initiative aimed at getting people back into work.

- Any local people you know with professional or business experience could prove very helpful in setting up the Work Club or by being guest speakers or helping with mock interviews, CV tips and other session themes.

- Local businesses may be keen to support the Work Club by either providing speakers, meeting room space or, if appropriate, company tours. They could provide a valuable insight into the world of work in their sector.

- Other Work Clubs might also be useful sources of information and may well be able to help you in developing one. Sharing best practice will contribute to the development of a strong network of Work Clubs.
5 Preparing a local marketing plan

Alongside this guide there are some templates that might be helpful for promoting the Work Club.

- A positive solution to local unemployment is likely to be very newsworthy. You could talk to a journalist on your local paper, including the free ones, about what you are trying to achieve and give them plenty of advance notice when you are launching a Work Club. It could be worthwhile suggesting that they run the story the same day they carry job vacancy adverts.

- You might want to use the press release template (that we’ve supplied), and think as widely as possible about where you could send it. Local papers, including the free ones, are a good place to start.

- Target local message boards and websites as they could be a good place to post information about your Work Club for free, as are message boards in local shops and supermarkets.

- You could think about where people who are out of work might go and consider trying to get your publicity materials into those places. Local businesses, libraries, shops and takeaways will often let you put up posters for free if you’re running a community venture.

6 Sourcing members through other networks

Losing a job can make even the most confident person feel vulnerable. Joining a Work Club may not be an easy thing for many people to do. Encouraging people through personal and business networks is one of the most effective ways of initially attracting participants.

Jobcentre Plus will also make people who they think could benefit aware of Work Clubs in their area so it will be worthwhile keeping in touch with them about the details such as the venue and times. Even if the Work Club starts with only a few people it could grow steadily through word of mouth and sustained local marketing. Building links with Jobcentre Plus, the Citizens Advice Bureau, and other local organisations could provide a steady stream of Work Club members.

The services offered by local Work Clubs should reflect the demand in the community for this type of support. Work Clubs are intended to provide additional support to that already offered through Jobcentre Plus and other agencies and organisations. The aim is to support the community and meet its needs and these may change over time.

7 Sustaining the Work Club

Once the members of your Work Club have connected, leadership could come from within the group. Natural leaders may shine through and leadership can be passed on when members leave to start new jobs. The role of the organiser might be to maintain momentum and raise continued awareness of the Work Club in order to keep attracting new members.
Where to get more help

If you are interested in setting up a Work Club in your area or feel you could contribute to the development of one and would like further information then please get in touch:

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Appendix B – Informed Consent Form Interviews

This is Not Working
Informed Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Taking Part
- I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
- I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project may include being interviewed and audio recorded.
- I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.
- I understand that once a document using my data has been published I cannot withdraw my statements and participation regarding said documents (withdrawal from any future publications will still be possible).

Use of the information I provide for this project only
- I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project.
- I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.
- I would like any photos or images of me used in publications, reports, web pages, or other research outputs to be anonymized.

Please choose one of the following two options:
- I would like my real name used in the above.
- I would not like my real name to be used in the above.

So we can use the information you provide legally
- I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to Gaby Wolferink, Doctoral Researcher within Loughborough University’s School of Business and Economics.

________________________  ____________________  __________
Name of participant  [printed]  Signature  Date

________________________  ____________________  __________
Researcher  [printed]  Signature  Date

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