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# Exploring participation and non-participation in the 2010/11 student protests against fees and cuts

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**February 2014**

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Part of the data from this research has been previously published in the following article:

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# Exploring participation and non-participation in the 2010/11 student protests against fees and cuts


## Thesis abstract

This research project uses the 2010/11 student protests in the UK as a case study to understand why certain individuals mobilise for forms of political participation and activism and why others do not. The student protests are ideal as a case study of participation and non-participation for a number of reasons. The UK Government's proposal to treble the cap tuition fees for students in England represented an issue of widespread grievance for the student population, a grievance which was compounded for many by the Liberal Democrats' decision to u-turn on its 2010 election campaign pledge. The student response featured large-scale regional and national demonstrations, as well as the formation of a network of simultaneous campus occupations across the UK, arguably presenting a greater scale and diversity of protest than had been seen for a generation. Despite these multiple participatory opportunities, however, student participation did not come close to matching the scale of opposition to trebled fees and university funding cuts as articulated in surveys. This raises fundamental questions about the social and political differences between participants and non-participants.

Using original survey data of students from 22 UK universities, and 56 in-depth interviews with students from 6 universities, this research examines social and political patterns and relations between high, medium and low-cost/risk participants, and non-participants. Taking into account the idea of the university campus as a network of actors, the research posits that networks may *preclude* as well as facilitate participation. The research studies in detail the formation and maintenance of student activism networks – including their collective identifications and dis-identifications. Conversely, the study also looks at the social networks of non-participants, and how these may help to socially produce and sustain non-participation at an agency level. Finally, the research considers whether the protests against fees and cuts should be seen as a unified *movement*, and whether student attitudes taken together reveal a broadly-identifiable 'participatory ideal'.

## Acknowledgments

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

## 1. Introduction: Millbank tendency

On 9 November 2011, approximately 6,000 students from around the UK marched through London to protest the marketisation of higher education. University funding had been a key student campaigning issue for more than a decade, but this was no ordinary demonstration. The Metropolitan Police deployed 4,000 officers for the event, having announced in the days beforehand that they would be prepared to use rubber bullets, baton rounds and water-cannons on students, a threat which had the blessing of Prime Minister David Cameron (*Daily Mail*, 8 November 2011). As a participant on the march conducting fieldwork[1], I observed on the morning of the march police distributing flyers at tube stations warning marchers to avoid 'outbreak[s] of violence and disorder' as being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time might lead to arrest and a criminal record that 'could seriously affect your future employment or educational opportunities'. As the march progressed through central London, every side-street was closed, barricaded and patrolled by police officers, as snatch squads dressed in 'Black Bloc' attire intermingled with marchers. In a march lasting more than four hours, demonstrators were effectively encircled by a police line for its entire duration.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I recall in my field-notes that these conditions contributed to a tense and paranoid atmosphere. As the march crossed Holborn Viaduct into the city's financial district – a pointed gesture in its own right – office workers from the overhead buildings peered from their windows at the marchers below – some cheered, one or two flicked v-signs, but most just stared or took photos on their smartphones, prompting one student marcher to ask: 'why are they watching us, why don't they join us?' Students kept up spirits by singing and chanting, even if their repertoire started to shift away from the familiar campaign slogan 'No Ifs! No Buts! No Education Cuts!' to commentaries on the march itself – a group of female undergraduates chanted at police officers 'you're sexy! You're cute! Take off your riot suit!', whereas others sang (to the tune of 'She'll be Coming Round the Mountain') 'you can shove your rubber bullets up your arse'.

[1] This fieldwork was part of my 'background ethnography' in preparation for interviews with student activists (see chapter three, 'reflexivity').

Meanwhile, on the event's Facebook page and Twitter hashtag (#nov9) students and activists were monitoring the demonstration and its media coverage: some blamed the police for being too aggressive, others criticised the marchers for being too timid, stressing the need for direct action to attract more press attention. On the ground, however, opportunities seemed limited: with each passing barricade, tension built between marchers and police, boiling over on some occasions into direct confrontations as marchers were arrested (videos of which were soon posted on YouTube). An attempt to set up a tent occupation of Trafalgar Square was quickly quashed. By the time the march reached London Wall, a police dispersal order saw marchers being tightly encircled by a police line (a tactic known as 'kettling') with small numbers being allowed to filter out at set intervals. By 5pm, the march was over. Among demonstrators the general feeling was that the protest had been effectively snuffed out – aside from the left-leaning *Guardian*, there was very little coverage in the national press. In the now-opened side-streets, student representatives took roll-calls of names before boarding their minibuses back home.

Despite the limitations imposed by police, some students had found ways of making the march worthwhile. Among students interviewed for this research, Yvonne, a first-year undergraduate at the University of Warwick, admitted that she had also been partly attracted by a union-subsidised day out in London. Ronnie, a Warwick postgraduate and experienced activist, recalled enjoying the march because it was ultimately 'a day out with people who I get on with quite well'. For many student activists, however, 9th November was recalled with much negativity, the march described variously by other interviewees as 'unpleasant' (Peter, Edinburgh), 'really bad' (Marianne, Cambridge), 'disempowering' (Brett, UCL) and 'the worst demo ever' (Rhiannon, Edinburgh). Angie, a second-year undergraduate at Cambridge recalled that she and her friends attended out of a 'sense of duty', convinced that they would all get kettled. Clearly, the police tactics were designed to stifle what might be considered more confrontational or spontaneous actions. For John, an Edinburgh student, there was no question as to why this was the case: 'it was because of Millbank. No-one was pretending it wasn't. They didn't want it to happen again'.

'Millbank' was on a lot of people's minds. Almost exactly a year previously, the National Student Union's (NUS) march against Government plans to enact mass-cuts to higher education and treble the cap on tuition fees for students in England had attracted 52,000 students, with over one hundred universities represented. The demonstration climaxed with a small group of students breaking off from the main march to attack the Conservative Party's campaign headquarters at 30 Millbank. With some of the crowd diverging from the main

march route, the building's front windows were smashed and approximately 200 protesters entered inside and hung banners from its roof. This was followed by clashes between protesters and police, culminating in injuries to 14 people – including police and activists – and the arrest of around 50 protesters (*Guardian*, 10 November 2010). Millbank – as the event came to be known – was significant for giving the student cause a large amount of public interest and kick-started a series of student protests across the UK unseen in scale and scope since the 1960s. Students were on the front pages, with the press devoting column inches to a new radical youth generation responsible for leading the fight against the coalition Government's nascent austerity agenda.

Government proposals to treble the fees cap passed – albeit with a much-reduced parliamentary majority – in December 2010. Despite this defeat, many student activists felt energised by the upsurge in mobilisation and public attention garnered by the protests and sought to take the fight into 2011. They were also concerned with the content of the Government's recently-published White Paper which proposed further steps towards marketising higher education. By November 2011, with the adjacent Occupy Movement in full swing and a UK public sector strike looming, the student demonstration should have been the perfect opportunity for students to resume their fight.

As it turned out, plenty of students stayed at home – indeed, many seemed unaware that the demonstration was even taking place. Several of those who *did* attend felt that the police had sought to scare students off by issuing threats and emotional blackmail amounting to the effective criminalisation of protest. Others claimed that the demonstration had lacked a clear political objective: compared to the previous year when the fees bill had yet to be voted on by Parliament, the 2011 demonstration's focus on opposing the White Paper appeared more esoteric. Ideological fault-lines between activists also seemed more manifest than the previous year, with students unsure over whether they should be campaigning for 'free' or 'affordable' education. In the end, the strongest uniting factor was, as Ronnie put it, to 'remind people that we hadn't forgotten about last year'. The demonstration's organisers – independent activist network NCAFC – understandably defended the event, but blamed low participation on the lack of leadership from the NUS. Without its backing, finances, and air of legitimacy, activists struggled to convince union committees to arrange travel expenses to London, and mindful of the risks presented by Millbank the previous year, many unions chose to ignore the event.

Of course, non-participation has always been a feature of social movements and the student protests of 2010/11 were no different. Nor should 'participants' be taken as a homogenous

category: after all, the vast majority of students on the NUS demonstration did not occupy Millbank, and the vast majority of students did not attend the NUS demonstration, well-attended though it was. Moreover, most students did not take part in *any* form of activism in the protests against fees and cuts. The point here is not to belittle the movement's efforts in mobilising people: rather, it is to draw attention to the movement's research potential. First, those who took part in the protests participated in different ways, from signing petitions and 'liking' Facebook pages to shutting down public meetings and occupying university buildings. Second, one cannot assume those who did not participate were not engaged in the fees and cuts issue: Opinion Panel (2010) surveyed students shortly after the fees announcement and found that 81 per cent opposed the increase. In sum, the student protests make for an ideal opportunity to study the relationship between participation *and* non-participation: why did participants participate in the way that they did, and why did so many supportive non-participants not participate at all?

## 2. Studying participation/non-participation

Participation and non-participation has long been a subject of theory and research in political science, sociology and social movement studies. On the one hand, studies of participation have often reflected normative and ethical interests, where research has been conducted with the basic goal of finding ways to improve state-citizen dialogue and broaden democracy to hard-to-reach areas of society. On the other hand, researchers have also sought to broaden how we *define* participation, with studies of protest campaigns and activist movements demonstrating how individuals sometimes express their dissatisfaction towards the participatory *system* as much as its decision-makers.

Large-scale quantitative studies of participation conducted by Parry et al, (1992); Jordan and Maloney (1997); Pattie et al, (2004), as well as the Hansard Society's annual Audit of Political Engagement (2004-13) have all shown that participation can be measured longitudinally. Results tend to claim that only around 10-15 per cent of the UK population can be considered 'politically active', and that traditional indicators of participation such as civic and party memberships are found to be in terminal decline (Hansard, 2010; see also Norris, 2002). This has led to non-participation being depicted through basic quantitative ideal-types, ranging from the 'alienated/hostile' (Hansard, 2010) who are mostly disconnected from the political process, to the 'concerned, unmobilised' (Jordan and Maloney, 2007), whose political engagement and concern goes unconverted due to a lack of confidence in the efficacy of available participatory repertoires.

It is also found in research of this kind that young people are overrepresented in the non-participant category, with 18-24 year-olds frequently found to be the least active age group and displaying relatively little interest in politics. This has been challenged by researchers who contend that young people are politically engaged and active in more ‘cause-oriented’ ways that are not so easily captured in mass surveys (Bang, 2004; Marsh et al, 2007). Arguments have also been made to suggest that young people have had little encouragement to get involved as their interests have been mostly ignored in electoral politics for many years (Henn et al, 2002; Cunningham and Lavalette, 2004; Hay, 2007; Henn and Foard, 2012).

Sociological approaches to political participation have generally taken a more qualitative approach, seeking in particular to explore the interactions, cultures and identities associated with parties, social movements and civic associations. Studies have variously focused on how participation is shaped by family background and schooling (Coles, 1986; Braungart and Braungart, 1990), social networks and microstructures (McAdam, 1986; Crossley, 2008), the conversion of emotional engagement and righteous anger (Gamson, 1992; Jasper, 1997) and social and political identifications actors might have with a particular issue or cause (Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1988). To some extent, the same tools have been used to explain non-participation, with studies drawing attention to how people collectively manage negative emotions of powerlessness (Norgaard, 2006), how their lack of access to political deliberation networks results in the non-conversion of initial engagement into action (Oegema and Klandermans, 1994), and how certain actors dis-identify with the idea and image of political participation (Eliasoph, 1998).

Furthermore, of growing interest is the impact of web technologies and online social interaction, particularly the user-oriented ‘Web 2.0’ (Hands, 2011). Web technologies have transformed the way individuals interact with one another and access information (Castells, 2009), making it easier for politically-minded individuals to access the means necessary not only to become more politically engaged and knowledgeable, but also the tools to organise and promote new campaigns (Nah et al. 2006; Wall, 2007). The online world has also helped facilitate mobilising large numbers of people into taking small-scale individual actions via e-petitions, Facebook groups and campaign slogan avatars (see Patel, 2007). The question as to whether this mass-reach and flow of information and action is generating a ‘civic surplus’ of enhanced political participation (Shirky, 2010) or a generation of complacent ‘slacktivists’ (Morozov, 2011) is an ongoing debate in academia and the media more generally.

Issues of youth engagement, mobilisation, and new technologies are all important reasons for studying campus activism. Of course, students are not exactly a typical subsection of young people (nor are all students necessarily 'young'), and campus activism has its own long tradition in the UK and beyond (Boren, 2001; Hoefferle, 2013). As Crossley (2008) notes, this owes to the unique social and spatial resources provided by the university campus via its union, societies and dense networks. Moreover, Binder and Wood (2012) note how the university campus – combined with more general life-cycle effects – can play a significant role in shaping young peoples' political interests, activities and sense of identity.

## 3. The fees and cuts protests as a case study

Researching the 2010/11 student protests against fees and cuts will further our knowledge and understanding of each of the themes discussed in the previous section. Doing this requires a basic framework for conceptualising and discussing the protests as a case study. A good place to start is to consider the protests as the product of a collective action frame (Snow et al, 1986; Gamson, 1992; Tarrow, 1992; Klandermans, 1997). Although its application varies across social movement studies, a collective action frame can be broadly defined as 'a set of action-oriented beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns' (Gamson, 1992: 7). This considers how movements develop from the perspective of its *organisers*, who 'punctuate or single out some existing social condition or aspect of life and define it as unjust, intolerable, and deserving of corrective action' (Snow and Benford, 1992: 137). According to Gamson, there are three key components of collective action frames: feelings of injustice, a construction of identity, and the emergence of agency. These three components shall be used to unpack the case study as a subject for research.

### *Higher education funding and injustice*

According to Klandermans (1997: 38), feelings of injustice usually relate to the way authorities treat a social problem. Injustice has to become objectified in the sense that groups and individuals frame their feelings around the legitimacy of systems or authorities judged to be responsible for the way things are. This is because injustice may often go unnoticed if it develops slowly and affected individuals are given little opportunity to reflect upon their position. Consequently, a collective sense of injustice is more likely to develop from *suddenly imposed* grievances, or when they sense that their *moral* principles have been violated (Ibid). The former have an arbitrariness which invites a critical comparison of its perceivable 'before' and 'after' effects, whereas the latter describes the dissonance between actors' personal values and a change in their treatment in a broader social context.

The principal issue of injustice for this case study – higher education funding in England[2] – has taken the form of a 'long revolution' (to use McGettigan's (2013: 10) application of Raymond Williams's famous term) transforming in 15 years from a system of universal free education to a cap of £9,000 annual tuition fees for students. Policy changes during this period can be divided into three distinct phases. Until 1998, university education was funded by a 'block grant' from government, with students granted maintenance costs during study. In the 1980s and 1990s, this funding block was slowly reduced by successive governments whilst at the same time university participation doubled (Collini, 2012: 105). In 1997, the Conservative Government-commissioned Dearing Report recommended the introduction of means-tested tuition fees to help universities cover their increasing costs. The newly-elected Labour Government took this even further, introducing in 1998 up-front tuition fees of a maximum £1,000 per year, and replacing maintenance grants with government loans to be repaid as a percentage of income following graduation. These reforms chimed with Labour's desire to see 50 per cent of young adults going into higher education in the next century, but critics such as Barr and Crawford (1998: 81) voiced concerns that introducing fees and saddling students with long-term debt would put off students from poorer backgrounds.

The second policy phase began in 2003, when the Labour Government announced plans to introduce 'variable fees' with a maximum figure of £3,000 per year (indexed to inflation). Unlike before, fees would now be paid after graduation via an expansion of the student loans repayment scheme, with repayment deferred until graduates' annual income exceeded £15,000. Whilst these proposals brought extra income to universities, this again came from students rather than the state. Admittedly, students no longer had to pay fees upfront and outstanding payments were to be written off after 25 years, but the increase nevertheless represented a controversial policy u-turn on Labour's 2001 election manifesto. The bill passed by a majority of only seven MPs in 2004 and the new system was introduced in the 2006/7 academic year. Despite the promise of variable fees with universities encouraged to

[2] Although the case study's principle grievance concerns higher education funding in England, the field of study concerns the UK as a whole. This is because campus protests in 2010/11 extended to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since state devolution, higher education reforms have applied differently to the rest of the UK: unaffected by the 2010 reforms, students from Northern Ireland continued to pay annual fees of around £3,500 and Scottish students remained exempt from paying fees altogether (although Scottish universities charge its students from the rest of the UK their own tuition rates). Since the Welsh Assembly holds only secondary legislative powers, universities in Wales were subjected to a 12 per cent cut in government funding, but the Assembly agreed to subsidise the fees increase so that its students studying in the UK would not have to pay any higher amount from 2012/13.

‘compete on price’, all universities almost immediately elected to charge the maximum fee (Collini, 2012: 106).

Built into the 2004 legislation was the instruction that the £3,000 fee cap would be independently reviewed after three years. This paved the way to the third policy phase, upon which the 2010/11 student protests were primarily focused. In 2009, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (a telling departmental shift) announced plans to develop a more ‘entrepreneurial’ higher education sector that was less dependent on public funding, especially in the wake of the global financial crisis and the UK’s growing structural deficit. This led to the commissioning of the Browne Review, which was tasked with designing a sustainable system of financing higher education whilst continuing to meet demand for undergraduate education (McGettigan, 2013: 20). Its final report was published in October 2010 and recommended the abolition of the cap on tuition fees, allowing universities to set their own costs (subject to a progressive levy issued by government). Repayments were pushed back to once graduates were earning over £21,000 per year. In addition, it argued for the removal of direct public funding for arts, humanities and social science degrees.

Much of the thinking behind the Browne Review centred on a desire to ‘put students at the heart of the system’ (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2011) by repositioning them as ‘consumers’ of higher education. It was argued that linking university funding more directly to university ‘performance’ would drive up standards as universities would work harder to ensure that their courses offered strong employment returns and value for money. The newly-elected Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Government accepted the recommendations to abolish direct funding for non-STEM subjects and alter the terms for graduate fee repayment, but it rejected the levy system in favour of increasing the current cap on fees to a maximum £9,000 per year for undergraduates commencing study in 2012/13. Furthermore, by using the existing architecture of the 2004 legislation the government was able to quickly secure a parliamentary vote on the bill. This again passed with a marginal majority, this time by 21 votes.

It was later discovered that research commissioned for the Browne Review (but excluded from the final report) found that most students and parents believed government should pay at least half the cost of higher education because ‘the personal benefits were seen by many to match the benefits of society’ (THES, quoted in McGettigan, 2013: 21). As it turned out, government funding cuts amounted to £3 billion (Collini, 2012: 106), with the University and College Union (UCU) predicting that universities with a strong humanities profile could lose as much as 96 per cent of their current teaching budget (*Guardian*, 20 October 2010).

These reforms were not necessarily unforeseen – after all, the Browne Review had been commissioned in 2009 – but shock was felt in the speed which legislation was passed: as McGettigan (2013: 21) observes, by using secondary legislation from the 2004 bill, the Government was able to hold a 'snap vote' in Parliament without publishing a White Paper beforehand. This gave little time for the vagaries of the proposals to be teased out and debated in public. Consequently, McGettigan argues that the bill went through with activists unsure about 'just what had been won and lost' (Ibid).

As an overall issue of *grievance*, the 2010 reforms represented for many people a violation of their moral principles. This related to the role and responsibility of the state as funders of higher education, with NUS President Aaron Porter arguing that its reforms amounted to the state 'effectively pulling out of Higher Education altogether' (NUS, 2010b). This centred especially on the notion of *fairness*, with critics pointing to contrasts in the entitlements of individual policymakers, who during their time at university had received their higher education for free, whereas English graduates from 2015 onwards would be incur debts of up to £27,000 from fees alone (plus maintenance repayments and interest). Moreover, higher education campaigners once again feared that long-term student debt would put people from poorer backgrounds off choosing seemingly-devalued degrees in the arts, humanities and social sciences, or even studying at university altogether.

***Creating identity: students, first-time voters, and the 'jilted generation'***

To convert these grievances into a collective action frame, it is necessary for some sense of *identity* to develop among its affected population. Identity is a much-contested concept in social movement studies, though for collective action frames it need only refer to the transformation of grievances into a collective sense of 'them' and 'us' (Klandermans, 1997: 41). On the one hand, students already possess the foundations of a collective identity by virtue of their shared social and economic status as students, and their political representation via the NUS. On the other hand, as an interest group the student population is hamstrung by its constant turnover of student cohorts, making it harder for students to mount consistent mass campaigns. Moreover, governments invariably post-date higher education reform to take effect *after* current students have graduated, arguably placing limitations on the ability to build a mass movement of students who personally feel 'disadvantaged, threatened, ignored or badly treated' (Klandermans, 1997: 18) by higher fees and cuts.

Of course, large numbers of students *did* protest in 2010/11. Ibrahim (2011: 415-6) argues that this is because a sufficient number of students considered the Government reforms

‘morally out of alignment with what is fair’. As students, many would have felt well-placed to judge whether £9,000 represented an acceptable amount to charge, as well as debate questions of ‘value’ in higher education more generally. Whilst this clearly falls under Gamson’s definition of a ‘moral grievance’, it is more questionable whether they can also be considered a ‘suddenly-imposed grievance’ since students’ *own* education costs were not directly affected. However, it can be argued that many students in 2010 were motivated into protesting because of a separate-but-related ‘suddenly-imposed grievance’ of their own. As junior coalition partners co-responsible for translating the Browne Review’s recommendations into policy, Nick Clegg’s Liberal Democrats found themselves in an invidious position of their own making: in the run-up to the 2010 general election the party had taken the bold step of publically opposing any increase in university tuition fees, and even pledging in their manifesto to abolish fees altogether if elected to government (Sanderson-Nash, 2011).

Tuition fees have for many years been a key political concern for young people (Henn and Foard, 2012) and for the 2010 election the Liberal Democrats took a free education position. This had the added advantage of helping build a strong electoral base for the party among first-time voters (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012; Sanderson-Nash, 2011). For its campaigning, the party’s election broadcasts drew attention to Labour’s ‘broken promises’ over tuition fee increases, and Clegg made regular visits to university campuses to generate support. Along with 400 Liberal Democrat candidates, Clegg also signed the NUS’s pledge to vote against any rise in tuition fees in the next Parliament (NUS, 2010a). When the 2010 election result produced no majority victory, the formation of a coalition Government between the Liberal Democrats and David Cameron’s Conservatives suddenly placed the Liberal Democrats’ tuition fees pledge in a new light. Clegg’s decision to reverse his party’s original policy on fees consequently represented a suddenly-imposed grievance for the first-time voters who had only recently been swayed by the party’s youth-friendly electoral campaign. For the NUS and higher education campaign groups, students’ sense of anger and betrayal became a resource for mobilisation, evidenced in the number of protests taking place outside Liberal Democrat party offices in autumn 2010 and activists’ subversion of the party’s ‘broken promises’ electoral rhetoric in their campaigns (see Channel 4, 2010).

If higher fees and cuts appealed to many students’ sense of ’moral economy’ (Ibrahim, 2011) and the Liberal Democrats’ policy u-turn their sense of betrayal, it also proved easy to find connections between the two. A key part of the government’s rhetoric surrounding education reforms was the necessity of widespread public sector cuts to help reduce the state’s

structural deficit following the global financial crisis. For many students, it was hard not to feel that the Government's austerity programme was making them pay for a crisis that they had not caused. Moreover, the fact that higher education fees and cuts would predominantly affect young people lent credibility to the construction of 'them' and 'us' in *generational* terms. For Howker and Malik (2010), this fitted into a broader narrative in which the 'baby boomers' benefitted from the post-war expansion of the welfare state, whereas the 'jilted generation' of young people born after 1979 have been left with escalating welfare costs, a housing shortage and high unemployment. Together with a university system now considered one of the most expensive in the world, Mason (2012) argued that the graduates of 2012 were unique for being the first in the post-war era to expect to grow up poorer than their parents.

***Protest and making history: the possibility of agency***

It should be clear from the previous section that students drew on a number of grievances to assist constructions of a collective sense of 'us' (as students; Liberal Democrat voters; young people; left-wingers) in opposition to 'them' (the Liberal Democrats; the political establishment; the baby-boomers; neoliberals), even if the extent to which this could be aggregated into a single pan-student 'collective identity' is open to debate. Mason's (2011b) characterisation of the London demonstrators as a 'dubstep rebellion' carried clear generational properties, as did Penny's (2011) depiction of students as the 'generation that was sold out'. Others, however, saw this as a media-friendly narrative that ignored the fact that not only had austerity politics transcended generational divides, but they also affected students in different ways: Gilbert (Gilbert and Aitchison, 2012), for instance, argued that activists' focus on fees reflected a loss of 'middle-class privilege' that did not resonate with poorer students already faced with a reality of long-term debt repayment.

What is undeniable, however, is that collective grievance was converted into collective action, as between 2010 and 2011 students protested in large numbers using a range of different repertoires. According to Klandermans (1997: 18), it is through collective action that individuals may experience a sense of *agency*, which equips them with a belief that their actions have the power to transform social and political conditions. Of course, getting individuals to convert grievance into participation can be difficult: whilst many might accept the importance (even the duty) of collective action, this does not necessarily translate into a sense of *efficacy*. Consequently, activists often devote years to building campaigns and finding ways of mobilising individuals for protest (Rule, 1989: 157). Nevertheless, opportunities for mass-mobilisation sometimes require certain favourable *structural*

conditions that help make grievances, identities and the possibility of agency more manifest to prospective participants. These might include changes in policy and the political environment which lower the costs and dangers of protest participation, evidence of sympathy and support from certain elite political figures, or the uncovering of divisions and instabilities at state level. All of these are important tools for giving groups and individuals the ‘cognitive liberation’ that a successful outcome might be possible (McAdam, 1982).

Since the 1990s, student activists from successive cohorts have sought to generate a sense of agency by building and sustaining a strong and knowledgeable movement to fight Government higher education reforms. This task has been shaped by the availability of certain specific mobilisation causes, and struggles within the student activist community. As has long been the case in British student politics, radical independent student campaign groups frequently disagreed with the more conservative (and accountable) NUS over how protests and campaigns should proceed ideologically and tactically (Crouch, 1970; Hoefferle, 2013). In the 1990s especially, NUS was accused of failing to build an effective movement against tuition fees because of its historical ties to the very party – Labour – responsible for introducing them (Boren, 2001; Swain, 2011; Solomon, 2011). This reticence precipitated the formation of the independent Campaign For Free Education (CFE) in 1995, which in its efforts to push NUS into taking a free education position, entered into longstanding struggles to build a ‘unity slate’ of leftist groups for annual NUS elections.

CFE succeeded in pressurising NUS to become more active on fees campaigning in the early 2000s, and consequently NUS organised national demonstrations in 2000, 2002 and 2003 that each attracted around 20,000 people. Following Parliament’s vote to increase fees in January 2004, February 25th saw up to 2 million staff and students walk out of lectures in protest, along with local rallies taking place across the UK (*Guardian*, 25 February 2004). Though these mass-protests and the subsequent election of a CFE candidate as NUS President might have suggested the beginnings of a more radicalised student movement, higher education campaigning instead fell back into decline in the late-2000s. CFE dissolved and was succeeded by ‘Education Not For Sale’ (ENS) which continued to put radical candidates forward for NUS election. Nevertheless, after holding two poorly-attended national demonstrations in 2004 and 2006, NUS dropped its free education doctrine in 2008, citing a need not to ‘revert to dogma’ of militant left groups in order to debate effectively with government (*Guardian*, 2 April 2008).

Student campaigning on higher education returned to prominence in 2009 following the commissioning of the Browne Review and Government announcements that the higher

education budget would likely face cuts of more than £500 million after the next election. This caused some universities to make pre-emptive cuts to degree programmes and departments, resulting in a number of protest campaigns and campus occupations (Swain, 2011). Early 2010 saw the formation of three new campaign networks: the UCL-based National Campaign against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), the SWP-affiliated Education Activist Network (EAN) and the Leeds-based Really Open University (ROU), all of which shared information about higher education funding and posted reports on their websites of university teach-ins and occupations. These groups also helped pressurise NUS into calling a national demonstration for November 2010.

Following the Browne Review's publication in October, student demonstrations and occupations started to take place across the UK, though one can argue that it was not until the NUS demonstration on 10 November that students appeared to reach a moment of true agency: Swain, for example, (2011) describes the event as 'the spark for the inspirational movement that followed' whereas Penny (2011) quotes from a student recalling that 'after Millbank, the possibility of resistance became real'. From this point until the parliamentary vote on 9 December, student protests were widespread and frequent in number. Seeking to distance itself from the more radical aspects of the 10/11 demonstration, NUS played little part in subsequent actions other than to arrange a 'candlelit vigil' on the eve of the parliamentary vote. In its absence, NCAFC's 'National Walkout and Day of Action' on 24 November saw the participation of 130,000 college and university students across the UK (Solomon, 2011: 15). Whilst some universities were keen to stress the 'peaceful' nature of their chosen activities, others used the day as a springboard for staging campus occupations. By the end of 2010, Palmieri and Solomon (2011: 60) noted at least 51 occupations that had taken place across the UK, many lasting for more than two weeks.

The overall aim of the protests was to build and sustain enough coverage to pressurise MPs (especially Liberal Democrats) into voting against the fees bill. Occupations in particular made use of Twitter, Facebook and Skype to establish online networks through which news and information could be shared and distributed publically (Theocharis, 2012), though many soon broadened their political discussions to include critiques of neoliberal capitalism (Ibrahim, 2011; Salter and Kay, 2011; Hopkins et al, 2011). The protests climaxed with Parliament's vote on the Government's bill on 9 December: a NCAFC and ULU-organised demonstration in London attracted 30,000 participants and featured violent confrontations between protesters and police – especially once news spread that the bill had been passed by

Parliament. With the academic term drawing to a close, most campus occupations ended soon after.

Despite the passing of the fees bill, the following term saw many students resume their campaigns by linking up with the wider anti-cuts movement. This involved participating in the anti-tax avoidance network UK Uncut and attending the TUC national demonstration on 26 March. Campus protest generally remained strong at universities threatened with staff redundancies and course closures, but by early 2011 the majority of student protest networks had stopped updating their websites, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds. The publication in June of a Government White Paper proposing further marketisation measures to the sector (McGettigan, 2013; Wolfreys, 2011) resulted in NCAFC calling a national demonstration for the autumn. Whilst this demonstration – and the 15 or so occupations which soon followed – struggled to attract the same mass-participation and media interest of the year before, student activists were at least able to declare victory when the White Paper was shelved in early 2012 (THES, 24 January 2012). Nevertheless, activists were realistic enough to anticipate having to resume their campaigns once the next phase of higher education reform gets underway.

In sum, whilst student activist groups and leaders have for many years worked continually on building and maintaining campaigns against reforms to higher education funding, episodes of *agency* – that is, when students were genuinely confident of success – tended to be framed around defending student interests when matters were about to be made *worse*. In other words, anti-fees campaigns were seemingly at their strongest when there was something specific at stake, and students felt that they could exploit disharmony in government and thereby influence its outcome. This complements McAdam's (1982) view that 'cognitive liberation' is brought about by tensions and opportunities at a structural level. For the 2010/11 case study especially, these tensions and opportunities – evidenced by an untested and potentially divided coalition Government – were clear to see. Consequently, the seven-week period between the publication of the Browne Review and the parliamentary vote produced a collective action frame with clearly-identified *grievances* – higher fees, cuts and electoral betrayal – a basic *consciousness* of who 'us' (the students) and 'them' (the Government) were, and through mass-participatory events such as the NUS demonstration and NCAFC day of action, a sense of *agency* among students that, for a moment, anything was possible.

Of course, the unique conditions upon which collective action frames are based have a natural lifespan, and the student protests were no different – once the fees bill passed,

activists were forced to reframe their grievances and recapture a sense of mass cognitive liberation among the student population. This dilemma relates very much to Tarrow's (1989) concept of the 'protest cycle' which describes how openness to protest and general public sympathy provide the conditions for new political identities, activist groups, and innovative protest repertoires to develop, and that movements fall into decline once government responses (either concessionary or repressive) result in activist co-optation by authorities, or a split between those seeking to consolidate their activism position and those advocating a radicalisation of goals and tactics.

## 4. Researching the student protests

Although there is much potential for studying the student protests, compared to recent and related movements such as Occupy, the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados, or even the English riots, they remain relatively under-researched at present. This does not mean that plenty has not already been written on the subject, however. Academics in particular have produced several books and articles on higher education funding which critically analyse the Browne Review in conjunction to arguments on the intellectual and educational purpose of universities (see for example, Baert and Shipman, 2005; Molesworth et al, 2010; Holmwood, 2011; Bailey and Friedman, 2011; Docherty, 2011; Collini, 2012). Given the importance attached to maintaining a public profile for student resistance, activists generated large amounts of media content throughout the protests via online blogs and independent news sites as well as in the mainstream press. In 2011, two edited collections of articles by Hancox (2011) and Palmieri and Solomon (2011) were published. Assembled at a time student protests were still taking place, both reflect activists' *esprit de corps* in seeking not only to inform readers but to inspire them into taking further collective action. In late 2011, UCL students produced *The Real Social Network*, a film which chronicled the London demonstrations and UCL's campus occupations, and was screened at universities, activism conferences and film festivals.

Outside the movement itself, the student protests received extended coverage in newspapers and magazines throughout 2010 and 2011. Notable pieces include Laurie Penny's (2011) report on the UCL occupation for the New Statesman, and Paul Mason's (2011a) article for the BBC website 'Twenty Reasons Why it's Kicking off Everywhere', which attempted to trace organisational commonalities between the student protests and uprisings in France, Greece and North Africa. This was later expanded into a book (2011b) which among other things extolled students' use of social media and network technologies for their protest organisation. At present, academic research on the student protests has focused mostly on

students' democratic organisation of campus occupations, with accounts covering events at Newcastle (Hopkins et al, 2011), UCL (Aitchison, 2011) and UWE (Salter and Kay, 2011), as well as occupations' more general use of social media (Theocharis, 2012). With the exception of Crossley and Ibrahim's (2012) use of social network analysis to explore activist groups and networks at the University of Manchester, studies of student mobilisation, participation and non-participation, however, have so far been lacking.

***The research project***

The basic aim of this research is to study participation and non-participation in the 2010/11 student protests, and explain why students came to participate (or not) in the way they did. Of particular interest are students who identified as 'activists' prior to the case study and came to play an important role in the mobilisation of others; students who were mobilised (and radicalised) by the protests but had previously been mostly inactive, and students who, whilst sympathetic to the protests' aims, took little or no part in them. Given that these questions carry broader relevance to issues of youth engagement and new repertoires of collective action, it is also hoped that this research will make a useful contribution to studies of political participation in social movements more generally. Specifically, this research focuses around four particular questions, each of which will be dealt with in their own chapter:

1. Of the overall student population, who participated and why?
2. What were the paths and barriers to participation?
3. Why did some people keep participating after the vote?
4. How can we explain sympathetic students who did not participate?

The research gathers two distinct but interrelated forms of data: first, it measures students' participation and non-participation in the 2010/11 case study, along with their attitudes towards fees and higher education funding as an issue for mobilisation. Second, it is important that the case study is grounded in the broader context of student political participation. This means that the research also sets out to capture students' knowledge of and engagement in politics, their attitudes towards the efficacy of participatory repertoires, and their overall participation in formal and activist politics. To gather both forms of data, the research studies students in the 2011/12 academic year, specifically via surveying a sample of UK universities and interviewing student participants and non-participants. The choice of these methods allows for participation to be measured quantitatively by mapping trends of thought and action, and understood qualitatively through capturing students'

reflections on their personal experiences of politics and activism at university. The choice of survey and interview research also allows for data to be analysed in relation to similar studies, notably Hansard's (2004-13) participation surveys, and qualitative case studies of student movements and other protest groups (e.g. Crossley and Ibrahim, 2012; Binder and Wood, 2012; Eliasoph, 1998). Further methodological issues will be covered in more detail in chapter three.

One must also acknowledge some of the limits and boundaries to this research project. Such is the nature of case studies that there are always certain themes and issues which fall outside its boundaries, even though many are worthwhile topics of study in their own right. Consequently, movements and campaigns contemporaneously connected to the student protests – notably Students' Justice For Palestine (which set the template for many of the repertoires used by students in autumn 2010); staff-led anti-cuts groups such as the Campaign for the Public University, and wider anti-cuts groups such as UK Uncut – are mostly excluded from the study. More regrettably, the limitations of the study necessitate that certain *populations* within the student community are missing. Perhaps the most obvious (and ironic) example of this are students who are themselves paying £9,000 fees. This cohort was not yet at university in 2011/12 when data was collected, though some would have participated in protests the previous year: school and college students attended the national demonstrations in London in large numbers, and were arguably a key element to Mason (2011b) and others' portrayal of the protests in generational terms. Some went on to join in with university occupations, whereas others even started their own at schools and colleges.

Also missing from the data are students from the 2010/11 academic year who were no longer at university in 2011/12. This creates a slight disjuncture between the principal period of study and the available research population, particularly in the case of final-year undergraduates who graduated before research collection began. It should also be pointed out that whilst the survey closed in June 2012 and the last interview was conducted that October, higher education campaigning has continued into 2012/13 and 2013/14. Consequently, recent protest events such as the NUS national demonstration in November 2012, and December 2013's 'Cops Off Campus' demonstrations are excluded from the narrative covered in this research study.

One final point about the study's limitations concerns its overall purpose. The research does not seek to offer analysis as to why the student protests failed to prevent the fees bill being passed in Parliament, or whether this was even a realistic possibility. The focus of this research is participation and mobilisation – clearly essential aspects to making any

movement successful – but it will be left for others to judge whether the evidence presented suggests that increased participation or different tactical decisions might have produced a different outcome.

***The structure of the thesis***

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Given the project's aforementioned engagement across sociology, political science and social movement studies, chapter two seeks to bring these literatures together with a comprehensive account of existing theory and research in political participation and non-participation. Of particular interest are approaches to explaining paths and barriers to mobilisation, be it related to electoral, civic and protest participation, as well as the unique properties of the student activism field. Chapter three will focuses on the project's methodology and research design. This involves framing the case study around the campus field so that the participatory activities and attitudes of students studying at university in the 2011/12 academic year can be effectively measured and explored.

The following four chapters focus on the study's substantive research findings. Chapter four lays out basic trends from the student survey, including general forms of political participation as well as those specific to the fees and cuts case study. These trends are then explored in more detail in the following chapters, which use qualitative data to trace the narrative of the case study. Chapter five focuses on the paths and barriers of different types of student activist, as well as those involved in little or no activism. This spans students' lives from family socialisation to their mobilisation for the fees and cuts protests. This narrative continues into chapter six, which focuses on students' *experience* of protest participation and the formation of collective identities around certain events and activities. This also takes into consideration activist collective identities as perceived by *non-*participants, a theme which is expanded on in chapter seven which focuses on students who did not take part in the protests. This involves comparing supportive, unsupportive and undecided non-participants, along with more general analysis of the social backgrounds and social networks which might frame and contextualise their attitudes. Finally, chapter eight will draw conclusions across the four findings chapters, as well as discuss their wider contribution to the literatures on social movements, student activism and political participation.

# Chapter 2

# Literature review: theory and research on political participation and non-participation

## 1. Introduction

To understand the student protests case study within a broader context of political participation, one must go deeper into the trends, conflicts and innovations that have shaped politics and civic engagement in Western societies over the past fifty years. Key to this is the apparent decline of 'mass society' via the disembedding effects of market-driven individualisation (Beck, 1992) which is said to have eroded individuals' civic anchorage (Putnam, 2000; Bennett, 1998). This runs parallel to similar changes in mass politics, as evidence of party dealignment, low voter turnout in elections and the interminable decline of party membership (Putnam, 2000; Norris, 2001; 2002) all suggest that society is becoming increasingly disconnected from traditional political processes and institutions.

Decline in mass politics does not necessarily entail decline in political engagement, however. In fact, some have claimed that it provides opportunities for *greater* engagement, as the narrow and inflexible formal channels of old have slowly given way to greater choice in how citizens can legitimately express themselves. This owes much to increases in literacy, wealth and education which drive patterns of political participation (Norris, 2002), but also the decoupling of identity from collective traditions (Beck, 1992). This has enabled actors to pursue new political interests and activities in addition to their basic material interests, including identity-based and single-issue politics (Inglehart, 1977; Giddens, 1991).

Unsurprisingly, protest and political activism has been a key part of this transformation. Although it is disputable whether social movements in the twentieth century can be considered 'new' and distinct from the long history of political struggles that preceded them (see for example, Calhoun, 1993), compelling arguments have been made to at least suggest that protest has now become a key part of the political process, even if depictions of a 'social movement society' (Tarrow, 1998) render protest functionally wedded to Western liberal democratic structures. This transformation also reflects how social movements as an area of academic study began to win respect in the social sciences. According to Rootes (2012: 4864-5), the study of *student* movements in Europe and the United States in the 1960s was a

key element of this development as they did not fit with orthodox Marxist theories or warrant explanation through 'psychosocial and reductionist' crowd theory approaches (e.g. Feuer, 1969). Consequently, the university campus became a key site for popularising not only post-Leninist 'new left' politics, but also the sorts of identity politics Giddens and others describe. Whilst student movements struggled to maintain the activist peaks of 1968, they did succeed in helping set the foundation for the legitimation of protest as a political activity and the popularisation of alternative political agencies such as social movement organisations, single-issue parties and DIY movements, particularly in Western Europe (Ibid: 4867).

Despite the richness and variety of studies in political participation and social movements, its fractured and messy history has arguably left us with a fractured and messy academic literature. Political science approaches remain mostly committed to measuring participation using formal definitions of politics. Although useful for producing measurable data that can be repeated and compared over time, it arguably does so whilst flattening out social, historical and generational distinctions. Conversely, social movement approaches are more case-study oriented and often produce rich sociological findings, but researchers are sometimes resistant to applying their findings to explain wider participation and mobilisation trends. The same is arguably true of research on student movements given that case studies have tended to focus on significant upsurges in protest activity (of which this project is no exception) rather than the spaces in between. In other words, the assembled literatures provide a wealth of social and political movement analysis, but in isolation each lacks a crucial analytical ingredient. Furthermore, there has been a distinct lack of detailed studies of *non-participation*, a deficit which this research project hopes to help resolve.

This literature review will be divided into four substantive themes. First, it will review political science approaches to measuring political participation, with particular attention paid to youth participation. Second, it will cover the practice of social movement participation, and the various repertoires through which one might participate. Third, it will discuss and critically evaluate different theoretical approaches to understanding the *process* through which individuals come to participate (or not). Fourth and finally, it will consider the usefulness of these theories in relation to the unique field of student activism and the university campus.

## 2. Measuring political participation and non-participation

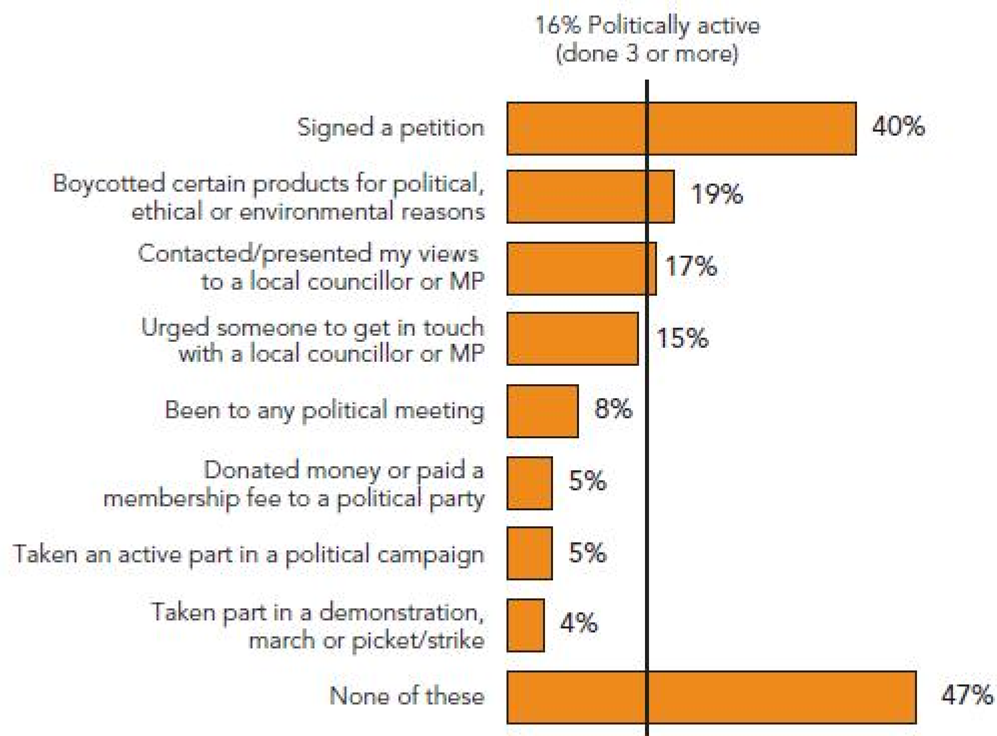
The expansion of political science to include forms of protest and activism presents a number of dilemmas to scholars seeking to measure it. For many years, quantitative studies of political participation have focused predominantly on formal processes of engagement (e.g. voting, party membership) as well as examples of civic behaviour (again measured in group and association membership). Measuring and comparing these forms of participation longitudinally has been central to major UK studies by Parry et al. (1992), Pattie et al. (2004), and Hansard's annual Audit of Political Engagement (2004-13). Indeed, it is this focus that has led political scientists in the United States especially to argue that political participation and civic engagement has been in steady decline since the 1960s (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003).

In the UK, Hansard's 2010 audit of political engagement classifies 16 per cent of citizens as politically active, and only 10 per cent as 'politically committed'. The politically active and committed tend to be white, middle-class, university-educated. By definition, they are also more likely to be interested in and knowledgeable about politics and hold stronger beliefs in the importance of an active citizenry than the UK average. As figure 2.1 shows, participation for most citizens involves signing petitions and forms of ethical consumption. Repertoires that might be considered higher in personal cost and risk (McAdam, 1986) are generally less popular, with only 4 per cent claiming to have taken part in a demonstration, picket or strike in the past three years.

Figure 2.1 also shows that almost half of UK citizens have participated in *none* of the listed activities in the past three years. Of course, to automatically categorise this as 'non-participation' is a misnomer since respondents may be involved in activities absent from the survey's criteria – indeed, surveys of this kind are often criticised for using a narrow and inflexible definition of politics (Marsh et al, 2007). One can certainly argue that forms of protest and social movement participation are underrepresented on the list, with all forms of protest seemingly amalgamated into a single category of equivalent weighting to 'urging someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP'. Of particular concern here is Hansard's definition of 'being active'. In the 2009 audit, respondents who had done three or more activities were classified as 'activists' – a moniker which was revised to 'politically active' in the 2010 audit. In either case, calculations prioritise *range* above frequency, which means committed, frequent protesters who are cynical or resistant towards formal political processes might not even qualify as 'active'. Whilst this might be partly attributable to the historical bias towards governmental systems as the more 'legitimate' avenues of

participation, it also reflects more practical methodological constraints: voting and membership are easily studied quantitatively whereas the more amorphous world of social movements is arguably harder to capture and integrate into these sorts of measurements.

**Figure 2.1** Selected percentages of forms of political activity among UK citizens from the 2010 Hansard Audit of Political Engagement




N=1,156 GB adults 18+.
Question: Which, if any, of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years?

What Hansard's measurements do at least capture is the large proportion of citizens' inactivity in electoral and civic forms of politics. This can elicit some useful findings and workable ideal-types: Hansard distinguishes between different types of non/under-active citizens, including 'detached cynics' (17 per cent of British adults), 'disengaged/mistrustful' (24 per cent), 'bored/apathetic' (8 per cent) and 'alienated/hostile' (9 per cent). These categories are calculated using respondents' knowledge of electoral politics, participation and sense of 'civic duty'. The high percentage points of the first two categories in particular echoes concerns raised by Hay (2007) about citizens' dissatisfaction with the *quality* of politics on offer. Explanations of this include governments' separation of public debate and private decision-making (Gripsrud, 2002), which also relates to critiques of parties' preference for delivering image above content to the voting public (Hay, 2007; Cunningham and Lavalette, 2004; Henn et al., 2002).

Although one might be wary of extrapolating too much from these specific categories without the support of qualitative data, they nevertheless represent useful ideal-types which go beyond simple participant/non-participant distinctions. Of particular interest are the categories which indicate engagement *without* participation, as the issue is not so much the valuing of politics than the inability or unwillingness to convert this into political action (at least according to the survey's definition). In their study of interest groups, Jordan and Maloney (2006; 2007) identify a similar intersectional category called the 'concerned, unmobilised'. Drawing on the same survey data as Pattie et al. (2004), they found that only a third of respondents who felt strongly about environmental politics were members of environmental organisations (Jordan and Maloney, 2007: 37). Some questioned the efficacy of such memberships, though others may instead have lacked certain pathways or resources to become more active and consequently remain 'unconverted'. Separating and explaining each of these two categories will be a key consideration in this study.

***Measuring youth participation***

One of the most common findings from UK political participation surveys is that young people are more disconnected from politics than any other age group. This can manifest itself in a number of ways, with 18-24 year-olds found to be the least politically active age group (Hansard, 2010), less interested in formal politics (Heath and Park, 1997), and less likely to identify with any particular party (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012). This has led to (or perhaps reinforced) social and political commentators' portrayal of contemporary youth as an 'apathy generation' or 'Thatcher's airheads' (Toynbee, 1997; Hiscock, 2001), who 'plug in, recharge their batteries, and bop along giving not a damn about the burning world around them' (Agger, 2009: 49). To understand the causes of such trends requires a careful avoidance of such normative depictions, not least as there are problems disentangling specific generational properties from more regular life-cycle effects (Henn et al, 2002).

Despite these concerns, survey research by Henn et al (2002) indicates that the majority of young people *do* discuss politics with their friends and family at least some of the time. Follow-up research by Henn and Foard (2012) supports these findings, with two-thirds claiming to have at least some interest in politics. This calls into question the notion that youth non-participation in formal politics is synonymous with apathy: certainly, as Eden and Roker (2000) point out, one can be cynical and engaged at the same time. Moreover, it raises the question of how political engagement is measured: Marsh et al (2007) claim that many large-scale participation surveys are guilty of employing a preconceived definition of politics which is too narrow and inflexible to take account of changes in participatory patterns. Henn

et al. (2002) agree, arguing that surveys presuppose a common understanding between researcher and respondent, allowing for the reproduction of certain assumptions about what politics *should* mean, regardless of their applicability to all social cleavages in contemporary society.

Interestingly, Hansard's 2009 audit reports that younger people (18-24) are more enthusiastic about the effectiveness of 'campaigning' (broadly defined) than other age groups: 57 per cent see it as effective, compared with the overall average of 47 per cent. This creates a contradiction between young people's attitude towards activism, and their apparent qualifications as activists: nearly half of 18-24 year-olds have signed a petition and the majority are enthusiastic about the efficacy of campaigning, yet young people are apparently less active than any other age group. This raises the question that if young people are broadly receptive to activism, what are they doing exactly?

Norris (2003) argues that young people increasingly favour 'cause-oriented' styles of politics. This is distinct from 'citizen-oriented' actions in that they are as likely to target corporations and communities into enacting change as they are government. Bang (2004: 14) takes this further, claiming that contemporary young activists are more interested in enhancing their capacities for *self-governance* and *co-governance* than 'submitting themselves to an abstract social norm or mode of state citizenship'. In this sense, political identity is acquired not through citizenship but from being 'ordinarily engaged in the construction of networks and locales for the political governance of the social', making them 'everyday makers' of politics (Ibid: 26). Significantly, this entails a political engagement more on individuals' own terms: unlike the consistent, long-term commitments of party membership, everyday makers are more likely to switch their engagement on and off depending on their own personal interests and availabilities. This emphasis on flexibility and short-termism not only runs parallel to the greater demands for mobility in the labour market, but also complements Bauman's (2000) observation that identity has transformed from a given to a 'task'.

Young people's apparent disconnection from formal politics is understandably an issue of concern for politicians and officials, who fear that this attitude will persist as they progress through their adult lives. Yet as Howker and Malik (2010) argue, contemporary youth have much to be concerned with when it comes to their own material interests. Whereas the so-called 'baby boomers' were well placed to prosper from post-war opportunities such as free university education, affordable housing and the services of a burgeoning welfare state, Howker and Malik argue that today's youth have become 'lab-rats in a decades-long

economic experiment' of neoliberal policy (2010: 76). They depict a 'jilted generation' of young men and women burdened by student debt, their earning opportunities stunted by a depressed and risk-conscious employment market, and ultimately expected to make up the difference in public sector costs as their parents' generation grows older.

What is less clear, however, is the extent to which contemporary youth possess a 'generational consciousness' to match these social conditions. In their survey data, Henn and Foard (2012) find that young people are especially concerned with issues related to the economy, education funding and unemployment. Furlong and Cartmel (2012) find similar results, but note also that the political concerns of the so-called 'Generation Y' are not particularly different from older generations. Certainly, it is clear from both surveys that young people are untrusting of politicians and cynical towards the efficacy of the democratic process. This can be seen to be rooted in experience as much as perception, with Marsh et al. (2007) noting how young people have tended to be treated more as 'political apprentices' than citizens in their own right. Kimberlee (2002) traces the growing marginalisation of youth access in UK political parties, noting the scaling down of the major parties' youth wings, as well as the sharp decline in parliamentary candidates under the age of 30. Roberts and Sachdev (1996) point to parties' reluctance to target young people electorally as it runs the risk of alienating their larger and more reliable core of older voters. Marsh et al (2007: 117) also note that attempts to bring youth back into the political process – such as the Young People's Parliament model – are based on a didactic model of participation and consequently possess little or no binding effect on policymakers.

Perhaps the most prominent (and relevant for this study) example of state attempts to enhance youth political engagement concerns the introduction of compulsory citizenship classes in secondary schools. Despite the Government-commissioned Crick Report's recommendation that classes should promote 'political engagement' and 'concern for the common good', Cunningham and Lavalette (2004) found that the citizenship curriculum instead prioritised civic duty and obedience. This distinction was made all the more manifest by the fact that the classes were introduced around the same time as Britain's decision to support the United States and invade Iraq in 2003. Protest against the war was large in scale and reach across the world, though in the UK protests became notable for their youth involvement: according to the journalist Libby Brooks, the protests featured 'the most significant child-led campaign for a century' as 'schoolchildren as young as 10 walked out of their classrooms to attend what were, for most, their first political demonstrations' (Brooks, 2003; quoted in Cunningham and Lavalette, 2004: 259-60). Whilst Cunningham and

Lavelette's interviews with school protest participants suggest that they were 'showing an awareness of international issues and events' and a 'concern for the common good' as originally envisaged by the Crick Report, they found that LEAs and teacher associations tended to view the protests instead as a disciplinary issue.

In summary, youth political participation is subject to life-cycle effects, generational effects and also broader trends and attitudes that transcend age groupings. All of these impact on how we might measure youth participation. There is evidence to suggest that part of the reason young people appear disconnected from formal politics is that they are afforded very little attention from government and policymakers, whereas research by Bang (2004) and Marsh et al. (2007) indicates that young people are less likely to perform well in participation surveys because they favour a cause-oriented politics that does not necessarily conform to consistent, repeatable forms of civic engagement. It is for this reason that the case study of the student fees against fees and cuts is interesting: not only does it reflect in the most part an instance of large-scale protest participation against government, it is also a case that has its roots in attempts by the Liberal Democrats to appeal to the youth vote by pledging to abolish tuition fees. It is therefore important to conduct research that captures students' engagement and participation whilst avoiding conflation or essentialism. To effectively do this, we need to explore the nature of political activism repertoires and why participants might find them to be more efficacious and meaningful than formal participation repertoires.

## 3. Social movement repertoires: costs, risks and efficacies

Protest might be the most obvious form of social movement participation, but not all forms of social movement participation necessarily count as protest. The basic objective of protest is to give what Tilly (2004) calls 'WUNC displays' i.e. displays of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment directed at holders of power and influence (or society more generally). Protest of course requires *protesters*, and although it is common for organisers to set themselves mobilisation targets, one should be wary of automatically equating size with success. It is not necessary, for example, that all 3 million Greenpeace members take part in the shutting down of a power station for the protest to be considered successful. For a whole host of reasons, protest rarely attracts anything close to a 100 per cent turnout of its sympathetic public, although the inability to do so is seldom used to explain a protest's failure. Of course, ensuring and increasing protest turnout is undoubtedly extremely important to its success, but participation recruitment should ultimately be seen as a means to an end rather than an end in itself (Klandermans, 1997).

To successfully mobilise a suitable number of participants, protest usually requires some degree of organisation, and by proxy, *organisers* with the knowledge, skills and resources for planning and publicising an event and defining its political purpose. This is certainly the view of social movement scholars associated with ‘political process theory’: Tilly (2004), for example, argues that social movement campaigns are often the work of ‘social movement entrepreneurs’ e.g. actors or small groups who identify issues or grievances in need of public attention, synthesise ideas, and deploy them in a way that can stimulate social and political change. As this illustrates, social movement participation is more than just protesting, though the precise nature of ‘leadership’ and ‘organising’ roles vary greatly according to a group’s structure. In certain cases, a group’s founder(s) might become its de facto leader(s) via a central committee, whereas others might seek to disperse power democratically throughout its participants, with decision-making decided upon by vote or consensus (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). This impacts on how an individual might be expected to participate more generally: it might involve holding an elected position, playing an active part in consensus meetings, or simply being willing to muck in with various aspects of day-to-day organisation.

It should also be noted that most political groups do not require or expect *equal* participation from all members. Not all prospective protest participants have the same time and resources to devote to activism, and so must choose ways of participating which suit their own ‘biographical availability’ (McAdam, 1986). This is made easier when protest campaigns offer a range of different protest repertoires for individuals to participate in. Differences in how individuals participate may be more problematic, however, when they are seen by some to also reflect differences in *commitment*. This is more likely to cause tension among participants in smaller groups where social ties and affinities are strong, as they tend to rely more on the regular participation of core members for the group to continue. Moreover, as Crossley (2007: 228) observes, ‘high density tends to produce trust’, and consequently should certain individuals be judged to have compromised that trust in some way, conflict may arise.

A further source of potential tension comes from variability in the *length of time* individuals are prepared to devote to participating in an activist group. ‘Participation’ might of course entail a single, one-off act of protest, or it might amount to an entire activist ‘career’. Whilst attracting dedicated participants might be less of a concern for campaigns that have a relatively brief lifespan, social movement groups and organisations tend to think in the long-term. This usually reflects the enduring nature of campaigning issues – the identity politics

of gender, race and sexuality; global concerns such as poverty, war and the environment; and the ebb and flow of partisan politics is not going to go away anytime soon – and so groups seek to recruit participants that will help build or maintain a group's stake as a mobilising and influencing force.

### *Repertoires of participation*

So what might social movement participants actually *do*? McAdam (1986) offers a useful starting point with his distinction between activism repertoires which are low or high in cost and risk. Cost refers to the 'expenditures of time, money and energy that are required of a person engaged in any particular form of activism', and risk refers to the 'anticipated dangers – whether legal, social, physical, financial, and so forth – of engaging in a particular type of activity' (McAdam, 1986: 67). Whilst such distinctions are of course useful, categorising activism repertoires according to these measurements raises the important question of context, especially in relation to risk: for example, in most cases the act of signing a public petition will be low-risk given the lack of immediate physical interaction involved, but such actions might prove dangerous in the long-run if one is living in certain political contexts (such as totalitarian states, or to use McAdam's own example, the United States at the height of McCarthyism).

**Figure 2.2**: Examples of high and low-cost/risk social movement participation in a generalised Western context

| High-cost/risk participation | Low-cost/risk participation |
|---|---|
| Leading/organising a protest | Signing a petition |
| Direct action (e.g. shutting down a meeting) | Writing a letter |
| Taking part in a strike | Boycotting consumer products/ethical shopping |
| Staging an occupation/sit-in | Wearing a campaign badge |
| Computer hacking/distributing classified | 'Liking' a political campaign/group on Facebook |
| Information | Joining a social movement organisation |

The examples of high and low-cost/risk participation shown in figure 2.2 are presented as extreme 'ideal types'. There are many forms of participation not included in the table, such as attending demonstrations, meetings and conferences, giving speeches, and participating in vigils, either because they are too variable an activity to be considered wholeheartedly as high or low-cost/risk, or they are likely to sit somewhere in between. Tarrow (1995: 98) notes how the more 'confrontational' and 'violent' forms of protest tend to be higher in cost and risk and consequently harder to mobilise large numbers for. Low-cost/risk forms of participation, on the other hand, tend to be more 'conventional' in character and can attract large numbers more easily – a trend that is reflected in the participation percentages shown in figure 2.1.

Given their longstanding popularity among student activists (ibid), it is useful to focus on two established protest repertoires – demonstrations and occupations/sit-ins – and consider when and why they might be used by activists. Demonstrations are perhaps the most commonly recognised protest repertoire of all. As Tilly (1976; 1995) observes, the idea of taking to the streets to make collective claims has existed for thousands of years, though the modern demonstration of organising public marches to protest on behalf of a specific grievance has its roots in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. Demonstrations became more frequent during the interwar years of the twentieth century, and later gained widespread prominence in the civil rights, student and anti-war protests of the 1960s, a prominence enhanced by the growth of mass-media news coverage which often gave demonstrations a real-time *mediated* as well as physical audience. According to Meyer and Tarrow (1998: 4), public demonstrations have now become a 'perpetual element in modern life', a point exemplified by the fact in many countries they are now written into state law and policed accordingly (see McCarthy and McPhail, 1998).

Using Casquete's (2006: 47) definition, a demonstration is 'a collective gathering in a public space whose aim is to exert political, social, and/or cultural influence on authorities, public opinion and participants through the disciplined and peaceful expression of an opinion or demand'. In this sense, demonstrations embody Tilly's 'WUNC display' very clearly. A demonstration does not really seek to achieve its aims through the *act* of demonstrating per se: rather its power depends on its mediation, visibility and symbolic salience to force *others* – usually institutions of authority, or society itself – to meet its demands. Moreover, finding oneself surrounded by a multitude of like-minded people may provide separate *process* benefits to demonstrating, both strategically – participants having opportunities to sign up to campaign mailing lists and gain new activism contacts – and also in the sense that protesting can be exciting, empowering and fun (Jasper, 1997: 197).

When considering the *cost* of participating in a demonstration, one should acknowledge first that demonstrations are a diverse tactic and certain cases will demand more from participants than others. In general, though, demonstration participation can be understood as an activity that takes time out of one's day, requires a certain amount of physical exertion, and obliges its participants to physically identify themselves with the cause in question. In the latter case, it should be added that the cause may also end up identifying *them*, since the visibility of their actions might result in activists having to defend their beliefs and actions to others (ibid). Beyond these basics, however, the *potential* for increased costs and risks depends on a multitude of factors, including where and when the demonstration is taking place, the extent

to which the demonstration co-operates with police provision, the contentiousness of the issue, the numbers of participants involved, and even the weather conditions on the day. Nor are risks and costs necessarily dependent on *how* one participates in the demonstration: large, uncontrolled demonstrations with too much or too little police provision may become intimidating and dangerous places to be, whereas small, carefully-organised and peaceful rallies might in contrast demand very little from participants.

If the goals of demonstrations ultimately depend on their ability to pressurise *others* to meet demands, the goals of occupations are more closely tied to the *process* of protesting itself (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Hopkins et al, 2011). Put simply, occupations are predicated on a desire to physically *reclaim space* and in so doing, remind authorities or society at large of the power of individual agency. Although there are numerous different types of occupations, they tend to draw on one of two distinct protest traditions (and sometimes both). The first is the *occupation-as-strike*, which draws on the history of labour movements and is thus predominantly demands-based e.g. calling for better pay or working conditions. Combined as they often are with strikes and walkouts, the taking of the space becomes a bargaining tool i.e. 'we are not leaving until you do *this*', and consequently locations are chosen on the basis of their capacity to disrupt the normal running and output of the organisation. Historical examples of this include the Alfa Romeo car plant occupation in Milan in 1920, the UAW Flint Sit-Down Strike in Michigan in the 1930s, as well as student sit-ins to protest against separate male-female dormitories at UK universities in the 1960s (Mason, 2008: 249-50; Fine, 1965; Crouch, 1970).

The second tradition is *occupation-as-camp*, which takes a more long-term, communal approach to claiming space. These are seldom framed by demands placed on *others*, but are arguably more politically ambitious through their desire to build 'futures in the present' (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). In practice, this may involve practicing alternative democratic systems, living according to certain moral and ethical ideals, or experimenting with sustainable lifestyles 'between the cracks of capitalism' (Holloway, 2010). This can serve to transform the consciousness of its participants, as well as those who come to visit and learn about the space. As this suggests, these are also inherently *social* spaces, allowing participants and visitors to 'meet, build trust and develop shared goals and strategies' (Schein, 2012: 337) and thus build towards a 'revolution from below'.

Camp occupations are often formed initially around existing social movement groups, coalitions and networks. They can also take place in a range of different locations: occupations requiring little more than planning and discussion spaces may choose to occupy

empty buildings as de facto squats, whereas those targeting specific locations with a view of shutting down certain facilities and activities in the process are more resolutely protest-oriented. Examples of this include Faslane and Greenham Common anti-war camps in the 1980s (McKay, 1996), and the Camp for Climate Action which took place at numerous UK power stations in the late 2000s (Saunders, 2010). More recently, the occupation repertoire has been used for occupying public spaces to visualise the 'emancipatory possibilities' of new political subjectivities, as evidenced in citizens' occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, which later inspired Occupy Wall Street and the subsequent global 'Occupy' movement (Kerton, 2012; Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012; Graeber, 2013).

Whilst not a new tactic (Tiananmen Square in 1989 being perhaps the most notable historical example), public occupations have succeeded in giving radical politics a great deal of coverage, evoking Lefebvre's (1996) formulation of citizens' 'right to a city' in a manner that through their global mediation, dramatise ideals of autonomy and agency in ways that might otherwise go unnoticed. As this suggests, occupations can be considered high-cost/risk due to the time, energy and commitment they generally demand from participants to set up and maintain camps, especially when under the threat of forced eviction or arrest. Whilst these costs and risks might deter some from becoming involved, participation can also produce an 'affective commitment' among members which often encourages continued participation (Klandermans, 1997).

In contrast to the social and interactional properties of high-cost/risk participation, *low*-cost/risk participation tends to be more individualistic in character. Although not best suited to demonstrating protest *commitment*, activities such as petitions, co-ordinated letter-writing campaigns or SMO memberships can be produced to provide quick and efficient displays of support for an issue or cause using what Della Porta and Diani (2006: 171) call 'the logic of numbers'. Alternatively, grassroots repertoires such as wearing badges, consumer boycotts, and ethical shopping can be useful for raising awareness of an issue, promoting a cause or campaign, or helping to challenge certain everyday practices and assumptions.

In many ways, petitions have much in common with demonstrations, given that much of their traction derives from the ability to provide evidence of the *scale* of public feeling. Unlike demonstrations, however, petitions can be produced at relatively little notice and cost and physically presented to a target. Perhaps in light of this, petitions can function as effective snap-polls which expose democratic deficits in an authority's decision-making. Power often comes from the speed and the scale of the response: whereas demonstrations require time to organise and mobilise, petitions can mobilise more people into registering

their views without them having to do so simultaneously (see for example, Kaldor, 2000: 112). Petitions arguably also have a clarity and sincerity in which their purpose can be articulated – whereas demonstrations can sometimes become receptacles for multiple groups campaigning with different aims, the aims of a petition are fixed and clearly stated from the outset giving signatories a clear, collective focus.

***Online activism: creating new repertoires?***

Much of the discussion so far has focused on repertoires conducted ‘offline’. Until recently this distinction would be of little significance, but there is increasing evidence to suggest that a fair amount of political consumption, debate and action now takes place online – especially among young people (Banaji and Buckingham, 2012; Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Anduiza et al, 2009). Broadly speaking, one can argue that the internet has three main uses for activists: as a means of organisation, a means of producing and consuming information, and as a field for political action. Increasingly, however, distinguishing between these uses has become difficult, especially since the advent of the user-as-producer world of ‘Web 2.0’ (Hands, 2011). This section will focus on online repertoires of protest, including repertoires of ‘communication power’ (Castells, 2009) which arguably blur the lines of media production and protest participation.

To begin, one should acknowledge the significance of the internet for increasing the reach of existing protest repertoires. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is the e-petition. E-petitions are capable of speeding up the process of petitioning whilst reducing organising costs, enabling them to be created and distributed with such speed that they can provide almost immediate feedback to an issue of concern as it unfolds. These attributes are borne out in recent research data: for example, the Oxford Internet Survey found that between 2007 and 2011 the percentage of people who had signed an online petition doubled to 14 per cent, whereas those doing so offline fell from 20 to 18 per cent (Dutton and Blank, 2011).

The proliferation of e-petitions across the web is aided by the fact that they are often built using freely-available multi-access software. In recent years, however, e-petitions have also become useful tools for bringing multi-participatory citizenship into the governmental process: Adams et al (2005) note how Scottish Parliament pioneered the use of e-petitions by integrating them into the political process via a Public Petitions Committee, who screen and forward them to relevant departments. This initiative was then introduced by the UK Government in 2006, with the attached promise that petitions with over 100,000 signatories would be debated in Parliament. By 2012 its website had received over 8 million signatures

from over 5 million unique email addresses (Hale et al, 2012). Similar to this are online groups and pages on the social networking site Facebook where users are invited to register their support by joining or 'liking' them. Although primarily used to distribute information and invitations to offline protest events, the act of 'liking' a politics page has begun to gain significance for its capacity to generate large numbers. Each of the main UK political parties now has its own official Facebook page, with Labour and the Conservatives both having around 150,000 likes – figures comparable to their own formal party memberships (Bartlett et al, 2013).

More expressive forms of online activism have emerged since the advent of 'Web 2.0', broadly defined as 'the proliferation of user-created content and websites specifically built as frameworks for the sharing of information and for social networking, and platforms for self-expression' (Hands, 2011: 79). Web 2.0 represents a significant step in the rise of what Castells (2007; 2009) calls 'communication power', which has emerged from the exponential increase in peer-to-peer communications technology usage, from mobile phones to WiFi networks, and now serves as a platform for individuals to produce forms of 'counter power' via social networking, blogging and file-sharing. Counter power emerges from the establishing of new norms of interaction – particularly among young people – as online platforms provide network access on a global scale for users to both access forms of information they wish to receive and also find and engage with like-minded people (Nah et al. 2006; Bennett, 2008; Theocharis, 2012).

Crucially, Web 2.0 has resulted in the blurring of user and content provider, creating so-called 'prosumers'. This has transformed media consumption to the extent that institutional, mainstream media increasingly looks to independent content providers for its information: either as smartphone-equipped 'monitorial citizens' who act as 'witnesses at the scene' (Banaji and Buckingham, 2012: 168) or as alternative 'participatory journalists' (Deuze, 2003). There is some debate as to whether media production of this kind is a facilitator of protest or a form of protest in itself. Certainly, it has long been part of the *culture* of protest, from the Walter Benjamin-inspired proliferation of radical 'zines' in the 1960s and 1970s, to the autonomist 'be the media' sloganeering of the alter-globalization movement in the late 1990s (Lievrouw, 2011). It is clear that participatory journalism has a significant political objective within the media itself – namely providing first-hand accounts of events otherwise ignored or given one-sided coverage in the mainstream press – but its efficacy as a form of protest in its own right is perhaps more questionable. Certainly, it can 'raise awareness' and influence public opinion into taking action, but taken in isolation participatory journalism is

perhaps overly dependent on a Habermasian faith in the potential of online communication networks to operate as a newly virtualised public sphere, facilitating the free distribution of information and ultimately enabling the better argument to come out on top.

### *Comparing high and low-cost/risk repertoires*

Discussions around the purpose of certain protest repertoires can easily lead to more normative questions over what constitutes 'good' or 'effective' activism. Although social movement scholars tend to avoid such debates, protest repertoires can at least be measured in terms of the costs and risks they demand from participants, which can sometimes be taken as a measure of their normative protest 'value'. For example, high-cost/risk repertoires are usually practiced by groups and movements who advocate a hitherto-marginalised politics, necessitating more radical and eye-catching ways of garnering attention. Because of the commitment involved, participants might sometimes make value judgments on groups and individuals who are seemingly less committed than themselves (e.g. Saunders, 2008: 247). On the flipside, Bobel (2007) found in his interviews with feminist group members how some felt they had failed to live up to the 'perfect standard' of participation as practiced by others, and consequently felt self-conscious about self-defining as 'activists'.

If high-cost/risk participants sometimes brood over whether their involvement reaches these perfect standards, those involved in predominantly low-cost/risk participation are sometimes questioned over whether their activities constitute activism at all. For mobilising agencies such as Avaaz.org which deal mostly in petitions and coordinated template letter-writing campaigns, their defence is that low-cost/risk activism is both efficacious in its own right and serves to mobilise individuals who do not have the time or resources to be more physically active (Patel, 2007). This view is questioned by Morozov (2009), who claims that these repertoires have a more nefarious effect, namely creating the *illusion* of having a more worthwhile impact whilst reducing motivations to engage in higher-cost/risk (and thereby more effective) forms. In other words, 'slacktivism' promises all the glory and personal satisfaction of social movement participation, but with none of the engagement, endeavour or responsibility that should come with it. Moreover, authors such as Putnam (2000) and Gladwell (2010) argue that low-cost/risk forms of activism on their own are too individualised and noncommittal to build the necessary strong social ties that are integral to successful campaign groups and social movements in the long-term.

Of course, low-cost/risk repertoires have their limitations. One can argue that they work best when targeting a specific issue and have a particular audience in mind. Whereas an anti-

capitalist occupation might make sense as part of an overall ‘revolution from below’ ethos, a petition denouncing capitalism would arguably be of little use. That is not to say petitions cannot be deployed for the ‘big issues’: as the alter-globalization and Occupy movements have demonstrated, petitions can operate as a useful auxiliary to other, more high-cost/risk repertoires (Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 165). They can help illustrate a population’s broader support and solidarity for activists engaged in high-cost forms of protest. This is especially useful for those people unable to physically take part but who wish to register their support in a meaningful way. ‘Slacktivist’ arguments also imply that low and high cost/risk participation is a zero-sum relationship, meaning that individuals who ‘like’ a cause on Facebook automatically feel extricated from the need to attend demonstrations and suchlike. This, however, makes the doubtful assumption that both are subject to equivalent recruitment processes. This of course leads us to the issue of *mobilisation*, and the context through which individuals are invited to participate. This is a key focus for the next section.

## 4. Theories of political mobilisation

Explaining *how* people might come to participate is a separate question to explaining *why* people participate – after all, most activists will state that they share a movement’s grievances and wish to act in order to help it achieve its goals. Yet sharing grievances is not necessarily enough to inspire individuals to participate. Given that social movements require *collective* action, explaining *how* individuals participate requires the study of political *mobilisation*. This might be self-determined (where groups of people collectively decide to do something) or it might be brought about via invitations and call-outs from existing political agencies. Approaches to mobilisation can cover a variety of different fields of research, and although some focus on civic participation and electoral politics rather than social movement activism, each is worthy of discussion here for the variety of theoretical and empirical approaches to studying participation, as well as the ways in which they explain *non*-participation.

### *Mobilisation as rational incentive*

The first major theoretical approach to explaining political mobilisation draws on economic theories of voter and citizen behaviour in US political science approaches in the 1960s, most notably in Olson’s (1965) theory of collective action. Olson firmly held the view that mobilisation was not a natural or spontaneous process for individuals. Rather, members ‘will not act to advance their common or group objectives unless there is *coercion* to force them to do so, or some *separate incentive* distinct from the achievement of the common or group interest, is offered to the members of the group individually (Olson, 1965: 2, original

emphasis). Whereas the former stimulus referred to action determined by belonging to dense social collectives such as trade unions, the latter opened up a more nefarious aspect of mobilisation: that given the choice, assuming a group is likely to be successful in achieving its goals an individual's incentive to participate is in fact *reduced*. This is because the actor's contribution is not vital to the group achieving its objectives, nor does it provide the actor with any cost-benefit value beyond those derived from the group's objectives, which are likely to be achieved regardless. In this context, the rational choice is to *not* participate and 'free-ride' on the group's successes.

Olson's theory is arguably useful for understanding mobilisation strategies employed by political agencies that in the pursuit of consistently-high membership strategies clearly have incentives of their own. However, its theorisation of *individual* participation has been criticised for employing a fixed definition of rationality which disregards the specificity of a group's political goals, strategies and repertoires. In addition, participation might appear rational for reasons *other than* the realising of explicit political goals, including more intangible social or moral benefits. Moreover, Olson's depiction of the decision *not* to act has little grounding in any sort of social and cultural context. As Crossley (2008) argues, the theory assumes that people only participate on the condition of equal involvement, which might not be necessary or relevant to a movement's organisation. Additionally, participating actors may not have the resources to make an 'equal' contribution to the group's activities.

An attempt to provide more relational context to the individualistic drives depicted by Olson can be found in resource mobilisation theory (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). It takes the view that contentious politics is really played out by those who are the most socially *connected* rather than *disaffected*, given that most people sympathetic to a cause seldom convert this into sustained action. This again emphasises the importance of mobilising agencies for explaining participation. Large and small groups and campaigns advertise participation through the production and distribution of flyers, leaflets, posters or news articles so as to access a critical mass of individuals, some of whom might be predisposed to take part. Acts of protest, too, may serve partially as means of recruitment, attracting intrigued onlookers who though conversation with activists and/or the receiving of flyers and leaflets might feel like getting involved.

The argument put forward here is that mobilising agencies seek to present joining their group or campaign as the rational choice for politically-minded individuals unsure of how best to mobilise their concerns. Whilst this approach succeeds in opening up mobilisation as a two-way relationship, it implies a process divorced from any social or cultural context such as

biographical availability or information access. Recalling the earlier discussion of online activism repertoires, it is also questionable how relevant this theory is to a new, more networked context where social movement entrepreneurship is less dependent on professionalised mobilising agencies. Moreover, mobilisation is also depicted mechanically and even cynically, assuming that the likelihood of mobilisation is somehow *calculable* – a view perhaps not relevant to all protest repertoires.

An attempt to provide a more nuanced definition of rationality can be found in Verba and Nie's theory of 'civic voluntarism' (Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba et al. 1995). This theory identifies three factors that account for political mobilisation and non-mobilisation. First, access to resources (defined as time, money and civic skills) determines whether individuals *can*, or *cannot*, participate. Second, psychological factors related to the individual's sense of political efficacy determine whether an individual *wants* to participate or not. Third, and finally, formal and informal recruitment networks – be they social networks of friends, family and colleagues, or the recruitment strategies of political agencies – determine whether an individual has been *asked* to join or not. The core idea of this model, therefore, is that resources which aid participation are the product of social structures of class and education, and that individuals in possession of these resources are more likely to participate.

This model is convincing insofar as socio-economic status broadly correlates to levels of political participation, with high-status individuals over-represented in the category of very active participants, and under-represented among the inactive (Verba and Nie 1972: 131-3). However, as Pattie et al. (2004) point out, using socio-economic status as a predictor of participation and civic values fails to explain why large numbers of high-status individuals do not participate in politics. Moreover, the theory does not account for why countries with higher educational rates do not have consistently higher civic participation and voter turnout. In other words, political engagement requires explanation beyond the economic capital of participants.

In sum, one can argue that rational choice approaches to mobilisation are somewhat restricted by the underlying assumption that individuals consciously choose whether to participate or not from the options presented to them. According to Marsh et al (2007) this presupposes politics as an identifiable 'arena' that one consciously enters into (along with an awareness of, and respect for, the rules of the game) rather than as an evolving, multifaceted *lived* experience. This arguably reflects a case bias towards electoral politics where 'participation' tends to be more formally represented through membership and voting. This limits their applicability for protest participation: unlike parties or civic agencies, movements

are often more fluid and unpredictable. Participation can come in many different forms, making participatory *incentives* more difficult to predict, especially in newly-formed movements.

***Mobilisation through emotional cognition***

Perhaps unsurprisingly, rational choice perspectives tend to say little about the mobilising power of the political issues themselves – after all, if grievances alone explained participation there would be no such thing as non-conversion. Nevertheless, authors such as Gamson (1992), Jasper (1997) and Goodwin et al (2001) have argued for the need to look deeper into how certain grievances might generate particular emotional responses that become significant for mobilising individuals into taking action. To clarify the relationship between emotion and mobilisation, Jasper (2006) adapts Giddens's (1991) distinctions between practical consciousness, discursive consciousness, and the unconscious. Whereas the first relates to explicit, reflexive thought and action, the second two are more instinctive and harder to articulate. Jasper's key argument here is that emotions originate not singularly from the discursive level (as is perhaps assumed in rational choice approaches) or the unconscious level (as found in Freudian psychology) but from *all three* levels, often simultaneously.

Furthering his argument, Jasper claims that this produces a range of different emotional responses – urges, moods, reflexes – but it is *moral* emotions that are of most interest here. These often arise out of individuals' reactions to and beliefs about the world we live in, a sort of 'moral habitus' that we carry around with ourselves and add to through experience. Emotions play to our internalised sense of reason and justice, and as Jasper argues, these 'moral shocks' frequently lead to action. According to Gamson (1992: 32), this is because moral emotions are the 'hot cognitions' that provide 'the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul'. Moreover, acting according to one's own moral code (especially in the face of opposition) 'feels good *directly*' (Jasper, 2006: 167, original emphasis). In contrast, those who do not perceive pleasures and satisfaction in such actions, or perhaps have a more distant engagement with such moral emotions, are consequently less likely to mobilise.

Emotions do not only come into play through individual responses to events: they can also be used as a mobilisation device by social movement groups so as to appeal to individuals' sense of morality, especially if the intended audience are not materially affected (Goodwin and Jasper, 2006). Emotions can also be used to *sustain* participation through forging

relations of solidarity and trust among activists, along with the enjoyment, pride and sense of identity one might gain through belonging to certain activist cultures. As Jasper (1997: 220) asserts, 'virtually all the pleasures that humans derive from social life are found in protest movements: a sense of community and identity; ongoing companionship and bonds with others; the variety and challenge of conversation, co-operation and competition'.

Using emotions alone to explain mobilisation leaves some discernible gaps, arguably creating opportunities for it to be used in tandem with other approaches. First, more needs to be said about the role of *knowledge* in emotional and discursive engagement with a political issue. Converting initial moral outrage into action often entails a deliberation process that opens up a multitude of further choices – does one choose to participate in the first available opportunity presented to them, or consider other options? If participation becomes a question of choice, by what criteria is this decision made? Echoing the arguments of Morozov (2011) and Putnam (2000), low-cost/risk participation often has both the reach (especially online) and the resources (especially in professional campaigns) to get to the front of the queue when individuals are seeking opportunities to convert their moral outrage into action – does this represent the most effective form of participation, or simply the most accessible? Deciding which form of participation might be a daunting task, especially where certain choices are high in cost and risk. Consequently, the acquisition of knowledge to decide on the best form of action can be a never-ending process – unless one makes a leap of faith, one can end up doing precisely nothing.

As this suggests, emotions can have a *demobilising* as well as mobilising effect on potential activists. Political issues worthy of our attention might also create negative emotions, such as helplessness, guilt, insecurity, anxiety and fear – and these might not necessarily be resolved through participating in any of the available choices for action. This is especially prevalent in political issues that do not lend themselves easily to goal-oriented campaigning – Norgaard (2006), for example, found in her study of non-participation in climate change activism in Norway that negative emotions were often *collectively* managed by individuals through certain shared narratives. This is because of the significant social gap that exists between emotional cognition and political action, making emotions 'deeply embedded in and reflective of social structure and culture' (Norgaard, 2006: 379). An example of this in practice was citizens' use of 'selective attention strategies' to negotiate anxieties over climate change. For some, this involved engaging in certain environmentally-friendly activities so as to appear to be at least doing *something*. For others, even face-saving acts of tokenism represented a leap of faith too far, preferring instead to 'protect themselves'

emotionally by controlling their exposure to information on climate change and avoiding thinking too far ahead. Others adopted a 'perspectival selectivity' to deflect personal responsibility in favour of narratives that express either an individual's powerlessness to effect meaningful change (i.e. 'my participation doesn't make a difference so why bother') or the supposed neglect and culpability of others (i.e. 'we might not be perfect, but *they* are far worse').

Certainly, the act of protest involves putting oneself politically 'out there', and this commitment has consequences for how individuals choose to present themselves publically. The desire to maintain favourable images of the self in front of others recalls the social psychology of impression management (Goffman, 1971), which in the case of politics, can work both ways – in some contexts, political participation can be viewed extremely positively, as individuals' desires to act upon their moral code might draw admiration from others. In other contexts, however, political participation may prove more troublesome. If, as Bauman (2000) claims, identity has indeed become a 'task', then political identities are 'stickier' – demanding greater commitment from owners – than the floating, flexible and short-term 'consumer identities' he identifies in *Liquid Modernity*. This, of course, remains context-dependent, and Eliasoph (1998) in her study of the American Buffalo community illustrates how in fields where narratives of apathy dominate, the idea of being politically active invites ridicule rather than admiration:

> Buffaloes… equated citizen involvement in toxics, disarmament, and foreign policy with 'protesting', which meant 'carrying a sign', 'standing out in a parking lot with a sign', 'wearing sandals': making a fool of oneself, ineffectually standing out in the middle of nowhere. People who think they can have an effect on politics are fools, who are puffing themselves up – and that would seriously violate country-westerners' political etiquette. (Eliasoph, 1998: 135)

In sum, it can be argued that emotions are an important and often-overlooked raw material for explaining social movement mobilisation and demobilisation. This raises important questions about expectations of efficacy in political campaigns, as well as how apathy is socially produced – questions which are central to this research project. Of course, converting instinctive emotional responses into collective action (or inaction) requires broader cultural contextualisation, which returns us to the social level. For this reason, discussion of mobilisation theories will close on two final themes: theories of collective identification, and theories of mobilisation fields and networks.

***Mobilisation through collective identification***

In the theoretical approaches discussed so far, the concept of 'collective identity' is assumed to exist as a by-product of other processes rather than being given its own explanatory power. As we saw in chapter one, identity is a key element in Gamson's (1992) definition of a collective action frame, situated as an important bridge between grievance and agency. Explaining its importance draws on social psychology, particularly theories of symbolic interaction: Melucci (1988), for example, argues that political ends and means are decided collectively by actors, which involves taking into consideration the limits and possibilities provided by the environment in which they find themselves. From this negotiation, a sense of the collective 'we' is produced, a vital shared disposition for generating protest activities. At a strategic level, the 'we' determines the goals and repertoires a movement might adopt, and at an interactional level it initiates a collective evolution in the beliefs, norms and attitudes of its participants. It is out of these social, strategic and emotional experiences among participants that a sense of *collective identity* can be produced, which helps to strengthen and sustain movements beyond their initial mobilisation (Melucci, 1988).

There is some disagreement among scholars as to the importance of collective identity in social movement studies. Typically, collective identity refers to both social and practical relationships in the present, though Polletta and Jasper (2001) extend this to also include shared *imaginaries*. Less clear, however, is whether the concept should be applied at a group or movement level. Certainly, Melucci (1996), Klandermans (1992) and Diani (1992) are all of the view that a stronger collective identity produces a stronger and more productive group. However, beyond a basic shared interest, collective identity is more difficult to apply at a *movement* level, as individual groups and networks might feature significant ideological, organisational and tactical variation (Saunders, 2008). Furthermore, McDonald (2002) claims that anarchist 'DIY' activist networks that make up much of the alter-globalization movement reject the *principle* of collective identity as infringing on activists' individual autonomy. Consequently, collective identity is produced not by its interpersonal relationships but by its *actions* – a distinction that might also be true of certain occupations and protest camps.

Whilst McDonald refutes notions of collective identity for its perceived political uniformity, the visibility and importance of a group's actions (especially direct actions) may still be a necessary part of creating a collective identity 'product'. According to Snow (2001: 4) this can act as 'a powerful impetus to collective action', and 'the constructed social object to which the movements' protagonists, adversaries, and audience(s) respond'. A good example of this would be Occupy Wall Street, which positioned the occupation tactic as a central part

of its protest identity. This identity was then adopted by copycat camps across the world, creating a worldwide Occupy Movement (Gitlin, 2013). As this suggests, collective identity products may also be co-produced by actors *outside* of the initial movement – be they political allies, opponents, or the media – though this raises the possibility of a semantic struggle over what a movement's collective identity 'product' should look like.

It can also be argued that McDonald's emphasis on individual activist autonomy does not necessarily refute Melucci's (1988) depiction of collective identity as the *outcome* of a group's interpersonal relationships and shared experiences. Whilst these relationships and experiences might not be seen as integral to the group's overall decision-making, occupations and protest camps arguably benefit from building of relationships of mutual trust, respect and commitment between participants. Moreover, even whilst upholding a strong sense of individual autonomy, Saunders's (2008) research indicates that groups may still coalesce around certain related social activities and cultural 'lifestyles'. In this sense, these shared experiences and lifestyles might not be dissimilar from the 'shared meanings, experiences and reciprocal emotional ties' which Fominaya (2010: 397) sees as defining outcome-based group collective identities. Exploring this further arguably requires a closer analysis of the nature of these interactions, especially when considering how product and outcome collective identities might facilitate (or prevent) mobilisation. This is the subject of the final theoretical approach to be discussed.

***Mobilisation through field and network access***

The final discussion draws on two interrelated approaches to studying social movement participation. The first is Crossley's (2002) adaptation of Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice to bring concepts of habitus and field into social movement analysis, and the second concerns Diani and McAdam's (2003) attempts to combine a unified theory and method of social networks. Although possessing different theoretical backgrounds, both are arguably trying to achieve the same thing, namely a micro-structural approach to social movement mobilisation. Bourdieu's theory holds that individuals make themselves in response to the conditions that they find themselves in, and that become characterised by the knowledge and dispositions they acquire and the concrete preferences they make. This reflects the interaction and negotiation of one's personal 'habitus' – the ongoing acquisition of schemas, interests and dispositions that inform our social instincts – and the particular fields we enter, which have their own norms and hierarchies of knowledge and behaviour.

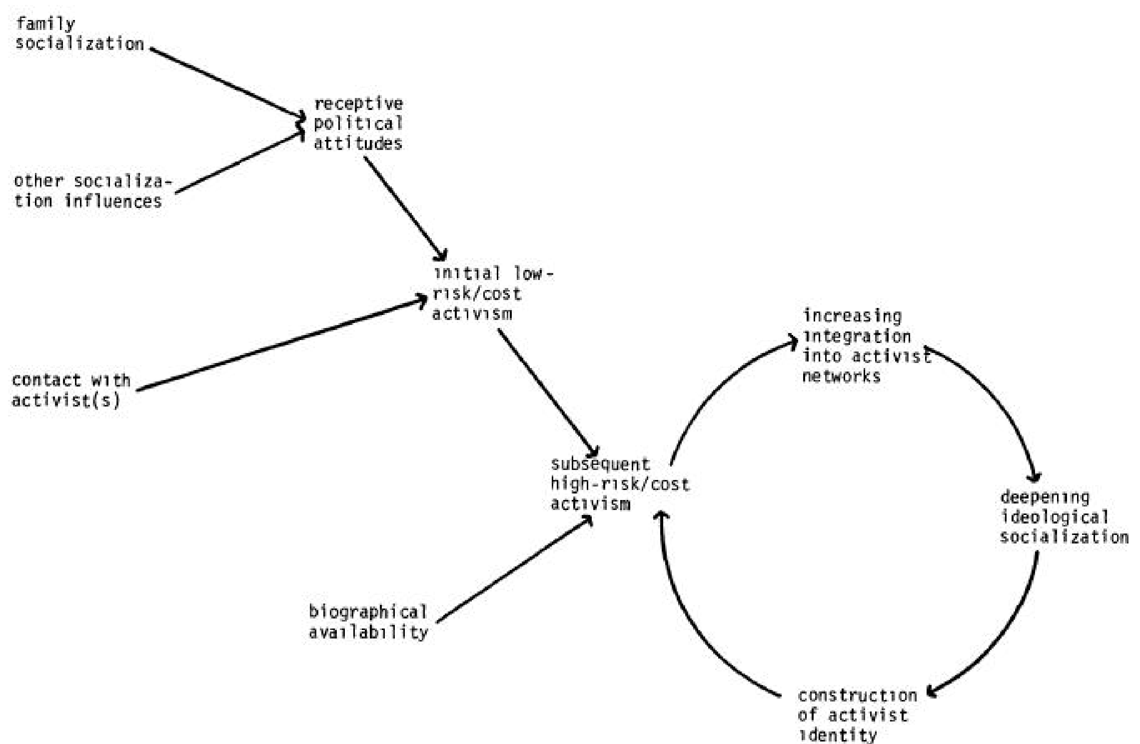
Applied to social movements, Crossley (2003) argues that this proposes an intuitive rather than rational basis for mobilisation, with individuals acting according to what feels appropriate personally and socially. To be an activist therefore requires a 'radical habitus' which is acquired through sustained engagement with activism fields. There are two significant points here. First, the theory places important emphasis on the *process* of acquiring an activist identity or disposition. One does not become an activist simply by choosing to be one – he or she is expected to acquire distinct forms of political knowledge (why one is supporting a cause and the ideals behind it), the social and cultural capital that generate opportunities to participate, and the practical knowledge and experience of participating. These cannot be acquired easily, and new recruits may find themselves under-resourced in their initial experiences of activism. Second, this theory highlights the *embeddedness* of social agents, where choices, priorities and opportunities are framed by the fields and networks they belong to. This directly challenges the rational choice assumption that decision-making processes are highly individualistic, whilst breaking down the participatory opportunities provided by collective action frames to a more interactional, micro-structural level.

For some activists, embeddedness in activism fields has its roots in their family and upbringing. Coles (1986), for example, observes how children learn about the political world through the experiences and attitudes of their parents and family. Political socialisation can be understood at different levels: for some, it might mean the specific and comprehensive absorption of values, ideologies and practices, whereas for others it might simply mean a basic appreciation of political engagement and an encouragement to express oneself politically. In their life-course study of youth activist leaders from the 1960s, Braungart and Braungart (1990) found that most had followed the political direction of their parents' politics, albeit in different ways and to different degrees. Some reflected on the influence of their early exposure to activism through parents taking them picketing, whereas for others a more general inspiration came from activism having played a part in their family history. In their early familiarity with political texts and ideologies, the emotional inheritance of a family political history, or the practical experiences gained through participating in protest activities, it is clear that political socialisation equips activists with a habitus that gives them a head-start for activism opportunities later in life.

Given this variation in socialisation narratives, there is a need to explain mobilisation beyond simple cultural reproduction. Crossley draws inspiration for his approach from McAdam's (1986) study of the conditions that facilitated high-cost/risk participation in the 1964

Freedom Summer project. McAdam argued that applicants were more likely to end up participating if they already had memberships in other political organisations, had prior activism experience, and knew other people also involved in the project. This places greater emphasis on the social costs of decision-making, where fulfilling social obligations and expectations might initially seem more important than the politics of the issue itself. McAdam found that applicants with personal links, a political background and prior experience of activism were better equipped to perceive and prepare for participation, especially when it is high-cost/risk. In contrast, those without such attributes were more inclined to lose their nerve and withdraw their application, which given their lack of social connections, carried less social burden of 'letting the side down'. This case study led McAdam to theorise a model of recruitment for high-cost/risk activism (see figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.3**: McAdam's (1986) model of recruitment to high-cost/risk activism




Although one can argue that individuals already equipped with an activist habitus through family political socialisation might be fast-tracked through this recruitment process, McAdam's model is useful for visualising the paths (and barriers) to activism mobilisation, as well as how participants develop into committed activists. Given its emphasis on *accessing* participatory opportunities, as well as the social context of decision-making, it is perhaps unsurprising that both Crossley (2002, 2007) and McAdam (Diani and McAdam, 2003) are drawn to studying social networks. This is a growing area of study in social

movements (Diani, 2004; Crossley and Ibrahim, 2012) with scholars applying McAdam's initial model to other empirical cases and, in so doing, separating predictive processes from relational ones. In their study of Italian environmental activists, Diani and Lodi (1988) found that 78 per cent had been recruited through private or associational networks, a finding supported in similar work carried out by Della Porta (1988). Network theorists have also pointed out a potential weakness in McAdam's initial model, where the recruitment process appears to exist separately from *other* networks. In particular, the relationship between 'biographical availability' – which might contain ties with different networks – and the activism one is considering participating in, warrants further exploration. This led McAdam to qualify his position somewhat by arguing that commitment to a *particular* identity, reinforced by ties to participants, was a stronger predictor of participation than prior organisational involvement on its own (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993).

As recalled in the previous discussion, 'outcome' collective identities arguably play a key role in how individual protest networks *sustain* participation and membership. Returning to figure 2.3, taking part in high-cost/risk activism enters the participant into a cycle of network integration, which increases the chances of deepening ideological socialisation and identification, which in turn leads to further participation. From a network perspective, this entails the accumulation and strengthening of ties with other activists whilst simultaneously diluting the effect of non-network ties that might discourage activism. These strong activist ties may exist both objectively and symbolically, as the practice of shared activities helps strengthen personal affinities and vice-versa. Consequently, the overall network becomes *denser* as individual ties strengthen, producing relations of trust which set the foundation for further acts of high cost/risk participation (Crossley, 2003; 2007) and discourage members from leaving (McPherson et al, 1992).

Whilst dense networks clearly have their advantages for building and sustaining movements, they also carry risks when networks start to operate as 'cliques'. This may depend on a group's internal structure, as dispersed democratic groups might be more eager to reflect on their decision-making processes than strictly hierarchical groups, but this can only help negotiate rather than overcome the probability some activists will be more experienced, better resourced or more 'biographically available' than others. Saunders (2008) found in her study of radical environmental groups that network relationships can incorporate subcultural elements which help legitimise and reinforce group relationships. These elements might make groups seem inaccessible to newcomers, especially when social dynamics and values are assumed or unspoken (such as informal hierarchies, language choices etc).

Network approaches can also explain aspects of non-participation. First, a primary socialisation that pays little or no attention to politics, or perceives social movement activism to be illegitimate or dangerous is likely to discourage individuals from participating unless they find themselves in strong and persuasive networks where activism is strongly valued. Second, individuals with political interests but no network context through which to participate might find it difficult to seek out protest opportunities, and if they do, the experience of protesting alone might seem boring or alienating (McAdam, 1986). Moreover, activist participation draws on knowledge and debate to help form individuals' opinions. Oegema and Klandermans (1994) surveyed individuals in the Netherlands to find whether they planned to sign a national petition against cruise missiles. For those who had expressed an initial willingness to sign but ultimately failed to do so, Oegema and Klandermans identified two explanations – 'nonconversion' and 'erosion'. The first can be explained by individuals' lack of opportunities to convert their support into action. This might include not being targeted for an organisation's campaign drives, as well as lacking access to networks which might discuss the issue and what they might do about it. As a result the *lack* of social pressure to think or act results in nonconversion. Erosion, on the other hand might be caused by facing the 'reality' of participation, which might stimulate the sorts of negative emotions described earlier in Norgaard's work. Alternatively, erosion might be the result of network 'cross pressures' where cynics or opponents of the issue might dissuade or discourage individuals from acting upon their original willingness. In other words, participating might cause *too much* social pressure and antagonism, resulting in non-participation becoming the easier option.

In sum, network and field approaches provide a microstructural theory of participation and non-participation where participation in protest opportunities is largely dependent on the social circumstances that individuals find themselves in. As a method of research, these approaches pose challenges for how networks can be identified as providing greater explanatory power than other variables used to explain mobilisation. This is no easy task, and Diani (2004) admits that network approaches risk providing tautological analysis, especially when using protest case studies. This is because if one looks for networks in protest groups, it is likely that networks will be found, but this alone does not prove that any causal mechanism. As Diani notes, a better testing of the theory might be found by looking for cases where activist networks *do not* produce participation. Similarly, adopting an approach similar to Oegema and Klandermans (1994), where variables of participants and non-participants might yield more reliable results. One can argue that the densely networked context of the university campus provides such an opportunity to study participation and

non-participation side-by-side. This necessitates a further exploration of the essential properties of the university campus as a field, and the culture of activism it facilitates.

## 5. Exploring the field: protest participation and non-participation on the university campus

Student activism has for many years been a significant form of social movement participation – indeed, its prominence in Europe and the United States the 1960s was a key factor in establishing some of the social movement theories covered in the previous section. This final section focuses on three issues: first, it reflects on the history of student movements, paying particular attention to specific properties which have characterised cases in the UK. Second, it considers the university campus as a field for mobilisation and protest participation, taking into account aforementioned social movement theories and concepts. Finally, it discusses direct and indirect outcomes of student activism on politics, the university and the students involved.

### *Student activism in Europe and the United States*

At some level, student protest has existed for as long as there have been students, but as an organised and influential form of political contention in its own right, student activism is a relatively modern phenomenon (Boren, 2001). Broadly speaking, student politics can be divided into two distinct but interrelated traditions. The first concerns students as an *interest group*, focusing on political matters related to the university campus and higher education more generally. The second concerns students as de facto *vanguards*, which often relates to campaign issues beyond the campus including matters of government policy, foreign affairs or identity politics. As Rootes (1980: 475) points out, students hold some degree of political significance in a society as ‘an incipient, if not always actual intelligentsia’, acting as society’s progressive moral arbiters. In these cases, the student protest can act as a forerunner to more widespread national or international movements.

Until the twentieth century, occurrences of student unrest – at least in Europe – reflected the sometimes uneasy birth of universities as institutions, as students became increasingly dissatisfied with their declining social power relative to that of a university’s administration (Boren, 2001). In certain historical cases – notably the 1848 revolutions in Europe – students played an important contributory role to wider political movements. The rise of student activism in the twentieth century owed much to the expansion of the university system, which among other things increased the population of students to the point that they represented a critical mass in society. Moreover, the integration of universities with

government, state and society formalised the hierarchy of university governance, a transformation that arguably left students cast as too transient a population to warrant a role in decision-making processes.

Along with these systemic conditions, the rise of student activism in the 1960s was also shaped by broader social processes, notably the expansion of welfare provision and the emergence of the post-war ‘baby boomer’ generation. Out of this grew a frustration with the values of their elders who they considered morally conservative, politically authoritarian and socially paternalistic (Hoefferle, 2013). This rose to sudden and spectacular prominence in 1968 when, in France, student protests against authoritarianism in the university system dovetailed with trade unions to force nationwide strikes, resulting in riots in Paris and President Charles De Gaulle briefly fleeing the country. Although defeated soon after, the events helped spark student-led protests in Germany, Italy, Poland, Yugoslavia, the United States and others throughout 1968 and 1969 (Gordon, 1998; Boren, 2001).

In the UK, student activists were arguably less coordinated and their protests less violent than their international counterparts, though they still mobilised in large numbers on a range of issues throughout the late 1960s (Ellis, 1998; Hoefferle, 2013). Campaigns were somewhat hampered by the lack of leadership from the NUS, which at the time had a limited political mandate. This leadership vacuum saw the formation of alternative student organisations such as the Radical Student Alliance and the Vietnam Solidarity campaign. The latter set up local branches in most major campuses across the UK and helped organise three anti-Vietnam War national demonstrations in London’s Grosvenor Square between 1967 and 1968. For the October 1968 demonstration, students inspired by events in France helped draw a crowd of around 100,000 people, even though it was condemned by the NUS on the grounds that it was led by ‘political hooligans’ seeking a ‘weekend revolution’ (Ellis, 1998: 66).

For many in the UK, student protest was a new and alarming development. Hoefferle (2013: 205-6) notes that the press preferred to characterise activism as another example of the nefarious influence of ‘Americanism’ on British youth. This sidestepped the fact that student activism in France, the United States and elsewhere spoke of a wider politics – namely opposition to paternalistic authoritarianism and the right to freedom of speech – that British students recognised in their own universities. Consequently, students adapted the generational *spirit de corps* and, protested on issues such as the provision of same-sex accommodation and increasing student democracy on campus.

By the 1970s, student activism had lost much of its ‘countercultural’ identity and many of its ‘rank-and-file’ participants but its campaigns had begun to effect changes in university policy, as well as help consolidate student protest and activism as a normal feature of UK campus life (Yettram, 1981). The early 1970s saw the NUS amend its constitution to allow for political debate on a greater variety of issues, whilst campuses saw the expansion of political party branches, leftist factions and social movement organisations. By the 1990s, student activism had become a firm fixture in UK universities but was struggling to gain traction beyond its campuses. As noted in chapter one, the Labour Government’s introduction of tuition fees in 1998 failed to provoke the scale of contention or media interest that one might have expected, causing activists to once again question the leadership qualities of the NUS (Boren, 2001: 227). Despite this, however, the university campus continues to offer a range of opportunities for social movement participation unmatched in most other social fields – a topic which we turn to next.

***The campus field – opportunities and constraints***

As a field for mobilisation, the university campus has many advantages. Its students are mostly at the same point in their life-cycle which, in the UK at least, tends to result in a relatively homogenous core of white, middle class, full-time undergraduates who either live on, or close to, the university campus (see HESA, 2012). There are, of course, many other categories of student – postgraduates, international students, students living at home, students studying part-time and working part-time – and they might find basic shared experiences of university life in other ways. These include attending lectures and seminars on campus, using study facilities, following course curricula and assessment, receiving staff contact time, sharing accommodation, attending student social events, belonging to the same student union, and ultimately above all else, seeking to graduate with a university degree. It is from these shared experiences that one can identify a basic student disposition which has the potential to create a collective sense of the student ‘we’, even if the heterogeneity of the student population arguably precludes this from being converted into an overarching collective identity.

The university campus also provides clear *social* opportunities for students to interact and form a critical mass. Crossley (2008: 32) notes that entering university structurally ‘frees up’ young people for activism as they are liberated from the controlling influence of parental/family ties. From this starting point, ‘the typical campus concentrates a large population and affords mechanisms which allow the politically motivated to find one another and form networks’ (Crossley, 2008: 29). Network-making can operate formally and

informally – on the one hand, campuses feature identifiable network foci for politically-engaged students to find one another, such as student groups and societies, as well as the student union. On the other hand, dense networks can also exist within halls of residence and course classes, leading students to make friends based on shared interests.

Opportunities for finding students with common interests in many ways depend on the nature of the campuses themselves. Larger campuses, for example, are more likely to attract sufficient numbers of students with minority interests enabling them to ‘form the networks necessary for whatever forms of collective action inspire them’ (Crossley and Ibrahim, 2012: 610). Larger campuses are also likely to feature a wider range of different political societies, as well as a student union with the resources to fund full-time union sabbatical officers responsible for academic affairs, student democracy or campaigning. Van Dyke (1998) claims that this becomes self-reproducing, having found that American universities with a history of past activism were four times more likely to host student protest in the 1960s. This, she found, was attributable to social networks facilitated by a critical mass of students; a university’s historical reputation for liberal values; the presence of politically active faculty members, and a sufficient number of elite students whose greater self-confidence in their actions enabled them to take positions of leadership in student groups on campus. Although usually in the minority on campus, Binder and Wood (2012) observed a similar effect with regard to right-wing students, with particular types of university inclined to foster the development of particular ‘styles’ of conservative activism.

Although the university campus provides unique opportunities for student activism, it also provides unique constraints. Most obviously, student groups are permanently limited by the fact that a campus’s population is in a permanent state of flux, with undergraduates expected to graduate after three or four years, and a cohort of new undergraduates arriving each year. This creates obstacles for political groups and societies wishing to build and sustain skills, resources and knowledge across successive cohorts. This is made easier when a campus’s existing activism structures can keep attracting politically-active young people to study there, either through the public prominence of its campaigns or social networks operating between school and university students. As Biddix and Park (2008) argue, the recent proliferation of online technologies such as websites and mailing lists make it easier for student activists to overcome ‘generational mortality’ and maintain unbroken chains of group campaigns and organisational management.

***Paths to mobilisation***

The political agencies responsible for maintaining activism across cohorts are a campus's political groups and societies, and its student union. For issues where there is common ground between these units, temporary or long-term coalitions are sometimes formed, enabling activists to pool their collective skills and resources to create large protest events in and around campus. In cases where an issue may be of national or international concern to students, these groups and coalitions might collaborate with or inspire groups and coalitions from *other* universities to create simultaneous protest events, such as campus occupations (e.g. those which took place in UK universities and art colleges in 1968 out of solidarity with French demonstrators) or nationwide 'days of action'.

As with most movements, students mobilise for a range of low and high-cost/risk protest repertoires including petitions, rallies, teach-ins and demonstrations, with different groups favouring certain repertoires over others. For local and national student unions, their status as representative and semi-independent bodies means that they usually favour peaceful protest organised in consultation with university management and the police. In contrast, radical repertoires such as occupations, acts of vandalism and speech disruptions are more likely to be the work of independent groups and networks. According to Clarke and Egan (1972), there is usually correlation between repertoire choices and certain political attitudes, with demonstrators being most likely to show signs of discontent with formal political institutions than those engaging in forms of low-cost/risk activism.

Although social movement research into campus protest tends to be case-study based, student groups and societies organise inside and outside of specific protest opportunities to find ways of engaging and mobilising the wider student population. Even in times of high struggle, however, evidence suggests that only very low numbers of students can be mobilised into protesting. Hoefferle (2013: 204-5) claims that opinion polls carried out in the 1960s and 1970s showed potentially radical student activists consisting only of around one or two percent of a university's overall student population. Clarke and Egan's (1972: 507-8) study of students at Florida State University found activism to be more widespread, albeit divisible into distinct layers. At its core were student demonstrators who amounted to 22 per cent of the student population (less than 20 per cent of whom had participated in 'illegal' demonstrations). Outside of this was a layer of 'conventional activists' (19 per cent) engaged in relatively low-cost forms of participation. The majority of students, however, were those categorised as 'politically passive', claiming to follow politics in the media without being politically *active*. Participation also featured certain demographic trends, with Altbach

(1989) and Blackstone and Hadley (1971) finding that student activists in Britain and the United States were more likely to have a non-religious background and study social science. Blackstone and Hadley's research also supports the political socialisation thesis, finding that activists were considerably more likely to have left-wing parents (see also Sherkat and Blocker, 1994).

Beyond activist socialisation, there is evidence in the student movement literature of the importance of social networks in activism mobilisation. Crossley and Ibrahim (2012) depict the modern university campus as consisting of multiple interrelated social networks. Activist networks may coalesce around certain identifiable foci such as the student union and political societies, but it is the overall *network* that is ultimately responsible for developing and sustaining activist identities on campus. This is because it operates as a tightly integrated political world where 'information, rumours, resources and directives are likely to pass very quickly around' (Crossley and Ibrahim, 2012: 603). Like McAdam (1986), Crossley and Ibrahim (2012: 606) find that *denser* networks enhance activism opportunities, as they 'afford greater potential for solidarity, support and participation incentives to emerge within a network'. Once established, these networks can become self-sustaining, as 'networks facilitate actions and actions (qua foci) generate networks'. This might be exemplified by student activists living together, forming relationships or running societies, which helps them keep one another 'in the frame' (Ibid: 607). Moreover, these networks may draw in students who are connected to activists in other ways, such as housemates, course-mates, friends and partners.

Given the emphasis placed on strong personal affinities within these activism networks, Crossley and Ibrahim (2012: 608) issue a word of caution, acknowledging that 'networks can perhaps become too cohesive for purposes of collective action' and appear inaccessible to newcomers. Research by Hirsch (1990) links network density among activists on campus with the development of a shared ideological commitment, the practicing of high-cost/risk protest repertoires, and the collective eschewing of self-interest. Interestingly, Hirsch also finds that the activist collective identity is reinforced by members' social polarisation from the rest of the student population, which supports the view that student activism features subcultural properties comparable to those identified by Goffman (1971) and Becker (1991).

In this context, 'collective identity' refers not to a student movement as a whole but rather the specific *networks* that form around and draw in specific groups or activities. Network density is also affected by how much political consensus there is between members. In some cases, dense networks that incorporate, say, an environmental group, an LGBT group, a

political party and a free education movement might appear at first glance relatively heterogeneous. However, such networks might be strong because none of these groups are politically *incompatible* with each other. Instead, fault lines emerge when there are philosophical, ethical or tactical contradictions between groups and campaigns. As a result, larger campus coalitions which incorporate groups and campaigns with more fragile political compatibilities have to be managed more carefully, and as such are less likely to produce a shared collective identity.

A good example of these tensions can be found in Crouch's (1970: 78) critical reflections on student activism at the LSE in the 1960s. He identifies clear political distinctions between activists working with the student union, who campaigned on more manageable political targets such as increasing student representation, and activists associated with the 'New Left', who advocated a more radical and spontaneous politics and were prepared to use the threat of violence as a political weapon. According to Crouch, this often resulted in the university's critical mass of left-leaning students being split along ideological lines. In cases where common ground could be found between both sides – such as an opposition to the Vietnam War – coalitions could be established, even if conflicts would often again arise over the choice of protest tactics (see also Van Dyke 2003).

***Outcomes of student activism***

Although the campus provides unique resources and opportunities to mobilise, the transitory nature of the student population places limitations on activists' capacity to sustain an activist base on campus. Nor do students possess the same power to withdraw their labour as unionised workers, and so have to find different ways of building influential movements. For protests that issue demands to university management, its intended goals are clear to see, whereas for sit-ins and occupations the *process* of protesting might become their most valued outcome. Activist groups also sometimes face pressure to put to one side grander political ideals in the pursuit of goals which might be considered more achievable. This does not always go down well, with Crouch (1970) observing that the popularity of the existentialist maxim that *action should be true to one's ultimate values* sometimes resulted in activists' attaching greater value to radical and uncompromising protests which brought disastrous failure than protests with more achievable aims that were partially successful.

Campus-based student protests often seek to establish channels of communication with university management. Interestingly, negotiations often draw on the opinion of the wider student body (or in Clarke and Egan's terms, the 'politically passive') as *de facto* arbiters.

For the protesters, their task is to achieve leverage through mobilising students to sign petitions or vote for motions of support at the student union, as well as through everyday interaction and debate with non-protesting students. On the other hand, university management will often challenge the assertion that activists are speaking ‘for’ a wider community if they feel they have neither the mass-turnout nor the democratic mandate to do so. A good example of this dynamic can be found in Crouch’s (1970) account of how an act of political vandalism on campus by radical activists provoked the LSE’s director to write a series of letters to all students calling for a condemnation of their actions. After the student union failed to agree on any organised response to the letters and ‘ordinary’ students took no collective response either, this overall non-response was ultimately considered as a victory for the activists.

For issues bigger than the campus – such as anti-war demonstrations – building popular and coherent campaigns is harder than it might first seem. Of course, the ultimate goal of anti-Iraq War student activists was the prevention of the Iraq War, but the vast majority were realistic enough to accept that this was unlikely to be realised by students alone. Consequently, the goal of student campaigns of this kind – explicitly or implicitly – is to kick-start a wider movement that mobilises all sections of society. This can cause tensions between activists, university management, and the wider student body, especially when the campus is co-opted as a protesting or recruiting space. Crouch (1970) reflects on the difficulties activists at the LSE faced in mobilising against the Vietnam War because many ordinary students struggled to see the relationship between the protests’ anti-war goals and the university as a site for protest. As with protests more closely related to student matters, the public opinion of the wider student population – even in times of wider political ‘opportunities’ – can be volatile, easy to misjudge, and hard to measure.

In these cases, a further task for student activists is to persuade the wider *public* of its views. As already noted, the specific societal positioning of students as an ‘incipient intelligentsia’ has sometimes given them the role of *de facto* vanguards, tasked with drawing the public’s attention to hitherto-underappreciated moral grievances. As this suggests, activism of this kind depends heavily on awareness-raising repertoires designed to gain traction through media coverage. For students especially, this has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, national and international media coverage undoubtedly helps to inflate a student campaign’s voice far beyond what it is typically capable of, and thus provide it with an important opportunity to influence public opinion and political debate. On the other hand, the

media can also be a capricious and impermanent platform on which to base a campaign, especially if the media turns on the activists or loses interest in them (see Gitlin, 1981).

The notion of students appealing to the wider public also has its difficulties. Echoing Norgaard's (2006) findings, students speaking out on non-student matters face *ad hominem* dismissals on the grounds that their 'naïve', 'privileged' and detached position from the rest of society renders them unqualified to comment on such matters as war, public policy or the economy. This also gives rise to the popular assumption that once students graduate and become part of the 'real world' their radicalism or idealism will fade. Whilst it would be wrong to assume that student activists are not prone to changing their politics over time, the logic of the argument returns us to the rational-choice assumptions that the politics of youth-based movements are somehow a product of self-interest, be it material benefit, egoistic attention-seeking or Bakhtinesque countercultural performance. Nevertheless, such criticisms do point out structural tensions in instances where students seek to tell others why they should think or act in a different way.

In sum, one can argue that the dual role of student activists as a self-representing interest group and society's de facto vanguards makes it sometimes difficult to separate and identify clear political outcomes. Recalling the discussion of the 2010/11 student protests case study in the previous chapter, one can argue that they occupied both roles. As an interest group, activists appealed to citizens in highlighting the moral grievance of £9,000 fees in a time of austerity to a society where many had received their higher education for free, and asking them to help put pressure on Parliament to vote down the fees bill and revise its position on higher education funding. But for more radically-minded students, fees and cuts were merely symptomatic of a broader struggle against neoliberal capitalism, and so were engaged in finding ways of kick-starting a wider movement against the coalition Government's austerity programme. In this sense, students took the role of de facto vanguards. Clearly, this duality has clear consequences for how we take this study forward.

## 6. Conclusion

The literature review provides important pointers for the design and analysis of this research study. It also reveals certain aspects of the current literature which warrant further exploration. First, the discussion of contemporary patterns of political participation demonstrates the need to contextualise new findings within existing studies. This involves comparing not only student participation to the UK average as presented in Hansard (2010), but also students in the 1960s and 1970s. Comparisons with the latter enables us to consider

the impact of online communications as a possible means of enhancing mobilisation opportunities, along with how much the fees and cuts issue was able to mobilise students outside of traditional social demographics.

Second, the literature provides important pointers as to how one should approach the production of *agency* in the student protests, including paths and barriers to mobilisation students might have encountered. This includes the role played by family socialisation, schooling, as well as the broader context of the Iraq War, which coincided with the majority of undergraduates' early teenage years. On campus, the mobilising power of unions and alternative campaign groups and networks is an area of interest. The work of McAdam (1986) and Crossley (2007) is important for framing the social processes through which students came to take part in the protests, especially high cost/risk protest repertoires. One might also consider how Oegema and Klandermans' (1994) concept of network erosion or nonconversion might help explain students who remained 'concerned, unmobilised' (Jordan and Maloney, 2007).

Third, the subject of participation itself is a key area for exploration in this research project, particularly in comparing students' experiences of high and low-cost/risk forms. The literature has uncovered interesting insights into the *culture* of high-cost/risk activist groups, including the evolution of norms and standards of activist behaviour (Bobel, 2007), and the strong ties and clique cultures that can evolve out of densely networked and committed groups (Crossley and Ibrahim, 2012; Saunders, 2008). Comparing this to the experience of *low*-cost/risk participation offers an opportunity to add to the gaps in the literature, especially given debates over the efficacy of so-called 'slacktivist' repertoires (Morozov, 2009). The student protests featured a range of different protest tactics – from occupations to Facebook pages – and this raises questions about the extent to which they succeeded in creating a cross-repertoire, movement-level 'collective identity' (Saunders, 2008).

Fourth, the experience of non-participation is a key interest in this research project. The existing literature in this area is quite patchy, with very few studies directly devoted to the subject. The literature does, however, provide some pointers: the useful, if sketchy, ideal-types put forward by Hansard (2010) provide a template for exploring different shades of non-participation. Jordan and Maloney (2007) expound on those who are 'concerned, unmobilised' and question whether this can be explained by a lack of faith in the *efficacy* of participation. This, too, invites cultural analysis of the kind taken by Eliasoph (1998) and Norgaard (2006), both of whom pay close attention to the narratives of powerlessness and self-preservation among non-participants.

Fifth and finally, the literature review identifies a number of important methodological considerations for this research project. On the one hand, the discussion of political survey data reveals the limitations of measuring participation, especially the capacity to incorporate new repertoires. On the other hand, using consistent measurements of participation is clearly useful for comparing patterns and trends uncovered by Hansard (2010) and Pattie et al. (2004), as well as student case studies (Blackstone and Hadley, 1971; Clarke and Egan, 1972). For this reason, it is important to build a survey that combines objective and subjective elements of participation, as well as one that captures the specifics of the fees and cuts case study. Interviews, too, should capture aspects of participation unsuited to quantitative research. This is especially relevant to potentially sensitive topics such as clique cultures, ghettoization, political violence and dis-identification, which may involve critiquing aspects of their own social identities and relationships, and the identities and relationships of others. Both forms of data collection require a robust research design, and it is this which we turn to in the next chapter.

# Chapter 3

# Methodology and research design

## 1. Introduction – framing the case study

It was posited in chapter one that the student protests case study required a mixed method research design to capture the different aspects of the research questions. To recap, the project makes specific use of two methods of research:

1. **Online survey questionnaire** to measure protest participation and non-participation, sources of information and communication, attitudes towards protest repertoires, and social background. The survey was open to all undergraduate and postgraduate students from a selected sample of universities.

2. **Semi-structured interviews** focusing on participants' and non-participants' experiences of, and attitudes towards, the student protests and political participation more generally. Interviewees were recruited principally through invitations included in the questionnaire, with additional recruitment coming via purposive and snowball sampling to access hard-to-reach populations, such as protest organisers.

As demonstrated in the last chapter, population surveys and semi-structured interviews are common tools for research into political participation. Case studies, too, are frequently employed in studying social movements, both as a means of exploring activism cultures (e.g. Saunders, 2008) and for comparing participants and non-participants (e.g. McAdam, 1986). Although social movement case studies frequently employ triangulation, they tend to favour a blend of different qualitative approaches (Snow and Trom, 2002). The scarcity of quantitative/qualitative triangulation owes in part to constraints in framing and accessing a case study's membership for surveying purposes, especially when 'members' might be difficult to identify. At another level, both methods reflect different methodological preferences in political science and social movement research. The use of survey data in social science is useful for producing data from which one can easily identify long-term trends, but has also been criticised for flattening out the specificities of certain case studies and personal narratives which might uncover participatory causation. Conversely, qualitative studies provide more scope for understanding how social movements *emerge*, but risk becoming too bound up in the specificities of individual cases to facilitate generalisation. In

other words, the methodological limitations of one method are in many ways the strengths of the other.

This research project – perhaps ambitiously – sought to build a research design which incorporated both statistical generalisation and analytical validity under a single case study. This opportunity owes greatly to the advantages of studying the field of student activism. First, since my focus is on *student* participation/non-participation, their status and university affiliation makes them relatively easily locatable as a research population. Second, this research project is focused on participating *and* non-participating students. By focusing on university campuses as the principal field of access, student participants and non-participants can be studied side-by-side. Moreover, given debates around what constitutes 'participation' covered in the previous chapter, approaching students via their institution rather than through certain specific actions (e.g. Walgrave and Verhulst, 2011; Favre et al, 1997) allows for a more subjective notion of 'participation' to emerge.

Although the student protests might appear a worthy subject for a case study, researchers should always make clear what they consider their study to be a 'case of'. According to Snow and Trom (2002: 149), case studies involve the detailed and holistic study of an 'instance or variant of some more generic phenomena'. One can argue that the student protests case study covers both typical and atypical elements. First, it represents an instance of a suddenly imposed grievance which mobilised large numbers into taking collective action, even though the majority of students who shared those grievances *did not* participate. This is arguably a common feature of most social movements, for as Klandermans (1997) notes, campaigns seldom, if ever, successfully mobilise an entire affected population. Second, and perhaps less typical, is students' status as an 'affected population'. Due to constant cohort turnover, they are often placed in the position of representing 'students' without necessarily representing their own material interests. This is true of the £9,000 fees grievance, making the case study in some ways comparable to post-material social movements. Third and finally, the case study is something of a deviant case in UK student politics insofar as the fees and cuts protests succeeded in mobilising students – albeit for a short period – on a scale arguably not seen since the 1960s. Analysing why this collective action frame mobilised large numbers of students is key to not only explaining its abnormality, but also possible reasons for lower rates of participation in other movements and campaigns.

In more practical terms, studying students in the 2011/12 academic year meant that research had to be completed before the academic year closed (30 June 2012) so as to maintain a

unitary cohort sample. As noted in the first chapter, this creates a slight disjuncture between the year of data collection (2011/12), and the year in which fees grievance principally took place (2010/11). Although the bill was passed by Parliament in December 2010, this did not mean student activism simply stopped – groups such as NCAFC were especially keen to take its campaign into 2011/12, and so the case study would have to be relatively flexible and open to the possibility that new major protest events might occur during fieldwork. As it turned out, the principal post-fees grievance for student campaigners – the Higher Education White Paper – was indefinitely shelved by the Government shortly before fieldwork began, resulting in no major higher education protest events or campaigns coinciding with this timeframe. This meant the case study became principally *retrospective*, with first year students likely to have had fewer opportunities to participate than those who had been at university the previous year. Rather than accepting this as a weakness of the research per se, I decided to *test* this cohort effect by incorporating the study of how groups sustained campaigns and promoted higher education activism to new students *after* the fees bill had passed.

To take things further, this chapter will next focus on the two research methods in more detail. For both I will outline the reasons for their selection along with each method's research design, sampling, access and ethical considerations. Both sections will also include evaluations of the data collection process. The fourth section will focus on approaches and tools for research data analysis. This incorporates a basic presentation of the survey and interview data, as well as a discussion of strategies employed to triangulate the data to address the research questions.

## 2. The survey

A fundamental aim of this research project was to measure participatory trends among the UK student population, both in relation to the case study and more generally. Broadly speaking, survey questionnaires offer 'standardised measurement that is consistent across all respondents' which 'ensures that comparable information is obtained about everyone who is described' (Fowler, 2009: 3). As we saw in chapter two, surveys are a key tool in political science participation studies. At a basic level, the choice of survey research for this project reflected a desire to engage directly with trends and findings from this body of literature, as well as help frame and contextualise qualitative accounts from student interviews.

In recent years, the reach and consistency of surveys has been enhanced further by the popularisation of *online* questionnaires. As Bethlehem (2009) observes, online surveys have

become increasingly popular in social research due to the speed with which they can be launched and their low cost of distribution compared with postal surveys. A familiar note of caution concerns questions of coverage, as populations without easy access to the internet are automatically excluded from the survey's reach, but this did not present a problem for this research project. Kaplowitz et al. (2004) found that using online surveys is aided by the fact that all students are given a university email account and free on-site internet access. Should access to mass-student mailing lists be obtained, online surveys would not automatically exclude any relevant groups within the overall student population.

***Research design***

To begin, it is important to establish what the survey aimed to measure, and the sort of data it sought to capture. To address the project's research questions the survey covered six themes: the student experience (covering extra-curricular activities and union involvement); attitudes towards higher education funding policy; political attitudes and activities; students' general political participation; students' participation in the student protests, and personal questions. These themes consisted of three types of data: measurements of participation, attitudinal questioning, and social demographics. This incorporated two broad categories of participation – 'general' (including formal, civic and protest politics), and case-study specific. As we saw in the last chapter, one should be mindful of presupposing definitions of participation in the survey's questioning, as this runs the risk of blindly reproducing preconceived notions of participation whilst ignoring emerging forms. At the same time, there are also advantages to employing some standardised measurements and definitions via the adaptation of previous survey questionnaires. Not only can these draw on tried-and-tested questions which are proven to elicit useful responses, they also allow for cross-case comparisons (Klandermans and Smith, 2002: 24).

As a result, the survey employed a combination of new and old survey questions, incorporating both survey-defined and respondent-defined interpretations of participation. The questionnaire (see appendix A) measures general participation by adapting the model employed by Hansard (Q23). The selection of political activities offered a greater range of 'activist' repertoires than Hansard (see chapter two, figure 2.1) though as we shall see in the next chapter categorisations of the 'politically active' differ. For case study participation (Q32), respondents were invited to select from any of the twelve listed options, which reflected the different repertoires employed by students as part of the protest, from high-cost/risk to low-cost/risk activities. Given the case study's flexibility, its participation is measured more subjectively than for general participation. In addition to the listed activities,

respondents were invited to input their own activities via the ‘other’ open dialogue box. This flexibility reflected the intention for respondents’ participation to be defined as much by the respondent as the survey criteria, exemplified in the fact that prior to this question respondents were asked ‘have you participated in any way in the student protests against fees?’ (Q31). From this point, the survey temporarily split, with respondents who answered ‘yes’ being asked questions about their participation, and respondents who answered ‘no’ asked questions about their non-participation. This had the effect of inviting respondents to predefine ‘participation’ independently of any stated activity, thereby opening up possible gaps between activities listed in the survey and activities included in the ‘other’ category.

Although the case study included notable events – the 2010 NUS demonstration, for example – survey questions focused on participation in *activities* rather than specific *events*. Relying on the accuracy of respondents’ memory is a common problem for political surveys (Fowler, 2009: 87), and a survey that records attendance for specific protest events 18 months ago might produce unreliable data if respondents struggle to accurately recall which particular events they attended. Moreover, unlike studies by McAdam (1988) or Oegema and Klandermans (1994), the student protests did not coalesce around any one single measurable action or event. This also allowed the survey to accommodate any new participatory opportunities which might emerge during data collection.

The second category of data captured in the survey was *attitudinal*, focusing on students’ perspectives on politics, protest and the fees grievance. For more general themes related to trust, political background and political efficacy, certain questions were adapted from existing participation questionnaires such as Pattie et al (2004), Hansard (2010) and Klandermans et al (2011). To make more complex political attitudes broadly measurable, questions were presented as a series of statements which respondents were invited to select from a sliding scale to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed. This provided a richness of different possible articulations, with respondents encouraged to feel more comfortable in selecting truthful answers from a range of political statements to agree or disagree with (Fowler, 2009).

The third category of data related to respondents’ personal details and social demographics. It is important to situate survey trends within the context of the different types of student studying at university, as well as sociological categories of sex, age, and class. These needed to be clearly presented, but in a way that did not provide any issues with respondents’ anonymity – especially given the nature of the participatory data recorded. One issue worth expanding on here is how social class was measured: although surveys traditionally use an

employment-based model (e.g. Goldthorpe et al's (1980) scheme), this does not easily translate to students without asking more detailed questions about respondents' parents. As a result, the survey adapted the method used by Klandermans et al. (2011) whereby respondents were invited to categorise themselves as belonging to a particular class category (or not). This introduced the variable of 'class identification' which could also be compared with respondents' participatory patterns.

The survey was built using Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) which allows for the flexible creation and customisation of questionnaires, which are then hosted on a secure, unique and easily accessible web address. BOS was found to be flexible and practical for building a questionnaire that reproduced the basic research design, though its lack of 'smart surveying' meant that the questionnaire was not able to subdivide according to respondents' participation or non-participation in the case study. This meant that respondents who clicked that they did not participate would still see – and have to skip over – follow-up questions specific to participants, and vice-versa.

Totalling 46 questions, many of which feature multiple sub-questions, the questionnaire is considerably large. To encourage respondents to complete in full, the survey's first page notified users that the questionnaire consisted of five web pages of questions. Respondents could not access latter pages without having completed questions from each preceding page. The first question page concerned the most inclusive theme in the questionnaire – the student experience. This theme, and the page's relatively short length, aimed to encourage respondents to continue with the questionnaire as it became more detailed in the latter pages. Questions related to personal details and social demographics were placed at the end of the questionnaire. Given that respondents had by this point seen and answered its attitudinal and behavioural questions, it was felt that they would feel less wary of disclosing more personal information.

The survey's length also created possibilities for 'order effects' where the sequencing of attitudinal and participatory questions might have primed respondents to answer the latter in certain ways (Klandermans and Smith, 2002: 24). Consequently, efforts were made to sequence questions capturing electoral and civic participation *before* attitudinal questions dealing specifically with the efficacy and value of such activities. It was felt that answering attitudinal questions first might oblige respondents to over-estimate their participation so that it more closely matches their beliefs in the importance of taking part. Similarly, questions regarding attitudes towards higher education funding were placed at the beginning of the survey, and questions about participation placed at the end.

***Sampling, access and ethics***

Effective questionnaire design is of course necessary for building a workable survey, but its usefulness arguably depends most on its distribution. As we saw in the previous chapter, student protest surveys have tended to sample only one campus (e.g. Blackstone and Hadley, 1971; Clarke and Egan, 1972), which inevitably limits their broader representativeness. However, the speed and economy of *online* surveys makes it easier for questionnaires to be sent out to multiple institutions via mass emails – even if undertaken by a single researcher. This standardised method of communications means that students can be potentially reached quickly, directly and on a mass-scale.

As this suggests, the scale of the sample is dependent on the sort of *access* the researcher is able to gain to a university's student mailing lists. To test this, I undertook an access pilot study three months prior to the survey's launch. The pilot sampled three universities and involved emailing the same request for the survey to be distributed to students to three different access points – registry, the student union, and academic departments. The first two access points received no responses at all. Academic departments – which were approached by emailing academic staff members such as heads of department – were more successful with 2-3 responding that they would be willing to forward the survey either to students from a single degree programme or an entire department. This confirmed my view that academic staff members represented the most promising 'gatekeepers', even though it would require over-sampling potential gatekeepers to overcome the likelihood of non-responses and refusals. Building a *representative* sample would require multiple gatekeepers from different departments. Given the desire to achieve UK-wide representativeness, I designed a basic sample of 20 universities which covered the different regions, campus types, and institutional age (the final sample is shown in figure 3.1; initial university coding is found in appendix E). For each university, at least three departments or degree programmes from the arts and humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences, and logic and technology subjects were sampled.

Of course, the projected size of the sample depended to a large extent on the sort of response rate each department could be relied upon to produce. As online survey questionnaires are self-administered, response rates tend to be low – even with advance notifications and reminders – at around 20-23 per cent (Kaplowitz et al, 2004; Bethlehem, 2009). To test response rates, as well as the functioning of the questionnaire and BOS software, the survey was piloted in January 2012 using the University of Edinburgh sociology postgraduate and senior honours undergraduate mailing lists. An incentive was provided for questionnaire in

the form of a prize draw for a £10 book token. Out of a combined mailing list total of 220 students, the survey received 19 respondents. The response rate of 8.6 per cent was significantly lower than expected, but the number of students *accessed* was considerably higher. From this, I concluded that by targeting 20 respondents per department sampled, each university could be expected to achieve 60 respondents overall, providing an estimated survey total of 1,200 across all 20 universities. Achieving this target would require 60 different gatekeepers, and given the mixed response from the pilot survey it was decided that the university list would have to be flexible, with like-for-like substitutions lined up should certain institutions prove unsuccessful for securing gatekeepers.

The distribution of the survey to a large UK-wide sample of students inevitably created ethical considerations. Survey data was anonymous and the questionnaire design avoided capturing any data where criminal activity might be disclosed, but as an incentive for survey completion respondents were invited to leave a personal email address that could be entered into a prize draw to win £50 of book tokens. Although a common practice in surveying (Klandermans and Smith, 2002: 17) completion incentives risk creating response biases, though book tokens were felt to represent a relatively 'neutral' (and apolitical) incentive for students. The presence of email addresses on the survey dataset (some of which were personal accounts) meant that survey data had to be stored on secure servers with all documents password-encrypted. Following the survey's completion and the prize awarded, email data from non-interviewees was permanently deleted.

***Survey distribution and evaluation***

The survey was distributed in two broad phases – the first spanning 5 February 2012 until the Easter holidays in early April, and the second beginning on 30 April and lasting until the end of term/semester in late June. A spreadsheet was created to monitor the sampling process which included a list of possible gatekeepers from a variety of different subjects for each of the universities. Potential gatekeepers were identified on the basis that they were most likely to have first-hand access to their departmental student mailing lists, thereby increasing the likelihood that the survey could be forwarded to students quickly and directly. This meant heads of department and directors of undergraduate/postgraduate studies were key targets. For humanities and social science departments, staff members with research interests complimentary to the project were prioritised, whereas for natural science and technology departments staff union representatives were targeted on the basis that they might be more likely to sympathise with the case study's fees grievance.

Gatekeepers were sent two emails in quick succession: first, a personalised request for distribution which contained details of the project and supervisor contact details; and second, a copy of the standardised student email containing information on the project, details of the prize draw and the link to the survey's website (final versions are found in appendix B). The construction of the student email was crucial for the project's aim of achieving a representative ratio of participants and non-participants. As Rüdig (2010) reminds us, activist survey respondents tend to be skewed towards those who have borne higher 'cost' for their participation, and therefore seek recognition. The student email deliberately downplayed the questionnaire's political content so that less-active students would not feel discouraged from taking part. Instead, it emphasised its more universal and inclusive aspects – notably 'the student experience' and students' attitudes towards the cost of higher education.

The preferred means of distribution was for the survey email to be forwarded to students using group departmental mailing lists – the intention being that gatekeepers would have to do as little as possible. This was found to be overwhelmingly successful among willing gatekeepers, though in 4-5 cases it was requested that the survey was distributed via other means (e.g. weekly departmental bulletins, WebCT course homepages) due to departmental restrictions on 'spamming' student email accounts. These alternative methods were found to be considerably less successful for drawing strong response rates and so were discouraged whenever possible. Another issue was that the first phase clashed with the distribution of the National Student Survey, for which many universities had their own quotas and incentive schemes. This resulted in the postponement of the survey being distributed to around ten departments until the second phase.

Between the two phases, the surveying strategy – including the content of both emails – was revised to take account of emerging issues from phase one. Only minor aspects of the questionnaire itself were altered – mostly additional information on how to answer certain questions – though one statement was added to question 12 to test students' generational consciousness by including the statement 'politicians don't care about the interests of young people'. It was concluded that the request email was too long and detailed, and asked too much from gatekeepers. Additional requests that gatekeepers indicate the number of students on each mailing list (so as to calculate response rates) and forward the survey onto potential gatekeepers in other departments, were both removed. Neither had elicited strong responses during phase one – few were sure of the size of mailing lists or had contacts in other departments – and so it was felt that simplifying the request would increase the chances of the survey being automatically forwarded onto students.

As anticipated, the malleable nature of the access strategy meant that the survey had to be constantly monitored so that targets were achieved and certain groups and universities were not significantly under or over-subscribed. The nature of mass-mailing departments sometimes meant that the survey would be forwarded onto students without my knowledge, by which time I had already approached a different department. This meant that some universities – such as Nottingham and York – achieved a wider range of departments simply because a higher rate of staff members simultaneously sent out the survey email. In other cases, university sampling was interrupted by emails being forwarded onto ethics committees. As a standard procedure for many universities this issue had been anticipated, and all requests were complied with. In some cases, this only resulted in a temporary delay in the sampling process, though for others the committee process took too much time for the survey to be distributed before the end of the academic year. This meant that some universities only achieved a sample of one department (sampled prior to referral), whereas others had to be dropped from the sample altogether and substituted by an equivalent institution. As a result, the final number of universities sampled increased from 20 to 22.

The first phase was overwhelmingly successful, achieving 1,514 responses despite the survey having only been distributed to around 60 per cent of the total targeted gatekeepers. This owed in part to the conservative estimation of response rates from the January pilot study, as well as the fact that the sampling process – where emails were sent out in blocks of ten to potential gatekeepers each morning – was found to be successful and easily repeatable. This resulted in an expansion of the original sample to four departments per university, thereby increasing the target to approximately 2,000 respondents (from 22 universities). By the point at which the survey closed, it had achieved a total of 2,493 responses. Details of the sample, including selection criteria, are shown in figure 3.1.

To summarise, the survey research design and method of distribution proved extremely successful, achieving a total number of respondents more than double the size of the initial target. This owed to the flexibility of the basic sample design, the speed and efficiency of the process through which gatekeepers were approached, and the generosity of the gatekeepers themselves. The large dataset increased the scope for the sorts of analysis the survey could be used for. These large numbers did not necessarily reflect high response rates, however. As noted before, it proved prohibitively difficult to keep track of all response rates throughout the data collection process, but available data shown in figure 3.2 suggests that rates were well below standardised response rates for postal surveys. This suggests that the high yield of respondents owed to the significant amount of access achieved through departmental

mailing lists – most of which averaged at around 200 students – which meant that a response rate of around 5-8 per cent still produced a reasonable number of respondents.

Another issue concerned the large number of 'uncompleted' questionnaires[3], which totalled 323. Given the length of the survey and its political content, this was perhaps to be expected, though there may be the problem of self-selection bias, as students without political interests may have felt less compelled to continue with the survey than those with more political interests and activities to record[4]. Of course, this did not prevent the number of completed questionnaires from exceeding its original target, nor did it affect the survey's demographical representativeness (see section four). Certainly, one aspect of the survey that did achieve a high response rate was the number of respondents who expressed an interest in being interviewed for the research project – a total of 32.2 per cent. This brings us to the project's second research method.

[3] BOS surveys has a 'save' option, enabling respondents to resume and complete the questionnaire at a later date. This was felt to be a significant advantage given the questionnaire's length, but BOS also captured data on those which were left uncompleted.

[4] Nevertheless, adding incomplete questionnaires to the overall survey data produced only a 0.1 per cent shift in overall results from the question 'have you participated in the student protests?'

**Figure 3.1** Survey sample of UK universities and academic departments

| | University | Region | Est. | Campus Structure | No of students | No of depts | Departments sampled |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | University of Edinburgh | Scotland | 1583 | Multi-site city | 457 | 4 | Social and Political Science, Arts, Biological Sciences, Chemistry |
| 2 | University of Nottingham | East Mids | 1948 | Multi-site city | 248 | 10 | Sociology, Physics & Astronomy, Music, Theology & Religious Studies, Computer Science, Philosophy, Mathematics, Biology, Education, History |
| 3 | Plymouth University | South West | 1992 | Multi location | 157 | 4 | Social Science, Psychology & Criminology, Marine Science & Engineering, Arts |
| 4 | University of York | North | 1963 | Single campus | 155 | 4 | Sociology, Health Science, Mathematics, History |
| 5 | Aberystwyth University | Wales | 1872 | Dual campus | 149 | 4 | Management & Business, Geography and Earth Sciences, International Politics, Art |
| 6 | University of Liverpool | North West | 1903 | Single campus | 141 | 5 | Dentistry, Veterinary Science, Biological Sciences, Politics, History |
| 7 | University of Warwick | West Mids | 1965 | Multi-campus | 138 | 6 | Economics, Sociology, Classics & Ancient History, Law, Medicine, Engineering |
| 8 | Nottingham Trent University | East Mids | 1992 | Multi-campus | 123 | 4 | Arts & Humanities, Education, Physics, Mathematics |
| 9 | University of Cambridge | East | 1209 | Multi-site city | 118 | 7 | Social & Political Science, Divinity, Economics, Archaeology, English, Geography, King's College |
| 10 | Newcastle University | North East | 1963 | Single campus | 116 | 4 | Geography, History & Classics, Psychology, Modern Languages |
| 11 | University of Sussex | South East | 1961 | Single campus | 105 | 7 | Sociology, Physics & Astronomy, Law, Informatics, English & Drama, Politics, Philosophy |
| 12 | University of Leeds | North | 1904 | Multi-site city | 93 | 3 | Politics & IS, Food Science, Biological Sciences |
| 13 | University of Roehampton | London | 1992 | Dual campus | 91 | 4 | Social Sciences, English & Drama, Education, Business |
| 14 | Cardiff University | Wales | 1883 | Multi-site city | 69 | 4 | Social Sciences, Welsh, Law, Computer Science & Informatics |
| 15 | University of Abertay Dundee | Scotland | 1994 | Single campus | 69 | 1 | Social Sciences |
| 16 | University College London | London | 1826 | Multi-site city | 61 | 5 | Engineering & Computing, English, Anthropology, Philosophy, History |
| 17 | Brunel University | London | 1966 | Multi-campus | 57 | 4 | Health Science, Sports Science & Education, Law, Sociology |
| 18 | University of Derby | East Mids | 1992 | Multi-site city | 48 | 4 | Sociology & Cultural Studies, Geology, Film & Television Studies, Biological Sciences |
| 19 | Birmingham City University | West Mids | 1992 | Multi-campus | 42 | 2 | Social Science & Education, Health Science |
| 20 | Queen Margaret University | Scotland | 2007 | Single campus | 29 | 2 | Sociology & Psychology, Nursing & Occupational Therapy |
| 21 | University of The West Of England | South West | 1992 | Multi-campus | 14 | 1 | Journalism & Creative Writing |
| 22 | Swansea University | Wales | 1920 | Single campus | 5 | 1 | Computer Science |

N=2,485; errata removed.

**Figure 3.2** Selected response rates from university departmental mailing lists

| Department and institution | Size of mailing list (approx) | Responses | Response rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social Science, Abertay | 500 | 69 | 13.8% |
| Social & Political Science, Cambridge | 500 | 44 | 8.8% |
| Physics & Astronomy, Sussex | 300 | 21 | 7.0% |
| Sociology, York | 522 | 36 | 6.9% |
| Classics & Ancient History, Warwick | 200 | 12 | 6.0% |
| Geography, Newcastle | 321 | 16 | 5.0% |
| Politics, Liverpool | 220 | 11 | 5.0% |

## 3. Student interviews

As found in chapter two, qualitative research methods are perhaps the most common method of social movement research – especially for case studies. This is because, as Mason (2002: 62) argues, they operate on the basis that knowledge is situated and contextual. In this sense, the use of semi-structured interviews provides an opportunity to access this context from the perspective of those involved in *making it*, be they high-cost/risk participants involved in campaign groups or non-participants socially embedded in networks of apathy or distrust. Examples of the former include Saunders's (2008) study of activists in radical environmental groups and Crossley and Ibrahim's (2012) analysis of activism networks at the University of Manchester, whereas the latter can be found in research by Eliasoph (1998) and Norgaard (2006). In both applications, Burgess's (1984: 102) depiction of semi-structured interviews as a 'conversation with a purpose' neatly captures the opportunities for uncovering and understanding how students *perceive* and *experience* politics and participation.

### *Research design*

Broadly speaking, the research project sought to 'bring to life' the attitudes and experiences of students from the survey. This required accessing a depth and range of different interviewees so that common themes and narratives could be found and used to make generalisations about types of participant and non-participant. The principal means of interviewee recruitment – an invitation via the survey – helped satisfy this need for breadth, and was augmented by forms of purposive sampling to capture types of participant (or non-participant) that might be under-represented among the survey's list of willing interview candidates. The research design targeted 30-40 interviews, including participants in the protests (from petition-signers to protest organisers), as well as supportive and unsupportive non-participants. A range of different demographical voices – including sex, domicile, age, degree subject – were also sought. In order to achieve this range of interviewees, the selection of interview candidates was broadly purposive, using survey respondents'

individual questionnaires, as well as information ascertained through purposive or snowball sampling. To help frame the research (as well as make it more practically realisable), interviews focused around 5-6 universities selected from the survey sample.

Much like the survey, the research design for interviews incorporated a certain amount of flexibility. This reflected potential issues around gaining sufficient access to political networks on individual campuses (which will be discussed in the following section), but also a desire for freedom to follow-up and expand on emerging themes and narratives during the interview process. This created multiple possibilities in how the research design could be framed: they could support and expound on survey trends, or take a more micro-case study approach by focusing more on campuses as distinct social fields. This, too, could take different forms, such as an in-depth study of how students join and interact inside campus activist *networks* (comparable to Crossley and Ibrahim's study), or a *comparative* study of how activist networks might differ according to different types of campus (echoing the work of Van Dyke (1998)). In other words, incorporating flexibility into the research design was felt to be necessary to pursuing the sorts of data that might be found once in the field.

Given the need for flexibility, there are clear benefits in taking a 'semi-structured' approach to interviewing. Operating informally from a general interview guide rather than a fixed set of questions (Blee and Taylor, 2002) interviews sought to capture three broad forms of data. First, recruiting interviewees via the survey provided the opportunity for certain aspects of their questionnaire responses to be to elaborated on, challenged or contextualised. For example, further detail could be ascertained on the meaningfulness of 'political' family backgrounds as well as reasons why certain forms of participation might be considered more efficacious than others.

Second, interviewing multiple students allowed the research to gather information about the different political groups and societies on campus (including the student union), as well as recent campaigns. This also included gaining an understanding of the sorts of mobilisation strategies groups employed, and the way these groups were perceived by non-participants. Interviews also set out to use multiple perspectives to construct a collective narrative of the fees protests on each campus, including the role played by the union and student societies, the origins of the key protest events such as demonstrations and occupations, and the extent to which activists continued with their campaigns after the fees vote. Moreover, interviewees who attended UK-wide protest events such as the London demonstrations were invited to recount their experiences in detail, so as to build a multi-perspectival account of the events on that day.

The third and final aspect of interviews focused on interviewees' *personal* narratives and political 'life history'. For self-defined activists in particular, this involved tracing the roots of their politicisation via the groups, causes and parties they were involved in, and their interactions with certain potentially-political *fields* such as school and university. As Blee and Taylor (2002: 92) observe, this approach is especially useful for capturing the causal nature of mobilisation, including the available resources and social context which surrounded their decision-making. At the same time, tracing this narrative also created space for spontaneous reactions and themes to emerge which were not part of the research design. By maintaining a flexible interview schedule, interviewees were encouraged to self-evaluate and 'convey intangible feelings' (Blee and Taylor, 2002: 99). This was particularly valuable in the case of non-participants, as their lack of involvement meant that they had seldom reflected on their own 'political narrative' before.

Of course, eliciting this sort of information and self-reflection from interviewees requires a comfortable and non-judgmental interview environment so that conversations can flow as naturally as possible. This places great importance on the positioning of the interviewer. As a UK student, my position can be understood as being simultaneously an 'insider' – in the sense that I have long-term knowledge and experience of belonging to a student community – and an 'outsider' – in that to interviewees, my status as a researcher ultimately overrode that of a fellow student. Given the breadth of different types of interviewee, it was felt that the interviewer should appear to embody the sort of interviewer each would like to see. This meant appearing generally sympathetic towards their disposition, be they high-cost/risk activists or disengaged non-participants. Such an approach is not disingenuous given that my principal aim was to *understand* their political disposition, though I was sometimes able to challenge interviewees by drawing on arguments made by *other* interviewees (activists who defended direct action, for example). In other words, the flexible positioning of the interviewer facilitated a 'mediated' debate between different types of participant and non-participant. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal in the positioning of the researcher was to ensure the interview was as close to a 'natural conversation' as possible.

***Sampling, access and ethics***

The sampling of campuses and interviewees was driven by a desire to achieve 'completeness' in terms of students' different experiences of protest and the fees case study. This involved, in Blee and Taylor's (2002: 100) words, following the principle of 'similarity' and 'dissimilarity', so that contrasts and conflicts between groups and actors were identified and general themes and trends corroborated. In addition, it was felt that the selection of

universities for interviewing should include a range of university *types* – including different geographical locations, campus types (e.g. unitary or dispersed) and age (e.g. ancient, modern, post-1992). Fulfilling these ideals, however, was affected by accessibility constraints – both in terms of available campuses and the diversity of prospective interviewees.

As noted earlier, the qualitative research design had a malleable target of 5-6 universities and 30-40 interviewees for its sample, which was considered a realistic field saturation point within the available timeframe. Given that the bulk of interviewees were to be recruited via the survey, the selection of universities had to be drawn from the survey sample. A further constraint was the fact that interviews were scheduled to take place mostly concurrently to the survey. This meant that universities would have to be selected from those which had already yielded a high number of respondents. With the overall percentage of respondents willing to be interviewed hovering at around 30-35 per cent throughout the survey's duration, I estimated universities with total of around 90-100 survey respondents would ensure a healthy enough sample size of potential interviewees.

With an average of around 25-35 students per university to select for interview, it was quickly found that survey recruitment alone could not provide sufficient access to a campus's activist networks. This is because very few students involved in student union politics or organising campus occupations were recruited for interviews – reflecting, of course, their tiny proportionality to the overall student population. Unlike non-participants or petitioners who were numerous enough to be generalised, protest organisers and high-cost/risk activists represented a finite group of individuals on campus who warranted approaching directly. Two selections – Edinburgh and Warwick – were quickly made as I had already established links with gatekeepers involved in their respective campus occupation groups in autumn 2011 via each group's Twitter account. Both were receptive to the research project and indicated that they would be able to give me email addresses of students involved in organising protests on campus, including occupants and union officers. This was augmented by the fact that both quickly achieved more than 100 survey respondents, indicating that both would be able to provide a suitable diversity of active and inactive interview candidates.

Two further universities – Cambridge and Roehampton – were selected for the sample without the aid of gatekeepers, though in each case one interviewee would be recruited through purposive sampling via personal connections and Twitter. Both achieved a survey response in excess of 90, and featured a diversity of different academic departments

sampled. Cambridge was an interesting case because its higher education activism campaigns had prominently extended into the 2011/12 academic year – exemplified in the shutting down of the Universities Minister David Willetts's talk in November 2011. Roehampton, on the other hand, was notable for having announced its intention to close its Human Rights undergraduate course within weeks of the Browne Review, provoking protests by students on campus. Since autumn 2010, however, there had been little evidence of student protest campaigns. Roehampton also represented the only post-1992 university in the sample.

The selections of UCL and Leeds represented a desire to engage with some of the student protests' UK-wide campaigns. Both hosted prominent student-led campaign groups – NCAFC and the Really Open University (ROU) – that had been active in campaigning for free education and against higher tuition fees prior to the Browne Review. Although UCL achieved a below-par survey response, it warranted inclusion on the basis that its prominence in the UK media coverage of the student protests provided interesting opportunities to compare attitudes of participants and non-participants. Moreover, the securing of a gatekeeper to its activist network provided access to a large number of high-cost/risk participants. This provided the opportunity to study this network in some depth, especially in terms of students' paths to mobilisation. Leeds achieved 93 survey responses, including many studying natural science which would help restore balance to the range of subject background in the overall sample. Activists at Leeds were accessed via its occupation group's Facebook page, which was still relatively active in spring 2012. This, however, proved comparatively unsuccessful in practice, with only one of the arranged interviews taking place after two cancellations and one no-show. Attempts to contact ROU also proved unsuccessful as their website appeared not to have been updated since summer 2011.

UWE and Newcastle University had also been shortlisted as possible campus selections. The latter proved unsuccessful in gaining access to an activist gatekeeper, whereas the former failed to secure more than one department for the survey's distribution. Although a gatekeeper was secured, the low survey response meant that achieving a range of participants and non-participants would not be possible. As this might suggest, the constraints in selecting campuses had a strong effect on shaping the interview research design. Although geographically diverse, the final selection of universities was dominated by large Russell Group universities in major cities. At the same time, however, the list reflected a higher number of activist gatekeepers secured than originally anticipated. Both of these factors resulted in the research design moving away from comparing activism according to different

campus types, and more towards a comparison of participants and non-participants *within* campuses where opportunities for activism were relatively abundant. The effect this shift had on the analysis will be discussed in more detail in the fourth section of this chapter.

The selection of interviewees from the survey sample required a range of different types of student. To do this, survey results from each university's willing interviewees were downloaded onto a spreadsheet and analysed manually. Among students who had participated in the protests, a range of different participatory types were sought, such as students involved in high-cost/risk activism (augmenting purposive sampling), students involved mostly in low-cost/risk activities, and students who were seemingly more active in the protests than in politics generally (and vice-versa). The selection process also paid attention to which parties students had voted for in the 2010 election, and which party (if any) they now identified with – in particular, Liberal Democrat voters who had since dis-identified were a key group of interest.

Among non-participants, certain key indicators were sought. In particular, it was important to sample a range of students who were 'supportive', 'undecided' and 'unsupportive' towards the protests. Also targeted were 'pure' non-participants i.e. those who had participated in none of the general activities listed in the questionnaire. Perhaps inevitably, very few of these students expressed a willingness to be interviewed, though three interviews were secured with students who had participated in nothing beyond 'ethical shopping'. For participants and non-participants, attention was also paid to achieving a range of different types of student including international students, postgraduates, students from science and technology backgrounds and mature students, as well as a 50:50 male-female ratio.

Finally, the research design took careful consideration of possible ethical issues, and was conducted in compliance with BSA ethical guidelines. Since interviews were due to be recorded, all interview material was anonymised for the thesis and related publications, with interviewees assigned false names. Given the use of snowball sampling to recruit some interviewees, information regarding interpersonal relationships was also excluded from the writing-up process. One potentially contentious aspect of the interview process concerned the disclosure of illegal activity – a possibility in the event of students' recollection of protest events that had resulted in arrests and convictions. To deal appropriately with all ethical issues, interviewees were presented with an 'Interview Information Sheet' outlining the purpose of the study, and a Consent Form (see appendix D) inviting them to state that they understood and accepted the terms of the interview. In cases where illegal disclosure were felt to be a potential issue, students were informed that the interviewer did not wish to be

privy to such information, and that when relevant, interviewees either avoided disclosing such information or depersonalised and anonymised their recollections.

### *Reflexivity*

To help prepare for interviews with high-cost/risk activists, between June and December 2011 I undertook informal participant observation in a series of activism activities. Although not formally part of my data collection, this 'background ethnography' proved extremely valuable for furthering my knowledge and experience of protest participation. Activities included attending local and UK-wide student and anti-cuts demonstrations (including the NCAFC student demonstration, recounted in chapter one); attending student activism conferences; visiting the 2011 Edinburgh student occupation groups and conducting an informal focus-group interview with participants, and visiting Occupy London throughout October/November 2011 to discuss with participants the working group structure and observe consensus meetings. These experiences enabled me to put myself in the position of an activist, so that I could gain a first-hand understanding of some of the experiences one might encounter when involved in occupations and large-scale demonstrations. Participant observation was supplemented with more discourse-oriented research, including following protest groups on Facebook and Twitter and interacting with users over certain political and organisational issues. All of these experiences were found to help me 'perform' as an engaged and knowledgeable interviewer, so that high-cost/risk activists in particular would feel comfortable in discussing activist politics openly and candidly.

For the interviews themselves, efforts were made to choose locations that were comfortable and accommodating. This meant that the majority of interviews took place at public, central campus locations – usually small cafes. For one student – who was away from university during my campus visit – our interview was conducted via Skype. Interviews at Leeds, Warwick and Cambridge were conducted during 3-5 day field visits to each city between March and July. For Edinburgh, Roehampton and UCL, their locations were more easily accessible for me, resulting in interviews taking place at various times throughout April and October. Initially, interviews tended to last between 40 and 80 minutes, but towards the end of fieldwork they had extended to a minimum of 60 minutes, with some extending beyond two hours. It was quickly found that my open and flexible interviewing style, combined with comfortable locations, resulted in interviews extending longer than I had originally anticipated. The time flexibility often allowed interviewees the freedom to talk openly and candidly and the interviewer the opportunity to explore emerging themes and experiences in more detail. As a result, over the course of the interview schedule more time was allotted for

each interview and fewer interviews were timetabled for each day so that longer interviews could be accommodated.

Flexibility was necessary for the interview guides, though this did not come at the expense of preparation. For non-participants and moderately-active participants, interview guides had a generic narrative structure which was then adapted for each interviewee using their individual questionnaire responses. This might include information on the party they had voted for, the sorts of protest activities they might have undertaken, and their attitudes towards higher education funding and the student protests. These were not necessarily all discussed in the interview – I was conscious throughout of minimising the amount of time I checked my notes so as to ensure conversation remained as free-flowing as possible – but were sometimes invoked in order to lend concreteness to some of the discussions. This was often a necessary tactic for non-participants or occasional participants, as discussion would easily lapse into 'generic' discussions unmoored by any specific experiences of events or encounters. Interviews with high-cost/risk activists presented a slightly different challenge. Interview preparation required research into specific campaigns and protests that took place on their campus, so that the interviews could follow a personal life history/case study narrative. Some activists were scholars of social movements and political philosophy, and so would often draw links to other concurrent events such as Occupy, the Arab Spring and the English Riots. Whilst these regularly provided interesting insights, they were often beyond the scope of the study, and so my task was often to maintain focus on personal/case study narratives.

My positionality as an interviewer was a regular subject for self-reflection. As a student who was supportive of anti-fees protest campaigns but had only minor involvement as a participant prior to data collection, I was conscious of the need to conduct interviews in a manner that drew sparingly from my own personal experiences and attitudes. As noted earlier, my strategy was to reflect the sort of interviewer interviewees wanted to see, albeit without providing hard evidence that my positionality necessarily matched this. This strategy proved broadly successful, though in certain interviews I found it useful to disclose personal attitudes and experiences. This was because of the need to maintain a relaxed and natural interview environment, and so personal disclosure became an appropriate means of showing sympathy and empathy to interviewees' *own* experiences and reflections. For high-cost/risk participants especially, recalling personal experiences of major demonstrations (e.g. the 2011 NCAFC march) and occupations proved useful for putting the interviewee at ease when it came to building a basic level of trust. This trust often facilitated further discussion of more

contentious tactics and events. Occasionally, interviewees would directly question my own positionality: at Edinburgh, some high-cost/risk participants asked me whether I had personal connections to activism groups and campaigns on campus. In these instances, I chose to be honest in explaining my limited activism involvement. In general, though, I found that high-cost/risk participants were more trusting of me as an interviewer for the *knowledge* of their occupations and campaigns I was able to demonstrate during interviews, rather than my own activism participation. This gave them the confidence that I *understood* their perspective, and had no preconceived impression or 'agenda' regarding their campaigns or tactics.

To evaluate, the interview research design – much like the survey – benefitted from a robust data collection strategy that also allowed for certain flexibilities of focus. The ease of access and repeatability of the interview process resulted in a higher number of interviews conducted – 56 – than originally anticipated. Moreover, as we shall see in the next section, the richness of narrative data from these interviews – both at a personal and case study level – strengthened my view that the survey should support the interviews rather than vice-versa. Despite this richness, there were some shortcomings in the interviewing process. Although a 50:50 male-female ratio was achieved, sampling strategies secured fewer female high-cost/risk activists than males. This imbalance was not felt to be necessarily representative of activist networks, but placed limitations on the extent to which *gender* could be adequately studied as a variable in high-cost/risk mobilisation. More generally, Roehampton and Leeds yielded a lower number of respondents than the others (see appendix C), which limited their capacity to be analysed as micro-case studies in their own right. All of these issues had to be taken into consideration for converting raw data into analysis and narrative formation. This is the focus of the final section.

## 4. Research data analysis

The following discussion will be divided into three categories: the first deals with survey data preparation and analysis; the second does the same for interview data, and the third covers the translation of this data into the formation of narratives and themes which form the basis of the four findings chapters.

### *Survey data coding and analysis*

The first task of survey data was to prepare it for analysis. To allow for the questionnaire to be edited between phases one and two, the survey was divided into two separate datasets which had to be joined together. Since the raw data contained mostly multiple-word variable

names, the dataset had to be coded into binary using Excel before being converted into SPSS 19. The raw dataset also contained numerous 'open box' questions – e.g. parties voted for and supported, degree subjects – which had to be coded manually. Excel was used to identify duplicate and voided questionnaires, and certain clusters of variables were analysed in order to detect mono-response questionnaires. This resulted in the dataset being reduced from 2,493 to 2,485 respondents.

During the coding process it was found that certain survey questions had failed to produce reliable data. This owed to the poor construction of certain questions – notably the question regarding student democracy within the university (Q7) – and so had to be excluded from further analysis. It was also found that survey questions failed to capture key variables related to 'biographical availability' (McAdam, 1986) – e.g. whether students were studying full or part-time, or lived on/close to campus – which restricted the usefulness of quantitative analysis for studying paths and barriers to protest participation. Another problem was that the manual process in which the survey 'split' questioning between student protest participants and non-participants (where all questions were still visible to all respondents) meant that a minority of participants completed survey questions intended for non-participants and vice-versa, though this 'leakage' was not found to have produced any statistically significant patterns.

Another problem related to missing data from questions directed at non-participants. Up until the participant/non-participant split, all questions were compulsory, with respondents' unable to progress to the next page without having completed all previous questions. For participant/non-participant-specific questions this was not possible, which meant around 30-40 of the 1,932 non-participants failed to fully answer question 37. Again, this did not conform to any particular pattern, suggesting that this could be attributed to respondent error in following the questionnaire's instructions.

Converting the dataset into SPSS 19 allowed for the sample to be tested for its representativeness. As we can see from figure 3.3, the survey amounts to a 0.1 per cent sample of the UK student population as a whole. In the most part, it reproduces demographical proportionalities of the overall UK student population, including a comparable split of undergraduates, postgraduates, English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish-domiciled students, EU and non-EU international students. There is also a comparative distribution of science students and arts, humanities and social science students. There are, however, response biases, most notably a clear slant towards female students, and a slightly above-average proportion of students domiciled in Scotland – no doubt reflecting in the fact

that nearly one in five respondents studied at the University of Edinburgh. This necessitated specific analysis of these variables so that any trends specific to gender or domicile were clearly identified for any impact they might have on skewing UK-wide representative statistics.

**Figure 3.3** Survey demographics compared with UK universities as a whole

| | | UK Population (2011/12) | % | Survey (2011/12) | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General | Students (all) | 2,496,645 | 100.0% | 2,485 | 100.0% |
| | Undergraduates | 1,928,140 | 77.2% | 1,981 | 79.7% |
| | Postgraduates | 568,505 | 22.8% | 504 | 20.3% |
| Sex | Male | 1,089,685 | 43.6% | 742 | 29.9% |
| | Female | 1,406,940 | 56.4% | 1,724 | 69.4% |
| Domicile | UK | 2,061,410 | 83.0% | 2,104 | 84.7% |
| | Other-EU | 132,550 | 5.3% | 193 | 7.8% |
| | Non-EU | 302, 685 | 12.1% | 184 | 7.4% |
| UK domiciles* | England | 941,665 | 84.3% | 1,670 | 79.4% |
| | Wales | 65,175 | 5.8% | 107 | 5.1% |
| | Scotland | 87,490 | 7.8% | 295 | 14.0% |
| | Northern Ireland | 23,010 | 2.1% | 22 | 0.9% |
| Degree subjects | Sciences | 1,048,066 | 42.0% | 921 | 37.1% |
| | Arts, humanities and social sciences | 1,448,575 | 58.0% | 1,564 | 62.9% |

UK population statistics are taken from http://www.hesa.ac.uk/. * UK population statistics are taken from first year enrolment only.

Survey analysis was divided into basic themes, each of which is covered in the four findings chapters: basic demographics of participation (in the case study and in general), attitudes towards the civic ideal and the efficacy of protest repertoires (chapter four); cultural and network-based paths and barriers to political participation in the case study and in general (chapter five); the uniformity of political attitudes and collective identification among case study participants (chapter six), and the social origins of non-participation (chapter seven). The tools of data analysis consisted mostly of frequency tables, cross-tabulations, and the aggregation of multiple variables into ordinal ideal-types. All cross-tabulations were tested for statistical significance using the Pearson Chi square statistic, with significance levels set at either 1 or 5 per cent. Ideal types were especially useful for generating two participatory measurement scales – the 'general participation index' and the 'student protest participation index' – as it condensed large amounts of data into three categories (plus non-participants). These ideal types also helped frame and contextualise interviewees, so that the accounts of survey-recruited interviewees could be used to speak for and explain the actions and motivations of each category.

It was felt that the initial decision to seek a *representative* sample limited opportunities to make use of more advanced quantitative data methods. For example, the survey captured only 101 respondents who participated in campus occupations or sit-ins in the student protests. This low yield consequently limited the survey's ability to compare social demographics of different participatory types. Of course, this small sample could have been boosted by purposive sampling via messaging activism group Facebook pages, as well as encouraging the 20+ high-cost/risk interviewees recruited via gatekeepers to fill in the questionnaire. This, however, would have distorted the survey's claim to representativeness, whilst also risking asking too much from interviewees and gatekeepers.

***Interview data analysis***

Interview fieldwork was completed by the end of August 2012 (with one additional interview conducted in October). Transcription began whilst fieldwork was still taking place, which enabled certain emerging themes to be tackled more directly in subsequent interviews. To help organise the interview data, a spreadsheet was set up to detail basic demographical information from each interviewee, as well as certain categorical data from the survey e.g. which group in the general participation/student protest indexes they belonged to. This helped categorise interviewees by their participation, making it easier to identify which transcripts might be most useful for clarifying or elaborating on certain survey trends.

Interviews were transcribed in full, with some transcripts extending to around 20,000 words. Each transcript was analysed and annotated at two levels. The first involved providing citations (including academic publications, news reports and activist blogs) to clarify or correct interviewees' references to groups, events and individuals. The second level was more analytical and thematic. This involved coding certain themes which had been part of the standard interview schedule e.g. political family background, the 2010 election, views towards higher education funding, Millbank, and the use of direct action. Interview transcripts were also annotated for the purposes of identifying emerging themes – such as the role played by 'secret Facebook groups' (see chapter six) or specific events occurring on certain campuses (i.e. Cambridge's strategy for occupation – see chapter five).

To help build collective narratives, timelines of activism on each campus were created through combining interview quotes and research taken from contemporary media and student sources. These proved useful for corroborating information related to sequencing events, and constructing a multi-perspectival account of demonstrations and occupations, as well as identifying aspects of interviewee recollections which proved unreliable. Moreover,

these timelines were key resources for organising the case study for chapter analysis, so that it was easy for me to look up and compare events which might have taken place on any of the campuses at any particular time.

One consequence of this chronicling process was a deepening awareness that some universities functioned better as micro-case studies than others. As noted earlier, Leeds and Roehampton yielded fewer interviews than Cambridge, Edinburgh, Warwick and UCL. This deficit became more apparent when constructing timelines for Leeds and Roehampton as it became clear that interview material did not coalesce around shared experiences to the same extent that the others did. For Leeds, this reflected the aforementioned failure to secure gatekeepers to high-cost/risk activists and protest organisers. This meant that I mostly drew on secondary sources to construct a timeline of protest events on campus – an issue compounded by the fact that a higher proportion of interviewees secured were non-participants. Roehampton interviewees, on the other hand, were mostly participants, but did not coalesce around common themes or experiences (apart from the NUS demonstration). Moreover, interviews amounted to a relatively diverse sample, including mature students, international students and students living some distance from campus.

In contrast, the timelines constructed for Cambridge, Edinburgh, Warwick and UCL bore strong similarities to each other: all four had sent large numbers of students to the NUS and NCAFC demonstrations, hosted occupations in 2010 and 2011, and seen occupation subgroups go onto stand for student union elections. This also meant that the narratives of non-participants at the four universities were similar as they were often reacting to similar events, disputes and mobilisation opportunities. This allowed for a core, multi-campus and multi-perspectival narrative of the student protests to emerge, and the experiences of participants and non-participants aggregated and generalised to some extent. Put together, these narratives were vital to the construction of an overall *findings* narrative that covers each of the research questions set out in chapter one. This process is the subject for the final section.

***Triangulation and narrative formation***

As has been noted throughout this chapter, the basic approach to triangulation was to use the survey data as a means of framing and contextualising narratives uncovered in the qualitative research. During the process of fieldwork and data collection, the primacy of the latter over the former strengthened. This is because interviews generated a greater richness of personal reflections among participants and non-participants than had originally been anticipated.

This owed in part to the access I was able to gain to a range of different interviewees, the extended length of many of interviews, and the candidness of the interviewees themselves. Interviews' breadth and richness also made it easier to construct collective narratives out of interviewees' corroborated accounts. The aforementioned multi-perspectival narrative concerning the autumn 2010 fees at Cambridge, Edinburgh, Warwick and UCL was arguably the strongest to emerge. Its strength came from the fact that interviewees generally had access to *the same* participatory opportunities, both on campus and nationally. This coalescence made it easier to identify and analyse key variables which separated participants from non-participants, and as a result, this narrative formed the core basis of analysis of paths and barriers to mobilisation (chapter five) and collective identity formation (chapter six). Chapters four and seven – which deal with participatory trends and non-participation respectively – are less narrative-driven and therefore benefit from discussion being framed by the categories constructed from survey data. This lack of narrative also allows interview data from Roehampton and Leeds to be more easily incorporated into the discussion.

In terms of triangulation, the general approach was to use survey trends as a backdrop for contextualising qualitative findings. For example, the experiences uncovered in interviews with high-cost/risk participants or supportive non-participants could be framed according to each category's overall proportionality to the overall UK student population. In other words, the survey served to *enhance* interviews by extending the significance of their findings beyond the boundaries of the campuses sampled. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the focus on protests in autumn 2010 created a disjuncture between the period of study and the survey's sample. This made it important to use survey data carefully when testing or contextualising findings specific to autumn 2010 – for chapter four especially this involved separating first year students from the survey sample to see how it might affect trends.

A final point concerns the study's claim to representativeness. First, whilst the survey can be claimed to be a representative sample of the overall UK student population, the same cannot necessarily be said about the qualitative data. Although I consider findings related to the campuses studied in chapters five and six broadly representative of large Russell Group universities in general, this does not necessarily extend to all UK universities. This owes to the fact that the qualitative research shifted its focus from comparing campuses to comparing students within campuses, as well as the relative failure to successfully capture activism culture at the only post-1992 university in the sample. Second, despite a sampling strategy designed to achieve a diversity of demographics, the interviews do not necessarily capture the full range of student voices in the UK today. In particular, female high-cost/risk activists,

right-wing activists, students studying business and technology subjects, non-EU students and students from different ethnic backgrounds are under-represented in the forthcoming chapters, whereas students who graduated in 2011 are absent entirely. This, of course, owed to the unique time constraints of needing to complete fieldwork by the end of the 2011/12 academic year, as well as the resources available to a single researcher. Nevertheless, I am confident that the following findings chapters provide a richness of data that goes some way to addressing this project's research questions.

# Chapter 4

# Survey patterns of student political participation in the UK

## 1. Introduction

Given that this study focuses on the relationship between participation and non-participation, it is appropriate that analysis should begin by considering the student population as a whole. The survey, which has sought to achieve broad representativeness of universities in the UK, enables us to do this. Consequently, this chapter has two basic aims. First, it considers political participation in general, drawing comparisons between student constructions of a 'participatory ideal' and their participatory practice. By mapping out patterns of political engagement among all university students, it is hoped that this will provide the broader context through which the student protests against fees and cuts can be understood. In particular, this involves identifying which forms of participation students consider the most efficacious. In addition, efforts have also been made to break down participation as a basic category and explore trends and patterns within it.

The second aim of this chapter is to provide basic attitudinal and participatory trends in the 2010/11 student protests against fees and cuts case study. The intention here is to map out who participated and what they did. An advantage of the scale and scope of this survey research is that it provides an opportunity to study the full range of student categories currently studying in the UK – home and international students, younger and mature students, undergraduates and postgraduates – and compare their participation patterns and attitudes. Previous student surveys have tended to be fairly small-scale and date mostly from the late 1960s and 1970s and, as such, focus on what was then a smaller population of mostly 'home' undergraduates (e.g. Blackstone and Hadley, 1971; Clarke and Egan, 1972).

It is also an aim of this chapter to introduce basic trends and patterns related to student non-participation. This has been an under-researched topic in political science, if not necessarily under-theorised given the influence of Olson's (1965) 'free-rider' concept. This chapter will therefore seek to flesh out some of the demographic and attitudinal properties of non-participants, both in terms of the case study and in general. These properties are then explored in more detail in the following chapters.

## 2. Civic engagement and forms of political participation

***A participatory ideal?***

Adapting questions from the survey used by Pattie et al. (2004), students were asked a variety of questions related to participatory duty and responsibility. Respondents displayed little evidence of apathy towards political participation in principle*,* with 65.8 per cent agreeing that 'if a person is dissatisfied with the policies of the government, he/she has a duty to do something about it' – more than the 59 per cent found by Pattie et al. (2004: 159). In terms of converting this duty into effective participation, there appears to be more confidence in collective rather than individual action: 52.2 per cent agree that 'my participation can have an impact on government policy in this country', whereas 68.8 per cent agree that 'organised groups of citizens can have a lot of impact on public policies in this country'.

Although these statements do not specify any particular forms of action, they do centre on influencing public policy and government. Questions related to formal political participation elicited a decidedly mixed response. For example, 79.8 per cent agreed that 'most politicians make a lot of promises but do not actually do anything' and 60.4 per cent claimed to distrust political parties in general. For a third of respondents, this distrust extended to a cynical view of electoral participation, with 33.9 per cent agreeing that 'I don't see the use of voting, parties do whatever they want anyway'. That said, 53.4 per cent disagreed with this statement, suggesting that the majority still believe in the *principle* of voting, even if this has not been lived up to so far in practice by the available politicians and parties. This is illustrated further in figure 4.1, which shows that voting is considered by some distance to be the most effective form of political participation of the available options, with 85.7 per cent considering it to be effective.

Comparing results from figure 4.1 with those of Hansard (2009: 68) it is noticeable that student respondents are more positive about the effectiveness of voting (85.7 to 72 per cent), and signing petitions (69.3 to 47 per cent) than the general UK population. Beyond petitions and generically-defined 'campaigns', Hansard does not measure in any great detail the perceived effectiveness of *civic* or *protest* repertoires. Figure 4.1 indicates forms of protest divide respondents: on the one hand, a higher proportion considers strikes and direct action 'very effective' compared with letters to MPs and civic associations. On the other hand, a higher proportion of respondents consider direct action, strikes and protest marches to be *not at all* effective compared to all other presented options. There appears to be no recognisable correlation between effectiveness and the costs and risks of the participation repertoires

themselves, with petitions and SMO membership considered overall to be as effective as strike action.

**Figure 4.1** Perceptions of effectiveness of different forms of political action

| | Very effective | Somewhat effective | Not very effective | Not at all effective | Not sure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Voting in elections | 37.7% | 48.0% | 10.0% | 2.4% | 1.8% |
| Petitions | 10.2% | 59.1% | 23.4% | 4.0% | 3.3% |
| Consumer boycotts of products and services | 15.6% | 45.8% | 25.7% | 7.0% | 6.0% |
| Contacting an MP | 8.0% | 45.6% | 26.9% | 8.2% | 11.3% |
| Joining/financially supporting an SMO | 10.5% | 51.6% | 21.5% | 5.9% | 10.5% |
| Joining or forming a civic association (e.g. Fathers 4 Justice) | 6.1% | 45.1% | 24.3% | 6.0% | 18.6% |
| Protest marches | 8.4% | 45.4% | 30.2% | 11.0% | 5.0% |
| Strike action | 17.0% | 48.5% | 20.9% | 8.5% | 5.2% |
| 'Direct action' protest (e.g. occupations, sit-ins, blockades) | 10.7% | 36.8% | 29.1% | 15.2% | 8.2% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by row.
Question: How effective a form of political participation do you think are each of these activities?

With voting considered more effective than other forms of participation, it was important to test respondents' attitudes towards UK democracy. Focusing only on UK-based students, figure 4.2 shows only 23 per cent agree that 'no problem exists with the current democratic system'. There is clear support for increasing referenda for major issues of public interest, as well as introducing proportional representation for UK elections (though it is noticeable that a third appear unsure about their position, despite electoral reform having been an issue of public debate throughout 2010 and 2011). Interestingly, support for the abolition of parliament in favour of a system of direct democracy – a fairly radical notion – received 18.2 per cent support. In general, these findings suggest that students see voting as the most effective means of political participation but that its current means of delivery is inadequate. This has led to students' openness to alternative models of democracy, even if the true extent of their *engagement* in such debates is less clear.

**Figure 4.2** Perceptions of democracy *(UK domiciled students only)*

| | Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| Democracy in the UK would be improved by having more referenda on major issues of public interest | 66.7% | 20.3% | 13.0% |
| Democracy in the UK would be improved if a system of proportional representation was introduced for general elections | 51.2% | 32.5% | 16.3% |
| True democracy in the UK is only possible through the abolition of parliament and the creation of a new system of direct democracy | 18.2% | 35.4% | 46.4% |
| I see no problem with the current democratic system in the UK | 23.0% | 27.0% | 50.0% |
| Democracy in the UK already gives people too much of a say on political issues | 5.6% | 21.1% | 73.3% |

N=2,104. Note: Percentages by row.
Question: It has sometimes been argued that democracy in the UK needs to be reformed to allow for greater voice from its citizens. What is your view of the following?

Of course, in the absence of a fully-functioning democratic system students might see protest as the best alternative means of making their views heard. Figure 4.3 shows that respondents have an overall positive view of protest, with 58.5 per cent seeing it as an 'essential' form of political engagement, and only 11.3 per cent considering it 'illegitimate'. Questions regarding the *uses* of protest, however, draw more mixed feelings. Respondents see virtually no difference between the capacity of protest to change the policies of government or corporations: in each case around 45 per cent think they can, which is lower than the overall effectiveness attributed to voting in elections or contacting an MP. Furthermore, 34.1 per cent agree that 'there are always better ways of making your views heard than by protesting', with 32.7 per cent disagreeing and 33.2 per cent unsure. This suggests that although protest in principle represents a necessary form of political participation, in practice it might be considered more effective in certain circumstances than others.

Exploring what effective protest might look like, figure 4.3 indicates a preference for what one might call 'peaceful' tactics: 72 per cent disagree with the view that effective protest requires taking power by force, and 69.3 per cent agree that 'protest suffers because the actions of a minority usually spoil it for the majority' (though admittedly it is not implied what such actions might refer to). Again, it would seem that whilst students uphold the *principle* of protest, they are less certain over the arguably messier practicalities of protest *participation*. This is borne out by the most popular statement in figure 4.3 being 'protest can increase the wider population's knowledge and awareness of an issue'. In many ways, this chimes with the perceived legacy of much of 1960s and 1970s student activism, where

gender equality and sexual politics slowly gained broader acceptance in society after initial protest campaigns brought these issues to public attention (Altbach, 1989; Hoefferle, 2013). In other words, protest might achieve a diffusive effect over society, with its ideas and values contributing to citizens' overall thought and behaviour over time, even if the actions themselves are more difficult to explain or defend at the time.

**Figure 4.3** Attitudes towards protest

| | Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| Protest can positively influence the views and interests of the wider population | 71.2% | 16.5% | 12.3% |
| Protest can increase the wider population's knowledge and awareness of an issue | 90.6% | 6.8% | 2.6% |
| Protest can help change UK government policy | 45.8% | 28.0% | 26.3% |
| Protest can help change the policy of corporations | 44.9% | 26.5% | 28.5% |
| Protest is an essential form of political engagement | 58.5% | 23.6% | 17.9% |
| Protest is not a legitimate form of political participation | 11.3% | 23.6% | 65.1% |
| Protest can only be effective if it involves taking power by force | 10.8% | 17.2% | 72.0% |
| There are always better ways of making your views heard than by protesting | 34.1% | 33.2% | 32.7% |
| Protest suffers because the actions of a minority usually spoil it for the majority | 69.3% | 18.1% | 12.5% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by row.
Questions: People might choose to protest for a variety of different reasons. What sort of impact do you think protest can have? To what extent do you agree with the following statements about protest?

### *Students' participatory practice*

According to Hansard (2009: 20), there is a strong correlation between interest in politics and the likelihood of participating politically. The 2009 audit shows that only 30 per cent of young people claimed to have 'discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two or three years' – lower than any age group apart from the over-75s. Given their decision to stay on in education, it is perhaps unsurprising that the student survey shows much higher levels of political engagement: only 3.6 per cent claim to 'never' discuss politics, with 76.3 per cent claiming to do so at least 'sometimes'. Around a quarter of students claim to discuss politics regularly. The most significant variable in separating those who discuss politics and those who do not in Hansard's survey is social class, with a 48 per cent gap between ABs and DEs who discuss politics. Although the student survey employs a subjective definition of class, the discrepancy in political interest between those identifying

as ‘upper middle class’[5] and ‘working class’ is narrower: 49.1 per cent of the former claim to discuss politics often, whereas for the latter the figure is 43.9 per cent[6]. Again, this suggests certain attitudinal similarities between university students which to some extent transcend class background.

As discussed in chapter one, the 2010 general election was notable for the Liberal Democrats bucking recent trends and appealing directly to young voters about tuition fees. This appeal was arguably borne out in UK voting behaviour, Ipsos-MORI (2010) finding that turnout among 18-24 year-olds was 7 per cent higher than in 2005 at 44 per cent. The most popular party were the Liberal Democrats with 30 per cent of the vote, an increase of 4 per cent compared to 2005. Opinion Panel’s (2010) student survey found the Liberal Democrats achieved a 39 per cent share of the student vote, 15 per cent more than Labour, the second most popular party. Using my own survey, electoral turnout was much higher among students than the UK average at 74.7 per cent (excluding ineligible respondents). Again, the Liberal Democrats were found to be by far the most popular party, achieving a 45.6 per cent share of the vote (among those willing to reveal their choice) – 16.7 per cent of the survey sample overall.

Moving onto other forms of political participation, figure 4.4 shows students to have engaged in a wide range of civic and activist practices. Comparing findings with those from Hansard’s 2010 audit, it would appear that students are far more politically active than the UK average: students are ten times more likely to have attended a protest march, and more than twice as many have signed a petition in the past three years. Of course, this partly reflects a difference in ‘biographical availability’, for as Crossley (2008) argues the majority of students entering university are ‘structurally freed up for activism’, with the campus likely to provide multiple opportunities to become more politically involved.

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[5] Since only 19 respondents (0.8 per cent of the sample) identified as ‘upper class’, this category has been excluded from comparative analysis in this study.

[6] p=0.05.

**Figure 4.4** Forms of student political participation

| | Yes, more than once | Yes, I did this once | I have not done this |
|---|---|---|---|
| Signed a petition | 66.0% | 18.6% | 15.5% |
| Boycotted certain products and services for political, ethical or environmental reasons | 38.5% | 12.5% | 49.0% |
| Bought certain products and services for political, ethical or environmental reasons | 52.5% | 9.2% | 38.3% |
| Worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker | 26.5% | 14.0% | 59.4% |
| Presented my views to a local councillor or MP | 15.7% | 13.0% | 71.2% |
| Been a member of a social movement organization (e.g. Amnesty, Greenpeace) | 17.8% | 11.4% | 70.8% |
| Worked or campaigned on behalf of a political party | 6.5% | 9.0% | 84.5% |
| Stood as a candidate for school/student/local elections | 12.3% | 14.2% | 73.5% |
| Distributed flyers for a political campaign | 8.6% | 8.7% | 82.7% |
| Taken part in a protest march | 16.2% | 14.0% | 69.9% |
| Taken part in strike action | 6.7% | 9.3% | 84.1% |
| Taken part in an occupation/sit-in | 4.4% | 8.2% | 87.4% |
| Taken part in the blockade of a building or meeting | 2.5% | 7.4% | 90.1% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by row.
Question: Please tick if you have done any of the following political activities in the last three years (select all that apply).

Returning to the issue of effectiveness, the survey tends to find a correlation between perceived effectiveness in certain activities and respondents' participation in them. For occupations, 63.7 per cent of occupants consider 'direct action' tactics effective compared to 45.2 per cent of non-occupants[7]. Similarly, 67.6 per cent of marchers think protest marches are effective compared to 47.9 per cent of non-marchers[8], and 71.7 per cent of petitioners think petitions are effective compared to 56.1 per cent of non-petitioners[9]. The disparity is notably narrower, however, in the case of strike action: 74.7 per cent of strikers see it as effective, compared to 63.7 per cent of non-strikers[10]. This may owe to the likelihood that students will have had relatively few opportunities or invitations to take strike action in the past three years, save for striking in solidarity with academic staff. Non-strikers might also oppose strike action precisely *because* of its effectiveness.

Although the survey question presented in figure 4.4 derives from Hansard's (2010) questionnaire, it differs by drawing a distinction between *repeated* and *one-off* activities. What becomes clear is that certain repertoires are likelier to be practiced more than once, particularly signing petitions, wearing campaign badges, ethical shopping and joining SMOs.

[7] p=0.00.
[8] p=0.00.
[9] p=0.00.
[10] p=0.00.

In contrast, taking part blockades, distributing flyers, occupying, working/campaigning for a political party are comparatively less likely to be practiced more than once. To some extent, this reflects differences in the supply of, and access to, certain activities: petitions (especially e-petitions) are widely available via different campaigning organisations, and repeated action is essential to ethical shopping and consumer boycotts.

Nevertheless, there is also evidence to suggest that in general, one-off participants found their particular experience less meaningful and efficacious than those who chose to repeat their participation. If we cross-tabulate respondents who took part in an occupation or sit-in (N=314) with their personal perceptions of efficacy towards direct action repertoires, a clear distinction emerges: 78 per cent of repeated participants consider direct action effective (34.9 per cent considering it 'very effective') compared with 56.1 per cent of one-off participants (with only 14.1 per cent considering it 'very effective'[11]). A similar pattern can be found when comparing attendees of protest marches: 73.9 per cent of repeated participants consider protest marches effective (16.7 per cent seeing it as 'very effective'), compared to 60.2 per cent of one-off participants (only 8.1 per cent of whom seeing it as 'very effective'[12]). This suggests that although one-off participants might have done enough to qualify as activists according to Hansard's (2009) calculation, it would appear that not all of them found their experience positive enough to make them want to participate again.

***Measuring participatory cost and risk***

In large-scale surveys, it can be useful to group or index forms of participation to allow for respondent types to be more easily measured against each other. One can of course identify numerous ways of defining the 'politically active'. Hansard (2010) measures participation according to the *range* of activities an individual is involved in. However, as argued in the previous section, measurements of participation should also take into consideration *repeated* activity. Participation can also be measured in terms of the characteristics of individual activities, though as noted in chapter two this can run the risk of attaching normative classifications on what might constitute 'proper' or 'meaningful' activism. Arguably a more consistent means of measuring participation is to adopt McAdam's (1986) classification of protest repertoires in terms of cost and risk. This might also carry the assumption that the higher the personal cost and risk incurred through an individual's participation, the more meaningful and/or efficacious that participation must be. Rather than seeking to reproduce

[11] p=0.00.
[12] p=0.00.

this assumption, the purpose of this participation index is to test it by comparing categories with perceptions of efficacy and individuals' politicisation.

For the construction of this model, figure 4.5 shows how each participation activity has been given a score of 1 (low-cost/risk), 3 (medium-cost/risk) or 6 (high-cost/risk), with scores doubled for repeated activity. Scores correlate to those set out in figure 2.2 of chapter two, which sought to broadly categorise participation by cost and risk in a Western context. Categories of participation are then calculated based on the cumulative aggregate of each score type. This means that low-cost/risk participants are identified on the basis that they score between one and ten, ten being the highest an individual can score whilst only engaging in low-cost/risk forms of participation. Consequently, medium-cost/risk participants are those with scores between 11 and 32, and high-cost/risk participants are those who score between 33 and 92, 92 being the aggregation of every (repeated) activity on the list.

**Figure 4.5** Scoring participation repertoires by cost and risk to participants.

| Participation activity | "Did this once" score | "Did this more than once" score |
|---|---|---|
| Signed a petition | 1 | 2 |
| Boycotted certain products and services for political, ethical or environmental reasons | 1 | 2 |
| Bought certain products and services for political, ethical or environmental reasons | 1 | 2 |
| Worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker | 1 | 2 |
| Presented my views to a local councillor or MP | 3 | 6 |
| Been a member of a social movement organization (e.g. Amnesty International, Greenpeace) | 3 | 6 |
| Distributed flyers for a political campaign | 3 | 6 |
| Taken part in a protest march | 3 | 6 |
| Worked or campaigned on behalf of a political party | 6 | 12 |
| Stood as a candidate for school/student/local elections | 6 | 12 |
| Taken part in strike action | 6 | 12 |
| Taken part in an occupation/sit-in | 6 | 12 |
| Taken part in the blockade of a building or meeting | 6 | 12 |

Question: Please tick if you have done any of the following political activities in the last three years (select all that apply)

Applying this measurement to all survey respondents, figure 4.6 shows the overall mode score for participation as 2 – equivalent to having signed a petition more than once. From this point on, there is a fairly consistent downward curve the higher the participation score. Dividing these scores into low, medium and high-cost/risk participants and non-participants, figure 4.7 shows that 83 per cent of students have engaged in *some* form of political

participation in the past three years. Around half of students qualify as low-cost/risk participants, with medium and high-cost/risk participants totalling at 30 and 15 per cent respectively. This pattern broadly correlates to the 'inner' and 'outer' cores identified by Clarke and Egan (1972) in their survey of Florida State University students. Of course, there is the possibility for overlap in the index between these participatory categories: for instance, a student who has done nothing apart from take part in a one-off high-cost/risk activity would be categorised as a low-cost participant. Such cases are rare, however, as students who engaged in high-cost/risk forms of participation were also likely to have engaged in low-cost/risk forms: 98.4 per cent of occupiers, for example, have also signed petitions. This means that a student who has helped occupy a building is likely to score enough elsewhere to at least be categorised as a medium-cost participant.

**Figure 4.6** Range of scores for student participation measured by cost and risk

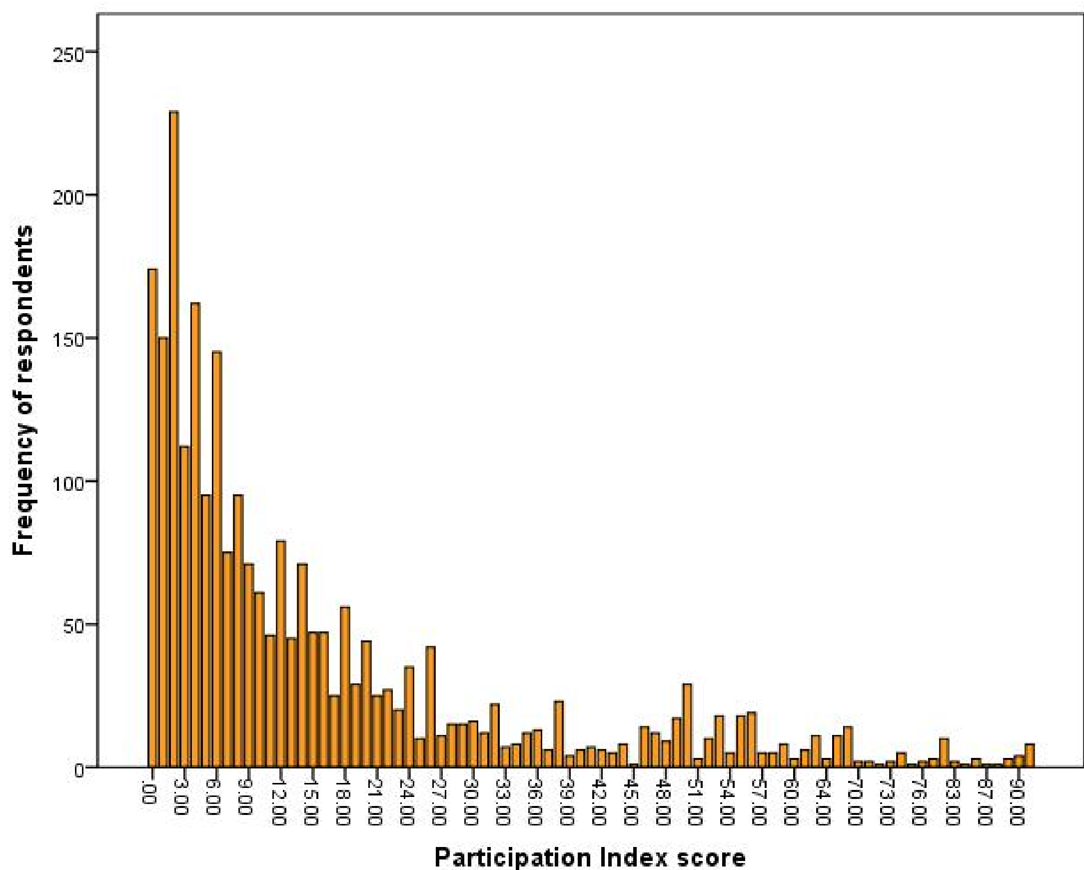


**Figure 4.7** Student participation measured by cost and risk

| | Score range | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Non-participant | 0 | 174 | 7.0% |
| Low-cost/risk participant | 1-10 | 1,195 | 48.1% |
| Medium-cost/risk participant | 11-32 | 739 | 29.7% |
| High-cost/risk participant | 33-92 | 377 | 15.2% |
| Total | | 2,485 | 100.0% |

N=2,485.

The participatory index enables us to compare these four categories according to a variety of different variables. Figure 4.8 compares participatory categories by social demographics and student statuses. There is little difference in participation measured (subjectively) by class, other than to note that the number of non-participating students who did not identify with any class grouping was double that of non-participants overall. Exploring this figure, it was found that this figure had an above-average percentage of non-UK students, implying that many may have identified little with the concept of a class system. This lack of identification might also have been compounded by their apparent lack of political engagement, causing class to hold little significance for them. Either way, counter to Hansard's (2010) findings, class identification was found to be a relatively weak indicator of participation among the student population[13]. There are also significant distinctions to be found when looking at students' age: although the ratio of participants and non-participants both above and below 23 is near identical, the proportion of high-cost/risk participants over 23 is almost twice that of students under 23. The same pattern also emerges when comparing undergraduates and postgraduates. Both trends warrant contextualisation: given that the index partly measures participation by the frequency and the range of individuals' activities, one can argue that older students are generally likely to have had more opportunities to accumulate multiple participatory experiences in the past three years than younger students. These opportunities, in turn, may depend on the fields and frames he or she has access to.

[13] It should be acknowledged that comparing the student survey with Hansard's 2010 audit raises questions over the timing of such data collection. Whereas data from the latter was collected during a relative fallow-period for social movement participation, the former captures a period of multiple participatory opportunities.

**Figure 4.8** Participation categories as percentage of demographics

| | | Non-participant | Low-cost/risk participant | Medium-cost/risk participant | High-cost/risk participant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | Male (N=742)<br>Female (N=1,724) | 7.5%*<br>6.6%* | 45.6%*<br>49.4%* | 30.3%*<br>29.6%* | 16.6%*<br>14.4%* |
| Age | 18-23 (N=1762)<br>23+ (N=690) | 7.0%<br>7.1% | 50.3%<br>42.2% | 30.2%<br>29.4% | 12.5%<br>21.3% |
| Domicile | UK (N=2,104)<br>Other EU (N=193)<br>Non-EU (N=184) | 6.3%<br>4.7%<br>17.9% | 49.2%<br>42.5%<br>40.8% | 30.4%<br>30.1%<br>22.3% | 14.2%<br>22.8%<br>19.0% |
| Subject | Sciences (N=921)<br>Arts, humanities & social sciences (N=1,564) | 9.0%<br>5.8% | 54.5%<br>44.3% | 26.0%<br>32.0% | 10.5%<br>17.9% |
| Degree | Undergraduate (N=1,981)<br>Postgraduate (N=504) | 6.9%<br>7.3% | 50.0%<br>40.5% | 29.5%<br>30.8% | 13.6%<br>21.4% |
| Class | Upper middle class (N=701)<br>Lower middle class (N=1,035)<br>Working class (N=503)<br>No class identification (N=227) | 6.3%<br>6.6%<br>5.8%<br>14.1% | 47.8%<br>48.8%<br>50.1%<br>42.3% | 28.7%<br>29.5%<br>31.4%<br>30.0% | 17.3%<br>15.2%<br>12.7%<br>13.7% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by row. *p>0.05[14].

One such field is the university campus itself. Figure 4.8 also shows that there is a much higher distribution of medium and high-cost/risk participants among students from the arts, humanities and social sciences than students studying science and technology subjects. This distribution supports the similar findings of Blackstone and Hadley (1971) and Altbach (1989) which indicated that certain degree courses attract more politically-engaged students. Moreover, as Crossley and Ibrahim (2012) argue, degree courses can also operate as recruitment networks for politically-active students wishing to build wider campus support – especially for higher cost/risk activities such as demonstrations and occupations. Assessing the recruitment potential for certain courses is a theme we will return to in chapter five.

Networks may also play a part in explaining the large proportion of non-EU students who are non-participants: 17.9 per cent, compared with the overall figure of 7 per cent. Non-EU students are by nature an amorphous social category, united by the fact that they pay more expensive tuition fees and require a student visa to study in the UK. Given these added costs and risks, it is possible that international students might feel cautious about engaging in the sorts of political activities which might put their visa status in jeopardy. Conversely, figure

[14] All cross-tabulated survey data used for figures in chapters 4-7 is statistically significant using the p<0.01 threshold, unless specified otherwise.

4.8 also shows that non-EU students make up an above-average proportion of high-cost/risk participants. To help explain this, it is worth comparing students' countries of origin: around two-thirds of non-participants come from East Asian states, particularly China, Hong Kong and Malaysia, whereas the majority of high-cost/risk participants come from Canada and the United States. One can argue that political activism is more commonplace in the latter states than the former, meaning that American and Canadian students might also be referring to high-cost/risk participation in their own countries. Another interpretation is that this reflects certain cultural differences in terms of how western and non-western international students assimilate (and are assimilated) onto UK campuses – a theme that will be discussed in chapter seven.

Students' consumption of political news and media is analysed in table 4.9 and shows a clear and consistent correlation between political participation and 'omnivorous' political media consumption. High-cost/risk participants access political information from a range of different media sources, displaying similar patterns in their consumption of television, alternative news websites and social networking sites. In contrast, there is a clear hierarchy in the news consumption of non-participants and low-cost/risk participants, with most accessing their political news through television and newspapers. Perhaps reflecting their more varied political interests, high-cost/risk participants are more likely to seek out political blogs and newsletters: as more niche forms of political information, these arguably require more political knowledge to be located and accessed (see Anduiza et al, 2009).

It is also notable that despite young people's widespread usage of social networking sites (Dutton and Blank, 2011) comparatively few non-participants and low-cost/risk participants use sites such as Twitter and Facebook to access political information. This perhaps reflects the reciprocal nature of social networking, and how this relates to personal interests: students with little interest in politics are less likely to have politically-active Facebook friends or 'follow' political Twitter feeds, and students with few politically-active Facebook friends and follow few political Twitter feeds are consequently less likely to receive political information through social media and foster an interest in politics.

**Figure 4.9** Political news and media engagement by participation index

| | | Non-participant | Low-cost/risk participant | Medium-cost/risk participant | High-cost/risk participant | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Television | Regularly/often | 46.5% | 57.2% | 61.8% | 65.0% | 58.9% |
| | Sometimes | 23.0% | 22.6% | 17.5% | 13.8% | 19.8% |
| | Rarely/never/ don't know | 30.5% | 20.2% | 20.6% | 21.2% | 21.2% |
| Newspapers | Regularly/often | 50.6% | 62.5% | 78.5% | 82.5% | 69.4% |
| | Sometimes | 23.0% | 22.4% | 15.0% | 11.1% | 18.6% |
| | Rarely/never/ don't know | 26.4% | 15.0% | 6.5% | 6.4% | 12.0% |
| Alternative news sites | Regularly/often | 30.4% | 38.9% | 52.8% | 65.8% | 46.6% |
| | Sometimes | 20.1% | 26.0% | 26.9% | 21.8% | 25.5% |
| | Rarely/never/ don't know | 49.4% | 35.1% | 20.3% | 12.5% | 27.8% |
| Independent blogs | Regularly/often | 6.9% | 11.5% | 21.0% | 41.4% | 18.6% |
| | Sometimes | 10.9% | 16.6% | 23.4% | 19.1% | 18.6% |
| | Rarely/never/ don't know | 82.2% | 71.9% | 55.6% | 39.5% | 62.9% |
| Social networking sites | Regularly/often | 29.9% | 42.0% | 52.5% | 63.9% | 47.6% |
| | Sometimes | 20.7% | 24.7% | 20.7% | 17.0% | 22.1% |
| | Rarely/never/ don't know | 49.4% | 33.3% | 26.8% | 19.1% | 30.3% |
| Emails and newsletters | Regularly/often | 13.8% | 12.7% | 33.4% | 53.6% | 25.1% |
| | Sometimes | 11.5% | 15.4% | 17.6% | 18.3% | 16.2% |
| | Rarely/never/ don't know | 74.7% | 71.9% | 49.0% | 28.1% | 58.6% |

N=2,485 Note: Percentage by column.

Figure 4.10 compares participation categories with attitudes towards efficacy and the participatory ideal. It generally appears that the more high-cost/risk participation students engage in, the more likely they will feel positive towards the importance and efficacy of political participation (including protest). It also seems the case that the more students participate in high-cost/risk activities the more they will have misgivings over the current democratic system in the UK. Focusing on non-participants, it seems there is more ambivalence over the 'duty' of political participation than those who do participate, though only 17 per cent outright disagree with the notion. If disregard for the participatory principle appears a relatively weak explanation for students' non-participation, concerns over a lack of knowledge appears much stronger: 69 per cent agree with the statement 'I often feel that I don't know enough about politics to engage in it'. This apparent knowledge deficit will be a key theme for chapter seven.

**Figure 4.10** Political attitudes by participation index (% of participation group).

| | Non-participants | Low-cost /risk participants | Medium-cost/risk participant | High-cost/risk participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 'If a person is dissatisfied with the politics of the government, he/she has a duty to something about it' | 46.0% agree<br>37.4% neither<br>16.7% disagree | 59.3% agree<br>30.3% neither<br>10.4% disagree | 74.2% agree<br>18.4% neither<br>7.3% disagree | 78.5% agree<br>16.7% neither<br>4.8% disagree |
| 'My participation can have an impact on government policy in this country' | 36.8% agree<br>35.1% neither<br>28.2% disagree | 47.2% agree<br>24.0% neither<br>28.8% disagree | 57.5% agree<br>17.7% neither<br>24.8% disagree | 64.5% agree<br>15.1% neither<br>20.4% disagree |
| 'Protest can help change UK government policy' | 29.9% agree<br>39.1% neither<br>31.0% disagree | 41.2% agree<br>31.1% neither<br>27.7% disagree | 49.4% agree<br>24.0% neither<br>26.7% disagree | 60.5% agree<br>21.0% neither<br>18.6% disagree |
| 'I often feel that I don't know enough about politics to fully engage in it' | 69.0% agree<br>16.1% neither<br>14.9% disagree | 63.7% agree<br>13.1% neither<br>23.3% disagree | 47.2% agree<br>12.9% neither<br>39.9% disagree | 33.7% agree<br>14.3% neither<br>52.0% disagree |
| 'I see no problem with the current democratic system in the UK' | 27.6% agree<br>47.1% neither<br>25.3% disagree | 25.5% agree<br>30.3% neither<br>44.2% disagree | 20.7% agree<br>19.8% neither<br>59.5% disagree | 17.5% agree<br>21.2% neither<br>61.3% disagree |

N=2,485. Note: Percentage by column.

Compared to non-participants, low-cost/risk participants are more positive about the efficacy and importance of political participation. They are also more likely to take a critical position on the health of the UK's democratic system, even though 63.7 per cent claim to lack confidence in their political knowledge. Students engaged in medium and high-cost/risk participation share broadly comparable attitudes towards participation, displaying a similar concern for the state of democracy in the UK, a belief in the duty to participate, and a faith in its wider impact. Perhaps unsurprisingly, high-cost/risk participants possess the strongest sense of civic duty, and are notably more confident in their political knowledge. They are also more positive about the ability of protest to directly affect UK policy, though at 60.5 per cent this is perhaps lower than one might expect. This might reflect the index's conflation of electoral, civic and protest participation: for example, students who have worked or campaigned for a political party (who make up 76.1 per cent of high-cost/risk participants) might take a more critical view of extra-parliamentary protest. In other words, whilst high-cost/risk participants in this index are seemingly more active than other participants, they are not necessarily more politically *radical*. At the same time, however, students' participation

in these activities might belie their shifting attitudes towards electoral and protest politics since the fees and cuts grievance. This will be a key issue for the next section.

***Summary***

Whilst it is clear that most students have some sense of a participatory ideal insofar as most believe it to be a duty to act upon one's political beliefs, there appears to be a lack of consensus on how best to put this principle into practice. On the one hand, voting is considered the most effective available participatory repertoire, despite the fact that most respondents are critical of politicians and parties. Moreover, the majority find fault with the current democratic system, suggesting that more effective opportunities to vote and participate should be possible. Survey findings indicate that efficacy of citizen participation increases with the *practice* of citizen participation, which raises questions over the nature of its causality: do people participate *because* they perceive it to be worthwhile, or do feelings of efficacy develop *through* sustained participation? These are important questions to be dealt with in the following chapters.

Respondents consider protest to be a legitimate form of political participation, albeit one with comparatively little power to directly influence governmental or corporate policy in the short-term. There is also evidence to suggest that a large proportion of respondents see protest as secondary to formal participation processes, possibly as a last resort. Attitudes towards protest are generally more positive among those who have taken part in it – especially in activities categorised as high-cost/risk.

The participatory index shows a correlation between political knowledge and the cost/risk of participation students engage in, with those engaged in high-cost/risk activities most confident in their views. This is demonstrated in the range of different sources of political information they claim to regularly consume. There are a higher proportion of older students among high-cost/risk participants, along with students studying arts, humanities and social sciences. In contrast, non-participants feature a higher proportion of East Asian international students, and students studying sciences subjects. This opens up the possibility that certain campus networks and fields draw in and cultivate a culture of political activism more than others – a theme we shall explore in more detail in chapters five and six.

## 3. Participation and non-participation in the student protests against fees and cuts

The second substantive section of this chapter focuses on participation and non-participation in the student protests against fees and cuts. Although the survey included a separate section

on the fees and cuts in addition to general participation questions, the fact that both were collected as part of the same questionnaire means that there will be clear overlaps between case study data and general participation data. This places limitations on the extent to which the two can be compared. As a result, this section seeks to deal with similar questions to those of the last, only this time linking them explicitly to the field of the university and the fees and cuts grievance.

***Students' attitudes towards the university, tuition fees and higher education funding***

It was found in the previous section that the majority of students – from non-participants to many medium cost/risk participants – often felt they lacked sufficient knowledge to participate fully in politics. One can argue that this is where the case study differs from general trends in one important aspect: although Government proposals to treble the tuition fees cap did not materially affect students in higher education during the 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years, it did focus on an issue about which many students could claim both knowledge and experience, namely, the cost and value of higher education. Most current students possess first-hand experience of university life and studying for a degree, and are likely to start repaying tuition fees at some point after graduation. Furthermore, as an educational institution with its own history of political activism, the university campus can be said to have its own political culture and participatory repertoires (Boren, 2001). All of these issues play into wider and more longstanding debates about the role of the university and what students should seek from it: should it represent the Humboldtian ideal of institutional autonomy and academic freedom (Baert and Shipman, 2005), or does it need to serve students and the economy in more transactional terms?

In many ways, survey findings reflect both ideals. Respondents were asked what they felt the purpose of university was. Of the five functions, the two most popular were 'to prepare students for a career' (55.1 per cent strongly agree) and 'to make students more free-thinking and independent' (60.5 per cent strongly agree). Although the more contentious claim that university should 'make students better citizens' was the least popular choice, it still scored surprisingly strongly, with 52.3 per cent considering it to be important and only 19 per cent considering it unimportant. Tailoring the role of university to students' own personal experiences, respondents were asked how important a series of options were in their decision to study at university (see figure 4.11[15]). Again, the most popular options arguably reflect a split between a Humboldtian and market-based rationale of higher education: more than two-

[15] An unfortunate oversight in the questionnaire design was to not ask respondents to rank these functions in order of importance.

thirds considered ‘improving career chances’ and ‘hav[ing] a passion for the subject I am studying’ as ‘very important’. As with the citizenship statement, the option ‘an opportunity to become more socially and politically aware’ drew the least popular response from the available options, yet 63.8 per cent still considered it to be an important reason and only 14.3 per cent found it unimportant. This again arguably supports the notion of politics as a learning process for young people, one that is dependent on certain opportunities to further their knowledge.

**Figure 4.11** Student motivations for studying at university

| | Very important | Slightly important | Neither important or unimportant | Not very important | Not at all important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Improving career chances | 66.0% | 24.8% | 5.2% | 2.8% | 1.2% |
| An opportunity to meet new people | 36.6% | 37.7% | 15.8% | 6.8% | 3.1% |
| I have a passion for the subject I am studying | 73.6% | 21.4% | 3.8% | 0.9% | 0.3% |
| An opportunity to become more socially and politically aware | 24.6% | 39.2% | 21.9% | 9.5% | 4.8% |
| A chance to learn about the world | 38.6% | 37.7% | 15.6% | 5.5% | 2.7% |
| A chance to discover a new town/region | 23.8% | 31.9% | 19.2% | 11.6% | 13.5% |
| An opportunity to have fun | 33.0% | 38.3% | 15.5% | 8.0% | 5.2% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentage by row.
Question: How important were the following in your decision to study at your current university?

The desire to become more socially and politically aware, combined with experiences of the demands of university life, would perhaps give students a strong bedrock of knowledge and understanding on the subject of university funding. Focusing on students’ own experiences, 73.4 per cent claimed that the cost of fees and subsistence had factored in their thinking when deciding whether to go to university or not. This appears to have given students strong views about the cost of a university education: according to figure 4.12, 83.2 per cent agree that ‘access to an affordable university education is a right, not a privilege’. Significantly, there appears to be little neutrality on the issue: only 5.5 per cent claim to neither agree nor disagree. It of course remains open to interpretation what constitutes an ‘affordable’ university education – NUS advocated a graduate tax instead of tuition fees, whereas student campaigning groups such as NCAFC have campaigned for tuition fees to be abolished altogether, a policy which was also part of the Liberal Democrats’ 2010 election manifesto. Indeed, students familiar with the cost of a university education in countries such as the United States might consider £9,000 annual fees to study at world-renowned institutions to

represent good value. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that students considered these increased fee costs to be too expensive: 84.3 per cent agreed that they were ‘concerned’ that higher fees would ‘put some strong candidates off applying for university altogether’. This supports the view put forward in the first chapter that the fees issue represented a ‘moral grievance’ (Gamson, 1992; see also Ibrahim, 2011). This also enables one to draw comparisons between this and forms of ‘cause-based’ politics that Bang (2004) and others see as especially appealing to young people.

As discussed in chapter two, there is debate over whether young people’s political participation reflects a ‘generational consciousness’. Figure 4.12 shows that 63.6 per cent of students agree with the view that ‘politicians don’t care about the interests of young people’. Of course, agreeing with this view does not necessarily reflect a generational consciousness among students: certainly, there is little difference between the percentage of 18-23 year-old students who agree with this view (63.8 per cent) and the percentage of students above the age of 23 (61.8 per cent). Moreover, 55.5 per cent of students above the age of 30 also agree with this view. This suggests that whilst the majority of students appear dissatisfied with the representation of youth in electoral politics, this attitude is not necessarily a reflection of students’ own age. Moreover, attitudes related to the right to an affordable university education and the importance of political parties keeping their electoral pledges drew stronger approval from students of all ages. This suggests only limited importance afforded to the fees grievance as an indicator of wider generational discontent.

**Figure 4.12** Student attitudes towards higher education funding and the 2010 UK general election

| | Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| Access to an affordable university education is a right, not a privilege | 83.2% | 5.5% | 11.3% |
| I am concerned that higher fees will put some strong candidates off applying for university altogether | 84.3% | 6.0% | 9.7% |
| I feel let down by the Liberal Democrats over their reversal of tuition fees | 72.9% | 19.2% | 7.9% |
| Politicians don’t care about the interests of young people* | 63.6% | 16.1% | 20.4% |
| Parties should always be held accountable for their election pledges once they become part of government | 85.5% | 9.6% | 4.9% |

N=2,485 (* N=977[16]). Note: Percentages by row.
Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about recent changes to the funding of higher education in the UK?

[16] As discussed in chapter three, this question was added to the survey’s second phase, and so is drawn from a reduced sample of 977.

***The 2010 general election and the Liberal Democrats***

Recalling arguments made in the first chapter, for many UK-based students the moral grievance of tuition fees was compounded by the personal grievance of having voted Liberal Democrat in the 2010 election because of their anti-fees stance. Given that the party received a 45.6 per cent share of the student vote, figure 4.13 tests this relationship by focusing on student attitudes towards higher education funding whilst also comparing responses from Labour and Liberal Democrat students. Although Labour were by no means vanguards of a free or fair-funded education perspective – having commissioned the Browne Review in 2009, their only policy response to the student protests was to pledge a maximum annual fee cap of £6,000 – they nevertheless competed with the Liberal Democrats for the position of students' most popular left-leaning alternative to the Conservatives in the 2010 election. What is clear from the table is that the political views of Liberal Democrat and Labour voters differ very little in their views on fees and funding: the vast majority of both believe access to an affordable university education is a right, not a privilege (both above the average for all students). Perhaps more surprisingly, both hold very similar views on how higher education should be funded: both express similar level of support for the idea for higher taxation and both are similarly opposed to an opt-out for taxpayers who did not go to university. Both similarly reject the view that maintaining higher education funding is not a priority in the current economic climate.

**Figure 4.13** Student attitudes towards higher education funding and the 2010 UK general election

| | % Lib Dem voters agree | % Labour voters agree | % Con voters agree | % all students agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Access to an affordable university education is a right, not a privilege | 86.0% | 90.1% | 68.9% | 83.2% |
| I feel let down by the Liberal Democrats over their reversal of tuition fees | 88.7% | 85.6% | 43.3% | 72.9% |
| Parties should always be held accountable for their election pledges once they become part of government | 90.4% | 93.8% | 79.9% | 85.5% |
| Maintaining higher education funding is not a priority when public service cuts have to be made | 28.2% | 23.0% | 43.3% | 28.1% |
| Higher education funding should be maintained through higher taxes | 41.0% | 44.0% | 15.2% | 33.2% |
| Taxpayers who did not go through higher education should not be expected to pay for the higher education of others | 19.5% | 14.8% | 26.8% | 19.2% |

N=2,485.
Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about recent changes to the funding of higher education in the UK?

This suggests two things. First, it strongly supports the view that student voters were swayed into voting Liberal Democrat by the party's pledge on tuition fees. Second, it would seem that many of these voters were closer in their politics to Labour than the Conservatives, indicating that coalition with the latter party was as much an unanticipated consequence of the 2010 election to Liberal Democrat student voters as their subsequent u-turn on its tuition fees pledge. This is supported by the finding that 88.7 per cent admit to feeling personally let down by their party over their u-turn, with 90.4 per cent also agreeing that 'parties should always be held accountable for their election pledges once they become part of government'. Evidence of antipathy can also be found in interviews with voters, as well as the survey's more qualitative aspects:

> I was hoping for a Labour-Lib Dem coalition instead of what we ended up with – I didn't think that they would go in with the Conservatives. I wouldn't ever vote Lib Dem again, as a matter of principle now. They're dead to me! (Mick, Cambridge)
>
> I voted Lib Dem and I think a lot of people felt *so* betrayed … and *still* feel betrayed. They've completely ruined themselves as a party. The amount of people I know who said 'I voted Lib Dem, I'm never voting Lib Dem ever again…' (Angie, Cambridge)
>
> 'Foolishly, Liberal Democrats'; 'Lib Dem (Wasted Vote)'; 'lib dem....i feel betrayed'; 'Lib Dems (BIG MISTAKE)'; 'Lib Dems (unfortunatley) [sic]';

> ‘Liberal Democrats...tactically!’; Liberal Demofucks’; ‘Liberal lying Democrats’ (extracts from pre-coded survey data[17])

In more practical terms, the hypothesis that most Liberal Democrat voters were more aligned to the centre-left than the direction their party took after the 2010 election is supported through cross-tabulating voting with current party identification. It should first be noted that in polling data respondents’ party identification tends to atrophy between election cycles, which the findings of this survey broadly reproduces. Despite this, however, one can compare the extent to which the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have retained voter support in the two years since the 2010 election. Whereas the Conservatives and Labour have retained the support of around 73 per cent of their 2010 voters, the Liberal Democrats have retained 14.2 per cent. This represents a significant atrophying of their electoral support, with most either jumping ship to Labour and the SNP, or declining to identify with any party. Although representation of the latter party is likely affected by the survey’s bias towards Scotland-based students, it may also indicate a desire to support a party with a more fair-funded fees agenda: Labour represents the only mainstream English party who have pledged to at least reduce the fees cap, whereas the SNP sought to make political capital out of the student protests by emphasising Scotland’s free education policy (see *The Journal*, 27 October 2010).

**Figure 4.14** Cross-tabulating current party identification with Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters in the 2010 general election (UK domiciles only)

| UK domiciles | | | Current party identification | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Con | Lab | Lib Dem | SNP | None |
| Party voted for in the 2010 general election | Conservatives | % of 2010 voters’ current party identification | 73.5% | 6.2% | 1.2% | 1.9% | 13.6% |
| | Labour | % of 2010 voters’ current party identification | 1.2% | 72.7% | 0.4% | 7.9% | 10.7% |
| | Liberal Democrats | % of 2010 voters’ current party identification | 4.4% | 30.1% | 14.2% | 18.1% | 26.2% |

N=1,670. Note: Percentages by row.
Question: With which political party, if any, do you most closely identify with right now?

[17] The question in the survey asking who respondents voted for in the 2010 election (Q19a) was an open-dialogue box and required manual coding prior to being imported to SPSS.

***The protests against fees and cuts: participation/non-participation***

It should be clear from the previous section that the majority of students had reasons for opposing Government proposals to raise tuition fees. Translating this anger or betrayal into political *action*, however, represented a different step entirely. Of course, in the aftermath of the 2010 election some students may have felt unsure of how they might legitimately or effectively express their views. For others, the answer was clearer: not only did *protest* symbolise a rejection of formal processes of political participation, it also arguably represented a more direct means of influencing governmental decision-making – especially during the autumn term of 2010, when students had the task of exerting pressure on MPs to vote down the fees bill in Parliament.

Figure 4.15 breaks down participation in the student protests into different social categories in a similar fashion to the general participation trends shown in figure 4.8. Whereas this initial set of participation statistics sought to objectively measure participation in largely-established repertoires, questions related to the case study sought to capture a mixture of the objective and subjective. In the survey, respondents are asked if they participated in the protests against fees and cuts before being asked to specify what they did. The survey records that overall, 22.3 per cent of students claimed to have participated in the student protests against fees and cuts. To some observers, this figure might seem quite high for a single campaign, though it is of course far fewer than the 83 per cent who claimed to have participated politically in the past three years. More significantly, however, the figure is far below that of students believing an affordable higher education to be a right not a privilege.

**Figure 4.15** Participation in the student protests as percentage of demographics

| | | Participated in the student protests |
|---|---|---|
| Sex | Male (N=742) | 21.7%* |
| | Female (N=1,724) | 22.4%* |
| Domicile | UK (N=2,104) | 23.9% |
| | Other EU (N=193) | 20.7% |
| | Non-EU (N=184) | 6.0% |
| Class identification | Upper middle class (N=701) | 16.5% |
| | Lower middle class (N=1,035) | 23.7% |
| | Working class (N=503) | 29.8% |
| | No class identification (N=227) | 17.6% |
| Party voted for in 2010 election | Conservatives (N=164) | 13.4% |
| | Labour (N=243) | 36.2% |
| | Liberal Democrats (N=415) | 31.6% |
| | Did not vote (N=416) | 15.1% |
| Degree subject | Art & design (N=128) | 20.3% |
| | Humanities (N=786) | 24.3% |
| | Social sciences (N=650) | 29.1% |
| | Natural sciences (N=642) | 16.7% |
| | Logic and technology (N=279) | 14.3% |
| Degree type | Undergraduate (N=1,981) | 23.4% |
| | Postgraduate (N=504) | 17.9% |
| UG by domicile | UK (N=1,762) | 24.2% |
| | Other EU (N=122) | 23.0% |
| | Non-EU (N=97) | 9.3% |
| UG by year of study | First year (N=717) | 19.4% |
| | Second year (N=590) | 24.2% |
| | Third year or more (N=674) | 26.9% |

N=2,485. * $p>0.05$.

It should be noted that the survey question does not specify a timeframe for participation in the student protests, allowing respondents to base their answer on activities undertaken at any time they see as relevant. It is therefore possible that older students and postgraduates might include protest participation dating back to campaigns circa 2008-10. Given this subjective timeframe, it is perhaps unsurprising that figure 4.15 shows that first year undergraduates have a lower participation rate than second and third year undergraduates. This is because the supply of protest opportunities arguably disadvantages first year undergraduates as they were not yet at university in 2010/11 when the protests were at their peak. Consequently, their participation that year would have depended on accessing opportunities via friends and family or through campaigns taking place at school or college. Moreover, by the time they arrived at university, opportunities to participate would largely depend on whether their university had a still-active anti-cuts movement in 2011/12.

A finding of the general participation index was that postgraduates scored more highly as high cost/risk participants than undergraduates. It is therefore surprising that participation in

the student protests was below average for postgraduates (17.9 per cent). Of course, this may disadvantage first year (or one year) postgraduates who were not at university in 2010/11, though it is likely that at least some would have been in their final year of undergraduate study at the time. This arguably suggests that postgraduate participation had less to do with the general supply of protest opportunities on campus than their overall *connectedness* to activism on campus. One possibility is that these students had a more limited biographical availability at the time of the protests, though given that postgraduates demonstrated a similar level of support for affordable higher education and had recently participated in other forms of political action, their failure to be mobilised in larger numbers might be considered something of a missed opportunity for the student movement, especially given their general participation elsewhere.

An alternative way of interpreting the lower percentage of postgraduate involvement is to argue that it shows just how popular protest participation was among *undergraduates*: almost one in four took part in some way, a proportion which might have been even higher had the survey been conducted in 2010/11. Among undergraduates, the proportion of participants was at its highest for students studying social science (30.4 per cent), students who identified as 'working class' (30.9 per cent – challenging to some extent Gilbert's (Gilbert and Aitchison, 2012) allegation that the protests were middle-class dominated), and students who voted Labour (38.7 per cent) or Liberal Democrat (32.7 per cent). Although participation among Conservative-voting undergraduates was notably lower (14.8 per cent[18]), it still represented a significant enough proportion to argue that the issue of increased tuition fees and higher education budget cuts partly transcended party tribalism.

Returning to the theme of the Liberal Democrat u-turn, it is notable that around a third of the party's student voters took part in the protests. Among those participants, a third now claim to identify with Green or Socialist parties (more so than those now identifying with Labour), suggesting that their experience of the protests served to push their politics further from the established political centre-ground. Figure 4.15 also finds that only 15.1 per cent of students who did not vote (when eligible to do so) participated in the student protests – a similar proportion to participants who had voted Conservative. This rather goes against some of the journalistic hyperbole claiming that the protests had woken up the 'apathetic youth': on the contrary, the fees and cuts issue was much more likely to mobilise students who were already politically active in some way. That said, it is perhaps significant that 33.2 per cent of students whose protest participation qualified as medium or high-cost/risk (using the

[18] All cross-tabulations are p=0.00.

participatory index outlined in figure 4.19) had worked or campaigned for a political party in the past three years[19]. This suggests that the fees grievance might have caused many students to switch from 'electoral' to 'protest' activism, although the long-term effects of this remain unclear at present.

Although we have already seen evidence that the vast majority of students were concerned about the potential trebling of tuition fees, it remains possible that non-participants made a rational choice *not* to take part. Figure 4.16 compares the attitudes of participants and non-participants towards higher education funding, protest participation and the legacy of the student protests themselves. Focusing on the first theme, participants generally demonstrate moderately stronger opposition to higher tuition fees and cuts than non-participants. The attitude gap is notably wider, however, on the subject of raising taxes to pay for higher education. This indicates that for at least half of participants their opposition came from a more politically developed left-wing perspective. Others, on the other hand, may have either favoured alternative means of resolving the funding issue, or had few thoughts beyond their basic opposition to it.

There is a noticeable difference between participants and non-participants' attitudes towards protest. Certainly, a far higher proportion of participants consider protest to be an essential form of political engagement than non-participants. One could argue that a sizeable number of students opposed to higher fees did not participate because they lacked belief in the effectiveness of protest to influence government policy. There is also evidence to suggest that they take a more critical view towards formal political participation processes – only 12.7 per cent see no problem with UK democracy whereas 39.1 per cent take the view that protest represents the 'last meaningful form of political engagement available in the UK'. Although this suggests a small but significant proportion of politically active students have strong misgivings over the health of democratic participation in the UK, it appears not to have caused an outright rejection of it: 82.8 per cent of activists claim that they will 'definitely' vote in the next general election.

[19] p=0.00.

**Figure 4.16** Comparison of attitudes between participants and non-participants in the student protests

| | % of participants agree | % of non-participants agree | Total respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| Access to an affordable university education is a right, not a privilege | 92.9% | 80.4% | 83.2% |
| I am concerned that higher fees will put some strong candidates off applying for university altogether | 94.8% | 81.3% | 84.3% |
| Higher education funding should be maintained through higher taxes | 50.8% | 28.2% | 33.2% |
| I see no problem with the current democratic system in the UK | 12.7% | 26.0% | 23.0% |
| Protest is an essential form of political engagement | 79.9% | 52.4% | 58.6% |
| Protest can help change UK government policy | 55.9% | 42.9% | 45.8% |
| Protest is the last meaningful form of political engagement available in the UK | 39.1% | 24.7% | 27.9% |
| The tuition fees issue has made me more politically engaged | 70.2% | 35.2% | 43.0% |
| The student protests have made me more politically engaged | 61.3% | 23.6% | 32.0% |
| I am definitely going to vote in the next general election | 82.8% | 70.1% | 72.9% |

N=2,485.

Although many student activists are uncomfortable with self-identifying as political vanguards for the wider student population, anti-fees campaigns were keenly focused on raising awareness of the issue of higher education funding. Occupations in particular were keen to reach out to students 'biographically unavailable' to participate physically, and consequently members made full use of online communications technologies to 'expand the room' (Mason, 2011b: 45). Although the survey data cannot account for non-participating students who already considered themselves well-informed about the fees grievance, figure 4.16 shows that 35.2 per cent of non-participants became more politically engaged as a result of the fees issue. Perhaps more significantly, 23.6 per cent felt that the *protests* made them more politically engaged. Analysing the subsection of engaged and 'supportive' non-participants will be a key area of focus for chapter seven.

***Participation in the student protests: what did students do?***

So far, analysis of the student protests has focused only on a basic participation/non-participation binary. This is useful for identifying some of the essential properties of students who did *not* take part, but one should be mindful of depicting those that *did* as a homogenous group: after all, participation might involve repeated participation on a variety

of activities, or it can mean doing a single activity once. Moreover, students may also have taken a variety of different political positions within a basic 'anti-fees' standpoint. In other words, it would certainly be unwise to automatically equate the 22.3 per cent of student protest participants to a collective social movement identity. This final section will therefore map out basic attitudinal and participatory trends within the basic participatory category so that certain ideal types can be identified and explored in chapter six.

Survey respondents who answered 'yes' to having participated in the student protests were asked specific follow-up questions about the nature of their participation and their experiences more generally. Figure 4.17 shows students' participation in a range of activism activities put to them in the questionnaire. Once again, the most popular activities are predominantly low-cost/risk – 84.9 per cent of participants signed petitions, and 63.6 per cent 'liked' campaign Facebook pages – and the more high-cost/risk activities such as organising protests and participating in blockades were the least popular. Somewhat bucking this trend, nearly half of participants attended local, regional and national marches and demonstrations – around 10 per cent of the student population as a whole. This broadly reflects the large number of marches and demonstrations that took place in 2010 and 2011, particularly in autumn 2010 when the fees campaign was still 'live'.

**Figure 4.17** Student protest activity in the student protests against fees and cuts

| | I did this more than once (% of participants) | I did this once (% of participants) | Participants as % of all students |
|---|---|---|---|
| Signing a petition | 42.9% | 42.0% | 18.9% |
| Wearing or displaying a campaign badge or sticker | 17.5% | 20.3% | 8.4% |
| Distributing flyers | 8.9% | 9.4% | 4.1% |
| Attending a national or regional level student march | 15.6% | 25.1% | 9.1% |
| Attending a student march in your own/nearest town or city | 15.6% | 31.3% | 10.4% |
| Taking part in the blockade of a building or meeting | 4.5% | 7.4% | 2.7% |
| Taking part in an occupation/sit-in | 6.5% | 11.8% | 4.1% |
| Taking part in the organizing of a protest event | 6.1% | 6.3% | 2.8% |
| Attending a student-led teach-in or activism workshop | 6.1% | 8.7% | 3.3% |
| Attending a university or union-arranged debate or meeting about student fees | 10.5% | 17.5% | 6.2% |
| Like/join a protest page/group on Facebook | 26.9% | 36.7% | 14.2% |
| Follow a protest group on Twitter | 11.0% | 10.5% | 4.8% |
| Other | 3.6% | 2.5% | 1.4% |

N=553.
Question: If you clicked 'YES' to the last question, please tick if your participation in the student protests involved any of the following activities.

Going deeper into this data, it is found that a slightly higher proportion of undergraduate participants in their second year or more attended national/regional demonstrations than first year participants. The trend is unsurprising given that most student marches and demonstrations took place in the 2010/11 academic year, thus giving students in their second year or above greater access to multiple participation opportunities than students who started university in autumn 2011. What is more surprising is the narrow marginality of difference – only 3.5 per cent[20] – which suggests that being on campus did not make a huge difference to whether protest participants took part in national/regional demonstrations. This is even borne out in the data on repeated participants, with only 1.5 per cent[21] more undergraduates in their second year or more having attended multiple demonstrations than first year undergraduates. It would therefore seem that repeated first year undergraduate demonstrators were likely to have attended a national or regional demonstration prior to coming to university, and had a

[20] 7.3 per cent of first year undergraduates took part in national/regional demonstrations, compared with 10.8 per cent of undergraduates in their second year or more (p=0.01).
[21] 2.4 per cent of first year undergraduates took part in more than one national/regional demonstration, compared with 3.9 per cent of undergraduates in their second year or more (p=0.01).

sufficiently positive experience to take part in another one, either the same year or following their arrival at university in autumn 2011.

In terms of case numbers, occupations in the autumn of 2010 were more widespread on UK campuses than they had ever been in the UK – including 1968 – but only 4.1 per cent of students took part in them. This seeming disparity is partly explained by the fact that unlike demonstrations, occupations do not depend on mass participation to be considered effective. Moreover, occupations took place in fewer than half of UK universities between 2010 and 2012[22]. As with marches and demonstrations, more occupations took place in 2010/11 than 2011/12. To some extent, this is reflected in the fact that among undergraduate participants in their second year or more 19.4 per cent of took part in occupations compared with 11.5 per cent of those in their first year[23]. Unlike marches and demonstrations the vast majority of occupations were located on campus. Consequently, the lower numbers of first-year occupation participation may be attributed to the fact that their campus location made it less likely for activists not yet at university to access what might have seemed a 'campus-only' event.

As with the general participation index, it is useful to aggregate student protest participation in terms of cost and risk as a means of comparing political attitudes and social demographics. Using respondents' answers to the survey question outlined in figure 4.17, figure 4.18 scores each form of participation according to the general costs and risks involved[24]. Forms of participation in figure 4.18 have been scored the same as in the general participation index (see figure 4.5) other than to distinguish between 'local marches' and 'national or regional marches'. The former has been categorised as medium-cost/risk on the basis that these events required only moderate cost in time and money as they were local to the students' university. The latter, on the other hand, has been categorised as high-cost/risk. There are three reasons for this. First, these events mostly took place in non-campus

[22] Of the 101 occupying students, 9 came from universities where no campus occupation was recorded by Palmieri and Solomon (2011: 60). Given the small sample size, attempts to compare this with universities with occupation generated no statistically significant results.
[23] p=0.03.
[24] The category of 'other' was not included the participation index due to problems found with incorporating its coded activities into the overall scoring of participants. This is because not all respondents would have had the same range of activities to choose from: some respondents saw fit to count certain activities as 'other' participation when others probably did not, either because they personally did not consider the activity as 'participation', or they simply forgot to include them. The subjective element here is interesting – especially the prevalence of forms of 'media production' among many students' answers – but the low yield of responses (N=34) limits the scope for any further statistically robust analysis.

locations, namely the city centres of London (six demonstrations between 2010 and 2011), Manchester (one in January 2011) and Edinburgh (two). As a result, the majority of students had to travel some distance to attend these events. Second, students were not always well-supported in being able to attend these demonstrations. Whilst provision of coach travel to the 'official' NUS demonstration on 10 November 2010 was facilitated by most student unions, students wishing to attend NCAFC-organised national demonstrations (of which there were four in 2010 and 2011) were dependent on belonging to a student union willing to fund travel to 'unofficial' protests, or they would have to make their own way there. Third, national demonstrations in London following 'Millbank' were associated with risks and uncertainties related to forms of direct action used by some activists and police tactics used on protesters (notably 'kettling'). Given the amount of media coverage this attracted, one can reasonably argue that in the context of this particular case study national and regional demonstrations were a more high-cost/risk activity than had been the case in previous years.

**Figure 4.18** Scoring participation repertoires in the student protests by cost and risk to participants

| Participation type | "Did this once" score | "Did this more than once" score |
|---|---|---|
| Signed a petition | 1 | 2 |
| Wore or displayed a campaign badge or sticker | 1 | 2 |
| Liked/joined a protest page/group on Facebook | 1 | 2 |
| Followed a protest group on Twitter | 1 | 2 |
| Distributed flyers | 3 | 6 |
| Attended a local student march | 3 | 6 |
| Attended a student-led teach-in or activism workshop | 3 | 6 |
| Attended a debate or meeting about student fees | 3 | 6 |
| Attended a national or regional student march | 6 | 12 |
| Took part in the blockade of a building or meeting | 6 | 12 |
| Took part in an occupation or sit-in | 6 | 12 |
| Took part in the organising of a protest event | 6 | 12 |

Question: If you clicked 'YES' to the last question, please tick if your participation in the student protests involved any of the following activities.

Figure 4.19 categorises students' participation using low, medium and cost/risk score aggregates in the same way as the general participation index. Aggregating these scores reveals the anomaly that seven respondents participated without appearing to specify any particular activity: this can be partly explained by the fact that four of these had recorded their participation using the 'other' category. Comparing participatory groupings in figure 4.19 with the general participation index in figure 4.7 one can again see that the majority of participants reside in the low-cost/risk category (the most frequent participation score is again 2). Figure 4.19 also posits a percentage of high-cost/risk participants that is

comparable to Hoefferle's (2013) estimate for radical student activists in British universities in the 1960s and 1970s. This suggests that whilst the *range* of political participation has perhaps expanded in UK universities since this time (witness the higher percentage of high-cost/risk participants in the general index), the proportion of students able and willing to mobilise for student-focused, left-of-centre protest campaigns remains broadly the same.

**Figure 4.19** Participation in the student protests against fees and cuts measured by cost and risk

| | Score range | Frequency | Percent | % of all students |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No specified participation | 0 | 7 | 1.3% | 0.3% |
| Low-cost/risk participant | 1-8 | 281 | 50.8% | 11.3% |
| Medium-cost/risk participant | 9-32 | 200 | 36.2% | 8.0% |
| High-cost/risk participant | 33-80 | 65 | 11.8% | 2.6% |
| Total | | 553 | 100.0% | 22.3% |

N=553.

Figure 4.20 compares the social demographics of each participatory category. Findings suggest no statistically significant difference in the level of participation between undergraduates and postgraduates, as well as degree subject categories. What *is* significant is that a higher proportion of male students take part in high-cost/risk participation than females ($p<0.05$). This raises questions over whether groups and activism networks responsible for organising high-cost/risk activities featured any male bias in their politics and organisation. Certainly, there are factors which might discourage high-cost/risk female participation: the literature on social movements and gender has identified women's often 'auxiliary' role to men in groups' leadership and organisation (Lawson and Barton, 1980), as well as the gendered stereotyping female activists have historically endured from political opponents and third parties designed to de-legitimise their status as political actors (Einwohner et al; 2000; Yulia, 2010). The theme of gender and non-participation will be explored further in chapter seven.

**Figure 4.20** Student protest participation categories as percentage of demographics

| | | Low-cost/risk participant | Medium-cost/risk participant | High-cost/risk participant |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | Male | 42.9%** | 38.5%** | 15.5%** |
| | Female | 54.4%** | 35.2%** | 9.8%** |
| Subject | Sciences | 56.5%* | 34.7%* | 6.8%* |
| | Arts, humanities & social sciences | 48.8%* | 36.7%* | 13.5%* |
| Degree | Undergraduate | 51.4%* | 36.5%* | 10.6%* |
| | Postgraduate | 47.8%* | 34.4%* | 17.8%* |

N=553. Note: Percentages by row. * $p>0.05$; ** $p<0.05$.

Turning to figure 4.21, which compares political attitudes between low, medium and high-cost/risk participants, it is perhaps unsurprising to find no statistically significant difference in students' opposition towards fees and the Liberal Democrats' policy u-turn. There is general dissatisfaction towards democracy in the UK, but lower-cost/risk participants are notably more cautious in their views regarding direct democracy or protest as participatory alternatives. In contrast, more than half of high-cost/risk participants are supportive of a system of direct democracy. Whilst these do not necessarily represent pre-eminent alternatives, it does suggest a certain ideological divide between high-cost/risk participants and the rest of the participating students. This is also very noticeable in the proposal that 'higher education funding should be maintained through higher taxes': 80 per cent of high-cost/risk participants agree with this view, compared to less than half of low-cost/risk participants. This provides strong evidence that protest participants, whilst united in opposition to fees and cuts, were more divided when it came to advocating ideological or policy-based alternatives. Certainly, it would seem that the more radical leftist politics of high-cost/risk participants – typified in the free education, 'tax the rich' politics of many occupations and alternative campaign groups – only found limited support among the wider population of protesters. One can argue that it was this lack of ideological or policy-based unity that played a significant role in the student protests' decline as a mass campaign following the tuition fees vote on 9 December 2010.

**Figure 4.21** Political attitudes by participation in the student protests

| | % low-cost /risk participants agree | % medium-cost/risk participants agree | % high-cost/risk participants agree | % all students agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Access to an affordable university education is a right, not a privilege | 92.5%* | 92.0%* | 100.0%* | 83.2% |
| I feel let down by the Liberal Democrats over their reversal of tuition fees | 90.0%* | 91.0%* | 96.9%* | 72.9% |
| Higher education funding should be maintained through higher taxes | 44.8% | 51.5% | 80.0% | 33.2% |
| I see no problem with the current democratic system in the UK | 17.1% | 7.5% | 7.7% | 23.0% |
| True democracy in the UK is only possible through the abolition of parliament and the creation of a new system of direct democracy | 26.3% | 30.5% | 53.8% | 18.2% |

N=553. * p>0.05.

## 4. Conclusion

It should be clear from the evidence presented that the politics of higher education funding are of interest and concern to the vast majority of students, most of whom have themselves given the affordability of their own education some serious thought. Students' widespread engagement in, and position-taking on, the Government's plans to treble fees and cut university funding therefore comes as no surprise, and can be presented as a 'moral grievance' (Gamson, 1992). Moreover, engagement with the issue was clearly bolstered by the 'suddenly imposed grievance' felt by the majority of Liberal Democrat voters, who had been attracted by the party's election pledge to abolish fees and vote against any increase in Parliament. Liberal Democrat voters expressed strong views against higher fees and have since deserted the party in large numbers, feeling a strong sense of betrayal towards their policy u-turn. Consequently, one can argue that the high proportion of Liberal Democrat voters – almost one in five of students in 2011/12 – was a significant factor in building a critical mass of anti-£9,000 fees sentiment on UK campuses.

Converting this sentiment into mass action, however, was a different matter. Whilst the percentage of students who claimed to have participated in the protests – 22.3 per cent – is not inconsiderable, it is significantly lower than the percentage of students who have participated in activism elsewhere, and far below the percentage of those who registered their opposition to the Government's proposals. In other words, there is a sizeable proportion of the student population who were politically predisposed for activism but did not even sign a petition. To some extent, non-participation reflected certain social demographic patterns – students studying science, postgraduate students, non-EU international students, and non-voters were generally less likely to participate than undergraduate, Labour or Liberal Democrat-voting working class-identifying students who studied arts, humanities and social science subjects. Non-participants were also less sure of the value and efficacy of protest participation, though around a quarter became more engaged as a result of others' participation. Non-participant attitudes and demographics will be explored in greater detail in chapter seven.

For students who *did* participate, the majority took part in low-cost/risk activities. Despite this, attendances for marches and demonstrations were high – amounting to 10 per cent of the total student population – which was no doubt helped by the fact that students could choose from a range of local, regional and national-level marches to attend, especially in autumn 2010. Moreover, students not yet at university as of 2010/11 also participated in healthy numbers, an experience which seemed to encourage further participation once they

arrived at university. High-cost/risk participants – classified as having taken part in national marches, occupations and blockades – were a very small minority of students overall but were responsible for generating multiple activism opportunities – such as petitions, meetings and local marches – for larger numbers of students to participate in. That said, beyond a shared opposition to cuts and higher tuition fees, high-cost/risk participants and the rest notably differed in opinion when it came to alternative means of funding higher education or improving democracy. This may have restricted activists' ability to create a sense of collective identity among students – an issue which will be analysed further in chapter six.

Finally, it was found that students were uncertain about the efficacy of protest participation in general, even if most saw it as a legitimate and important form of political expression. Students appeared confident that protest could have a diffusive effect in terms of raising public awareness of issues (recalling the efficacy of 1960s student activism discussed in chapter two), but there was considerably more doubt over its ability to *directly* influence governments and corporations. Moreover, there was disagreement over what an effective protest might look like – for example, the majority appeared uncomfortable with 'direct action' tactics. This raises the question of why some students might feel more positive about the power of protest than others. Certainly, findings from the general participation index indicated that students were more positive about the efficacy of political participation the higher the cost/risk of activities they were typically involved in. This arguably points to the importance of specific participation *cultures* which surround certain groups and activities, though it would seem that some students have greater access to these cultures than others. Social paths (and barriers) to protest *mobilisation* are therefore of paramount importance to answering this question, and form the focus for the next chapter.

# Chapter 5

# Mobilisation and the university campus: paths and barriers to participation in the student protests

## 1. Introduction

The previous chapter identified the range of activism repertoires practiced by students, both in the fees and cuts protests and more generally. It also found that the majority of non-participants were broadly opposed to a trebled cap on tuition fees and higher education cuts. The task of this chapter is to explain how and why certain students were more easily mobilised than others. Mobilisation has long been an area of interest in the social and political sciences, with researchers seeking to expound on what lies between grievance and action. This chapter focuses in particular on two key drivers of mobilisation: pre-university socialisation, and social networks within the university campus. The former is important given the knowledge and resources generally required for activism participation. One can argue that students already equipped with a political background via family or school are well-placed to quickly make the most of activism opportunities at university (Coles, 1986; Braungart and Braungart, 1990; Crossley, 2002). In the case of the latter, authors such as Verba and Nye (1972) and Oegema and Klandermans (1994) have argued that outside of the family, an individual's mobilisation is heavily dependent on being targeted by recruitment strategies, both formally (via unions or professionalised agencies) and informally (via friends, family or social networks). In both forms, mobilisation is more likely when participation appears desirable, efficacious and legitimate. At university, recruitment takes on a distinct character given students' sharing of the campus field. For Van Dyke (1998) and Binder and Wood (2012), the campus has been shown to provide opportunities for political engagement and activism on a range and scale that the majority of students are unlikely to have experienced before.

This chapter will be divided into two substantive sections. The first focuses on students' pathways to becoming politically active at university. Using survey and interview data, this considers the importance of family background and political upbringing on students' expectations of coming to university and getting involved in activism. The second section considers paths and barriers to mobilisation in the fees and cuts protests – specifically events

taking place between October and December 2010. Drawing on interviews from four universities in particular – Cambridge, Edinburgh, UCL and Warwick[25] – this section focuses on how student activists generated protest events and activism opportunities on their respective campuses both inside and outside of unions. In particular, it looks at how campaigners mobilised for two notable protest events: first, the NUS national demonstration on 10 November 2010, and second, the NCAFC-facilitated 'National Walkout and Day of Action' on 24 November which led to occupations of university buildings on each of the four campuses.

## 2. Student paths and barriers to political engagement and participation

### *Politicisation and the family*

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984: 439-40) argues that 'political education… is always partly received from the family, from the earliest days of life'. For activists, political socialisation can be particularly valuable for normalising and legitimising certain repertoires of political action – especially those higher in cost and risk – and thereby providing them with the knowledge and resources to participate from a young age (Braungart and Braungart, 1990). Although this conversion is to some extent dependent on individuals' access to certain fields and campaigns, it is worth testing the relationship between family background and pre-university activism. Figure 5.1 aggregates respondents' pre-university participation in a range of different campaigns into a basic participation/non-participation binary. Respondents who recorded having participated in *any* of the listed issues – as well as those specified as 'other' – are counted as politically active prior to arriving at university. There are admittedly limitations to measuring pre-university participation in this way: the listed choices focus on social movement activism rather than formal politics, and are also biased towards what might be considered 'left-wing' campaign issues[26]. Nevertheless, a wide range of campaigns was well-represented via the 'other' category (such as Help For Heroes, the Countryside Alliance, and anti-bullying campaigns) though it remains possible that the framing of the question caused some respondents to exclude certain forms of participation.

[25] As noted in chapter three, the narrative which emerged out of interviews from these four universities was found to be the most comprehensive and multi-perspectival for understanding student protest mobilisation, albeit not necessarily representative of UK universities overall.
[26] By way of an illustration, among those in the survey eligible to vote in the 2010 general election, 9.1 per cent voted Conservative. Among those in the 'pre-university activism' group, the rate drops slightly to 6.5 per cent.

**Figure 5.1** Comparing students' political background with their pre-university participation

| | | Politically active prior to university (N=931; 37.5%) | Politically inactive prior to university (N=1,554; 62.5%) | All students |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| At the time when you were growing up, how often was politics discussed at home? | Regularly | 28.0% | 14.2% | 19.4% |
| | Fairly often | 25.3% | 18.7% | 21.2% |
| | Sometimes | 23.1% | 32.4% | 28.9% |
| | Rarely | 19.0% | 27.5% | 24.3% |
| | Never/don't know | 4.5% | 7.3% | 6.2% |
| How politically active were your parents/guardians when you were growing up? | Very active | 8.9% | 3.9% | 5.8% |
| | Fairly active | 36.5% | 25.0% | 29.3% |
| | Not very active | 38.6% | 46.5% | 43.5% |
| | Not at all active | 13.7% | 21.4% | 18.5% |
| | Don't know | 2.3% | 3.3% | 2.9% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by column.
Questions: Please tick if you have been involved in any campaigns and protests relating to the following issues (select all that apply): human rights/global justice; the environment; anti-racism/ethnic discrimination; gender rights and sexual politics; anti-war campaigns; anti-capitalism/neoliberalism; campaigns against cuts to the public sector in the UK; other (please specify).

Figure 5.1 shows that 37.5 per cent of students claim to have been involved in some form of activism prior to starting at university. Significantly, there appears to be correlation between this and their family background: 53.3 per cent of students active prior to university had grown up in a household where politics was discussed regularly or fairly often, whereas the corresponding figure for the inactive is only 32.9 per cent. A similar pattern can be found with regards to the political participation of students' parents/guardians: 45.4 per cent of the pre-university active had parents/guardians who were very/fairly active, whereas for the inactive the figure is 28.9 per cent. Returning to the general participation index introduced in the previous chapter (see figure 4.7), figure 5.2 suggests a strong link between pre-university activity and the participatory *costs* and *risks* students typically engage in: 74.5 per cent of students politically active prior to university are categorised as medium or high-cost/risk participants (using the general participation index), compared with only 27.2 per cent of students politically inactive prior to university. This posits a connection between students' participation as measured in the index and their family socialisation, which is explored in figure 5.3. Around half of high-cost/risk participants come from politically-engaged and active families compared to less than a third of low-cost/risk participants. This suggests low-cost/risk participation does not particularly benefit from political socialisation via the family – a point perhaps supported by the fact that high-cost/risk repertoires typically demand more specialist forms of activist knowledge than low-cost/risk activities.

**Figure 5.2** Comparing pre-university political activity with general participation index

| | Politically active prior to arriving at university (N=931; 37.5%) | Politically inactive prior to arriving at university (N=1,554; 62.5%) | All students |
|---|---|---|---|
| High-cost/risk participant (N=377) | 28.4% | 7.3% | 15.2% |
| Medium-cost/risk participant (N=739) | 46.1% | 19.9% | 29.7% |
| Low-cost/risk participant (N=1,195) | 24.6% | 62.2% | 48.1% |
| Non-participant (N=174) | 1.0% | 10.6% | 7.0% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by column.
Questions: At the time when you were growing up, how often was politics discussed at home? How politically active were your parents/guardians when you were growing up?

**Figure 5.3** Comparing students' political background with their current participation

| | | High-cost/risk participant | Medium-cost/risk participant | Low-cost/risk participant | Non-participant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| At the time when you were growing up, how often was politics discussed at home? | Regularly | 33.4% | 25.4% | 12.7% | 8.6% |
| | Fairly often | 22.3% | 24.9% | 19.5% | 14.4% |
| | Sometimes | 23.3% | 25.7% | 32.4% | 30.5% |
| | Rarely | 15.9% | 19.2% | 27.9% | 39.7% |
| | Never/don't know | 5.0% | 4.7% | 7.4% | 6.9% |
| How politically active were your parents/guardians when you were growing up? | Very active | 12.5% | 7.8% | 2.8% | 2.3% |
| | Fairly active | 34.5% | 34.8% | 25.7% | 19.5% |
| | Not very active | 33.7% | 38.4% | 49.0% | 48.9% |
| | Not at all active | 18.3% | 16.8% | 19.1% | 22.4% |
| | Don't know | 1.1% | 2.2% | 3.3% | 6.9% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by column.

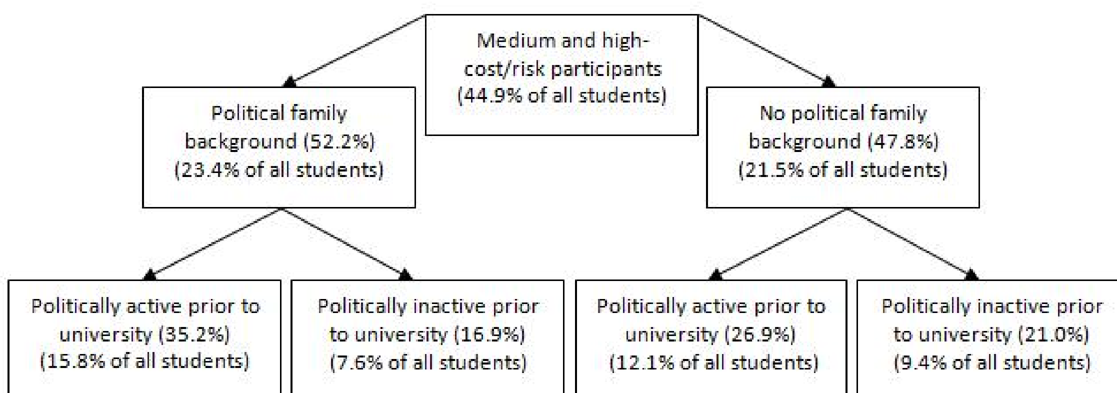
Although these findings show correlation rather than causation, they appear to support the qualitative studies of Braungart and Braungart (1990) and Coles (1986) which emphasise the importance of family socialisation on the development of students' political participation at university. Looking at figure 5.3, there is a noticeable similarity in the political backgrounds of high and medium-cost/risk participants – backgrounds which stand in stark contrast to low-cost/risk participants and non-participants. This goes against Binder and Wood's (2012) study of right-wing student activists at US universities, which place far greater emphasis on how campuses play a primary role in shaping initial political interests into a fully-fledged political identity. This may partly reflect differences in US and UK campus cultures, though it is also significant that Binder and Wood do not compare the upbringing of activists with those of inactive students. To tease out these differences, the following two sections analyse

the political socialisation of medium/high and low/non-participants using both survey and interview data.

***The political socialisation of medium and high-cost/risk participants***

Figure 5.4 maps the pre-university pathways to political participation for medium and high-cost/risk participants. In this case, 'political family background' is measured according to whether survey respondents recalled politics being discussed 'regularly/fairly often' at home. The largest sub-category of medium and high-cost/risk participants (35.2 per cent) relates to those who had a political family background and had been active prior to coming to university. This broadly fits with the political socialisation perspective, though one can argue that the correlation between family background and pre-university activism is not as strong as one might expect: 26.9 per cent of medium and high-cost/risk participants became politically active prior to university *without* having had a strong political family background. Of course, 'political background' in this instance does not necessarily entail a practical introduction to *participation*, since other pre-university factors may also come into play, including schooling and non-family social networks.

**Figure 5.4** Mapping the relationship between political background and high and medium-cost/risk participants




N=1,116.

Turning to interview data, there is evidence to suggest many medium and high-cost/risk participants recognised the advantages of their political family background. Students spoke of growing up in a household where political knowledge and media was freely accessible, and were encouraged to 'discuss politics around the dinner table'. Certain formative experiences were described with some significance: Andrew (Cambridge), for example, recalled finding a copy of Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* in the family bookcase, whereas Lindsey (Edinburgh) spoke of learning about climate change via copies

of *New Scientist* left 'by the loo at home'. For both, these interests led to reading contemporary writers such as Noam Chomsky and George Monbiot ('the slightly clichéd anti-establishment thinkers' according to Andrew). Although neither claimed that their parents qualified as activists, others were able to speak knowledgably about parents' and relatives' experiences and involvements:

> I've been, like, left-wing all my life really – my family is political. My grandfather was very involved in the miners and stuff like that; my aunt was a full-time student organiser for a number of years. (Peter, Edinburgh)

> I grew up being aware that when [my parents] were students they went on protests. Protest has always been something that is kind of like, 'that's what we did'…I know that my mum was at Greenham Common for a while. (Angie, Cambridge)

Although many spoke admiringly of their family's political heritage in much the same way Braungart and Braungart's (1990) sixties activists did, most saw only limited overlap between their 'political upbringing' and current activist identity and affiliation. Parallels can be drawn here to Binder and Wood's findings, as students were reluctant to present their politics as somehow unreflexively inherited from their parents, and were conscious that their personal politics had developed significantly since their formative years. Whilst it might be true that the political *content* of their upbringing may pale in comparison to their highly-reflexive current political identity, it is perhaps useful to see family background as providing high and medium-cost/risk participants with the *platform* to embark on their own political journey. Interviewees such as Brett (UCL) recalled 'being dragged along to the odd march by my parents' but few recalled such events as particularly significant for their own personal politicisation. What students *did* gain, however, was the normalisation and legitimation of protest as an activity, and the feeling that the experience could be quite enjoyable.

Not all formative experiences of activism came through family, however: figure 5.4 shows that 26.9 per cent of medium and high-cost/risk participants were politically active prior to university despite the lack of a political family background. For many of these students, politicisation came via school. In some cases, interviewees' schools functioned as mini-universities: not only providing pupils with the opportunity to study politics and join debating societies, but also enabling them to meet already-politicised pupils. This is illustrated in the case of Gaz:

> There was this guy at school and he must have been a socialist, and I remember starting to question critically the Iraq War and he was like, 'look, quite clearly this is about oil' and explained it. And at that point lots of things started to make sense. (Gaz, UCL)

Protests against the Iraq War coincided with most 2011/12 undergraduates' early teenage years, and so represented for many their first major political issue of personal interest. Brett recalls 'spend[ing] hours and hours discussing Afghanistan, Iraq, and the War on Terror' at sixth-form, whereas Damon (UCL) was taken on the 2003 Iraq demonstration by his parents and played a part in organising walkouts at his school. For Andrew, commuting to a larger city for his sixth-form studies meant going to a college where socialist parties would regularly flyer outside, and befriending pupils from different social backgrounds. This, together with reading up on Chomsky, Monbiot et al, helped him foster an interest in left-wing politics, and once exposed to certain specific grievances related to his local environment, Andrew felt sufficiently angered that 'no-one else was making a fuss' that he started organising protests himself:

> The first real form of activism I took was when I mobilised a group of students from my sixth form to go down to the Unite Against Fascism demo. It was quite a terrifying experience because it was the first time I'd ever actually done something with my politics apart from read about it. (Andrew, Cambridge)

At a practical level, these experiences of organising protests can be seen as an invaluable part of developing a 'radical habitus' (Crossley, 2003) which Andrew recalled as especially useful for campaigns he would later help organise at university. At a more symbolic level, it is interesting how he and others identify particular biographical moments in which they began to self-identify as an 'activist' or 'radicalised'. As illustrated in Ronnie's experience of an anti-fascist protest against the BNP, and Gaz's participation in the 2008/9 Gaza protests in London, these moments involved witnessing or experiencing injustice and then seeing protest provide an effective and empowering response:

> I'd say that I've always been aware of [political] problems, but it wasn't until about 5 or 6 years ago that I ever thought it would be possible to act in a way where you could effect change… I think the fact that the first demonstration I went on was so effective – that was in Derbyshire, you know the BNP conference? And that was considered by the people engaged in it to be a very successful action – it pretty much shut down their conference. (Ronnie, Warwick)

> With Gaza there was the first big protest, and there were thousands who started to gather at the embassy. The police… I just couldn't understand it, they were being just so violent, so physical […] I just couldn't understand what they were doing, and it made me really fucking angry. (Gaz, UCL)

Certainly, not all students who would later qualify as high or medium-cost/risk participants could draw on such experiences: as figure 5.4 shows, 16.9 per cent grew up in political household but did not convert this into participation prior to university. Unlike Gaz, Andrew

and Damon, students such as Jeremy, Bekka and Angie found limited opportunities to develop their nascent political interests at school:

> I'm from a village where nothing much really happens, so there isn't much discussion of politics […] I'd read a couple of books by Chomsky and stuff, but never sort of clicked applying this to day-to-day life so much. (Jeremy, Edinburgh)

> I moved from a school which had a big mix of people to a school that was in the middle of the countryside that was full of like, racists and sexists and…just Tory bastards really. And I think that made me think a lot about what my own politics were. (Bekka, Edinburgh)

> We do talk about politics a lot at home, and when I was at school that was something that marked me out a lot, I felt, from a lot of my peers because they just weren't interested in politics and they didn't know anything about it. I didn't know anyone who would want to go to protests. (Angie, Cambridge)

Common themes in these accounts point to certain environmental factors – notably access to culturally-diverse urban centres – that made students feel their school lacked the critical mass of sympathetic and politically-engaged pupils that Andrew and Damon were seemingly able to draw on. For some – such as Jeremy – frustrations came from the lack of activism opportunities in his local environment, whereas Angie and Bekka recall the lack of kindred spirits willing to battle against the seemingly apolitical (or right-wing) consensus at the school. As a consequence, these students had to wait until arriving at university before converting their political engagement into collective action.

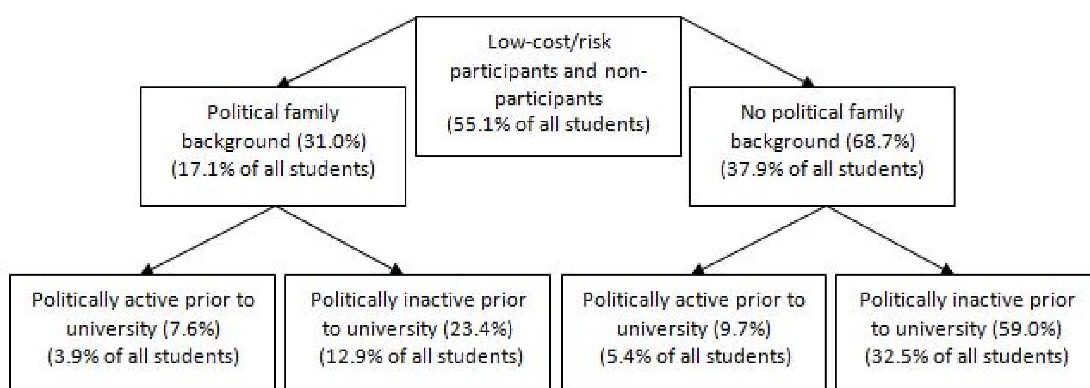
***The political socialisation of low-cost/risk participants and non-participants***

At first glance, merging analysis of low-cost/risk participants and non-participants might seem counter-intuitive: after all, one group participates and the other does not. To some extent, this is borne out in comparing their political backgrounds: for low-cost/risk participants, 32.2 per cent had a political family background, whereas for non-participants the figure is 23 per cent. However, it was found in interviews that students from both categories told similar stories about their background, suggesting that the gap between the two was not as significant as the survey statistics implied: after all, as we saw in chapter four, the most frequent score in the general participation index was only 2 – equivalent to signing one petition and making one ethical purchase in the past three years.

Looking at figure 5.5, it is clear that the majority of low-cost/risk participants and non-participants grew up in households where politics was rarely discussed. It is also notable that the percentage of students who became politically active prior to university without having had a political family background is actually higher than those who *did*. This suggests that low-cost/risk participation depends very little on growing up in a political household.

Moreover, only a quarter of those *with* a political family background converted this into any form of pre-university activism (7.6 per cent of low-cost/risk participants and non-participants overall). This raises the possibility that other factors may have played a part in their nonconversion: as with medium and high-cost/risk participants, these students might have lacked politically *active* parents, opportunities to get more politically-active at school, or access to urban centres or other environments where opportunities for political participation were strong.

**Figure 5.5** Mapping the relationship between political background and low-cost/risk participants and non-participants




N=1,369.

Interviews with low-cost/risk participants and non-participants tend to support these findings, as for many students politics was rarely discussed at home, and if it was, was seldom a topic for debate. By way of an illustration, students were asked if they knew who their parents voted for: whereas medium and high-cost/risk participants were usually able to speak knowledgably about their parents' political views, low-cost/risk participants and non-participants often had to 'guess' who theirs voted for:

> We don't discuss [politics] at all. I have no idea what any of my family's political opinions are. I know my dad is not Conservative, but I don't know what he actually is. (Heather, Leeds)

> My parents never really discuss politics. I think my parents are probably Lib Dem supporters if I had to [guess]. No, we've never really been sort of politically…maybe that's why I'm not particularly politically strong. (Louise, UCL)

This opacity over political self-identification appears to have had a strong legacy in how non-participants and low-cost/risk participants engage with politics. At one level, it gives the impression that political action was afforded little social value within their families. This meant that certain key tools of *active* engagement – listening to and critiquing arguments,

reading up on an issue, defending one's own views – were not passed onto these students as part of their family socialisation. This was strongly expressed by Cynthia (Cambridge), who was very self-conscious about her lack of political understanding and debating skills, admitting that she found it difficult to discuss politics even with close friends. This disposition she saw as having been inherited from her parents, both of whom avoided politics as a point of discussion on the grounds that to do so was invasive and impolite. In a sense, one can argue that aspects of a 'non-participatory' habitus can be inherited in much the same way as a 'radical' habitus. For Sharon, this inheritance is 'political' in some respects, though it also rests on the assumption that any conversion is best left avoided:

> The main reason people vote the way they do is because that's what their parents voted, and I make no pretence that I'm not active because I'm just copying them […] We're political in that we complain a lot, but there's never been any kind of 'let's go and make a difference, let's go and protest'. There's been political involvement in terms of voting, but we wouldn't write a letter to our MP or anything like that. (Sharon, Warwick)

In some ways, Sharon's limited participation implies a view that *politics* is the problem (see Hay, 2007). This is not dissimilar to the disposition of Julian and Rick, both of whom have academic parents and recall growing up in a household where politics was discussed more as a subject for satire and scorn than debate and action. As Rick put it:

> We were big fans of satirical news programmes, so we used to watch *Have I Got News For You* and so on. We did talk a lot about politics in the house, and generally it was quite negative towards whoever was in power at the time! […] I think maybe because politics is something that we so openly discuss and talk about, that diffuses the need to feel like I need to go out and do something active. (Rick, Edinburgh)

Perhaps significantly, Julian and Rick's political background played a part in their decision to study politics. This appears to have solidified their 'sideways' view of politics. For example, when discussing the student protests it was noticeable that Rick and Julian often slipped into analysing activists' tactics and forms of organisation from a 'political science' perspective, rather than recalling their personal thoughts and experiences. In this sense, it is interesting that Rick characterised political discussion and political participation as somehow incompatible. Of course, studying politics does not discourage participation – several high-cost/risk participants also studied the subject at degree level – though it is possible that it helps reinforce one's pre-existing political perspective. Furthermore, Rick's attitude towards political participation was strongly affected by his parents' experience of accidentally getting caught up in an anti-Iraq War demonstration in Edinburgh. This incident gave him a lasting impression of protest as a volatile activity:

> They told stories about how one time they were going down Princes Street and ended up being kettled because they were too close to some people protesting – that sort of idea puts me off wanting to be anywhere near active protests, because even if you're not taking part you can end up getting caught up in it. (Rick, Edinburgh)

In sum, non-participants and low-cost/risk participants show signs of having inherited certain attitudes which prevent or discourage a more active engagement in politics. Of course, low-cost/risk participants have bucked this trend to some extent, though it would seem that their participation – mostly involving petition-signing and ethical consumption – reflected little in the way of family socialisation beyond a basic-level interest in politics. Developing such nascent interests, of course, depends on network opportunities provided by the university campus and this will be the focus of the next discussion.

***Arriving at university: seeking political groups and networks***

Given the prominent role played by politics and activism in the overall image of university life (Boren, 2001), it is perhaps unsurprising that the survey shows around two-thirds of students considered the chance to 'become more socially and politically aware' an important reason for studying at university (see figure 4.11). In practice, this owes much to the resources provided by the campus field, both socially and institutionally. In their study of student activism at the University of Manchester, Crossley and Ibrahim (2012) identified two overlapping networks comprised of interlinked political agencies and their corresponding social network of students. The agencies network consisted of political parties and campaign groups with the student union residing somewhere in the centre, whereas the social network mapped the connectedness of individual activists. Crossley and Ibrahim argue that it is the combination of these networks through which students kept 'in the loop' about upcoming actions, events and campaigns, though it is in the latter particularly where affinities, loyalties and friendships develop, creating a more informal distribution of knowledge and ideas.

For new students wishing to become politically active on campus, accessing this network is of paramount importance. Although student unions and politics societies are generally open in their recruitment processes, Crossley and Ibrahim note that the surrounding social networks can sometimes be difficult for neophytes to penetrate. This is because networks might generate strong affinities between members, resulting in dense network cohesion. In other words, political mobilisation on campus draws on formal institutional recruitment drives (e.g. via mass-emails, advertisements or fresher's fairs) *and* informal network access (friendships, relationships, shared living spaces), creating a complexity of different paths and barriers that students encounter in seeking to become politically active.

This complex picture is exacerbated by the range of different backgrounds, prior experiences, and expectations of university life new students arrive with. For freshers who are already politically active, interviews suggest that their pre-university experiences of activism equipped them not only with knowledge of activist politics and repertoires, but also a social *confidence* to make the necessary connections with existing activist groups and networks. In this sense, students such as Andrew, Gaz and Damon arrived at university already in possession of a 'radical habitus'. Indeed, for students such as Andrew and Graham (the latter also advantaged in his position as a postgraduate), their paths were smoothed even further by already having connections to activists and groups on campus before they arrived as freshers:

> I'd been talking to various people who'd found that I was going to Cambridge and contacted me and said 'oh yeah, there's this great anti-cuts group, since you're really political'… (Andrew, Cambridge)

> I started at UCL and the very first thing I did on campus was a London Living Wage protest. I recognised a couple of faces from the old political landscape, and on the back of that I got some space on a [fresher's fair] stall to promote a mass-action to shut down the oil refinery in Kent. By doing that stall, I met a couple of the old-hat union activists […] So very quickly I got to know the limits of the amount of people that were doing stuff here. (Graham, UCL)

Graham and Damon's experiences reflect Tilly's (2004) concept of the 'social movement entrepreneur' insofar as both came to university already knowledgeable about student politics, and were committed to bringing specific campaign issues onto the campus via the setting up of events and campaign groups. For Damon, this issue was higher education policy:

> I came into university knowing that I was going to be political so I was elected a delegate to the NUS conference in my first year. Most of the activism I started doing was UCL Students for Free Education because NUS had ditched free education as a policy and started backing a graduate tax, and we felt that we had to do something or it would just fall entirely off the agenda. (Damon, UCL)

For many of the students from political backgrounds who had *not* been active prior to university (28.7 per cent of students according to figure 5.1), arriving on campus represented an opportunity to make up for lost time. In practical terms, this meant attempting to locate and situate themselves firmly in groups and networks where they knew they were likely to find fellow political advocates:

> Something that I found really nice about coming to university is that I could get involved a bit more. Part of the reason why I chose King's as my college was because I knew it had a reputation for left-wing politics. (Angie, Cambridge)

> I researched it and found out exactly what I wanted to do before I even came here. I found this little group and looked at different groups on campus, so I made contact with them, probably in the first week of being here or so, and then joined in at that point. (Raphael, Warwick)

Not all students who came to university with a desire to become more active were able to do so, at least initially. Unlike Angie and Raphael, Peter and Bekka's initial motivations were diluted by a seeming lack of *social* pathways to open up, or sustain, involvement. This, they both claimed, was a consequence of the halls of residence they found themselves living in during their first year as undergraduates. Given the sometimes fragile confidence and social malleability that might come from entering into a new and unfamiliar social setting, Peter and Bekka's experience in different ways suggest a demobilising effect from encountering network 'cross pressures':

> My first year was basically a write-off – I came expecting to do lots of politics and activism and so on, [but] it just never really happened. I was in catered halls and it was quite an inward-looking community there, and I ended up doing very dull things like drinking Carlsberg. In my second year I got much more involved. (Peter, Edinburgh)

> I remember in first year getting a bit involved in Socialist Worker, and a lot of my friends that I made in halls – who aren't my friends anymore – were kind of condemning me for that, and didn't really, like, understand the reasons for wanting to get involved more in politics […] I think as well when you're first starting to engage in politics and going on demos and stuff, especially if you don't know people, like, your friends aren't doing it, it can be kind of alien[ating]. (Bekka, Edinburgh)

Both accounts speak of environmental factors having a de-motivating effect on the seeking out of participatory opportunities. In some ways, this adds a further dimension to Crossley and Ibrahim's (2012) findings, namely that belonging to the *wrong* networks can delay or preclude participation. Bekka's experience recalls Oegema and Klandermans's (1994) concept of 'erosion': in cases where participating threatens to cause *too much* social pressure and antagonism – especially among friends – non-participation becomes the easier option, with the student embedded in what effectively becomes a political *counter-network*. For Bekka, this positioning appeared to erode – or rather, *corrode* – her confidence as an activist, and partly as a consequence she did not become regularly involved in activism until she established friendships with more politically-active students in her final year.

If some students with political aspirations found themselves in the *wrong* networks to realise them, other students found themselves in the *right* networks to become more politically active, even when they had few initial political ambitions. In Marianne's case, the collegiate network at her university provided the pathway to her participation in union politics. In

contrast to Bekka, this environment helped her develop a social confidence, resulting in her becoming President of her college union:

> I had done a bit of committee stuff previously, but never been the person who stood at the front of things. I came to university and realised I could do things I probably didn't think I could do earlier on. I think it's a social confidence, but also realising that other people were perhaps not any better at things than I was! (Marianne, Cambridge)

As shown in figure 5.4 this sort of mobilisation accounts for a sizeable proportion of medium and high-cost/risk participants: of these combined categories, 37.9 per cent had not been mobilised prior to coming to university – 17 per cent of students overall. At one level, this refers both to the broader *availability* of medium and high-cost/risk activities typically available at university. At another level, the propagation of specific grievances among the student community – at a local and global level – gives students a greater number of causes to consider. One such cause was the 2010/11 student protests against fees and cuts, and the influence of this on the mobilisation of hitherto-inactive students is a key consideration for the next two sections of this chapter.

***Summary***

One can summarise that growing up in a household where politics is regularly discussed, and where a students' parents are politically active, creates the conditions for students to develop their own political interests and become more active. This also has consequences for the *type* of participation students come to engage in: whereas the majority of medium and high-cost/risk participants come from political backgrounds, the same is true for only a third of low-cost/risk participants. In this sense, the latter group has more in common with non-participants, as students from both often spoke of lacking the knowledge and confidence to be more politically active.

Although family background sets an important platform for students' political development, school is also very important to furthering their experience and expertise as political participants. For high-cost/risk participants especially, formative experiences of mobilising people for campaigns equipped them with the confidence to make connections immediately once at university. For those without prior experience, more seemed to depend on how they negotiate the campus field when they first arrived: whereas some (such as Raphael and Angie) were strategic in how they identified the sorts of groups and networks they wanted to join, others were less proactive. Drawing from the case of Bekka, it would appear that some students might find themselves in the *wrong* networks – networks which may in some ways discourage and preclude political participation. In contrast, students such as Marianne found

opportunities to become more politically active via having the *right* network links – even if they had relatively little prior expectation of getting involved in student politics. Of course, political background and campus networks are not deterministic. Survey data shows a minority of students overcame their lack of political background to become active at university, and interviews indicated that some students were more proactive in seeking to make social connections than others. Conversely, students with multiple opportunities to be politically active may still choose to be inactive.

There has been little discussion so far of the mobilising appeal of certain new and prominent *grievances*. Turning to the next section, the emergence of collective action frames can enhance pre-existing paths to participation both for mobilising agencies and informal social networks on campus. In this sense, explaining *non*-participation – especially in the case of a 'popular' grievance – requires the introduction of new variables.

## 3. Mobilisation and the 2010/11 student protests: paths and barriers to demonstrations, rallies and occupations

This section retraces the narrative of the 2010/11 student protests in terms of its key mobilisation opportunities. This involves looking at how certain sociological processes of participation – especially political background and network access – dovetailed with the formal and informal mobilisation strategies of political agencies (including the NUS, student unions and societies, and non-institutional campaign networks) to generate the series of interrelated protest events and activities that comprised the 2010/11 student protests. Marrying the two together, of course, is the concept of the 'collective action frame' discussed in chapter one. Therefore the key focus of this section is to show how mobilising agencies were able to emphasise notions of grievance, identity and agency, and how students responded in their participation.

### *Mobilising agencies: coordinating networks and resources*

Given that the majority of student interviews in this section are from Cambridge, Edinburgh, UCL and Warwick, it is useful to begin by providing an account of the activism fields at each campus at the beginning of the 2010/11 academic year. All saw well-attended activism events take place on campus during the 2010 autumn term, even if the survey indicates that the majority of students remained inactive. According to Crossley and Ibrahim (2012), the campus provides multiple resources for building activism campaigns, with students fairly accessible for mobilisation drives both on campus and online (see also Biddix and Park, 2008). At the same time, however, building large multi-repertoire movements requires the

effective coordination of activist groups and their resources on *campus*, and the clear expression of grievances and agency to the wider student community.

As institutions, one can argue that Cambridge, Edinburgh, UCL and Warwick were all well-resourced for building mass-campaigns. Each has a student population in excess of 18,000, and is in the most part geographically concentrated in a single campus or city centre. The population size and wealth of each institution also contributes to the maintenance of a large and well-funded student union (Cambridge operating with a supplementary college union structure). All are members of the Russell Group – the elite group of UK universities which lobbied Government throughout the late-2000s for the tuition fees cap to be abolished – and so activists from each university felt that some of their grievances towards higher education funding reform could be directed to their university management as well as the Government. At Warwick and UCL especially, student activists commonly bemoaned their university's reputation as 'right-wing': students from the former referenced its large business school, whereas students from the latter had run no-confidence campaigns against their university's vice-chancellor for his advisory role in recent NHS restructuring reforms.

According to student activists, this 'right-wing' political character also extended to the student population. UCL and Warwick activists regularly decried its apparent critical mass of conservative, privately-educated students. Cambridge and Warwick students also referred to the sometimes inward-looking 'bubble' of campus life. At the same time, however, each university boasted a large, interconnected network of left-wing political groups and societies similar to the one identified by Crossley and Ibrahim (2012) at the University of Manchester. Although research did not extend to a formal social network analysis of campus political worlds, interviewees did touch on the often diverse range of groups hosted at each university – especially at Edinburgh:

> There was everything you can imagine – so, in terms of political parties there were Tories, Labour, SNP, Lib Dems, Greens and Socialists. In terms of campaign groups People & Planet was probably the biggest, but there was Stop Aids, Amnesty, Students Act for Refugees, Students For a Free Tibet, others I've probably forgotten. I don't know of any other university that has all those different groups. (Lindsey, Edinburgh)

Depictions of the relationships between activism groups tended to vary. Students acknowledged a strong personnel overlap between many of the groups, which created a reciprocal relationship when it came to attending each others' campaign events. This also reflected the broad underlying political consensus between these groups on left-leaning issues and causes, especially the 'post-material' politics of anti-fascism, nuclear

disarmament, LGBT activism, and the environment. However, group relationships were sometimes more fraught when they reflected *ideological* differences. Recalling patterns of disputes in UK student activism going back to the 1960s and 1970s (Crouch, 1970; Hoefferle, 2013), fault-lines emerged between Labour Party affiliates and the more radical left-wing groups such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Alliance For Workers Liberty (AWL), as well as more independent socialist and anarchist societies. Activists also recalled disagreements within the radical left milieu itself, and whilst these differences usually have ideological roots – autonomy versus collectivity; reform versus revolution; hierarchy versus network etc – they also take on a *social* character due to the fusing of political groups with affinity networks. This point is well described by Ronnie:

> In the social circles that I'm in, people's friends tend to be quite ideologically close, so one exacerbates the other, which is that you don't like it when somebody challenges your political beliefs, but you don't like it when somebody challenges your friends, and if that's both, then I think it makes the factionalism worse […] I think that group-herd mentality often leads to people drawing boundaries that often aren't really there between yourself and other people with whom you share 90-95 per cent of the same beliefs. (Ronnie, Warwick)

A related finding is that interviewees would sometimes identify certain groups as the 'core group' of the wider activist network. This was usually the group with the network's largest membership overlap, making it a de facto forum where the majority of activists were most likely to regularly meet and discuss ideas. Although the core group was usually also the most 'active' group, its specific identity would vary by university and over time. When Eric arrived at Cambridge in 2008, he felt that the group in question was Education Not For Sale:

> Before I came to Cambridge I looked up on the website of societies and picked a load that looked quite interesting. I very quickly found that ENS was quite active, and lots of people from other societies were using ENS as an umbrella group. So it was quite a good coordinating hub. (Eric, Cambridge)

Given the importance of coordinating activists on campus into organising effective actions, interviews indicated that the 2010/11 student protests at Cambridge, Edinburgh and Warwick benefitted in particular from having hosted occupations in early 2009 in protest against Israel's attack on Gaza. Each of these occupations was successful in bringing student activists from across the network together in an open, discussion-based environment. Resources and practices were also pooled from a variety of different movements students had been involved in elsewhere – notably Climate Camp activists' use of consensus decision-making. Moreover, at least five or six students from each occupation would later help set up occupations against student fees in autumn 2010, and thereby transfer knowledge

and skills such as campaign outreach, democratic organisation, and negotiations with university management to younger students:

> What [the occupation] did do was get a lot of the student left together in a room for a long enough time that they got to know each other and make friends and learn from each other which was very useful preparation for what happened two or three years later when those people who had been in first year stayed friends, and the Tories get in power – I think that happened nationally. (Lindsey, Edinburgh)

For students hitherto only semi-connected to the activist network on campus, the Gaza occupations represented an opportunity to meet a wider range of activists than they had done previously. It also provided a forum to challenge some of their own preconceptions about political groups and ideas elsewhere on the network, whilst learning new organisational skills and campaign tactics. The experience was particularly valuable for John, then a member of the Humanist Society, and Marianne, a college union delegate. Both would later participate in campus occupations in 2010 and 2011:

> That was kind of the first time I met lots of the people who were involved in the left on campus […] I actually went to the Gaza occupation originally thinking that I was going to go there and think 'well, I agree with everything they're saying but I just don't like their tactics', but actually when I got there I just had a conversation with a couple of people and decided to stay. (John, Edinburgh)

> It made me feel really uncomfortable that they were doing it! Because on the one hand I felt like I *should* be there, and then on the other hand I felt 'this is so out of my comfort zone' […] But anyway, I came along a couple of times and spent one or two nights there. It was a sort of gentle entry to methods that I had never been involved with previously. (Marianne, Cambridge)

Although the Gaza occupation represented a successful forum for transferring activist skills and resources to a less-experienced audience, students were always conscious of the problems in maintaining groups and campaigns caused by constant cohort turnover. Whilst there was evidence to support the benefits of communications technologies for passing on an online architecture of mailing lists, campaign content and websites, this could not counter the loss of influential personnel once they graduated. Of particular value were 'advocates' whose network position and mobilising skills made them especially valuable for organising protest events. Advocates differ from political 'leaders' in the Weberian sense insofar as they do not necessarily hold any formal position of authority. Rather, they are influential participants who can harness their network position – both inside and outside of activist networks – to promote events and help ensure strong turnouts. At Cambridge, Edinburgh, UCL and Warwick at least, this also reflected the general shift in popularity from traditional group hierarchies (which depended more on elected leaders) to more horizontal and consensus-based modes of organisation, which though 'leaderless' in principle, nevertheless required

skilled and knowledgeable participants to ensure their effective running. The role of organisational structures and their impact on participation will be a key theme for the next chapter.

***The student protests against fees and cuts: building for the NUS demonstration***

It was noted in the first chapter that the late-2000s represented a relative fallow-period for higher education funding campaigns at UK universities, especially in comparison to strengthening Climate Camp and pro-Palestine movements. Consequently, the lack of grievances to mobilise around resulted in the decline of higher education funding campaign groups on campus, as key advocates graduated from university without being instantly replaced. For remaining students such as Damon, Eric, Raphael and Peter, this necessitated a need to build new groups, coalitions and campaigns – usually with new identities:

> In April 2009 – my first year – all of the left at UCL went off on a year abroad so I'm left running Stop the War society, Friends of Palestine society, the Free Education campaign, the Living Wage campaign. Over the summer I talked to a guy [and] we start talking about a national convention against fees, the idea being at the time that free education is falling off the political map because NUS isn't backing it. (Damon, UCL)

> So 2009/10, post-ENS, there wasn't very much going on at all. The activist infrastructure wasn't pursued but lots of people went out and did Climate Camp stuff. There wasn't any broad forum so the task for activists in the next academic year – 2010/11 – was setting up something called the Cambridge Left Group. (Eric, Cambridge)

> We used to also run a magazine called Dissident Warwick, which we used to publish two or three times a term… but those were the Blair and Brown years so it was quite a different activism to how it is now, it was a much smaller group. Most of them left after my first year, because they were all in their final year. (Raphael, Warwick)

> Towards the end of my second year, I was like, 'okay, there's all these different groups on campus doing things – why are all these people not co-ordinating?' […] There was some appetite for it, and then what actually happened is a separate, simultaneous initiative from the SWP *did* start, and that was the Anti-Cuts Coalition. (Peter, Edinburgh)

As the above accounts suggest, by 2010 many student activists were conscious that higher education funding was about to return as a key campaigning issue: they were aware of the Browne Review's impending recommendations, and had seen the issue become a focal point for the Liberal Democrats in the general election. Consequently, forming new groups were necessary for reframing the political context on campus and appealing to new cohorts of students. By the beginning of the 2010/11 academic year, student activists saw a notable upsurge in interest in, and attendance at, leftist and anti-cuts meetings:

> I guess education funding became the big issue once Peter Mandelson got hold of the university sector and started making cuts. And then when the Tories got in, it was obvious that that was going to be the issue […] [I organised] the UCL Education Forum, which was every Wednesday at 5pm, with free food and drink. And I branded it in quite a lefty way, and we got quite a lot of random people coming to it, so it was 30-40 people sometimes and we would sit in a big circle and we'd talk. (Damon, UCL)

> The Cambridge Left Group had two meetings, I think. By the second meeting there were suddenly 80 people there. That was the day after the Browne Report, and we realised that we were entering a different period now. So it became a kind of anti-Browne Review meeting, and it happened every Wednesday and eventually we had to book bigger rooms. […] [We] got a whole wave of new people who had maybe done a bit of activism here and there, now brought into educational activism for the first time. A friendship group at King's College provided a lot of people. (Eric, Cambridge)

At this point, much of the above organisation had been done with little involvement from each university's student union. Although Damon, Raphael and Peter sat on their respective student councils, all felt they were in the minority when it came to pushing for mass-protest campaigns. The NUS and many student unions had been actively involved in persuading electoral candidates to sign its pledge to oppose tuition fees increases, but there had been little in the way of collective action drives. Labour's 2010 general election defeat removed a significant shackle from Labour-dominated student unions mobilising against the Government on higher education (Solomon, 2011). With Damon involved in the running of nascent free education group NCAFC, and SWP running its parallel Education Activist Network, NUS called a national demonstration for 10 November 2010 in London – two weeks after the Browne Review's publication, and the first of its kind since 2006.

With the implications of the Browne Review being discussed widely in the UK press, and the Liberal Democrats' tuition fees pledge now being placed under increased scrutiny, newly-formed campaign groups at Cambridge, Edinburgh and UCL felt well-equipped to pressurise their student unions into ploughing more resources into mobilising for the NUS demonstration. According to Andrew, Cambridge Defend Education (CDE) was able to push CUSU into organising buses to London – the *Guardian* (10 November, 2010) reported that 362 Cambridge students attended, along with 150 students coming from Warwick, and 1,000 from UCL (aided by its central London location, but still at least double that of any other London campus). Tasked with mobilising students for an 800 mile round-trip, activists at Edinburgh were especially keen to ensure a strong turnout:

> I was one of the very few people who was heavily involved in the Anti-Cuts Coalition whilst still being very involved in EUSA [Edinburgh University Students' Association] […] When we first organised it, we were like, 'We need to

> try and get people on these buses, it's going to be really difficult'. And we didn't even charge for them, which from what I can tell is quite rare in student union politics. So people would give a five pound deposit, that got them the journey there and back, and a packed-lunch for the day – like a school trip (laughs). We spent almost £10,000 on it. (Peter, Edinburgh)

EUSA later reported that five buses containing a total of 250 students travelled to London for the demonstration (EUSA, 2010). Similar to McAdam's (1986) findings on Freedom Summer applicants, interviews suggested that students sympathetic to the anti-fees cause but with little or no prior activism experience were more likely to sign up if they knew at least one other person who was thinking of attending. Given that the survey found one in five UK students had voted Liberal Democrat, and that most had admitted to feeling betrayed by the party's fees u-turn, there was no shortage of potential participants on campus. As a result, Danny, Jeremy, and Rhiannon – all undergraduates with nascent interests in politics but no prior activism experience – were each able to find friends with whom they could attend the demonstration:

> I was going to go on the demo because a friend – a new friend at uni – said, you know, 'Let's go on this, it looks like fun'. And so I thought, 'Yeah, this is what you do at uni: yeah, what a great opportunity – £5 bus to London and back. (Jeremy, Edinburgh)

> I was with a group of friends from first year – about six of us. Of those six, four are now really involved. (Rhiannon, Edinburgh)

> I found out that my flatmate was going. I decided I would go down, but a big concern with going on this trip was not knowing anyone on it – that was a *terrifying* concern, so it helped that I knew she was going. (Danny, Edinburgh)

Unlike at Edinburgh, UCL students were not faced with the same time costs for attending the London-based demonstration. Nevertheless, students without prior activism experience felt similar barriers of inexperience and social hesitancy. For Donna, her reservations about attending were outweighed by the social pressure created by the fact that her whole friendship group attended:

> I was interested in [politics], but I wasn't an activist […] I had a boyfriend at Oxford who was, like, incredibly political and they were organising loads of really interesting things. As soon as the Browne Review came out he got involved immediately in organising something. So I was hearing about that a lot, and I was talking about it with my friends, and some of my friends were quite political – not activists – they were keen Labour supporters. So we decided to go on the first demo […] But I think it was just because my whole friendship group went – probably, like, 20 of us went on that march. (Donna, UCL)

The recollections of Jeremy, Rhiannon, Danny and Donna all highlight the fact that for most people, attending a demonstration is a fundamentally *social* activity, and for those who had

not been on demonstrations before this social context helped them share and make sense of the experience. In Donna's case especially, the 'social pressure' she felt is similar to the mobilising factors identified by McAdam (1986). In contrast, the *absence* of a comparable social context not only removes a key motivation to participation, it might also function as an active motivation for non-participation. This was arguably true for Bekka, who had previously had her enthusiasm for activism knocked-back by the corroding effects of her network position:

> I had my opinions about [the fees increase]. I thought – and still think – that it's absolutely disgusting and it's elitist. But I wasn't really as engaged as I should have been – I didn't go to any of the things in London, and I don't feel guilty about that but I kind of feel that I should have stopped being so lazy and done it. I think that me and my flatmate were just like, 'Oh yeah, we should really go to that… yeah, we should really go… oh whoops, we haven't gone…' (Bekka, Edinburgh)

As an Edinburgh student, Bekka had been subjected to the same enticements to attend the demonstration as Jeremy, Danny and Rhiannon, but unlike them, lacked the surrounding network links to make it seem a viable opportunity. At this point, she was arguably more politically-engaged than Donna was, but whereas Donna was given the opportunity to convert and develop her nascent political interests by virtue of her network position, Bekka waited until her final year before realising that she would have to be more proactive in seeking out activism network links. One can argue that there are many engaged students who remain mostly 'unconverted' as medium or high-cost/risk participants because of their network position – regardless of the work of mobilising agencies to publicise events and lower the costs of participation.

***Digesting Millbank: student networks of deliberation***

The experience of attending the NUS demonstration – and being part of crowd of 52,000 – was described by interviewees in overwhelmingly positive terms. The witnessing of the Millbank occupation, however, had a more divisive effect. For some students, the occupation was immediately exhilarating and empowering, representing a true and necessary 'moment of excess' (Free Association, 2011) where students showed to a UK-wide media audience the extent of their feelings towards the Government and its higher education reforms. This was compounded the moment they realised the full extent of the media coverage, and how 'Millbank' was setting the news agenda for that day:

> I remember talking to some friends about [the demonstration] before we went on it – I was just kind of like, 'oh, I don't know if demonstrations are my kind of thing' […] Even when I was on the march, it was like… it was a fun atmosphere, but

> until Millbank happened it wasn't that interesting. And then Millbank happened and everyone was like 'hey, this is *really* cool!' […] I guess it was people actually expressing *anger*, and the sense of it suddenly not being like a nice little protest that no-one cared about. (Donna, UCL)

> I stayed in the lobby [in Millbank Tower], taking photos of the people pressed up against the window and somebody spray[ing] the anarchy symbol on a pillar. Suddenly these guys started kicking this window […] But then I didn't realise that there was a TV in the lobby that happened to be showing Sky News, and suddenly just seeing the Skycopter filming this massive crowd that were outside – it was like, 'oh, I'm stood inside there! That's a lot of people!' (Jeremy, Edinburgh)

> There was a lot of anger, and I guess with it being the first time for an awful lot of people there – including myself – that they had been on a very large demonstration. Millbank, I guess, must have been the largest demonstration since Stop the War in London. So the fact that it was the first time I had been on something like this I have to say I felt empowered. (Ronnie, Warwick)

Interestingly, Millbank also served to inspire and re-energise older activists who had seemingly grown impervious to the protest repertoires routinely employed by students. Some high-cost/risk participants involved in Climate Camp and forms of direct action expressed their surprise at the demonstration's anger and radicalism, which they considered unusual compared with recent UK student protests. For them, the event recalled moments of agency in social movement history, and consequently opened up the possibilities in terms of what sort of mass-movement could be created:

> To be honest, I was very defeatist about the entire thing, thinking it would just be this stupid march where you walk around for a bit, and Tony Benn speaks, and just… the usual. And I didn't realise how big of a struggle and how big of an issue it was. (Raphael, Warwick)

> The police were completely outnumbered, and just seeing kids smashing up the Tory HQ and dancing around to dubstep, I was like, this was fucking *brilliant* – they're only kids, but they fucking know instinctively that the Tories are fucking scum (laughs). And I was with some friends who were quite uneasy about it – they were like, 'Ooh, better move away… it'll just make us look bad: all this violence, the media will hate it'. And I felt sort of instinctively, like, *this is good*. (Brett, UCL)

Arguably a key component of Millbank's power was the *uncertainty* caused by the protesters' actions. Although ideas for direct action had been (covertly) planned in advance of the march, the events that followed were largely spontaneous and uncoordinated. The resultant uncertainty can be considered as a form of 'counter-power' (Gee, 2011), recalling Alinsky's (1971: 129) maxim that 'the threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself'. For Brett, his 'instinctive' appreciation of Millbank reflected his activist background and knowledge of social movement history. For other participants, Millbank was felt to be self-defeating – both in the fear and uncertainty *they* felt on the day, and also in the way it

depicted students to the rest of society. The latter was especially a concern for Roehampton students Laura and Hayley. Angered and frightened by the escalation of events, both chose to leave the march with their respective friendship groups once the Millbank occupation started:

> We ended up in a pub because everywhere was not letting students in. And we were sitting there and this woman was like, 'has this got anything to do with you?' and she was pointing to the TV. And as we were watching it, people [were] throwing things off the top of Millbank. I felt quite disgusted because… I mean, I don't always agree with the police and their approaches to things, but to drop something off of a building is absolutely disgusting – you cannot justify it. (Laura, Roehampton)

> [Millbank] upset me because a lot of people – friends, people in passing – know that you're a student directly after that… several comments: 'Oh, you're a student, oh don't start a riot!' […] Every student is now sort of in a box, and because I live off campus I was incredibly offended to be associated with it. (Hayley, Roehampton)

It is interesting how both students recalled anger at being made to feel somehow *accountable* for Millbank. This owed much to the interactions Laura and Hayley had with non-students in the event's aftermath, which compounded their own initial feelings of anger and frustration. There may have been a network aspect to this: as mature students, neither was strongly embedded in undergraduate student life since both worked part-time, lived away from campus, and had non-student friends. Hayley, too, was mother to a young child and spoke of the reaction other parents had to the event on her school run. Given their range of surrounding social networks, it is perhaps unsurprising that both placed greater emphasis on how events such as Millbank would be perceived by *non*-students. Consequently, both would later play little or no role in follow-up protests.

For many of the demonstrators who *did* play a large role in the protests, their initial response to Millbank was a mixture of excitement and caution. Though pleased at how it broke the shackles of 'polite protest' (a notion many linked to the 2003 Iraq War demonstration) and had put students on the front pages – many remained unsure as to how it might impact on the movement as a whole. Like Laura and Hayley, some were concerned that students had lost the moral high-ground in their use of direct action tactics, and felt that the confrontational scenes would put some students off mobilising for future actions. Again, students' network position was important to how this was resolved. In the week following the NUS demonstration, debates took place formally via student unions and informally among networks and affinity groups. It was through these debates that high-cost/risk activists developed a shared consensus on how Millbank should be framed:

> I think I stood by Millbank being very bad up until there was a motion taken to Student Council – by this point I recognised the people who I thought were the people who were clever and who got it and who I wanted to be friends with. And that was the first time I heard someone say that violence is very different if it's towards an inanimate object […] I guess hearing people talk about that changed my mind a huge amount. (Rhiannon, Edinburgh)

> My immediate reaction to Millbank was kind of 'Ah, this is crazy', and now I've revised my opinions of it […] I spent a lot of time thinking about it myself, and then I started talking to other people about it, bouncing ideas off people – political friends whose opinions I trusted […] and I realised that I'd been thinking about it in a kind of reactionary way. (Andrew, Cambridge)

Both Rhiannon and Andrew's reflections capture the importance of social networks as a resource for developing shared narratives whilst counteracting dominant media discourses. Indeed, it can be argued that such networks *strengthened* in response to such events: through listening to activist friends they trusted, both grew confident in articulating a political *defence* of Millbank, and became more clearly aware of which 'side' they identified with. In particular, students had to respond to accusations put forward in some of the UK press that the protests had been 'violent', 'thuggish' and 'infantile'[27], with many focusing on the incident where a student threw a fire extinguisher from the roof, narrowly missing police lines. With the vast majority of demonstrators having immediately condemned this particular incident (Mason, 2011b: 43), drawing distinctions between 'symbolic' and 'actual' violence (see DeLuca and Peeples, 2002) was considered essential to constructing the 'Millbank defence'. Ultimately, activists argued that through its widespread media coverage Millbank created a political *event* which had drawn attention to the symbolic violence perpetrated by the *Government* against young people. In Damon's words, the fees and cuts grievance was now being reflected by an 'alternate reality': not only was the coverage helping to promote upcoming protest events, it also helped propagate a sense of *agency* that defeating the parliamentary vote (still four weeks away) was indeed possible. To take this forward, activists recognised the need to bring this sense of agency back to the campus. For this purpose, NCAFC's 'National Walkout and Day of Action', scheduled for 24 November, was perfect:

> Millbank gave us two things: it gave us the coverage in terms of all of a sudden every newspaper in the country would be calling you going 'when is the next big mobilisation?' […] So activists on the student left felt confident, and they had a date two weeks away, which is a decent amount of time to build for – time to hold a meeting and then do an action. (Damon, UCL)

[27] See, for example, 'Student demo thugs' Tory HQ riot' (*The Sun*, 11 November 2010).

This sense of agency became all the more palpable in the week following the NUS demonstration when interviewees recalled a notable surge in attendance for anti-fees and cuts campaign meetings. Much of these meetings was taken up by debates on the ethics of Millbank – with many students voicing criticisms – but given the broad underlying opposition to the fees and cuts and the sense of urgency many felt in maintaining momentum in the run-up to the December parliamentary vote, this was not a problem for campaigners. As Damon recalled, 'It was "job done" – they were in the room!'

***Bringing Millbank to the campus: the NCAFC day of action, and the university occupations***

Key to the appeal of the NCAFC day of action was its merging of local and UK-level activism. On the one hand, NCAFC's press release encouraged 'students of all ages and backgrounds to take peaceful and creative forms of political protest and direct action' (NCAFC, 2010). Although they did suggest 'university occupations, banner droppings and walkouts' as examples of effective actions, activists, groups and unions were ultimately free to define 'political protest' in whichever way they saw fit. Consequently, the day of action provided a focal point for student groups to mobilise *en masse*, either by organising new protests or coordinating already-existing plans so that they all took place simultaneously across the UK. In this sense, the day of action was a highly-effective means of creating a single spectacle out of multiple local events. Moreover, its openness enabled students to organise events on their own terms: UEA activists, for example, were keen to stress the peaceful nature of their march *in opposition* to the radicalism of Millbank (Norwich Evening News, 2010). Regardless of the politics or protest repertoires used, organisers recognised the demand for protest on campus, and therefore recognised the appeal and importance of connecting this to the national narrative created by NUS demonstration and ongoing media debates:

> So literally a week later [after the NUS demonstration] there was a meeting. It was quite a small group before then, but at this meeting a lot more people turned up than we expected, and so there were a lot of people just really angry, calling for an occupation, which I didn't expect going to the meeting. The NCAFC called the day of action, so that was what this meeting was for, so we planned for a small demonstration. (Raphael, Warwick)

> The idea was to say 'where next?' and we decided that we would call our own demo, to do something ourselves in Edinburgh – we need to target the Liberal Democrats: there are no Tories up here, so let's focus on them. So we organised a demo where we marched to the Liberal Democrat HQ in Haymarket. And that was the 24th November, two weeks exactly after the Millbank day. (Peter, Edinburgh)

In bringing the protests to the campus, the events scheduled succeeded in sustaining the interest and participation of high-cost/risk participants who may have otherwise drifted back towards other campaigns. This was certainly true for Graham, a UCL postgraduate, who had arrived on campus that term with the intention of promoting environmental actions. Moreover, it lowered the costs of participation for a number of students who had not been to the NUS demonstration and up until that point had been less politically-engaged. This was certainly true for Justine, a UCL student with very little prior background or interest in politics, but like Donna for the NUS demonstration, had been persuaded to join the protest on 24 November via friendly peer-pressure:

> [My housemates] were just friends I made on my course – I never even knew that they were political! […] They went to a couple of meetings and then were like, 'There's going to be this thing called an occupation…' and I was like, 'I don't care about the fee rise, what's it got to do with me?' And so my friend was like, 'Do you think I would have even been able to start doing any of this if the fee rise had come into play before we started our degree?' And so I got really emotional – because I'd had a bottle of wine obviously – and was like, 'Oh, that's *so* true… okay, actually no to fee rises'. So I texted my dad saying okay, I'm doing this [occupation] tomorrow, and I think that everything you said ever is wrong. (Justine, UCL)

As Justine's quote suggests, talk of occupations was already in the air. Although some had already started prior to the NUS demonstration – notably at Manchester and Sussex – at least a third of the 51 occupations (Palmieri and Solomon, 2011: 60) in autumn 2010 were initiated on the 24 November day of action. Due to the need to organise semi-covertly (so as to avoid alerting university management of their intentions), planning relied strongly on existing networks of experienced activists, some of whom had had prior involvement in the 2009 Gaza occupations. Crucial to an occupation's establishment was achieving a critical mass of participants that could outnumber security staff and 'hold the room'. As a result, activists at Edinburgh and Warwick adopted a strategy that in many ways replicated the Millbank occupation the previous fortnight: with student unions having organised a local march on NCAFC's national day of action, activists disseminated plans for occupation through the crowd, so that a sizeable number would follow them to their intended destination. Although numbers dropped off once the march adopted this tactical switch, both occupations were successful in attracting upwards of 200 students to their intended locations.

UCL activists took an even more daring approach. Conscious that no Gaza occupation had occurred on campus in 2009, activists advertised and then staged a 'mock' rally, promising to lead its students to the main demonstration in central London. Instead, they exited UCL only to march back onto campus and occupy the Jeremy Bentham Room. This had the

advantage of effectively tricking many of the students on the march into occupying, and whilst some quickly left for their originally-intended destination, the occupation was boosted by a sizeable number of anti-fees students who had not expected to find themselves engaged in direct action but nevertheless decided to stay on.

Activists at Cambridge had initially planned their occupation in much the same way as Edinburgh and Warwick, but on 24 November found that their intended location – the Old Schools Combination Room – had been locked up by the university's facilities staff. Consequently, a group of students planned to stage an occupation a few days later. This was akin to a military operation in which a group of 20 students occupied the Combination Room at 10am, followed by another 20 students who locked the doors. Again, this drew strongly on existing activist networks, and the experience of former Gaza occupants:

> I rang the Labour Club. I texted lots of people who weren't there and everybody rang their mates and soon that 40 became 50, 60, 70, 80 – it was established in the first afternoon, so it happened quite quickly. But we knew there was a large milieu of people who had maybe been to one or two meetings that we could rely on to be involved. (Eric, Cambridge)

> I was with someone who was much more experienced, and basically used their legal knowledge for why we couldn't be chucked out. I think from the occupation as a whole I came out as a much more experienced activist. (Andrew, Cambridge)

Despite the relative openness in how they mobilised students, one can generally observe that occupations drew heavily on pre-existing networks and affinities. Significantly, all occupants interviewed were able to identify at least two pre-existing friendships with other attendees, though the more experienced activists were likely to be better-connected than first-year undergraduates. As a result, some who had been drawn in via affinity networks found themselves initially unsure of their role as occupants:

> I remember getting a text from a friend one day saying 'we're in Old Schools – come down, bring food'. I was like 'What? Okay!' […] But it was kind of like 'What do we do now?' I wasn't sure! (Angie, Cambridge)

> There were people there – third and fourth years – who knew each other from past causes and things that they all did together […] I think I was just intellectually a bit out of my depth, but I stayed because I wanted to learn and hear all the stuff and decide what I thought about it. (Rhiannon, Edinburgh)

Whilst students such as Angie and Rhiannon quickly became aware of their comparative lack of knowledge and expertise regarding the purpose and organisation of an occupation, to paraphrase Damon's earlier comment, it did not matter too much as *they were already in the room*. Recalling McAdam's (1986) model of recruitment to the Freedom Summer campaign (see figure 2.3), putting individuals in a position of *opportunity* was enough of a mobilisation

victory on the part of its organisers, as from this point on the students were experiencing high-cost/risk participation. Of course, many chose to leave shortly afterwards, but others – such as Angie and Rhiannon – opted to stay on. Analysing the political and social factors involved in participants' growing *commitment* to occupations will be a key consideration for chapter six.

## 4. Building critical mass on campus: survey data on student mobilisation networks

In order to apply the paths and barriers identified in the previous section to the UK student population as a whole, this final section returns to survey data analysis. First, it will seek to test the extent to which recruitment drives for fees and cuts campaigns successfully accessed the whole UK student population. This involves identifying specific recruiting agencies – notably the student union – as well as certain methods of recruitment such as Facebook event pages. Second, it will attempt to test the extent of students' *network* connectedness to activism participants. This allows for comparisons to be drawn between participants and non-participants, as well as the cost and risk of activities students were typically involved in.

### *Networks of recruitment*

As noted in section two, students' pre-university political backgrounds are important for equipping them with knowledge and experience of protest, as well as an appreciation of its social benefits. For students *without* pre-university activism experience, one can argue that the 2010/11 protests provided an ideal first opportunity to convert their grievances into action. Figure 5.6 shows that 36.7 per cent of students who had been politically active prior to university took part in the student protests – among UK students only, this figure rises to 40 per cent[28]. Both figures are comfortably above the overall participatory rate for the student protests of 22.3 per cent. This figure drops considerably to 13.6 per cent when it comes to mobilising students who had been *inactive* prior to coming to university. This suggests that despite students' widely-shared grievance regarding fees, those students with the 'head-start' of pre-university activism experience were generally better-placed to convert their grievances into action.

[28] p=0.00.

**Figure 5.6** Participation in the student protests and pre-university activism.

| | Politically active before coming to university (N=931) | Politically inactive prior to coming to university (N=1,554) | | Participated in the student protests (N=553) | Did not participate in the student protests (N=1,932) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participated in the student protests (N=553) | 61.8% | 38.2% | Politically active before coming to university (N=931) | 36.7% | 63.3% |
| Did not participate in the student protests (N=1,932) | 30.5% | 69.5% | Politically inactive prior to coming to university (N=1,554) | 13.6% | 86.4% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by row.

Although the ‘pre-university activism’ variable does not account for students’ participation *between* arriving at university and the start of the student protests, one can at least see from figure 5.6 that 38.2 per cent of students who took part had no pre-university activism experience. It is here where one can contextualise the experiences of Jeremy, Danny, Rhiannon and Donna in their mobilisation for the NUS demonstration: all were able to draw on the critical mass of students predisposed towards participation, as well as the pathways to attendance provided by their student union. In other words, students benefitted from receiving a combination of different modes of recruitment – both social and practical – to encourage their participation.

These different modes of recruitment are also measured in the survey. Respondents were asked to state whether they had been invited to participate in the student protests by the following options: student union; course colleagues; friends from your university; friends from other universities, or Facebook group/event invitation. Again, notions of connectedness are indicative as it is possible students may have been invited by means not stated in the available options, and ‘participation’ is again subjectively defined by the respondent to include any action considered relevant. Nevertheless, figure 5.7 shows that 70.9 per cent of respondents recalled being invited via at least *one* of the available options. This indicates that the student protests achieved a broad reach of mobilisation paths to the overall student population, including two-thirds of students who arrived at university with no prior activism experience. Demographically, a marginally higher proportion of non-UK students; postgraduates; and maths, science and technology students were not invited. This supports findings from chapter four, which identified a high proportion of these student populations as

non-participants opposed to higher fees, and consequently something of a missed opportunity for activism organisers.

**Figure 5.7** Comparing students invited and uninvited to participate in the student protests

| | % Invited to participate (N=1,762; 70.9% ) |
|---|---|
| UK (N=2,104) | 71.9%** |
| Non-UK (N=377) | 65.5%** |
| Undergraduate (N=1,981) | 73.0% |
| Postgraduate (N=504) | 62.7% |
| First year of study (UG & PG) in 2011/12 (N=967) | 61.1% |
| Second year or more (UG & PG) in 2011/12 (N=1,518) | 77.1% |
| Politically active pre-university (N=931) | 77.7% |
| Politically inactive pre-university (N=1,554) | 66.9% |
| Studying arts, humanities or social sciences (N=1,564) | 73.8% |
| Studying logic, technology or natural science (N=921) | 65.9% |

N=2,485. **p<0.05.
Question: Have you been invited to participate in the student protests against fees by any of the following? Yes/no binary aggregated from the following available options: student union; course colleagues; friends from your university; friends from other universities; Facebook group/event invitation.

It is also noticeable that a smaller proportion of first-year students were invited to participate in the protests than students in their second year or above. This points to the slight disjuncture between the case study and the data collection period – undergraduates beginning their degree in 2011/12 were unlikely to have been at university in autumn 2010 when the NUS demonstration and first wave of occupations took place. Although this indicates that the supply of mobilisation opportunities declined in 2011/12 compared to the previous year, the drop was perhaps lower than one might expect given that the passing of the fees bill in Parliament in December 2010 arguably removed the protests' most powerful grievance. This suggests that the *organisational* legacy of the 2010 protests remained strong in 2011/12, even if the grievances themselves were harder to mobilise for.

Comparing different recruitment channels, figure 5.8 shows that the student union had the widest reach when it came to inviting students to participate in the protests. This is perhaps unsurprising considering that student unions typically have access to the mailing lists for the entire student population on campus. This reach, together with the mass-email newsletters unions typically use to communicate with students, perhaps explains why this method of invitation also has the highest population of 'don't remember' answers. It is also the union's mostly mass-communication methods that likely accounts for it having the lowest conversion rate of invitees into participants: only 30.1 per cent of students who recalled being invited by the student union took part in the protests, though this remains the largest share of

participants as a whole. Of course, these statistics cannot separate specific conversions from other invitations student might have also received, but it is noticeable that 'network' invitations via university friends and course colleagues had a much higher conversion rate – in each case more than 40 per cent. Although these figures account for a lower proportion of students overall, they do again point to the value of the *social context* of activism participation evidenced in Danny, Rhiannon, Jeremy, Justine and Donna's mobilisation, so that students' initial interest does not go unconverted, to use Oegema and Klandermans's (1994) term.

**Figure 5.8** Invitations from networks and mobilising agencies to participate in the student protests, and their rate of conversion

| | Yes, invited | No, uninvited | Don't remember | % invited participated | % of all students |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student union | 53.7% | 33.2% | 13.2% | 30.1% | 16.2% |
| Course colleagues | 26.3% | 64.9% | 8.9% | 42.1% | 11.1% |
| Friends from your university | 36.8% | 56.7% | 6.5% | 40.8% | 15.1% |
| Friends from other universities | 23.4% | 68.8% | 7.8% | 46.8% | 10.9% |
| Facebook group/event invitation | 49.0% | 42.6% | 8.4% | 32.4% | 15.9% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by row (first three columns only).
Question: Have you been invited to participate in the student protests against fees by any of the following? Have you participated in any way in the student protests against fees?

Given the large amounts of press attention paid to the new social networking technologies at students' disposal (Mason, 2011b; Penny, 2011), it is perhaps unsurprising that 'Facebook group/event invitations' achieved the second-highest reach of invitations to students. Users might receive group and event invitations if they are already members of activism groups, or are connected to users who share these invitations with their own friends. Unlike mass-emails, there is a reciprocity to Facebook event invites as users are encouraged to RSVP, which may encourage participation. Moreover, in cases where invitations come via friends, one can argue that Facebook is more personalised than mailing lists: this possibly also accounts for the fact that more students remember being invited via Facebook than they do by the student union. Despite this added personalisation, the conversion rate is only marginally higher for Facebook than for student unions and around 10 per cent lower than offline social network routes. What might not be captured in the data is the supplementary role online social networking played in tandem with *offline* social networking captured elsewhere in figure 5.8. At a basic level, this involves sharing practical information about the event, which may support or initiate concurrent face-to-face discussions. Moreover,

Facebook event invitations allow its users to see *who else is going,* which might encourage them to attend themselves:

> If you're gonna organise a protest you put it on Facebook – that's how I find out about protests. So I think definitely that's how you spread the word – yeah, it's primarily through Facebook. (Angie, Cambridge)

Although less likely to achieve the same reach as student union mailing lists, Facebook event invitations boast a visibility and openness of information which helps users decide whether to attend the event. Moreover, Facebook also doubles as a deliberative enclave for friends to openly share resources and discuss and debate issues. Certainly during the student protests, these networks helped popularise the politics of the student protests via a combination of event invitations and information sharing. Event invites, however, were still rooted in 'offline' social ties, as students would often make distinctions between invitations from 'real' friends, and invitations from 'Facebook friends'. The latter refers to weaker and more distant social ties, and given the mass-invitational reach of Facebook (where users might forward an invitation to his or her entire friends list without necessarily screening or personalising the process), invitees are consequently less likely to consider them as 'real' invites. A good example of this distinction can be found in non-participant Rick's 'invitation' to join the 2010 NUS demonstration.

> Most people who were going [to the NUS demonstration] invited people just through massive Facebook events, and I think for most of those I clicked 'no' or 'maybe' – because 'maybe' is just a polite way of saying 'no' – but I never really had to explain myself for not going. I was never accused of being 'for' tuition fees, because the people who I know who went on those demos are people who I don't tend to interact with too much directly – it's mostly online. (Rick, Edinburgh)

Nevertheless, Facebook remained useful as a means of sharing information and mobilising users within the medium itself – be it signing a linked petition or 'liking' a group page. This allowed interested users to increase their knowledge and engagement as if by osmosis. A good example of this was Danny, a student with nascent political interests in autumn 2010: whilst his 'offline' network links to activists were not strong enough to broker integration into that term's campus occupation, his 'online' links proved useful for helping him further his own knowledge of and engagement in the issue:

> I remember reading about [the tuition fees increase] online, probably through Facebook – so someone would link a blog and I would read it. I do remember reading and just thinking in my head, and reading papers and speaking to my friends who were more politically engaged than I was at the time. (Danny, Edinburgh)

In other words, Facebook connections can help enhance and supplement students' pre-existing 'offline' friendships. One such network this might draw on is likely to be friends and colleagues from students' degree courses. According to figure 5.8, 'course colleagues' achieved the second-highest participation conversion rate of the available options, but also accounted for the second-lowest proportion of overall students. Looking at figure 5.9, it is clear that the arts, humanities and social science subjects appear to operate more effectively as recruitment networks than the science subjects. With students of the former more politically-active in general (see figure 4.8), one can argue that their classrooms and lecture halls were more likely to feature conversation and debate about the fees and cuts issue, and the protests taking place nationally and on campus. Moreover, with the majority of protest participants studying these subjects anyway, this network aspect was arguably self-fulfilling: interviews found that occupation participants would sometimes give 'shout-outs' at the start of their lectures to promote forthcoming protest events on campus. Similarly, students from the humanities and social sciences especially recalled staff members discussing the protests in class, or even teaching their classes and supervisions at the occupation venue.

**Figure 5.9** Invitations to participate in the student protests via course colleagues: conversion rate per subject type

| Degree subject type | % invited to participate by course colleagues |
|---|---|
| Art & design (N=128) | 29.7% |
| Humanities (N=786) | 28.8% |
| Logic and technology (N=279) | 15.4% |
| Natural sciences (N=642) | 19.0% |
| Social sciences (N=650) | 34.0% |

N=2,485.

A further means of measuring students' network position is through their personal connections to other participants. As interviews with Donna and Bekka indicated, individuals surrounded by friends who were keen to participate arguably helped normalise activism activities whilst providing a social pathway to participation. Figure 5.10 uses survey data to compare students' participation to their stated personal connections to other participants. Of course, one can argue that the act of participation by its very nature increases the likelihood of meeting and connecting with other participants. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that around half of students with five or more personal connections to participants also participated themselves. In contrast, for students with only one personal connection, one in ten participated themselves. This suggests the importance of network *density* as a pathway to participation, where a student's social circle reaches a critical mass of interested, prospective

participants. This was certainly illustrated in Donna's recollection of attending the NUS demonstration, where *not* participating might have seemed the harder option to take.

**Figure 5.10** Participation measured by social network connectedness to protest participants

| | % Participated |
|---|---|
| Nobody (N=1,032) | 8.2% |
| One person (N=201) | 12.4% |
| 2-4 people (N=612) | 21.9% |
| 5 people or more (N=640) | 48.3% |

N=2,485.
Question: How many people (other than yourself) do you know personally who have participated in the student protests against fees at your university?

This returns us to the costs and risks of participation, and the importance of network connectedness for mobilisation. Figure 5.11 compares personal connectedness of participants to the type of participation they engaged in, using the student protests participation index introduced in chapter four. It finds that 90.8 per cent of high-cost/risk participants personally knew five or more participants, compared to only 42.3 per cent of low-cost/risk participants. This partly reflects the fact that activities included under the former are inherently more social than many of the activities included under the latter. In other words, one may not need multiple personal connections to be mobilised into signing a petition, but it might be more helpful for those thinking of travelling to higher cost/risk events such as protest marches. This was certainly evidenced in Donna, Jeremy and Danny's accounts of their mobilising for the NUS demonstration, as the costs and risks involved in the activity (and social enjoyment) could be collectively shared.

**Figure 5.11** Student protests participation type measured by social network connectedness to protest participants

| | Nobody (N=1,032) | One person (N=201) | 2-4 people (N=612) | 5 people or more (N=640) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-participant (N=1,932) | 49.0% | 9.1% | 24.7% | 17.1% |
| Low-cost/risk participant (N=281) | 21.4% | 6.0% | 30.2% | 42.3% |
| Medium-cost/risk participant (N=200) | 10.0% | 3.0% | 21.5% | 65.5% |
| High-cost/risk participant (N=65) | 1.5% | 1.5% | 6.2% | 90.8% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentage by row.
Question: How many people (other than yourself) do you know personally who have participated in the student protests against fees at your university?

## 5. Conclusion

A recurring point made throughout this chapter is just how *social* paths and barriers to protest participation are. Although to claim that mobilisation does not take place within a vacuum borders on sociological cliché, one can argue that students' political backgrounds and network position play significant roles in shaping the sort of participation (and non-participation) students typically perform. In the case of the former, it was found that the majority of medium and high-cost/risk participants had been politically active prior to university. In the most part this came via the family, with students' parents giving them an early appreciation for politics, and, in some cases, providing them with formative activism experiences. For others, political engagement and participation were encouraged at school. Conversely, family background also played a strong part in shaping the political attitudes of low-cost/risk participants and non-participants, giving them a detachment towards most forms of political participation, or a cynicism towards politics in general.

Once on campus, it was found that students already equipped with an activist background possessed the knowledge, skills and confidence to quickly connect with activist networks on campus. Students without such a background, in contrast, depended more on network factors: some found pathways to activism via the friendship groups made at their halls of residence or through their degree courses, whereas others found themselves effectively belonging to the 'wrong' network. These *counter-networks* add further layers of social interaction and conflict to the one-directional recruitment networks analysed by McAdam (1986) and others. As a concept, 'counter-networks' remains empirically under-developed at present, though van Stekelenburg (2013: 229-30) identifies similar 'disapproving networks' which may 'nourish beliefs, values, norms, and identities that may…*discourage* participation' among members. What is also important is the way non-participant networks assert their distance from participant networks as a means of strengthening their own beliefs norms and values: chapters six and seven will explore in more detail how counter-networks *dis-identify* with student activist groups. What should be clear at least is that research into activism recruitment networks would benefit from paying closer attention to network 'cross-pressures' caused by actors' positioning in more than one network.

These conclusions broadly explain paths and barriers to protest participation *in general*, but within certain collective action frames one can argue that some of these barriers can be broken down, enabling individuals to be more easily 'fast-tracked' to participation. This owes not only to the protests achieving a media-augmented 'objective reality', but also the greater number of available protest events and activities individuals can be mobilised for. At

Cambridge, Edinburgh, UCL and Warwick at least, mobilisation was aided by the effective coordination of each university's activism network – where core groups and coalitions formed and became the network's principal communicative and organisational hub. It was though these groups that activists were able to pressurise student unions into building for the NUS demonstration, as well as meet on campus and debate using protest repertoires that student unions would never be able to officially sanction – notably university occupations. Alongside this, of course, were the student unions themselves. Each of the four principal campus case studies had well-funded and resourced unions that mobilised students in large numbers for the NUS demonstration, and organised and publicised local marches and actions for the NCAFC day of action a fortnight later.

Moreover, paths to mobilisation were aided by *online* social networks, as Facebook invitations in particular provided information on upcoming protest events and enabled invitees to see who else might be attending. Given the critical mass of students who shared the fees (and Liberal Democrats policy u-turn) grievance during autumn 2010, one can argue that online networks become especially powerful resources for mass-mobilisation during collective action frames, even if they still draw principally on friendships and affinity links developed 'offline'.

These findings provide important lines of study for the next two chapters. First, there has been relatively little discussion so far of the *experience* of protest, and how this may affect participants' attitudes towards politics and activism in general. Similarly, whilst there has been some discussion already about activism networks, less has been said of their socio-cultural aspects, including how collective identities form and new participants are integrated. These will be key themes for chapter six. Second, chapter seven will explore non-participation in the student protests as a category in its own right. This will look into certain sub-populations – notably international students – in more detail, as well as exploring further the concept of dis-identification, and how it may contribute to a 'non-participant identity'.

# Chapter 6

# Exploring participation: commitment, radicalisation and the building of collective identities

## 1. Introduction

Analysis presented in the previous two chapters afforded relatively little consideration to collective identity as a means of explaining participation in the student protests. As a necessary component of a collective action frame as per Gamson's (1992) definition, the identity of the 'students' as the interest group pitted against the Government was widely propagated by mobilising agencies and the UK media throughout 2010/11, which helped make clear a collective sense of the 'we' in the building of a protest movement. Yet survey findings in chapter four make clear that opposition to Government proposals for higher fees and cuts were not restricted to only protest participants. Furthermore, survey and interview data in chapter five stresses the importance of affinity networks in making protest participation appear a politically legitimate, socially enjoyable and efficacious activity – networks which were seemingly not available to all sympathetic actors. In other words, to attach too much significance to the formation of a collective sense of 'we, the students' in mobilising large numbers to protest would be to fail to get to the root cause of what separated participants and sympathetic non-participants.

Of course, certain individuals might identify *more* with a cause than others irrespective of their network position. Collective identity can also be seen as the social glue of specific campus activism networks for keeping members 'in the frame'. Consequently, this chapter broadens our understanding of participation to include questions of how it is *sustained* and *increased* beyond one-off activities – especially after the closing of the fees-based collective action frame – and how certain experiences might come to separate participants from non-participants even further.

As we saw in chapter two, applications of collective identity tend to fall into one of two broad categories: identity as a constructed social 'product', and identity as an 'outcome' of participants' sustained social interactions (Fominaya, 2010). Although different, these conceptions of collective identity do not contradict each other – indeed, one can argue that they often operate simultaneously. For this chapter it is necessary to consider the impact of

collective identity on students' initial mobilisation and sustained participation in the protests. This involves a sharpened analysis of what sort of collective identities were produced and where. According to Melucci (1988) and Diani and Bison (2004), this is a key question in considering whether the student protests should be considered a 'movement' or not. Consideration will also be paid to how the protests continued after the December 2010 parliamentary vote on tuition fees. On the one hand, the passing of the fees bill removed a key facet of the collective action frame described in chapter one. On the other hand, because of the shared experience of protest participation, together with the ongoing grievances of higher education cuts, many students saw the need for campaigns to continue into 2011. It is here in particular that the effects of collective identity on protest participation becomes significant, and will consequently be a key theme for discussion. As with chapter five, the use of qualitative data in is chapter focuses predominantly on interview accounts from Cambridge, Edinburgh, UCL and Warwick students.

## 2. Experiencing demonstrations and occupations: the building of a collective identity

Given the scale and scope of the student protests, and the different groups and agencies involved, there are multiple locations and interactions from which a sense of collective identity might emerge. Of course, Melucci's (1988) definition of collective identity would suggest that it is more likely to emerge in spaces where affective ties develop. In this context, campus occupations arguably represent key fields of study, as their constant supplying of news material for the UK media – including protest actions, public events and publicity stunts – indicates that they were significant contributors to the propagation of a group *and* movement-level collective identity. After all, following the 10 November demonstration, NUS had distanced itself from taking a lead role in the protests (excepting its 'candlelit vigils' on 8 December), after its President Aaron Porter publically condemned the events of Millbank. Instead, the independent network NCAFC organised follow-up demonstrations in London in autumn 2010, as well as the 'national' demonstration in autumn 2011. Much like the 1968 protests in the UK, the lack of an *institutional* voice of student protesters created a vacuum for media-savvy alternative voices to occupy and define the movement themselves – and as this chapter will show, this had consequences for how students were perceived by non-participants.

At a campus level, one can claim that at the beginning of 2010/11 activism networks at Cambridge, Edinburgh, UCL and Warwick did not have strong collective identities already in place. To some extent, this reflected the lack of a single partisan group dominating

activism on campus in the same way that, say, the SWP appeared to do at the University of Leeds (see Really Open University, 2010). As we saw in chapter five, semi-formal activism networks had evolved out of the Gaza occupations in 2009 (excluding UCL), but it remained the case that no single group was powerful enough to 'impose' a specific identity on new recruits. Of course, factionalism remained an underlying issue at most occupations, but with student unions mostly divided between activists and what many interviewees called 'reactionary Tories' or 'Blairites', occupations became the focal point for where protest participants discussed politics, built solidarities and disseminated ideas and activities to the wider student population. As a result, it seems appropriate to focus on occupations for analysing key themes related to collective identity formation.

***Inside the occupations***

At a 'movement' level, much of the significance of the autumn 2010 campus occupations was attributable to their scale and length: Palmieri and Solomon (2011: 60) estimate that 51 occupations took place that term, and though some only lasted 24 hours, others – notably at Kent and UWE – lasted for nearly a month. The longevity of the occupations at Cambridge (which spanned ten consecutive days), Edinburgh (eight) and UCL (sixteen) owed much to the choice of location and the organising structures put in place within the first 24 hours. UCL's Jeremy Bentham Room, Cambridge's Old Schools Combination Room, and Edinburgh's Appleton Tower were all large, relatively comfortable spaces in central locations – UCL and Cambridge's spaces featured kitchen areas, whereas Appleton Tower was even equipped with shower facilities. Although occupying these spaces was disruptive to the university timetable, they were arguably not disruptive *enough* for university management to quickly force evictions. In contrast, Warwick's location choice of the Warwick Arts Centre represented a more direct attack on the university's finances. Subjected to greater ostracism from university management, this more ambitious occupation could not be sustained beyond one night – a cause for personal regret for some participants:

> I think [the occupation] achieved very little, outside of a few column inches in a few papers. The university clamped down very heavily, and because the movement didn't have the strength to respond, it lasted 12-14 hours or something so I think calling it an occupation is quite generous! […] I think the longer occupations go on, and go on successfully, the more places go into occupation – that's how the Gaza thing worked – and people go 'Well, if they can do it we can do it'. And I think *failing* almost undermines that confidence in others, not just yourself, so what I took away from that was that sometimes you need to compromise if ultimately it's gonna benefit your movement. (Ronnie, Warwick)

Ronnie's admission that 'the movement didn't have the strength to respond' to external pressures is instructive: as will become more apparent throughout this chapter, the building of collective affinity and trust between participants was a key aspect of occupations' endurance at Cambridge, Edinburgh and UCL. Comparatively undisturbed in their respective locations, these occupations were able to quickly transform the space to suit their needs. Students with occupying experience suggested the group divide into smaller 'working groups'. Each was tasked with focusing on one aspect of the occupation's overall running, be it kitchen, media, security, or outreach. Graham, a UCL postgraduate and experienced occupier, was especially conscious of the need to make less-experienced students feel they felt as much a part of the occupation as self-defined activists. Working groups thus embodied what he saw as 'the politics of *doing*', which together with the writing and issuing of a list of political demands[29], was a key foundation to fostering a shared sense of 'we' within the occupation, and a reason to keep participating. This was certainly the case for Justine, who as we saw in chapter five had been recruited to the occupation through her politically-active housemates. By the first evening of the occupation, she and Donna attached themselves to the media working group, and consequently felt more compelled to stay on:

> I know so many people that were like me that came in on the first day of the occupation and kind of got involved because there was this massive spirit of 'Yeah, we're doing something amazing here'. Within a couple of hours they realised that they didn't really have a place to fit in […] But luckily I had this tiny little thing with Twitter which meant that I had a *role* [otherwise] I would have felt really, really obsolete. (Justine, UCL)

All three occupations quickly established an organising structure of working groups, daily assemblies, consensus decision-making, and a 'safer spaces' policy[30]. This model had been a feature of camps associated with alter-globalization movement since the 1990s (Graeber, 2009), and had been employed both in recent Climate Camps and the 2009 student Gaza occupations (it would later become the favoured model for Occupy movement camps in 2011). For anarchist groups especially, a key advantage of this structure is found in the *liminal* conditions it helps create, with participants able to separate themselves from normal structural constraints and build their own 'autonomous geographies' (Pickerill and

[29] UCL's occupation (2010) demanded that the university publically condemned 'all cuts to higher education and the rise in tuition fees'; implemented an open books policy on budget constraints; made assurances of no redundancies, reversed its outsourcing policy, implemented the London Living Wage to all staff, and made guarantees for the protection for occupation participants.

[30] A 'safer spaces policy' typically sets ground rules against forms of discrimination, promotes inclusivity and a respect for individuals' physical and emotional boundaries. It often, though not always, involves the banning of alcohol and drug consumption in the space. An example of this in a student activism context can be found here: http://anticuts.com/ncafc-policy/safer-spaces-policy/

Chatterton, 2006; Yang, 2000). For participants already embedded through the working groups, this produced an ontological shift in which politics became *practiced* as well as discussed by participants on a daily basis. These effects were clearly felt by Donna:

> I guess because if you do consensus meetings and you start to arrange your daily life in a different way – and it happens really fast – you start thinking about the world in a different way. Because those are the only conversations we were having… you learn a lot, and it's all you are thinking about for two and a half weeks. (Donna, UCL)

Although consensus decision-making was important for creating this liminality, its practical application was sometimes difficult. Activists' favoured model of consensus decision-making requires a trained facilitator so that consensus on a given proposal can be reached, and participants who are willing to employ the system's own language of different hand-signals. Its anti-hierarchical structure reflects its roots in anarchism, focusing on respecting the individual autonomy of all participants and making group decisions openly and organically without the need for leaders or representatives speaking on others' behalf (facilitators ideally alternate between meetings). Although the majority of interviewees spoke positively about the system overall, many were also conscious of its obvious flaws – most notably its tendency to produce very long meetings after which consensus was not always even reached. More problematic still was the longstanding argument that the system creates a 'tyranny of the structureless' (Freeman, 1969), as participants with greater activist knowledge and expertise (and sometimes commitment) can consequently become accidental, de facto leaders (Purkis, 2001). This has some overlap with the concept of 'advocates' discussed in chapter five, as network connectedness can sometimes operate as an instrument of power and influence. Eric, for example, recalled seeing this in action during the Cambridge occupation:

> I remember somebody had a proposal to do something and said 'Oh, shall I run it past X?' who they thought was in charge. And they went over to this guy and said 'Can we do this?' and the guy's like, 'Well I'm not in charge!' But the *impression* that certain activists give off is that they actually are in charge, and unless they agree with something it doesn't really happen. But because they're not *formally* in a position of authority they're actually not accountable. (Eric, Cambridge)

Perhaps inevitably, individuals accused of behaving as 'accidental leaders' were often those who had the most experience of using the consensus model. At UCL especially, consensus advocates were conscious of this problem and therefore keen to train up more participants as facilitators. Nevertheless, many students who had not been involved in occupations before admitted to finding the process difficult to learn: Rhiannon recalled that she 'hardly spoke' in meetings, feeling that some of the political discussions were going 'so over my head',

whereas Justine recalled that she would often copy the hand-signals of 'someone I liked'. As active participants throughout the occupation, however, both Rhiannon and Justine would eventually become capable and experienced users of consensus decision-making by the time of the 2011 occupations. In 2010, Donna noted more infrequent visitors to the UCL occupation often struggled to pick up the system well enough to take part, though it is unclear if the system itself was a direct impediment to their continued participation.

Despite this discrepancy of experience, it is worth pointing out that occupations were *mutual* learning spaces where knowledge and skills were freely shared. Andrew, for example, had organised protests at Sixth Form College, but had not been involved in an occupation before. For him, the occupation provided opportunities to train as a protest legal observer and action medic. Brett, too, was an experienced activist but spoke positively about the opportunities for participants to learn from each other:

> There were just some brilliant people in that occupation… and I was learning so much from all these people, and learning off each other. (Brett, UCL)

As noted in chapter five, the student protests at Cambridge, Edinburgh and UCL were as much a victory for *coordinating* existing activist networks on campus under a single issue as they were a victory for mobilising large numbers of students. This was felt particularly at UCL, where there had been no Gaza occupation in 2009. Not only did its occupation bring together union officers, Labour members, anarchists, socialists, Liberal Democrat voters and even reportedly one or two Conservatives, it also became a hub for attracting activists in London who were not tied to occupations elsewhere in the city, but were socially connected to those involved. This produced a broad and diverse network of occupants, many of whom had different expectations of how the occupation should proceed. This was highlighted in Justine's initial encounter with Noel, an experienced activist and occupier:

> On the first day of the occupation, I was, like, 'What do you do?' 'I occupy'. That's what he said he does. [Noel's] one of those people who just *terrify* you when you're new to everything […] When I first met him he clearly had an instant dislike to me because he hated the internet [and] he hated the thought that he couldn't trust every single person through knowing them from endless meetings and protests, who had this deep sense of leftishness instilled in them. And as much as I learned that people like him aren't necessarily scary – they're just *entrenched* – he had to learn that people like me would come in and might actually be a little bit useful to the cause, and maybe they wouldn't have got, like, half as many people out on the protest as they did if we hadn't just been like… 'We're gonna tweet about it though babes, okay? I know you don't want us to'. (Justine, UCL)

Justine's recollections suggest that the occupation succeeded in breaking down certain 'identity' preconceptions among participants. Part of this was attributable to the working

group structure, as it enabled participants with little or no prior activism experience to introduce their own skills and areas of expertise – in her case, social media as a tool for publicising the occupation and its related events. Moreover, with a basic shared political consensus regarding higher education fees and funding, not to mention the fact of participants sleeping over in the occupation space, it is perhaps unsurprising that occupants quickly developed personal and collective affinities:

> It's so ridiculous how you bond with people so quickly, because you suddenly realise that there *is* this one thing you can have in common with someone which you never would have even considered talking about with them before, but you're all in this same space – it kind of takes away that awkward small talk at the beginning of any conversation, and then friendships are built and it's wonderful. (Justine, UCL)

> I'd never been in something that felt that big, this national thing where all these people were feeling similar things and it might've gone somewhere and achieve[d] something. So I would say in retrospect that I stayed because I felt like if I left I would have then been personally missing out and also detracting from this energy and this thing that was happening. (Rhiannon, Edinburgh)

As Rhiannon points out, collective affinities were partly borne out of the unique shared experience of being in occupation together, one which compelled participants to put other activities to one side so as to not 'miss out'. Clearly a significant part of this was also the *empowerment* that came from participating. As with Millbank, this had a lot to do with the extensive coverage the UK-wide network of campus occupations were receiving from national and international news and television:

> It was incredibly exciting because you felt part of something that felt really big and important. We – as not just the occupation but the national occupations that were happening – were on the news every day and that was really exciting, so when we got a mention it was 'wahey!' and so on. (Peter, Edinburgh)

> We had journalists coming in all the time. The moment where you have any kind of political agency where the media is *coming to you*, that's really rare – most of the time if you're involved in any kind of political activism, you're chasing the most minute bit of coverage. (Brett, UCL)

As well as helping to promote the fees issue, this media traction was also used by occupants as a form of leverage against university management: although occupations would routinely be threatened with forced eviction, management were nevertheless mindful of the negative publicity such an action would cause. Moreover, activists were keen to supply the media with further news stories to keep the fees and cuts issue on the front pages: according to Gaz, UCL routinely organised flashmobs on 'slow news days' and made sure the press were there to report it. Part of this, he admitted, was borne out of being in 'friendly competition' with

other occupations over whose stunt could gain the most column inches, but it reflected more a growing inter-occupation solidarity rather than any genuine rivalry. In fact, occupations would regularly Skype each other and exchange messages of solidarity and support:

> It was really nice actually, when you're tired and then Manchester or Edinburgh tweet or Skype and be like 'Hi! What's up?' and you're like, 'Oh hey, a room very similar to ours with lots of posters up and loads of crazy lefties too! This is great' – it showed that we were actually physically not alone at that stage. (Justine, UCL)

> There was a Twitter hash-tag involved, and there were messages of solidarity coming from across the country – UCL in particular I remember. And there was a movement across the country where if [an occupation] ended up getting kicked out, we would basically jam the phones to the whole university, so you'd get people from across the whole country calling up the university! (John, Edinburgh)

As well as sharing the same protest repertoires, occupations tended to veer towards a politics more radical than a basic anti-£9,000 fees stance. On the one hand, left-leaning education activist groups from CFE to NCAFC have always campaigned for *free* education along with wider concerns regarding the marketisation of higher education. Both of these issues were areas of concern among more experienced student activists, and would soon gain traction within the Cambridge, Edinburgh and UCL occupations, even if members remained ostensibly committed to defeating the tuition fees bill first and foremost. On the other hand, the practicing of anti-hierarchical models of organisation and decision-making meant that a more radical left-wing politics was being *practiced* as well as discussed. For many participants – including experienced as well as inexperienced activists – this was felt to be highly significant to the development of their own personal political views and self-identification:

> There was quite a lot of kind of radical politics there, which is interesting to think about now [because] that's the first time that I'd come across people really talking about that kind of anti-capitalist message […] I think the fees issue was a way of getting into a much broader range of political issues and quite radical politics. (Angie, Cambridge)

> I was on the revolutionary left when the occupation started, and now I'm a revolutionary anarchist as opposed to a revolutionary socialist, because for me that was a visible demonstration that anarchist politics could be made to work. (Gaz, UCL)

Although the more regular occupation participants tended to lurch leftwards the longer time they spent at the space, this did not appear to coalesce around any particular party or philosophy. Of course, occupations provided opportunities for political and philosophical debates, but their significance in *group* relations tended to be outweighed by the broad consensus regarding participants' opposition to fees and cuts, and their commitment to

maintaining the occupation space. This had a basis in the urgency brought on by the impending parliamentary vote, and the knowledge among activists that they only had a certain amount of time to generate pressure – in this context, factional differences were fairly irrelevant to the main task at hand:

> That was the best thing – it didn't really matter where you stood. Everyone from hardcore anarchists to some centre-right people turning up, and it didn't really matter. As a Marxist-socialist, that was the only point I think where I've been involved in the left where I've never had any political arguments with anyone else! (laughs) Like, 'Against fees and cuts? Good! That's it'. (Andrew, Cambridge)

In other words, at a time when there was a clear and strong campaign and tactical consensus – not to mention emerging social and emotional bonds – one can argue that an 'outcome' collective identity developed between occupation participants. The application of 'collective identity' here probably warrants further clarification. Given its historical roots in Marxist class politics, the application of collective identity to direct action tactics has been refuted by authors such as McDonald (2002) for assuming group uniformity whilst ignoring its anarchism-inspired emphasis on individual autonomy. In this case study at least, Melucci's notion of an 'outcome' collective identity aptly describes the affinities and relations of trust which emerged from the shared *practice* of occupying. In this sense, ideological differences within the occupations – at least in 2010 – did not act as barriers to the emergence of a collective identity.

One can also contend that a broader, looser collective identity also emerged through the simultaneous *network* of occupations – at least on the basis of the three studied. By their very nature, occupations shared the same repertoire of protest tactics, along with the desire to pressurise universities' management into publically opposing the £9,000 fees cap. Certainly among the longer-lasting occupations, a reflexive sense of 'we, the students' was produced through their intercommunications (and, as evidenced in John's earlier quote, shared actions), one in which Ronnie admitted frustration that Warwick's occupation did not last long enough to become part of. Moreover, all were aware of the symbolic power of an interconnected UK-wide network of campus occupations, and contributing to this network generated feelings of pride and agency. This helped reinforce and legitimise activism at a local level, as participants spoke positively about feeling part of something bigger and more powerful than the room itself. Within this context at least, occupants certainly had good reason to feel part of a wider occupation movement.

### *Building a cross-repertoire movement*

It is perhaps unsurprising that activists in occupation not only saw themselves as part of an occupation movement – they also felt part of a wider *student movement*. Of course, this feeling partly had normative dimensions, though reported attendances of the NUS demonstration and NCAFC day of action gave occupants reason to believe that their political views were shared in numbers far greater than those currently sleeping in campus buildings across the UK. To propagate the idea of a multi-repertoire student movement, occupations used blog websites, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds to issue press releases, advertise events and protests, and provide diaries, pictures and videos of life inside the occupation. As is the nature of these mediums, they also became interactive spaces where users could write messages of support, post articles and event flyers, and debate with occupants. Here, 'participation' takes on a more subjective definition, though it is perhaps significant that occupants took these forms of online interaction very seriously:

> To feel that through the online presence people across the UK and beyond were being inspired by this to act for themselves and to get involved themselves… activist groups in Scotland and trade union people all suddenly getting in touch, and all clearly being inspired. (Jeremy, Edinburgh)

Although Jeremy recalled that the majority of emailed messages of support came from the already-active, more indirect forms of participation – notably the online hits of blog pages and YouTube videos, as well as the number of Twitter followers and Facebook 'likes' – were regularly quoted by interviewees as indicators of the occupation's wider support. The upcoming parliamentary vote had created a sense of urgency to keep publicising the fees issue, and so occupations became centres for planning and publicising multiple medium and low-cost/risk protest actions on campus. Actions were sometimes arranged in partnership with the student union – not least due to the fact that many of its more left-leaning officers were often sleeping in the occupation – and had a variety of audiences and purposes. First, petitions were set up to show support for the occupation among students and staff. This had the dual benefit of pressurising university management and enabling the more distantly-connected or biographically unavailable to register their support. Jeremy claimed that Edinburgh activists produced a 600-strong petition from staff backing the occupation, which was then sent to the university's vice-chancellor.

Second, occupations organised their own local marches. These sometimes had a clear objective – such as pressurising a local Liberal Democrat MP into voting against the fees bill – though more generally they were geared towards building a united and visible student

*movement*. Aided by social media technologies, these marches were relatively easy to plan and promote at short notice:

> We had two of our own demos whilst we were in occupation, a week apart. So each time we were getting maybe 400 people or so, not doing any real publicity – just putting it online, tweeting it and saying 'Let's meet here' […] Once you get the core people and different political groups that are already established, and just having them send out messages, get[ting] their friends along, it makes a big difference. (Jeremy, Edinburgh)

> We could get demos weekly by demand – just call a demo, make a Facebook page and a couple of hundred people show up. It was simple… those were the times we were in. (Eric, Cambridge)

Survey data from the last chapter showed Facebook had an invitational reach to match the student union, and at a time when the fees issue was being given considerable media coverage in the UK press, marches could be organised quickly and easily, with the fees grievance virtually selling itself. As Jeremy observes, the activism network on campus could be trusted to mobilise in large numbers, but beyond this 'core' was a much larger peripheral layer of more loosely-connected and less-politicised individuals who – under the right circumstances – could also be mobilised in large numbers.

To some extent, *occupation* mobilisation can also be explained in terms of cores and peripheries. Chapter five found that students' routes to joining occupations on the first day came mostly from pre-existing social ties, even if this did not aggregate to a single united network. In general, students who stayed over on the first night were generally more likely to get involved in consensus meetings, working groups and social events, and as such develop feelings of solidarity, enjoyment and belonging, and thus stay on for its full duration. Beyond this core, the outer layers of participation are well-described by Angie:

> Obviously there was the kind of hardcore group who'd been there from the start and stayed there to the end. Then there were people like me who went there every day and might have stayed there a few nights, but weren't there permanently. And then there were quite a lot of people who were just dropping in and out, like, coming to show their support, or just coming because they'd heard something good was happening there. (Angie, Cambridge)

According to interviews, the outer layers of occupation participation were mobilised principally through social connections to those already involved. At UCL and Cambridge especially, this meant that the occupation took on a specific character through the college and course networks it drew from. As with local marches, a vital tool for helping turn these social ties into pathways to participation was the fact that the media coverage of the fees issue was helping publicise the occupations as much as the occupations were helping to

publicise the fees issue. Consequently, these networks extended outwards to draw in people who were connected to participants in non-political ways:

> It was almost like a beacon. So for instance, my girlfriend had never done anything political ever, and her friend got involved in it and a guy that she knew – a PhD student who was working at the coffee shop she went to – gave her a leaflet, and she looked at it and saw that her mate was going along and decided to go with him. And now that's opened her up to a whole new group of people and a whole new set of ideas. (Liam, Cambridge)

> It was a really sociable… people invited their friends to come, like, my brother came to visit, people from other universities when their occupations ended, they came down. (Donna, UCL)

> It was mostly King's people there – partly because it was next door to King's – so everyone was up there. And people from other colleges who came in were like, 'Oh, it's always all King's people'. So I guess you're drawing from a slightly different pool of people, because it was people who weren't necessarily even that interested in politics, who were vaguely onside, but they were coming up because that's where people were hanging out on an evening. The student bar was empty all of that week'. (Angie, Cambridge)

Despite the power of these social networks, mobilisation was tempered by the fact that at its core, occupation participation was a high-cost/risk activity. Not only were occupations deviant and disruptive in nature – sometimes incurring personalised threats from university management – they also required the shared and sustained commitment of a sufficient number of participants to sleep at the space each night (not to mention sharing nightly 'guard duty' during a particularly cold winter). Given the social nature of occupations, interviews suggest that outsiders would be less-inclined to consider these costs and risks insurmountable provided there were *social* pathways to getting involved. This was certainly true for Rhiannon, Justine and Angie, all of whom had friends they attended their respective occupations with on the first day. In contrast, students such as Anoushka, Yvonne and Danny had participated in other marches, but lacked both strong social connections to occupants and friends also interested in joining. Without a social context to counter the higher costs and risks involved, none ultimately felt that joining the occupation was an option personally open to them:

> If I knew more people who were going I would have gone. I mean, I *knew* people, as in a couple of people involved because of Facebook, but I was never formally invited. (Anoushka, Cambridge)

> I wasn't involved in the occupation – I remember thinking it was a bit ridiculous. I didn't even know it was happening, to be honest. I walked through there a couple of times, saw people, didn't know any of them, and didn't want to approach them! (Danny, Edinburgh)

> It's the same people involved again and again. I know – not personally too much – some of the people, but they are all older than me, so I guess there were no freshers involved. (Yvonne, Warwick[31])

Anoushka's reference to Facebook is especially telling, as it chimes with arguments made in the last chapter about the limitations of social media as a mobilising tool *on its own* (see Gladwell, 2010). Given that Danny and Yvonne also recalled having weak ties with occupation participants, there is further evidence to suggest that occupation participation – defined at least in terms of taking an active part in consensus meetings – was more likely if students were well-connected *offline* to participants. Of course, for occupants involved in 'outreach' working groups this was something to be challenged, and so they employed multiple strategies to attract the more distantly-connected. At a basic level, this involved presenting a positive image of the occupation to outsiders. Certain activities – notably a 'dance-off' between UCL and Oxford occupations which became a YouTube viral video – were clear reflections of the fun and camaraderie being created in addition to activism work. Certainly, many occupants were keen to avoid the intensity, dogmatism and earnestness that had arguably been traditionally associated with political activism and make the occupation (both offline and online) appear socially and aesthetically appealing to visitors:

> I mean, we didn't sit there thinking (*advertising exec voice*) 'How can we be new, how can we be exciting, how can we synergise?' – but I remember being quite keen to sort of work on its image, which is why I did a lot of the graphic design [on the occupation website] because I wanted it to appear quite modern and not fall into a sort of outdated, irrelevant thing like the SWP. (Gaz, UCL)

> So sort of trying to present this image of this as being something savvy, something exciting, a bit cool. (Jeremy, Edinburgh)

Public events were almost a daily occurrence at Cambridge, Edinburgh and UCL's occupations and functioned both as a means of occupation outreach and promoting the fees and cuts issue more generally. During the day, there would be invited talks and debates – as well as certain staff members from well-represented faculties relocating their lectures and seminars to the space – and evenings were usually filled with social events such as film screenings, open mic nights and ceilidhs. According to Graham, all were forms of outreach designed to make the occupation more appealing so that visitors would then be compelled to engage more in its political content. Although occupants generally considered attending such events an endorsement of the occupation's politics, Marianne and Eric expressed some frustrations over the limited extent that the political element was being effectively put across:

[31] Yvonne is speaking about Warwick's 2011 occupation.

> I think we even had a couple of hundred there one night, after a particularly fun evening. Maybe they weren't convinced of all the ideas, and I've actually had people who were really involved in CDE tell me subsequently on the January 28th demo that they didn't actually believe in free education – it shocked me a little bit. I think I was glad that lots of people were there, but I was a bit concerned that it was becoming an extension of the English Faculty poetry scene… which was pleasant and nice, but it begs the question of what the occupation is for, really. (Eric, Cambridge)

> It does irritate me when people are just like, 'I'm going to turn up and educate myself but I'm not going to take *any* time out of my day to actually help build this thing'. But that is a form of participation and if they come in and they get a positive feeling about what's going on, then that changes the conversation *they* have with people around them in their colleges or whatever. (Marianne, Cambridge)

This again points to different layers of participation, and corresponding layers of collective identification. For those sleeping over most nights and participating in the majority of daily assemblies, the occupation was more likely to have transformative social and political effects. For those on the periphery, who might have attended social events but participated little in the occupation's debates or protest events, feelings of collective identification were likely to have been weaker. It is also unclear where exactly the boundaries of 'occupation participation' might lie: for example, Leeds student Heather revealed in her interview that she had brought soup for the occupiers, yet did not include this in the survey as part of her 'participation'. Conversely, another survey respondent specified 'providing food for occupiers' as one of their 'other' participatory activities. In other words, it is questionable whether infrequent visitors to the occupation *felt* that they were participants, especially when they compared themselves to individuals more heavily involved in its day-to-day running (see Bobel, 2007). According to interviews, much of this seemed to hinge on who spent the most *time* at the occupation – including sleeping over for the most nights. For Justine and Rhiannon, this was an area where accidental hierarchies could emerge: not only did long-term participants develop a stronger sense of ownership over the space, this potentially compromised the occupation's apparent 'openness' to visitors:

> I think that a lot of the time people might not have enjoyed that sense of coming into a space where clearly people have been sleeping, eating, living, breathing, existing – not everyone is as comfortable with that […] [For the 2011 occupation] we were like, 'Nobody sleeps here two nights in a row; we don't want any ownership of this space'. Obviously you need a lot of people there for the running of it, like the kitchen and things, but a lot of it was to do with the fact that we really didn't want anyone to feel uncomfortable when they came in. (Justine, UCL)

> [The occupation] *did* draw people in, so obviously it was effective. But it is a small number of people who will go down because it takes two days for 30 people

> to hang out together and all get to know each other and then it's a clique. (Rhiannon, Edinburgh)

Furthermore, sleeping in the space regularly appeared to increase participants' *commitment*, as this opened individuals more up to the space's liminal powers. Angie – who tellingly began her interview by stating that she 'wasn't one of the hardcore people who stayed there the whole time' – admitted these different levels of commitment created tensions. She recalled two of her friends – both of whom had become members of the occupation's 'core' participants – telling her that she had to come down to sleep at the occupation one night and partake in a 'secret' protest which they would only reveal once she came over. Expressing hesitation, her friends angrily demanded 'if you care at all about this you will stay tonight and you will come down tomorrow morning!' Although they later apologised, for Angie it reflected the divide between 'hardcore' and outer-core participants, recalling that the experience of being in the former had made her friends very 'intense' in their commitment – a commitment which she did not share.

To summarise, one can argue that the occupations and their related actions produced *multilayered* collective identities, with a core group of radical and committed occupants followed by multiple outer-layers of participants. Although protest participants shared consensus over opposition to £9,000 tuition fees, the political transformations experienced by students such as Gaz, Donna, Justine, Jeremy and Rhiannon did not necessarily extend to the occupation's more infrequent visitors and fellow demonstrators, let alone its petition signatories. Of course, 'transformative political experiences' might vary from individual to individual, and Angie, for example, certainly valued her time spent at the occupation even if she did not consider herself one of the 'hardcore'. What this does call into question are the limits to which collective identity can apply to all of its participants, or even who its 'participants' truly are.

On the other hand, one should perhaps avoid being overly stringent on how homogenous participants have to be in their political and tactical views to generate a sense of collective identity: after all, for the purposes of building a student movement occupants were keen to emphasise a united anti-fees stance in the run-up to the parliamentary vote, even if many were simultaneously developing more radical political views. In this sense, protest participants *were* part of a collective movement, even if not always for the same reasons: if some were simply happy to protest for fees to remain at £3,290, others saw this as an incremental victory as part of a wider struggle. But during autumn 2010 at least, such distinctions did not really matter.

***Outside the occupations: counter-networks and dis-identification***

In some ways, persuading protest participants to unite under a single protest tactic or political philosophy was only a small part of the struggle: a sizeable and more significant task was engaging and mobilising students who might have disagreed with a £9,000 fees cap but only had a passing interest in politics. As argued so far, participation in medium and high-cost/risk participation owed greatly to the existing social networks surrounding those regularly involved: with the fees issue gaining widespread support among students, social networks became 'activated' as mobilisation networks. When questioned on the network properties of occupation recruitment, Damon admitted that the ideal is that 'the networks never stop' though in reality he acknowledged that politically sympathetic students '14 layers of connection' away from the occupation were probably less likely to get involved. As has been argued in previous chapters, research into non-participation tends to focus on *activists'* failure to mobilise them, rather than any properties unique to non-participants themselves. This returns us to a concept introduced in chapter five, that of *counter-networks* to social movement participation.

One of the more remarkable aspects of the student protests was that its UK-wide network of campus occupations gave many students their first encounter with direct action politics – encounters which would extend to a wider public following the worldwide Occupy Movement 12 months later. As a public space, occupations were themselves a form of outreach, and activists were keen to choose locations which were visible and accessible to students on campus. To attract the interest of passers-by, occupations ran information desks during the day for students to visit and discuss issues. The principal purpose of this was to inform and discuss with visitors higher education funding grievances, and what students could do about it. The latter, of course, played into a secondary purpose which was to explain and defend the occupation itself. As occupants at Edinburgh recalled, this was met with difficulties:

> In the lobby we had tables out where people would be sat all day, talking to students. We had people out flyering. On campus people were unsure of what to make of it, because this is very much something new. So people weren't saying 'Oh no, we disagree with this' or anything, there were just lots of people saying, 'yeah, it's quite right that you're doing this'. (Jeremy, Edinburgh)

> Hardly anyone came in and disagreed with us completely – everyone was like 'Well, you know, yeah, I get that, but how is this going to change that?' That kind of attitude was difficult. (John, Edinburgh)

Visitors' general sense of disconnect from the occupations' *practical* purpose – to pressurise each university into publically opposing a £9,000 fees cap and in turn, pressurise MPs into

voting against the bill – suggests certain limitations in the movement's capacity to engage and mobilise many of its more latent supporters. This was confirmed in some of the recollections of occupation visitors:

> I didn't really understand why they were occupying the university when it had nothing to do with fees, especially in Scotland. (Danny, Edinburgh)
>
> Seeing the occupy thing here saying that they were against student fees was like, 'No one is seeing this banner that you put up; no one that can actually change this is aware that you're doing this!' So I think in a policy sense I think they're generally pretty useless. (Lawrence[32], Warwick)

This recalls survey findings from chapter four which indicated that whilst the majority of respondents saw protest as a legitimate form of political participation, few were sure of its overall effectiveness, especially in relation to governmental politics. Not all non-participating visitors were necessarily sceptical of the occupation tactic, however. Rick, for example, was quite comfortable in his role as a 'supportive non-participant' on the basis that he and others were important conduits for helping spread its message to a wider audience:

> I think Appleton Tower was occupied for a while and I had classes in there, so I would walk past and they would have a banner and a little table saying 'Ask us about occupy' kind of thing. And I was just like, looking at this and thinking 'this is good'… and just continued on! (laughs) It was like, 'I support this' but I'm not going to sleep in Appleton Tower […] I think it's important for there to be people who aren't directly taking part saying 'I support this, I think it's a good idea' that gives them a bit more legitimacy. (Rick, Edinburgh)

Although supportive, Rick felt under no social obligation to join the occupation, admitting that most of his friends were like him in being opposed to the £9,000 fees cap but were not the sorts of people who 'will necessarily actually go out and join in a protest'. Once again, social networks were a key part of this: as we saw in chapter five, Rick had received notional invitations to join the NUS demonstration via Facebook, but did not have strong enough *offline* links with participants to feel any expectation or pressure to attend. This suggests that Rick's non-participation could be explained as a form of 'nonconversion' according to Oegema and Klandermans's (1994) definition due to the lack of strong ties to the occupation. It is worth considering that both Rick and Danny's political views and level of engagement in autumn 2010 were not all that different from the initial thoughts of many who *did* join the occupations on the first evening. The difference was that students such as Justine, Donna, Angie and Rhiannon had connections which made the prospect of participation more socially appealing. Moreover, unlike Rick, the prospect of their non-participation might have been considered by their peers as tantamount to 'letting the side down' à la McAdam's (1986)

[32] Lawrence is speaking about Warwick's 2011 occupation.

Freedom Summer applicants. Once involved, however, each had the sort of unanticipated transformative social experience that arguably proved difficult to translate to visitors on the other side of the 'welcome' tables.

In this sense, Rick and Danny's friendship groups at that time – though supportive of the protests – functioned as *counter-networks* in much the same way as Bekka's did in the run-up to the NUS demonstration (see chapter five). With little value afforded to participation, and minimal social pressure to get involved, counter-networks can hold individuals back from participation in the same way activism networks can push individuals *towards* participation. As a barrier, however, counter-networks on their own are not insurmountable, for as we will see in the next section both Bekka and Danny would become more politically-active the following year. Barriers might grow stronger, however, when they are supplemented by related counter-*grievances*. Sometimes this may amount to certain inconveniences brought about by the protests – Anita, for example, admitted to being predisposed against the Cambridge occupation because it prevented her from accessing her favourite coffee shop. This was certainly a more common complaint against occupations, as students would sometimes find their lectures and seminars cancelled or relocated. Occupations would often try to negotiate ways of ensuring that classes could still go ahead, though this would sometimes cause disagreements within the occupation over how disruptive the protest really should be.

One prominent example of this issue was found when the UCL occupation's choice of venue forced the cancellation of rehearsal bookings made by the Musical Theatre Society. The society favoured the space due to its wooden floors, and requested that the occupation leave the room entirely for its duration. Seeking to maintain their ownership of the space without wishing to cause conflicts with other students, occupants engaged in a long and heated discussion about the disruptive ethics of the occupation, and its relationship to the wider student body:

> I remember facilitating – it was one of the more difficult GAs [general assembly] to facilitate. There was a whole heated debate about the various options – on the one extreme we get out and let them have it, and on the other extreme we don't let them in, or can we find a compromise where we move to one side of the room. Very long meeting, and whenever we eventually got to a proposal they were blocked. So we didn't achieve consensus on anything – there were a large amount of significant people blocking the idea of letting them in, because we were in occupation. So yeah, that posed some tensions with the group undoubtedly. (Graham, UCL)

With no consensus reached, the occupation had no choice but to stand its ground. The cancellation caused a great deal of animosity between students, as various affected drama and dance societies united around this grievance and accused the occupation of lacking legitimacy as a representation of student views. The occupants, on the other hand, felt that the society's lack of flexibility reflected the right-wing disposition of its members. This may have had some validity, not least as a number of anti-occupation Facebook groups and Twitter feeds sprung up shortly afterwards (e.g. 'UCL Trespass', 'UCL Mockupation') claiming that it had caused 'financial and reputational damage to our university[33]'. Nevertheless, there were students involved in these societies who *were* sympathetic to the anti-£9,000 fees cause, but found themselves pitted against the occupation because of their counter-grievances:

> I did go in and try to speak to people because I was very interested in it all… and it was very one-sided, and anybody who didn't completely agree with and 100% support everything that was going on was just heckled and told that you were a Tory. It wasn't a very nice atmosphere at all. I'd imagine it would have been great for the people who were involved in it, but I thought it was quite unnecessary and immature in a way. (Sonya, UCL)

> I think it's awful that tuition fees have changed, but I'm not sure than an occupation is the right way to do anything… It became a place for people partying, it was taking up space that was needed for exams and the like… I just saw people becoming 'martyrs to the cause'. Its supporters were in the minority across the university… Clubs and societies – zero support. (Louise, UCL)

Louise's position was especially interesting. She was against trebled fees, and as an English student and sports societies member, she belonged to two contrasting networks – the former had a critical mass of supportive and participating students, and the latter, she claimed, had neither. From a networks perspective, Louise's non-participation might be explained as a form of 'corrosion' (adapting Oegema and Klandermans (1994)) given that her initial anti-fees stance was compromised by her membership of counter-networks. Another factor, too, was her disengagement from protest politics more generally, which as we saw in chapter five went back to her lack of a political background growing up. To some extent, this was also fuelled by counter-networks' collective *dis-identification* from activists involved in the occupation. As a concept, dis-identification has its roots in Bourdieu-influenced class analysis; particularly in the way actors might ascribe particular cultural or behavioural

[33] Facebook page entitled 'no ifs, no buts, this occupation sucks' https://www.facebook.com/pages/No-ifs-no-buts-this-occupation-sucks/172862326072135?id=172862326072135&sk=info. This also reflected an accompanying grievance brought about by the occupation, namely the practice of 'chalking'. Reflecting the views of some participants that the occupation had not been disruptive enough, this involved writing political slogans in chalk on university buildings, resulting in arrests being made.

signifiers to a group or class in order to draw distance from them (e.g. Savage et al, 1992; Skeggs, 1997; Savage et al, 2010). Although invoking these signifiers is usually designed to emphasise a group's perceived otherness or stigma, they also reveal something about the individual doing the ascribing, and what he or she wishes to dis-identify from. In the case of political activism, this tends to relate to certain styles, behaviours and practices that students might feel uncomfortable about – especially those associated with high-cost/risk activism. This might be garnered from encounters with certain activists on campus, though it can also relate to more generalised media images and stereotypes. A clear example of activist dis-identification can be found in comments made by Mick, a Cambridge student:

> When I came here I considered myself a left-winger, and then I actually met left-wingers at my college… they were mental, so I jacked that in quite quickly! (laughs) It's full of the annoying side of the left – vegans and self-proclaimed Trotskyites, people who were living in squats and stuff like it was a political statement or something. Also people who tended to be from quite wealthy backgrounds, which is always hilarious. (Mick, Cambridge)

Interestingly, Mick qualified as a medium-cost/risk participant in the student protests according to the survey: not only had he been present at the NUS demonstration, he was even supportive of the attack on Millbank. In other words, his dis-identification from the Cambridge occupation (and resultant non-participation in it) was *socially* rather than politically motivated. The point of analysing dis-identification therefore has less to do with the real practices, styles and attitudes of activists (many of which are analysed elsewhere in this chapter) than demonstrating how activist significations are used by *non-participants* as a means of drawing distance. Dis-identification, counter-grievances and network position can be mutually reinforcing, because much like the selective attention strategies described by Norgaard (2006), collective dis-identification helps legitimise individuals' own non-participation – even when some might be sympathetic to a campaign's goals. This was arguably true for Louise, whose depiction of the occupation as a hedonistic space was invoked as a means of questioning the sincerity of their actions. Similarly, Mick's reference to some activists' alleged 'wealthy backgrounds' draws on discourses of class-based 'lifestylism' in activist politics (Haenfler et al, 2012). Non-participants' dis-identification from activists will be explored in more detail in chapter seven.

## 3. Identity, affinity networks and cliques: the tuition fees vote and after

Given the widening gap of experience between core occupants and other student protest participants in the run-up to the parliamentary vote, this section focuses on the impact of the

vote itself on the students who had forged strong affinity links to other participants and wished to continue campaigning into 2011. As already noted, time spent in occupation had widened many participants' grievances beyond tuition fees to include the wider marketisation of higher education. Nevertheless, the fees remained autumn's principal target, and one which via the parliamentary vote on 9 December 2010, carried the possibility of political agency should students pressurise enough MPs into defeating the bill.

***'Day X-3' – the day of the vote***

By this time, Cambridge and Edinburgh's occupations had ended, though students from the latter joined NUS Scotland's march to Parliament on 8 December, whilst students from the former – via Cambridge Defend Education – combined with the student union to arrange coach travel for 300 students and sixth formers to attend the demonstration in London on the 9th. Still in occupation the night before, UCL became a mass-sleeping space for student activists who had travelled down from across the UK. With a reported 30,000 in attendance, the demonstration was marked by a large police kettle in Parliament Square, which the crowd forced its way out of once news got out that the bill had been passed by Parliament. Although some interviewees recalled attending the demonstration anticipating police clashes – and had 'masked up' accordingly – many found themselves stuck in the middle of violent confrontations:

> I was legal observing that day and I'd never seen that kind of violence up close. I could see people getting trampled, I could see people getting their heads smashed in, and as the police charged I saw someone from Cambridge who was lying on the ground: I think she managed to break out and then got knocked over. So I and one of my friends picked her up and tried to carry her away, at which point the police charged again, and I ended up getting bashed on the head as I was trying to carry this really badly injured girl away. (Andrew, Cambridge)

Having lost the vote but defied the police, many of the students involved recalled the protest with a mixture of pessimism and empowerment. The latter feeling, however, was instrumental to giving students cause to resume the protests the following January. Although unsuccessful in their principal aims, and left exhausted by the occupations and weekly demonstrations, the experience had given many a sense of collective agency which they felt could be mobilised again for other grievances. Moreover, many admitted to undergoing such a political – and arguably, *emotional* – transformation that they felt that there was now little turning back:

> I think because everyone kind of like felt their whole world-view changed quite drastically, and so nearly all of us carried on. I mean, the student fees were kind of

> over, but I think people had just been radicalised and wanted to do more political actions, so it didn't feel like people were defeated at all. (Donna, UCL)

> I think one of the steps people make towards engagement is to realise that you're in this for the long haul, it's not like we're going to go on one demonstration and the Government are going to say 'oh, silly us – let's just revoke all this stuff'. (Andrew, Cambridge)

With the fees issue now in the past, each occupation network met up in early January to discuss where to go next. Some students were concerned that mobilisation for non-NUS demonstrations had been restricted by their student union's reluctance to promote and finance 'unofficial' protests and were therefore keen to form 'activist' slates for forthcoming elections. That way, student activism would be better funded and resourced at a local level, and with unions across the UK operating on a pro-activism remit, opportunities to build a united student movement would be strengthened. Others, however, felt that the most powerful legacy created by the occupations and demonstrations was their use of direct action, and that if anything, the protests had not been radical enough. From their perspective, this had been what had put students on the front pages, and the relationships of trust and solidarity that had formed between participants could be used to mobilise for further actions, actions which could be used to build links with other groups in the wider anti-cuts and anti-capitalist movements. Consequently, parts of the wider occupation networks began to drift off into different directions. Although interviewees were usually keen to stress that these differences were *tactical* rather than personal, some acknowledged that the split reflected the fragile and temporary nature of the political consensus which had been forged within activism networks the previous term:

> That entire [previous] semester there wasn't much structured political discussion. We had a purpose – we were all there because of the fees thing, and the fact that some people were SJPs [Students' Justice for Palestine], and some were anarchists or whatever, it didn't matter – it was kind of like, 'We all agree on this', it didn't matter about the rest. That of course caused problems when the vote happened because it wasn't clear anymore what we were united on. (Peter, Edinburgh)

In many ways, such disagreements conform to Tarrow's (1989) theory of 'protest cycles', with one side advocating escalation and the other institutionalisation. Given the broad *political* consensus that remained between core occupants, however – free education, anti-marketisation – this did not cause a complete fragmentation of the network. This reflected the social affinities involved –'we're all still friends', one was keen to stress – as both sides would help out the other: union sabbatical officers would speak out in support of (and sometimes, albeit covertly, participate in) occupations and forms of direct action, whereas direct action activists would campaign for union candidates. In some ways, however, these

tactical differences also reflected different approaches towards mobilising the rest of the active student community. Certainly there was a need for a new approach: having initially resumed organising meetings and demonstrations in much the same fashion as they had done the previous term, activists quickly realised that the loss of the tuition fees issue had removed a key uniting and mobilising issue, causing attendance numbers to diminish:

> The first thing we needed to deal with was a lot of people giving up because the bill had gone through, and our numbers shrank because of that. We decided to build for localised events, and for quite a long period that year we were just organising things like trying to get our MP to call to reinstate EMA, that kind of thing. (Andrew, Cambridge)

> We were still very high-profile, we had a lot of support – a lot of *latent* support – but when we didn't have an active issue to grapple around, that became a problem […] Because we had attached our political actions to the actions of Parliament, we're then subservient to their timescale, and as soon as they stop doing things relevant to us, we cease to be relevant. (Gaz, UCL)

This pointed to two problematic legacies of the previous term's protests. First, the protests had mostly been built around the grievance of the £9,000 tuition fees cap. In truth, fees were only one aspect of the Browne Review's recommendations, and whilst higher education campaigners and occupation participants were well aware of this, they nevertheless recognised that fees had represented a trump card for mobilising students in large numbers. Without this trump card, activists lost an issue that had appealed to the wider student body, and provided campaigns with a clear political objective. Inevitably, the seeming timeframe-dependence of the fees grievance became a problem for activists wanting to broaden their campaigns to other higher education grievances. But grievances related to the Higher Education White Paper did not carry the same sense of *urgency* as the fees issue, nor did they appeal to students' feelings of betrayal from the Liberal Democrats' 2010 election manifesto. This not only affected how students interacted with the issue on a personal level – it also impacted on how the issue was framed in the media:

> The tuition fees were the tip of the iceberg, [but] the media would just drag the narrative back to (*reporter's voice*) 'Students protesting against higher tuition fees…' – we're not protesting against higher tuition fees, we're protesting because there's eighty percent cuts to university teaching! It's about far more than just tuition fees! (Gaz, UCL)

This played into a second legacy, that activists had become somewhat dependent on widespread media coverage to promote their grievances and actions throughout autumn 2010. Not only was the fees issue easy for students to grasp, it also made for an appealing narrative for the UK press, one which dovetailed with the already-prominent news story of the newly-formed coalition Government. With the controversy surrounding the Liberal

Democrats' policy u-turn, followed by Millbank signalling the 'return of student activism', the media were keen to amplify activist voices which helped give promotion to forthcoming protest actions on a far greater scale than would have been possible independently. For sympathetic students only distantly-connected to activism networks on campus, the media coverage may have provided the necessary tipping-point. For Damon, this was a key tool for mobilising students in autumn 2010:

> Students believe that a student movement is worth fighting in when they see it reflected by an alternate reality – when the mainstream media is writing the same kind of articles that appear in their student paper, and they go 'Ah, wait – this one matters'. (Damon, UCL)

This tool, however, had a limited lifespan. Once the bill passed, the press' fees-centric characterisation of the student protests rendered it effectively completed as a news story. Damon, too, acknowledged that 'there is a limit to how much you can use the *Guardian* front page as your main communications tool because they *can't* actually print it every other week'. Although protest would continue to receive large amounts of media coverage in 2011, with the Arab Spring, UK public sector protests, the English riots and the worldwide Occupy movement, student campaign groups found it harder to mobilise students on issues of higher education to the same extent that they managed in autumn 2010.

***Resuming the struggle***

Given this apparent shift in media focus, many activists chose to put their energies into mobilising for other campaigns within the wider anti-cuts movement, including UK Uncut, anti-NHS privatisation campaigns, and union protests – notably the TUC march in London on 26 March – and the public sector strike on 30 November. Such was the strength of the occupation network at UCL that it saw a further three occupations take place in the spring term, the last of which was designed as an organising space in the build-up to the TUC rally. The choice of occupation space – UCL's Registry – reflected the extent that radical protest repertoires had gained traction among those involved in the previous term's occupation. As Aitchison (2011) noted, whereas the 2010 occupation was principally a demands-based action seeking to build support on campus through multiple outreach strategies, the Registry occupation employed more 'ruptural' visions of an occupation's purpose: one which was not founded on a politics of demands (or, indeed, student outreach) and was more interested in creating its own forms of counter-power (see Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Gee, 2011). A similar display of radicalism by a group of former occupants occurred in Cambridge in November 2011, when a talk given by Minister for Universities David Willetts was shut down by students, resulting in a 30-month suspension of studies for one of its participants

(*Varsity*, 2012)[34]. Whilst such actions reflected the relationships of affinity and trust that had built up between core-members of the 2010 occupations, it arguably also reflected the extent to which they had become disconnected from the wider student body:

> People definitely became slightly ghettoized, and there were fewer people joining in as the months progressed, in that cycle between Millbank and March 26th it became much more of a group of friends. And this is a pattern that's repeated across activism movements – the idea that you have to be friends with the people you organise with, and you have to be ideologically correct and all this kind of stuff – that is quite pernicious. (Brett, UCL)

> This is something that I had an issue with, in the past year or so, which is that it's become this little clique of people who just kind of talk about things amongst themselves. (Angie, Cambridge)

To some extent, these 'cliques' were borne out of the increased *risks* incurred through their choice of protest repertoires. The experience of occupying spaces had resulted in participants being threatened with legal action, having their degree registrations terminated, and being ordered to pay legal or cleaning costs. In addition, some interviewees had been arrested during protests, and nearly all spoke of their personal connections to individuals who had received criminal charges (most of which they disputed) or had been seriously injured as a result of the London demonstrations. All were knowledgeable about high-profile court cases concerning student activists – notably Alfie Meadows and Charlie Gilmour – and many had become involved in campaigns such as Defend The Right To Protest as a result. In other words, many activists felt strongly that they had been victimised, and consequently were wary of planning and promoting their actions as openly as they had done in autumn 2010. This, together with the friendships and loyalties that had developed had the knock-on effect of making it more difficult for outsiders to join these groups or networks as equal participants. One practical illustration of this was the invitation-only 'secret Facebook group'. Although occupation groups also had larger 'public' Facebook groups which unconnected students could freely join, it was in the secret groups where the real debates and decisions were made:

> With Facebook groups, we have one which is a secret group, which has about 40 people on it, and then there is a broader one that has about 300, so I think that would be the core and periphery balance. We eventually became aware that we were being monitored from the Facebook group by security because they started turning up for our meetings, so we set up this secret group. (Raphael, Warwick)

[34] After large-scale protests from students, the sentence was later reduced to one term (*The Cambridge Student*, 2012).

> We have a [Facebook] page where we broadcast messages, and there's the secret group, which in a way isn't very healthy – it's a terrible way of organising. (Damon, UCL)

As Raphael suggests, these groups were initially set up so as to avoid university management being able to monitor their plans. When in occupation, students involved had been freely added to this group, but by 2011 it had become a de facto secret planning group. This symbolised the barriers put up against students who wanted to join the group, but had not been involved in the original occupation. One such student was Danny, who as we saw in chapter five had attended the NUS demonstration but felt insufficiently connected socially to get involved in the Edinburgh occupation. Having read up on issues around austerity politics and attended local marches and actions, he began to strengthen his social ties to activists who had been involved in the 2010 occupation, some of whom had since set up a slate for upcoming student union elections on a 'free education' platform. Through these actions, he recalled a 'growing acceptance of who I was and what my political beliefs were', but this remained subject to the overcoming of certain barriers of affinity and trust:

> So there's a secret Facebook page and that's where a lot of organising used to happen. It used to be quite a little hub and I wasn't let on it for several months just to make sure I was alright – if I'm a cop I'm not going to tell you, right? (laughs) […] It's very much the case that if you've got connections then they assume you're good, whereas if they've seen you around campus, they sort of know who you are but they don't really know your politics it takes a while to get their trust, which I felt a little bit alienating to be honest. (Danny, Edinburgh)

A related hurdle to the recruitment of new participants was also found in the way existing members had developed their own political views. Although the 2010 occupations had seen political differences put to one side for the collective pursuit of anti-fees goals, many activists were still involved in other groups and campaigns. Over time, occupation groups developed certain consensus views on a wide range of issues, including gender politics, foreign policy and the environment, among others. Interviewees from one university recalled an incident where a student requested to join their free education group (which had evolved out of the occupation). The group responded by calling a private emergency meeting to discuss whether they should be allowed to do so. The reason for this was that some members – who were also active in Students Justice For Palestine (SJP) – had accused the student of being a Zionist. Whilst the evidence for this claim was disputed by some members, the group's SJP members considered his views tantamount to apologism for (Israeli) violence, and thus a violation of the group's 'safer spaces' principle. With no consensus reached, the student was ultimately refused membership.

Some members expressed their regret over the way the issue was handled, admitting that the decision and the way it was handled had made the group look 'scary' and 'alienating' to outsiders. The relevance of the issue to *higher education* was also considered a problem, especially given that the group apparently had no official position on Israel-Palestine politics. This example, along with Danny's belated entry into the Edinburgh occupation's 'secret Facebook group', both arguably illustrate some of the more problematic consequences of an 'outcome-based' collective identity: for individuals who consider themselves part of the same movement but are outside certain schemes of experience, their integration into these networks is compromised. Although there was nothing 'official' to stop either individual from joining the free education group, the broad underlying political consensuses which had developed out of the sustained interaction of its core members posited certain *invisible* criteria to apparent 'outsiders'.

There is, of course, an irony to these 'clique' issues given that one of the key successes of the 2010 occupations was their mobilising of students with little or no prior activism experience. Within the space of a year, however, students involved in these core occupation groups matured as activists with considerable speed. Although this points to wildly different experiences of the student protests between high-cost/risk participants and the rest, occupations on a practical level were more concerned with building a multi-repertoire student movement than a population of occupiers. Testing the basis for a cross-repertoire collective identity will be the focus of the final section.

## 4. Participating in the student protests: measuring shared experiences and solidarities

Throughout this research, we have seen certain consistencies and inconsistencies when comparing the political views of participants. In chapter 4 (figure 4.21), the survey found that the vast majority of low, medium and high-cost/risk participants were united in their belief that access to an affordable university education is a right not a privilege, and that parties should always be held accountable for election pledges once elected to government. Consensus began to fragment, however, when it came to assessing certain political policy solutions, as well as attitudes towards the democratic process. Although these statistics do not demonstrate any *causal* effects, they do posit certain limitations in the extent to which protest participants might have shared a collective sense of 'we', at least beyond a desire to use collective action to force Parliament to vote down the fees bill. Moreover, we have seen in accounts of participating in occupations and large-scale demonstrations that these experiences had a transformative effect for many of the students involved – generating

strong feelings of empowerment, emotion, solidarity and commitment – feelings which were sometimes difficult to translate to low or medium-cost/risk participants. This opens up questions about the differing *experiences* of participation students had, and thus warrants further consideration through comparative survey data analysis.

***Comparing high, medium and low-cost/risk participation***

Figure 6.1 compares high, medium and low-cost/risk participants' reasons for participating in the student protests. Given their broad endorsement of most of the statements put to them – barely any respondents outright disagreed – it compares the extent to which each category *strongly* agreed. This uncovered a consistent trend in which higher-cost/risk participants were more likely to strongly support statements, though the disparity between high and low-cost/risk agreement varied. The biggest disparity (of 30 per cent) is found in the statement regarding the need to pressurise universities into publically opposing fees. This reflects the fact that occupations often appealed directly to university management to publically oppose higher fees in their list of demands. Moreover, as we saw earlier in this chapter, this purpose proved difficult for occupants to explain to sceptical visitors. This suggests that low and medium-cost/risk participants were less clear-minded in their protest *targets* than high-cost/risk participants – it is noticeable, for instance, that both considered the more general notion of 'raising awareness' as considerably more important than directly pressurising politicians or universities.

Considering the last chapter's emphasis on social networks in protest mobilisation, it is perhaps surprising that the participation of 'friends and people I respected' should score comparatively poorly as a reason for participation. Although by no means an unpopular answer – more than 60 per cent of respondents agreed across all three categories – it clearly pales in comparison to the other available options. This may be a failing of the survey question, as it creates a false equivalency in situating a 'supply-side' reason in a list of reasons which are otherwise all directly political.  In other words, regardless of political background respondents are unlikely to identify the participation of 'friends and people I respected' as *more* important than the political cause – as we saw in the cases of Danny, Jeremy and Donna, their friends' involvement functioned more as the tipping-point to their own participation than the principal reason itself. This supports Klandermans's (1992) argument that strong identification makes participation more likely, but it does not necessarily capture *how* participation became more realisable for students, especially those with little prior activism experience. Consequently, these sorts of paths and barriers are arguably better captured through the qualitative research found in chapter five – both in

terms of high-cost/risk participation found through occupation recruitment, and in low-cost/risk participation typified by the forwarding of Facebook pages and e-petitions.

**Figure 6.1** Comparing high, medium and low-cost/risk participants' reasons for taking part in the student protests

| | % High-cost/risk participants strongly agree | % Medium-cost/risk participants strongly agree | % Low-cost/risk participants strongly agree | % Total participants strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I want to express my views | 75.4% | 72.2% | 57.8% | 65.7% |
| We must pressurise politicians into making things change | 80.0% | 67.9% | 55.2% | 63.3% |
| We must raise public awareness | 83.1% | 80.0% | 57.7% | 76.9% |
| I wanted to express my solidarity with fellow students | 70.3% | 54.2% | 43.5% | 51.1% |
| Friends and people I respected were also getting involved | 36.9% | 34.0% | 22.8% | 29.1% |
| Students need to pressurise universities into publically opposing fees | 83.1% | 60.4% | 53.0% | 59.8% |
| It is important that students are part of a wider anti-cuts movement | 83.1% | 69.4% | 56.7% | 65.1% |

N=553 (excluding when respondents did not answer certain questions).
Question: If you HAVE taken part in the protests, how much do the following statements capture your reasons for protesting?

Statements related to collective identity – e.g. acting in solidarity with fellow students, becoming part of a wider anti-cuts movement – elicit much stronger support from high-cost/risk participants in figure 6.1, reflecting the networks of trust and commitment forged through involvement in occupations and the like. Whilst the existence of UK-wide student and anti-cuts campaigns were hardly a secret, it raises the question of whether low-cost/risk participants had fewer meaningful interactions with other participants than medium or high-cost/risk participants. Certainly, the repertoires used to define the latter are more social in nature, and as we saw in the last chapter (figure 5.11) low-cost/risk participants appeared notably less-connected to other activists than medium and high-cost/risk participants.

This supports the earlier argument that the protests produced *layers* of collective identification based on the costs and risks that students' participation typically incurred. Further supporting evidence can be found in figure 6.2, which compares the experience of participation with the costs and risks typically involved. The vast majority of high-cost/risk participants found their experience of protest to have been enjoyable, and a source of pride, even if only around half also felt that the experience had made them feel positive about the power of protest. This suggests that for high-cost/risk participants, the experience of protest

has positive effects that make further participation worthwhile irrespective of its political successes or failures – a point perhaps illustrated by Warwick student Ronnie's admission that participating in the 9 December demonstration represented 'the most empowered I've ever felt in my life'. Moreover, the ostensible failure of the protests appears not to have deterred three-quarters of high-cost/risk participants from stating their preparedness to protest on similar issues in the future. A similar amount of pride could also be found among medium-cost/risk participants, which indicates that feelings of collective identity extended beyond occupation groups. However, such feelings only extended to around half of low-cost/risk participants: whilst 82.2 per cent claimed to have 'felt good' about their personal contribution, less than half claimed to have actually 'enjoyed' participating.

These findings point to a clear divide in the social and personal *consequences* of protest participation between high and low-cost/risk participants. Less than half of the latter claimed to have become more politically knowledgeable, gained a strong sense of solidarity with fellow protesters, or felt more positive about the power of protest as a consequence of their participation. Moreover, only 12.1 per cent claimed that their experience led to them making more friends when the corresponding figure for high-cost/risk participants is 69.2 per cent. This correlation implies that friendship-forming and feelings of collective identity are mutually reinforcing. The scale of new friendships made also suggests that the more trust-heavy protest repertoires were not the sole preserve of already-experienced and socially-connected activists. This recalls students' earlier accounts of occupations bringing together different overlapping networks, and allowing for unlikely friendships and affinities to develop (e.g. Justine and Noel at the UCL occupation).

Given the fact that experiences of protest might be positive or negative, respondents were asked if they had any regrets about their participation. Overall, the vast majority reported no regrets in getting involved. Given this broad consensus, it is interesting that 22.2 per cent of low-cost/risk participants admitted wishing that they had expressed their views on the fees issue 'in a different way' – more than both other categories and twice that of high-cost/risk participants. One can hypothesise that these participants might have liked to have undertaken more costly or risky activities than they ended up doing, which given the findings of the previous chapter, may reflect a lack of network connectedness.

**Figure 6.2** Comparing high, medium and low-cost/risk participants' experiences of, and attitudes towards taking part in the student protests

| | % High-cost/risk participants agree | % Medium-cost/risk participant agree | % Low-cost/risk participants agree | % Total participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| It felt good to do something about an issue important to me | 95.3% | 97.4% | 82.2% | 89.8% |
| My involvement has made me more politically knowledgeable | 87.7% | 69.1% | 52.6% | 63.8% |
| My involvement has led to me making new friends | 69.2% | 35.6% | 12.1% | 28.9% |
| Overall, I enjoyed getting involved in the student protests | 96.9% | 82.2% | 46.3% | 67.3% |
| I am proud to be part of a UK-wide student movement | 86.2% | 81.6% | 54.8% | 69.5% |
| My involvement has made me feel positive about the power of protest | 50.0% | 43.2% | 29.8% | 37.7% |
| I wish I had expressed my views on the student fees issue in a different way | 9.2% | 16.7% | 22.2% | 18.2% |
| I now regret getting involved in the student protests | 6.2% | 5.2% | 3.9% | 4.7% |
| The student protests will be remembered more for violence than politics | 35.4% | 52.5% | 63.3% | 55.7% |
| The student protests have made me more prepared to protest on issues of importance to me in the future | 75.4% | 72.9% | 46.3% | 59.1% |

N=553 (excluding when respondents did not answer certain questions).
Questions: If you HAVE taken part in the protests, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?; This question is for all respondents. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

As found in chapter five, networks played a key part in how different students responded to the events of Millbank at the 2010 NUS demonstration. Although 'violence' is not defined in the question, it is perhaps telling that whereas 52.5 per cent of medium and 63.3 per cent of low-cost/risk participants agreed that 'the student protests will be remembered more for violence than politics', only 35.4 per cent of high-cost/risk participants agreed with this view. Continuing with this theme, figure 6.3 compares participants' general trust in state bodies. Trust in the UK Government is unsurprisingly low for all three participation categories. The slightly higher percentage of trust among low-cost/risk participants supports findings in chapter four (figure 4.21) which indicated that they were less likely to treat the fees issue in ideological terms than medium or high-cost/risk participants. Complementing this apparent ideological separation is the different forms of knowledge flowing between high and medium-cost/risk participants. In particular, high-cost/risk participants display

remarkably low levels of police trust – 46.2 per cent claimed to '*strongly* distrust' the police, with 70.8 per cent distrusting overall[35].

**Figure 6.3** Comparing high, medium and low-cost/risk participants' trust in the UK Government and police

| | % High-cost/risk participants trust | % Medium-cost/risk participants trust | % Low-cost/risk participants trust |
|---|---|---|---|
| UK Government | 6.2% | 13.5% | 19.6% |
| The Police | 18.5% | 42.5% | 54.1% |

N=553.
Question: Please indicate, in general, how much you trust each of the following.

This disparity arguably reflects the nature of the protest activities undertaken by high-cost/risk participants and the sorts of insider information pooled and distributed between participants. As noted earlier, many high-cost/risk participants recalled first-hand experiences of police violence in interviews, along with friends who had faced criminal prosecutions following their involvement in the London demonstrations. With information related to certain cases being shared across activism networks, it is perhaps unsurprising that high-cost/risk participants developed a strong distrust of the police. One such case is recalled by Brett:

> I had this sort of 'idea' that the police lied all the time, and now I've seen them *repeatedly* lie systematically, to try and send people I know, like, friends, to prison. Like one friend, they said he assaulted a police officer. Six police officers went on record in court saying he assaulted a police officer. The defence kept a piece of evidence on YouTube – they said 'Take it down and keep it till the day of the trial, and allow the coppers to perjure themselves and then produce the video'. And the video showed it was the copper assaulting him! And it was like, 'In light of new evidence that has cast *significant* doubt in the testimony of the officers we are going to be withdrawing the prosecution'. We were, like, pissing ourselves, but probably no repercussions for those police officers. (Brett, UCL)

For an impression of how much participants diverged in their experiences of the police, it is worth comparing this quote to those of Laura and Hayley in chapter five. The divergence of information and experiences being shared among different social networks is also reflected in figure 6.4, which shows that a higher proportion of high and medium-cost/risk participants considered themselves aware of cuts taking place at their own university than low-cost/risk participants. Although it is not possible to test if cuts actually *were* taking place at each university – such information may not have been widely reported in the national or local press – the *perception* is nevertheless significant: whereas only 10.8 per cent of high-

[35] p=0.00.

cost/risk participants admit to being unsure of the answer, the figure is 44.5 for low-cost/risk participants. In other words, high-cost/risk participants were more likely to belong to networks where more specific grievances and forms of campaign information were shared and discussed.

**Figure 6.4** Comparing students' knowledge of local university cuts with participatory cost/risk

| | | Low-cost/risk participants | Medium-cost/risk participants | High-cost/risk participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Are you aware of any recent/ongoing cases of cuts being made at your own university? | Yes | 53.0% | 63.5% | 89.2% |
| | No | 2.5% | 2.0% | 0.0% |
| | Don't know | 44.5% | 34.5% | 10.8% |

N=553. Note: Percentages by column.

## 5. Conclusion

The extent to which collective identity was felt by participants in the student protests has been a key consideration for this study: not only does it help explain why some people chose to continue participating after the tuition fees vote, it also represents a key question for determining whether the student protests constitute a *social movement*. According to Diani and Bison (2004: 283), a strong, enduring collective identity is essential to elevating movements beyond a specific event, campaign or coalition. This distinction also recalls Tilly's famous definition of social movements as consisting of 'a *sustained* series of interactions between power-holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation' (Tilly, 1984: 306; emphasis added). On this basis, for the student protests against fees and cuts to constitute a movement it would have to show evidence of having extended its grievances beyond opposition to trebled tuition fees, and its collective action beyond the parliamentary vote. Moreover, the construction of a strong and durable collective identity would provide the motor for further campaigns against the marketisation of higher education.

This chapter has argued that the student protests produced multiple layers of collective identity, each varying in its social effects and life-span. Adapting Gamson's (1991) definition, one can draw basic distinctions between identities formed around the community (in this case, the students), specific groups and organisations (the NUS, student unions, individual occupations) and the overarching anti-fees campaign. Authors such as Hunt and Benford (2004) claim that further layers of identification might also operate in between these levels, and given that this chapter discussed the cores and peripheries within *occupation*

participation, the student protests were no different. Whether this can be aggregated into an overall *movement-level* collective identity, however, is questionable: not only did distinct and sometimes conflicting identities emerge from different forms of participation, these identities were shaped in different ways by the time-dependence of the £9,000 fees grievance.

One can perhaps claim that the student protests succeeded in building a basic-level collective identity among the majority of participating students. Survey findings indicate that feelings of collective identity – measured by respondents' feelings of pride in belonging to a wider student movement – extended to 69.5 per cent of all participants, with 51.1 per cent citing the desire to act in solidarity with other students as a motivating factor in their participation. Such feelings of collective identity did not reach at least half of low-cost/risk participants, however, and explaining this necessitates going deeper into comparing students' *experiences* of protest participation.

Perhaps inevitably, collective identity experiences were generally strongest and most durable among high-cost/risk participants. This owed to the specific and sometimes unique experiences students shared – be they sleeping in lecture rooms, negotiating threats from university management, communicating with national and international media, being 'kettled' at national demonstrations, confronting police, or having friends receive serious injuries. Not only were these experiences instrumental in generating strong affinities and relations of trust between participants – thus creating an 'outcome' collective identity – they arguably created a participatory legacy quite removed from that of low-cost/risk participants. This is borne out in survey data, which found that high (and to a lesser extent, medium) cost/risk participants felt better-equipped to protest again as a result of their experience. For high-cost/risk participants especially, this was evidenced in the way they took higher education campaigns into 2011 – either through forming union election slates with an anti-cuts mandate, or taking increasingly radical forms of direct action – notably UCL's occupation of the University Registry and Cambridge's shutting down of the David Willetts talk.

In contrast, low-cost/risk participants – who made up the majority of participants overall – had comparatively little in the way of a 'transformative' political experience. This may have reflected the fact that the forms of participation they typically undertook – e.g. signing petitions, liking Facebook pages – tended to draw less on strong, sustained, face-to-face social interactions. This meant they gained comparatively little in the way of affinity ties, political knowledge or feelings of enjoyment from their involvement. Moreover, there was

evidence of dis-identification from other students, with some feeling uncomfortable with high-cost/risk participants' choice of tactics, as well as the attitudes and 'lifestyles' of the individuals involved.

Differences were also found in how students framed their own participation. Survey data found that high and medium-cost/risk participants displayed a clear sense of their intended audience – the Government, local MPs, university management – whereas for low-cost/risk participants their action was borne out of a more generic need to 'raise awareness'. In some ways, this complements findings from chapter four (figure 4.10) which indicated that whilst the majority of (general index) low-cost/risk participants saw political participation as part of a citizen's duty, less than half felt it could change UK Government policy. In this sense, low-cost/risk participants' activity choices were arguably indicative of a desire to do *something* in a similar vein to the narratives of self-preservation described in Norgaard's (2006) study.

Despite these differences and tensions, occupation groups were keen to 'talk' a student-wide collective identity into existence through their media work and numerous protest actions. Given the shared grievance of £9,000 fees, augmented by the betrayal felt by many regarding the Liberal Democrats' u-turn and the large numbers of students participating across a range of different repertoires, autumn 2010 in many ways represented a perfect storm. Under these shared grievances, the protests saw the participation of anarchists, Trotskyists, Labour supporters, Liberal Democrat voters, and students with little or no prior activism experience. During this time, this unlikely coalition operated as a highly effective protest campaign. Whether the protests constituted a *movement*, however, is more doubtful. Given Tilly's emphasis on sustained engagement, and Diani and Bison's on a collective identity that is not reducible to a single campaign, the student protests against fees and cuts arguably fall short. Whilst the campaign-level collective identity was strong enough to maintain broad coherence in the run-up to the parliamentary vote, it rested on the shared goal of forcing Parliament to vote down the fees bill. As soon as the bill passed, the conditions for a movement-wide collective identity evaporated, leaving a smaller network of high-cost/risk participants brought together and radicalised through the occupations and demonstrations to take the protests into 2011, albeit on a reduced scale.

Although the protests lacked the strength of collective identity and broader political goals to build a mass student movement, for participants such as Damon, John and Eric, the 2010 fees protests had been the latest instalment in the long-term narrative of student higher education campaigns. In this respect, NCAFC represent the current torchbearers for a small

but enduring ‘free education’ movement that extends back to the 1990s (see chapter one)[36]. Whilst the autumn 2010 protests failed to sustain mass-participation, it nevertheless succeeded in expanding the support-base for the free education movement (as well as the broader anti-cuts movement): all were involved in follow-up occupations in 2011, and most had become involved in union politics or NCAFC with the intention of building a strong organisational base to promote the principle of free education on their respective campuses, and across the UK.

Of course, one may argue that this represents a very niche sub-movement given the scale of participation in the autumn 2010 protests. This reflects the significant strength of students' opposition to trebled tuition fees during this time. In this context, it also bears thinking how much support the protests gained from *non*-participants, especially given the tactical and social dis-identifications which emerged among those who did take part. This brings us to questions fundamental to this research project, namely why the vast majority of students chose not to participate in the student protests *at all*. This will be a focus for the next chapter.

[36] The endurance of a free education group in UK student politics owes, in part, to the wider NUS system and electoral process. Following on from CFE and ENS, NCAFC positions itself as the campaign group responsible for maintaining a free education voice within NUS. In practical terms, this involves putting candidates forward for NUS elections, and holding information stalls at the annual conference. This effectively operates as an ‘abeyance structure’, giving campaign groups a purpose and continuity in spite of the constant cohort turnover and occasional fallow periods for fees-based collective action frames.

# Chapter 7

# Exploring non-participation: opposition, dis-identification and the ‘caring but not committed’

## 1. Introduction

Non-participation has been a theme throughout this study, but so far has tended to be used as a means of comparison with participants. The purpose of this chapter is to consider non-participation as a social and political category in its own right. Whilst non-participation – especially among young people – has recently become an area of study in the political sciences, this work has tended to focus on emerging gaps between patterns of engagement and public policy (e.g. Marsh et al, 2007; Pattie et al, 2004; O’Toole et al, 2003; Loncle et al, 2012). These studies have been important for reframing the debate to include ‘supply-side’ as well as ‘demand-side’ factors (Hay, 2007: 56), but arguably they undervalue the possibility that non-participation might also be *socially produced* at an agency level. To some extent, this has been addressed in rational choice theories of participation (e.g. Olson, 1965; McCarthy and Zald, 1977), which presuppose that non-participation is a product of the incompatibility of a group’s goals and an actor’s personal interests. Yet, as we saw in chapter two, this perspective does not fully flesh out the *social context* of non-participants’ decision-making, nor whether rational ‘decisions’ have even been made.

The shortcomings in political science approaches to non-participation have inspired more sociological approaches. Some studies have directly addressed non-participation (e.g. Norgaard, 2006; Oegema and Klandermans, 1994; Eliasoph, 1998), and an applying and expanding these may help us to understand not only how non-participants differ from participants, but also how non-participation is produced and sustained in everyday life. As we have seen in the past two chapters, the role of counter-networks (and accompanying counter-grievances) held back some politically-disposed students from getting involved in certain activities, when other, less-engaged students seemed to convert their political sympathies into action *because of* their network position. Moreover, in chapter six we saw how some students *dis-identified* with activist groups because of the protest repertoires they used, and the socio-political ‘lifestyles’ that members seemingly practiced. This suggests ‘supply-side’ factors in students’ non-participation at a campus as well as governmental

level, where encounters with political actors generate feelings of wariness or hostility. In this sense, if collective identity helps to produce and sustain participation, collective *dis-identification* may help to produce and sustain *non-participation*.

This raises interesting questions about how non-participants might be studied as a group, albeit one that operates mostly 'in itself' rather than 'for itself'. Given that this research has focused on general and case study-specific aspects of non-participation, this chapter consists of two substantive sections. The first uses survey data to compare different types of students who did not participate in the student protests. This involves a comparative analysis of students who identified themselves as 'supportive', 'unsupportive' and 'undecided', with interview data from each category used to illustrate and expand on emerging themes. The second section uses these themes as a basis for studying individuals who might be considered as 'caring but not committed'. This draws on material specific to the fees and cuts case study, as well as findings related to political groups and campaigns in general.

## 2. Non-participation in the student protests: trends and experiences of the 'supportive', 'unsupportive' and 'undecided'

***Exploring non-participation trends***

Analysing non-participants in the survey gives us plenty to work with, as they represent a total of 1,932 respondents – 77.7 per cent of the sample. According to figure 7.1, around two-thirds of non-participants 'broadly supported' the student protests, with only 15.3 per cent – 11.9 per cent of students overall – claiming to be outright opposed. This provides further evidence not only of majority opposition to higher fees, but also widespread support for the protests themselves. As shown in chapter six, a key issue of struggle for occupations was the extent to which they could claim the support of a 'silent majority' of students on campus. Although this can broadly be taken as validation of occupants' claims, it does not necessarily reflect widespread support of the *occupations* per se: after all, protest participation featured layers of collective identification that varied according to certain ideological standpoints, not to mention protest tactics favoured. Nevertheless, as a basic level of collective identification one can combine percentages of participants (22.3 per cent) and supportive non-participants (51 per cent) to claim that 73.3 per cent of students overall were positively disposed towards the protests.

**Figure 7.1** Non-participants' attitudes towards the student protests

| | No. of students | % of non-participants | % of students overall |
|---|---|---|---|
| Supportive of the student protests | 1,268 | 65.6% | 51.0% |
| Unsupportive of the student protests | 296 | 15.3% | 11.9% |
| Undecided | 343 | 17.8% | 13.8% |

N=1,932 (excluding respondents who 'did not answer').
Question: If you have NOT participated in the student protests, do you broadly support students' campaigns and protests on the issue?

Before breaking down analysis into the three categories of support, it is useful to consider non-participants in the student protests as an overall group. Chapter four discussed the demographic differences between participants and non-participants found in the survey, with the former group featuring a higher proportion of students studying the social sciences, undergraduates in their second year or above, UK-domiciles, and students identifying as working class (see chapter four, figure 4.15). Comparing demographics of supportive, unsupportive and undecided students (shown in figure 7.1), we can see that a much higher proportion of male students opposed the student protests than female students. There appears to be no single explanation for this, although it is notable that a higher proportion of non-participating male students studied science subjects (46 per cent) than female students (37.6 per cent[37]). We will return to analysis of gender patterns among supportive non-participants in the next section.

**Figure 7.2** Comparing social demographics of supportive, unsupportive and undecided non-participants

| | Supported protests | Did not support | Undecided |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male (N=573) | 59.9% | 24.1% | 16.1% |
| Female (N=1,322) | 69.5% | 11.9% | 18.6% |
| UK students (N=1,581) | 68.1% | 15.7% | 16.3% |
| EU students (N=152) | 66.4% | 11.8% | 21.7% |
| Non-EU students (N=170) | 51.2% | 17.6% | 31.2% |
| Upper middle class (N=577) | 60.5%** | 19.1%** | 20.5%** |
| Lower middle class (N=782) | 69.1%** | 13.8%** | 17.1%** |
| Working class (N=348) | 73.0%** | 12.1%** | 14.9%** |
| No class identification (N=183) | 61.2%** | 18.6%** | 20.2%** |

N=1,932 (excluding respondents who 'did not answer'). Note: Percentages by row. **p<0.05.

Chapter four also discussed findings that non-EU international students were significantly underrepresented among protest participants, with only 6 per cent taking part. Figure 7.2 shows that just over half of non-EU non-participants were supportive, with 31.2 per cent 'undecided'. Whilst their majority support might be attributable to the fact that international

[37] p=0.00.

students normally pay fees at least twice as high compared to UK and EU students, their low conversion rate to participation – together, perhaps, with their high proportion of 'undecided' – might reflect their lesser degree of network connectedness on campus, thus reducing students' *opportunities* for engagement and participation. This disconnectedness relates to two things: first, the propensity for universities to house international students in separate halls of residence to UK students; and second, the existence of certain cultural boundaries that make integration into UK university life more difficult for international students, especially those from non-English-speaking countries. Schweisfurth and Gu (2009: 468) observe from interviews with UK-based international students that they often felt alienated by the social practices of the home student body, especially the focus around 'drinking alcohol' and 'clubbing'. The end result is that 'students may self-select into peer groups consisting mainly of people from their own, or similar cultures' whilst avoiding 'intercultural' situations. This tendency was observed by Rhiannon, a non-EU protest participant and international representative for her student union:

> A lot of universities basically segregate international students. So when I was in halls – but flats – in my first year all my flatmates were international students… It became this insular thing where they just hung out with each other. I would meet international students 6-8 months into my course and they had not met a Scottish person! (Rhiannon, Edinburgh)

Rhiannon's political background, combined with her network access to politically-active UK students on campus led to her joining the autumn 2010 occupation, which in turn, helped her go on to become strongly involved in fees and cuts campaigns at Edinburgh. Yet her participation was still to some extent constrained by her visa status, which unlike the majority of her activist friends, placed much higher levels of risk on her involvement in certain protest activities. Moreover, in her role as union representative, she recognised how these constraints limited opportunities for international students' mobilisation for medium or high-cost/risk activism – even when it related to grievances specific to this group:

> Mobilising [non-EU students] is almost impossible, so it's all petitions and all anonymous things. I want to go out and picket the UKBA but no-one will do it, and in fairness I probably wouldn't either […] I'm on a student visa, which is why all my interest in things like Millbank is very academic – I'm *never* going to do anything like that because the second I'm near a policeman I'm like, 'fuck, I'm going to get deported', and have to stay at the back with a camera and be like, 'I'm just a journalist' or something. (Rhiannon, Edinburgh)

To some extent, non-EU international students' network position is reflected in survey data shown in figure 7.3. With disconnectedness measured by *not* being invited to participate by friends or groups, and not knowing *any* participants, it is noticeable that EU students were

not significantly less-connected to the student protests than UK students, whereas non-EU students are around ten per cent adrift of the rest. Although international categories draw on substantially smaller sample sizes, findings indicate that non-EU students may have been less connected through social media to receive Facebook invites from active students, or know UK or EU-based course colleagues well enough to be aware of their protest participation.

**Figure 7.3** Comparing network disconnectedness to the student protests according to domicile

| | Not invited to participate | Knew nobody who participated |
|---|---|---|
| UK students (N=2,104) | 28.1%** | 40.7%** |
| Other EU students (N=193) | 30.6%** | 41.5%** |
| Non-EU students (N=184) | 38.6%** | 50.0%** |

N=2,485. **p<0.05.
Question: Have you been invited to participate in the student protests against fees by any of the following? Yes/no binary aggregated from the following available options: student union; course colleagues; friends from your university; friends from other universities; Facebook group/event invitation. How many people (other than yourself) do you know personally who have participated in the student protests against fees at your university?

Figure 7.3 also indicates that network disconnectedness affects participatory opportunities for UK as well as international students. We can see from figure 7.4 that two-thirds of supportive non-participants had at least been *invited* to participate, and this suggests the majority of supportive non-participants did not lack opportunities to get involved. However, figure 7.4 also shows that 47.8 per cent of all supportive non-participants did not *personally* know anybody who participated.

**Figure 7.4** Non-participants' invitations and connectedness to the student protests

| | | Supported student protests (N=1,268) | Did not support student protests (N=296) | Undecided over student protests (N=343) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Have you been invited to participate in the student protests against fees by any of the following? | Invited | 68.0% | 61.1% | 54.5% |
| | Not invited | 32.0% | 38.9% | 45.5% |
| How many people (other than yourself) do you know personally who have participated in the student protests against fees at your university? | Nobody | 47.8% | 45.9% | 56.3% |
| | One person | 8.3% | 11.5% | 9.9% |
| | 2-4 people | 25.2% | 27.7% | 19.5% |
| | 5 people or more | 18.7% | 14.9% | 14.3% |

N=1,932. Note: Percentages by column.
Question: Have you been invited to participate in the student protests against fees by any of the following? Yes/no binary aggregated from the following available options: student union; course colleagues; friends from your university; friends from other universities; Facebook group/event invitation.

As we saw in chapter five, personal connections to prospective participants appeared a much stronger pathway to participation than the receipt of anonymous mass-invitations through Facebook or student union mailing lists. This suggests that nearly half of supportive non-participants (a quarter of the total survey population) felt little social encouragement or pressure to participate in the protests from their friendship groups on campus, even if they were aware that protest events were taking place. This is clearly evidenced in the accounts of Christine, a 'supportive' non-participant, and Cynthia, an 'undecided' non-participant.

> In terms of Edinburgh, I suppose I don't have many friends, but I didn't really hear anybody saying 'We're going to the student protests' or 'We went to the student protests', so I wasn't just going to go along… I was just doing my thing in college that day. (Christine, Edinburgh)

> I read a bit about it, I don't think I discussed it with many people. There were a few marches I think… I don't remember much of the details. I didn't go on any of them. I think my problem at that time was that I didn't know people around. (Cynthia, Cambridge)

Whereas Christine was supportive of the protests but lacked a network context through which to get involved, Cynthia was 'undecided', and therefore depicted her disconnectedness in terms of not being able to *discuss* the fees issue with others and form an opinion of it. As we saw in chapter five, Cynthia admitted that she saw politics as something of a taboo subject, and would avoid discussing it if she felt that the other person was 'not particularly willing to bring it up in conversation'. This, she felt, strongly reflected her upbringing where

politics was never discussed at home. Looking at figure 7.5, it is striking that supportive and undecided non-participants have very similar political backgrounds, with just over a third claiming to have grown up in households where politics was discussed at least 'fairly often'. Unsupportive non-participants, on the other hand, have political backgrounds that generally sit between supportive/undecided participants and participants. This would indicate that the unsupportive had more 'political' reasons for not participating in the protests – reasons that we shall explore in more detail shortly.

**Figure 7.5** Comparing participants and non-participants' political background and discussion of politics

| | | Non-participants | | | Participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Supportive | Unsupportive | Undecided | Participated |
| At the time when you were growing up, how often was politics discussed at home? | Regularly/fairly often | 36.2%** | 43.6%** | 38.8%** | 49.7%** |
| | Rarely/never | 33.8%** | 28.0%** | 31.5%** | 23.3%** |
| How often do you discuss politics? | Regularly/fairly often | 43.0%** | 52.7%** | 37.0%** | 63.8%** |
| | Rarely/never | 26.7%** | 21.3%** | 31.2%** | 13.2%** |

N=2,485. **p<0.05.

Drawing on survey data from each specific category, as well as interview data from students who fell into each category, the following discussion is separated into the three categories non-participants identified with: 'supportive' of the student protests, 'unsupportive' and 'undecided'. This allows us to explore some of the political as well as sociological reasons for students' non-participation.

### *'Supportive' non-participants*

This category is arguably at the heart of the research project, as out of all the subsections studied in the fees case study – low, medium and high-cost/risk participants; supportive, unsupportive and undecided non-participants – supportive non-participants are by some distance the largest (51 per cent of the total survey population). Figure 7.6 looks at supportive non-participants' reasons for not taking part. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the claim of being 'too busy with academic work' is strongest at 64.1 per cent. Ostensibly, there is some evidence for a rational choice interpretation here, with a third admitting that the issue did not personally affect them, and 37.7 per cent agreeing that their involvement would not have made any difference. This feeling was reflected in some ways by Julian (Leeds) and Rick (Edinburgh), both of whom had friends on the NUS demonstration, but felt that they were too busy with their studies to take part:

> At the time I was just like, I'm going to just go do some work – there's no point in me going down, it's a waste of time, I've got better things to do essentially. [My friends] didn't think very much of that attitude – especially coming from a politics student! [Protest] is effective, but only if enough people take part… and obviously it's a bit contradictory for me to say 'It works only if enough people take part so I'm not gonna go', but at the same time for some reason I've got the attitude that all those other people are going on the demonstration so I don't need to be there. (Julian, Leeds)

> I knew lots of people who went down to London but I was kind of thinking that I wanted to keep on with my studies, and also thinking that I had a bad feeling about what was going to happen with these protests, when you see the amount of policeman riding into students and stuff – I was thinking that I didn't want to go down and get involved in that at the moment, it's a bit too dangerous. That's just self-preservation, but I definitely felt that the protests were good. (Rick, Edinburgh)

**Figure 7.6** Reasons for supporters' non-participation in the student protests

| | Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| The student fees issue is not important enough for me to protest | 14.6% | 14.5% | 71.0% |
| I feel that I do not know enough about the student fees issue to make an informed decision | 27.3% | 13.1% | 59.6% |
| I was undecided about how good or bad the Government's proposals were | 21.8% | 16.8% | 61.4% |
| I support the Government's changes to Higher Education funding | 3.9% | 13.1% | 83.0% |
| I was too busy with academic work to participate | 64.1% | 15.5% | 20.4% |
| I didn't participate because the fees and funding issue does not personally affect me | 33.4% | 12.6% | 54.0% |
| Personal commitments (job, family etc) prevent me from participating in the protests | 44.6% | 20.3% | 35.1% |
| I am concerned about clashing with police and/or getting arrested during student protest marches | 48.0% | 15.5% | 36.5% |
| I do not approve of the protest tactics used by students | 34.7% | 30.0% | 35.4% |
| I do not personally identify with or feel comfortable around the people involved in the protests | 33.8% | 25.6% | 40.6% |
| My involvement wouldn't have made any difference | 37.7% | 25.7% | 36.6% |
| It is right to protest against public sector cuts, but wrong to prioritise the student cause | 17.4% | 31.9% | 50.7% |
| The student protests were not radical enough | 8.5% | 25.5% | 66.0% |

N=1,268 (excluding respondents who 'did not answer'). Note: Percentages by row.
Question: If you have NOT participated in the student protests, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Although focusing on academic work is by no means an illegitimate reason for non-participation, it is not necessarily one that distinguishes participants from non-participants – after all, the 'barrier' of study time should affect all students (at least in theory). Nor is it necessarily the case that non-participants were any less 'affected' by the fees increase than

those who participated – especially since the £9,000 fees cap did not directly affect any students at university when the survey was distributed. Nevertheless, this and 'being too busy' should not necessarily be taken at face-value, as they may reflect a difference in students' *priorities*. As we saw in chapter five, both Julian and Rick admitted to having little in the way of an 'active' political background growing up, and, as political science students, tended to view politics more from an abstract 'academic' perspective. Moreover, Rick's earlier mention of concerns about violence at the NUS demonstration also reflects his more general tendency to consider protest in 'rational' rather than 'emotional' terms:

> I really tend to think through the pros and cons of doing something, and I try to put my personal feelings on the back-burner a bit more, I think – it's like, 'Do I want to be spending a lot of time in St Andrews Square protesting, or should I really be working on my dissertation' or 'Do I want to stay in the warm more than I want to do that?' (Rick, Edinburgh)

Although Rick's comment here fits with a classic rational choice deliberation, it is worth pointing out that neither he nor Julian had ever been on a demonstration. This means that what Whiteley and Seyd (2002) refer to as 'process' and 'outcome' incentives – which in the case of demonstrations might include feelings of political empowerment and a personal satisfaction for acting upon his or her beliefs, as well as making new friends – remain mostly abstract. Furthermore, these might be outweighed by more easily-perceivable *disincentives* (fear of arrest, time spent travelling to London, missing out on study-time). As we saw in chapter five, Rick's recollection of his parents' experience of being accidentally kettled when passing by a demonstration appeared to heighten his impression of active protest as high-risk and volatile. This returns us to issues surrounding students' political backgrounds: as noted in figure 7.5, only 36.2 per cent grew up in a household where politics was discussed regularly or fairly often. This would indicate that supportive non-participants in general lack a political background – one where politics might be freely discussed and political participation considered a normal, legitimate, and broadly 'safe' activity – that makes protest participation *appear* as a 'rational' option.

Of course, we saw in chapter five that politically-interested students without much in the way of a political background or activism experience may see the university as providing opportunities for engagement. Moreover, it was also found that some students without strong political interests found themselves becoming more active by virtue of their social networks on campus. For Julian and Rick, their statuses as social science students meant that they were relatively well-connected to students who attended local and UK marches (though not to those involved in campus occupations). According to figure 7.7, non-social science students

were generally less-connected socially to the protests. Science students generally considered themselves busier with academic work than students in the arts, humanities and social sciences. On the one hand, this reflects the fact that science subjects tend to be more densely-timetabled, making it more likely that protest events would clash with lectures (especially given that the 2010 and 2011 NUS/NCAFC demonstrations both took place on Wednesdays). On the other hand, it is again possible that feeling 'too busy' partly reflects the absence of social pressure to participate: just over half of science students claimed to know nobody who participated (around ten per cent higher than arts, humanities and social science students), and the percentage invited to participate by course colleagues was nearly half that of humanities and social science students. In this sense, their 'support' for the student protests as registered in the survey may have been purely notional, with little or no expression in practice.

**Figure 7.7** Supportive non-participants' availability and network connectedness by degree subject

| | Art & Design (N=71) | Humanities (N=379) | Logic & technology (N=134) | Natural science (N=362) | Social science (N=322) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| % were 'too busy with academic work to participate' | 61.4% | 64.7% | 65.6% | 70.4% | 56.2% |
| % were invited to protest by course colleagues | 18.3% | 25.1% | 13.4% | 14.6% | 26.1% |
| % knew 5 or more participants | 23.9% | 22.4% | 13.4% | 12.4% | 52.2% |
| % knew no participants | 40.8% | 46.4% | 53.7% | 52.8% | 42.9% |

N=1,268.

As noted earlier, supportive non-participants include an above-average proportion of female students. Considering that the survey is already biased in favour of female students, this creates a considerable gender imbalance in the supportive non-participant category: 72.5 per cent are female and 27.1 per cent are male (discounting 0.5 per cent who did not answer). This means that female supportive non-participants amount to 37 per cent of the survey population, suggesting that their non-participation might carry gender-specific properties. To test this, figure 7.8 compares male and female supportive non-participants' political engagement. The first three statements, all of which focus on the moral properties of the fees issue, elicit extremely similar responses from both male and female students. The fourth statement, however, relates to a basic policy proposal for funding higher education. Comparing this to results from chapter four (figure 4.21) we can see that this statement draws stronger support from participants (especially high-cost/risk participants) than supportive non-participants. However, figure 7.8 shows a notable gap between male and

female students, with only 29.2 per cent of women agreeing. This might suggest that female non-participants were either more circumspect towards certain left-wing policy solutions than men, or that they were less sure of their views.

**Figure 7.8** Comparing male and female supportive non-participants' political engagement

| | Male (N=343) | Female (N=919) |
|---|---|---|
| % agree that 'access to an affordable higher education is a right is a right, not a privilege' | 86.6%** | 90.5%** |
| % agree that 'I feel let down by the Liberal Democrats over their reversal of tuition fees policy' | 81.0%* | 80.5%* |
| % agree that 'I am concerned that higher fees will put off some strong candidates off applying for university altogether' | 87.2% | 92.3% |
| % agree that 'higher education funding should be maintained through higher taxes' | 43.7% | 29.2% |

N=1,268. * p>0.05; **p<0.05.

Of course, the case study is principally concerned with why supportive students did not participate in the protests and chapters five and six identified network connectedness and dis-identification as key variables for explaining why students participated in different ways. Figure 7.9 indicates that connectedness and dis-identification does not differ significantly between supportive male and female non-participants. Where they *do* differ, however, is how often each claims to discuss politics, and the extent to which they consider themselves politically knowledgeable. Despite having similarly strong views about tuition fees and being no less-connected to protest participants, only 39.6 per cent of female students claim to discuss politics often – 13.5 per cent less than male students. What is more, 67.6 per cent of female students often feel that they 'don't know enough about politics to fully engage in it' – a figure that is 24.5 per cent higher than for male students. In other words, although women are apparently no less politically engaged or connected to political people than men, they do not appear to discuss politics as often. This raises key questions about women's engagement in politics in general – particularly relating to why they feel less confident in discussing politics than men (or conversely, why men claim to be more confident in discussing politics than women). This will be explored in more detail in the third section of this chapter.

**Figure 7.9** Comparing male and female supportive non-participants' political discussion

| | Male (N=343) | Female (N=919) |
|---|---|---|
| % knew 5 or more participants | 44.9%* | 43.7%* |
| % knew no participants | 46.4%* | 48.1%* |
| % agreed that 'I do not approve of the protest tactics used by students' | 32.4%* | 34.3%* |
| % discuss politics regularly/fairly often | 53.1% | 39.6% |
| % agreed that 'I often feel that I don't know enough about politics to fully engage in it' | 43.1% | 67.6% |

N=1,268. * p>0.05.

Figure 7.10 indicates that coverage of the tuition fees issue increased engagement for 42.6 per cent of supportive non-participants, which at 21.7 per cent of the total sample, is almost as many as those who actually participated in the protests. Similarly, 29.1 per cent claimed to have become more politically engaged as a result of the *protests* – 14.8 per cent of students overall. Although the survey did not explore what this engagement might have actually entailed, it is reasonable to assume that this included accessing the extensive coverage of the protests in the UK press, together with media generated by occupations and campaign groups. Notwithstanding students who may have been 'biographically unavailable' to participate in the protests, one can argue that persuading these supportive and engaged individuals to take part in anything from signing petitions, liking Facebook pages to attending marches would have almost doubled the overall participation rate for the whole UK student population. Whether this would have made the protests any more successful is a moot point – what is clear, however, is that the protests – well attended though they were – did not mobilise anywhere near as many students as they could have done.

Certainly for medium and high-cost/risk activities, it has been argued by many activists and academics (e.g. Power, 2012) argue that police tactics – particularly in London – were deliberately deployed as a deterrent to students' participation in demonstrations and forms of direct action. Figure 7.10 indicates that the majority of supportive non-participants were critical of protesters' treatment by the police and judiciary – 60.3 per cent agreeing that 'the Government and police force have made protest appear an illegitimate and deviant act'. As a deterrent to their *own* involvement, cross-tabulating this category with those who admitted that police clashes and fear of arrest factored in their decision not to participate totals at 31.5 per cent[38] of supportive non-participants (16 per cent of all students). In other words, given supportive non-participants' general lack of political socialisation and network connectedness, one can argue that all of these factors were mutually reinforcing, resulting in

[38] p=0.00.

many students – like Rick – feeling sympathetic to protesters' treatment by police but lacking much personal motivation to get involved.

**Figure 7.10** Supportive non-participants' attitudes towards the legacy of the student protests

| | Agree | Don't know/ neither agree or disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| The tuition fees issue has made me more politically engaged | 42.6% | 28.2% | 29.3% |
| The student protests have made me more politically engaged | 29.1% | 34.5% | 36.4% |
| The student fees and anti-cuts protests will make the Government pay more attention to the views of its citizens in the future | 27.4% | 28.2% | 44.3% |
| The student protests will be remembered more for violence than politics | 56.9% | 23.0% | 20.0% |
| The student protests have made me more prepared to protest on issues important to me in the future | 27.4% | 35.7% | 36.9% |
| The Government and police force have made protest appear an illegitimate and deviant act | 60.3% | 26.7% | 13.1% |

N=1,268. Note: Percentages by row.
Question: If you have NOT participated in the student protests, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Despite such disincentives, figure 7.10 also shows that 27.4 per cent claim that the protests have made them more prepared to protest on issues important to them in the future. Of course, there is no indication what the cause might be, or what 'participation' might involve, but it does at least suggest that the protests were partially successful in promoting the importance of this form of political expression. Nevertheless, converting individuals' willingness into *action* would likely depend on many of the perceived barriers to participation covered in this section being overcome.

### *'Unsupportive' non-participants*

Given the research questions of this study, it would be easy to overlook 'unsupportive' non-participants because their self-identification effectively excludes them as 'unconverted' non-participants. Nevertheless, one should not take this category at face-value, as students might have many different reasons for not supporting the protests: as we saw in chapter six, opposition to the protests (evidenced by 'Mockupation' websites and the like) can be a response to specific counter-grievances, grievances that are themselves to some extent the product of persuasion and mobilisation. Moreover, to effectively understand participation and mobilisation it is important to understand the criticisms that anti-fees campaigns had to counter.

Recalling statistics from figure 7.5, the unsupportive appear to represent the most politically-engaged group of the three non-participating categories. A higher proportion of this group grew up in households where politics was discussed regularly/fairly often, and a higher number still claim to discuss politics regularly/fairly often. This might indicate that the unsupportive are more likely to have discussed and debated the issue of higher education funding than other non-participants. Data investigating unsupportive non-participants' reasons for not taking part in the protests (figure 7.11) can be used to test this further. Ostensibly, the dominant views were students' disapproval of the 'tactics used by students' (72.6 per cent agreeing), and disagreement with the statement that the protests 'weren't radical enough' (75.9 per cent), suggesting that respondents felt the protests were too radical. However, this seeming disapproval of more radical tactics appears to have only played a limited part in explaining why this group did not participate, especially given that only 32 per cent were 'concerned about clashing with police and/or getting arrested during student protest marches'. Figure 7.11 shows that around half of unsupportive non-participants claimed to support the Government changes to higher education funding (only 6 per cent of students overall), with 26.6 per cent opposed to them and 22.7 per cent unsure. In other words, there is evidence to suggest a polarisation of views amongst unsupportive non-participants between those who did not support the protests for political reasons (i.e. they were broadly supportive of higher fees) and those who shared the same grievances as the students who participated, but opposed the protests for different reasons.

**Figure 7.11** Reasons for unsupportive students' non-participation in the student protests

| | Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| The student fees issue is not important enough for me to protest | 47.5% | 17.4% | 35.1% |
| I feel that I do not know enough about the student fees issue to make an informed decision | 19.9% | 15.2% | 64.9% |
| I was undecided about how good or bad the Government's proposals were | 16.3% | 25.5% | 58.2% |
| I support the Government's changes to Higher Education funding | 50.7% | 22.7% | 26.6% |
| I was too busy with academic work to participate | 37.1% | 21.1% | 41.8% |
| I didn't participate because the fees and funding issue does not personally affect me | 42.5% | 16.4% | 41.1% |
| Personal commitments (job, family etc) prevent me from participating in the protests | 13.8% | 22.0% | 64.2% |
| I am concerned about clashing with police and/or getting arrested during student protest marches | 32.0% | 22.8% | 45.2% |
| I do not approve of the protest tactics used by students | 72.6% | 15.3% | 12.1% |
| I do not personally identify with or feel comfortable around the people involved in the protests | 61.0% | 19.1% | 19.9% |
| My involvement wouldn't have made any difference | 40.4% | 30.9% | 28.7% |
| It is right to protest against public sector cuts, but wrong to prioritise the student cause | 27.4% | 34.9% | 37.7% |
| The student protests were not radical enough | 5.0% | 19.1% | 75.9% |

N=296 (excluding respondents who 'did not answer'). Note: Percentages by row.
Question: If you have NOT participated in the student protests, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

To take this further, figure 7.12 compares attitudes towards the fees, the protests and activism according to unsupportive non-participants' views on higher education reforms. Although data relating to students unsure or unsupportive of the reforms is limited by very small sample sizes, it is still possible to detect patterns that explain their respective reasons for not participating. Unsurprisingly, around two-thirds of students who supported Government reforms displayed right-wing, libertarian and pro-market views: 64.3 per cent claimed to identify with the Conservative Party, and only a third admitted concerns that strong candidates might be put off by higher tuition fees. In clear contrast to students unsure or unsupportive of Government reforms, 44.1 per cent of students supporting reforms agreed that taxpayers who did not go through higher education should not have to pay towards funding the system. In other words, two-thirds of students in this category were *politically* opposed to the student protests.

**Figure 7.12** Comparing attitudes towards the fees, the protests and activism of unsupportive non-participants according to their views on the Government's higher education reforms

| | Supported HE reforms (N=143) | Unsure about HE reforms (N=64) | Did not support HE reforms (N=75) |
|---|---|---|---|
| % agreed that 'I do not approve of the protest tactics used by students' | 81.8% | 62.5% | 56.0% |
| % agreed that 'I feel that I do not know enough about the student fees issue to make an informed decision' | 11.9% | 28.1% | 28.0% |
| % agreed that 'Protest suffers because the actions of a minority usually spoil it for the majority' | 81.8% | 70.3% | 68.0% |
| % agreed that 'Maintaining higher education funding is not a priority when public service cuts have to be made' | 56.6% | 43.8% | 36.0% |
| % agreed that 'I am concerned that higher fees will put some strong candidates off applying for university altogether' | 34.3% | 59.4% | 77.3% |
| % agreed that 'Taxpayers who did not go through higher education should not be expected to pay for the higher education of others' | 44.1% | 9.4% | 21.3% |
| % currently identifies with the Conservative Party | 64.3% | 37.5% | 40.0% |

N=296 (14 respondents did not answer).
Question: If you have NOT participated in the student protests, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? "I support the Government's changes to Higher Education funding".

Evidence of a pro-fees attitude was also expressed in the majority of interviews with unsupportive non-participants, many of whom gave their own counter-arguments to activists' anti-fees position. For all interviewees in this category, openness to £9,000 fees combined with general dissatisfaction with the current standard of university education in the UK, as well as hostility to Tony Blair's famous policy target of getting 50 per cent of young people going to university by 2010. Given the fact that students frequently invoked personal experiences when discussing this issue, it is possible to argue that dissatisfaction with the existing higher education system functioned as a 'counter-grievance' to student protest campaigns:

> The reason I backed the tuition fee rise is that fewer people will go to uni, and what a degree is worth would increase because you will have fewer people doing fewer of the… I hate to pick on it, but performing arts and theatre studies degrees. So you would have fewer people going to uni just for the sake of having a degree – you would have more dedicated students, and possibly a higher quality of graduates because people will think twice about whether doing a degree is actually worth it. (Dennis, Warwick)

> I think Tony Blair's whole 'Everyone should go to university' campaign was a really bad idea. There's a massive amount of difference between the expected level at different unis, and if you have everyone going to university it does kind of devalue some degrees. Because a degree's not for everyone, not everyone benefits

> from spending three years at university studying, like, travel and tourism. I think there are too many courses, too many universities. (Louise, UCL)

> There are people at my school who I don't think should have gone to university. Some of my friends went and they dropped out because they were just not that interested. I think there's this stigma attached to not going to university – if you don't go to university then you must be really stupid or lazy. I think the 50 per cent target is a big problem actually. (Anita, Cambridge)

Perhaps significantly, concerns related to Labour's '50 per cent' ideal were shared by some students who *participated* in the student protests (though never high-cost/risk participants). In other words, unsupportive non-participants felt that the student protests were effectively defending a higher education system that many students – participants included – recognised as deeply flawed. Of course, activists would likely contest the counter-argument that these reforms will drive up standards as it rests on the assumption that higher fees will only deter the 'bad' or 'uninterested' students from going to university, but students such as Pattie also claimed that student protest campaigns intentionally depicted the tuition fees increase in a catastrophic way whilst downplaying the terms of its loan repayment scheme:

> Most of the people I know who went on the protests were saying 'It's completely unjust that students should have to pay more for their education'. And that spurred me to go online and find the documents that set out what the proposed changes were, and I actually decided that in an economy where cuts had to be made in order to reduce the deficit, tertiary education *is* a privilege [...] The rate in which you pay it back is quite low – if after graduation your degree is only getting you into a job where you're at the minimum of paying it back, the cost of paying it back is one less pint a week – it's not that much money! (Pattie, Cambridge)

To explain the non-participants who did not support the protests *or* the fees cap increase (7.2 per cent of all non-participants), we can return to figure 7.12. In some ways, this group is more closely aligned politically to supportive non-participants: 77.3 per cent of non-participants are 'concerned that higher fees will put some strong candidates off applying for university altogether', and only 21.3 per cent agreed that 'taxpayers who did not go through higher education should not be expected to pay for the higher education of others'. What remains strong, however, is their dis-identification with the activists themselves, and their scepticism about the efficacy of protest. The one interviewee who fell into this category was Louise, who opposed higher fees but also held misgivings about the current system of higher education. As we saw in chapter five, the combination of her relatively apolitical background and membership of counter-networks to the UCL occupation meant that she opposed the protests. These factors also contributed to her fatalistic view of electoral politics, leaving her feeling both powerless to change anything about higher fees, and cynical about the actions and motives of those trying to doing so:

> It is a constant problem in education that there isn't very much money – particularly in humanities subjects. And I think it's unfair because it means some people are pushed out of education because they haven't got the funds to do without. But I just feel that I can't really see a way around it – there's nothing I can do. (Louise, UCL)

Students' feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty regarding political action will be discussed in more detail in this chapter's third section. But such feelings also play a significant part in explaining the non-participation of the final sub-category, namely those who were 'undecided' whether they supported the student protests or not.

***'Undecided' non-participants***

Perhaps predictably, analysis of undecided non-participants tends to locate them somewhere between supportive and unsupportive non-participants, though more emphasis is arguably placed on students' uncertainty and lack of engagement with politics in general. Looking at figures 7.13 and 7.14 it is noticeable how few strong feelings undecided non-participants appear to hold: no single statement achieves 60 per cent agreement or disagreement, even the otherwise widely-contested claim that 'the student protests weren't radical enough'. Other statistics provide useful pointers, however. For example, there is evidence to suggest that around half of this category were relatively disengaged from the higher education funding issue as well as the protests: figure 7.13 shows that only 21.3 per cent disagreed that they were undecided about how good or bad the Government's proposals were. Around half of students in this category also felt that the fact that the fees issue did not personally affect them, as well as a general dis-identification with the activists and the tactics they used.

**Figure 7.13** Reasons for 'undecided' students' non-participation in the student protests

| | Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| The student fees issue is not important enough for me to protest | 29.8% | 32.7% | 37.5% |
| I feel that I do not know enough about the student fees issue to make an informed decision | 46.4% | 20.7% | 32.9% |
| I was undecided about how good or bad the Government's proposals were | 48.3% | 30.3% | 21.3% |
| I support the Government's changes to Higher Education funding | 13.5% | 44.6% | 41.9% |
| I was too busy with academic work to participate | 50.1% | 26.9% | 23.0% |
| I didn't participate because the fees and funding issue does not personally affect me | 49.9% | 16.7% | 33.4% |
| Personal commitments (job, family etc) prevent me from participating in the protests | 23.3% | 33.4% | 43.3% |
| I am concerned about clashing with police and/or getting arrested during student protest marches | 41.6% | 28.4% | 30.0% |
| I do not approve of the protest tactics used by students | 54.0% | 33.4% | 12.5% |
| I do not personally identify with or feel comfortable around the people involved in the protests | 51.7% | 31.8% | 16.5% |
| My involvement wouldn't have made any difference | 42.0% | 39.0% | 18.9% |
| It is right to protest against public sector cuts, but wrong to prioritise the student cause | 26.9% | 46.7% | 26.3% |
| The student protests were not radical enough | 3.6% | 35.8% | 41.9% |

N=343 (excluding respondents who 'did not answer'). Note: Percentages by row.
Question: If you have NOT participated in the student protests, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Figure 7.14 presents similar results, showing that the student protests had little impact on changing the thought and behaviour of undecided non-participants. Only 11.7 per cent followed them enough to have become more politically engaged as a result, and only 7.6 per cent claimed that they have made them more prepared to protest on other issues in the future. Significantly, nearly half of students held no view on whether the student protests had failed in their aims, suggesting that there might have been little awareness of what its aims and outcomes might have been. This might point to a broader disengagement from politics in general: only 58.3 per cent said that they were certain to vote in the next election, a proportion which is considerably lower than non-participants overall (see figure 4.16). To some extent this reflects the above-average proportion of lesser-connected international students (see figures 7.2 and 7.3) in this category, as the percentage jumps to 69.3 per cent when limited to UK students only (N=257). This may also suggest ambiguities over which election the question is referring to. Similarly, 66.3 per cent of undecided international students (N=86) offered no opinion of whether the protests had failed or not.

There is further evidence, however, that undecided non-participants have little belief in the efficacy of political participation regardless of individual cases: whilst just over half of this group believe that it is a citizen's duty to participate when necessary, only 45.5 per cent believe that their participation can have an impact on UK Government policy. Faith in *protest* to achieve this is lower still, at 33.2 per cent. In other words, not only are undecided non-participants generally unsure about the fees grievance, two-thirds disagree that protest can help change government policy anyway.

**Figure 7.14** 'Undecided' non-participants' attitudes towards the legacy of the student protests, and the efficacy of political participation

| | Agree | Don't know/ neither agree or disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| The tuition fees issue has made me more politically engaged | 20.7% | 38.2% | 41.1% |
| The student protests have made me more politically engaged | 11.7% | 40.8% | 47.5% |
| The student protests have failed in their aims | 45.2% | 45.5% | 9.3% |
| The student protests will be remembered more for violence than politics | 58.3% | 32.4% | 9.3% |
| The student protests have made me more prepared to protest on issues important to me in the future | 7.6% | 40.2% | 52.2% |
| I am definitely going to vote in the next election | 58.3% | 32.1% | 9.6% |
| My participation can have an impact on government policy in this country | 45.5% | 26.5% | 28.0% |
| If a person is dissatisfied with the policies of government, he/she has a duty to do something about it | 53.9% | 32.1% | 14.0% |
| Protest can help change UK government policy | 33.2% | 41.1% | 25.7% |

N=343. Note: Percentages by row.
Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

To some extent, undecided non-participants' lack of strong feelings might be explained by the fact that only 37 per cent claim to discuss politics regularly or fairly often. This reflects their political background, with only 38.8 per cent claiming to have grown up in a home where politics was discussed regularly or fairly often (see figure 7.5). This lack of political engagement might also reflect their social network position on campus: figure 7.4 shows that a higher proportion of undecided non-participants were not invited to participate in the protests (45.5 per cent) and knew nobody who participated (56.3 per cent) than supportive and unsupportive non-participants. This general disconnectedness is illustrated by Cynthia, whose lack of confidence discussing politics combined with her political network disconnection meant that she felt left behind when it came to weighing up the pros and cons

of the fees increase. Interestingly, however, her desire to be rational and methodical in her decision-making was often put forward as a contrast to students who *did* participate:

> Lots of people that were protesting I thought – rightly or wrongly – probably only know one side of the story, and are not willing to discuss the issue properly. I think lots of people had already made up their minds, and as I hadn't made up my mind and felt like I didn't have enough information to take part. But on the other hand I don't think you're ever going to know *everything* about an issue, so you have to make some kind of preliminary decision and work with that (Cynthia, Cambridge)

Although slightly more confident in their views, this perception of 'political students' was shared by Sharon and Sonya, both of whom also self-identified as 'undecided' non-participants. This reflects a slightly different type of dis-identification, namely a dis-identification with a more general 'student activist' identity:

> I just felt that the same buzzwords were being brought up over and over again, and I didn't get much in the way of information or reasonable discussion [about tuition fees] […] It was that kind of very scandalised take on it all, which again I think is a part of the reputation students have – you know, they get to university and they go crazy and they think that they know everything. (Sonya, UCL)

> I was sceptical about those protests because a lot of it was people just being self-centred and not wanting to pay personally for what they enjoy. (Sharon, Warwick)

This characterisation of student activists as self-interested egoists masquerading as self-appointed moral arbiters recalls discussions of the history of student activism in chapter two. Whereas Sonya's comments reflect her first-hand encounters with the UCL occupation discussed in chapter six, Sharon's observations draw little on personal connections with protest participants. In both cases, however, the argument is that activists are overly dogmatic. This dogmatism was seen to have come at the expense of being well-informed about the conditions and origins of the fees increase. As we saw earlier, this was also felt by students who opposed the protests – such as Pattie – but also by some students who actually *participated* in the protests:

> I was actually down in London, and there were people shouting for Labour, and I turned round to these guys and said 'Do you realise that it was Labour who brought in fees in the first place you bloody idiot – we're only here because they started it!' (Mick, Cambridge)

Irrespective of how informed or uninformed student activists were, one can argue that this sort of dis-identification points to many students' more fundamental problem with politics overall. This relates not only in the perceived failure of democratic systems, but also the perceived failure of political actors – from ministers to student activists – to practice politics in the way it *should* be done. This dissatisfaction arguably transcends both the case study and

distinctions between participants and non-participants, and it this that we shall focus on in the third section of this chapter.

## 3. 'Caring but not committed': individualism, uncertainty and political dis-identification

The previous discussion pointed to ambiguities in non-participation: although a large proportion frequently showed disappointment and frustration with politics as performed in government and on campus, non-participants were often conscious of their own limitations as politically-engaged actors. However, as we saw in chapter six, many protest *participants* displayed similar uncertainties and dis-identifications. This final section seeks to bridge this divide by addressing sociological themes that help explain students who were found to be 'caring' about politics but not 'committed' to participating in specific groups or activities. According to the survey, there is evidence to suggest that a large number of respondents might qualify as 'caring but not committed': 51 per cent of survey respondents supported the student protests but did not participate in them, whereas chapter four showed that 63.7 per cent of general low-cost/risk participants admitted that they 'often don't know enough about politics to fully engage in it'.

As a theoretical concept, 'caring but not committed' recalls Eden and Roker's (2000) 'engaged cynic' and Jordan and Maloney's (2007) 'concerned, unmobilised' categories, both of which focus on individuals in society who do not convert their political predispositions into any form of action. Whereas these concepts explain non-participation in terms of a perceived lack of efficacy, more sociological approaches (e.g. Norgaard, 2006; Eliasoph, 1998) look at how negative emotions and collective narratives of self-preservation can serve to produce and legitimise non-participation in everyday life. Analysis of why students might be caring but not committed draws from both of these approaches, focusing on interview accounts from eleven students who fall into this category: Lawrence and Sharon (Warwick); Anita, Cynthia and Mick (Cambridge); Christine and Rick (Edinburgh); Louise and Sonya (UCL), and Heather and Julian (Leeds).

### *Dis-identification with political parties*

A principal expression of the 'caring but not committed' phenomenon is students' widespread dis-identification from political parties. Although survey statistics point to a swing towards 'no party identification' since the 2010 general election (see figure 4.14), interviews indicate that many who still identify express similar reservations. Party dis-identification is a well-studied area in political science: recent research has found that in the

UK young people especially are increasingly disengaged from formal politics, characterised by declining electoral turnout since the 1980s (Henn and Foard, 2012: 47-8). To some extent this is connected to wider societal transformations, where the increased mobility demands of the labour-market has resulted in individuals becoming more and more 'disembedded' from their local environment (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). This in turn has contributed to the decline of 'mass politics' which political parties traditionally depended on for their support (Putnam, 2000). This is increasingly replaced by forms of political participation more congruent to the contemporary labour ethic of mobility and flexibility, such as single-issue social movements and campaign that are identity-based or concerned with a 'post-material' politics (Inglehart, 1997).

Reflecting this, recent research has found that young people in the UK prefer to practice politics on their own terms, evidenced in their increasing engagement in non-traditional 'one-off' forms of 'consumer citizenship' (Pattie et al, 2004; Marsh et al, 2007; Bang, 2004). Student interviews suggest that the appeal of this ethic has had a knock-on effect in terms of attitudes towards electoral politics. A common theme across the eleven interviews was a rejection of party identification on the basis that it would compromise their desire to be flexible in their political opinions on a range of issues:

> I don't really buy the whole political spectrum anymore […] I don't see the point of wedding myself to one sort of programme come up by some dead guy yonks ago. (Mick, Cambridge)
>
> I've voted in elections and voted for different parties each time, because policies change, and political parties change – yes, you've got a traditional model of what a Tory is and what a Labour supporter is, but I think you're getting yourself into trouble if you take that model as gospel. (Sonya, UCL)
>
> I'm open-minded, and if something makes sense, whoever's saying it, I'll go along with it. So it's never really been a case of me wanting to wage an ideological war against Conservatives or whoever's in power – I always criticise things based on policy. (Julian, Leeds)
>
> If you vote Lib Dem you are supposed to agree with X, X and X – but I might not, it might be the first two things and the third thing I disagree with completely. So it's difficult to give a fully-rounded view of one's political views if you mainly politically identify with a party. (Anita, Cambridge)

It is worth pointing out that each of these four students voted Liberal Democrat in the 2010 general election. As noted in chapter four, many voters had considered the Liberal Democrats as a left-of-centre alternative to Labour prior to the election, and so felt wrong-footed by the formation of the coalition. The fact that these students seem to prioritise 'pragmatism' and 'open-mindedness' above party identification arguably reflects their

original motives for voting Liberal Democrat, and their subsequent desire to reassert their political autonomy. This is because of their concern with doing politics on their own terms – a desire which is congruent with the more autonomous forms of participation described by Bang (2004). Party identification, on the other hand, is seen as sticky, restrictive and defining – not just because of pressure to defend unpopular policies, but also a perception that supporters are expected to subscribe to various positions on a range of issues they might not agree with or feel sufficiently knowledgeable about. Although the students above disagree on whether party identification weds them to an impregnable historical ideology (as suggested by Mick) or a party programme that is itself constantly changing (as argued by Sonya) the effect is much the same. Instead, these students favour a political engagement process in which they personally acquire and consider knowledge impartially before making a decision:

> I don't like pinning myself to any kind of allegiance without doing proper research on the party, and I haven't had the time or impetus to do that yet. (Rick, Edinburgh)

> Someone [who] declares themselves a left-winger and then goes and finds out what that entails for them to believe, rather than making up their mind what they should be the case and sort of sticking to that – it seems like the wrong way round. (Mick, Cambridge)

> If you're a Lib Dem or whatever, you'll vote for this because you're with them…which I don't think is a particularly good thing if they're changing things about their party. [But] I'm not personally convinced that I have everything clear in my head in order to be able to judge what the most important issues are. (Cynthia, Cambridge)

Despite this desire for a methodical process, it is questionable how far this can be successfully practiced in reality. As Rick admits, he requires 'the time and impetus' to engage fully, neither of which he claims to have had during his four years at university. Moreover, practicing this ideal might be harder still when political issues are numerous and complex. Cynthia's comment alludes to how political parties are supposed to help voters judge what the most important issues are. Of course, widespread cynicism towards the actions and motivations of political parties and politicians can be seen to have broken this relationship of trust (see Stoker, 2006; Hay, 2007) and evidence suggests that the 'caring but not committed' find problems in undergoing this individualised engagement process alone. We will return to this theme later in this section.

Of course, part of the reason why so many students were prepared to mobilise for the fees protests was that the issue could be interpreted on a basic moral level i.e. the *right* to an affordable education. In this way, it had a similar appeal to many forms of single-issue

politics. Furthermore, an anti-£9,000 fees position can also be taken from a strictly non-partisan perspective: after all, Labour had introduced fees in 1998 and commissioned the Browne Review in 2009; the Liberal Democrats had campaigned to abolish fees only to then u-turn on the policy, and the Conservatives were ultimately responsible for pushing the fees bill through Parliament. As we saw earlier in this chapter, however, majority support did not translate into anything approaching majority participation. To a significant extent, this reflects many students' uncertainty over *protest* as a means of participation.

***Protest and efficacy***

For many higher education campaigners, protest was the only available repertoire of participation that could influence the parliamentary vote in December 2010. Although the survey indicates the protests successfully mobilised 22.3 per cent of students, the caring but not committed often spoke of feeling uncertain and uncomfortable about this choice of tactic. First, the directness of many of the protest repertoires – especially the London demonstrations – was a source of unease, as it went against their preconceptions that protest was most efficacious when its primary goal was to 'raise awareness' – evidenced by the diffusive effects of long-term social change discussed in chapter two – than attempting to force sudden and emphatic changes of government policy:

> It's always a bit tricky with protest and activism to tell whether they've made a really palpable difference, but I think that more often than not they do the job of raising awareness among the public rather than the government. (Rick, Edinburgh)

> I can't think of many instances in the recent past where protest has made a notable difference, at least not a protest where you take to the streets. (Sonya, UCL)

> What have protests done for us lately? All the major ones we've had in the past few years – the budget cuts, the student one, Iraq… you know, the Iraq one was *huge*, and it was completely ignored. I support the *right* to protest, you know – that's fundamental – but because they don't get listened to, it's not really worth it. (Sharon, Warwick)

This combination of a strong respect for the *importance* of protest and a general lack of faith in the power of protest to provoke change (at least at a governmental level) recalls survey findings from chapter four. A key aspect of protest's perceived impotence relates to confusion over how it should be performed. Whereas students involved in direct action repertoires frequently cited the 2003 Iraq War demonstrations as evidence of the limitations of what 'polite protest' could achieve, low cost/risk participants and non-participants often cited it as showing the limitations of what protest of *any* kind could achieve. These debates became especially prominent in the aftermath to 'Millbank' in autumn 2010: although defenders of the event were usually high-cost/risk participants, some of the caring but not

committed were prepared to consider the possibility of direct action and property violence as more effective than mass ‘peaceful’ actions:

> I think it’s going to get people’s attention more than a march would, because it’s prolonged, and it can cause more disruption than a march might, so I do think it’s a valuable political tool. (Julian, Leeds)

> Realistically, if a government knows that all you're going to get out of a movement is peaceful protest, you know, you can just write them off – like, ‘Oh, the peaceful protesters are outside again’ – like, what does that mean? Absolutely nothing to anyone! The public will forget about it within a week. They need to be disruptive. (Mick, Cambridge)

> If I were in a situation where I felt extremely strongly about something, I think I would probably be happy to commit a criminal offence. (Lawrence, Warwick)

Of course, these comments are hypothetical responses to hypothetical situations: of these three students, only Mick had recently attended a demonstration, and he admitted to being too worried about his own career prospects to personally participate in the sorts of disruptive actions he deemed necessary. Moreover, these sorts of arguments, even in the abstract, were distinctly in the minority among caring but not committed students. To explore this further, interviewees who condemned Millbank were invited to consider activists’ defence of the event – that it represented a deliberately controversial but necessary ‘moment of excess’ to give the fees grievance wider coverage. Students’ usually responded by claiming that arguments for the use of ‘violence’ were incompatible with any legitimate claims to the moral high-ground in a political debate:

> It’s not productive to get aggressive and angry in that way – it just looks like you're a mob. If you *reason* with someone it’s more productive than if you threaten them. I just think it’s counterproductive, and now they’re gonna pay a fuck-load of money to fix the building – it doesn’t really benefit anyone. (Heather, Leeds)

> To an extent I can see that you have to inconvenience people to make them listen, but I don’t think you have to make people feel afraid – and I don’t just mean David Cameron. If I were to go on a big demonstration, to be perfectly frank I would be slightly afraid that I’d end up dead, or injured in some way. It’s a big crowd, it can be volatile. (Anita, Cambridge)

> A large chunk of them are just along for the ride, I think, and the violence comes from people who are just looking for an excuse to go out and be violent – I’m sorry, but not wanting to pay higher fees isn’t a valid reason for smashing a window. It definitely does undermine the goal, because it portrays these protests as being just people wanting to yell for the sake of yelling. (Sharon[39], Warwick)

[39] Though these anti-violence quotations are drawn exclusively from female interviewees, and quotations from ‘open-minded’ are all male, this might reflect selection bias rather than a ‘gendered’

As with students' preferred method of choosing which party to support, emphasis is again placed on rationality rather than emotion. It is revealing that, when asked to clarify what the ideal model for protest might look like in practice, many students cited the 'peaceful' and 'dignified' historical examples of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and the U.S. civil rights movement. This suggests that protest is perhaps easier to consider as 'effective' or 'legitimate' once history has proven it as such. Moreover, aspects of violent or radical tactics (as were a feature of both the anti-apartheid and civil rights movements) were not commented on.

Another aspect of students' aversion to protest participation was a desire to avoid being 'tarred with the same brush' as activists who might seek to use contentious tactics or promote unrelated causes. This recalls chapter five's discussion of the anger felt by NUS demonstration attendees Hayley and Laura for being made to feel 'responsible' for Millbank, though more generally it reflects students' desire to maintain autonomy and control over what they choose to protest for, and how they do it. For example, Anita was hesitant about attending demonstrations because, she claimed, 'it only takes one person [to act violently] for everyone to get tarred with the same brush'. Mick, on the other hand, attended the NUS demonstration and was supportive of Millbank, but recalled being angry that marchers were displaying pro-Palestine and Labour Party banners, neither of which he wanted to be seen to be endorsing by association. In this sense, the desire to maintain control over one's self-expression in a protest march is always potentially compromised by the actions of the other protesters. Not only does this recall actors' need to maintain a favourable (and flexible) impression of the self (Goffman, 1971), it also suggests problems with the notion of *collective* action, reflected in students' tendency to dis-identify with political actors.

### *Dis-identification with political actors*

These interviews show multiple ways in which students dis-identified with political actors. To explore this relationship, non-participants and low-cost/risk participants were invited to describe and compare his or herself to the most political person they knew personally. This had the dual purpose of clarifying the extent of their ties to activism networks on campus (as studied in chapter six), and revealing how they saw themselves as political actors. Broadly speaking, the caring but not committed regularly sought to characterise themselves as

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trend per se: the survey, for example, shows that a slightly higher proportion of female students considered 'direct action protest (e.g. occupations, sit-ins, blockades)' very /somewhat effective (48.1 per cent) than male students (46.0 per cent).

rational, reasoned and open-minded in their political decision-making, whereas their more-active peers were often depicted as lacking in these qualities:

> I like to think I think about the other side. And I think he is generally more extreme in his views, so every little thing that springs up about politics he's very quick to get on his soapbox. (Sonya, UCL)
>
> I don't chat with her [about politics] because it goes into a big mess and it isn't what I would consider a proper debate because it just gets emotional and not logical. It's self preservation! (Sharon, Warwick)
>
> I don't want to debate with somebody when I'm being forced into the position of defending a party that I don't agree with, just because I can't bear to be in a debate where only one party is represented. Because I will misrepresent the argument, and it will sound like I am agreeing with them, when in fact I am just trying to understand them. (Cynthia, Cambridge)

Again evident in these accounts is a sense that the more politically-active fail to live up to students' ideal standard for political decision-making. According to Sonya's description, her chosen activist is dogmatic rather than rational. Sonya and Sharon also claim to feel uncomfortable with their activists' tendency to politicise everyday conversations and get on their 'soapbox'. As recipients of this behaviour, it is also noticeable how Sharon and Cynthia draw attention to their lack of control in how discussions proceed. For Sharon, her inability to impose 'rational' rules of debate in the face of 'emotional' arguments leads her to withdraw from the debate completely ('it's self preservation!').

Sometimes implicit within these criticisms is the argument that political actors are not necessarily as well-informed and knowledgeable as they think they are. This recalls students' concern that choosing to identify with a political party eventually results in the party identifying *you*. In other words, the caring but not committed often suspect people who publically espouse their political views of having blindly accepted a group's stance on an issue without having independently considered both sides of the argument. Some students were able to identify specific cases where activists used information which they considered inaccurate or misrepresentative. Such instances not only confirmed their suspicions about activists' dogmatic thinking, but also heightened their general distrust of how they might take positions on *other* campaign issues. This is seen as reflecting the way activists in a group sometimes develop a collective consensus on a range of different issues. As we saw in chapter six's discussion of the free education campaign group's stance on Gaza, the relationship between these issues might have appeared abstruse to outsiders, and more the result of a 'clique culture' than individuals having independently come to the same conclusions on a range of issues. This also involves a blurring of what might be considered

‘political’ and what might be considered ‘lifestyle’ factors. Anita and Cynthia recalled similar experiences of wanting to join political groups – the feminist society for the former, and the college student council for the latter – finding that their political similarities were ultimately outweighed by their cultural dis-identification from existing participants:

> I felt like we weren’t alternative enough – we didn’t only go and shop at the fair trade market and every time someone made a joke about women we didn’t pounce on them and go ‘Actually that’s derogatory’. I don’t see how [radical feminism] translates to other lifestyle choices … it made me feel that if I came back wearing dungarees and Doc Martens and been a bit more ‘yeah, screw the patriarchy’ I would have fitted in a bit more. (Anita, Cambridge)

> I went to some of the open meetings in college but I was a bit disillusioned with that because they were incredibly cliquey […] They were all from pretty similar backgrounds – or if they weren’t, they pretended that they were – and cultivated similar interests, and bought the same clothes, and you got the sense that politics came with that. (Cynthia, Cambridge)

Both identified what they felt to be the group’s key ‘tie-signs’ – be it clothes, food consumption or other leisure interests – as a stronger basis for dis-identification than the group’s politics or organisation. This feeling was also found in Mick’s experiences of the Cambridge student occupation (“it was run by a lot of the hipstery, vegany bits of the left”). Although cultural conformity and underlying hierarchies can create negative impressions for any group or organisation, activist dis-identification can be as revealing about the identifier as it is about the identified. The desire of the caring but not committed to avoid being defined by their politics is key to this; for Anita especially, being a feminist did not have to mean dressing and behaving in specific ways. It may also be the case that dis-identification is sometimes self-fulfilling, with the ‘caring but not committed’ using certain encounters to confirm preconceived impressions of activists and their motivations. Some questioned the authenticity of activists’ political identity, believing them to mask more nefarious personal motivations, such as narcissism (Louise bemoaning Facebook being filled of ‘arty’ Instagram photos of students ‘suffering for the cause’), self-interest (Sharon claiming that students attending protest marches ‘are just trying to get a day off’) or hypocrisy:

> It’s the dishonesty and hypocrisy… seeing one of these guys after graduation being driven by his dad in his enormous Jaguar – like, one of these really prominent left-wingers, I think you are a ridiculous person, telling everyone that you're bloody poor… (Mick, Cambridge)

Accusations of ‘radical chic’, ‘lifestylism’ and cultural tourism have been a regular issue for leftist activists for many years and do not necessarily warrant deep analysis here. What perhaps *can* be claimed, however, is that in comparison to the complexity of many political issues, perceived inconsistencies between an individual’s politics and actions are often

invoked to confirm an underlying cynicism towards the motivations of political actors. Yet as Runciman (2008) has argued, an individual's demand for an 'authentic' hypocrisy-free politics rests on unrealistic expectations, expectations which might reflect more the individual's own lack of experience with the practical realities of political action. For the caring but not committed in particular, accusations of narcissism, self-interest and hypocrisy seem to reflect their suspicion towards individuals who have taken the 'leap of faith' into the complex world of political activism and self-identification, a leap which the caring but not committed feel unable or unwilling to take themselves. This forms the basis of the final discussion.

***Civic ambivalence or civic anxiety? Knowing enough to care, but not enough to participate***

At one level, taking the step from political engagement to political action is something that the vast majority of students in this study have done at one time or another: only 7 per cent of survey respondents claimed to have participated in *none* of the listed activities in the past three years. Inviting students to reflect on their own decision-making process, however, reveals a greater ambivalence over the meaning of their actions. For certain members of the caring but not committed this ambivalence is underpinned by a tendency to feel engaged and knowledgeable enough to broadly follow politics and appreciate its importance, but not enough to convert this into any forms of committed action they see as efficacious.

The issue of lacking sufficient political knowledge to participate in politics has been a theme throughout this research, as well as political surveys more generally. Henn and Foard (2012) found that 47 per cent of 18 year-olds felt they did not know enough about what is going on in politics in general and only 24 per cent felt they did. Moreover, there is also further evidence to suggest a gender imbalance in political confidence: Hansard's (2011: 91) survey finds that 62 per cent of men feel knowledgeable about politics, compared with only 42 per cent of women. Not only does this chime with earlier analysis of supportive non-participants (see figure 7.9), figure 7.15 suggests that this gender imbalance extends beyond non-participants as well – among those who participated in the student protests, the proportion of women claiming that they 'often feel that they don't know enough about politics to fully engage in it' is almost double that of men.

**Figure 7.15** Comparing male and female students' political confidence and discussion

| | | Participated in the student protests | | Did not participate in the student protests | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 'I often feel that they don't know enough about politics to fully engage in it' | Agree<br>Neither agree nor disagree<br>Disagree | 27.3%<br>9.3%<br>63.4% | 49.2%<br>12.4%<br>38.3% | 39.1%<br>16.0%<br>44.9% | 66.4%<br>12.9%<br>20.8% |
| How often do you discuss politics? | Regularly<br>Fairly often<br>Sometimes<br>Rarely<br>Never | 53.4%<br>22.4%<br>13.0%<br>9.3%<br>1.9% | 32.4%<br>26.4%<br>26.9%<br>13.2%<br>1.0% | 29.4%<br>25.5%<br>25.6%<br>16.2%<br>3.3% | 16.2%<br>22.1%<br>31.8%<br>25.1%<br>4.8% |

N=2,485. Note: Percentages by column.

The literature on gender and political participation has variously cited the lack of female role-models in formal politics (Taft, 2006), women's hesitancy and uncertainty over feminist identifications (Aronson, 2003; Crossley, 2010), and depictions of female activism as being somehow incompatible with women's gender identity (Freeman, 2005; Hercus, 2005) as possible reasons for female non-participation. Nevertheless, the extent to which this impacts disproportionately on how women discuss and debate politics in everyday life is less clear, and warrants investigation in future research. In this study, however, there is evidence to show that both male and female interviewees' claim insufficient knowledge about politics as a key reason for their non-participation in many activities and campaigns they were interested in:

> I don't think I understand politics very well. I appreciate that lots of people who vote probably don't understand politics very well, but it's often difficult for me to try to weigh up which particular points are the most important. It seems to be very easy to form initial impressions of political parties or political figures which are very superficial and based on things that don't really matter. (Cynthia, Cambridge)

> I'm always aware that stuff's more complicated than what I know generally, so I was a bit dubious to get involved unless I'm aware of what I'm doing. (Mick, Cambridge)

> I would [like to be more politically active] but I'd like to know more about it. I tend to like to know a *lot* about something before I'll argue about it normally. I don't know how much I'd have to know before I'd want to argue about it! (Heather, Leeds)

Given students' earlier criticisms of political actors for possessing an inflated confidence in their own political views, the caring but not committed are understandably keen not to fall into such traps themselves. Like many students, Heather found it fairly easy to take a basic *moral* position on tuition fees, but was less sure if this alone was a strong enough reason for

participating. For those without activist backgrounds and social connections to activist networks, nagging doubts and uncertainties over the detail of the fees policy ultimately meant that 'supportive non-participation' – or in Heather's case, low-cost/risk participation – represented the easier option. Seemingly underpinning this withdrawal is a desire for self-preservation and the avoidance of double-standards, as publically stating one's opinion on an issue runs the risk of being exposed as insufficiently informed and subject to the sort of ridicule they might normally direct at other political actors:

> I'd say one of the things that has happened to me at university is in general I've become less sure of my views. Like, a lot of the time I'm thinking okay, I know I think this, but not with enough confidence to try and persuade other people of it. So I might support a cause, but I'll be aware that there are people who are far more intelligent than me who don't and say that it isn't a good way of doing this. And I don't feel confident enough to go preaching my views to other people. I mean, I'm happy to have them myself – I'm not insecure in having them – but at the same time I don't want to go shouting it from the roof if I'm not sure of it. (Lawrence, Warwick)

> I don't want to be the person shouting about politics when I only know enough to be spouting the opinion I've heard from someone else, and I don't know enough to base it on an actual thought-process. (Heather, Leeds)

> In an ideal world you would find a party or a movement where you think that their views are roughly the right opinion, and follow them and what they say. I don't think that will ever really happen, but even if you did, you would still need to read the opinions of your opponents otherwise how are you going to understand the logic of anyone who believes differently? The problem is basically there's always other things I could be doing than sitting and reading about politics, and you know, most of the time I'm going to pick them, because I have things that I need to do. (Cynthia, Cambridge)

This perhaps gets to the core of what makes these students 'caring but not committed': the view that political participation should in theory be the product of a rational and informed decision-making process which, in practice, all-too-often becomes a puzzle that is too demanding and ultimately not worth solving. For Cynthia especially, her need for useful and impartial information about both sides of an argument leaves her with an arduous task of making sense of an issue but little outside pressure to actually do so. This is because of the relative absence of external expectations of her acting politically, expectations which would otherwise have come from her political family background or network access to politically-active peers. Since she claimed to have neither, her rational instincts ultimately steer away from undertaking an otherwise arduous and thankless task.

Cynthia's withdrawal from decision-making is partly dependent on the amount of time she is prepared to allocate to learning, thinking and talking about politics. This also relates to

political background and network position. For political actors – especially high-cost/risk participants – the time they allocate reflects the external pressures and expectations that come from their membership of activist networks, the greater access to information and debate they have at their disposal, and the importance of politics to their overall self-identity. The caring but not committed, on the other hand, face none of these expectations and consequently devote little time to their idealised process of impartial decision-making. This becomes a vicious cycle, as the absence of external expectation to participate places little pressure on them to increase this allocation.

Whilst interviews go some way to showing how the caring but not committed withdraw from political commitment, it is more difficult to ascertain its emotional significance. For example, in her study of non-participation in climate change activism Norgaard (2006) noted that individuals' uncertainty over how best to convert their engagement into participation caused feelings of helplessness and guilt. Students, however, generally gave little impression that being 'caring but not committed' over the fees grievance or other issues of interest was a source of personal anxiety. A possible explanation for this comes from Warde (1994), who argues that individuals are only likely to feel a 'choice anxiety' if subjected to expectations that their deliberations will produce an outcome[40]. For most 'caring but not committed' students, however, their lack of network access to collective participation opportunities meant that their non-participation was seldom subjected to any emotional pressure.

Interview accounts indicate that students are most likely to critically reflect on their non-participation when confronted – either via the media or in person – with individuals who, unlike them, have taken a position and acted upon it. Some – such as Rick – were admiring of participants standing up for their beliefs, though for many others there is a suspicion that the action of some participants reflected a rashly-taken and ill-informed 'leap of faith'. Recalling Norgaard (2006), one can argue that this sort of dis-identification from political actors functions as a form of 'perspectival selectivity': by identifying inconsistencies in the actions and behaviours of activists, non-participants might also be protecting themselves from confronting their *own* political indecisions and uncertainties. This has an overall effect of legitimising their non-participation, especially in social networks dominated by other

[40] This was sometimes an unintended outcome of the interviews themselves. Among caring but not committed interviewees especially, I often got the sense that they enjoyed the opportunity to discuss politics with someone who appeared impartial and was willing to listen to their views. Some lines of questioning, however, often resulted in students' feeling under more pressure to self-scrutinise their political thoughts and (in)actions. This was reflected upon by Julian: "In hindsight when you do objectify it in this way it does appear to have more value, and it's like, well, yeah, I should have done something".

'caring but not committed' students. Unless an individual makes social connections to someone who might broker access to participation networks – networks which are open and welcoming enough to challenge his or her grounds for dis-identification – this cycle of non-participation is likely to remain unbroken.

## 4. Conclusion

This chapter has posited a number of approaches for studying non-participation, both in relation to a specific collective action frame – the fees and cuts grievance – and on political issues more generally. Although non-participation is to some extent a response to the specificities of collective action frames – a fundamental disagreement with the grievance or tactics, for instance – there is also evidence to suggest non-participation as a more general phenomenon might also be socially produced and maintained independently. Interview accounts show how students use narratives of dis-identification to contrast an idea of emotional, dogmatic and ill-informed participants with reasoned, rational and realistic non-participants. Whilst for 'unsupportive non-participants' this is generally unlikely to be the only reason for their non-participation, it is perhaps significant that dis-identification is also found in the accounts of the 'caring but not committed'.

Focusing on the fees and cuts case study, it was found that 65.6 per cent of non-participants (51 per cent of all survey respondents) supported the protests. Whilst this confirmed many activists' claims that their anti-fees stance reflected the vast majority of student views, only a third of supportive students felt they had become more politically engaged as a result of the protest. A similar percentage also indicated that police violence and fear of arrest had played a part in their decision to not participate, though for many it would seem their 'support' amounted to little more than answering the survey question than any deep engagement in the fees grievance. To some extent, this reflected their disconnectedness to activism networks on campus – especially among international students and students studying science and technology subjects – which created comparatively few opportunities to discuss the issue, or social pressures to act. This led to the slightly misleading finding that most considered themselves 'too busy with academic work' to take part in the protests, even though as fellow students they were generally no more 'biographically unavailable' than those who did participate.

What becomes clear is that a large proportion of 'supportive' and 'undecided' non-participants felt generally uncertain of their own political views and how to act upon them. This suggests deeper problems of engagement: few discussed politics very often, or came

from family backgrounds where politics was considered particularly important. This meant that their feelings towards certain issues – be it trebled tuition fees or other grievances – were ultimately not strong enough to withstand corrosion by counter-arguments and counter-grievances and be converted into participation. In the case of the student protests, corrosion came in the form of uncertainties over 'violent' protest tactics and a sense that the protests were defending a higher education system they considered to be flawed. For students such as Sonya and Louise, these uncertainties were given greater precedence due to their membership of counter-networks, resulting in them taking an 'anti-£9,000 fees' but not a 'pro-protest' stance.

Arguably at the heart of many students' non-participation was a lack of confidence when it came to taking political positions and acting upon them. It was notable that most had high standards of how political decisions *should* be made, yet putting these standards into practice was often felt to be too demanding. This position of stasis was seemingly reinforced by a perception that political actors frequently failed to live up to these standards too, rendering the whole process of political participation fundamentally flawed. At the same time, however, few students showed signs of anxiety over their non-participation – in fact, non-participation seemed to represent for them a state of autonomy and self-control. One expression of this was students' desire to avoid being 'forced' into participating in politics on someone else's terms (such as a party or movement), be they ideological or identity-based. Another was the fear of being made to look foolish for expressing an opinion on something that others might be better-informed about. Compounding matters, both of these fears ran the risk of affecting students' friendships and relationships, as people who held a different view might think differently of them as a result. In this context, it often feels easier to avoid politics as a topic of conversation altogether.

This desire for autonomy and self-preservation arguably reflects 'supply-side' problems with the quality of politics typically available to individuals (Hay, 2007), but it also might have roots in more sociological processes. In general, the 'caring but not committed' take a very individualised view of politics. In some ways, this resembles Bauman's (2000) consumer-centric 'task' of identity in a society that increasingly prioritises mobility and flexibility. Whilst their non-participation firmly eschews some of the more nefarious aspects of participation – dogmatism, hypocrisy, cliques – this desire for self-preservation often leaves individuals stuck as 'caring but not committed' instead of getting their hands dirty in the messy (but potentially more efficacious) reality of political participation.

# Chapter 8
# Conclusion

## 1. Introduction

This research project broadly sought to understand and explain why some students mobilise for forms of political participation and activism, and why others do not. As a case study of participation and non-participation, the UK Government's proposal to treble tuition fees in autumn 2010 represented an issue of widespread grievance for the student population, yet very few converted their grievances into collective action. As the findings chapters have shown, this study has used the fees and cuts collective action frame to explain differences in patterns of participation and non-participation (chapter four); identify what sort of paths and barriers might enable or preclude mobilisation (chapter five); understand how collective identities build movements and help sustain participation between collective action cycles (chapter six), and illustrate how non-participation can be collectively produced and sustained (chapter seven).

To bring the research project to a conclusion, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section summarises the thesis's key findings using data and analysis from chapters 4-7. The second section provides an evaluation of the research study, identifying its key contributions to the study of political participation, social movements and student activism, and considering its methodological limitations. The third and final section returns to the case study and considers the legacy of the 2010/11 student protests for higher education and anti-austerity campaigns in the UK and abroad, as well as for the participants themselves.

## 2. Participation, non-participation and the student protests

At a basic level, the vast majority of students were political participants in some form: recalling survey findings from chapter four, only 7 per cent had taken part in *none* of the listed activities in the past three years. Around half of students, however, classified as 'low-cost/risk' participants – with most having only ever taken part in occasional one-off activities. In general, medium and high-cost/risk participants expressed a stronger all-round confidence in the efficacy of protest. Despite the fact that 83.2 per cent of students considered affordable higher education a right not a privilege, only 22.3 per cent took any part in the student protests. More pertinently still, two-thirds of non-participants claimed to have supported the student protests. This posits a number of possible explanations for why,

despite numerous different participatory opportunities, the student protests failed to mobilise two-thirds of its overall support base.

This discussion will be divided into three sections, focusing first on students' protest habitus and network connectedness; second, the layers of collective identification that developed between participants, and third, the social conditions of non-participation.

***Habitus, networks and mobilisation***

> It's so to do with the people that surround you the whole time. If I had got in with the sports crowd or something at UCL, god knows, I could have been running the *Mockupation* Twitter account! (laughs) (Justine, UCL)

A fundamental area of interest for this research was how individuals *accessed* political knowledge, debate and participatory opportunities. Overall, the study found that students' political socialisation tended to come from family, school, or in Justine's case, friendships and social connections made at university. One can argue that family background was the strongest of these, given that the majority of medium and high-cost/risk participants grew up in a household where politics was discussed often. Moreover, the majority of high and medium-cost/risk participants also claimed to have also been politically *active* prior to arriving at university. These formative experiences gave them the confidence to easily assimilate into their campus's activist network once they arrived at university. In contrast, the political socialisation of low-cost/risk participants arguably had more in common with *non*-participants: merging the two categories from the survey, chapter five found that two-thirds had come from family backgrounds where politics was seldom discussed, and 59 per cent had been politically inactive prior to university. Interviews revealed that politics often felt like a 'taboo' subject, with many students admitting to not knowing who their parents voted for.

To some extent, the campus provided resources and opportunities for students to subvert their non-political background, though much depended on the sorts of friendships and social networks they formed in their first year. As implied in Justine's above quotation, having friendship groups that considered protest 'normal' behaviour provided unanticipated opportunities for the less-experienced members to become more politically engaged and active. Conversely, however, some already-engaged students found themselves belonging to the 'wrong' networks where politics and activism were either afforded no social value or actively discouraged. For students lacking the confidence to ignore these pressures and find new networks, their participation was likely to be held back by these 'counter-networks'.

These networks were not deterministic, however, as specific political 'events' and collective action frames – especially those that gain media traction beyond the university – play a significant part in opening up new participatory opportunities. Although higher education funding had long been a campaigning issue for students, the Government's proposal to increase the fees cap to £9,000 per year, combined with the grievance felt by many student Liberal Democrat voters over the party's decision to u-turn on its fees policy, gave the issue an 'objective reality' through regular, widespread media coverage. This enabled activists to pressure student unions into funding travel to the NUS demonstration, which in turn, lowered the costs of participation for students. This generated a critical mass of potential participants, as students could sign up in the confidence that they were likely to personally know others attending.

The result was a demonstration attended by over 50,000 people from universities across the UK, though the occupation of Millbank perhaps represented the significant 'event within the event'. Controversial and certainly divisive among students, networks were key to students' subsequent framing of the event. Many high-cost/risk participants admitted to being initially critical of Millbank, but through discussions with fellow activists were eventually won over to its value as a necessary 'moment of excess' (Free Association, 2011). In contrast, students who were critical of Millbank but resided outside of more radical activism networks were less likely to be confronted with counter-arguments, thus giving them little cause to alter their views.

Networks also played a key role in protest mobilisation after Millbank. With the NUS reluctant to preside over a campaign that featured direct action tactics, individual student groups, unions and networks took it upon themselves to organise their own local and national protest events. The most prominent and coordinated of these was NCAFC's 'National Walkout and Day of Action', which served as the springboard for the majority of campus occupations across November and December. Occupations brought together different networks of people which over time coalesced into a single, multilayered network of students involved in the daily running of the space. Occupations functioned as a political 'hub' on campus, as students with social connections to participants could be persuaded to visit the space, participate in meetings and debates and even sleep overnight. Aided by the considerable coverage the protests were getting in the UK press and television, these connections extended out further and wider than the similarly-organised Gaza occupations had managed in 2009. In turn, the more people attended the occupations, the more media coverage the occupations received, and the more people became aware of the fees grievance.

For students sharing the fees grievance but who did *not* take part in occupations, networks to some extent played a part in their non-participation. In general, students were less inclined to visit the occupation if they did not have personal connections to people involved, even though the space was ostensibly open to all. Lacking these social pathways, students were more likely to see the costs and risks of participation (sleeping in public buildings during winter, fear of sanctions from university management) rather than the benefits (empowerment, education, and developing strong social affinities). Moreover, participation was sometimes held back by certain 'counter-grievances' caused by the occupations, be they the cancellation of events and services originally timetabled for the space, or some of the tactics used by students. These counter-grievances passed around aforementioned 'counter-networks' in much the same way that the 'Millbank defence' did around activist networks, meaning that students from these networks who shared the fees grievance were more likely to have their protest support corroded by narratives of *dis-identification*.

Whilst networks go some way to explaining protest mobilisation this does not mean participants were homogenous in their opposition to the £9,000 fees cap. Nevertheless, activists were keen to propagate the notion that protest participants were broadly united under a common cause. Analysing the foundations of this notion is the subject for the next section.

***Building collective identity: a campaign or a movement?***

> Looking back it was kind of the golden days of the anti-cuts group. We actually did something; students were a bit radical – it was good. Lots of friendships. Almost all of my friends are from that group. And my girlfriend as well. (John, Edinburgh)

Given the range and diversity of tactics used, it should come as no surprise that participants had differing experiences of the student protests. For John, participation in the Edinburgh occupation helped him strengthen his political views and develop lasting personal relationships with many of those involved. Yet whilst similar experiences were relayed by many high-cost/risk participants at Edinburgh, UCL, Cambridge and Warwick in autumn 2010 (and to a lesser extent, autumn 2011), they were by no means typical of participants as a whole. Survey findings in chapter four found that around ten per cent of all students participated in demonstrations, and four per cent in occupations, whereas more 'low-cost/risk' activities such as petition-signing and joining/'liking' Facebook groups were more popular. This raised questions over the extent to which 'collective identity' could emerge out of a multi-repertoire movement.

As discussed in chapter two, there is much disagreement in social movement studies over whether collective identity represents a necessary component of any movement (Mellucci, 1988), or whether they are too heterogeneous ideologically, tactically and organisationally to generate any sort of mutuality beyond a basic overarching 'shared concern' (Saunders, 2008). Certainly in the student protests, feelings of shared trust, solidarity and affinity were more easily locatable at a group and tactic level. Campus occupations in particular were spaces for intensive debate and knowledge-sharing, as well as the *practicing* of politics through consensus meetings, working groups and protest planning. Much like Gitlin's (2013) depiction of Occupy Wall Street participants, however, students at Edinburgh, Cambridge and UCL spoke in terms of cores and peripheries. For core members, their participation had radicalising effects: most extended their critique to an opposition to public sector marketisation, with many also becoming more open to radical protest tactics (Aitchison, 2011). Moreover, the costs and risks involved in maintaining the space helped develop strong mutual relations of trust. In contrast, members of occupation peripheries were more loosely connected to the occupation's daily assemblies, debates and decision-making processes, and so were less likely to feel these radicalising effects. Moreover, infrequent visitors to the occupation struggled to understand the tactic itself, whereas others considered the attitudes and lifestyles practiced by many occupants a cause for derision and dis-identification.

If these tactical differences reflected some of the problems in building a cross-repertoire movement, it should still be remembered that *all* participants were united by the common goal of forcing the defeat of the fees bill in Parliament. According to survey statistics, this common goal generated a sense of collective identity for the majority of participants, with 69.4 per cent claiming to have felt 'proud to be part of a UK-wide student movement'. Whilst this indicates that feelings of collective identity remained strong across the majority of high, medium and low-cost/risk participants some 18 months later, in practice campaigns had struggled to sustain mass-participation after the fees vote passed. This was because collective identity was firmly rooted in the fees grievance, and from 2011 onwards broader grievances related to higher education marketisation and the Government's White Paper found only limited engagement among the wider student population. This restricted activists' capacity to build a durable mass-*movement* out of the fees protests' mass campaign. What the autumn protests *did* achieve was an upsurge in mobilisation for the much smaller 'free education' movement, which had been a fixture in student politics since tuition fees were originally proposed in the 1990s. Via certain student unions and the UK-wide student network NCAFC, these activists were responsible for the 'unofficial' national demonstration

on 9 November 2011, along with further campus occupations. Although popular, these actions generally operated on a much smaller scale than in the previous autumn.

Of course, the right to an 'affordable' university education had represented enough of a shared concern to unite the majority of participants irrespective of ideological or tactical differences in autumn 2010, but the 22.3 per cent who took part in the protests reflected only a fraction of the scale of student opposition to trebled fees – as noted earlier, 83.2 per cent of students agreed that 'access to an affordable university education is a right, not a privilege'. In other words, whilst the fees grievance might be taken as a basic commonality between protest participants, it does not account for the difference between *participants and non-participants*. Explaining the non-conversion of the latter is a key issue for the next section.

### *The social production of non-participation*

> I don't see that my participation would have changed the way that things were going. I didn't think it was going to do anything, so why take part, why bother! (Julian, Leeds)

Survey findings from chapter seven showed that 65.6 per cent of non-participants in the student protests were supportive of them, with 15.2 per cent unsupportive and 17.8 per cent undecided. Although this suggests something of a victory for activists who claimed latent support from the wider student population, less than a third of 'supportive non-participants' claimed to have become more politically engaged by the protests. This indicated that students engaged with the grievance on a moral basis, but lacked the political knowledge and participatory ethos to convert this into participation. Moreover, only 43 per cent claimed to discuss politics often – lower than participants and unsupportive non-participants. In other words, the precise nature of non-participants' support for the protests suggested more fundamental barriers to participation than 'biographical unavailability': as indicated in Julian's quotation above, this pointed to a wider problem with valuing political participation in general.

It is perhaps significant that many supportive non-participants were open to some of the counter-arguments put forward by unsupportive non-participants. They felt the preceding Labour Government's target of putting 50 per cent of young people through higher education had dulled the prestige of a UK university education, and that the increase in fees could help improve this situation. Whilst unsupportive non-participants usually framed this argument from a right-wing perspective (underlined by the fact that two-thirds identified with the Conservative Party), supportive and undecided non-participants were more cautious in their

claims, sometimes admitting that they did not know enough about the policy to make more forceful arguments either way.

Network factors played a part in supportive students' non-participation. Survey evidence found that although two-thirds had been invited to participate, nearly half personally knew nobody who participated. Network effects also accounted for why certain types of student were more disconnected than others. Among supportive non-participants, it was found that science and technology students knew far fewer participants than humanities and social science students. Similarly, fewer non-EU international students were invited to participate than UK and EU students, suggesting that cultural as well as political barriers played a part in their non-participation, as well as the heightened risks involved in protest activity for students on study visas.

Among the many non-participants who lacked strong political network links, interview data in particular pointed to certain trends and themes around their tendency to be 'caring but not committed' on a range of political issues. Recalling the work of Beck (1992), Giddens (1991) and Bennett (1998), these students had 'dis-embedded' from traditional collective political practices – notably memberships and party identification – preferring instead to appear flexible and noncommittal about political groups and causes. This stemmed from a general dissatisfaction and cynicism towards the *supply* of politics – both at a campus and UK level – with political actors all-too-often failing to live up to students' expectations by taking ill-informed 'leaps of faith' or acting unreflexively out of group/party loyalty. That said, students often struggled to live up to their *own* expectations, as they were either unable or unwilling to devote the time they considered necessary to becoming knowledgeable enough to participate. Networks also played a part here, as the caring but not committed were seldom expected by their peers to be politically engaged or active, which meant they were unlikely to feel any pressure to devote more time to political engagement. Non-participation therefore represented a position of sanctity and self-preservation, and was perhaps only challenged when specific collective action frames become national or international talking-points.

Survey evidence also implied that the 'caring but not committed' phenomenon might affect women more than men. A lower proportion of women – including participants as well as non-participants – discussed politics regularly/fairly often; whilst a higher proportion of women agreed that they 'often feel that they don't know enough about politics to fully engage in it'. These findings indicate barriers to female political engagement via the way politics is discussed and debated in everyday life, though it might also indicate that women

tend to be more self-critical in how they perceive themselves as political actors. Either way, these findings arguably warrant further consideration in future research – considerations which will be expanded on in the following section.

## 2. Evaluating the research study

Building on the findings outlined above, this section firstly situates the research project's contribution to the literatures on student activism, social movements and political participation discussed in chapter two. Second, it evaluates the study's methodology and research design, taking into consideration the validity and reliability of its key findings. Third and finally, it considers these findings as a basis for future research.

### *The significance of the findings*

This section seeks to make five basic points about the research findings and discuss their relevance to the literatures on social movements and political participation. The first is that for most politically-active students, *politicisation begins before university*. This chimes with Bourdieu's (1984) emphasis on the importance of primary socialisation for shaping cultural norms and values, which applied to social movements provides important steps towards acquiring a 'radical habitus' (Crossley, 2003). Recalling Braungart and Braungart's (1990) study, this habitus did not involve the verbatim inheritance of a political ideology or party identification: rather, it provided students with the tools of politicisation – notably access to knowledge, the normalisation of political debate, and the legitimation of protest as an activity. For some students, this politicisation began in school rather than at home, with interview findings pointing to the politicising effects of certain educational environments – especially private schools. This arguably warrants investigation in future research.

Second, it was found that *networks create paths and barriers to participation*. This complements research by McAdam (1986) and Crossley and Ibrahim (2012) as it was found that individual mobilisation for occupations and demonstrations required a social context to make the activity seem viable and socially valid. For high-cost/risk participants especially, this context tends to take the form of a campus's wider activist network, taking in numerous political groups and societies. Although sometimes tightly-bonded and cliquey, these networks are subjected to flurries of recruitment during the emergence of new collective action frames. Networks can also create barriers to participation, as some predisposed students belonged to friendship groups where activism was afforded little or no social value, or was actively discouraged. Adapting Oegema and Klandermans's (1994) terms, belonging to these counter-networks can corrode the potential participation of individuals through their

peers' counter-arguments to protest campaigns, or it can go *unconverted* as students have no outlet in which to discuss the issue any further.

Third, *dis-identification from political groups and actors causes non-participation.* It was argued in Crossley and Ibrahim's (2012: 608) recent study that activist networks on campus develop mutual 'tie-signs' which 'communicate strong links between actors'. Research by Crossley (2008) and Saunders (2008) have both illustrated some of the problems of dense activist networks bound by strong cultural markers. Despite these studies, little research has actually been conducted on the thoughts and experiences of 'outsiders' themselves. Interviews especially showed that dis-identification – that is, rejecting a group or individual's perceived political identity or 'lifestyle' – was a significant barrier to joining occupations or becoming a member of a political group/society. Connections can also be made to Norgaard's (2006) work, as impressions formed by non-participants about the motivations and lifestyles of participants helped keep them in their counter-network 'frame'. In other words, just as collective identity helps produce and sustain participation, collective dis-identification helps produce and sustain non-participation.

Fourth, *online networks can help strengthen offline ties but they can also strengthen cliques.* Information networks and social media are undoubtedly valuable tools for mobilising online *and* offline activism, but for the latter especially mobilisation seldom operates independently of actors' 'real' social ties. Certainly in autumn 2010, local marches could be organised at short notice via Facebook 'events' – arguably pointing to a certain dependence on the power of collective action frames – but attendance still depended mostly on whether individuals had friends also thinking of going. In other words, Facebook alone does not mobilise people – rather, it simplifies and helps visualise already-existing offline social networks. In some cases an individual's online identity can *strengthen* an individual's offline social networks – Danny, for example, recalled using social media to access the sorts of debates activists were having, which helped him assimilate into activist groups on campus. However, not all activist debate and information sharing is freely accessible: occupation groups at UCL, Edinburgh and Warwick regularly made use of invitation-only Facebook groups throughout 2011, which arguably helped reinforce a clique culture around 'core' participants. In other words, as Morozov (2011) has argued, the internet is an extremely malleable tool that can be used to facilitate network openness, but also network secrecy.

Fifth, and finally, it was found that *sympathetic non-participants favour self-preservation over collective action.* In this context, self-preservation means avoiding political engagement and action that might involve being challenged about one's political opinions, or feeling

forced to defend the views of a group or party they might not fully understand or believe in. To some extent this can be understood from a rational choice perspective, where individuals choose to avoid getting their hands dirty by 'free-riding' on the work of others (Olson, 1965), though ironically their non-participation is often managed collectively through counter-networks and 'perspectival selectivity' (Norgaard, 2006). For the 'caring but not committed' especially, their non-participation was 'rational' insofar as few felt any social pressure or expectation to be more active, but they recognised that their lack of confidence in their political knowledge and decision-making had meant that they were failing to live up to their *own* expectations of how citizens should act. These findings perhaps owe to temporary 'life-cycle' effects (Henn et al, 2002), which might recede after graduation, though arguments have been made for the growth of political individualism (e.g. Putnam, 2000), evidenced in many individuals' preference for one-off, low-cost/risk participation via professionalised 'protest businesses' (Jordan and Maloney, 1997). As an emerging theme from this study, the 'caring but not committed' phenomenon arguably warrants further research in a range of other fields.

***Methodological issues***

Of course, ascertaining the significance of these findings also depends on the robustness and reliability of the study's overall research design. Unlike most studies of student activism, this research had the advantage of sampling multiple campuses – thus laying claim to UK-wide representativeness. Moreover, the survey enabled testing the impact of certain key variables – family background, pre-university activism, network connectedness, invitations to participate – on participants *and* non-participants, allowing for comparative analysis. The meaningfulness of these variables was then explored in more detail through student interviews with participants and non-participants. Inversely, narratives emerging from interviews could be tested for their reliability by situating the experiences of certain types of individual onto the representative map of the survey. Clearly, this duality of analysis was the fundamental advantage to employing triangulation in the research design, though the process of data collection nevertheless produced certain methodological issues which might place some limitations on the reliability and applicability of its findings.

First, despite the desire to achieve representativeness the survey incorporated elements of bias into its sample. This owed to certain problems experienced in the sampling process: response rates were generally low (though this did not affect response numbers) and the high yield of students studying at particular departments at the University of Edinburgh resulted in a slight sample bias in favour of arts, humanities and social science students, as well as an

above-average proportion of Scottish domiciles. Furthermore, the survey generated certain response biases, most notably female students. Whilst it was felt that these biases were not problematic enough to warrant weighting the sample for representativeness, subject and gender variables would have to be analysed separately whenever necessary. That said, gender bias might be a factor in the data underpinning analysis of the 'caring but not committed' and thereby warrants follow-up research to test these findings further. It should also be pointed out that the survey's representative purpose came at the cost of generating a large sample of student protest participants. The small yield of high-cost/risk participants (N=65) limited the extent to which types of participants could be subjected to detailed comparative analysis. This category, however, was overrepresented in interview sampling, allowing for this data to take the lead on analysis of demonstrations, occupations and groups involved in direct action repertoires.

Second, survey data analysis frequently made substantive use of 'indexes' of aggregated variables. The most prominent examples of this were the 'general participation index' and the student participation index', both of which sought to measure participation in terms of the frequency of students' participation in activities by cost and risk. Their arbitrary nature necessitated careful use: with the possible exception of high-cost/risk participants, the categories did not have any objective 'group consciousness' – rather, they existed as tools designed to measure general participatory trends. The data used for these indexes might also be considered problematic: the failure to incorporate data from the 'other' category meant that certain forms of participation absent from the list – notably writing letters to MPs, writing blogs, making YouTube videos – did not factor into the analysis. Although the fixedness of selection might have reproduced standard survey measurements in much the same way as other datasets, this might also reflect the limitations of surveys as a research method, as the 'other' option yielded very few responses anyway. Instead, these missing forms of participation might be worth adding to the list of options for similar indexes in future research so that their aptitude can be tested.

Elsewhere, the survey used aggregated variables to measure the 'campus effect' i.e. the extent to which coming to university increased students' political participation. Causality can be difficult to measure in surveys without multiple points of data collection, or depending on respondent memory. The latter formed the basis of the aggregated variable to test the campus effect, but like the general participation index it drew from a fixed list of group/movement activities. Of course, there is no way of knowing whether the inclusion of different activities

would have significantly altered findings, but results produce similar ‘campus effects’ as Crossley’s (2008) comparative study.

Whilst the objectification of complex concepts via variable measurements is an inevitable issue with survey research, interviews allowed for definitions to emerge more naturally through semi-structured conversation. This, however, brings us to a third issue: despite the richness of its data, interviews are restricted by breadth of sampling, and even though the research project produced 56 interviews, certain voices and narratives were under-represented. Perhaps the most significant issue was the failure to secure a broader sample of university types. The limited returns at Roehampton meant that narrative accounts are overwhelmingly dominated by students from large Russell Group universities with well-funded unions. Consequently, chapters five and six – which make strongest use of these narratives – are perhaps limited in their applicability to all UK campuses.

It was also found that within the campuses studied certain types of student were underrepresented in the final interview sample. Given the gender-specific trends uncovered in the survey, a notable issue is the lack of female high-cost/risk participants who had been active prior to university. Similarly, the overall lack of non-EU international students also limited opportunities to test possible network effects – notably their social disconnection from home students – which might have provided barriers to their participation in the student protests. This also points to the fourth and final methodological issue: that despite the emphasis placed on network effects in providing paths and barriers to participation, the study does not make use of social network analysis (SNA). For analysis of high-cost/risk participants, this was not considered a significant limitation: on the one hand, interview data hinted at similar activist networks at Cambridge, Edinburgh, UCL and Warwick to the one uncovered using SNA by Crossley and Ibrahim (2012) at the University of Manchester, and so its existence could be taken as a given. On the other hand, *not* collecting network data arguably gave interviewees more freedom to speak freely and candidly about issues of hierarchy, conflict and cliques. Seeking these reflections *and* detailed network information about the participants involved might have created a conflict of interest for interviewees. Of course, SNA might be better employed for testing some of the emerging themes and concepts from this study in follow-up research, which is the focus of the next section.

***Directions for future research***

As noted above, this study has been shown to have its limitations, with some lines of analysis arguably better-served through follow-up research. However, it is also hoped that

the study has been responsible for introducing new issues and concepts – notably counter-networks, dis-identification, and the 'caring but not committed' – which can be adapted and applied to other participatory fields. There is also scope for follow-up studies which expound on areas within the field of student activism that require further investigation. First, a study of political participation at 'post-1992' universities would provide a valuable counterpoint to the campuses focused on in this study's qualitative work. Whilst research of this kind would not necessarily coalesce around a specific case study, it would be useful to test the extent to which activist networks comparable to those identified by Crossley and Ibrahim (2012) exist on different types of campus.

Second, there is plenty of scope to study the new repertoires of political activism, including in particular Web 2.0 'media making' and online discussion. These repertoires were only partly captured in this research project, and future research would perhaps benefit from taking a web ethnographic approach in tandem with the sorts of interviews used for this study. Third, perhaps the most significant 'emerging theme' from this study was that women appeared to be less confident in expressing their political views than men. Given that plenty of research has already been conducted on the subject of gender and social movements (e.g. Taylor and Whittier, 1998; Kolá ová, 2009) further research would perhaps benefit from studying the level *below*: that is, students' everyday conversations about politics. An area of particular interest would be the study of female students who – like Anita – joined feminist groups and societies only to stop attending meetings and events after a term. Moreover, ethnographic research into general political groups and societies on campus would likely benefit from being studied principally through a gender lens.

Fourth, research findings have often stressed the importance of 'events' for providing grievances with an objective (media-amplified) reality, and students with multiple participatory opportunities. To tease out the significance of this variable, it is perhaps worth following Ibrahim's (2010) lead and researching student campaigns *outside* of specific collective action frames. This would be particularly useful for ascertaining the extent to which mass-mobilisation is dependent on the media narratives to give campaigns traction and validity. Of course, studying social movements requires researchers to be responsive to emerging grievances and collective action frames: at the time of writing, student protests in the UK under the moniker 'Cops Off Campus' have arguably displayed a radicalism to suggest that the political and organisational legacy on the 2010/11 protests warrants follow-up analysis in its own right. This brings us to the issue of the protests' overall *legacy*, which is the subject of the final discussion.

## 3. The legacy of the student protests

> I don't think any of us expected to win [the fees vote] – I think we'd always seen that this was something greater, and that all we could really do was be detonators to wider society. I mean, the student movement blew apart any consensus that the cuts were inevitable or necessary, and they played a very strong part of the resistance. The Lib Dems' electoral haemorrhaging I think stems directly and irrevocably from the student movement. We were eleven [sic] votes away from winning. So we had an absolutely massive impact, even if we didn't win what we wanted. (Gaz, UCL)

Ostensibly, the protests failed in their principal aim of preventing the Government from raising the cap on tuition fees for students in England, and since 2012/13 undergraduates have faced a future of up to £27,000 in debt repayments from fees alone. Given that higher fees represented a 'headline issue' in autumn 2010, and was the core uniting grievance among protest participants during this time, it is perhaps surprising that only around half of survey respondents agreed that the protests had 'failed in their aims' (see figure 4.16). This arguably chimes with Gaz's claim that the legacy of the student protests should not be judged purely on the outcome of the fees vote. Certainly, there is a literature in social movement studies that seeks to broaden the analysis of movement outcomes beyond basic policy goals to include forms of cultural, ethical and institutional change (Giugni, 1998). As we saw in chapter two, the significance of student-led movements has often been found more in long-term *societal* changes, such as the shifting of dominant norms and values. Whilst wider societal effects might be difficult to gauge so soon after the protests took place, one can at least consider their impact on higher education campaigns, student politics and social movements in general.

To begin with the issue of higher education, one can reiterate Gaz's argument that pressurising Parliament into voting down the fees bill was always going to be a steep task for students. Whilst the fees grievance drew widespread sympathy from students and the general public, protest campaigns were faced with the Government's all-encompassing austerity mantra of 'there is no alternative', and even opponents to austerity politics were liable to claim that student grievances were 'low in the pain pecking order' (e.g. Toynbee, 2010). Protest, too, was only an indirect means of effecting change. In this context, the narrowness of the bill's passing is something of a testament to the pressure students exerted on MPs, especially Liberal Democrats. Moreover, it has been argued by McGettigan (2013: 24) among others that a desire to avoid repeating the scale and radicalism of the 2010/11 protests was a likely factor in the Government's decision in 2012 to shelve its Higher Education White Paper.

One can also claim that the protests drew significant attention to the Liberal Democrats' u-turn on tuition fees, causing substantial damage to the party's image, especially among young people. As Gaz alludes to, many commentators had cited this as a factor when the party lost 695 seats in 2011's local council elections (*Daily Mail*, 7 May 2011). However, the protests' legacy was arguably made most apparent in September 2012, when Nick Clegg took the unusual step of personally apologising for the breaking his party's pledge to oppose increasing tuition fees (even if he did not apologise for backing the policy itself).

Of course, these indirect outcomes did not stop many activists and commentators from making critical arguments about the 2010/11 protests from a campaigning perspective. McGettigan (2013) pointed out that the protests' primary focus on tuition fees and the parliamentary vote was problematic, as this meant that comparatively little attention was paid to the conditions of the repayment mechanism, as well as the Browne Review's broader recommendations for the marketisation of higher education. Gilbert (Gilbert and Aitchison, 2012) argued that the emphasis on fees reflected the fact that the movement was 'overwhelmingly… by and for the children of the professional classes' rather than those students *already* faced with a reality of long-term debt repayment. Both Gilbert and McGettigan were also critical of the way campaigns sometimes misleadingly gave the impression that students would be expected to pay £27,000 fees up-front. As we saw in chapter seven, lack of information was felt to be a problem for the 'caring but not committed' who wished to make a policy-informed decision about fees, and also students who questioned the motivations of campaigners' presenting of government proposals in such catastrophic terms.

At the same time, however, activists' depiction of the fees issue primarily as a *moral* grievance (Ibrahim, 2011) was arguably vital to the protests gaining as much support and participation as they did. Not only did its simplicity make the issue easy for most students to understand, it also functioned as an important hook for mobilising cohorts who were not themselves affected by the increase. Moreover, the Government's decision to hold a 'snap' vote necessitated a 'snap' response, with students given only seven weeks to digest the recommendations of the Browne Review and build a UK-wide campaign. In this sense, the fees grievance gave the autumn protests a clear sense of narrative: a common goal, a pre-set timeframe, a sense of who 'us' and 'them' were, and the possibility of agency through pressurising of MPs to vote down the bill – in other words, all the fundamental properties of a 'collective action frame' (Klandermans, 1997). This frame was then amplified through the media, which served to promote and legitimise the campaign's goals to a wider audience. At

the same time, however, the focus on fees arguably placed limitations on its capacity to sustain the level of momentum it had created: once the bill passed, the media (and many students) considered the campaign to have served its purpose, and subsequent protests struggled to mobilise on the same scale as before.

With much emphasis placed on creating media spectacles, one can also argue that the student protests generated a significant *tactical* and *organisational* legacy. A key aspect of this was students' use of direct action, evidenced by Millbank and the UK-wide network of campus occupations in autumn 2010. For many activists, memories of the 'million march' against the Iraq War in 2003 had served as a stark reminder to the limits of 'peaceful' mass-participation, rendering more confrontational tactics necessary for breaking away from seemingly-ineffectual standardised protest repertoires. Although direct action tactics and anti-hierarchical forms of organisation were by no means new, the fact that they were directed at Government, and were being practiced on a UK-wide scale, meant that they succeeded in attracting new participants and reaching new audiences. Moreover, the power of a coordinated UK-wide network of simultaneous protest events proved a key inspiration for UK Uncut, the global Occupy Movement in 2011/12, and also Quebec's student movement in their 2012 campaigns against austerity politics (Palacios, 2013).

At the same time, students' direct action tactics arguably spawned a more nefarious legacy, namely the tactical and organisational responses from the police and university management. Since autumn 2010, student protest has been subjected increasingly to extreme forms of public order policing – from kettling to the pre-emptive arresting of activists – with many activists claiming that such approaches have been more successful in provoking public order situations than preventing them (Bastani, 2013; Power, 2012). Moreover, at certain universities there have been instances where management has obtained injunctions to ban demonstrations or occupations on campus (*Independent*, 15 December; Chakrabortty, 2013). Given this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the survey found 16 per cent of students were supportive of the protests but had considered police tactics a deterrent to their own participation. Interviews suggested mixed feelings over the extent of student culpability in this deterrence: whilst students such as Rick lay blame firmly on police tactics, others (such as Hayley and Laura) felt that radical student tactics were often responsible for provoking these responses.

Of course, for high-cost/risk participants there was no question as to who they felt was culpable in putting students off protest. Many had first-hand experience of some of the violent confrontations between students and police during the London demonstrations, and

had seen friends arrested or seriously injured as a result. For many of these students, these experiences caused a realisation – in Andrew's words – that they were now 'in this for the long haul'. Consequently, many of those core occupants and committed activists were instrumental in trying to ensure that the protests' legacy was one of sustained resistance rather than slow decline. Like any long-term movement, though, students have had to contend with the cyclical nature of protest (Tarrow, 1998; Ibrahim, 2010), as there is invariably a limited supply of collective action frames to provide powerful mobilisation opportunities, and in turn, create possibilities for flurries of tactical and organisational innovation.

Given the scarcity of such collective action frames, one can argue that the upsurge in *participation* was the protests' main achievement, and arguably their most important legacy. Not only did 22.3 per cent of students participate in the protests, 38.2 per cent of whom had not been active prior to university (see figure 5.6). For hitherto-inactive students such as Justine, Donna, Jeremy, and Danny, their participation had transformative effects, both personally and for the people around them[41]. Of course, at present it remains to be seen whether this transformation will create a 'radical generation' of political activists, or will steer students towards certain career and lifestyle choices (cf. Sherkat and Blocker, 1997). What can be claimed, however, is that the fees protests provided many of its participants with a strong belief in the importance and meaningfulness of political participation. Much of this owed to the multiple participatory opportunities provided by the fees collective action frame, but also the openness of the activism *networks* they became part of. Through these networks, students not only became more politically engaged and knowledgeable, they also built affinities, loyalties and relations of trust which encouraged their further participation. One can argue that maintaining the strength of these networks, whilst ensuring that they remain open and available to new students and budding activists, is crucial for the future of student activism in the UK. This is because, to quote Damon, 'ideally, the networks never stop'. The further the networks extend, the greater opportunities for mass mobilisation, politicisation and participation.

[41] Some students spoke of the residual politicising effects of their participation on friends and family members, particularly younger siblings. This was recalled by Jeremy, for example: 'I have friends outside politics, but they end up being political, just through osmosis. Like, with my little sister, suddenly it was like, 'what do you want for Christmas?' 'I want some books on feminism'. 'What?''

### *Final words*

> We’re going to be better people for this having happened. We’re not going to do shit things with our lives, and maybe we’ll become teachers and social workers and human rights lawyers… We’re not the Baader-Meinhoff gang. (Donna, UCL)

It is hoped that this study has made a valuable contribution to knowledge and understanding of the 2010/11 student protests, the sociology of social movements, and contemporary paths and barriers to political engagement and participation. In particular, one hopes that the development of a more unified study of *non*-participation – hitherto undervalued in the social sciences – will benefit from some of the narratives, analyses and concepts discussed in this study. The protests, though short-lived, marked a significant moment in the fight-back against austerity politics and the building of an anti-cuts movement. Moreover, for many of students interviewed for this project, the protests created significant and unique personal experiences: feelings of pride and solidarity, moments of anger and empowerment, and of friendships made. And as indicated in Donna’s reflections, these experiences have generated for many participants a desire to change the way they live their lives for the better. I hope that this study, in the stories it tells and the analysis it makes, has done those experiences justice.

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## Appendix A – Student survey questionnaire

**1. How important were the following in your decision to study at your current university?**

*(1) Very important; (2) Slightly important; (3) Neither important or unimportant; (4) Not very important; (5) Not at all important*

1.a. Improving career chances
1.b. An opportunity to meet new people
1.c. A chance to learn more about the world
1.d. I have a passion for the subject I am studying
1.e. An opportunity to become more socially and politically aware
1.f. A chance to discover a new town/region
1.g. An opportunity to have fun

**2. What, in your opinion, is the purpose of university?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree*

2.a. To prepare students for a career
2.b. To help students gain a clearer sense of what he or she is good at
2.c. To help students learn more about their personal interests and perspectives
2.d. To make students better citizens
2.e. To make students more free-thinking and independent

**3. What sort of extra-curricular activities did you expect to participate in when you started at your current university?**

*(1) Yes; (2) No; (3) Don't know*

3.a. Join societies
3.b. Take a part-time job
3.c. Become involved in student politics/councils
3.d. Make friends with people different to you
3.e. Become more politically aware/active
3.f. Take up an internship/voluntary work

**4. Tick if you HAVE done any of the following since starting at your current university**

*(1) Yes; (2) No*

4.a. Joined societies
4.b. Taken a part-time job
4.c. Become involved in student politics/councils
4.d. Made friends with people different to you
4.e. Become more politically aware/active
4.f. Taken up an internship/voluntary work

**5. How active are you in the student societies you belong to? (If you belong to more than one society, select the one you are most involved with)**

*(1) I am involved with the society's organization and decision-making; (2) Regularly attend meetings and events; (3) Occasionally attend meetings and events; (4) Passive, little involvement; (5) I do not belong to any student societies*

**6. Have you done any of the following activities relating to your student union/guild/association?**

*(1) Yes; (2) No but might do in future; (3) No and not interested*

6.a. Taken part in a student union-led campaign
6.b. Participated in a student union-led volunteer scheme
6.c. Voted in a student union meeting/assembly
6.d. Voted in student union elections
6.e. Stood as a candidate in student union elections
6.f. Campaigned on behalf of someone else standing in student union elections

**7. How much of a say do you think students should have in influencing the following issues related to their university? (tick all that apply)**

*(1) A right to vote on the outcome; (2) A right to be consulted; (3) A right to campaign on the issue; (4) Students don't need to get involved with this; (5) Don't know*

7.a. The selection of university chancellor
7.b. Financial investments undertaken by the university
7.c. University stance on Government Higher Education policy
7.d. Provision of student facilities i.e. Halls of Residence, Common rooms etc.

**8. To what extent do you feel that your university student union represents your interests?**

*(1) A lot; (2) A little; (3) Not very much; (4) Not at all; (5) Don't know*

**9. To what extent do you feel that the National Union of Students (NUS) represents student interests in wider society?**

*(1) A lot; (2) A little; (3) Not very much; (4) Not at all; (5) Don't know*

**10. To what extent do you agree with this statement? 'Everyone would benefit from a university education'**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree*

**11. How much did the cost of fees/subsistence come into your thinking when deciding whether to go to university or not?**

*(1) A lot; (2) A little; (3) Not very much; (4) Not at all*

**12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about recent changes to the funding of Higher Education in the UK?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree*

12.a. Access to an affordable university education is a right, not a privilege
12.b. I feel let down by the Liberal Democrats over their reversal of tuition fees policy
12.c. Politicians don't care about the interests of young people
12.d. Parties should always be held accountable for their election pledges once they become part of government
12.e. I am concerned that higher fees will put some strong candidates off applying for university altogether
12.f. Maintaining higher education funding is not a priority when public service cuts have to be made
12.g. Higher Education funding should be maintained through higher taxes
12.h. Taxpayers who did not go through higher education should not be expected to pay for the higher education of others

**13. Are you aware of any recent/ongoing cases of cuts being made at your own university? (e.g. course or departmental closures, staff redundancies etc)**

*(1) Yes; (2) No; (3) Don't know*

**14. At the time when you were growing up, how often was politics discussed at home?**

*(1) Regularly; (2) Fairly often; (3) Sometimes; (4) Rarely; (5) Never; (6) Don't know*

**15. How politically active were your parents/guardians when you were growing up?**

(1) Very active; (2) Fairly active; (3) Not very active; (4) Not at all active; (5) Don't know

**16. How often do you discuss politics?**

*(1) Regularly; (2) Fairly often; (3) Sometimes; (4) Rarely; (5) Never*

**17. Do you use any of the following to access news and information about political issues?**

*(1) Regularly; (2) Fairly often; (3) Sometimes; (4) Rarely; (5) Never*

17.a. Television
17.b. Newspapers (print and online)
17.c. Alternative news websites
17.d. Independent blogs
17.e. Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter etc.)
17.f. Emails/newsletters etc from a group that you belong to

**18. With which political party, if any, do you most closely identify right now?**

*Open dialogue box*

**19. Did you vote in the 2010 UK general election?**

*(1) Yes; (2) No; (3) Prefer not to say; (4) Was ineligible to vote*

**19.a. If you answered 'yes', who did you vote for? (Optional)**

*Open dialogue box*

**20. Please indicate, in general, how much you trust each of the following:**

*(1) Strongly trust; (2) Quite trust; (3) Neither trust or distrust; (4) Slightly distrust; (5) Strongly distrust; (6) Not applicable*

20.a. UK Government
20.b. Scottish Government (if applicable)
20.c. Welsh Assembly (if applicable)
20.d. London Assembly (if applicable)
20.e. Political parties
20.f. Trade unions
20.g. Judicial system
20.h. The Police

**21. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree*

21.a. Most politicians make a lot of promises but do not actually do anything
21.b. I don't see the use of voting, parties do whatever they want anyway
21.c. My participation can have an impact on government policy in this country
21.d. Organized groups of citizens can have a lot of impact on public policies in this country
21.e. If a person is dissatisfied with the policies of the Government, he/she has a duty to do something about it
21.f. I often feel that I don't know enough about politics to fully engage in it
21.g. I'm usually too busy with other commitments to engage in politics

**22. It has sometimes been argued that democracy in the UK needs to be reformed to allow for greater voice from its citizens. What is your view of the following?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree*

22.a. Democracy in the UK would be improved by having more referenda on major issues of public interest
22.b. Democracy in the UK would be improved if a system of Proportional Representation was introduced for general elections
22.c. True democracy in the UK is only possible through the abolition of parliament and the creation of a new system of direct democracy
22.d. I see no problem with the current democratic system in the UK
22.e. Democracy in the UK already gives people too much of a say on political issues

**23. Please tick if you have done any of the following political activities in the last three years (select all that apply)**

*(1) Yes, I have done this more than once; (2) Yes, I did this once; (3) I have not done this*

23.a. Signed a petition
23.b. Boycotted certain products and services for political, ethical or environmental reasons
23.c. Bought certain products and services for political, ethical or environmental reasons
23.d. Worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker
23.e. Presented my views to a local councillor or MP

23.f. Been a member of a social movement organization (e.g. Amnesty International, Greenpeace)
23.g. Worked or campaigned on behalf of a political party
23.h. Stood as a candidate for school/student/local elections
23.i. Distributed flyers for a political campaign
23.j. Taken part in a protest march
23.k. Taken part in strike action
23.l. Taken part in an occupation/sit-in
23.m. Taken part in the blockade of a building or meeting

**24. How effective a form of political participation do you think are each of these activities?**

*(1) Very effective; (2) Somewhat effective; (3) Not very effective; (4) Not at all effective; (5) Not sure*

24.a. Voting in elections
24.b. Petitions
24.c. Consumer boycotts of products and services
24.d. Contacting an MP
24.e. Joining/financially supporting a social movement organization (e.g. Amnesty International, Greenpeace)
24.f. Joining or forming a civic association (e.g. Fathers 4 Justice)
24.g. Protest marches
24.h. Strike action
24.i. 'Direct action' protest (e.g. occupations, sit-ins, blockades)

**25. People might choose to protest for a variety of different reasons. What sort of impact do you think protest can have?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree*

25.a. Protest can positively influence the views and interests of the wider population
25.b. Protest can increase the wider population's knowledge and awareness of an issue
25.c. Protest can help change UK Government policy
25.d. Protest can help change the policy of corporations
25.e. Protest can gain the support of the mainstream media
25.f. Protest can strengthen the ideals and values of the people involved
25.g. Protest does not make a difference

**26. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about protest?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree*

26.a. Protest is an essential form of political engagement
26.b. Protest is the last meaningful form of political engagement available in the UK
26.c. Protest can only be effective if it involves taking power by force
26.d. Protest is a legitimate form of political expression, but only when campaigning on more important issues like civil rights
26.e. There are always better ways of making your views heard than by protesting
26.f. Protest is not a legitimate form of political participation

26.g. Protest suffers because the actions of a minority usually spoil it for the majority
26.h. Protest has never had the power to change things

**27. Please tick if you have been involved in any campaigns and protests relating to the following issues (select all that apply)**

*(1) Yes, before I became a student; (2) Yes, since I have become a student; (3) No, Never*

27.a. Human rights/global justice
27.b. The environment
27.c. Anti-racism/ethnic discrimination
27.d. Gender rights and sexual politics
27.e. Anti-war campaigns
27.f. Anti-capitalism/neoliberalism
27.g. Campaigns against cuts to the public sector in the UK
27.h. Other

**28. Please tick if you have been involved in any of the following campaign groups/networks**

*(1) Yes; (2) No*

28.a. Climate Camp
28.b. People & Planet
28.c. UK Uncut
28.d. Free Gaza campaign

**29. Have you been invited to participate in the student protests against fees by any of the following?**

*(1) Yes; (2) No; (3) Don't remember*

29.a. Student union
29.b. Course colleagues
29.c. Friends from your university
29.d. Friends from other universities
29.e. Facebook group/event invitation

**30. How many people (other than yourself) do you know personally who have participated in the student protests against fees at YOUR university?**

*(1) 5 or more people; (2) 2-4 people, (3) One person; (4) Nobody*

**30.a. What about at OTHER universities excluding your own?**

*(1) 5 or more people; (2) 2-4 people, (3) One person; (4) Nobody*

**31. Have *you* participated in any way in the student protests against fees?**
*(1) Yes; (2) No*

**32. If you clicked 'YES' to the last question, please tick if your participation in the student protests involved any of the following activities. (If you clicked 'NO', skip this and go straight to Q36).**

*(1) I have done this more than once; (2) I did this once; (3) I did not do this; (4) Did not participate*

32.a. Signing a petition
32.b. Wearing or displaying a campaign badge or sticker
32.c. Distributing flyers
32.d. Attending a national/regional level student march
32.e. Attending a student march in your own/nearest town or city
32.f. Taking part in the blockade of a building or meeting
32.g. Taking part in an occupation/sit-in
32.h. Taking part in the organizing of a protest event
32.i. Attending a student-led teach-in or activism workshop
32.j. Attending a university or union-arranged debate or meeting about student fees
32.k. Like/join a protest page/group on Facebook
32.l. Follow a protest group on Twitter
32.m. Other

**33. If you ticked 'other' in the last question, please explain what sort of activity you are referring to**

*Open dialogue box*

**34. If you HAVE taken part in the protests, how much do the following statements capture your reasons for protesting?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree; (6) Did not answer; (7) Did not participate*

34.a. I want to express my views
34.b. We must pressure politicians into making things change
34.c. We must raise public awareness
34.d. I protest to express my solidarity with fellow students
34.e. Friends and people I respected were also getting involved
34.f. Students need to pressurize universities into publically opposing higher fees
34.g. It is important that students are an active part of the wider anti-cuts movement

**35. If you HAVE taken part in the protests, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree; (6) Did not answer; (7) Did not participate*

35.a. It felt good to do something about an issue important to me
35.b. My involvement has made me more politically knowledgeable
35.c. My involvement has led to me making new friends
35.d. Overall, I enjoyed getting involved in the student protests
35.e. I am proud to be part of a UK-wide student movement
35.f. My involvement has made me feel very positive about the power of protest
35.g. I wish I had expressed my views on the student fees issue in a different way
35.h. I now regret getting involved in the student protests

**36. If you have NOT participated in the student protests, do you broadly support students' campaigns and protests on this issue? (If you HAVE participated, skip this and go straight to Q38)**

*(1) Yes; (2) No; (3) Undecided*

**37. If you have NOT participated in the student protests, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree*

37.a. The student fees issue is not important enough to me to protest
37.b. I feel that I do not know enough about the student fees issue to make an informed decision
37.c. I was undecided about how good or bad the Government's proposals were
37.d. I support the Government's changes to Higher Education funding
37.e. I was too busy with academic work to participate
37.f. I didn't participate because the fees and funding issue does not personally affect me
37.g. Personal commitments (job, family etc) prevent me from participating in the protests
37.h. I am concerned about clashing with police and/or getting arrested during student protest marches
37.i. I do not approve of the protest tactics used by students
37.j. I do not personally identify with or feel comfortable around the people involved in the protests
37.k. My involvement wouldn't have made any difference
37.l. It is right to protest against public sector cuts, but wrong to prioritise the student cause
37.m. The student protests were not radical enough

**38. This question is for all respondents. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

*(1) Strongly agree; (2) Slightly agree; (3) Neither agree or disagree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Strongly disagree (6) Don't know*

38.a. The tuition fees issue has made me more politically engaged
38.b. The student protests have made me more politically engaged
38.c. The student fees and anti-cuts protests will make the Government pay more attention to the views of its citizens in the future
38.d. The student protests have failed in their aims
38.e. The student protests will be remembered more for violence than politics
38.f. The student protests have made me more prepared to protest on issues important to me in the future
38.g. I am definitely going to vote in the next general election
38.h. The Government and police force have made protest appear an illegitimate and deviant act

**39. Which year were you born?**

*Open dialogue box*

**40. Your sex**

*(1) Male; (2) Female; (3) Prefer not to say*

**41. When you are not studying at university, in which country do you normally reside?**

*Open dialogue box*

**42. Which university do you currently attend?**

*(1) Aberystwyth University; (2) Birmingham City University; (3) Brunel University; (4) Cardiff University; (5) Newcastle University; (6) Nottingham Trent University; (7) Plymouth University (8) Queen Margaret University; (9) Swansea University; (10) University College London; (11) University of Abertay; (12) University of Cambridge; (13) University of Derby; (14) University of Edinburgh (15) University of Leeds; (16) University of Liverpool; (17) University of Nottingham; (18) University of Roehampton; (19) University of Sussex; (20) University of the West of England (21) University of Warwick; (22) University of York*

**43. Are you currently studying as an...**

*(1) Undergraduate; (2) Postgraduate*

***44. What is your current year of study?***

*(1) First year; (2) Second year; (3) Third year; (4) Fourth year; (5) Fifth year or more*

**45. What degree and subject are you currently studying for?**

*Open dialogue box*

**46. If you had to choose which social class group you belonged to, which would it be?**

*(1) Upper class; (2) Upper middle class; (3) Lower middle class; (4) Working class; (5) None*

# Appendix B – Email templates to staff and students

**Subject: PhD research – survey**

Dear [staff name],

I wonder if you could help me. I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, and I'm interested in student attitudes towards political engagement opportunities, and their participation/non-participation in the recent student protests. A significant part of the research will be quantitative and I am hoping to distribute my survey to current undergraduates and postgraduates studying in the UK.

[Institution name] is part of my survey sample, and I was wondering if you might be able to help me by forwarding the survey to current students in the [school/department/college]. The survey is online, so would only require you to forward to students an email, which I will send you shortly.

Any help you may be able to offer with this would be fantastic, and much appreciated. Please also feel free to get in touch with me if you have any further questions - further details can be found in my research page:
http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/research_students/alexander_hensby. If
necessary, I am happy to forward you copies of my ethical approval certificates. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr Michael Rosie (mrosie@staffmail.ed.ac.uk), senior lecturer in Sociology at the
University of Edinburgh, if you have any other queries about my research.

Many thanks for your time.

Alex

Alexander Hensby
School of Social and Political Science
University of Edinburgh
Chrystal Macmillan Building
15A George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LD
http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/research_students/alexander_hensby

**Subject: Student online survey - win book tokens worth £50**

Dear student,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a survey about your experiences as a student at the University of Sussex, with particular regard to fees and funding. All students are encouraged to take part – I am interested in all of your views and experiences, so your co-operation would be extremely appreciated. All respondents who include their email address at the end of the survey will be automatically entered into a prize draw for the chance to win £50 worth of book tokens.

The survey is an online questionnaire and you should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. All responses will be kept strictly confidential. To take part in this survey, please click on the survey link below:

https://www.survey.ed.ac.uk/student

Please note that when completing the survey, it is not possible to return to a page once you click 'continue', so think carefully before recording your answers.

This survey is part of a PhD research study on student political participation, of which further details can be found at my webpage at http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/research_students/alexander_hensby.

If you would also be willing to be interviewed as part of this research, please contact me at the above email address.

Many thanks for your time

Alex

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University of Edinburgh
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Edinburgh EH8 9LD
http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/research_students/alexander_hensby

# Appendix C – list of student interview names

| University | Name* | Sex | Degree/status | Participated in protests |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cambridge | Andrew | Male | English UG; union officer | Yes |
| (12) | Angie | Female | English UG | Yes |
| | Bruce | Male | Geography UG | Yes |
| | Eric** | Male | History PG | Yes |
| | Marianne | Female | Sociology PG | Yes |
| | Mick | Male | Biology UG | Yes |
| | Anita | Female | Theology UG | No |
| | Anoushka** | Female | History PG | No |
| | Cynthia | Female | Theology PG | No |
| | Charlie | Male | Sociology PG | No |
| | Keith | Male | Politics PG | No |
| | Pattie | Female | Geography UG | No |
| Edinburgh | Bekka | Female | Anthropology UG | Yes |
| (11) | Danny** | Male | Economics UG; union officer | Yes |
| | Jeremy** | Male | Physics UG | Yes |
| | John** | Male | Spanish & Politics UG; union officer | Yes |
| | Lindsey** | Male | Philosophy G, former union officer | Yes |
| | Peter** | Male | Politics UG; union officer | Yes |
| | Rhiannon** | Female | Politics UG; union officer | Yes |
| | Sara | Female | Arabic & Politics UG | Yes |
| | Stevie | Female | Sociology UG | Yes |
| | Christine | Female | Art UG | No |
| | Rick | Male | History & Sociology UG | No |
| Warwick | Billy** | Male | Politics UG | Yes |
| (11) | Gloria | Female | Sociology PG | Yes |
| | Lauryn | Female | Sociology UG | Yes |
| | Raphael** | Male | Economics UG; union officer | Yes |
| | Ronnie** | Male | Physics PG | Yes |
| | Spike** | Male | Politics PG | Yes |
| | Tina | Female | Sociology PG | Yes |
| | Yvonne | Female | Sociology UG | Yes |
| | Dennis | Male | Economics UG | No |
| | Lawrence | Male | Maths & Economics UG | No |
| | Sharon | Female | Economics UG | No |
| UCL | Annie | Female | English UG | Yes |
| (9) | Brett** | Male | Politics PG | Yes |
| | Damon** | Male | History UG; union officer | Yes |
| | Donna** | Female | English UG | Yes |
| | Gaz** | Male | Architecture UG | Yes |
| | Graham** | Male | Geography PG | Yes |
| | Justine** | Female | English UG | Yes |
| | Louise | Female | English PG | No |
| | Sonya | Female | English UG | No |
| Leeds | Heather | Female | Biology UG | Yes |
| (7) | Sean** | Male | Criminology PG | Yes |
| | Stella | Female | Neuroscience UG | Yes |
| | Zak** | Male | Cultural Studies PG | Yes |
| | Jason | Male | Biology UG | No |
| | Julian | Male | Politics UG | No |
| | Mary | Female | Politics PG | No |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Roehampton | Hayley | Female | Anthropology UG | Yes |
| (6) | Kieron | Male | Journalism UG | Yes |
| | Laura | Female | Human Rights UG | Yes |
| | Natasha | Female | Sociology & Criminology UG | Yes |
| | Paul** | Male | Computing UG | Yes |
| | Amy | Female | Journalism UG | No |

*All interviewee names have been changed. **Denotes student recruited via purposive sampling, snowball sampling or gatekeeper.

# Appendix D – Student interview information sheets and consent forms

## INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

***Alexander Hensby, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh***

***March 2012***

### What is the purpose of the study?

This research project uses the 2010/11 student protests in the UK as a case study for understanding contemporary expressions of political participation. According to survey data, young people are frequently found to be the least politically active among age ranges: this research seeks to reassess this view by suggesting that we might instead require new *indicators* that capture the changing way that young people engage with and participate in politics, indicators that pay greater attention to repertoires of protest and activism. The recent and ongoing student protests against increased tuition fees and the funding of Higher Education functions as a useful case study from which young people's attitudes towards political engagement can be explored, and a greater understanding of contemporary forms of political participation can be learned. It also allows us to analyse the significance of political protest as a form of participation in the UK today.

The study involves an online survey of students from 20 universities across the UK, and follow-up interviews with students from five different campuses.

### Reasons for interviewing students

Interview candidates have been recruited either via participation in the online survey, or through communication with local student occupations and campaigning groups. All participants are encouraged to discuss their attitudes towards and experiences of different forms of participation and protest, including (if applicable) the student protests. Interview candidates recruited from the survey will have the opportunity to clarify or elaborate on responses given in the survey. Interviewees who participated in the student protests, and contributed to specific student campaigns will also have the opportunity to detail their involvement and reflect on their experiences.

### Ethics and confidentiality

Research will be conducted in compliance with ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association. All interview transcript data will be carefully anonymised. Participants' identity is treated as confidential and no real names will be used in any publication. Publication of organization-specific findings may require permission. Data will be kept securely: transcripts held by the researcher and responses to the online survey will be accessible only to the researcher. In the event that acts of violence to others are divulged by interviewees during the course of the research, information will be passed on to the police.

This study is funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) which encourages award holders to share their data for archiving and re-use by other researchers – interview data will be supplied only with the permission of the interview participant. In all cases, interview data will be anonymised so that no participant can be identified.

# Political Participation and Contemporary Protest – Analysing the 2010/11 Student 'Winter of Discontent' and beyond

## Interview Consent Form

***Please read this form together with the Interview Information Sheet, initial each box and sign and date at the bottom where indicated.***

I agree to take part in this study as described in the Interview Information Sheet, dated March 2012. I confirm that I have read and understood this information, and have had the opportunity to ask any questions and to have these answered satisfactorily. The nature and purpose of this study has been explained to me, and I understand what will be required if I take part.

I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate, I can notify the researcher and withdraw from it immediately without giving a reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my interview data up to the point of publication (July 2013).

I consent to this interview being recorded. I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

I understand that the audio recording will only be accessed by the research interviewer/transcriber. I understand that the audio file will be deleted upon conclusion of this study, and that any quotations used in publications will be anonymised.

I understand that in the unlikely event that any of the information I give is considered to put others at risk, I would be informed of this, the interview would be terminated and that particular item of information would be reported to an appropriate person.

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS)

_______________________________________________

Signed ______________________________________________ Date _______

Name of researcher taking consent (BLOCK CAPITALS)

_______________________________________________

Signed ______________________________________________ Date _______

## USE, RETENTION AND REUSE OF PARTICIPANT CONTRIBUTIONS FORM

**STUDY TITLE**

**Political Participation and Contemporary Protest – Analysing the 2010/11 Student 'Winter of Discontent' and beyond**

**RESEARCHER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROJECT**

Alexander Hensby

**NAME OF PARTICIPANT**

…………………………………………………………………………………………………....................

**1. ARCHIVING AND SUBSEQUENT USE**

This study is funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) which encourages award holders to share their data for archiving and re-use by other researchers. Any data supplied by the project researcher for this purpose will first be carefully anonymised so that no participant can be identified (i.e. names and other identifying references are removed from transcripts). However, you are under no obligation to share your data in this way. It will only happen with your explicit consent. [Please tick which statement applies]:

**<u>I agree</u> to my anonymised transcript being archived in a public repository for use by other researchers.**

**<u>I do not agree</u> to my anonymised transcript being archived in a public repository for use by other researchers** ¦

Signed: ___________________________________________________

Date: __________________________

## Appendix E – List of UK universities for survey selection

| | University | Region | Formation/ accreditation | Structure | No of students | Est no at 10/11/10 NUS demo | Local march or walkout | % of students at NUS demo | On-site occupation? | Website still active? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | University Campus Suffolk | East | 2007 | Dual city campus | 3960 | 106 | 2.68 | No | No | |
| 2 | University of Bedfordshire | East | 2006 | Dual city campus | 23800 | 444 | 1.87 | No | No | |
| 3 | University of Cambridge | East | 1209 | Multi-site city | 18000 | 362 | 2.01 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 4 | University of East Anglia | East | 1963 | Single campus | 19600 | 320 | 1.63 | Yes | Yes | |
| 5 | Anglia Ruskin University | East | 1992 | Dual city campus | 20000 | 150 | 0.75 | Yes | No | |
| 6 | De Montfort University, Leicester | East Mids | 1992 | Dual campus | 21200 | 197 | 0.93 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 7 | Loughborough University | East Mids | 1966 | Single campus | 18200 | 100 | 0.55 | Yes | No | |
| 8 | Nottingham Trent University | East Mids | 1992 | Multi-campus | 24200 | 250 | 1.03 | Yes | No | |
| 9 | University of Derby | East Mids | 1992 | Multi-site city | 25000 | 180 | 0.72 | No | No | |
| 10 | University of Leicester | East Mids | 1957 | Multi-site city | 15000 | 290 | 1.93 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 11 | University of Lincoln | East Mids | 1992 | Dual city campus | 16700 | 325 | 1.95 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 12 | University of Northampton | East Mids | 2005 | Dual campus | 10600 | 500 | 4.72 | No | No | No |
| 13 | University of Nottingham | East Mids | 1948 | Multi-site city | 40000 | 250 | 0.63 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 14 | Birkbeck College | Gtr London | 1920 | Multi-site city | 19000 | 50 | 0.26 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 15 | Brunel University | Gtr London | 1966 | Multi-campus | 15500 | 100 | 0.65 | Yes | No | |
| 16 | City University London | Gtr London | 1966 | Multi-site city | 21400 | 100 | 0.47 | Yes | No | |
| 17 | Goldsmiths College | Gtr London | 1904 | Multi-site city | 7600 | 50 | 0.66 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 18 | King's College, London | Gtr London | 1829 | Multi-site city | 18600 | 100 | 0.54 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 19 | Kingston University | Gtr London | 1992 | Dual campus | 23100 | 40 | 0.17 | Yes | Yes | |
| 20 | London Metropolitan University | Gtr London | 2002 | Dual campus | 28500 | 130 | 0.46 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 21 | London School of Economics | Gtr London | 1895 | Multi-site city | 9000 | 500 | 5.56 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 22 | London Southbank University | Gtr London | 1992 | Multi-site city | 24700 | 80 | 0.32 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 23 | Middlesex University | Gtr London | 1992 | Multi-site city | 23200 | 200 | 0.86 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 24 | Queen Mary, University of London | Gtr London | 1915 | Multi-campus | 16000 | 100 | 0.63 | Yes | No | No |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25 | Royal Holloway, University of London | Gtr London | 1985 | Single campus | 8000 | 50 | 0.63 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 26 | SOAS | Gtr London | 1916 | Dual campus | 4500 | 100 | 2.22 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 27 | St George's, University of London | Gtr London | 1836 | Single site | 3000 | 50 | 1.67 | No | No | |
| 28 | St Mary's University College | Gtr London | 2007 | Multi-site city | 3600 | 50 | 1.39 | No | No | |
| 29 | University College London | Gtr London | 1826 | Multi-site city | 21500 | 1000 | 4.65 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 30 | University of East London | Gtr London | 1992 | Dual campus | 26300 | | | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 31 | University of Greenwich | Gtr London | 1992 | Multi location | 24900 | 50 | 0.20 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 32 | University of Roehampton | Gtr London | 1992 | Dual campus | 8500 | 200 | 2.35 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 33 | University of West London | Gtr London | 1992 | Multi location | 47400 | 60 | 0.13 | No | No | |
| 34 | University of Westminster | Gtr London | 1838 | Multi-campus | 24700 | 50 | 0.20 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 35 | Queen's University, Belfast | N Ireland | 1849 | Multi-site city | 24600 | yes | | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 36 | University of Ulster | N Ireland | 1968 | Multi location | 27600 | yes (SU) | | Yes | No | Yes |
| 37 | Durham University | North east | 1832 | Dual campus | 15500 | 40 | 0.26 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 38 | Leeds Metropolitan University | North east | 1992 | Multi-campus | 41200 | 150 | 0.36 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 39 | Leeds Trinity University College | North east | 2009 | Single campus | 2500 | 25 | 1.00 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 40 | Newcastle University | North east | 1963 | Single campus | 19700 | 220 | 1.12 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 41 | Sheffield Hallam University | North east | 1992 | Dual campus | 33800 | 284 | 0.84 | Yes | No | |
| 42 | Teesside University | North east | 1992 | Single campus | 29300 | 126 | 0.43 | Yes | No | |
| 43 | University of Bradford | North east | 1966 | Multi-campus | 13600 | 591 | 4.35 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 44 | University of Huddersfield | North east | 1992 | Multi location | 19700 | 150 | 0.76 | Yes | No | |
| 45 | University of Hull | North east | 1927 | Multi location | 22300 | 200 | 0.90 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 46 | University of Leeds | North east | 1904 | Multi-site city | 33500 | 402 | 1.20 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 47 | University of Northumbria | North east | 1992 | Dual campus | 30000 | 227 | 0.76 | Yes | No | |
| 48 | University of Sheffield | North east | 1905 | Multi-site city | 25700 | 500 | 1.95 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 49 | University of Sunderland | North east | 1992 | Dual campus | 20300 | 98 | 0.48 | Yes | No | No |
| 50 | University of York | North east | 1963 | Single campus | 13500 | 336 | 2.49 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 51 | York St Johns University | North east | 2006 | Single campus | 5600 | 63 | 1.13 | Yes | No | |
| 52 | Edge Hill University | North west | 2006 | Multi location | 18700 | 62 | 0.33 | No | No | |
| 53 | Lancaster University | North west | 1964 | Single campus | 12000 | 250 | 2.08 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 54 | Liverpool Hope University | North west | 2005 | Dual campus | 7900 | 50 | 0.63 | Yes | No | |
| 55 | Liverpool John Moores University | North west | 1992 | Multi-campus | 24400 | 80 | 0.33 | Yes | No | |
| 56 | Manchester Metropolitan University | North west | 1992 | Multi location | 33500 | 60 | 0.18 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 57 | University of Bolton | North west | 2004 | Single campus | 9000 | 60 | 0.67 | No | No | |
| 58 | University of Central Lancashire | North west | 1992 | Multi location | 35000 | 200 | 0.57 | Yes | No | No |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 59 | University of Chester | North west | 2005 | Dual campus | 15700 | 100 | 0.64 | Yes | No | |
| 60 | University of Cumbria | North west | 2007 | Multi location | 13000 | 130 | 1.00 | No | No | |
| 61 | University of Liverpool | North west | 1903 | Single campus | 20600 | 100 | 0.49 | Yes | Yes | |
| 62 | University of Manchester | North west | 1824 | Multi-site city | 39000 | 200 | 0.51 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 63 | University of Salford | North west | 1967 | Single campus | 20000 | 300 | 1.50 | Yes | No | |
| 64 | Edinburgh Napier University | Scotland | 1992 | Multi-campus | 17600 | 0 | | Yes | No | Yes |
| 65 | Glasgow Caledonian University | Scotland | 1993 | Single campus | 17000 | Yes | | Yes | No | Yes |
| 66 | Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh | Scotland | 1966 | Multi-campus | 10200 | 0 | | Yes | No | |
| 67 | Queen Margaret University | Scotland | 2007 | Single campus | 5400 | 0 | | Yes | No | |
| 68 | Robert Gordon University | Scotland | 1992 | Dual campus | 9900 | 0 | | No | No | |
| 69 | University of Aberdeen | Scotland | 1495 | Multi-site city | 13400 | 0 | | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 70 | University of Abertay Dundee | Scotland | 1994 | Single campus | 4100 | 50 | 1.22 | Yes | No | |
| 71 | University of Dundee | Scotland | 1967 | Multi-site city | 18600 | 0 | | Yes | No | |
| 72 | University of Edinburgh | Scotland | 1583 | Multi-site city | 28400 | 250 | 0.88 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 73 | University of Glasgow | Scotland | 1451 | Multi-site city | 23600 | buses | | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 74 | University of St Andrews | Scotland | 1410 | Multi-site city | 8640 | buses | | Yes | Yes | No |
| 75 | University of Stirling | Scotland | 1967 | Single campus | 11500 | 0 | | Yes | No | |
| 76 | University of Strathclyde | Scotland | 1964 | Dual campus | 26000 | 100 | 0.38 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 77 | University of the Highlands & Islands | Scotland | 2011 | Multi location | 5200 | 49 | 0.94 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 78 | University of the West of Scotland | Scotland | 2007 | Multi location | 13000 | 0 | | Yes | No | |
| 79 | University of Kent | South East | 1965 | Single campus | 18000 | 310 | 1.72 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 80 | University of Oxford | South East | 1096 | Multi-site city | 20300 | 300 | 1.48 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 81 | University of Surrey | South East | 1966 | Dual campus | 15700 | 200 | 1.27 | Yes | No | |
| 82 | Buckinghamshire New University | South East | 2007 | Dual city campus | 9000 | 500 | 5.56 | Yes | No | |
| 83 | Canterbury Christ Church University | South East | 2005 | Multi location | 18000 | 350 | 1.94 | Yes | No | |
| 84 | Oxford Brookes University | South East | 1992 | Multi-campus | 19000 | 170 | 0.89 | Yes | No | |
| 85 | Southampton Solent University | South East | 2004 | Multi-site city | 17500 | 87 | 0.50 | Yes | No | |
| 86 | University of Brighton | South East | 1992 | Multi location | 21000 | 30 | 0.14 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 87 | University of Chichester | South East | 2005 | Multi location | 4900 | 80 | 1.63 | No | No | |
| 88 | University of Essex | South East | 1965 | Multi location | 11000 | 300 | 2.73 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 89 | University of Hertfordshire | South East | 1992 | Multi-campus | 23700 | 50 | 0.21 | Yes | No | |
| 90 | University of Portsmouth | South East | 1992 | Dual campus | 21800 | 500 | 2.29 | Yes | ? | Yes |
| 91 | University of Reading | South East | 1892 | Multi-campus | 22800 | 600 | 2.63 | Yes | No | |
| 92 | University of Southampton | South East | 1952 | Multi-campus | 24700 | | | Yes | No | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 93 | University of Sussex | South East | 1961 | Single campus | 12500 | 300 | 2.40 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 94 | University of Winchester | South East | 2005 | Dual campus | 5900 | 200 | 3.389831 | Yes | No |  |
| 95 | Bath Spa University | South West | 2005 | Multi-campus | 7100 | 78 | 1.10 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 96 | Bournemouth University | South West | 1992 | Dual campus | 17500 | 120 | 0.69 | Yes | No |  |
| 97 | University College Falmouth | South West | 2005 | Dual campus | 3500 | 123 | 3.51 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 98 | University College Marjon, Plymouth | South West | 2007 | Single campus | 5000 | 70 | 1.40 | Yes | No |  |
| 99 | University of Bath | South West | 1966 | Single campus | 14000 | 150 | 1.07 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 100 | University of Bristol | South West | 1909 | Multi-site city | 18000 | 73 | 0.41 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 101 | University of Exeter | South West | 1955 | Multi-campus | 15700 | 227 | 1.45 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 102 | University of Gloucestershire | South West | 2001 | Multi location | 8700 | 125 | 1.44 | Yes | No |  |
| 103 | University of Plymouth | South West | 1992 | Multi location | 30500 | 45 | 0.15 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 104 | University of The West Of England | South West | 1992 | Multi-campus | 29000 | 150 | 0.52 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 105 | Aberystwyth University | Wales | 1872 | Dual campus | 12200 | 200 | 1.64 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 106 | Bangor University | Wales | 1884 | Multi-site city | 16600 | 200 | 1.20 | Yes | No |  |
| 107 | Cardiff University | Wales | 1883 | Multi-site city | 30900 | 150 | 0.49 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 108 | Glyndŵr University | Wales | 2008 | Dual campus | 7400 | 50 | 0.68 | No | No |  |
| 109 | Swansea Metropolitan University | Wales | 1992 | Dual campus | 5800 | 150 | 2.59 | Yes | No |  |
| 110 | Swansea University | Wales | 1920 | Single campus | 18500 | 250 | 1.35 | Yes | No |  |
| 111 | University of Glamorgan | Wales | 1992 | Multi location | 21500 | 100 | 0.47 | Yes | No |  |
| 112 | University of Wales Institute, Cardiff | Wales | 1992 | Multi-campus | 12000 | 50 | 0.42 | Yes | No |  |
| 113 | University of Wales, Newport | Wales | 1841 | Dual campus | 9100 | 50 | 0.55 | Yes | No |  |
| 114 | University of Wales, Trinity St David | Wales | 2010 | Dual campus | 11140 | 95 | 0.85 | Yes | No |  |
| 115 | Aston University | West Mids | 1966 | Single campus | 9500 | ? |  | Yes | No | Yes |
| 116 | Birmingham City University | West Mids | 1992 | Multi-campus | 24800 | 294 | 1.19 | Yes | No |  |
| 117 | Coventry University | West Mids | 1992 | Single campus | 19500 | 245 | 1.26 | Yes | No |  |
| 118 | Keele University | West Mids | 1949 | Single campus | 8900 | 338 | 3.80 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 119 | Newman University College | West Mids | 2007 | Single campus | 2600 | 280 | 10.77 | Yes | No |  |
| 120 | Staffordshire University | West Mids | 1992 | Multi location | 15200 | 267 | 1.76 | Yes | No |  |
| 121 | University of Birmingham | West Mids | 1900 | Dual campus | 26000 | 400 | 1.54 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 122 | University of Warwick | West Mids | 1965 | Multi-campus | 18500 | 150 | 0.81 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 123 | University of Wolverhampton | West Mids | 1992 | Multi location | 23500 | 204 | 0.87 | Yes | No |  |
| 124 | University of Worcester | West Mids | 2005 | Multi-site city | 9500 | 100 | 1.05 | Yes | No |  |